

1997 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 1, 1997 RED LIGHT POWER

The emergency call came late at night and I had spent several hours at the hospital with a distraught wife and a critically ill husband. Returning home I was cold, tired and ready to get a few hours of sleep before another day's duties began their demanding pace.

I came to a red light and stopped. The streets were deserted and it was VERY tempting to ease through that red light and get on back home. But I decided to obey the power of the red light even when I couldn't see any reason for it stopping me right then.

Today we begin a new year. It is filled with many problems as well as many promises. Many times you will come to stopping places and will want to go on without waiting because you can't see any reason to stop just because a light is red. That is when our faith in God's word and in His plan will come into play.

You see, I could have gone through that red light that night and I MIGHT not have gotten caught or I MIGHT not have been hit by another car I didn't see until the last second. But by disregarding the power of the red light I also disregard its protection and leave myself open to all kind of troubles.

When God brings you to a stop this year through sickness or circumstances just remember that God has a reason; even when you can't see any

January 7, 1997 LIFE'S GOALS

A life that has meaning must be much more than the mere avoidance of death. Or to put it another way, you will never really live as long as all you do is seek to avoid death.

The main reason this is true is because the battle with death is a losing battle! "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment". How depressing it must be to spend all your time and energy trying to avoid something that will come when you least expect it; and in spite of your best efforts to avoid it (You eat all the right foods, exercise every day; and a drunken driver slams head on into your car as you drive home from a doctor who said you were in glowing health!).

Jesus said He came to give us life and that more abundantly. He also said He had conquered the great enemy "death". Because of Christ, Death is simply the glorious transformation from physical limitations and pains to the wonderful presence of God. No longer should we be held captive to the controlling fear and bondage of death.

Don't foolishly harm your body or disobey God's laws for the care of your body. After all, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit and should be cared for as such. But don't become so preoccupied with preserving the body until you miss the fact that the body is temporary and the spirit is eternal. Spend most of your time and energy on the one that is most important.

January 8, 1997 FILO

We always called him "Filo". He was the group leader and outsiders called him by his rank or by his last name. Those of us who worked with him always called him "Filo".

It was a term of respect that was consistently and courageously earned. It was not a name that was given lightly. Everyone knew the responsibility, and possibly fatal consequences that came from being designated a "Filo". We knew that such a man had walked into the room of the tiger within and, having stared the tiger down, had come forth with a settled heart and a steady hand.

One of my goals as a Pastor and as a Christian is to be worthy of being called a "Filo". The name comes from the first letters of the four words that describe a good combat leader- First In, Last Out. That is the kind of Pastor I want to be; First to face the battle as I lead my People forward and the last one off the battle field so I can be sure everyone is accounted for and no wounded are left behind.

God has graciously granted me the best flock a Pastor could ask for. I pray I will so live and so lead until one day they will be able to say, "He was a Filo Pastor who pointed us to the Savior as he led us through life"

January 14, 1997 4 TREES

(Gen 2:9) And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

When God placed man in the Garden of Eden He put 4 kinds of trees in the garden with him. These trees represent the 4 areas of a man's life that need constant cultivation.

1) Pleasant to the Sight- Beauty and Culture. Man does not live by work alone. He needs some things that exist simply because they are pleasant to the senses. It is good to know that sometimes God simply wants us to enjoy the beauty around us.

2) Good for Food- Physical Development. Man was originally a vegetarian so God provided exactly the trees he needed for proper nourishment. Man today needs to learn that God wants us to eat the right foods, in the right proportions. If we did, what an amazing difference that would make in the health and wellbeing of mankind.

3) Tree of Life- Spiritual Nourishment. When we come by faith to a Relationship with God it brings Life from the deadness of sin. But this is not a one time experience; it is a lifetime commitment to continually eating fruit from God's Tree of Life.

4) Tree of knowledge of good and evil- Moral Discernment. The ability to recognize wrong; and then make a free will choice not to do wrong, is a big responsibility. Yet God puts this tree in our paradise so we will learn to seek the good and avoid the bad.

Four Trees, which ones will you eat from today?

January 15, 1997 ESTIMATED TAX

One of the "Ministry Myths" that most people believe is that Preachers do not have to pay taxes. The real truth is that a Minister has to pay twice as much tax as the average worker. A Minister is considered self-employed for most taxes so he has to pay the full tax load on all of his income, including Christmas gifts and the rental value of the parsonage!

Because my tax load is so heavy, I have to break it up into 4 payments a year called estimated tax. Today is the due day of one of those payments. As you can probably guess, I'm not overly enthusiastic about making these payments but I know that when the middle of April comes I'll be mighty glad I made them.

Jesus told about a similar plan. He said that when we had a special supper or party that we were to invite the poor, the lame, and the blind instead of just our friends. His reasoning was that when we invite our friends then they will invite us to their party sometime while the poor, the lame, and the blind could never return the favor of our invitation.

The "punch line" is what really thrilled me. Jesus said because the poor, the lame, and the blind could not repay us here then we would get our payment for helping them when we get to Heaven! (See Luke 14:12-14).

So the next time you have the opportunity to do well, remember it's just an advance payment on a big joy to come.

January 21, 1997 POST CARD PRAYERS

In addition to writing books and newspaper articles I also have the privilege of preaching a daily devotion over several radio stations each day. Many times during these radio devotions I will offer people the opportunity to receive our books simply by sending in a request for them. I received an interesting Post Card recently from someone who had heard the broadcast and wanted the books.

My name is Mike Jones but the card was addressed to H Jones. My Post Office Box is 1003 but the card was addressed to Box 103. The card came from a person in Florence but they had failed to put Lake City in my Address. The last line of the address was simply the zip code for Lake City- 29560. Yet, somehow, the wonderful people at the Post Office were able to add one and one together and come up with four!! And they got this card to me. I told them that God must really want this man to receive my books!

Sometimes I come to God with a heart so burdened until I really don't know what to say (The Bible calls it with groanings that cannot be uttered- Rom 8:26). At those times I know my prayers must make as much sense as the address on that card I received. Yet, somehow, God discerns what I really mean and makes sure I get what I need. Isn't it wonderful to serve a God who can even answer "Post Card Prayers"?

January 22, 1997 ARCHIVE AGONY

Several years ago I helped another church set up a system on their church computer similar to the one we have at the Church I pastor. It keeps track of our attendance (Pastor, Deacons, and Teachers receive a list of all the absentees that Sunday when they leave Church so they can follow up) and our finances (Weekly deposits, writes church checks, and produces yearend tax receipts).

Recently this church called to see if I could help them with some problems they had encountered. When I looked at their system it became immediately obvious what the problem was. Instead of archiving their data each year they had simply kept going. Now their files were so huge until it was becoming difficult for even a computer to handle all of the data.

I do a lot of counseling with people. One of the most prevalent problems I encounter is the fact that people allow the burden and shame of sin to continue to pile up in their life. I have to constantly point out to them that the same God who forgives our sins also cast them into the depths of the sea to be remembered against us no more- Micah 7:19.

If the joy and zip has gone from your Christian life then you might need to check your "archive" file. It may contain burdens and shame that God does not intend for you to carry. And you will be amazed at the difference in your life when you stop carrying this extra burden.

January 28, 1997 ONE FOOT CIRCLES

Around every person there is drawn a one foot circle. It is invisible but it is very much in evidence. As long as you stay out of this circle everything is fine. If you attempt to cross the invisible line and enter that circle the person who the circle belongs to will automatically and instinctively move back. That is their personal space; and their danger zone, and they do not want anyone entering it.

A friend is someone whom you trust enough to allow into your one foot circle. You feel secure enough with them that you do not pull back with they violate your space. That principle, by the way, is why Americans adopted the habit of shaking hands instead of hugging as they do in many other countries. Because America is made up of many cultures they became suspicious of each other and the hand shake allowed them to make contact while maintaining the one foot circle for both parties.

The Bible says that “Perfect Love casts out fear” (I John 4:18). When people accept the forgiveness of God and become acquainted with the Love of God something strange happens to our one foot circle. We begin to love and trust people; and suddenly that handshake is replaced with hugs of mutual fellowship. Instead of pulling away from people we want God’s love to manifest itself to them through us. And our one foot circle suddenly is big enough for more than one; as people realize God has made a change in our life.

January 29, 1997 SPRITE SERVICE

We have our monthly Minister’s Fellowship Meeting at one of the local restaurants in town. We’ve been meeting regularly for a little over a year now and our waitress has become aware of our little quirks. For instance, one of our ministers doesn’t drink coffee with his breakfast, instead, he drinks Sprite (I know that is weird but we still love him).

Recently when we arrived at the meeting the waitress had already set up the tables for us. What made everyone take notice was the fact that a can of Sprite had already been brought in for this Pastor. That can of Sprite taught me several lessons about Christians.

First, I realized that although the waitress saw this Pastor very seldom yet she was aware of his likes and dislikes. That reminded me that our testimony is being watched by people all around us and we need to be careful to show Christ in all we do.

Secondly, I saw that it is often the little things in our life that people remember the most. This waitress could tell what this Pastor wanted to drink but she probably had no idea where his church was. And I was reminded afresh that most of the people I come in contact with will remember my service for the Lord much more than they will remember the sermons I preach!

What kind of “Sprite” do people notice about YOU?

February 4, 1997 WHAT FAMILIES WANT

There are five things that EVERY Family wants. These common desires are expressed in different ways and in different orders of importance but they will show up on every family's list of things they want.

1) Financial Security- Enough money to allow the family to live in comfort without the constant worry about how they will make ends meet.

2) Family Stability- The Home should be seen as a castle filled with peace and love instead of a bus station where virtual strangers meet in a confusion of different schedules, different goals, and disastrous relationships.

3) Friends to share life with- People with whom you can share fun, fellowship, and burdens. After all, what is the purpose of getting a new car if you cannot show it to your neighbors!

4) Free from Sickness- Maybe a common cold or even something as burdensome as chicken pox can be lived with but major or extended illnesses should be off limits.

5) Foundation for Rough Places- When disaster, disease, or death does touch a family then they want something to give them help and hope to enable them to continue with their lives.

The Good News is that every one of these wants can find its fulfillment when the family has a consistently faithful relationship with Jesus Christ. He will meet our needs, give us common goals, be a friend that is closer than a brother, either cure or comfort during sickness, and provide a rock solid foundation that the storms of life cannot shake. Isn't He what YOUR family is looking for?

February 5, 1997 FAMILY PRIORITIES

The Bible lists five things that should be Priorities in EVERY Family. I hope you will cut out this list, put it on your refrigerator door, and pray each day that these priorities will be fulfilled in your family.

1) EVERY FAMILY MEMBER SAVED- Your greatest goal should be that one day the circle will be unbroken. Nothing else in the life of your family is as important as this.

2) MORAL STANDARDS ESTABLISHED- It's not enough to teach your child to wash behind their ears. They must learn consistently that purity of life is vital.

3) THE BIBLE AS YOUR MAIN BOOK- Build your family's principles and convictions based on the Word of God. Read it, refer to it, reverence it so the family honors it and its teachings.

4) LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER AS A FAMILY- Each member of the family is different. Make it your goal to treat each other with respect and understanding as you learn how to live together as the family God desires.

5) FAITHFUL TO A BIBLE BELIEVING, GOD HONORING CHURCH- Make it a priority to be in God's house each week with the entire family. Make sure the Bible is being taught; and then make sure your family learns the lessons! Faithfulness to this priority will greatly help you with the first four in this list.

February 11, 1997 GUIDANCE GUIDELINES

Sometimes it is difficult for a Christian to know what to do. Some churches say it is wrong to do certain things while others do those things without a thought. Or you try to live a Christian life at work or school and people are continually criticizing you about something you did or did not do. How do you know how a Christian is supposed to live?

I have three Principles that I use for Guidance in My Christian life. They have been of tremendous help to me and I think they will be for you also.

1) **WILL IT DEFILE ME?** If I do the action I am wondering about will it bring sin or evil thoughts into my life. Purity of heart is one of the primary requirements of fellowship with God. Is this action something I can do in the presence of God? If I do this action will I maintain the power of God on my life?

2) **WILL IT DISHONOR GOD?** Would others think less of God because of something I, one of His children, did? My greatest desire is to please God and love Him with all of my heart. If I do this action or accept this attitude will it cause God hurt or heartache?

3) **WILL IT DISILLUSION OTHERS?** If other people see me do this thing will it cause them to doubt my relationship with God and make me less effective for God's work? Will it cause others to doubt God's Power and stumble in their own Christian life?

Don't allow yourself to be ruled by the whims and shifting standards of others. Use these guidance guidelines and feel good about your choices.

February 12, 1997 BROKEN TIRES

One day recently I noticed that my car wanted to pull to the right when I was driving down the road. I took it to a local tire company for them to align the tires but it continued to pull to the right. I took it back to the tire company and explained that the problem remained. That was when the tire company manager said they couldn't align the tires any better because one of the front end bars was bent.

I talked about the problem to one of the men in my church who repairs cars and asked him what it would cost to get a new tire rod put on the car. He said the car I drove was supposed to have a bend in the tire rod! He said the problem was the fact that the tire wall in the right front tire had broken. He took it home with him and rotated that tire to the back of the car and now my car drives like a dream.

Sometimes people want to blame the faults and failures of the church on the organization of the church. They forget that God said the wisdom of the world was foolishness with Him and so He established the Church with what looks like a bend but, in reality, is simply God's way of working.

What is causing the Church to veer from the straight path is the fact that something is broken in the circle of fellowship that makes up the Church body. Once you rotate that problem to the back of the "car" you will find the ride will straighten right out.

February 18, 1997 TEN TIMES BETTER

It never ceases to amaze me when I see the people that God uses for His Glory. Take the case of Daniel. Here is a captive teen age boy who loses everything, is taken to a strange land and told to fit in or die, and, yet, holds so faithfully to God and His word until he ends up being ten times better than anyone else in the kingdom. How did he do that; and how can we follow his example?

First of all, Daniel had a DETERMINED HEART. The Bible says he purposed in his heart not to defile himself with those things that God had told him were wrong. He was determined to live by God's rules.

Secondly, he made a DEFINITE STAND to the people around him. He did not try to sneak by and hope no one would notice. He made a clear concise statement of his convictions and principles.

Thirdly, there was also the need of DIVINE COOPERATION. The scriptures say that the Lord gave Daniel favor with the person put over him. We will find that when we stand for God that God will stand with us!

Because of all of these factors we find that Daniel had a DISTINGUISHED TESTIMONY. His appearance bore witness to his convictions. His actions bore witness to his faith. And his abilities bore witness of God's hand of approval on what he had done. God gave him ten times more wisdom than those around him and allowed him to serve with distinction no matter what government was in charge.

I urge you today to follow Daniel's example so you too can be ten times better.

February 19, 1997 FOUR D'S OF RELATIONSHIP

THE MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY IN YOUR LIFE IS TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST. If you fail in this responsibility then it will have eternal consequences! Here are four requirements for establishing such a relationship.

If you want to build a relationship with God then the first thing you must do is DECIDE to Trust God to Save and change you. This comes about when you repent of sins and accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior.

Second, you must make a DEDICATION of yourself to God. This means you make yourself completely available to God for His use and His work.

Thirdly, if you would build a relationship with God then you must acknowledge your DEPENDENCE on God. Without God's strength at work in your life then you will fail miserably as you fall for every trick of Satan. You must claim, and cling to, the strength of God.

Finally, there must be a human part added to the Divine work of God. That means you must make a DETERMINATION to follow God's purposes and plans. God will show you the path of life but you must decide if you will walk down the right road or follow Satan's detours.

Are you following through on this most important responsibility? Remember it has eternal consequences.

February 25, 1997 PARENTING PRINCIPLES

One of the most difficult responsibilities in the world is that of being a parent. Part of the reason for that difficulty is the fact that everything has to be done with “on the job training”. That makes it very easy to be critical of other parents...until you find yourself trying to raise your own problem child.

With that in mind, let me share several guidelines from Dr Elaine McEwan about some things Parents need to avoid in raising a child.

A Parent should not:

- Attempt to live their life through their child.
- Try to put a square peg in a round hole.
- Make all of their child's decisions
- Give their child everything he wants, including his own way.
- Be punitive, unloving, and unrealistic toward their child.
- Deprive their child of normal growing up experiences
- Expect their child to be a psychological “Wonderkid”.
- Force their child to grow up too soon.

It would be good if you would take these principles and put them on your night stand for review each night as you say your final prayers that day for your children. It just might make a big difference in the way you pray for; and in the way you treat, your children.

February 26, 1997 WALLET WAITING

While visiting in the hospital recently I met a lady who told me a marvelous story of God's timing at work in her life. I hope it will also encourage you to look for God at work in the circumstances and situations of YOUR life.

This lady was preparing to go with her husband to North Carolina for a doctor's appointment. Since they did not know how long they would be away she decided to have her hair fixed just hours before she left. The Beautician she used was very good; and because of that fact she was very busy. This meant she needed people to be on time for their appointments and was upset when they came in late.

On this day, however, the beautician was the one who was late. While the lady waited on her she decided to clean out her wallet to pass the time. As she was doing this she found an appointment card for the doctor they were about to travel to North Carolina to see that said her husband's appointment was on a different day.

Confused by the card, she decided to call the Doctor's office before they left. That is when she found that the card was right and her notation on her calendar was wrong! If it were not for the fact that a usually punctual beautician was late then she and her husband would have driven all the way to North Carolina for an appointment they didn't have. Isn't it amazing how God guides His children!

March 4, 1997 EXPLANATION EXPECTATION

One of the most difficult parts of being a Pastor is having to explain away the workings of God. I know that sounds bad; and some of you may misunderstand what I mean, but it is a fact that explaining away people's expectations occupy a great deal of a preacher's time.

God does not think like we think and He does not work like we work- (Isa 55:8) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. Sadly, however, many people build their faith on their understanding of God. Since God works in ways that baffle their understanding- lose to gain, serve to be great, problems produce growth- the circumstances of life cause them to lose faith instead of develop into strong believers.

Over and over I have to explain to people that my faith in God is not built on the circumstances I encounter in life. My Faith is built on my heart knowledge of God. That personal intimate relationship with God has developed three principles that provide all the explanation I need about what God is doing- 1) I know God will do Right because He is God and He can't do wrong. 2) I know that God really really loves me and everything that comes my way must come through that love. 3) I know God has a Plan and that plan will be completed regardless of anything that anyone does or does not do.

Those explanations meet all my expectations.

March 5, 1997 GOVERNING SELF

One of those Bible verses that causes me great concern is (1 Cor 9:27) *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

This verse really makes me see the need of practicing what I preach. It also makes me look at some **AREAS IN MY LIFE THAT I NEED TO BE ON GUARD ABOUT:**

FOOD - (Prov 23:2) *And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.* (1 Cor 6:12-13) *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them.*

THOUGHT LIFE- (2 Cor 10:5) *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

GOSSIP/LOOSE TALK- (James 3:5-8) *Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! {6} And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

March 11, 1997 SERMON GOALS

One of the most basic principles a Pastor must realize is that “He who aims at nothing normally hits it”. That is why it is not just enough to prepare and preach a message; there must be something that the Pastor wants to happen once the sermon is completed. Without a goal even the best of sermons is nothing more than fancy oratory (Up town talk for lips flapping in the breeze!).

Every Sermon is delivered for the purpose of speaking to the hearts of those who hear it. And each sermon should have one of three goals that it seeks to accomplish in the heart of the hearer.

1) Some hearing the Sermon will be GLAD. The Gospel is “Good News” and it should inspire Hope for the discouraged, offer Help for the listener, or give instruction to those wandering without direction.

2) Some hearing the Sermon will be SAD. A Sermon should be directed by and backed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will then use the message to convict men about their sinful actions or attitudes so that godly sorrow will lead to repentance.

3) Some will hear the Sermon and become MAD. Instead of hearing the good news of the cross of Christ they will sense a threat to their sinful ways and selfish life style. They will blame the Hypocrites in the Church or some quirk in the appearance of the Pastor but the real problem will be the fact that the sword of the Spirit cut to the depths of their heart.

Hope you will be in Church this Sunday and I hope the Sermon will make you Mad at the Devil, Sad about your sinfulness, and Glad that forgiveness is by Grace through Faith in Christ.

March 12, 1997 WIND TOSSED TREASURE

You would think that Pensacola, Florida would have an abundance of seafood restaurants. But if you thought that, you would be thinking wrong. It has a great number of excellent Chinese restaurants because of the large population of Vietnamese immigrants. And it has some very good steak restaurants because of the abundance of cattle ranches in Florida (At one time they raised more cattle in Florida than they did in Texas). But most of the seafood restaurants are located in the beach and tourist areas instead of in Pensacola.

When I was the pastor of a church just outside Pensacola, our family came to visit and they wanted to eat some seafood. We decided to try a new restaurant on the road to Pensacola Beach. When we got out of the car at the restaurant the sea breeze was blowing rather strongly.

As we walked toward the restaurant entrance we noticed a man cutting across the edge of the parking lot toward a gas station. He looked pretty much down on his luck and I was feeling sorry for him until the strong breeze blew his hat off his head. That is when money started going everywhere!

This man had been using his hat as a bank and the wind had decided to distribute his funds all over that parking lot. We helped him pick up as much as we could but I know a lot of his money was lost. And I was reminded anew of how quickly our earthly treasures can vanish in the breeze.

March 18, 1997 LICENSE CHECK

It came totally unexpected. I was rushing around trying to get an article to a newspaper and then deliver my radio programs to the radio station before I got some supplies for our Outreach Ministry and my mind was totally occupied on these things. But, as I rounded a curve on a street in Florence, I came upon a driver's license road block.

Police cars and policemen were everywhere as I pulled up in line. The Policemen were very nice as they checked my driver's license, my car tag date, and determined that both my wife and I were wearing seat belts.

Of course, the first thing that came to my mind was the fact that this was a good illustration of the rapture. One day I will be busy doing my normal activities and suddenly I will "round a corner" and find myself at a check point. Someone will check to see if I have a Driver's license (Saved by Faith in Christ), will check to see if my tag has expired (Is my relationship with the Lord what it should be, as well as up to date), and will check to see if my seat belt is fastened (Am I in my place, doing what God has called me to do).

Without the license I will really be in trouble (Can't get to Heaven unless you are saved). If my car tag has expired I will be ashamed (How horrible it would be to face God and have to say I had allowed other things to come before time with Him). And if my seat belt is not fastened I will be fined (Lost rewards because I didn't do things God's Way).

Are YOU ready if you come to God's License check?

March 19, 1997 MY BIRTHDAY

Today is a VERY IMPORTANT DAY to me; it is my Spiritual Birthday. 35 years ago I knelt at an altar in New Prospect FWB Church and asked God to forgive me of my sins. I didn't know much about the Bible or about God but I realized that I had sinned and that the results of those sins would be being sent to Hell. And I didn't want that!

Kneeling at that altar, convicted, confused, and crying, I didn't know what to do. I just knew I needed help and the preacher had asked me to come to the altar and be saved.

As I knelt there trying my best to get God to do something in my life, one of the Deacons of the Church leaned over and told me to "Trust Jesus". That simple act of faith changed me from a hell bound sinner into a Heaven going child of God.

Since that day I have made more mistakes than I have finger, toes and elbows; but the mercy and grace of God has kept me in the fold and on the way. And the fact that God loves me and cares for me through it all still overwhelms me.

When I asked God to forgive my sins, the Holy Spirit came into my life. This Holy Spirit has become my companion, my comforter, and my guide. His presence has brought instruction to my mind, direction to my life, and power to my service.

You can have the same birthday as I have. Simply stop where you are, tell God you are sorry for your sinful life and you want to change, and then simply "Trust Jesus".

March 25, 1997 GOD'S DELIGHT

(Micah 7:18) Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy.

I enjoy doing things for other people. Part of that stems from the fact that I learned long ago that the "Greatest of all shall be Servant of All". Serving others allows me to benefit and bless them while at the same time showing them the love of God that dwells in my heart.

I also enjoy doing special things for my wife. I have driven thousands of miles, set in innumerable antique shops or shopping malls, and even learned to eat broccoli in order to please her.

It is that same type desire that drives me to attempt to learn more about the character of God so that I can do the things that make Him happy. So when I saw the verse at the beginning of this article in my Bible reading I marked it down.

The verse says that God delights in Mercy. I not only rejoice in that fact because I need all the mercy from God I can get, but I recognize in it a principle I can apply in my own life that will benefit others and make me more like God. And that is one of the great desires of my heart.

Aren't you glad God delights in mercy? Have you accepted God's mercy as a covering for your sins? Do you extend God's mercy to others that do you wrong?

March 26, 1997 CRIMINAL CONNECTION

It is tough when your brother is sentenced to die and you have to witness the execution. It is especially difficult when you know he is innocent of the crimes he is accused of but still he is going to be executed.

Even the judge admitted that he thought my brother was innocent of the crime that they accused him of. The Judge even tried to argue that if a punishment had to be given then it should surely be nothing as drastic as execution. But this was one time the judge couldn't change the sentencing guidelines.

It saddened me also that family and friends were at the execution. It was very hard on them. Not only did they have to see the suffering that he endured but they also were exposed to the callousness of the crowd. It is almost unreal what people will say and do at such a time. They laughed at him, mocked his sufferings, and some in the crowd even turned it into a carnival complete with gambling activities.

But the worst thing about the entire execution was the fact that it seemed as if God had turned his back on my brother. How that hurt him during his time of agony. I even heard him question God's actions during his dying moments.

I'm not ashamed of my brother, however. And I don't blame God for what happened. In fact, I know now that his dying was part of God's plan--to make me a child of God so that Jesus could be my Brother, and my Savior.

April 1, 1997 LESSONS ON LYING

Paul Harvey tells the story of Four high school boys who were late to their morning classes one day. They entered the classroom and solemnly told their teacher they were detained due to a flat tire. The sympathetic teacher smiled and told them it was too bad they were late because they had missed a test that morning. But she was willing to let them make it up. She gave them each a piece of paper and a pencil and sent them to four corners of the room. Then she told them they would pass if they could answer just one question: Which tire was flat?

It might do you well to remember this little illustration by Mr Harvey on this First day of April. After all, lies do have a way of returning to lie at your door when you least want them.

April fool's day is the infamous "day of the lie", a day in which everyone is expected to misrepresent the truth as a form of entertainment. On this day, for some reason totally obscure to me, all limitations on lying are supposed to be suspended for one day. It is like the little boy who asked his mother, "Mommy, what is a lie?" His mother answered, "Son, a lie is an abomination unto the Lord ... but a very present help in time of need!"

All I can say is that the Devil is a Liar and the father of lies while Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life". That certainly makes it appear that your use of the truth is directly related to who your spiritual father is!!

April 2, 1997 LOST LASS

We had been to lunch with several Church members and were returning home when I noticed the front door of the Church was open. That was unusual since I always make sure the doors are properly closed before I leave so the heating and cooling will function correctly.

When I went to investigate I found my next door neighbor inside the church searching for her daughter. She had left her daughter playing with the children next door while she went to get a burger for their lunch but when she returned her daughter was nowhere to be found. She had only been gone for 10 minutes and her daughter was very conscientious of staying within the boundaries her parents had laid down so she knew she had to be somewhere very near.

But she wasn't in the Church and she didn't respond to our calls. With increasing panic we searched the nearby woods and ditches. Her brother got on his bike and another neighbor used his car to go up and down the neighborhood looking for her.

Things were getting very tense until I walked back down to the home where she had last been seen and started calling her again. That is when she came out of the house. She had been in the back room with the neighbor kids and their dad thought she had gone home. What a joyful reunion we had.

Every Sunday I search the church for missing people. I can only hope that one day they will respond to my call.

April 8, 1997 POST OFFICE PATIENCE

I tell people that the lady who cleans the Post Office must be the most patient woman in all the world. Week after week I see her mopping the Post Office floor; and week after week I see people tracking right through where she has just mopped.

If my wife was mopping the kitchen floor and I tracked across her still wet floor she would not say kind words to me!! And I don't think my wife is a lot different than your wife.

As I admired this cleaning lady's patience I suddenly saw a practical principle. The desire of my heart as a Christian is to live a clean and holy life for God. Week after week, day after day, I am kept busy "mopping up the mistakes" I make in life. And just as soon as I get them mopped up it seems Satan tracks back across my life with a devilish determination to replace the dirt I just cleaned up. Sometimes it makes you want to scream.

I pray that God will give me the patience exhibited by this cleaning lady as I continually work on cleaning up my life. And I long for the day when God will put bars on the doors to keep Satan out so I can finally mop for the last time.

April 9, 1997 MEETING THE STANDARD

The Royal Marines are very well respected and have been highly honored. Many young men seek to enter their ranks in order to be part of such a glorious organization. Their standards, however, are very strict. This enables them to be relatively certain that the applicant can do the work that is required; as well as maintain the reputation of the group.

One of their requirements is that a man must be six feet tall in order to become a member. The son of one of the group leaders was only five foot and ten inches but he really wanted to join this elite group. Thinking he could get by because of who his father was he went to a recruiting station and filled out an application.

Everything went well until they asked him how tall he was. Knowing he could not fool a measuring stick, he admitted to being two inches short of the requirements. Then he told them who his father was.

"Makes no difference if your father is the King." said the recruiter. "Our standard is six feet and we cannot vary from that."

God has a standard also. His standard is that one sin disqualifies us from entering into Heaven. And like the Royal Guard, no one gets in without measuring up to God's standards.

That is what church and "religion" are all about. To show you that you will always come up short before God unless you come through Jesus.

April 15, 1997 LIFE TWICE

A wealthy English family once invited friends to spend some time at their beautiful estate. The happy gathering was almost plunged into a terrible tragedy on the first day. When the children went swimming, one of them got into deep water and was drowning. Fortunately, the gardener heard the others screaming and plunged into the pool to rescue the helpless victim.

That youngster was Winston Churchill. His parents, deeply grateful to the gardener, asked what they could do to reward him. He hesitated, and then said, "I wish my son could go to college someday and become a doctor." "We'll pay his way," replied Churchill's parents.

Years later when Sir Winston was prime minister of England, he was stricken with pneumonia. Greatly concerned, the king summoned the best physician who could be found to the bedside of the ailing leader. That doctor was Sir Alexander Fleming, the developer of penicillin. He was also the son of that gardener who had saved Winston from drowning as a boy! Later Churchill said, "Rarely, has one man owed his life twice to the same person."

That is what God has done for us. God gave us our life to begin with. Life is not the accidental antics of two irresponsible people, it is a divine gift from God. As such it should be treated with reverence and respect.

But God also saw that we were stricken with the spiritual sickness of sin so He gave his own son to die in our place in order for us to have not just physical life but eternal life. No wonder those who know God want to praise Him at every opportunity. Who would not want to praise and serve a God who has given us life twice!

April 16, 1997 TAPED UP TAMBOURINE

My ability to sing is legendary at the church I pastor. I'm the only person I know who is requested NOT to sing! But, in spite of that, I enjoy good singing. Wanting to be part of the music, I sometimes pick up the tambourine that we keep under the pulpit and bang it during an especially lively song. Even that brings groans from many of the members.

Recently, I noticed that the song leader had scheduled several of my favorite songs. As we began to sing and everyone joined in with gusto, I decided to do my part my playing the tambourine. As soon as I picked up the tambourine, however, the song leader went into a spasm of laughter. That is when I noticed, to my chagrin, that someone had taped up the tambourine so it that could not make any noise.

Everyone had a good laugh at my expense and we went on to have a great service. By the way, the next week when my song leader's kids went to a local hamburger place for a kid's meal all three of them got tambourines as their prize! Guess who got the last laugh.

You may sometimes feel as if someone has taped up your tambourine. You can't do much and when you try to do what you can someone "tapes up" you talent. Instead of laughing about it you may become discouraged and decide to quit. Don't do it. Keep at your task. After all, I believe the Heavenly Choir even has room for us tambourine players

April 22, 1997 PRIZING POSSESSIONS

Recently I asked the people of my Church to name the three possessions they valued the most. Some of the answers were, to say the least, unusual; but most of them fell into the Pets, Pictures, or Property category. I then went on to show them that we are accountable to God for our use of the possessions He has given us. Then I listed several principles to assist them in the wise use of their possessions.

1) Realize we are stewards, not owners, of the possessions of life. Accept Treasures as a Trust from God. Remember that HE is the one you must answer to about the way you have handled your possessions.

2) Accept your Abilities- Remember that "It takes a steady hand to hold a full cup". God knows how much you are able to correctly care for so don't ask Him to exceed your load limit or you may end up broken down.

3) Strive to live Debt Free- (Rom 13:8) *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.* Make Money/Possessions your servants, not your master.

4) Lay up your Treasures in Heaven- (Mat 6:19-21) Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: {20} But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: {21} For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. You can't carry it with you, but you can send it on ahead by following God's Principles and Plans.

Above all, do not let your possessions control you and dominate your life. Make sure you love people and use possessions instead of loving possessions and using people.

April 23, 1997 SNEAKY SNAKES

A man was taking a shower. The weather had begun to turn cold so his wife decided to bring in some plants she had under the garage so the cold would not kill them. When she sat the plants down in the house she saw a small green snake slide out of the plant and slither across the floor.

Immediately she began to panic and scream. Her husband rushed out of the shower to see what was the matter. She told him about the snake so he bent down to see if it had crawled under the couch. About that time the dog put his cold nose to the exposed rear of the man. The man thought the snake had bitten him and jumped into the corner of the couch knocking himself unconscious.

His wife thought the snake had bitten him so she called 911. When the medics arrived they assumed the man had been bitten by a snake so they loaded him on a stretcher to transport him to the hospital. As the medics picked up the stretcher to move the man the snake came out from under the couch. One of the medics panicked and dropped the stretcher, breaking the man's leg!

The next time you allow Satan into your house through the means of books, TV programs, or Videos just remember that the Bible first shows Satan as a Snake. You may think that a little snake could not cause you much trouble but you may end up with a lot more trouble than you bargained for!

April 29, 1997 DANGEROUS DECISIONS

It seemed like a good decision at the time. His moped was giving him problems and the weather was turning cold so he decided to bring it into the house to work on it. He realized the error of his ways when his wife came home to a house full of smoky fumes. She immediately began to quarrel at him for getting grease on her floor and gas fumes into her furniture.

One harsh word led to another and in his anger the man accidentally kicked the moped into gear. It, and he, then went sailing through the plate glass window in the living room. He had to be rushed to the hospital where it took 115 stitches to sew up the cuts on his face and arms.

While he was at the hospital his wife was cleaning up the mess. She found a can of gas that her husband had been using to clean the moped and decided to flush it down the toilet. When her husband arrived home from the hospital the first thing he did was go to the bathroom. While he was there he decided to light a cigarette. The boom was heard throughout the house.

In addition to new cuts and bruises, many of the recent stitches came loose. Again an ambulance was called. This time as they were carrying the man from the house one of the medics slipped and fell, dropping the man on the ground where he broke his leg!

Sometimes a single decision can have far reaching implications.. Wait on the Lord and let Him guide you in your Decisions. He won't lead you to bring the moped into the house!

April 30, 1997 FIRE DAMAGE

If you play with fire you will probably get burned. A statement that has probably been made by every parent at one time or another. And a truth that is proved out in daily living day after day.

Sadly, the statement should also say, "If you play with fire not only will you get burned but the fire will probably burn those closest to you also." A reality that is also evident in the double tragedy of dabbling with sin. Invariably, the consequences of your wrong actions not only affect you, they also bring repercussions on those you love.

When Noah got drunk and fell asleep in his tent he had no idea that his deed would bring a curse on one of his children for generations to come. When David decided to have a quick little fling he probably never gave a thought to the fact that his little match would blaze into a fire that would burn his family in the flames of incest, rebellion, and departure from God.

Good parents warn their children not to play with fire. Good Preachers must also warn their congregations that, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5). I know the flame is fascinating at first but it sure is deadly when a wind comes along and blows it out of control.

May 6, 1997 GARBAGE BOWLS

The Mother was cleaning out her refrigerator and had a bowl of garbage that needed to be carried out. She saw her son standing on the tongue of a trailer outside so she carried the bowl to him and told him to go dump it in the woods.

What the woman did not know was that her husband had put the boy on the trailer tongue in order to keep the trailer from moving while he went for the car. As soon as the boy jumped off the trailer tongue the trailer began to roll down the hill and ended up wedged between two trees at the bottom! And it took all kind of work by the father to get it back up the hill.

The moral wagon of America is on the slippery slope that leads to Moral Chaos. Sexual perversion, child abuse, and deadly diseases have become rampant. Lying, cheating, and stealing have become so common until these character flaws are accepted as normal even among our leaders. And standards about right and wrong seem to change faster than a wagon can run down a hill.

Christians have been given orders to prevent this downward spiral by standing in the place assigned them by God. Sadly, many have abandoned their post because of the garbage of the world and the moral wagon, no longer anchored, is racing downhill.

Paul said the one thing Christians must do is to stand, and having done all to stand (Eph 6:13). Don't be distracted by Garbage. You might be the only one keeping the wagon from rolling down the hill.

May 7, 1997 BLOCKS

I heard a statement recently that all of us need to memorize- **WHEN GOD IS AT WORK, DON'T DO ANYTHING TO PREVENT HIS WORK.**

The meaning is simple. When God is at work either get in His will or get out of the way! Become a building block in God's program instead of a stumbling block or a road block to God's Work.

The Stumbling Block comes from (1 Cor 8:9) "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." These are people who only care about their rights instead of realizing their responsibilities. They are unconcerned about the weak brother's conscience and so cause that brother to stumble in the work of God.

The Road Block is derived from (Mat 23:13) "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in". These are people who use their religion as a cloak to cover their desire for honor and power. Instead of leading people to Christ, their actions and attitude keep them away.

Road Block, Stumbling Block, Building Block; which are you?

May 13, 1997 GOD GIFTED

Have you ever wondered why some people have the ability to do certain task so well while others are all thumbs? The answer is found in an extended portion of scripture.

(Exo 35:30-35) And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; {31} And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; {32} And to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, {33} And in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. {34} And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. {35} Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.

This scripture says that God gives certain men certain skills to enable them to accomplish the task God has for them in life. Now all you have to do is find what God has gifted you with and then set your heart and mind to accomplish God's plan for YOU. And what a joy that will bring to YOUR heart and to all those around you.

May 14, 1997 ONESIPHORUS

(2 Tim 1:16-18) The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: {17} But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. {18} The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

Death for Paul waits just around the Corner. As he looks forward to his coronation day in Heaven he also looks back at friends and enemies. One of the friends he fondly remembers is a man called Onesiphorus. As Paul describes Onesiphorus he gives us some good guidelines for building friendships in our own life.

A Friend Refreshes you. The friendship of Onesiphorus brought new energy and enthusiasm to Paul's life and ministry. Just being together helped both parties.

A Friend is not ashamed of your Problems. A true friend is the first to come, and the last to leave, when you have problems.

A Friend WANTS to be with you. When Onesiphorus visited Rome he made it his business to find Paul. Friends joy in each other's company.

A Friend Ministers to you. Their friendship made each of them a better Person. Are you a friend like Onesiphorus?

May 20, 1997 UNDELETE

Sometimes computers can be wonderful. Right after I began using mine I found that if you mistakenly delete something from a document then you can simply use the undelete feature to restore the material you erased. That has saved me a tremendous amount of work and heartache during the years I have used my computer.

Many of the documents I use are the same basic form. Sometimes the easiest thing to do is to pull up an old document that is already in the correct format, erase the material that is on it, and insert the new material I want. After doing this for a number of times I happened to look at the size of one of my files and found it was much larger than it was supposed to be.

I couldn't figure out what was wrong until I was reading a publication of helpful hints recently. It said that my word processor had a feature that kept all the material you erased from a document hidden in the file of the document so you could go back and restore it if you so desired. The file was so big because I was still storing material from letters that had long been discarded. Once I cut that feature off my files dropped back to their proper size.

Often in counseling with people I find hidden burdens and guilt that should have been dealt with a long time ago. Instead of letting go of this guilt, however, they simply keep piling more guilt in on top of previous guilt. Soon their life is so burdened down until it is impossible to enjoy life or maintain meaningful relationships.

God told Israel that He would forgive their sins and cast them into the sea, never to be remembered against them anymore (Micah 7:19). In other words, when our sins are deleted we shouldn't have to carry the guilt of them any longer. So don't let Satan keep piling up forgiven sins in a secret place in your heart. When God forgives you of sin He forgets to remember those sins against you anymore.

May 21, 1997 THE SIGN

The Pastor noticed the Church sign as soon as he drove up. It announced a singing that had already taken place. The first day it did not bother him too much. The second day he was becoming a little irritated. By Wednesday night he was very unhappy.

Each month a family in the Church was assigned the task of changing the sign. The Pastor mentioned something in the Service about his irritation. After the service he found out that the lady who was supposed to change the sign that month had been sick all week!! Open mouth, insert foot!

Shortly after that it happened again. This time he was much more patient. This time he waited until Saturday before he got steamed. He called his secretary to find out who was responsible for changing the sign this month but she wasn't at her computer so she said she would tell him Sunday Morning.

The rush of Sunday activities caused him to forget until choir practice Sunday Night. When he went to ask his secretary, who was a member of the choir, who was the irresponsible person who had neglected to change the sign she said, "The answer is simple, Preacher. This is YOUR month to change the sign!"

(Rom 2:1) Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

May 28, 1997 FISH FACE

A Youth Pastor and several friends decided to go fishing early one morning recently. One of the men caught a big catfish and swung it around to show the Youth Pastor. Still half asleep, the Youth Pastor saw that catfish heading in his direction and tried to get out of its way. He forgot, however, that he was on a boat and there was only so far he could go.

In his own words, "That water was cold enough to wake up even someone who was sleeping through one of my sermons!"

Life has a way of throwing unexpected problems our way (Some as unusual as looking up and seeing a catfish headed in your direction). Normally our first reaction is to head for cover and get away from the problem. Sometimes, however, running away only makes the problem worst; as this Youth Pastor so chillingly found out.

When Sir Edmund Hillary attempted to climb Mt Everest the first time he failed. At a dinner party later as he was preparing to try again he made a toast and said this, "Mt Everest, You have defeated me, but I will return and I will defeat you because you can't get any bigger but I can."

I don't know what "fish" may come swinging into your face today. But I do know this, you can run away and end up in cold (or hot!) water or you can depend on God to make you more than conquerors through Christ.

June 3, 1997 **DEFEATING THE DEFEATER**

IF SATAN CANNOT DEFEAT YOU THEN HE WILL ATTEMPT TO DEFEAT SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU WHOSE DEFEAT WILL DEFEAT YOU.

How many times have you seen it? A greatly loved and well respected Pastor is forced to abandon his Church or his Ministry because of attitudes or actions by his wife or children. Or you talk with a man who has tremendous potential but is stuck in a mundane, mediocre job. When you talk to him you find that every time he was given a chance to advance in his job then his wife would not move; or the children were in some kind of trouble and he had to bypass the opportunity.

And it is not just men. I know numerous women who could have had brilliant and successful careers but abusive, drunken, or lazy husbands have kept them hidden in the shadows of obscurity. The dream is still there but day by day the reality of their situation eats away at its edges as it slowly turns from a dream into a nightmare.

The good news of the Gospel is that God has made us more than conquerors through Jesus Christ (Rom 8:27). To be more than a conqueror means that you don't just defeat a bad situation; you turn the bad situation into a good situation. That turns the defeater into the defeated.

Let me illustrate. The Church I pastor was doing great. Then one day a man came into our home and assaulted my wife. In needing to care for her I could not give the church the care it needed. Instead of allowing Satan to defeat me through defeating someone close to me, I began an outreach ministry that now allows me to reach thousands instead of hundreds. A bad situation has been turned into a good ministry. That is how you defeat the defeater.

June 4, 1997 **SATAN'S STRATEGY**

If you are a Star Trek fan then you know their biggest enemy is "The Borg". This collective cube of integrated people seek only to assimilate you into their collective or to destroy you. That is also a pretty good definition of Satan's goal.

Rev John Keen preached a message recently and listed several of Satan's methods of operation. They are important enough to share with you so you can avoid Satan's traps.

1) Satan seeks to Distract you-(2 Cor 2:11) *Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.* Satan will seek to get your attention somewhere else so he can come in and control every area of your life.

2) Satan tries to Deceive you- (Rev 20:8) *And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.* He will come in as an "angel of light" to turn your heart into darkness

3) Satan wants to Disgrace you- When Satan persuaded Adam and Even to sin they found they were naked. In the same way, following Satan will bring you disgrace and dishonor.

4) Satan seeks to Destroy you-(1 Pet 5:8) *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:* Like the Borg, Satan's goal is your destruction. Be on your guard!

June 10, 1997 MANAGING YOUR MINUTES

Ephesians 5:15-16 (Amp Bible)- Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as wise, sensible, intelligent people: Making the very most of the time- buying up the opportunity- because the days are evil.

More people complain to me about time pressures than any other complaint. We have ten times as many labor saving (and supposedly time saving) devices as our forefathers and yet we wonder why their 24 hour day was so much longer than our day today. Why is it that we only have time to do what has to be done while what needs to be done is most often shoved to the back burner; and we can't remember the last time we had time to do what we wanted to do!

Let me give you Four Guidelines that will help you manage your time more effectively so you "buy up the opportunities" that God has given you.

1) Make Plans- If you fail to plan then you plan to fail. Start each week with a list of things you need, and want, to accomplish. Most people waste more time trying to determine what to do than they spend actually working.

2) Set Priorities- Don't waste time with secondary tasks until you have accomplished those tasks that must be done each week. Stress comes when we major on the minors and then find we don't have the time we need to do what has to be done.

3) Schedule Pauses- You can only clinch you fist so long before it begins to affect the rest of the body. God's rule about one day in seven being a rest period was based on His knowledge that your body requires relaxation in order to function properly.

Finally, Expect Problems. Death, disasters, and other unexpected emergencies will capture your attention and control your time. The only way to defeat them is to realize that they are not unexpected by God and He will provide the strength and wisdom you need to go through them. Just remember, your times are in His hands.

June 11, 1997 FINGER FOOLED

A man once came to a doctor claiming he was in intense pain. The doctor asked him to tell him where it hurt and the man said it hurt everywhere. The Doctor then asked the man to show him some of the places it hurt.

First the man touched his elbow and screamed in agony. Then he touched his chin and moaned in pain. Finally, he touched his knee and almost doubled over from his suffering.

Greatly concerned, the doctor began his examination. It was not long, however, until the Doctor told his patient that he was the most foolish man he had ever seen. His pain did not come from problems with his body, it was brought about by the fact that the man's finger was out of joint and every time he touched his body to show the doctor where he hurt that caused him to feel his intense pain!

Paul said "When one member of the body suffers, then all the members suffer with it;..."(1 Cor 12:26). This man was a perfect illustration of that fact; and one we need to keep in mind as we work together for God. If one member of a Church is sin sick, defeated by Satan, or under demonic oppression then it can have an effect on the entire church.

That is why it is so important for us to Pray one for another, to lend a helping hand to someone stumbling along life's path, and to show concern and compassion for fellow believers. After all, a broken finger hurts the whole body.

June 17, 1997 STAYING STRAIGHT

(Mat 7:13) Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

The Bible continually reminds us to be careful in our daily living lest we stray from the straight and narrow and end up bogged down in Satan's swamp land. That is a place of despair, doubt, and damnation. Here are several guidelines to help you stay straight.

1) DON'T STRAY- Keep your eyes on the Master instead of looking at the world. Your prayer life and your study of the Word of God are vital. The broad road is very crowded and you may begin to believe that so many people can't be wrong but stop for a moment and look; they are all going in the wrong direction.

2) DON'T STRUT- Pride comes before a fall. Let him that thinks he stand take heed lest he fall. If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. Many a man has been so busy beating his breast until he failed to see that his feet had wandered into the mud.

3) DON'T STOOP- Don't allow depression or failure to cause you to look down so that you wander off the right road. Cast all your cares on the Lord for He cares for you. If your mind is in the mud then it will not be long until the rest of you is there also.

4) DON'T STOP-(Rom 12:21) Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Keep on keeping on. No matter what comes your way just remember that God is calling you, Christ is preparing a place for you, and the Holy Spirit is living in your body to provide the help and guidance you need. The stopping place is just inside the pearly gates. Don't stop, and don't wander, until you get there.

June 18, 1997 1-800-843-5673

Recently a preacher friend of mine preached a message at our church about prayer. To relate it to today's terminology he kept telling us to dial 1-800-843-5673 for the help we need. Then, at the end of the message, he told us that 1-800-843-5673 was actually 1-800-THE-LORD.

He was using the phone number as an attention getter but he doesn't know the people at Grace Church. Some of them went home and dialed that number just to see what would happen. Lo and behold, it connected them to a recording of Scripture reading, special music, and an opportunity to leave prayer request! The preacher was pleasantly surprised when they came back and told him there really was help on 1-800-THE-LORD.

Isn't that the way it works in many areas of our life? We know a principle that will work but we fail to translate it into physical living. Sometimes it would amaze us at the results we would attain if we stopped talking about God's phone number and actually dialed Him in prayer.

The Bible is in fact the word of God. Prayer really work. God still delights in the prayers of His people. Answers to prayers can still come instantaneously and miraculously. Our problem comes from the fact that we sometimes think praying is just a catchy little thing to do. But if we will actually dial God's number we will be surprised as what God will do in our life

June 24, 1997 THE RED DRESS

The Preacher's wife had worn her Red Dress many times in the past few years and now she was tired of it. It was still in pretty good shape but she felt like she had gotten her money's worth from it so she gave it to one of the lady's in the Church who was conducting a yard sale.

The next morning the Preacher was out visiting in the community and stopped by the home of one of his members who was having a yard sale. As he looked over the merchandise a red dress caught his attention. After examining the dress he concluded it would fit his wife so he gave the child who was in charge of the yard sale at the time a dollar.

He was very excited about his fabulous find until he showed it to his wife and she told him she had worn that dress countless times and she had given it to the lady for the yard sale where he had purchased it. His face was almost as red as the dress.

Over and over Jesus said that the problem with society was that it had eyes to see but would not see. Like this Preacher, People today fail to notice things under their eyes but seem fascinated by them when viewed in another setting. They will laugh or cry about real life dramas on TV but never see the same warning signs in their own family. They will discuss with their co-workers in great detail their ideas on how to handle a situation in the newspaper but never sit down with their wife and children and try to work out family destroying problems.

How sad it is to have perfect vision and yet not be able to see.

June 25, 1997 BUS SIGNS

On a recent trip, I stopped at a traffic light in Alabama. In one of the lanes facing me was a charter bus. Normally, the destination window on top of the bus will list either the name of the charter or the ultimate destination of the bus. This one, however, had a sign that simply said, "I'm lost".

I believe I'd have to think about taking a trip on that bus!

Sadly, I know some churches that give the same impression that bus was giving. Instead of promoting the adventure and excitement of the Christian life, they give the impression that they're as lost as the people they're trying to guide.

They talk about the Love of God but, if you ride their bus for a while, you find it full of bitterness, back biting, and battles. When you look at the problems in the "bus", you can't help but be reminded of the statement of Jesus about the blind leading the blind. And there are too many people in the ditch as it is.

My destination is Heaven. I want that to be the proclamation of my life as well as the testimony of my lips. I want to live every day, in every way, in such a manner that the people who come into contact with me will know exactly where I'm going. If I pass a stranger on the road of life, I want them to see "Heaven Bound" instead of "I'm Lost". Then, when I arrive at my destination, maybe my bus will be completely full of joyous passengers who have joined me along the way

July 1, 1997 PERSPECTIVE

The sun was hot and the day was long. Each morning they would begin work around 7am and labor on the house they were constructing until 4pm or 5pm. Each day saw some progress but the talk and the actions of the workman made it easy to ascertain that they would rather be somewhere else doing something more to their liking.

I was staying in the home right beside where these men were working. I was also up at 7am each morning and I also had a busy day each day. But my talk and my actions were about how much I was enjoying each day and how much I wanted to stay here forever!

The difference, of course, was that I was on vacation while the workmen were simply doing their job. The workman would stand on the balcony of their home and talk about lumber and labor. I would stand on the balcony of my home and marvel at the beauty spread out before me. They took the panoramic view spread out before them for granted. I, on the other hand, couldn't get enough of it. They couldn't wait to leave while I dreaded the thought that each moment brought me closer to having to depart.

Jesus came that we might have abundant life. Sadly, many people adopt the philosophy of the workmen and fail to see the wonders all around them. Instead of enjoying life where God has put them, they keep thinking that they would be happier somewhere else. Instead of lifting up their eyes from their daily drudgery and seeing the wonders God put all around them they chose to focus only on themselves. And that perspective will always cause you to endure life instead of enjoy life.

July 2, 1997 WRONG BOOK

I attended a Revival Conference recently and listened to several speakers preach about the need of revival and then give instructions about how to encourage Revival in your church. The illustrations and applications were very interesting.

Many times, after I listen to someone else preach, I will re-read the scripture text they used in my next devotion. That allows me to refocus on the message and to gather any information I may have missed while listening to the sermon. I think preaching is important; not only when I preach but also when I hear someone else preach.

During the Revival Conference one of the preachers preached from the third chapter of Ezekiel. The next morning I decided to end my devotion by reading that scripture again. I opened my Bible and began reading but the scripture did not seem familiar for some reason. I persisted however until I came to a verse that seemed to leap off the page at me. It proclaimed that "The Lord is my Portion" and was just what I needed at the time.

That is when I looked up in the corner of my Bible and found that I was in Lamentations chapter three instead of Ezekiel chapter three. God let me turn to the wrong book so I could get the right message. Isn't it wonderful the way the Lord works?

July 8, 1997 **HIDDEN ROADS**

During a recent vacation with my wife's family we stayed in a home located atop a mountain. Each morning I would sit on the balcony overlooking a vista of mountains and valleys as I drank my coffee and read my Bible chapters. Each time I sat there and looked out at this wonderful view I thought to myself "If this does not make you want to shout "Glory" then your powder must be wet."

One morning while I was reading I was also praying about a situation I had to face. When I stopped reading for a moment and looked out at the scenery to allow what I had just read to soak in I suddenly noticed a light pole sticking up out of the midst of the forest below me. Once I saw that pole I then found 3 or 4 more poles in a line thru the forest. As I followed these poles with my eyes I came to a clearing in the trees that allowed me to see that the light poles were located beside a road hidden under the canopy of trees.

That was the moment the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "When it looks like there is no road just remember that I have roads that you haven't seen yet."

I have no idea what kind of corner Satan has backed you into. All I know is that no matter how hopeless your situation seems you can always count on the fact that the Lord has a road for you that will bring you out of the corner and into a place of service and satisfaction. All you need to do to find your road is to get up high with God and begin looking at things from His perspective.

July 9, 1997 **MEASURING CUPS**

We were staying in a cabin with my wife's family recently and my brother-in-law decided to make some tea. The measuring cup in the cabin was a flat oblong cup instead of the normal circular shape. All the ladies in the cabin had to reassure him before he was willing to believe that cup was really a cup and use it to measure the sugar for the tea.

The Lord said His ways are not our ways and His thoughts were not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). Many times He will ask us to handle a problem in life with something that looks like it does not measure up. That is where our faith must come in. We must trust God enough to use the measuring cup He gives us even if our normal senses are telling us that God's ways will not work or God's word can't be applied to our situation.

When Samuel the prophet looked on David for the first time he thought to himself that surely this could not be the man God wanted to be King. God chided his prophet and told him that man looks on the outside but God sees the heart. David did not look like a king but God knew he would indeed measure up.

You may sometimes feel as if life has made you a square peg for a round hole. And Satan may sometimes use that to discourage or depress you. Just remember, a measuring cup still measures a cup no matter what its shape.

July 15, 1997 RATTLESNAKE

We had just completed an arduous eight mile journey on rough mountain trails to see a water fall and were almost back to the parking area. Everyone was beginning to look with anxious anticipation to finally getting to sit down and feel the cooling breeze from the car air conditioner.

Suddenly, one of the young boys with us cried out in fear as he noticed a large timber rattler laying on a rock beside the trail. Tiredness was replaced by tension as everyone's attention shifted to this new danger.

Once the initial shock wore off the reactions were interesting. One of the men tried to pick at it with his walking stick so he could see it coil up and rattle it rattler! Most of the ladies with us backed up as far as they could and looked all around them all the time. And the kids kept wanting to get closer and closer to it to identify all its details.

The Bible first describes Satan as a snake. Sadly, there is something about the danger from a real snake, as well as the deception of Satan, that seems to lure people into getting close enough so that the Snake (or Satan) can strike.

There are several things I can pretty well assure you about. If you play around with a snake (or Satan) long enough then you will probably get bitten. If you allow your curiosity about snakes (or sin) to draw you too close then you will also end up in trouble. God put that normal human wariness in your life for a reason.

By the way, right after we passed the snake and continued our journey to the car we met another group of hikers and we warned them about the snake just up the path. That's what I'm doing with this article, warning you that Satan is just up the path from you so you need to stay well to God's side of the path or you might get bitten.

July 16, 1997 THE SILENT YELL

Talking with a lady recently about some surgery she underwent revealed an interesting phenomenon. She said that when she was given the anesthesia to put her to sleep she suddenly panicked and tried to yell at the nurse to stop the procedure. Inside she was yelling as hard as she could but nothing was coming out. The nurse would even ask her how she was doing and smile at her when she didn't say anything; while on the inside she was silently yelling as hard as she could.

I know many women in similar circumstances. Some will smile at their family and nod at their husband while on the inside they are screaming with frustration about the lack of appreciation they endure. I know others who make a beautiful appearance in public but cries of rage and fear echo from the chambers of their soul as they look at husbands who are not willing to work but seem perfectly willing to put forth the effort to beat or abuse them. On the outside the waters are calm and smooth but underneath a raging river of despair, disappointment, and discouragement boils and tumbles. Their inward yell is loud and clear to them but silently ignored by those around them.

If you find yourself silently yelling, let me encourage you to direct those yells to the Lord. He cares about your situation and He is able to bring about change. I know that sounds too good to be true but I can tell you with complete assurance that that is not a Pie in the Sky saying but a Peace in the Heart Promise--*From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.* (Psa 61:2-3)

July 22, 1997 TIME TO LIVE

Every day you have one day less to live.

I believe each of us is born with a time clock ticking in our soul. That clock is set by God and there is very little we can do to change when it will expire.

There are only 2 ways that I can remember that lengthens the time on that clock. One was when Hezekiah was deadly sick and he prayed earnestly to God and God extended his life for 15 years. The other extension is given to people who honor their father and mother (Eph 6:1-3).

There is also a way that your life can be shortened- sinful activity: (Psa 55:23) But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

Basically, however, the clock of your life is ticking toward its end from the moment you are born. It is given to some people to know when that clock will stop (Both Jesus and Paul knew when their end was to be) but most people seem to stumble thru life and are completely in shock when the “alarm” finally goes off.

I don't know how long your clock will run. Some of you who read this may be long gone by next week. Others of you may be active and energetic long after my body is dusty debris.

There is one thing I do know about the length of my life and it is an anchor of stability no matter what comes my way- (Phil 1:21) For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Whatever the length of my life I plan to live it for the Lord. Then no matter when death comes it will be simply be the stopping of the clock of my fleshly body and the beginning of that time when time will be no more.

July 23, 1997 AFFORD TO WAIT

“One thing I am sure of, there is coming a day when every skeptic will agree with me and every unbeliever admit that my message is true, but it will be too late for them. I can afford to wait but they cannot.” Rev Vance Havner

Recently my mother had some surgery. It took place at three o'clock in the morning. I didn't want to do it then and the doctor did not want to do it then but my mother's condition couldn't wait. As the Doctor stood in the hall talking with the family after the surgery he made it plain that delay would have been deadly.

While mother was recovering a number of people came to visit her. After one lady's visit mother told me that this lady had 3 grandsons and all of them were living with someone without being married. Public decency, righteous responsibility, and the fact that they would have to face God one day did nothing to persuade them to do right.

One day they will wish with all their heart and soul that they had taken the time to do things God's way. Right now my sermons and exhortations are little more than a mosquito buzzing around their head but one day they will finally realize how important it is to do things God's way. And as Vance Havner said, “I can afford to wait but they cannot!”.

July 30, 1997 DIVERSE DISCIPLES

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

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

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

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

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

August 5, 1997 CAR ANTS

My Assistant Pastor and I had to go to Smithfield, NC to attend a funeral recently. He said he would drive and I said I would let him! Just before we left he took his car by to have the oil changed and they also vacuumed it out. That made it clean and nice for our trip.

We made several stops to see people on our way out of town and I then sat on the passenger's side and worked on Church material or talked to him for the 150 mile trip to Smithfield. We arrived a little early for the funeral so we decided to get some lunch at a local burger place.

When we finished lunch and I started to get back in the car I saw something move on the edge of the car mat. I looked closer and found a boiling heap of fire ants on and under the mat. We were baffled about how they had gotten into the car and looked under and around the tires but could find no trace of how they had established their bed under the car mat.

We finally came to the conclusion that they had gotten into the car the previous night, had settled under the mat, and the coolness of the air conditioner had kept them dormant until we let the car heat up while we ate lunch. Needless to say, we went directly across to a local store, purchased some ant spray, and put an end to the ant bed in the car.

Satan has a bad habit of hitch hiking in your life. Even if you vacuum your life and then engage in religious activity he will still pop up when you least expect him. Just remember that the same word of God that gives life to you spells defeat for Satan. Spray him liberally with the Word and then ride in confidence and comfort.

August 6, 1997 A CHRISTIAN WORKER

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

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

God wants to help you grow as a Christian. Do your part.

August 12, 1997 FUNERAL FESTIVAL

I have officiated at some strange funerals in my life. One time the special music during the funeral was Elvis singing "Are you lonesome tonight?". Another time the girlfriend of a son of the deceased called to let me know she was coming and to expect trouble from her boyfriend's wife! (Doesn't that make you look forward to a funeral!).

I have buried premature babies in the freezing rain and I have preached funerals when it rained so hard until people had to wade to their cars when they left the church. I even went to a funeral once where lightning struck two of the funeral directors during the service!

One of the best funerals I have ever attended, however, came recently when I went to a minister's funeral. It was a festival of rejoicing that this man had reached his heavenly home. There was great rejoicing as people remembered the wonderful works that this man of God had accomplished during his 50 years of ministry. The service was even capped off with an invitation for people to repent of their sins and accept the Savior this man had spent his life proclaiming.

Funerals are so final! Every case of "what might have been" or "what could have been" is forever changed into "what is done is done". All that remains is for family and friends to gather together and take part in the funeral that will put away the body that once held your eternal soul.

The most important question you will ever answer is whether your funeral will be a time of rejoicing as a child of God goes to his heavenly reward or if it will be a time of doubt and despair as family and friends look at your past and wonder about where you are at present.

As the tree falls, so shall it lay. The only time you have to make arrangements about the future is the present. Make sure your faith is in God's son so your future will be part of the festival in the Father's House.

August 19, 1997 FLORENCE POSSUM

My mother recently had to have some emergency surgery in the middle of the night. While the family waited for the surgery to be completed, I decided to get us some coffee and doughnuts. The streets of Florence are virtually deserted at three O'clock in the morning and I was thinking how nice it was not to have to fight traffic when suddenly an opossum ran out in front of my car. I barely missed him as he crossed the street going from one motel location to another.

I'll have to admit one of the last things I expected to see that night was a possum crossing the streets of Florence. I wondered how he survived until I thought about all the garbage cans in Florence.

The Opossum is a strange animal. It belongs to the Marsupial family; meaning it carries it's young in a pouch after birth. This makes the Opossum kin to the Kangaroo and Wallaby. Surprisingly, of the large number of Marsupial species in the world, the opossum is the only variety that lives in North America. It was also of interest to me to find that when the opossum is attacked it will many time roll over and play dead, hence our term "playing possum".

Possums were not meant to live in cities and dine out of motel garbage cans. One day this possum will probably dart out in front of another car and become simply road kill. In the same way, many people are darting from motel to motel without regard to their health, their family, or their accountability to God. They fail to realize that they won't be able to "play possum" on that fatal day when they dart one time too many.

What a difference it would make if they left the Marsupial family and became part of the Christian family. They would find that the food at the Father's house is much more satisfying than motel garbage.

August 20, 1997 CATALOOCHEE COVE

When my wife and I first started going to Cade's Cove it was almost deserted. Located deep in the heart of the Smokies, it is a beautiful cove surrounded by majestic mountains that make you want to just sit, look, and praise the Lord. You almost felt as if you were in your own private world. Now the traffic is nearly bumper to bumper and we hardly ever go there anymore.

I mentioned this to a ranger recently and he said I needed to go to Cataloochee Cove. He said it was as pretty as Cade's Cove but without the traffic. When we tried to get there we found out why.

Cataloochee Cove is located just outside of Maggie Valley and you have to travel 11 miles of gravel roads around and around mountains to get into the cove. Once you get into the cove the Park Service has provided some excellent roads inside the park and it is a nice view- not Cade's Cove by any means but nice.

Getting into Cataloochee Cove reminded me of some Churches. They make it very difficult for anyone to get to them but they are very nice if you can ever get inside. Physical hindrances, social prejudices, and party spirits all combine to effectively block the average person from coming to the Church. If only Churches would learn to make it as easy to access them as it is to enjoy them then they might be a lot fuller on Sunday Mornings.

August 26, 1997 SENTENCE SERMONS

Sometimes a sentence is as good as a sermon. I hope these short sayings will prove inspirational and motivational to you.

BEWARE OF HALF TRUTHS; YOU MAY HAVE HOLD OF THE WRONG HALF-The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. (Prov 26:22)

NO MATTER HOW BAD YOUR SITUATION, YOU CAN LOSE YOUR TEMPER AND MAKE IT WORSE- He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. (Prov 25:28)

A WIFE WHO HAS GOOD HORSE SENSE NEVER BECOMES A NAG- It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house. (Prov 21:9)

DIAMONDS ARE CHUNKS OF COAL THAT ENDURED PRESSURE-For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. (1 Pet 2:20)

A SMOOTH SEA NEVER MADE A GOOD SAILOR- My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; {3} Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. (James 1:2-3)

DUSTY BIBLES LEAD TO DIRTY MINDS- Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. (Psalm 119:11)

And one finally sentence that is actually a question- **WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING ABOUT HEAVEN??** Each day brings you closer to the day you will stand before God to be judged. Your preparation must be made before that court date comes due.

August 27, 1997 CHRISTIAN FAILURES

Sometimes people get so preoccupied with going to church and being good until they don't realize that their Christian life is seriously sick. Here are four symptoms to look for to help you determine if you have a problem.

Are you Powerless in the face of Temptation? It is not wrong (or unusual) to be tempted; but a Christian knows that "Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world". Continual defeat is a sign of a serious disease that "Dr Jesus" needs to deal with.

Have you lost your love and concern for the Lost? If all you are concerned with is your own situation while the multitudes drop into Hell then you have a deep problem.

Do you desire the Word of God and the House of God? When your Bible becomes dusty and you find yourself dreading to fellowship with God's people at Church then you are in grave danger of collapsing.

Is there a hunger in your heart to grow as a Christian? The reason lukewarm living makes God sick is because it is a clear indicator of a much deeper problem in your Christian life. When you stop longing for the Lord it will not be long until the weeds of this world will enter your life and choke your fruitfulness for God.

God did not call us to be failures. He told us to be more than conquerors through faith in Christ. Live that way!

September 2, 1997 CORROSION CORRUPTION

I purchased an indoor-outdoor thermometer several years ago. Almost every morning my wife would ask me what the weather was like outside so she would know what kind of clothes to wear. I figured the thermometer could help her make the right decision; and it has done just that.

In order to put the thermometer in the location we both wanted it had to pass through a door frame. I didn't want to drill a big hole in the frame so I cut the wire going to the outside sensor and then re-spliced it after I put it through a very small hole. It looked neat, worked great, and everyone was happy.

Several days ago I came in from visiting some people and was commenting to my wife on how hot it was. When I looked at the thermometer to see the temperature it said it was only eighty two degrees. I knew that was incorrect so I began to check the wires going to the sensor. When I looked at the place where I had spliced the wire I found that the joints were thick with corrosion. The corrosion was causing the sensor to give a false reading. Once I cleaned and re-taped them everything was back to normal.

There are a lot of people who used to know what was right and what was wrong. Today they act as if the sins of society are only eighty two degrees instead of one hundred and two. I'm afraid the wires leading to their heavenly sensor has become corroded. This problem needs to be dealt with quickly by confession of sins and returning to God. After all, if people think it is eighty two while it is actually one hundred and two then they may die of heat stroke. And the thermometer may stand before God with bloody hands (Ez 33:8)

September 9, 1997 GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

If God is God, and certainly He is, then it would only make sense that He would reveal Himself to mankind in order to show who He is, what He wants man to do, and demonstrate how much He loves man. Through the course of time God has used at least five methods to reveal Himself and show mankind what He wants with, and for, them.

THEOPHANY- God becomes visible in a human form and talks with man face to face. This is the way he walked with Adam, talked with Abraham, and went through the fire with the Hebrew children.

DREAMS (Revelations given to men while in an unconscious state) **AND VISIONS** (Revelations external to man that were seen or heard through ordinary faculties; although not always by everyone in the area- Paul's conversion). This is the most common method of revelation in the Bible- Ezekiel's visions, Wise Men's directions, Jacob's ladder.

PROPHETS, PREACHERS, MESSENGERS- Men who were supernaturally enlightened by God so they could clearly perceive the spiritual truths which they, in turn, speak to other people. Their trademark was to begin their message with, "Thus saith the Lord".

SCRIPTURES- God so influenced certain people until they were able to write the message which He wished to be given to people. We call this inspiration and it is God's way of using the talents and personality of a person while maintaining the complete and total accuracy of the words that were written.

CHRIST- (John 1:14) "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." God revealed Himself as a real person that showed us how God would deal with life and then died to pay our sin debt so we could live eternally with God. Glory!

September 10, 1997 PAINT PREPARATION

My wife decided recently that the guest bedrooms in the parsonage needed painting. It has only been thirteen years since they were last painted so I didn't see the need yet but she "persuaded" me that we really did need to paint those rooms.

I looked at the size of the rooms and tried to figure how long it would take to roll the walls and then trim all the molding, doors, and windows. I figured I could do it in a couple of nights if I really worked hard at it. Sometimes it is amazing how foolish I am!

What I failed to figure was that the furniture had to be moved, the door knobs, light and receptacle plates, and widow locks had to be removed, the pictures and objects on the walls had to be taken down and putty put in the holes, and tape had to be put everywhere! The painting wasn't so hard, it was the preparation that made it difficult.

Sometimes I long for Heaven so badly I can hardly stand it. I want to get to my new home and finally be at rest with the Lord. That is when I get frustrated and aggravated with all the preparation work the Lord is doing in my life now. I'm ready to start "painting" but God says prepare. God knows, however, that the preparation will make the painting go much easier and look much nicer so He makes me do the needed work first.

Lord, help me to work patiently so that when the time comes to "paint" I'll do a good job for you.

September 16, 1997 FISHY FLOWERS

The funeral director was new at his business and was trying to establish his reputation in town. That is why the knock at his door at midnight was doubling disturbing. He had not performed many funerals in town yet and when he was greetings at the door with, "Sir, you need to come check mother's body. There is an awful smell about it", he felt like going into a panic.

On the way to the home where the body was resting in state he reviewed in his mind the entire procedure he had gone through and could not find anything he had done incorrectly. As soon as he walked into the room with the body, however, he knew something was terribly wrong. There was in fact a very bad smell and it seemed to come from the vicinity of the coffin.

Strangely, as he leaned into the coffin to begin to work with the body the smell greatly decreased. Immediately he knew that something was not right about this situation. The body smelled fine but as he got closer to the flowers the smell really became obvious.

It took some investigation but it was finally determined that most of the flowers had come from a certain florist. This florist was located beside a fish market and she stored her flowers in the same cooler with the fish. The flowers had picked up the scent of the fish and the heat in the home on this Summer day had released the smell into the air.

The Bible tells us we are to be "fishers of men". I hope that means, among other things, that your "fishy smell" will affect everyone around you! I pray that every area of your family and co-workers' life will be affected by your love, your Christian character, and your trust in God. That kind of smell will affect them in life, and in death.

September 17, 1997 SKATEBOARD STOP

One of the neighborhood kids was showing off his skateboard to me on the parking lot at the Church recently. He was doing all kind of tricks and moves until the skateboard got caught in a crack in the pavement. That is when the skateboard stopped and the child did not!!

Thankfully, the only thing that was hurt was his pride. He was able to climb right back on the skateboard and start right back into his tricks and movements.

Many people seem to tackle life as if it were a skateboard. They think life is all about learning new tricks and impressing people with their skills and daring. The problems arise when they suddenly hit a crack and take a tumble.

Lying on their back on the concrete of life they are filled with pain and overcome with lose of pride. They just knew they could handle that marriage, that job, or that relationship but an unanticipated crack brought them tumbling from their "skateboard" onto the hard concrete.

Now they are faced with a life changing choice. They can lay crying on the concrete wrapped in their pain and humiliation or they can get back up and try that skateboard one more time.

Isn't it marvelous that coming to Christ means that He not only forgives the sin debt of our past, He also empowers us to get up and go forward again in the power of His Strength.

September 23, 1997 MUSINGS ABOUT MONEY

The Bible states that "the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim 6:10).

That makes it very important that we have a Proper Perspective about Money:

- "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Psa 37:16).
- "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov 11:4).
- "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches" (Prov 13:7).
- "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Prov 22:1).
- "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jer 9:23-24).

Remember MORE IS NEVER ENOUGH- "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?" (Ecc 5:11).

"Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Prov 23:5).

Don't go Mad over Money. Love people and use money; don't Use people and love money!

September 24, 1997 UPSIDE DOWN SPOONS

I did not have any sisters so my three brothers and I had to take turns washing dishes. I don't like washing dishes.

When I married a wife I gave up washing dishes except in an emergency or sickness. My wife doesn't try to preach for me and I don't try to wash dishes for her!

After we were married for a few years, I decided to "butter" her up by washing the dishes for her one afternoon while she was visiting her mother. Instead of telling me how nice I was, however, the first thing she did was tell me the spoons were lying in the drain the wrong way. So much for butter!

I hated to admit it but she was right. I had rinsed the spoons off and put them in the drain face up. That caused the rinse water to collect in the bottom of the spoon. I should have turned them upside down so all the water would drain from them.

That's a problem people sometimes have also. They come to God for cleansing but they don't turn over after they're clean and sin collects in their life again. They need to learn that God expects us to turn our back on sin when we turn our face toward Him.

If sin is continually defeating you today, maybe you're facing the wrong way. Turn over and let the sin drain out of your life.

September 30, 1997 BUBBLE GUM BOXES

The little girl did not realize it when she came into the store but she has stepped in a glob of bubble gum on the sidewalk. When she stopped at the counter while her mom purchased an item she felt her foot sticking and promptly began wiping the gum off her shoe onto the carpet.

When she left the store the manager saw the mess on the floor and got someone to clean it up. Getting that bubble gum up was pretty difficult and left a wet slick place on the floor. Not wanting anyone to get hurt, the manager used what he had available at the time to protect his customers from stepping on that spot. He put a box on each side of the spot and then bridged across those boxes with a box on top.

Shortly after this a man came to the store to purchase something. When he came to the counter to pay for it he ignored the entire length of available counter, walked up to the boxes, moved them out of the way, and stood in the wet spot to pay for his purchase! The manager just stood there in amazement.

One day God saw the mess that sin causes in a person's life. He erected barriers and signs to tell man to avoid that spot. Guess what man does when he comes to the wide open counter of life with boxes blocking the one area God wants him to avoid.

October 7, 1997 POWER OFF

When I go to the pulpit to preach I must continually be aware that my sermons will affect many more people than I can see in my congregation. Our eleven O'clock service is broadcast live over our local radio station and we know from past response that numerous people listen to the sermon that way.

We also make audio and video copies of both Sunday services so we can give or mail them to many local and out of state individuals. Each week thus affords us a great opportunity to share the gospel with a large number of people and we thank God for the privilege He has given us.

With all of this recording and broadcasting going on, however, it is necessary that I wear a tie-tack microphone so the sound can be recorded properly as I move around. Recently, my sound man had to stop me at the beginning of a sermon because my microphone was not working. We checked the switch on the mike and the battery but everything seemed to be okay.

After several minutes of confusion, it was finally discovered that someone had accidentally turned off the remote unit. The mike was on and working but someone had cut off the power at the receiving end.

Sometimes "mike" (me) works as hard as he can and it seems no one hears the message. If I don't find the problem in my equipment then I have learned to look for a problem in the remote. Something has turned God's Power off and I need to get it back on if I am to communicate effectively.

If you are working hard and accomplishing little you might need to check your connection with the Lord. You will find everything sounds great when the power is on.

October 8, 1997 LOST VISION

Have you lost your enthusiasm for Serving God? Is Church attendance a job instead of a joy? Do you feel defeated in your Christian life? It may be that your spiritual vision has become dim. Let's take a 3 point eye exam and see if we can correct your vision.

Looking too much at the riches of this world can dim your vision (Rev 3:17). Preoccupation with possessions will take your eyes off God. This lustful looking after the goods of this world will blind your eyes to the presence of God; and when you take your eyes off Him, you lose your source of joy.

Another eye problem is hatred of other people (I Jn 2:11). Anger, hatred, bitterness, and covetousness all combine to put blinders on our eyes and sorrow in our heart. One of the first rules I learned as a Christian is that you can't have joy in your life if there is hatred in your heart.

Finally, your vision will dim if you fail to grow as a Christian (II Pet 1:5-9). You are always either growing toward God or away from God. If you fail to grow, and drift away from God, then your vision will begin to dim and your joy will turn into mourning.

Don't let spiritual eye problems rob you of the abundant life. It will amaze you how great life can be when your focus is clear and your eyes have a vision of God.

OCTOBER 14, 1997 HEART HOLINESS

I deal with a lot of people who are suffering from spiritual heart disease. They have little spiritual stamina and are often spiritually sick. Let's look at a few of the harmful influences that bring about this dreaded disease.

Music- If music has the power to calm the savage beast (I Sam 16:23), then it also has the power to influence your thinking. Be careful about the kind of music you listen too as well as the amount of music you listen too. It is hard to keep a holy head when you continually dump garbage into your ears.

Movies- They influence your imagination, your perception of life, and your moral standards. The big screen and the little VCR both bring entertainment to our lives. They also bring enticements to lust, to covet, and to corruption as we begin to believe real life is like the life on the reel.

Magazines- Reading about other people's failures and follies tends to destroy your love for others and your confidence in people. You will never learn to love your neighbor as yourself if you only see him through the trash of sensationalism.

TV- Watching Television becomes a mind numbing habit that steals your time, corrupts your thinking, and determines your perception of world events. It would amaze the average person at the difference they would feel in their spiritual and physical life if they would go one week without turning on their TV.

The best advice I can give you if you suffer from spiritual heart disease is to come to the Great Physician. He has promised, (Ezek 36:26) "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

October 15, 1997 CAFETERIA OBSERVATIONS

I'm sitting in the cafeteria of a local hospital waiting on someone to finish their surgery. As I drink my coffee and await the results of the surgery I can't help but notice several things.

I noticed that in an informal count over the past few minutes less than half of the people who sat down to eat made a visible sign of thanking God for the food they were eating. I also noticed that race was not an issue in this. Black, white, and even a person from India all bowed before they ate. I know the glass is half empty of people who did not thank God but I sure do rejoice that it is half full of people who realize the source of all Blessings.

Another thing I noticed was that people separate themselves from strangers by seeking isolated tables but they congregate with family and friends. While I realize there is some degree of normality in that I still look forward to that Heavenly homecoming when all of God's children will sit around the same table as one big happy family.

Finally, I noticed that people talk more about negative topics than they do about positive subjects. Complaining about everything in the world seemed to be the order of the day. No wonder so many people walk around with frowns instead of smiles.

One closing thought. God sees us in every area of our life. When He observes our actions is He pleased or pained?

October 21, 1997 MARRIAGE MEANING

Recently my Assistant Pastor got married. The father of his very beautiful bride is also a Pastor so he got to perform the ceremony. But as someone who loves both of these young people, this is the message I would give them if I had the opportunity.

Marriage means you start a new home- (Gen 2:24) "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Talking with my Assistant Pastor before the wedding he said, with a quiver in his voice, that he had moved all his clothes and furniture into his new home. What a joy and honor it will be to watch that new home develop and grow and eventually become a blessing to the community and to the cause of Christ.

Marriage means two become one in thought, actions, and intimacy- (1 Cor 7:4) "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." A husband and wife become confidants, friends, and companions. They should share their thoughts, worries, and actions with one another in full trust that their partner will handle the exposure of their vulnerability with love and compassion.

Marriage means you become an example of our relationship with Christ-(Eph 5:25) "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;" The key ingredients in a Marriage will be Faith in each other (Just as we come to Christ by Faith), Forgiveness (just like Christ forgives us our failures), and Fruit (Just as Christians attempt to bring others into the body of Christ).

Marriage is a marvelous institution. I rejoice that, in spite of all of the problems in today's world, the Bible still says, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the LORD." (Prov 18:22).

October 22, 1997 EXAMPLE ADMONITIONS

"Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Phil 4:9)

In this scripture Paul gives us 4 admonitions about his example that show us what to look for in a godly man.

1) Emulate my Teachings- Paul tells the Philippians to remember the lessons they had learned from him and build their conduct accordingly.

2) Grow with my Gifts- Paul then tells the Church to remember all the examples and exhortations they had received from him. God had gifted Paul and then Paul shared his gifts with the Philippian church.

3) Listen to my counsel- Those things that you have heard from me you need to keep close to Your heart. Paul tried to speak the words of God in truth and he wanted the Philippians to hear what he had to say beyond the mere external hearing of the outer ear. He wanted it to sink in and take root.

4) Follow my example- Those things you have seen in me as I lived before you each day should be examples for you to follow. Don't just do as I say, do as I do.

Paul ends his admonition by pledging that if they would follow the examples that he had given them then the God of peace would be their constant companion. What a promise!

October 28, 1997 BROOM ROOM

The Room was full of brooms. Construction work at the front of the building forced me to enter from the rear and the back room contained bundles of brooms. The Business was helping a local charity by selling brooms for them and they were storing the extra brooms in the back room until they were needed.

The busy schedule of the business and the ongoing construction work had caused the floor of the building to become very dirty. Wasn't that an awkward situation- A room full of brooms and yet their floor was very dirty.

Kind of reminds me of some churches I know. The pews are full of Christians but the community is becoming increasingly dirty with the corruption of sin. What a difference it would make if we could only get that room full of "Brooms" to begin sweeping up the dirt in the community instead of being content to stay stacked in neat piles.

If your church attendance and your relationship with Christ do not move you to do something about the dirt that is piling up all around you then you need to reexamine your mission. Churches that spend all their time simply dusting their bundled brooms and moving them from one place in the church to another need to take a fresh look at the purpose of a broom.

My wife is death on dirt. She tries to keep our home as clean and livable as possible. In her mind, a broom is a tool to clean with; not an ornament to admire. If church members could begin to see themselves in that light then much of the dirt we have to wade through today would be swept away because the brooms would do their duty. And wouldn't that make it better for everyone?

October 29, 1997 WRONG WITH WITCHES

(Exo 22:18) Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. [witch= a sorceress; A woman who claimed to have superhuman powers by means of spells, magic, or knowledge that comes from evil spirits .]

(Deu 18:10) There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, ["pass through the fire"-The worship of Molech sometimes involved human sacrifice in the fire. "divination"- We would call them Psychics. "an observer of times"- The use of Horoscopes. "enchanter"- One who interprets omens. Balaam did this (cf. Num. 24:1). "witch"-A practitioner of spells, occult magic, or "charms". One who consults with familiar spirits, A medium. One who pretends to know about the unseen world. One who inquires of the dead.

(1 Sam 15:23) For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

(2 Chr 33:6) And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

(Gal 5:20) The sins of the Flesh are- Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, [Witchcraft refers here to the use of drugs and magical potions].

November 4, 1997 JOYFUL CHURCH

Several weeks ago I noticed that some of the people in the Church did not seem to be enjoying the church services the way I thought they should. There did not seem to be the joy and excitement in their life that should naturally come to a Christian when they attend Church- (Psa 122:1) *I was GLAD when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.*

All that week I prayed for God to bring Joy and excitement to our services. And all that week I got phone calls from people who were going to miss church because of home comings at other churches, job problems, or vacation. Sunday dawned gray, dreary, and rainy. Our Attendance was down and so were the people. It seemed as if the Lord had done exactly the opposite of what I had prayed for.

But then the altar call was given. Suddenly, joy and excitement flooded our Church as a young lady came down the aisle, knelt at an altar, and gave her heart to Christ. The Salvation of this young lady brought Joy to Her heart, Joy to every person at Church, and even brought Joy in Heaven (Luke 15:7). And our joy was even doubled next week when she brought her daughter and granddaughter to church with her.

People tell me sometimes that they aren't enjoying their Church services as much as they want to. If they will make it their goal to reach people with the Gospel then they will soon find a JOY in coming to Church that will put a smile on their face and a song in their heart. For there is nothing in life that brings joy and excitement like seeing a person born into the kingdom of God. So tell someone about Jesus this week. It might bring peace to their heart and joy to yours.

November 5, 1997 DEUTERONOMY DIARY

Did you know that the book of Deuteronomy was the favorite book of Jesus? He quoted more from Deuteronomy than from all of the rest of the Bible put together! A book that had that much interest for Jesus is a book you and I need to read and study.

As you read through this great Book try to see the truths and principles it contains from the perspective of Jesus. This will allow you to understand the way Jesus applied scripture to daily situations of life. It will also help show you what molded the mind of Christ so you can look at life from His point of view.

As you read through Deuteronomy keep a diary of verses, thoughts, and prayers that come from your reading. Look at it as more than a reading assignment that you must complete. Try to find the heart of God expressed in this second giving of the Law to a generation about to enter the promised land.

Above all, as you read and study this book (and all books of the Bible), Remember that Truth is a Person; not a principle- Jesus said, "I AM the Truth". God is not just trying to show you a rule to live by; He wants you to have a relationship to live With. That is why Jesus and the Pharisees were at odds so often, they followed rules and He followed the Father.

Let me close with part of Deut 11:18 "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul,..." That is what I hope you will do, for that will be life changing.

November 11, 1997 FIRST AID FOLLY

Once upon a time there was a lady who wanted to be civic minded and socially conscience so she decided to take a Red Cross Course. Shortly after she finished the course there was a major car accident on the street in front of her home. She rushed out of her house to see what was wrong and came upon a scene of utter devastation. Bodies were mangled and blood was everywhere.

When talking to her friend about the situation later she said she was so proud of herself. She said she did not know what she would have done if it weren't for her Red Cross course. As soon as she came up and saw all that blood and mayhem she knew exactly what to do. She immediately sat down, put her head between her knees, and didn't faint!

Sadly, that sounds like many people today. They have taken the time to study the Bible and learn how to pray or how to witness but when they come upon a situation that demands that the study become practice then they can only think about themselves.

They can give you a three point outline on the Purpose, the Promises, and the Power of Prayer but they don't know what to do when they come into a hospital room and the doctor has just told the patient that they have cancer. They have attended, and may even teach, a course at church on how to share your faith in Christ with others but they are frightened out of their wits when it comes to sharing that faith with their family, their friends, or their associates.

The Bible says we are to study to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed (II Tim 2:15). And it is a shame when we hide our heads when people all around us are desperately in need of our help.

November 12, 1997 LIFT OR LIFE

The sad truth today is that many churches appear to be in the Lift business instead of the Life business. Their services and sermons are all geared toward lifting a person up from their present condition into a better condition instead of raising people from the dead into a new life.

It appears that people have forgotten that the Bible declares men to be dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1). Everyone seems to want to spend their time and effort trying to give the corpse a better environment instead of raising that corpse to new life. And no matter how nice the suit, or how pretty the flowers, a corpse is still dead.

Jesus came to give men life. He came to free men from the bondage to sin and self. He did not go around crusading for woman's rights or child labor laws. He did not even raise up a group to stamp out the horrors of slavery. He simply presented himself as the Son of God who would die to pay the sin debt of mankind. He did not try to lift men up from WHERE they were; He offered a new life so they could change WHAT they were [For He knew that the change of new life would also change the way women, children, and slaves were treated].

Are you in the Lift Business or the Life Business?

November 19, 1997 MANAGING A MIRACLE

Sometimes God can't bless us because we do not know what to do with the Miracle He wants to involve us in! Let's look at some basis rules for managing a miracle from the famous story of Jesus feeding the 5000.

1) IDENTIFY YOUR NEED- The people had gone without food for a long time and were far from home. If food was not provided for them then they might die in the dessert.

2) RECOGNIZE YOUR RESOURCES- All they could find to meet this need was a little boy's lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish. But they would learn to do what they could, where they were, with what they had.

3) ORGANIZE YOUR PROBLEM- Jesus made the people sit down in small manageable groups. Don't try to bite off the entire problem, divide it into manageable areas.

4) LOOK TO GOD TO BLESS YOUR EFFORTS- Jesus took the fish and loaves and blessed them. If you can do it without God's help then it is not a miracle. Depend on God and watch something extraordinary happen.

5) DON'T WASTE GOD'S PROVISION- Jesus told the disciples to gather up the fragments that remained- 12 baskets full (One for each unbelieving Disciple!).

Your problem is not so big when you look to God for supply. Just don't waste His wonderful provision.

November 25, 1997 THE POWER OF PRAISE

“But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel” (Psa 22:3). The amazing truth of this statement is that it is found in the middle of the Psalm that describes the agony of crucifixion; and is the Psalm that Jesus repeated while on the Cross. During this time of agony and pain He gives us a very useful insight into the value and place of Praise in the life of the Christian.

Let’s look at a few more ways Praise is profitable to our life.

Praise helps our Health- Prov 17:22 “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.”

Praise helps our Looks- Prov 15:13 “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.”

Praise helps our attitude- Prov 15:15 “He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.”

And, above all, Praise Pleases God- Heb 13:15 “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” I Thess 5:18 “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” Ps 50:23 “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.”

God is not glorified by our silence, our fears, our doubts, or our frustrations. He is glorified by our Faith in His Plan and our Praise of His wondrous works. Make it your business this day to Praise the Lord; even when you, like Jesus, have to begin some of your praise by asking, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

November 26, 1997 HALLELUJAH

The Psalmist gives some very important information about our "Praise Life" in the last Psalm- Psalm 150. He begins with the Statement, "Praise ye the Lord". That translates to our word “**HALLELUJAH**”. Let’s look at some guidelines about Hallelujah time for the people of God.

1. **WHERE**- “Praise God in his Sanctuary: Praise him in the firmament of his power.” We are to praise the Lord in the Church and in the world. Always and everywhere.

2. **WHY**- “Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.” We are to exalt what God has done for us so that the world can see how wonderful our God is and how much we love Him.

3-5 **HOW**- “Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.” At our annual “Praise Service”, everyone is encouraged to praise the Lord with testimony, song, special music, drama, poems, etc. The Method is not as important as the actual praising.

6 **WHO**- “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.” This means YOU. Find a Place, you’ve got a reason, and praise the Lord today.

December 2, 1997 REJOICE

Are you tired of being tired? Are you sad over the fact that you are sad all the time? Have all the fun and games turned into drudgery and weariness? Are you looking for lasting joy instead of passing happiness? Let me tell you what my friend Jesus can do for you.

Jesus can RESTORE YOUR JOY by bringing you into a proper relationship with God. The heart is a restless hunter, seeking only God. Nothing will satisfy the ache in your soul until you gain peace with God and the peace of God. This salvation joy is described by the apostle Peter as “Joy unspeakable and full of Glory”.

Jesus can MAINTAIN YOUR JOY by daily walking with you through life’s battles and burdens. This daily walking with Christ gives your life purpose and direction and changes you from a defeated loser into a person who is “More than a conqueror through him that loved us”. Jesus put it this way, “Abide in me that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

Jesus can COMPLETE YOUR JOY by bringing you to a wonderful Heavenly end- “That I might finish my course with Joy” (Acts 20:24). This is not the joy of a World Series win one year and a busted season the next. The Joy of a relationship with Jesus begins at a young age, grows more meaningful during the changes of adulthood, and blooms into a sustaining hope and help in the twilight of your life. As one person so eloquently put it, “Serving Jesus just gets gooder and gooder!”.

Why spend your life settling for momentary pleasures? Jesus came that you might have real life and that it might be abundant life. Come to know Christ today. It will be the start of the greatest adventure, and the most lasting joy, you will ever experience.

December 3, 1997 PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION

Sometimes it appears the enemies of a Christian have them surrounded. Instead of living the Abundant Life it seems that many Christians are as harrowed and heartbroken as those who do not know Christ. If it looks that way in your life then let me share Five Providential Protections found in Romans chapter eight that deal with all of the foes you encounter.

1) INTIMIDATION- (Rom 8:31) *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?* I always heard that you don’t stop your car for a barking dog. Just ride with God let the dogs bark.

2) DEPRAVATION- (Rom 8:32) *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* God has already given us the best Heaven had to offer. Will He withhold anything that we really need now??

3) ACCUSATIONS- (Rom 8:33) *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.* God looks in our heart and sees the motive behind our methods. People’s accusations about our work for God may cause us heart ache here but always keep in mind who will be the final judge.

4) CONDEMNATION- (Rom 8:34) *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* Christ Paid for us and now Prays for us.

5) SEPARATION- (Rom 8:35-39) *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? {36} As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. {37} Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. {38} For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, {39} Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* God is with us and we are with God. That means in all circumstances we are more that conquerors through him that loved us.

December 10, 1997 GUIDELINES

We recently paved some more parking at our Church. I'm sort of a fanatic about paved parking. I think Church is a place where people ought to feel welcome; and I believe that welcome begins when they drive up to the Church. A Church that is unwilling to provide adequate parking implies to me that they aren't really interested in people coming to their services.

By the way, I think the members of the Church ought to think about Visitors when they park. We have two spaces reserved at the front door of our Church for visitors. If we have a special day and expect many visitors, I ask the members to park in "out of the way" places so the visitors can easily get into the Church (Just like an employer would ask his employees to park in the far parking lot so the customers could park at the door).

After the concrete dried we had to mark off parking areas. It's amazing where and how people will park if you don't outline the parking spaces.

That's the way it is in life also. God doesn't want to tell us what we can and can't do but if He doesn't give us some guidelines to go by we "park" our lives all over the place. It's not that God doesn't trust you. He just knows it goes much better if you have some boundaries to guide you.

Get inside your parking space at Church this week. You'll find we have a place for your car; and God has a plan for your life

December 16, 1997 QUESTIONING GOD

I have often said that if someone were to eavesdrop on my wife and I while we eat in a restaurant they would probably think we were heathens. The only recreation my wife and I have time for is the occasional evening out to eat a meal together. During these times we feel free to discuss deep philosophical ideas as well as intimate personal issues.

During these times of deep discussion it is not unusual to delve into questions about why certain people are sick, why applied Bible principles seem to work with some people but not with others, or how much does spiritual activity affect physical circumstances. We feel free to question every aspect of our relationship with God; and to do so by beginning at the furthestmost point of our doubt and work back toward the core of our confidence.

If a person were to hear only the beginning of our conversation they would probably assume that we had serious doubts about who God is and how He works. The opposite, of course, is true. We can delve into the depths of our doubts because of the security that we have in the foundation of our faith.

I think of our questions often this time of year when I think of Mary and Joseph. I can almost see them sitting beside a camp fire on the road between Nazareth and Bethlehem talking about all the unanswered questions they had. But, like my wife and I, they kept the faith through the journey of their doubts and ended up watching shepherds worship their new born son. All of their doubts were dissolved as the Promises became a person. And that is the real meaning of Christmas that God wants you to see. If you will continue to trust, even in the midst of mind boggling questions, you will eventually see God at work in ways that make even the angels sing.

December 17, 1997 PRESENT PERSPECTIVE

One of the men of my Church put presents in perspective the other day when he asked the question, "What would you want for Christmas if no one would ever know what you got?" Think about what a change it would make in the Christmas list your children give you if none of their friends ever knew what they received.

As we all know, 90% of Christmas gifts are peer pressure driven. Every child has to have the latest and greatest fad so they can be one of the "in" crowd. Advertisers know this and they try every means available to them to get your child to believe that EVERY other child will want and need that particular product; even if it is something as crazy as a pet rock, a cabbage patch doll, or a dog with spots all over it!!

Christmas is a time for us to celebrate the fact that God came to earth to dwell in a human form so we could see what God would do as one of us. Christmas is looking forward to this babe of Bethlehem becoming the Christ of Calvary who would die to set us free from the penalty and bondage of sin. When it becomes simply a means of trying to be like everyone else in the world by getting the same presents that they get then we have lost everything that Christmas is about.

What would YOU want for Christmas if no one would ever know what you got? And wouldn't that perspective return the Blessing to Christmas; as well as greatly lower the debt you would have to face in the coming year

December 23, 1997 THE PERFECT GIFT

Recently I asked the Adults at our Christmas supper to tell me their Favorite Gift of all time, their most used gift, and the most unusual gift they had ever received. The answers were very varied and very interesting. Almost without exception all of the gifts mentioned were not remembered because of their price or their popularity at the time. The distinguishing featured seemed to be the “Story behind the gift” that told of someone’s special love or sacrifice.

You may be wondering about all the gifts you are buying this year. Will those who receive them really enjoy them? Is the response of the person who will receive the gift worth all the crowds, the confusion, and the cash you must put into the gift? Is there some way you can enjoy the giving of gifts instead of dreading the entire process? Let me share a few gifts that I think would make the perfect gift.

On that first Christmas, God gave us the greatest gift of all. He gave us Love in the form of His only begotten Son. This year make it your business and your intention to give the people around you Love. Many people cannot give money, or what money can buy, but everyone can give Love. And you will be surprised what you will receive when you give this gift.

Another gift you can give this Christmas is Forgiveness. God sent His Son to earth on that first Christmas so that we could experience His Forgiveness. Follow His example.

Speaking of example, that is also a great Christmas Gift for those around you. Let you life be an example to others of how they should handle the pressures of the season by constantly keeping the reason for the season in the forefront of all you do.

The perfect gift is not found in a store in the Mall. It is found in a heart filled with a desire to share God with those who need His love so desperately; the same way it was done that first Christmas.

December 30, 1997 JOYOUS NEW YEAR

I think more people are happy on New Year's Day than on any other single day in the year. Multitudes of husbands will be happy because their football team wins. Multitudes of wives will be happy that football season is finally about over. Multitudes of kids will have finally mastered that new video game or figured out how that Christmas toy is really supposed to work. And multitudes of parents will be happy that school break is just about over!

It's good to be happy. That's the reason everyone wishes you a HAPPY New Year. That's the reason people spend so much money at Christmas for that perfect present. That's also why people are already counting the days until their next vacation. They are always looking was ways to be happy.

The sad fact, however, is that most of the people who are happy today will be unhappy tomorrow. The tax forms will arrive. The kids will take sick (again!). Bills will start arriving. The Holiday season will be over and everyone will start getting on everyone else's nerves.

I can't promise you will be happy all the time. That's because happiness is based on circumstances; and they change. I can, however, tell you about a joy that passes understanding. It comes from knowing Jesus Christ as your Savior and serving Him as your Lord.

I wish you lots of happiness this year. But I really pray you'll find the road that leads past happiness and that goes into the full joy of a relationship with Christ. That will turn it from a Happy New Year into a Joyous New year; this year, and forever.

December 31.1997 SCREEN SAVERS

My computer has a "screen saver" as part of its operation. If nothing is typed on the screen within a five minute span the screen dissolves into various patterns (This "saves" the screen by preventing the words on the screen from "burning" in).

Often, this screen saver reminds me that I haven't typed anything in the last five minutes! I'll start a sermon or an article and get "bogged" down. Then, as I stare at the screen trying to make some sense out of what I've written, the screen saver will come on and remind me that time is passing.

Calendars serve a similar purpose. There is little difference between the last day of December and the first day of January. Yet we mark it as a very special occasion because it is a warning to us that life doesn't sit still. So we make resolutions to lose weight, be better parents, or pursue a different course in our life. All because we are suddenly reminded that time is passing and we are sitting still.

Some people's "screen saver" has been on for a long time. They started out doing something, got side tracked, and now their life is just a series of confused patterns. Something needs to get things started again in their life.

God has a perfect plan for your life. Once you find what that plan is you won't just sit and stare at life. You'll be living life to its fullest. And isn't that what you are really longing for