

1994 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 5, 1994 UNREADABLE

I use my computer printer to print sermon outlines and newspaper articles. I also use it to cut mimeograph stencils that we use to print the books and newsletters our church publishes. The only difference is that I have to remove the printer ribbon when I cut a mimeograph stencil so the ink won't smear on the stencil. Then I replace the ribbon when I want to print letters and articles.

Those of you who know how absent minded I am will immediately realize that there are times I forget to replace the ribbon and end up with blank sheets of paper instead of the article I planned to submit to the newspaper. The article is written, the computer is working alright, the printer is receiving the information correctly, but the information is not being put on the paper.

That's the way our witness and work for the Lord sometimes goes also. We know what to do, we are willing to do what we can, and we even go through the motions of doing the work. But nothing is accomplished. Something is missing and nothing is "written on the page".

I believe the missing ingredient is active love. Paul said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (active love), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." (1 Cor 13:1-2)

Maybe it's time you stopped working long enough to see if there is anything "written on the Page". It's just possible that your printer is missing the "ribbon" of active love.

January 11, 1994 GOOD GOALS

By this time most of you have abandoned that diet you began the first of the year. It was a good excuse to allow you to over indulge during the holidays but it was not so much fun during the bleak first weeks of January. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak.

Dieting goals come and go but let me share a good goal with you that are obtainable; because it is a Godly goal. It is the goal the Apostle Paul gave his "son" in the faith, Timothy--"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Tim 1:5).

Paul told Timothy that a good goal to build his life on had a three-fold foundation.

1) Love from a pure heart. That doesn't take money or ability. It simply means allowing the love of God through Christ Jesus to spring up and take root in your heart. And the obtaining of this goal will delight others as well as yourself.

2) A Good Conscience. This simply means living in such a way that you don't have to worry about anyone looking in the window of your life.

3) A Sincere Faith. This goal means you actually live what you believe and you believe the message of God. Christianity is not a religion you have but a life you live.

These are good goals; and they will change your life not only in 1994 but forever.

January 12, 1994 ACCUSATIONS

The Early Christians were accused of Cannibalism, being Anti-Family, having Orgies, and being atheist. All of which were true!! From the Roman view-point.

Take the issue of Cannibalism- Each week the Christians met and, as part of their worship service, they would partake of the symbolic broken body and shed blood of Christ. When the Roman citizens heard of this they reacted with disgust and horror because they assumed the Christians were eating actual flesh and drinking actual blood.

Then there is the accusation of being Anti-Family. Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26). When this was quoted to Roman Society they misunderstood completely the real message and heard only the Anti-Family sentiment.

Because of persecution, and the fact that many Christians were working people, many times local churches would have their weekly meeting at daybreak. This meeting was many times called a "love feast" because it was a time to express their love for God and each other (Just like our testimony time at Wednesday Prayer Meeting). Romans immediately seized on the words "Love Feast" to mean Orgy.

But how could you accuse Christians of being Atheist?? The Romans worshiped many gods, including the emperor. Christians refused to worship any of these gods; which eventually resulted in the death and persecution of many of them.

As you can see, Accusations depended on view-point; and real knowledge. That is something it would do you well to remember when you are tempted to spread accusations about those around you. If you knew the truth, those people may be doing good instead of evil.

January 18, 1994 SITTING IN THE SUN

I recently helped put up a night light at the home of one of the widows in our church. The thirty minute task turned into several hours because the base we were attempting to put the light on was not the same size as the light itself. When we saw the problem I went back to Lake City to get the proper part. Naturally, it turned out that they gave me the wrong size again; which necessitated another trip to town (If the Lord would have had to order parts when He created the world it would have taken 7 years instead of 7 days!!).

When I was going out to the home to do the work I passed some men sitting on a bench beside a building. For the next two and a half hours when I would pass I would wave at these same men. When I passed them the final time I thought to myself, "It must be nice to have nothing to do all day but sit on a bench and warm in the sun."

The truth is, however, that I'm glad I've got more to do than sit in the sun all day. I can imagine these men going home at night, their family asking them what they did all day, and them saying, "I sat in the sun and watched the world go by." They didn't live life, they just observed it.

That's the same thing that happens to some church members. They sit in church each week and observe the "Son" at work in the lives of other people but they never get involved. If only they could grasp the truth of James 2:17, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

God calls us to stand on the promises, not just sit on the premises. Make sure when the "Son" warms your heart it also moves your feet.

January 19, 1994 MARY'S PONDERINGS

Luke 2:19 "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

Mary lay emotionally and physically drained on the hay and watched Joseph sleep an exhausted sleep. After days of travel, after finding no lodging and having to settle for a stable, and after the agony and fear of the birth Mary was finally allowed time to reflect.

The Baby had finally gone back to sleep after that strange visit by those hill side shepherds. The night sky was still sparkling with stars even though it was only a few hours until the dawning of a new day. In those few hours before the hustle and bustle of a new day drove her into worries about meals and clothes and a place to stay Mary was trying to make some sense out of the events of the past nine months.

It had all seemed so simple before the angel came. She was engaged to marry Joseph and live a good life in a small town. Joseph was not the most handsome man in Nazareth but he was solid, dependable, God-fearing; and he had a good business so he could support her well. How that all changed when the angel came.

At first she thought everyone would rejoice when she told them she was to give birth to the long awaited Messiah. She soon learned that most thought it grounds for gossip instead of rejoicing. Her ecstasy had turned to agony and she and Joseph had been almost glad they were forced to go to Bethlehem to sign the census.

Now she lays and ponders how God has worked. Surely it was not like she thought it would be. But isn't that always the way God works, His program instead of our plans. That's something everyone needs to ponder.

January 25, 1994 SIGN OR SERVICE

While visiting in the hospital recently I noticed a sign at the main floor Rest Room- "Caution Wet Floor". I looked inside and, sure enough, the floor was wet.

Someone had stopped up one of the urinals with some paper (That someone would do something that mean-spirited still amazes me). Instead of correcting the problem House-Keeping had simply put a sign at the door telling people the floor was wet.

I know people that do the same thing. They spend all their time telling other people what's wrong instead of repairing the situation. Sometimes it a pastor who spends so much time preparing the words and wit in his sermon until he forgets a sermon is only as good as the blessing or burdens it brings to the people who hear it. Or it might be a parent who spends all their time telling their kids what they should do instead of taking the time to look at what is causing the child to act a certain way.

The reason people put up signs instead of repairing the situation is because that's the easy way out. It's less work and, hopefully, someone else will correct the situation before you have to deal with it. In the meantime people have to walk thru dirty water with their only comfort a sign that tells them the floor is indeed wet.

One thing I noticed about Jesus is that He spent most of his time repairing situations instead of simply talking about them. Wonder what would happen if His disciples did the same thing today??

January 26, 1994 SELF SHOOTERS

During a recent New Year's Eve get together some of the people present had little firecracker guns that would pop and throw confetti. Naturally they spent a great deal of time sneaking up on other people and surprising them with a loud sounding burst of confetti.

One lady (who will remain nameless but who goes by the nickname, "Water Woman") put one of these pop guns in her pocket. When she sat down to drink some apple cider the pressure on her pocket caused the gun to shoot and she almost enjoyed an apple cider shower. Everyone laughed when the shooter became the shootee.

Sad to say, I've shot myself many times also. My problem is that I do it with my mouth instead of a gun. I had hoped that as I grew older it would become increasingly difficult to put my foot in my mouth but that is not the case. Time after time I find that as soon as the words leave my mouth I hear that little "pop in my pocket" and realize I've done it again.

That's not only embarrassing, it's also scary. Especially since Jesus said, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Mat 12:36-37).

About the only advice I can give is, "Be careful where you put guns". Keep them out of your pocket if you don't want to shoot yourself. In the same way, consider what you say before you say it. Once you throw words into the air it's hard to get them back.

February 1, 1994 THREE PROPS IN PROBLEMS

Most people are familiar with Paul's "Thorn in the Flesh". This was a problem in his life that was allowed by God but administered by Satan. It was a very real and very painful problem (Paul said it "Buffeted" him. That means it hit him from every side). The purpose of the problem was to defeat pride in Paul's life.

During his description of this problem Paul describes three attitudes that propped him up and turned this Problem into a plus.

1) PRAYER- Paul said he "besought the Lord" three times about this problem. He didn't just say a nice little "now I lay me down to sleep" prayer; He really prayed and poured out his heart to God.

When problems plague you spend time talking with God. Tell Him your hurt and your doubts; as well as your desire for help. You'll be surprised what a difference it will make when you talk WITH God instead of AT God.

2) POWER- As soon as Paul realized God wasn't going to correct his problem he found that God's Grace was sufficient. This gave him the Power to endure the problem and focus on the really important things in life.

3) PLEASURE- Now, amazingly, Paul takes Pleasure in his problems because they draw him closer to God!! Bitterness and bondage have been turned to blessing. The problem is now a plus. Glory! Don't let problems knock all the props from under you. Use Paul's props and become more than conquerors through Christ.

February 2, 1994 UNUSED POWER

Last summer we had to replace the air-conditioning unit for our fellowship building. In the process of replacing the unit the thermostat in the fellowship building was also replaced. Everything seemed fine until cold weather came our way.

When we built the fellowship building we insulated it extremely well and it has always been fairly easy to heat or cool. This winter, however, it seemed to never get really warm. We discussed everything from increasing insulation to replacing the heating unit. Finally, on one of those very cold Sundays we've had recently, the cries from the ladies became so loud until we were forced to act.

We called in another company to check the situation and they almost immediately found the problem. When the first company had hooked up the new thermostat they had failed to hook up the heat strips in the heating unit to the thermostat and the heat pump was unable to heat the building on cold days without the extra boost these heat strips gave.

The principle from this should be very plain- sometimes people fail to accomplish the task God gives them because they aren't fully connected to the power source. They do all right in simple situations but if things really get bad and extra power is needed they don't have the proper connections to enable them to accomplish the task. We call them "Sunshine Christians". They do well in the sunshine but falter in the storm. If they could only get their thermostat connected properly so they could have the power they need for whatever life sends their way.

February 9, 1994 A DEBT I OWE

Paul began his letter to the Romans by telling them he owed a debt to them and to God to faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Every Christian owes that same debt.

The first part of that debt is PITY. Truly, a person who has no peace in this life and the eternal death of hell waiting them need all the Pity I can give them. Paul said they profess themselves as wise but they have become fools. Just as today we have better educated people who enjoy life less than ever before.

But I owe lost people more than just my Pity. I also owe them my PRAYERS. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. In the same way, I can't make a person get saved but I can pray daily that God would put salt in their system so they would become thirsty! I need to pray for God to care for them until they see the light and for God to Convict them until they realize the need of accepting Christ.

Pity and Prayers can never pay my debt however. I also owe lost people the debt of PROCLAMATION. It's not enough to feel sorry they're lost; or even to ask God to save them. The Bible says that Faith comes by Hearing and hearing by the Word of God. I can't just feel sorry that men are dying in the desert of sin. Nor is it enough to pray that they will find their way to God. I have a debt to tell them about the Pardon, Peace, and Abundant Life found in Christ. Not to do so means I have to face God with their blood on my hands (Ezekiel 33:6)

February 15, 1994 LEAST PRAYED PRAYER

I think I can safely say that the MOST POPULAR prayer in the Bible is the Lord's Prayer; "Our Father, which art in Heaven...". Although it must be pointed out that this Prayer is actually the Disciple's Prayer; given in answer to their request for a model prayer. The Lord's Prayer would be the prayer found in John chapter 17 where He prays just before His trial and death.

In the same way, I believe I can safely say that the LEAST PRAYED prayer in the Bible is found in Philippians 3:10 "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"

Some people would willingly pray for a greater knowledge of Christ. And many people would gladly pray to receive the power that was strong enough to resurrect Christ from the Grave. What is prayed the least in this prayer is "that I may know the fellowship of His suffering".

That's not what people are looking for. They are looking to share His Kingdom and His glory but they certainly aren't looking to share His suffering. Yet, if you would really know a person then you must be willing to share in their sorrow and pain.

As long as you can look on a lost sin-sick world without a broken heart then you don't know the fellowship of His suffering. If you never suffer persecution or rejection because of your stand for righteousness then you don't know the fellowship of his suffering. And that means you need to turn the least prayed prayer in the Bible into your most prayed prayer.

February 16, 1994 PAUL'S CURSES

There are two places in Scripture that Paul asked that a curse be put on people. I think anything that would make this great servant of Christ ask for people to be accursed is something we need to know about.

The first scripture is First Corinthians 16:22 "If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!"

The Second scripture is Gal 1:8 "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Here is an Apostle who was stoned, beat, run out of town, and suffered immeasurable pain and pressure but never raised his voice to curse his enemies. Yet two seemingly simple attitudes cause him to raise up in righteous wrath.

The first reason for a curse was lack of love for the Lord. Doesn't this seem a little extreme? Not if you knew Paul; or his Lord. Paul knew that it was love that drew us to Christ. The love of Christ is also the motivating force in our work for Christ (John 14:15). Paul knew that if a man did not really love the Lord he could love God, his neighbor, or the world in the proper way.

The second curse was for abusing or misusing the simple Gospel of Christ (See 1 Cor 15:1-4). Adding to or subtracting from the scriptures was so serious until even John put a curse on people who did it (Rev 22:18). Faith in Christ is ALL the way and the ONLY Way. Let no one change that.

Playing the Christian game may fool the people around you but God sees into your heart; and knows if you deserve a commendation or a curse.

February, 22, 1994 GOOD ENOUGH FOR HELL

Once two men went to the Temple to Pray. One looked up toward God and told God what a great man he was. The other would not even lift his eyes as he called on God for mercy. Jesus said this second man went home justified.

That's surprising when you look at the "religious" qualifications the first man had.

The first man, as a Pharisee, was Good in the Eyes of the average Church, Good in the Eyes of his Neighbors, and good in his own Eyes (He was convinced everything was alright). Everyone just thought he was a "good old boy".

Not only was he Good, he also believed in God (It is good to remember that the devils also believe in God and tremble). This belief in God caused him to Pray to God, come to Church regularly, Tithe all he had, and even Fast twice a week.

But a Publican, who could only cry out to God for mercy, went home justified rather than this Pharisee. The reason, the Publican came to God with faith in God's Grace while the Pharisee came trusting in his own Goodness. The Pharisee was good enough to meet the standards of the world and good enough to meet the standards of society. But, sadly, he was just good enough to make it into Hell instead of Heaven.

Being good enough is not good enough. A person is saved by grace through faith and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God. It is not of works, lest any man should boast. Don't get caught boasting instead of believing.

February 23, 1994 WEDNESDAY WITNESS

No matter how much you advertise a product there is nothing as convincing as a personal testimony of the effectiveness of the product. That's the premise behind the Wednesday Witness program at our Church.

Numerous times during the year different families in the church are given the opportunity to share how they came to know Christ as Savior or how God is working in their life at this time. These are some of the most anticipated services of the year.

Just last Wednesday a family in the Church shared how God had worked through the years to bring the entire family to a saving knowledge of Christ. It was a service that allowed everyone to leave Church with a smile on their lips and joy in their heart. They'll glow in this service the rest of the week; even in the midst of a sin tossed world.

During this family's testimony the wife shared how her mother's serious sickness brought her to a firm commitment to Christ. Next the oldest son was saved when he really listened to the message of the Gospel one Sunday. Instead of flowing over his head the message sank into his heart. A year later the father was saved during a special service at church as he looked around and realized that everyone around him was praying for his salvation. Finally, the youngest son was saved during a revival service after wrestling with the decision to come to Christ.

This Wednesday Witness family showed how God works in different circumstances to bring people into a relationship with Him. It was a great time of encouragement and blessing. Why don't YOU become a Wednesday Witness; any day of the week.

March 2, 1994 COFFEE CUP CROWNS

My wife recently experienced a time of great discomfort in her chest. It was serious enough that the doctor thought she should be hospitalized and given some heart test.

During her hospitalization I stayed with her as much as possible. That meant that when I arrived home each night I had to catch up on much of the work I would normally have done during the day. Sleep became something you day dreamed about and longed for.

During one of her early morning test I was sitting in a waiting room trying to work on a sermon while I was as sleepy as the people who would listen to the sermon on Sunday Morning! About that time one of the hospital workers stopped by and asked if I wanted a cup of coffee. Right then it tasted like manna from heaven.

A hospital stay is always traumatic; pain, change of schedule, fear of the unknown, and the knowledge that the bills are piling up at an astronomical rate. Yet, as I look back on my wife's stay at McLeod's Hospital, one of the main things that stand out for me was the kindness and concern of everyone we came in contact with.

Nurses, orderlies, and technicians all treated us as nice as possible. They were a bright spot during some cloudy days of life. The Bible says that giving a cup of cold water will not lose it's reward (Matt 10:42). I pray this cup of hot coffee, and the other kindness we received, will receive a double portion!

March 9, 1994 BROKEN CHAINS

Recently the Church cleaning lady told me there was a problem in the men's rest room at the church. When I went to investigate my nose told me there was a real problem as soon as I entered the room!

Upon investigation, I found that the chain connecting the handle of the commode to the flushing apparatus had broken. The person using the commode had not realized the commode wouldn't flush. By the middle of the week, when the cleaning lady contacted me, the situation had become very unpleasant. That changed very quickly, however, once I repaired the chain so the flushing action could begin.

There is a powerful stench hanging over the moral, political, and educational landscape of America today. It appears the country's commode is stopped up and no one seems to realize the chain is broken. And the stench of loose morals, violent crimes, family failures, and drug abuse are clogging the climate.

Government, Industry, and Society are all spraying deodorant on the problem in the hopes that things will change but the stench simply gets worst. Will they never learn that the only help for the stench that sin produces is to allow Christ to cleanse your heart and give you a new beginning. What a difference it would make if they would realize that throwing money and management at the problem does not correct the stench. Only Christ is able to repair the broken chain. Let Him do that for you today.

March 15, 1994 SALTING SOCIETY

Several ladies recently came to my office greatly concerned with some of the material being taught their children in public school. A specific book contained very vulgar language in the midst of a story about how one young boy devised a way to kill his friend! Of course, this was not the educational values these parents wanted their children to learn.

One of my first questions was whether they had approached the school authorities about the problem. The answer was yes and no. They had confronted a person they knew within the school system but they had not gone to those in authority who had the power to make the necessary changes.

As we talked, however, it became apparent that even the slight contact they had made had produced positive results. The book was still available but it had ceased being used. And those who choose the books were beginning to do so with a great deal more consideration about content.

Many Christians seem to have lost hope and vision because of the magnitude and complexity of the problems we face in today's society. They need to get back to the fact that God called them to be the salt instead of the meat. That means we can't control anything but we can flavor everything. And it only takes a little salt to flavor a lot of meat. That is, if the salt is applied and doesn't remain in the shaker.

March 16, 1994 TESTS

We were going to my wife's dad for supper and she had baked a cake to carry. When we started to leave she decided some ice cream would be good so we stopped by a grocery store to purchase some. I was in a hurry so I went immediately to the frozen food section, found the kind of ice cream she wanted, and went to the express lane to check out.

Immediately ahead of me in line was a girl who looked very young. All she had was a six pack of beer; and she looked very nervous. When it came her time to check out the clerk asked for her ID. She said she had forgotten it in the car. The clerk then said she couldn't sell her the alcohol without an ID. The young girl then just turned around and left.

That's when the manager of the store walked up and told the clerk that she had passed the test! He had sent in a "ringer" to see if the clerk would follow proper procedure.

I wonder how often we are faced with similar situations in our spiritual lives. Maybe it's an unexpected visitor that unknown to us is an angel unawares (Heb 13:2). They ruin our routine and add stress to our already overburdened lives so we resent them or reject them. A test, but it looked so much like real life.

As we go through life remember there are tests all along the way. They involve the hungry, thirsty, naked, and jailed. But the test is easy to pass, just remember that "If you do it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Christ" (Matt 25:34-40).

March 23, 1994 WE WOULD SEE JESUS

A young preacher had just graduated from Divinity School and taken his first Church. Week after week he tried to impress the people with the depth of his understanding of the Scriptures or the relevancy of his message. And week after week he left the pulpit with a feeling of failure.

One Sunday when he arrived at the pulpit and started to put out his notes he saw a sign taped to the top of the pulpit. It contained a simple statement, "We would see Jesus".

Hurt and bewildered, the young preacher stumbled through the message and made it back to the parsonage. Waves of anger washed over him that someone would be so callous. This was followed by waves of depression and anxiety. He tried to lie down and get some sleep but that simple statement kept pounding in his mind, "We would see Jesus".

Finally he rolled off the bed into a kneeling posture. There tears of repentance washed through his soul as he acknowledged his pride and arrogance. What a change the new day brought. Instead of strutting among the people he looked for ways to serve them; and the Lord.

Day after day this happened until several weeks had passed. Then one Sunday, when he entered the pulpit, he found another sign taped to the pulpit, "Then were the Disciples glad when they had seen the Lord"

March 29, 1994 FACING DEATH

Most of us think of death in terms of its aftermath. An accident, a heart attack, or some surprise tragedy claims a loved one or friend and we must deal with the sorrow, the sadness, and the shock that follows. We cope somehow by using tears and memorials and the healing balm of time. And, eventually, we close that chapter in the book and go on with our life. It's hard but there is really no other choice.

But what of those people who must stare death in the face day after day, week after week? What do you do when the doctor says Aids or Cancer or No Hope? How do you deal with Death when it becomes a constant companion that must be communicated with instead of avoided?

That was a dilemma that Jesus faced every day. He knew every moment of His ministry that He had an appointment with death. And He knew it would not be a quick painless encounter. The Death that awaited Him would be extremely painful, filled with rejection, and soaked in despair as even His father would forsake Him.

Three primary factors allowed Jesus to stare death down each morning and share His dreams with death each night. First was His confidence in God's Plan. He knew that His appointment with death was in the will of God and for the glory of God. Second was His Love for mankind. He knew that man would never reach God unless God took man's death penalty. He simply loved mankind enough to die in our place. Finally, He could face death because He knew He could conquer death. He knew that beyond the cross was Easter morning. He knew that Death might win a victory but He would win the war.

When death knocks on your door; whether as a long time visitor or a short time acquaintance, the difference in your dying will be whether Christ is in your heart. Is He?

March 30, 1994 CONTINUAL COMFORT

My wife's favorite verses are Hebrews 4:14-16 "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

As we approach Easter day I have been giving some thought to these verses myself. They contain a very good explanation of the joy and victory Christians experience at Easter.

First, they say that the ministry of Jesus didn't end on a cross at Calvary. He has "passed into the heavens" and now continues His ministry as our great High Priest. When I come to God and ask for forgiveness of sins the Father has every right to ask why He should forgive me. That's when Jesus, my High Priest, holds out His nail scarred hands and points to His spear pierced side. God the Father then says, "Oh, the price has been paid. You are forgiven!"

Secondly, they say that I should not let discouragement or despair drag me down. My Heavenly High Priest knows my feelings and my failures and He will give me everything I need to continue and conquer.

Easter may simply mean bunnies, eggs, and new clothes to you. Let me tell you, however, that it's the memorial of the greatest victory God has ever accomplished. A victory that continues even today in the halls of Heaven where my Savior is also my Heavenly High Priest; providing continual comfort.

April 5, 1994 ISLAND BOOKS

Several men were sitting around discussing various ideas. One of them thought he would test the literary temperament of the group so he asked this question, "If you were stranded on a desert island and could have only one book with you, which one would it be?"

The first man in the group thought for a few moments and said, "I believe I would have to pick the complete works of Shakespeare." The next man said that was a good choice but if he were stranded with only one book then he would want to have the Bible.

On around the group the question went with one man naming one book and another naming another. Finally, it came to the last man in the group. After a little thought he said, "If I were stranded on a desert island and I could have only one book I would want it to be Thomas' book on How to Build a Ship!"

Good choice. When you're stranded on an island you're not nearly as interested in the philosophy of life as you are in a practical way to change your situation. That's the beauty of Christianity. Jesus taught tremendous principles but he did so in very practical everyday situations. Jesus didn't just give a lecture on the people's needs, He borrowed a boy's fish and bread and fed everyone lunch!

The Bible says the earth is hurtling toward its destruction. You can spend your time debating the reasons you sin or you can get aboard the Life boat that God has provided. Don't get caught with the book in your lap instead of Christ in your heart.

April 6, 1994 THE ANSWER

I believe I can safely say a Pastor's life is never dull; at least it hasn't been in the 25 years I've been pastoring. No two days are ever the same. The only routine you can count on is the fact that sickness, death, disaster, divorce, or something like that will change your routine.

Yet, no matter what circumstances or situation I face, I can face it with confidence that I have an answer. That's because the answer is always the same-Christ. I know that sounds too simple for real world living but the fact still remains that a proper faith in Christ can take us over or through any situation that life sends our way.

Take a recent day. A lady called who was very dissatisfied with her pastor. I couldn't change her pastor but I could get her to look beyond his faults to the Christ he proclaimed. Then I visited someone who was dying of an incurable disease. Instead of being depressed, we rejoiced in the fact that he would soon see Christ face to face.

Next I visited an elderly lady whose body was beginning to betray her but whose confident trust in Christ made me leave with a song in my heart. Finally, I visited a couple who had just learned the plant where both worked was closing. Instead of desperate despair they were resting in a quite confidence that Christ would continue to guide them and meet their needs.

Every day contains different questions and needs. I'm glad I have an answer to every problem that every day holds; confident trust in Christ.

April 13, 1994 BACKSLIDING BEHAVIOR

No one plans to Backslide away from God. But it happens a lot more than any of us would like to talk about. Let me show you the four stages a person normally goes through when they develop a Backsliding Behavior.

First a person becomes SPOTTED BY THE WORLD- James 1:27 "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." You stray away from God enough that the mud from the hog pens of the world splashes up and gets on your garments that were washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

Secondly, you cultivate a FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD- James 4:4 "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." The glitter and glamour of the world begins to sparkle in your eyes so you look for opportunities to spend more time with the World.

Thirdly, you develop a LOVE FOR THE WORLD- 1 John 2:15 "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Time, energy, and devotion are now given to the world and its pleasures instead of to the pursuit of holy living for God. Your source of joy is now worldly amusements instead of Godly fellowship.

Finally, you get to the place you CONFORM TO THE WORLD- Rom 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Your actions, your attitudes, and your affections are now controlled by the world system instead of the Holy Spirit.

The good news from all of this is that you don't have to stay in the hog pen. The Father is sitting on the porch awaiting your return right now.

April 19, 1994 WHAT TO THINK ABOUT

What you think about when you have nothing to think about tells what kind of person you are.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8 what we are supposed to think about- Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Compare that with what normally clutters your mind. Gossip about your friends, family, or co-workers; world news about wars, conflict, and disasters; or inner-personal turmoil over fear, doubt, discouragement, debt, or disease. No wonder so many people go around with a face that looks like they have had lemons for lunch!

Try Paul's formula this week. Divide an index card into 8 sections and label each section True (accurate, factual), Honest (honorable), Just (Right, Appropriate), Pure (Undefined), Lovely (Pleasing, Agreeable), Of Good Report (Fair sounding), Virtuous (Moral goodness), and Praiseworthy (Commendable). Put that card in your pocket and from time to time during the day look at it and compare your thoughts with what you are supposed to be thinking.

In a week's time you will be surprised what a difference this will make in your thought life. You'll also be surprised what a difference it will make in your attitude toward others; and in their attitude toward you.

April 20, 1994 VISITOR'S WELCOME

I was having some leg problems recently that were very painful. A local church was having revival meetings and I wanted to attend but didn't know if I would be able to sit during the services. I told the Lord He would have to put me in the right place so I could stretch out my leg if I were going to stay.

Some phone calls and other circumstances delayed me a little so the services had already begun when I arrived. The Church was nearly full (Glory) so I stood at the door for a moment trying to locate a seat. That's when one of the members on a back seat motioned me over and offered me his seat. When I sat down I found the seat was situated in such a way that I could put my walking stick out and use it to prop my leg against the seat in front of me. That eased the pressure and allowed me to stay for the entire service.

What if that member had simply ignored me and let me find a seat anywhere I could. I would probably have disturbed the service twice; once when I entered and again later when I had to leave. What if that member had said in his heart, "Everyone knows this is the seat I normally sit in. I'm not leaving my place for anyone." Instead, he suffered the embarrassment of getting up and finding another seat for himself so I could use his seat.

Almost all churches will tell people that Visitors are welcome in their services. Sometimes our actions convey that message louder than our words ever will.

April 26, 1994 TOO FULL

I recently had some business at the City-County Complex in Florence. You know the one I'm talking about. The one they raised our taxes in order to pay for several years ago with the solemn promise that when it was paid for the taxes would come back down. Guess what happened when it was paid for!! That's the City-County Complex I'm talking about.

When I tried to find a place to park the parking lot was completely full. When I arrived inside and inquired why so many people were at the Complex on that day I found that Criminal Court was going on, Taxes were being paid, and other normal activities were involving a large number of people. So the Parking Lot was full and I had to hunt and hunt to find a parking space (That's why I knew I needed to write an article about it. The Lord normally opens up a parking space when I need one. Since He didn't then I assumed He was trying to show me something).

I notice that a lot of people have lives that are just like this parking lot, too full. Some of their time is consumed with the results of wrong actions in their lives that produce long term consequences (Just like those who had to go to Criminal Court). Part of their time is consumed with activities they dread but still have to do (Like the people paying taxes). And some of their time is consumed with the normal activities of life.

Whatever the reasons, their "parking lot" is too full. That means they spend time looking for a place to park instead of enjoying the life they're living. Do you think that is the way Jesus would live?

April 27, 1994 CAME TO PASS

One of those little statements you find scattered though out the Bible is, "It came to pass". It's a wonderful statement because it describes exactly what happens to most of life's problems; they come but they pass.

When a problem first arrives we consume ourselves with getting to know it. We want to know what kind of disease we have or how the terrible accident happened to that person or what extend will this problem affect me and those I love.

After a while the "novelty" wears off and the visitor has become a pest. We want the problem to end and things to get back like they once were. Our patience wears thinner and thinner as our pain level increases. That's when we begin to question God's love. That's when many people scream in the silence of their souls, "Don't you care, God? I've had enough, make it quit." But, somehow, the minutes stretch into hours, the hours drag into days, and the days seem like they will never end.

That's when we need to firmly grasp the Rock of our Salvation, Jesus Christ, and hold to His promise that, "This too shall pass." There is coming a day when disease will be no more, when righteousness shall triumph over lawlessness, and when the problems of life will seem like a dream in the night. And that won't come to "pass"; it will be the wonderful state of the child of God forever. Glory!

May 3, 1994 PASTOR/SINGER

Once upon a time there was a Pastor who did a tremendous job in his position as Pastor. The members of the church loved and honored him. The people in the community respected him and regarded him as one of the pillars of the community. He had a good character and he did a good job in the position God had given him.

One day while attending a conference he heard a speaker say that no Pastor was a complete person unless he was also a singer. This stung the Pastor and he determined that he would become a singer as well as a pastor.

When he returned home he spent all his time training to sing instead of caring for his sheep and preparing his messages. Before long, each Sunday, before he preached, he would sing a special. He now considered himself a complete preacher. His people wished he would stop making them endure his singing and go back to visiting the flock and preparing his messages!

Once upon a time there was a woman who did a tremendous job as a Mother. She cooked and cleaned and cared for the family and her husband and children thought she was the best mom in the world. Then she went to a meeting where someone said she would never be a complete woman until she liberated herself from the house and became a force in the business world.

But that's another story....

May 4, 1994 MOTHERLY FIGURES

Moms come in all shapes and sizes. Some are very thin and some are pleasingly plumb. Some have lovely blond hair while others have crowns of silver. Some are great at baking pies while others specialize in drying tearful eyes. But regardless of what they look like, or specialize in, they have the heart of a mother; and that is what counts.

With that in mind, let's look at three Bible principles that turn women into mothers.

1) THEIR COVERING- "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering" (1 Cor 11:14-15). Paul is emphasizing the place the woman occupies in the family structure. When a woman marries a man she has the right to expect him to provide for and protect her. A symbol of that was her long hair that emphasizes her femininity.

2) THEIR CONDUCT- "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Titus 2:4-5). Women that become mothers realize that their primary duty is the care of their families. Everything else is a secondary concern.

3) THEIR COMPASSION- "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Mat 23:37). This example of the "mother hen" is a tremendous illustration of the compassion of a mother. Her "wings" are always open to provide that sense of peace and security children need so desperately.

There is no mold for mothers but there are guidelines that help all mothers become what God intended. I hope your mother is that kind of model and you'll wish her a very HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY.

May 11, 1994 SALVATION

The greatest gain in the entire world is the Salvation that is freely offered through Faith in the Sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ, for our sins. This salvation should be celebrated in song, in sermon, and in life. It should also be shared by everyone with everyone.

There are three ways the message of Salvation should be shared by those who have experienced God's saving Grace in their own heart.

1) SALVATION SHOULD BE TAUGHT- "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15).

People who know the Lord should use every opportunity to share the plan of salvation as revealed in God's Word with those around them. Family time, break time, vacation time; all are good times to share the Gospel.

2) SALVATION SHOULD BE CAUGHT- "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;" (1 Pet 3:1)

The reason I'm saved today is because a next door neighbor lived such a consistent life until I wanted what he had. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mat 5:16).

3) SALVATION SHOULD BE WROUGHT- "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Salvation is more than a mindset or a good moral life, it is a supernatural change brought about by the Holy Spirit when we trust Christ as Savior. It's a work that only God can work.

Salvation is wonderful. Don't leave earth without it.

May 17, 1994 BLANK SIGNS

Recently the local daily newspaper occupied nearly a third of the top half of its front page with the picture of a man painting a sign. It seems the sign company didn't have anyone to advertise so they were painting the sign to use as an advertisement for themselves. It really must have been a slow news day if they editors decided to use a blank sign to fill one of the main parts of the paper!!

Sadly, many people are like this blank sign. Their life has become empty and blank and they now spend all their time trying to paint over the emptiness so the world will not know what is really going on. They work out, drive themselves to exercise classes, and do without the food they crave in order to become a beautiful person; but under all the beautiful exterior the sign is empty.

Or they work themselves to death in a job that destroys their health, takes all their time away from their family, and consumes all their time and energy; to build a jewel encrusted house of cards that looks lovely to those outside but is in reality a cold blank sign full of bitterness, loneliness, and despair.

Maybe the newspaper was right. Maybe a Blank Sign is indeed big news. Maybe it's just what we need to remind us that man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart. And no matter how beautifully we paint the sign, the Lord still knows it's blank.

May 18, 1994 PRAYING PEOPLE

As long as there are final exams there will be prayer in School. The Government may regulate the Practice of Religion in Public but it can never eliminate the Need of God in life. And when that test paper is laid on their desk the student knows he needs some help from somewhere beyond himself!

While I remain concerned about Government interference in Religious activities in school I am more concerned about the prayer habits of Christians in their daily life in society. I'm convinced that Students would lead their School in Prayer more if they saw that prayer was a vital part of their parent's life.

A couple of real life incidents may help bring this into focus. My wife and I were driving through a town in North Carolina recently. It was a small town but we were involved in a major traffic jam. When we got to the center of town, we found that the reason for the traffic jam was a special prayer meeting being held at the courthouse. This large group of people had given up their lunch hour to pray for America. A practice echoed in town after town all across America that day.

As we continued on our way home we stopped at a restaurant for a meal. After my wife and I bowed to thank God for our food I looked over at another table where another couple was doing the same thing. Then, behind me, I heard a lady letting her small child say the Blessing over their meal.

If God is going to make a difference in America it will be because people stop arguing over prayer and start praying. And not just on one day or at one time but as the Bible says, "Pray without ceasing."

May 24, 1994 SMALL PRINT

When the pastor of a local church received his check recently he noticed that it had the church name listed without its denominational affiliation. He wondered about it for a while and finally called the treasurer to ask why the checks had been printed that way. That's when he realized how old he had become. The treasurer told him the checks had the exact information that had been on them for years. The only difference was that they had just received business size checks instead of personal size checks and the writing was a little bigger!

Jesus talked about people who have eyes to see but see not. That's a problem everyone seems to have from time to time (Especially old, dim sighted preachers!). That's why it's so easy to overlook the really important things in life. For some strange reason, most really important life events are written in "small print" while the things that really don't matter much get all the glamor and headlines.

Take a child. It's so easy to see their failures and folly; and scream and yell at them about the need to straighten up. But how often do we take for granted the crooked little smiles or the small signs of maturity that continually poke through their childish behavior. In some strange way, the faults stand out in glaring headlines while the good qualities get small print on the back page.

I think it's a good time to check up on our checks. Look at the small print and see what's really written there. Sometimes you will find problems that need to be corrected. But sometimes you will find Blessings that will change your attitudes and actions. Whichever, you need to know what the small print says.

May 25, 1994 OVERVIEWS

I was in the court atop the city-county complex recently and had the opportunity to look out the window. It's amazing how many trees there are in Florence!

When you are driving down the streets of Florence you hardly notice the trees but when you get an opportunity to look down at the city from above they are the first thing you notice. And they lend a beauty and serenity to the city that is entirely different from the stress and strife of fighting rush hour traffic. That same principle applies to taking a divine perspective on the daily difficulties we encounter.

Take the young man I recently talked with who was dying of AIDS. As I tried to ease my way through the difficult traffic of his sickness and pain he made an amazing statement, "Preacher, I'm glad I got AIDS. Before I got it I could have died in an accident and I would have been separated from God forever. Since I've contacted the disease I have developed a personal relationship with the Lord and look forward to going to Heaven." He had stopped looking at the streets and started looking at the trees.

Or how about the man who lost his wife and now had to face life without a companion or a mother for his two small children. He could have looked at how difficult it would be to travel the streets. Instead He's now a tremendous worker and witness for the Lord. He obtained a divine overview and now looks for a heavenly reunion.

If death, disease, or the daily grind of life has you down maybe it's time you climbed up closer to God. You'll be surprised at what a difference it makes when you start looking at life from a heavenly view.

May 31, 1994 SEEKING ADVICE

“Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war” (Prov 20:18).

Everyone seeks advice from time to time. “Where should we eat?” “What do you think I should do about the way the boss is treating me?” “When is a good time to plant tomato plants?”

Many times, however, the advice we seek is not as simple as the previous questions. It involves advice about what to do about a cheating mate or a wayward child. Or it could be about a hurting in your chest or a wrong done to you by someone else. Anything that we feel we need more input on in order to form a good decision.

The Bible puts a high premium on the need of seeking, and putting into practice, good counsel in our life. Sadly, living in the 90s, men have decided to get this counsel from the wrong sources- talk show hosts, psychic hot-lines, and bartenders. And if you start out with bad advice you’ll end up with a bad decision.

My advice to you about seeking advice is three fold:

1. Find Godly friends that God has given the spirit of Wisdom and “pick their brain” every chance you get.
2. Don’t look for only “yes” men to give you advice. Pick friends that will look at your situation realistically and point out obvious errors, even if you don’t want to see that side of the story.
3. Finally, Don’t let what you think is good over rule what God says is right- “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.” (Prov 19:21)

June 1, 1994 PREPARED FOR JONAH

The book of Jonah says that God prepared 4 things for Jonah in order to teach him some valuable lessons. Let’s look at those four things with the idea that we may see some things in our life that are there because God has prepared them in order to teach us some important life lessons.

First, God prepared a great fish (whale) to swallow Jonah. Jonah was running from God’s will for his life and God had to show him how dangerous that could be. When Jonah arrived in this fish God had prepared for him he said he was crying out to God from the belly of hell!! Maybe that’s where you feel you are today because of sickness, situations, or circumstances. Just remember this; God also prepared it so the whale would vomit Jonah up on dry land when he repented!

Secondly, God prepared a gourd to grow up and shade Jonah. Jonah was pouting because life didn’t go the way he wanted it to but he was happy enough to accept this shade from God. Do you take God’s blessings for granted but pout when God doesn’t allow you to run the universe?

Third, God prepared a worm to eat the gourd and kill it. Then He prepared a vehement east wind to blow upon Jonah. Without the shade of the gourd Jonah had sunstroke and almost died. Jonah cried out in anger to God about the loss of the gourd and God asked him a simple question, "Is it right for you to be more interested in a gourd that provides you shade than you are in the salvation of a city of six hundred thousand people?"

What has God prepared for you to cause you to re-examine your priorities and purpose in life? Whatever it is you need to learn the lesson God is teaching you.

June 7, 1994 FAIR SHARE

The world says that the only two things that are certain are death and taxes; and, given the chance, the government will tax you to death!!

In taxes, as in all matters, God has a plan that works wonderfully without becoming an oppressive burden or promoting dishonesty and cheating. It's called the tithe. It means one tenth and describes what God expects from EVERYONE- rich and poor alike. It's God's method of supporting His work; and it works.

It would also work in our government. The income tax should be repealed and a national tithe tax imposed. That way everyone, no matter how much or how little they make, would equally carry the burden of providing government services. Any time you bought anything, from a candy bar to a Cadillac, you would pay the same tax rate. And what a difference in attitude it would make if everyone knew that everyone else was paying the same tax rate they were paying.

Of course, the only way this could work effectively is to demand the government operate by the same rules everyone else has to operate by- your budget is determined by what you receive rather than by what you want to spend in order to become popular. In other words, the government could only spend what it received. The budget would simply be a percentage of what each government agency could expect from the money that came in from this tithe tax. It would not be an unlimited credit card that allowed the government to spend as if there were no tomorrow.

God's plan gives everyone the opportunity to give a fair share in order to live in this great land. Isn't it about time we tried it God's way??

June 8, 1994 PERILS OF PROCRASTINATION

"Opportunities multiply as they are seized; they die when neglected." --John Wicker

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." --James 4:17

All of us like to put off tasks in our life. I put off getting a haircut until my wife "reminds" me that hippie preachers are no longer in style. My wife puts off planning a meal until it's obvious I'm not going to volunteer to get us something and we'll go hungry if something is not done.

These are silly things, I know, but they illustrate the tendency of all of us to put off jobs that we know need to be done. Many times this procrastination does very little obvious damage. Some times, however, this passing up of opportunities and obligations brings disaster or long term consequences.

The Chinese have a saying that, "A journey of One Thousand miles begins with a single step." How often do we fail to journey down the correct road simply because we neglect to make that first step? And how often do we suffer now because we put off important decisions and duties yesterday?

In our scripture from James we find that procrastination is not just a bad habit, it can be deadly. Is there something God has been speaking to your heart about recently and you've been putting it off until a more convenient season? It's perilous to procrastinate. Determine to do your duty today.

June 14, 1994 WHERE ARE GENTLEMEN?

The man of today prides himself on being a man's man. He measures his "manliness" by his ability to intimidate and hurt others. He threatens everyone who doesn't see things exactly as he does with a hard sneer, a big gun, and a whispered, "Make my day."

Is that what a real man is all about? Is the only way to judge a man the fact that he's the biggest and toughest bull in the herd? If so, then we resemble the animal kingdom a lot more than we want to admit.

I think what God and society is looking for is something called a gentleman. A gentleman is a man who has his strength under control and is governed by standards of right and wrong. He protects women, children, and the helpless. He does not have to yell, scream, or threaten to get his point across. He does not curse those who irritate him. He does not want to destroy those around him, he wants to live together in peace and harmony.

A gentleman is courteous and thoughtful of others. He opens doors for ladies and says, "Yes, sir" and "Yes, Ma'am". He considers the needs and desires of his wife and children and tries to do what is best for them. He leads his family by his example and his wisdom; not by the force of his strength or the demanding of his rights.

We don't need any more bulls roaming in china shops destroying everything they come in contact with. We need some gentlemen who want to be gentlemen because they realize a gentleman is really a man's man.

June 15, 1994 STOOPED MEN

Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad (Prov. 12:25).

I have noticed a lot of stooped men recently. No, not men who have poor posture but men who have heavy hearts.

Some hearts are heavy because, in the politically correct 90's, society seems to think the worst possible person in the world is a hardworking, financially strapped, family man. Everyone seems to want to blame a man like this for every family, social, and even political problem. Many men are confused and heavy hearted because the very ideals they have been taught all their life now makes them disdained and despised.

Some men are stooped over with heavy hearts because the demands of work and debt kept them away from their family much more than they would like and now they see their family dissolving into anarchy and chaos. Most of the time the situation was beyond their control but they know they'll still get the blame for everything that's going wrong.

There are multitudes of reasons men's hearts are stooped with heaviness. Let's look beyond the reasons for the stooped hearts and see if we can't find a way to get these men to walk upright again. It seems like a fairly simple process, "A good word makes a stooped heart glad".

That's it. That's what you can give your dad this Father's day; a simple word of praise and encouragement. Let your words of affirmation draw the stoop out of his back and ease the discouragement out of his heart. It will really be a great Father's day when you see your Dad walking about with squared shoulders and smiling face. Try it.

June 21, 1994 BLIND DENOMINATIONS

From time to time people tell me they think I'm a pretty good fellow but I'd really be all right if I would just have the religious experience they have had. I generally just nod, say, "Thank you"; and go on serving the Lord.

Many years ago I told the Lord I would do anything or give anything to have everything the Lord wanted me to have and to be everything the Lord wanted me to be. Since that time I've had some extremely emotional experiences in my Christian life and I rejoice in every one of them. Most of the time, however, I walk day by day with the Lord, holding to His hand and trying to accomplish His will for that day. That's because I learned the lesson about building your Christian life on emotional experiences many years ago from the story of the three "Blind Denominations".

Three times in the Gospels Jesus reaches out and cures a Blind man. Each was a unique experience. One blind man was cured by Jesus simply speaking the word. Another blind man was cured when Jesus touched his eyes one time. The third blind man was not healed until Jesus had touched his blinded eyes twice. Building upon their experience, these men could have started the denominations of the No touch, the One touch, and the Two touch!

Regardless of how many touches they received, the important thing to remember is that each of them had blinded eyes that were made to see. So don't be blinded by your experiences. Just make sure that when you see you see everything God has for you to see and then you live accordingly.

June 22, 1994 SEEING IN THE DARK

Have you ever walked into a dimly lit restaurant and had to sit at your table for a few minutes before your eyes could become focused enough to read the menu? My wife and I went into a restaurant like this several months back and we finally had to ask to move to a better lighted booth in order to place our order!

Society today is becoming increasingly like these dimly lit restaurants. The light is so dim until it's very difficult to determine what you're getting.

The Bible says drunkards won't go to heaven so now they are called alcoholics. The Bible says Homosexuality is a sin so now they describe themselves as gays. Live in lovers used to be an abomination to society as well as God but now it's simply called an alternate life style. We used to think People who killed, robbed, and raped were wicked people controlled by Satan. Today Society tells us they can't help themselves because someone in their youth didn't give them everything they wanted and now they have a warped personality (That makes it a mental problem for society to argue over instead of a spiritual problem for them to repent over).

I'm not much for dimly lit restaurants. I've got a pretty wife and I like to see her when I eat. I also like to see what I'm ordering and what it looks like when it arrives (Isn't it strange that the more you pay for food the less they want you to be able to see it!). I'm that way about behavior as well. Dimming the lights doesn't change a murderer's heart; it simply gives him more opportunities to kill you!

Christians are the light of the world. We sure need to clean our lamp shades because it's getting awful dark everywhere I look.

June 28, 1994 ROCK TREES

There was no way it could be where it was but there it was. We had climbed a long winding path to view a waterfall. At the edge of the waterfall was a rocky ledge. Growing out of this ledge was a huge tree.

The roots of the tree were exposed to the air as they embraced the rocky ledge. There was no dirt visible to provide food and water for the tree. In fact, the roots look very much like a hand that had reached out and grasped a rock.

I've met people like this. Circumstances and situations had combined to make their life so hard until it seemed impossible that they could even survive, much less grow. Yet there they were, growing straight and tall against all odds because they were rooted in the rock, Jesus Christ.

Maybe situations in your life are very difficult right now- a prolonged sickness, a disabled parent, or a financial disaster. Sometimes it seems during times like this that there is no hope or help because your roots have only a rock to grasp. Let me assure you, that rock has all the strength you need if that rock is Jesus. Grab hold of Him today; you'll find He's able to provide for you no matter how hard the situation appears.

July 5, 1994 LOCKED

For years after my wife and I were married I would get up each morning, unlock the doors to our home, and leave them unlocked until we went to bed at night. All of that changed after she was assaulted. Now we must leave the doors locked all the time and I must contend with the frustration of using a key every time I want to get into my home.

Recently my wife's sister was helping her put up some butter beans. Since she had her children with her I unlocked the doors so they could come in and out without any trouble. That brought about several interesting incidents.

I was on the phone when I heard someone banging on the back door. I knew it was unlocked so I kept on talking. Soon the banging became persistent. I left the phone and met a very angry wife at the door who was upset because I wouldn't open the door for her. She cooled right off however when I showed her the door was unlocked the entire time! Can you see an illustration of how Jesus said that if we would knock the door would be opened. Our problem is that we knock on the open door and fail to walk through to the blessings on the other side.

The other incident was not seen until the following morning. When I started out of the house to get the paper I noticed that I had forgotten to re-lock the doors. All night long we had slept like babies in a house with all its doors unlocked! That's when I praised God that He is on the job even when I get old and absent minded. Locked or unlocked, it's great to know that "He that keepeth thee will never slumber or sleep".

July 6, 1994 WHAT'S WRONG WITH AMERICA?

An old proverb says, "Deviate an inch and eventually you'll lose a thousand miles." The idea is simple, if you are wrong at the beginning your error will grow larger and larger as you journey.

That's the answer to the question, "What's wrong with America?". Several years back we accepted a wrong philosophy and each year the error grows larger and larger. The error was our abandonment of God's Guidelines. Someone in power thought our interpretation and application of God's Guidelines were flawed so they decided to replace them with a "Man is god" philosophy.

At first this seemed the right course and many people rejoiced in the individual freedom they were able to claim. Wrongful desires could now be freely engaged in without fear of public censure because sin was now a matter of personal preference. Eventually even the consequences of such desires could be dealt with as blame was shifted from the person doing the wrong to the failure of their parents or of an inadequate Government program.

But everyone knows something is wrong so they appoint more committees and ask for more money from the Government. More and more people, however, are looking across that thousand mile gap between what we should be and what we actually are. But it's so far back to where we went astray until they decide to keep prodding forward. And each day finds us further from God and closer to anarchy, doom, and destruction. Somehow someone must convince them that the only way forward is to turn back to God. But it had better be soon because we're very close to the edge

July 12, 1994 FAMILY DEVOTIONS

One of the many benefits of "TV Less Tuesday" is the opportunity to develop a special night of family devotions (TV Less Tuesday is when your family agrees that they will not turn on TV on Tuesday in order to break the Habit of TV and to allow the family to spend an evening together building relationships). The problem many face, however, is their fear of failure or their frustration in continuing a meaningful family devotion. Here are a few Guidelines.

First, Set a definite time for Family Devotions. Before or after the Evening meal works for many people. You may not always be able to keep the same time but it's important that you have a time appointed.

Second, Have a Plan of action. Family Devotion should involve a time of Prayer (In which everyone gets to make request or participate), a time of Testimony and song (In which everyone takes part), and a time of Bible Study. Many families also include a time of "family counsel" in which problems are discussed and plans are presented so everyone will know what schedule is expected of them.

The book that I suggest for your first venture into the wonderful world of Family Devotion will surprise you; The book of Revelation. This book is exciting, entertaining, and informative; just what you need to get your devotion started on the right track. In chapter one you read a description of Jesus; have everyone draw a picture of Jesus and compare concepts. Chapter Thirteen tells about the reign of Antichrist in which you must have the mark of the beast to buy or sell; what an excellent time to stress the perils of Peer Pressure. And the final Chapters deal with our Heavenly Home; an excellent opportunity to discuss assurance of salvation, death, and the family's future.

Turn off your TV this Tuesday and Tune in to Family Devotions. You will be astonished at the difference it will make both now and for eternity.

July 13, 1994 HOW TO CATCH A MONKEY

Do you know how to catch a monkey? He's so fast until it's almost impossible to throw a net over him. When bananas are put out as bait for him, he will figure out a way to steal the bananas and run away laughing. But in spite of all this a monkey is very easy to catch.

Get a large jar with a small mouth. Put an apple in the jar and sit back and wait. The monkey will come along, put his hand in the jar, grasp the apple, and then be unable to remove both his hand and the apple. Unwilling to let go of his prize he will sit there while you capture him.

This is one of those cases where man and monkey show similar traits. Time after time, Men, also, have been caught in a "greed jar". One man drowns because he refused to let go of his money belt. Another man escaped from his burning house but ran back in and was later found with his burned hand grasped around his wallet. And there are numerous cases of bright intelligent people who lost family, friends, and jobs because they were caught with their hand in the "cookie jar".

Is it any wonder that God made the last of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shall not covet"? Get your priorities in order. Don't let money make a monkey out of you.

July 19, 1994 SAYINGS

From time to time it is good to look at some witty sayings and draw some spiritual insight from them.

1) WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING ABOUT HEAVEN? Philippians 3:20 says "Our citizenship is in heaven; which is where we look for the appearance of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ". Jesus told us to lay up our treasures in Heaven and to make all preparations to go there. But what have YOU done about Heaven? Are you more interested in your bank balance here than your Heavenly reward? Are you more excited about your upcoming vacation than you are about going to Heaven? What on earth are you doing about Heaven?

2) BEWARE OF HALF TRUTHS; YOU MAY HAVE HOLD OF THE WRONG HALF. Men say that, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me". The Bible says, "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they do down into the innermost part of the belly" (Prov 26:22). Jesus said that we would give account of the idle words we speak. That's especially important when we hear part of conversations or presume to judge people on what we think are their motives. When you only know half the story and attempt to fill in the remainder with your own interpretation you will normally do tremendous harm. And would you want that done to YOU?

3) NO MATTER HOW BAD YOUR SITUATION, YOU CAN LOSE YOUR TEMPER AND MAKE IT WORSE. The Bible says that "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov 25:28). Be careful how you give people a piece of your mind; you don't enough to be giving any away! And cursing the salesclerk will not mend the broken handle on your new pot.

July 20, 1994 DRESSED UP

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3)

Recently I had some business at a local establishment. When I entered I saw the secretary was dressed in an unusually nice looking dress for a normal work day. I commented on how nice she looked and then I looked at another Secretary. She too was dressed extremely nicely for a normal work day.

By now, I knew something special must be going on so I asked why everyone was so well dressed that day. The answer was very revealing. The directors of the organization, from the main headquarters, were due to arrive sometime that day and all the secretaries were trying to make a good impression on them.

That's a principle Christians use on a regular basis. We know that our "boss" (The Lord Jesus Christ) could come at any time. We don't know exactly when He will come but we know He's coming. So, every day, we live and act as if he will show up at our work place or supper table that day. That doesn't develop a constant sense of fear or anxiety in our life because we Love the Lord and we know He loves us. Instead, there is a wonderful sense of anticipation as we look forward to the completion of our task on earth and our wonderful reunion day in Heaven.

If the "boss" comes today for a visit will He find you ready for the rapture or looking for a hole in which to hide to avoid His wrath?

July 26, 1994 SAYINGS (II)

Last week we looked at several sayings that carried a spiritual message. Today I want to look at several more.

1) SHADOWS FALL BEHIND WHEN WE WALK TOWARD THE LIGHT. When troubles come into the life of many people the first thing they do is start missing church. By turning away from God they turn toward the darkness and that makes their situation that much worse. If they would only turn to God they would find the guidance and strength they so desperately need.

2) A MAN CAN BE JUDGED BY THE THINGS AT WHICH HE LAUGHS. Paul said that the height of evil was when men "knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such evil acts are worth of death, not only do the same, but derive pleasure from the watching of others do them." (Rom 1:32). Keep notes for a week. Mark down every time something on TV causes you to laugh. If sexual jokes, unkind cuts toward parents, and making fun of people of principle are the things that give you pleasure then you need to check up on your relationship with Christ.

3) DIAMONDS ARE CHUNKS OF COAL THAT ENDURED THE PRESSURE. Peter said, "If, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." (1 Pet 2:20). Some people think God is against them when they are put under pressure. He may simply be making you into something great for His glory.

4) DUSTY BIBLES LEAD TO DIRTY MINDS. The Psalmist says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against God." (Psalm 119:11). The Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Bible. How many chapters have YOU read this week?

July 27, 1994 GOD'S GOAL

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Rom 1:-16-17)

This living by Faith deal is a lot harder to live than it is to preach. It's easy to talk about faith in an air conditioned church with a good choir and friends all around. It's much more difficult to deal with in the midst of sickness, persecution, and temptation.

When I first became a Christian I thought God's Goal was for me to be happy, healthy, and successful. As I developed a relationship with Christ, however, I found God is more interested in making me what I ought to be than He is in giving me what I want to have!

I wanted smooth seas and easy sailing but God taught me a smooth sea never made a good sailor. I found that spiritual muscles aren't developed lying on the bed of ease. Strength is developed when we wrestle with the devil, endure the storms of trial and temptation, and watch in awe as God supplies our needs when it seems there is no hope.

Like any good parent, God wants me to develop into the best I can be. And that happens when I stop talking about faith and start living by faith.

August 2, 1994 FRINGE PHILIP

Are you one of those people who have good intentions but never seem to reach success? If so, you can probably relate to “Fringe Philip”.

Jesus paid a personal visit to Philip and asked him to become a disciple. Overwhelmed with joy, Philip immediately went to tell his good friend, Nathanael. He found Nathanael praying under a fig tree and told him Jesus was the Messiah.

Instead of jumping for joy, Nathanael asked cautiously, “can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip’s confidence plummeted and he could only stammer, “Come and see.” An opportunity for a stand became a stumble.

That pattern is repeated every time we see Philip. He tells Jesus how hungry the crowd is but doesn’t believe Jesus can do anything about it. Greeks come to him seeking admission to see Jesus and Philip passes the buck to Andrew. And, as Jesus tells of His upcoming death, Philip can only say, “Show us a physical Father and we will believe.”

Opportunity after opportunity passed for Philip to become great. Each time, fear of making a definite stand caused him to stumble. Instead of being part of that group close to Jesus, Philip was always on the fringe.

Does that same fear drive you to the fringe instead of into a closer fellowship with Christ? Is your Christian life a series of what might have been? Stop depending on other people’s approval, your own strength, or your limited wisdom. Make a definite stand for Christ today.

August 3, 1994 EVALUATING LOVE

God is love. You know God. Why don’t you feel loved?

Instead of feeling loved you feel unworthy, inadequate, and are constantly haunted by your past failures. The abundant life has become the agonizing life. What could cause such a thing to happen?

1> UNREALISTIC EXPECTATION- you still harbor a romantic notion about love in your mind that has nothing to do with reality. My wife probably had a dream about a white knight sweeping her away from all the cares and worries of life into a dream world of rest, roses, and excitement.

What she got was a fat, bald husband who wants clothes washed and the house cleaned. Yet, she and I both express the fact that we love each other far more today than we did 24 years ago when we first got married.

Some people expect Heaven to come to earth when they are saved. They forget that God called us to be examples and lights IN THE MIDST of a sin sick society. Real love is not floating thorough life on billowy clouds of ease; it is serving God by helping others.

2> UNREPENTED SINS- Repentance is more than feeling sorrow about the cause and consequences of sin. Repentance is TURNING FROM sin as you turn to God for forgiveness. It is realizing sin is so bad until it cost Heaven the most precious thing it had; but God loved you enough to pay that price! It is determining to love God enough to not only seek freedom from the penalty of sin but to also allow God to break the power of sin in your life.

Perfect love casts out all fear. I know God loves me and I know I love God. Now I don’t have to worry about the world’s wiles, words, or wisdom. I simply rest in God. And that’s abundant life.

August 9, 1994 ACTIVE SALVATION

If your Salvation does not change your life then I doubt that it has changed your heart; or your destination! Faith in Christ is more than a mental assent to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. It is a faith born of an awareness of sin so deep until it drives you to turn from sin and throw yourself on the mercy of God. It is believing that Christ died to pay your sin debt and now your life belongs to God.

SALVATION SHOULD BE WORKED OUT (Brought to completion)- "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13)

SALVATION SHOULD BE LIVED OUT- "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

SALVATION SHOULD BE ACTED OUT- Jesus left 3 "Examples" the Church is to use as a public showcase of our faith:

1) Lord's Supper- "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." (1 Cor 11:26)

2) Feet Washing- "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:14-15)

3) Baptism- Before Christ began His Ministry.

Has your Faith in Christ produced a Change in your life??

August 10, 1994 A PARABLE

Once there was an honest, hardworking, couple trying to raise their daughter the best they could. Due to sickness and circumstances beyond their control they got into financial difficulties. Soon they had to swallow their pride and ask the government for help in order to purchase food. The Government was very cooperative. They said they would be glad to assist the family if they would fill out one simple form.

When the Government worker arrived to fill out the form, she began asking questions about the couple's daughter instead of about the food needs of the family. After only a few questions the government worker said the government was going to take the child because she didn't think the parents were giving the daughter enough freedom or education.

Heart stricken, the parents said they would rather do without the food than lose their child. "Sorry," said the Government worker, "You've asked for our help and now you can't back out."

Now the couple sits at home with little food and no daughter. Meanwhile, the Government raises their child to believe the Government knows best and you should always look to the Government for your needs.

There once was a Church where the attendance began to drop. Finally, someone suggested the Church abandon preaching and praying and try the entertainment and activities that people liked so well in the world.

The World said, "That's the ticket. I'll be glad to help you. All you have to do is fill out this one simple form." But that's another story.

II Timothy 4:3-4 "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts will they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

August 16, 1994 WHAT PLEASES GOD

The heart desire of every true child of God is to please the Heavenly Father in all we say or do. The problem we encounter, however, is determining just how we should do that.

Let me give you 5 Guiding Principles for your relationship with God that will please Him. They will also bring peace and joy to your personal life, your family life, and your social life.

1. FAITH- But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb 11:6). Faith brings salvation. Faith is the determining factor in our walk with God. If you are going to please God you can't depend on your sight or your feelings; you must walk with God by Faith.

2. FRUITFULNESS- Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples (John 15:8). Fruit in the life of a Christian is Christian Character, Christian Conduct, and Christian Converts. God looks for all of these in our life.

3. SERVICE- And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all (Mark 10:44). Pride and the desire for Power led to Satan's fall. It pleases God when His children love Him first and then love their neighbor as themselves.

4. VICTORY- For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (I John 5:4). It pleases God when His children make all "A's" on the tests of life. This occurs when we grasp the potential of Phil 4:13 "I can do everything in the Strength of him who makes me strong".

5. PRAISE- Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God (Psa 50:23). Like any parent, God is pleased when His Children love and praise him.

August 17, 1994 SMELL GOOD TO GOD

I love God. I really do. The Love I have for God is not some abstract, spaced out wonder that causes me to feel funny. It is a deep abiding trust and confidence that causes me to desire to want to do anything I can to build and maintain our relationship. That's why I keep looking for things that God likes so I can attempt to share them with Him.

Listening to the Radio recently I heard a preacher say that God likes the smell of Christians (2 Cor 2:15). I wondered about that until I remembered how good a fresh washed baby smells. Everyone just wants to hug and kiss on a baby when they come fresh from the tub. May my life be lived so pure until God will want to just hold and hug me!

That caused me to start looking for other things that smell good to God. The list is not long but it is interesting.

We find in Genesis 8:21 that when Noah offered a sacrifice to God after the flood that it smelled so good to God until He promised to never curse the ground again for man's sake. That was a powerful smell.

When God gave the people of Israel instructions about offerings He told them the whole burnt offering of a lamb smelled sweet to Him. It doesn't smell sweet physically but it smelled sweet to God because it represented the sacrifice His son would make on a cross one day (Eph 5:2).

Finally, it's interesting to note that the prayers of Saints are the perfume God uses in Heaven (Rev 5:8). That's a smell I want to give God a lot of!

When God gets close to you does He smell a sweet savor or does He smell the stench of the world clinging to your garments?

August 23, 1994 SIN ADDICTION

You don't have to teach a child to lie. You have to listen to him tell you he didn't steal the cookies from the cookie jar as he wipes the crumbs from his mouth! You don't have to make people gossip. You simply have to give them 1 or 2 juicy items and let them build the story from there!

Why is sin so addictive? And what can we do to change this sin addiction in our life? Here are six principles that will help you comprehend, and conquer, your sin addiction.

1) We were created by God, for His glory (Rev 4:11). A relationship with God is the only place we will find peace and real joy.

2) God did not corrupt our nature, sin did- Rom 5:12, Psalm 51:5. We can't blame God for our addiction, or excuse it, by telling God He made us the way we are.

3) We naturally resist God's commandments and Solutions (Eph 2:2-3). The sinful flesh is at war with God from the moment we're born.

4) We love our sinful way of life, although we may not like some of its consequences (Rom 7:14-19). We WANT to do wrong. We have to continually be on guard in order to live right. If we could be assured there would be no consequences for our behavior we would jump into every known depravity with all our energy (That's why the breakdown of authority is bringing such chaos to America).

5) We are powerless to change our addictive love for sin- Jer 13:23, 17:9. We can force ourselves to adapt to society's standards but when those standards change we adapt to the lower standards.

6) The only real change is to be born anew by the Spirit of God so that God will give us a new Nature and Ability (John 3:6-7, II Pet 1:3-4). We can't change our addiction until Christ changes our heart. That changes us from the inside out.

August 24, 1994 PRAYER POSITIONS

The Bible says, "Men ought always to pray and to never quit" (Luke 18:1). I think everyone with any perception will readily agree with that principle. We easily see the need to pray for wisdom to deal with life's problems, healing for physical afflictions and salvation for lost loved ones. But I have learned through the course of my journey with the Lord that it's good to pray about everything- Where to park, who to visit, how to spend my limited resources, and so on.

In the course of all that praying I have learned to pray in a number of positions. On my knees in my prayer closet. Sitting, with my eyes open, as I drive down the highway. Probably my most favorite, walking around or inside the church as I pray for the church and its members.

We have experimented with several other prayer positions in our Church, however, that you may find useful.

Team Prayer- Everyone forms a circle and places their hand atop the Pastor's hand (like at a football game). The Pastor then puts his other hand on top and prays for everyone in the circle.

Huddle Prayer- The group is divided up into smaller groups with a captain of each group. He huddles with his group, gets their prayer request, and then leads his group in prayer as they huddle together.

Sandwich Prayer- People are put into groups of three. Two are the "bread" and one is the "Meat". The "Meat" shares needs with the Bread and the bread then gets behind and in front of the meat, lays hands on his shoulders, and prays for God to work in this situation in their life.

Circle Prayer- Everyone in the Church gathers around the outer edge of the pews and holds hands to form a circle all the way around the church. The prayer begins with silent prayer for the person directly opposite you and then is concluded by someone leading everyone in a closing prayer.

Find a prayer position today and pray without ceasing.

August 31, 1994 COW IN THE WELL

Once upon a time a farmer heard a loud noise and went to investigate. Much to his dismay he found his cow had fallen into an old dry well on his farm. He and his son made numerous attempts to remove the cow from the well but every effort failed. Finally the Farmer told his son the best thing to do was to bury the cow and get it out of its misery.

The son began hauling wheel barrow loads of dirt to the well and dumping them into the well. The cow didn't like this dirt falling on her so she continually shook it off and stamped it down. Wheel barrow after wheel barrow of dirt was emptied into the well until finally the son realized he could reach down and touch the cow! Instead of allowing herself to be buried the cow had used the dirt to make a way out of her predicament.

Sometimes, in the course of life, people accidentally find they have fallen into a problem that's so deep they can't get out of it. They can lie down and let others bury them. Or they can determine to use the dirt thrown at them to allow them to get out of their problem.

That's what Jesus always did. It seems that everything Jesus did was criticized by his foes or his friends or both. He would simply turn their comments around and use them to point to His Heavenly Father. Finally, it came to the place that they put Him in the deepest well of all, the grave. Instead of keeping Him down, however, it allowed Him to be raised from the dead and conquer every enemy.

If you've fallen into a well and can't get up then just lift up your eyes. God has help coming for you; even if it comes from someone trying to bury you!

September 6, 1994 3 CHEERS FROM GOD

Do you need some words of cheer today? Three times in Scripture God tells us to “Cheer up” and, in doing so, He deals with every aspect of our life.

1. Our Past-FORGIVENESS OF SINS -And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. (Mat 9:2)

The Past condemns us, Convicts us, and Worries us. Jesus has forgiven our sin, moved them as far as the east is from the west, and cast them into the depth of the sea; not to be remembered anymore. God say, “Cheer up; I am able to deal with your past.”

2. Our Present-COMPANIONSHIP -But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. (Mat 14:27)

Sometimes we get lonely or we become sick or we are hurt or problems beset us on every hand. Jesus tells us to Cheer up; He is in the boat with us and the storms of life cannot overwhelm us.

3. Our Future-VICTORY - These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Lift up your eyes past the tribulation of this world to our triumph with Christ in the world to come. This world will bring you trouble and temptation but, cheer up, God will never leave you or forsake you and He has promised you will be on the winning side with Him.

God wants to cheer you up. Let Him!!

September 7, 1994 WATER IN THE BOAT

Recently we went on a rafting trip with the youth of our Church. It was an exciting trip- Through a misunderstanding with the hotel manager our rooms were given to someone else. That made for a long exciting night! And to cap it off, someone backed into the van driven by one of the members while we were trying to figure out what to do about the fact that we didn't have any rooms. It was a memorial start to an exciting trip.

The next morning we arrived at the rafting location at 8:30am and found the rafting company was experiencing delays. Instead of leaving at 9am we were almost 45 minutes late. Then, when we began the trip down river, another group joined our group and one of them fell into the water and injured their leg. That made for another hour and a half delay. We finally arrived back at the camp after 2pm instead of before noon, as we expected. Needless to say, everyone was hungry and tired.

In spite of all the complications, we had a good trip that everyone seemed to enjoy. And we learned a valuable lesson while we rafted. I tell people all the time that it's alright for the boat to be in the water but its bad news if the water gets in the boat. Meaning a Christian is supposed to be in the world but the world is not supposed to be in the Christian.

When you white water raft water gets into the boat all the time. Every so often it was necessary to stop the rafts, jump out into the cold water of the stream, and turn the raft over to empty the water. It was not a pleasant job but it was a necessary one. That same thing applies to many Christians. They need to stop what they are doing long enough to empty the water from their boat. Then they can start enjoying the trip down the river of life again.

September 13, 1994 POT PURPOSE

It is beat up, warped, and old. You have to keep moving it around on the eye of stove until it sits just right in order to keep the water from spilling out. And, on top of all of that, it has lost its shine and luster so it looks pretty bad. Yet, in spite of all these shortcomings, this is one of the pots my wife and I use the most.

I think of my Christian life a lot when I look at that pot. In the thirty two years I've been saved I have been beat up, warped, and gotten old. Through the years the pounding I've received from Satan, Saints, and Circumstances have left me battered and scarred. Sin, human frailty, and the weakness of the flesh have many times warped me until the Lord had to turn me every which way but loose in order to make me a useable vessel. And age, anxiety, and a lot of miles have taken away the luster of youth and replaced it with the shine of a bald head!

Yet, somehow, God still uses this old beat up pot. I can't compete with the shiny new pots loaded with luster and new gadgets but I can still boil water when called upon by God to do so. And the water is just as hot as the big boys heat it!

The Bible says, "They that compare themselves among themselves are not wise". Remember, it's not the shine on the pot that matters but how much God uses that pot. Determine to be the best pot for God you can be.

September 14, 1994 GOD'S CHURCH

Three guiding principles should direct God's Church.

1. GOD HAS A PLAN FOR HIS CHURCH. The only actions and activities that will produce lasting good for God's Glory will be those things done within and, as a part of, that plan. Every Church should do some of almost all ministries but each Church will soon see that it has an area of speciality that fits its people, its location, its resources, and its place in God's overall plan for the community. WHAT IS HIS PLAN FOR THE CHURCH YOU ATTEND??

2. THE BUILDER OF THE CHURCH IS GOD- "I will build my Church". When we obey God's commands and follow God's plan then the Church will experience SUPERNATURAL growth. If the growth is because of man's reasonings or resources it will eventually fail because of a lack of proper foundation.

If the Church is not growing according to God's plans do you think God has failed; or have we failed to do those things God commanded us? What are our Failures? How can we correct them?

3. FOLLOWING GOD'S PLAN AND EXPERIENCING GOD'S POWER WILL PRODUCE GODLY PEOPLE; which is the ultimate purpose of the Church.

A) Godly people are concerned about their relationship with God so they seek holiness of life- "Be ye Holy for I am Holy, saith the Lord." This holiness of life is our main witness and work in a sin sick society.

B) Godly people are gifted by God to function in the body of Christ. These gifts are not according to their desires or whims; they are given by the Holy Spirit according to God's plan in order to enable the church to fulfil its function.

C) Godly People have an impact on their family, friends, and society- "You are the Salt of the earth, the light of the world, and the only Bible some people ever read." This impact will determine how well God's plan is accomplished through the Church.

Are you doing your part in the Church so the Church can do its part in reaching the world for Christ?

September 20, 1994 GAS LOGS

Recently, I was carrying a tape of our church services to a member of the Church who had missed a special service due to illness. While I waited on them to come to the door I looked at the back of their chimney. Running into the trap door where they would normally unload the ashes was a gas line. Immediately I knew that someone had gotten tired of cutting wood, building fires, and cleaning up the mess of a log fire.

Log fires and wood burning stoves were a craze several years ago. Everyone was going to save a lot of money as they enjoyed the cozy comfort of a wood fire. It didn't take long, however, for the harsh reality of the work involved in cutting wood in the summer and dusting the house all the time as a result of wood ash to cool that fever down to the temperature of a December night.

Jesus said some Christians would have that same tendency. They really see the need of making a change in their life so they begin with great zeal to do the things necessary to have a warm heart. Soon, however, the work, sweat, and labor involved in keeping "wood in the fireplace" causes them to give up on the idea as something beyond their ability.

How sad that no one ever told them that being Born Again does not mean hunting for firewood. When you are Born Again you are connected to the "gas line" that contains all the energy you will ever need. They were right in believing they need the fire. They just looked to the wrong source for the way the fire is supplied.

September 21, 1994 MUD PUDDLE MOP

It had been a rainy dreary day so I had been working in the office trying to finish some paper work. Finally, the sun came out as the showers came to an end. I needed to get out of the office so I decided to check on some of the sick people in the Church.

As I was riding down the road I saw a young boy who looked as glad to get out of the house as I had been. Like most young boys, he seemed irresistibly drawn to the mud puddles left from the recent rain. As I watched him I saw he had a stick of some kind that he was sweeping through the water in the mud puddle.

When I got almost beside him he lifted up the stick and I saw he was trying to mop up the mud puddle with his mother's mop! I can imagine there was an interesting conversation around that boy's home later that afternoon.

I feel like that boy sometimes. It seems as if a sin sick society is growing increasingly wicked and all I can do is get a mop and stir the water in the puddle into a muddy mess. Families are being destroyed, kids are being killed, and churches are much more concerned with the color of the carpet in the fellowship building than they are in the souls that are slipping each day into the eternity of Hell.

The thing you must remember is that God did not call us to mop up mud puddles. God calls us to witness and work and wait for His return. Mopping mud puddles will get you into trouble as you try to take God's place. And, if you serve God with all your heart, you will find a lot less mud puddles to worry about.

September 27, 1994 LIFE PRINCIPLES

Here are 5 Principles that are tremendously important as you try to build a meaningful life.

1) LIFE IS BUILT ON CHARACTER- The way you regulate and run your life is based on the Character you possess. Eventually, what you are on the inside will manifest itself in your attitude and actions.

2) CHARACTER IS BUILT ON DECISIONS- Your Character is determined by the choices you make. You can chose to be a whiner or a winner. You can spend your life blaming everyone else for your problems or you can accept responsibility for your actions. These decisions will determine your character.

3) DECISIONS ARE BASED ON VALUES- The Choices you make will be determined by the values that are instilled in you. These values will continue to deteriorate as long as the family continues to break up and values are received from rock music and talk shows. When you are taught it's cool to steal and cheat then you will make your decisions on those values.

4) VALUES MUST BE ACCEPTED BY FAITH- The appeal of wrong values is the fact that they make such sense to the person who is only interesting in being happy right now; with no thought for the future. When people lose faith in the present system and in their future hope then they begin to live only for the pleasure of the moment. A real Faith looks past the heat of passion to the joy of relationship.

5) FAITH MUST REST ON A FOUNDATION- That's why Satan is so intent on removing God and religion from School and Society. Without God, and His Word, there is nothing to build a foundation that will stand the stress of life. Then society will fall into anarchy and chaos. And we will become our own worst enemies. Has that day arrived??

September 28, 1994 DEFEATING SIN

There are many "types" of sin we confront in the Christian life. Common sins (gossip, envy, laziness...), Serious Sins (Lust, Hate, Cheating...), Besetting sins (Our weakness that may not be a weakness to others), and Stronghold Sins (Sins we have allowed to stay in our life for so long until they have built a stronghold in our life). The thing to remember is, that according to James, all sins are Deadly!

What can we do to Defeat these sins; instead of allowing them to defeat us?

1) CONFRONT THE SIN- Don't pretend it doesn't exist or isn't serious. It will destroy you and those around you if you allow it to continue. Look it straight in the eyes and realize you're staring at something that wants to send you to Hell!

2) CONFESS THE SIN- Acknowledge that you have broken God's law and His heart. Don't try to make excuses. Be specific; don't just say that you are generally bad. Acknowledge this particular sin. If necessary, confess it as a sin to any others involved. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

3. CHANGE THE SINFUL PATTERN- Don't just sweep out the house; put something positive in it's place (Matt 12:43-45). Change your location, change your friends, change your manner of life. Don't make it easy for Satan to trip you up.

"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world". Defeat sin before it defeats you.

October 4, 1994 LOVING CHRIST

If there was no Hell to avoid would you love Christ just as much??

Paul told Timothy that there was a crown of Righteousness laid up in Heaven for Him, and not only for him, but for all them that love the appearing of the Lord Jesus (II Tim 4:8). Are you longing for the appearing of the Lord Jesus so you can fellowship with Him or do you simply want to go to Heaven to escape the troubles and trials of this world? Do you simply want to disappear from the world or do you long for the appearing of the Lord??

When you pray do you spend as much time listening to Christ speak to you as you spend telling Him what you want Him to do for you?? Are you satisfied simply to be in the presence of Christ where you can enjoy just knowing that He is near? Or do you only speak to Christ when there is a crisis, a concern, or a church service? When is the last time you spent time simply telling Christ how much you loved and adored Him?

If Christ came back to earth as a human again and you had the opportunity to spend an hour with him in face to face conversation would you be amazed at how quickly the hour passed; or would you feel uncomfortable and uneasy after the first ten minutes?? Do you have enough of a relationship with the Lord until you could carry on a conversation as friends; or would you be forced to treat Him as some stranger you met at a party and simply make small talk?

Do you love the Lord; or is He simply someone you endure because of your concern about death and eternity?

October 5, 1994 SAILBOATS

While visiting some sick people recently I had the opportunity to talk to a nurse. I have found that a pretty good way to judge people's priorities is to ask them about anything interesting that has taken place in their life recently. This nurse thought for a moment and then said she guessed the most exciting thing that had happened to her recently was when her boat joined with hundreds of other boats to watch a yacht leave Charleston on an around the world race.

She talked with a great deal of envy as well as excitement about this event. I got the distinct impression that if cash, courage, and circumstances would have been right then she would have loved to have sailed on that yacht. But she didn't. Instead she sat in the harbor with hundreds of other boats and watched it sail away.

I'm afraid this same scene is played out in many churches. Hundreds of little "sailboats" watch yachts sail into the distance each week with envy and excitement; but never with commitment to join them. These "sailboats" represent people who get all excited when someone stands and tells of how they ventured out of the harbor, shared their testimony with someone, and watched them come to a salvation decision. They're excited but they'll just stay in the harbor, thank you.

It might get lonely or dangerous venturing out into the sea of Commitment so they'll just stay in the harbor with the other boats. When will they ever realize that God made sailboats to sail the seas; not clog the harbor!

October 11, 1994 SUCCESSFUL SIN

God does not allow His children to sin successfully. Sinners can sin and get by with it (for now) but not so with Christians. This fact causes many people to get the wrong impression of God.

Over and over people ask me why life is so difficult for those who are attempting to live the best they can; while, at the same time, those who are living ungodly lives seem to prosper. Little do they realize that the prompt and powerful punishment of sin in the Christian's life is a sure sign of God's love- For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (Heb 12:6)

Take the case of David and Bathsheba. If some sinner down the road would have seen Bathsheba bathing and committed adultery with her then we would never have heard of either of them. Sure they would have paid for their sin but, possibly, the payment would not even have come in this life time. Not so when it involved a man of God.

David thought he was successful in his sin after he had Bathsheba's husband killed but he had forgotten God was on guard. Soon the preacher was pointing his finger in David's face saying, "Thou art the man" and David's troubles had just begun. God does not allow His children to sin successfully.

Maybe Satan is whispering in your ear today that if you commit that little sin God will let it pass. Forget it! Sure others are committing "worst" sins but they aren't God's Children. And God loves His children too much to allow sin to stay in their life and destroy them.

October 12, 1994 GOOD OR GREAT

"NOTHING IS SUCH AN OBSTACLE TO THE PRODUCTION OF EXCELLENCE AS THE POWER OF PRODUCING WHAT IS GOOD WITH EASE AND RAPIDITY". Translation- You will never be great as long as you are satisfied being good.

Natural talent can be a killer in the work of God. Someone who has a natural ability to sing well can use their talent and receive many compliments from the congregation. Satisfied serving with fleshly talents the singer never develops the close relationship with God that is necessary to move them from music into ministry.

Or take the case of a man who is earnest, energetic, and has a pleasing personality. Week after week he is able to convince people that he is doing a good job as pastor because he's just a good old boy at heart and everyone likes him. Satisfied to simply measure up to the expectations of people in the Church he's always a man of the people instead of a man of God.

It may be that he even does a lot of good works as far as those around him are concerned. But there will come a day when his works will be burned up as wood, hay, and stubble, because they weren't the gold, silver, and precious stones God was looking for from his ministry (I Cor 3:10-13). Wood, hay, and stubble come from letting nature take its course. Gold, silver, and precious stones are only secured with hard work in unseen places.

Men think we're good when we bring them wood. God says we will never be great unless we go for the gold. Don't let your ability to do good keep you from becoming great. Don't be satisfied playing Christian. Do what it takes to actually live like Christ. That's where you will find the contentment you so desperately want.

October 19, 1994 FORGIVENESS

It had been a long week-end of getting to bed late and getting up early. My three year old nephew began to get whiny and rebellious. Finally, he told his mother he was not going to eat his lunch. Wrong choice of words. His dad took him to the bed room for some attitude adjustment and a period of "time out".

When his time was up his dad told he could only join the other kids at play if he would apologize to his mom. He came out of the room, ran up to his mother, hugged her leg, and said, "Mommy, I'm sorry I talked back to you". The only problem was that his mother was talking to my wife and wasn't paying him any attention.

He hugged her a few moments more and then told her again that he was sorry. She was still talking to my wife and didn't hear him. Finally, he just walked away and joined the other kids.

I've never committed adultery, robbed a bank, or murdered anyone. There have been times, however, when the flesh got in the way and I haven't obeyed God as I should. That's when God would love me enough to give me an attitude adjustment and tell me I needed to straighten up. And, Thank God, every time I've come to Him with a repentance heart to confess my sins and apologize for my behavior He's never been too busy to hear and accept my confession. Isn't God Good!!

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

October 25, 1994 FASTING TRIALS

We were entering into a period of Revival at the Church and I was fasting and praying for God to Bless and use the services to speak to hearts. During that fast a friend of mine called and asked me to take his place on his radio program. Since it was a program promoting prayer it fit in well with what I was trying to do.

After the program the secretary at the Radio station offered me a delicious looking brownie. In all the times I have been to the radio station this was the first time I was offered food; and I was in the middle of a time of fasting! Not wanting to offend the lady I took the brownie, wrapped it in a napkin, and ate it later when I stopped fasting (and it was delicious).

When I left the radio station I had to go by the pharmacy and pick up some medicine for my wife. Normally they have the medicine waiting on me but it was the first of the month and I had to wait for the pharmacist to complete the order. While I was waiting I talked some with the girls at the check-out counter. As we were talking one of them went into the back to get a snack. When she came back she not only had a bar of candy for herself, she also had one for me! In all the times I've picked up medicine at the pharmacy this was the first time I was offered food; and I was in the middle of a fast. I thanked her, put it in my pocket, and told her I would eat it later.

If you are trying to do good be aware that Satan will try his best to tempt you away from what you are doing for God. But remain steadfast; even in the face of brownies and candy bars.

October 26, 1994 RUNNER OR SPECTATOR?

The Christian life is often referred to as a race. Runners in a race must put forth great effort in order to prepare and to participate in the race. Many times it is a great struggle just to keep running and it seems as if it's more than you can do to continue until you reach the finish line.

That's the reason many Christians are just Spectators instead of Runners. They started out as Runners but they weren't willing to put forth the effort and energy necessary to keep running. So as soon as a convenient excuse or circumstance comes along they drop out of the race and became Spectators.

This turns churches into places that have a few Runners cheered on by a multitude of Spectators. These Spectators believe it's just fine to stand on the sidelines. They think that's all that is required of them. What they don't realize is that spectators don't win prizes; they just cheer on those who are running.

The Bible says we are to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). Heaven is the finish line. The prizes include the souls we win for Christ, the work we do for God, and the crowns God gives for faithful service.

It's heartbreaking to realize what awaits many Christians one day. They will come face to face with God and, with tear filled eyes, have to admit, "I was a Spectator instead of a Runner." Which one are you?

November 1, 1994 GOOD THINGS

The Lord really spoke to my heart through a verse in Psalms recently—"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psa 84:11).

It begins by saying God will give me Light and Protection. That means God will guide me as well as guard me in the way He guides me!

Then God promises grace and glory. This is redemption from my sins and rewards for my work for Him. This is exciting stuff! Guidance, protection, Redemption, and Rewards. But there is even more.

The verse ends with a promise that God will not withhold ANY good thing from those people who walk righteously. That's astonishing. So much so until I decided to look up the "Good things" in the Bible so I would know what to expect from God.

Partner- Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD. (Prov 18:22)

Power to do God's work- That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. (2 Tim 1:14)

Effective Witnessing- That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. (Phile 1:6)

Assurance of Salvation- Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. (Heb 13:9)

I'm glad I'm a child of God who can expect His "good things". Are You?

November 2, 1994 CAKE MIX

It didn't work. No matter how hard I tried it simply didn't work. I tried it slow and I tried it fast but it didn't make any difference. I even let someone else do it for me but the results were the same. Frankly, I was discouraged. Here I was putting forth my best efforts and still not achieving anything. Could it be that someone had mislead me??

You know what I'm talking about. Probably all of you have tried the same thing from time to time. It's this business of baking a cake. I have set down and read the directions on the box of cake mix as diligently as possible but, somehow, simply reading the directions never gets the cake baked!

I know that's the way it's supposed to work because I've been associated with Churches for a long time. Week after week they come together and read the directions on the "cake mix" with a great deal of enthusiasm and effort. They not only read the directions, they sing about them, study about them, and even pray about them. But week after week they walk away with a ting of sadness and disappointment because no matter how diligently they read the box they never get to eat cake.

Some radical rabble rouser suggested one time that you were supposed to actually follow the directions instead of simply read about them. It didn't take long, however, for those in authority to deal with him. After all, didn't he know that such an approach would produce a mess as the ingredients were mixed together. And there would also be the extremely unpleasant business of putting everything in a hot oven in order for it to bake.

No, the best way is to remain neat and trouble free. That means we just stick with reading the directions on the box. Still, it's hard to quench the hunger in my heart that longs for real cake.

November 8, 1994 AUTOMATIC

The Greek word “Automatos”; from which we get our English word Automatic, is found 2 times in Scripture. These two incidents give us a wonderful lesson on the marvelous way God deals with difficult circumstances.

The first use of the word is found in Mark 4:27 when Jesus describes how the Word of God grows as a seed. He says the word will “spring and grow up” automatically even though the person who plants the seed does not understand how that happens.

What a wonderful truth for those involved in Christian ministry. All too often they fail to witness or work because they can't understand how their work will produce results. If they would just realize that God has promised that His word will not return void but will “automatically” grow if given the chance. What a difference we would see in fruit if we used our energy to sow the word instead of spending all our time studying how to get God to do what He will automatically do if we just follow His directions.

The other use of “Automatos” is found in Acts 12:10 where it describes the way the doors of the prison opened to allow Peter to escape from jail. All of us have experienced automatic doors. When you walk up to them you trigger a switch which causes the doors to open.

That's the way God expects you to deal with life's problems that imprison you. Simply walk up to the door and expect the power of Christ to automatically open it and set you free. The only thing that can keep you enslaved is your unwillingness to use your faith and walk toward the door. It's on automatic; trust God.

November 9, 1994 JUDGING JURIES

One of the secrets you learn if you attend many trials is to look at the jury more than you listen to what is said. Witnesses and lawyers are actors on the stage trying to convince the jury about guilt or innocence. Some are very good actors and some are not. The ultimate judge of their ability, however, is the response of the Jury. Those 12 men and women will ultimately decide whether to believe or reject the information given by each witness and return their verdict accordingly.

That's where watching the jury comes into the picture. If they look distracted, drop their heads, or fidget in their chair a lot then it's probable they don't really believe the witness. If they lean forward, stare at the witness, and focus on what is being said they are interested and tend to believe the speaker.

How did I learn this secret? When I preach each Sunday, I also observe the actions and attitudes of the congregation. That's how I know if the Spirit is convicting someone or if the sermon is affecting the congregation. That enables me to know what kind of, or how long to make, the invitation at the end of the message.

Next Sunday when you're sitting in the congregation judging the preacher remember that he's also judging you. His judgment is not to condemn you but to know better how to help you relate to God. So give him your attention and listen to God's word. You may be surprised at how much better you'll enjoy the service.

November 15, 1994 PARKING LOTS

“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Mat 6:26).

Recently I was sitting in the car reading my Bible Chapters while my wife did some shopping. When I paused for a minute to reflect on the verse in Matthew about how God takes care of sparrows I looked into the parking lot and saw a group of sparrows feeding among the cars. At first I thought that was just a marvelous example of what God was saying but then I began to really look at the situation.

Someone had decided they wanted to change a forest into a shopping center. They came along and cut all the trees, removed all the underbrush, put down clay as a base, and then paved over the land. Everything that could possibly be done to keep the sparrow from finding food had been done. Yet, as I looked at these sparrows pecking along on that parking lot I realized that, in spite of all the horrible circumstances, God was still taking care of them (Glory!).

Are you faced with circumstances in your life that seem hard for God to handle? Rest easy, God specializes in doing the impossible. The hard doesn't even make Him break out in a sweat! If He can feed sparrows in a parking lot He can take care of you also. Trust Him today.

November 16, 1994 SOCKS

A Preacher friend of mine was visiting in the hospital recently when he noticed that he had mistakenly put on a blue sock and a brown sock. He thought he could "fake" it until he got back home by standing up so his pants would cover his socks. During the course of the day, however, he forgot about the socks.

One of his members had to have surgery so he found himself sitting in the waiting room with the family. As soon as he heard some of them laughing and pointing toward his feet he remembered his socks. Embarrassed, he finally went to the rest room where he decided that going sockless would be better than having mis-matched socks.

Isn't it amazing how we can get ourselves into trouble when we start doing things in the dark? Putting on socks in the dark caused this preacher a great deal of embarrassment but it was mainly a fun kind of embarrassment. How many others have gotten into dark places and gotten into a life changing trouble.

When they get back into the light they think no one will know what they have done. But soon they find that sin can't be hidden and people will begin pointing fingers. The results are much more than embarrassment; they can be devastating. Marriages are split, lives are ruined, and careers are destroyed as the "hidden socks" are brought into public view.

The good news today is that Jesus can wash your "dirty socks" and make them white as snow. All you need to do is come to Him and ask Him to forgive your sins and make you a new creature. He'll change you from the top of your head to the socks on your feet.

November 22, 1994

ENJOY OR ENDURE?

Have you ever listened to the tone of some people's testimony? They will describe in vivid lively details their life of sin and at the end will say, "and then I got saved" (But it really sounds like, "and then I caught the measles!"). They sound like Salvation is something you have to endure instead of enjoy; and wonder why they aren't very good soul winners!

Out of the millions of reasons why I'm glad I'm saved let me share with you three that will help you understand why I enjoy my relationship with the Lord so much.

1> Possession- Ps 4:3 "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself". I rejoice that I'm not simply one of the herd of humanity that struggles and dies on planet earth. I am the personal possession of the God of the universe; bought and paid for by the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

2> Prized- Zech 2:8 "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." Not only do I belong to God but God actually thinks I'm something special!! Since God bought me He had the right to make me a slave; instead, He made me a Son! And promised me an inheritance in Heaven!

3> Protected- I Pet 2:9 "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people;" The word Peculiar here means "Encircled" or "Surrounded" and shows how God allows only those temptations and trials to come my way that are for my good and His glory. The storms of satan may lash the world but I'm safe in the "Rock" and rejoice in His care.

I'm guarded and guided by a God who thinks I'm special because I belong to Him. It's not the "measles"; it's majesty!

November 23, 1994

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is a time to "count your Blessings" and try not to count your calories!

Thanksgiving is a time when Families get together and comment on how many hairs "Uncle Ed" has lost, how many pounds "Aunt Emma" has gained, and how marvelous it is that "Cousin Sally" has turned from a string bean into a rose. It's a time of hunting and shopping and trying to "catch your breath" before the stretch run toward Christmas.

Oh Yes! It's also a time to say a brief word about being grateful for Health and Family and things not being as bad as they could be (They aren't as bad as they could be; ask a Turkey!). It's true that things aren't as good in America as we would like but it's also true that it's better than any other country I can name. The economy is a source of worry and concern for everyone today but, at the same time, we take more inventions and conveniences for granted than any other generation in the history of the world.

Yes, we are not without trouble; but we have much to Thank God for. I hope that this Thanksgiving we will develop the same kind of attitude that Matthew Henry had. He wrote in his diary one day after being robbed, "Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

Remember that Thanksgiving does not come from what you have in your pocket but from what you have in your Heart!

November 29, 1994 SUNDAY SCRIBES

Jesus said to His disciples, "Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Mat 13:52).

Three types of people are described in this verse; Scribes, Disciples (Those instructed) and Stewards (Householder). A Scribe is someone who LEARNS a truth. We would call them scholars or students. That pretty well describes the average Sunday Morning Crowd at Church. They come to learn a truth; that is often forgotten before the last Amen has faded into the bright morning air.

The second person described in the verse is a Disciple. A Disciple is someone who goes beyond learning a truth to DOING the truth. They find a way to apply and use the message from God on a given Sunday Morning. These are the people who allow the Sunday service to not only effects their mind but to also energizes their body.

The final group mentions is the Steward. A Steward is someone who is given the task of guarding and dispensing a treasure. These are the Christians who go beyond learning and doing into SERVING. They are the 10% group in any Church who go beyond coming to Church into actually seeing that the Church continues to function. They are the meager little group who witness for their Lord each week so that others may come to be saved. They are the people who believe Christianity is not a lesson you learn but a life you live.

When you go to Church this Sunday will you go as a Scribe, a Disciple, or a Steward?

November 30, 1994 CHANGE

Everyone wants someone to change. A woman marries a man because he's just what she wants; and then spends the rest of their marriage trying to get him to change into something else. Parents go crazy because their children are acting just like they did at that age and they want them to change (Just like their parents did!). Even Pastors go from anxiety to ulcers as they attempt to transform their congregation into perfect people. And we haven't mentioned employers, advertisers, or government.

Change is on everyone's agenda. The question is, "What really causes people to Change??" Rev John Maxwell lists three times in the life of a person that will bring about change:

- 1) When they hurt enough to change
- 2) When they learn enough to change
- 3) When they receive the power to change.

That about covers it. A person with a life crippling problem must hurt enough to WANT to change, learn enough to know HOW to change, and then acquire power enough to PRODUCE change.

Remember these three guidelines in your efforts to produce change. If you remove the hurt too early you will never bring them to change. If you attack them instead of instruct them then they will build walls instead of learn lessons. But also be aware that no amount of hurt or education will enable a person to escape a slippery pit. They must have help from outside. That's the beauty and wonder of Christianity; Not only are sins forgiven but the Spirit of God indwells the new believer and empowers them to become a new creature in Christ. And that is real change.

December 6, 1994 FOUR FIGURES OF GOD

Is God a grey headed grandfather figure to you? Do you picture Him as a vague misty light in the vacuum of space? Or is He this holy unapproachable force that waits to zap you as soon as you make a mistake?

Your picture of God will determine how you serve God and how much zeal you put into serving Him. That's why it's important to recognize the four figures that God uses to reveal Himself to mankind in the Bible.

First He is revealed as CREATOR. We see Him bringing light into darkness and order out of chaos. We see Him put His "master blueprint" into place so the world will prosper and mankind will develop into the greatest of God's creations. Then we see the entrance of sin and the return of chaos and destruction.

This brings us to the second revelation of God as JUDGE. Unwilling to allow mankind to destroy himself under the power of sin, God reveals the law. The Law convicts us of our wrong and convinces us of our need of a higher power to curb our sinful tendencies.

Knowing we need an authority figure to guide and guard us God now reveals Himself as KING. Mankind was to be His subjects as God reigned in mercy and goodness. Mankind, however, decided he would be king and rule his own life. This brought about tyranny and terror as men used power for self instead of service.

But God was up to the challenge. Finally, He reveals Himself as FATHER as He sends His son to live the perfect life and die as payment for our sins. I can be born again, become a child of God, and have a relationship with a Heavenly Father. What a wonderful God we have!

December 7, 1994 SURPRISE ATTACK

My home port for three and a half years was Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Today was always a special day there as we remembered the "day that will live in infamy", the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. To the people of Hawaii, remembering is not a 10 second sound bite on the evening news; it is gathering at the memorials to the thousands who died and realizing how suddenly life can be turned upside down.

I believe many Christians should put up "memorials" in their life to the surprise attacks of Satan as a reminder of the slyness of sin. Remember, the attack on Pearl Harbor happened on a Sunday Morning!

Maybe you could start with a little red tongue pasted on your bathroom mirror. That would remind you that Satan is a liar; as well as the accuser of the brethren. When he attacks you with his lies or attempts to get you to help him gossip about other people you would immediately remember your early morning warning about his sneak attacks.

Then you could paste a little upward pointed arrow in the corner of your TV. That would remind you that Satan is constantly trying to discourage you with the world news or corrupt you with the propaganda of regular programs. You sit down to relax a little and suddenly you are bombarded with jokes about sex, laughter as kids rebel against parents, or you find yourself singing a little tune about the benefits of beer!

Finally, you could put a Bible on the kitchen table. That's to remind you that God's word is more important than food. It's also a reminder that your family needs to spend time TOGETHER in the word of God each day. Otherwise, when you send them out into Satan's territory they may be ambushed by a sneak attack.

December 20, 1994 WHAT CHRIST GAVE

In the hustle and bustle of Christmas giving it's easy to overlook what Christ gave up in order to be born in that Bethlehem Stable. And when we forget that, we lose the real meaning of Christmas.

Probably the best description of what Christ gave us when He came to earth is found in Philippians 2:5-11 "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This passage describes Four Things Christ Gave up in order to come and redeem mankind.

1. HIS ROYALTY- He left the splendors of Heaven for the squalor of a stable so that you and I could have eternal life. The King became a Babe so you and I could become sons of God.

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

3. HIS RIGHTS- The Son became a Servant. He gave up His rights that I might have the right to call on God as Father.

4. HIS LIFE- He who was life came to die in order for those who were dead in sin to have life. Christ has given the greatest Christmas present possible. Accept it today.

December 27, 1994 GAS MAN'S GAS

When I pulled up to the gas station recently I noticed that a gas delivery truck was getting gas at the pump beside me. The gas man was getting gas!

Gas trucks are something we don't spend a lot of time thinking about. We assume that the gas somehow just gets to the pumps so we can purchase and use it. We seldom think about how it gets all the way from the oil wells in Arabia to the gas pump at our local stores. Yet, a break down anywhere along that delivery route can produce shortages, increased prices, or empty cars tanks.

In much the same way, we seldom think about where the message comes from on Sunday morning. Many people think that the preacher simply stands up behind the Pulpit on Sunday morning and the message automatically is delivered. Little do they know that the message has to come in much the same way the gas gets to your local store.

Far away, in Heaven, God decides what message He wants a particular congregation of people to hear. Through Bible Study and Prayer the "seed" of that message is relayed to the Pastor. As the week progresses, Circumstances and commentaries help the pastor add meat to the skeleton of the message. All along the way, the Holy Spirit gives wisdom and direction to a faithful Pastor so the skeleton assumes the proper shape and size.

Finally, Sunday arrives and the Pastor delivers the cargo to waiting "cars" so they can receive the energy needed to travel Life's road. But it only happens correctly if the "gas man" has taken the time and effort to obtain fuel as well as give fuel. Remember that as you pray daily for your Pastor during the coming year.

December 28, 1994 GUIDELINES FOR GRAVES

While attending a funeral recently I parked at the back of the Church. When I got out of my car I noticed that I had accidentally parked on a grave. There was no marking anywhere to show that there was a grave there (except for the ground level head stone). All around that grave was empty space that evidently would eventually hold other graves.

I moved my car to another location but I couldn't help but think about what Jesus said about unmarked graves, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them." (Luke 11:44). These were religious leaders with dead souls, dead messages, and dead ideas that did nothing to help the hurting heart or cause the hell bound sinner to repent; and you could drive right over them without so much as a bump for your car.

Sadly, they still exist today. They are churches that open their doors but never open their heart to a world that desperately needs someone to love them enough to show them the right way. They are pastors who preach dry messages to dry members who never weep on a dry altar as they renew their vows and rekindle their dedication to God. Or they are colorless Christians who never make a mark for God because the world looks right through them.

When you put in graves without guidelines it becomes easy to drive over them instead of honor and respect them. Don't let it happen to you. Determine that next year you will make a mark for God as the Spirit of God makes you a living memorial for Christ.