

## 1998 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

These devotional articles were published on these dates in local newspapers. Newspaper guidelines limit them to no more than 300 words. © Mike Jones (Permission is given to use these articles in not for profit publications). [Mike@ministerministry.com](mailto:Mike@ministerministry.com)

January 6, 1998	WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN?	July 1, 1998	DUTIES TO GOD AND GOVERNMENT
January 7, 1998	ATTEND CHURCH IN 98	July 7, 1998	PRIORITY PRINCIPLES
January 13, 1998	GOD IS STILL THERE	July 8, 1998	IN PRAISE OF PETTING
January 14, 1998	DEDICATION	July 11, 1998	HOW TO CHANGE PEOPLE
January 20, 1998	DOCTORS	July 14, 1998	FINGER FAITH
January 21, 1998	FATHER'S VIEW	July 15, 1998	FAITH'S FRUIT
January 27, 1998	WHAT GOD EXPECTS	July 21, 1998	MISERY MUSIC
January 28, 1998	OIL CHANGE CHRISTIANITY	July 22, 1998	BIRD NEST BELIEFS
February 3, 1998	STRANGE SCRIPTURES	July 28, 1998	PURPOSE OF PROPHECY
February 4, 1998	LOVE IN ACTION	July 29, 1998	PERSEVERANCE
February 10, 1998	ABOUT ADULTERY	August 1, 1998	FIREMAN FUNCTION
February 11, 1998	LOVE DEMONSTRATED	August 5, 1998	HINDERED FROM OBEYING
February 17, 1998	I DON'T GAMBLE	August 11, 1998	CHRISTIAN CRITERIA
February 18, 1998	CHILDREN'S CHURCH	August 12, 1998	BEATITUDE ATTITUDES
February 24, 1998	WHEN GOD IS WITH US	August 15, 1998	HALL SNAKES
February 25, 1998	THE RIGHT TIME	August 18, 1998	TO VALUABLE TO WASTE
March 3, 1998	CHRISTIAN LOVE	August 19, 1998	PROBLEM MOVING POWER
March 4, 1998	THE COMPUTER CHRIST	August 25, 1998	SORRY PROPHET STORMS
March 10, 1998	ENCOURAGEMENT	August 26, 1998	PREACHER PRACTICE
March 11, 1998	HE DIDN'T DO IT	September 1, 1998	SALVATION SIGNPOST
March 17, 1998	MISSING MEMBERS	September 2, 1998	ABUNDANT LIFE BARRIERS
March 18, 1998	THE ROCK	September 8, 1998	BLOUSE BENEFIT
March 21, 1998	THE POWER OF PRAYER	September 9, 1998	WORRY-LESS FAMILY
March 24, 1998	STEALING SONS	September 15, 1998	COUNTING STARS
March 25, 1998	PRACTICING YOUR PROFESSION	September 16, 1998	BEEPER BOUNDARIES
March 31, 1998	PURPOSE OF PROPHECY	September 22, 1998	MARRIAGE MOMENTS
April 1, 1998	LIGHTING THE WAY	September 23, 1998	LAUGH LESSONS
April 4, 1998	INCOMPLETE THOUGHTS	September 26, 1998	DEADLY SINS
April 7, 1998	CAKE CONCERN	September 29, 1998	I'VE SINNED, WHAT NOW??
April 8, 1998	EASTER ABILITY	September 30, 1998	GOD HATES THAT
April 11, 1998	JESUS IS THE CHRIST	October 6, 1998	TAXIDERMIST TRUTHS
April 15, 1998	PARENT PRINCIPLES	October 7, 1998	WATER BUCKETS
April 21, 1998	LAUGH LESSONS	October 10, 1998	STUMPS
April 22, 1998	FACING FEAR	October 13, 1998	ROACHES, SPIT, AND POTATO BINS
April 28, 1998	CHRIST TO CHRISTIANS	October 14, 1998	A Nation's God
April 29, 1998	BECAUSE I CAN, SHOULD I?	October 20, 1998	UNDER THE TENT
May 2, 1998	FINAL ORDERS	October 21, 1998	SYMPTOMS OF UNBELIEF
May 5, 1998	WAVE WARNING	October 27, 1998	TEMPTATION LIMITATIONS
May 6, 1998	MARY'S MOTHER	October 28, 1998	WATER WILT
May 12, 1998	FEEDING HUNGER	November 3, 1998	CHRISTMAS CONSIDERATIONS
May 13, 1998	DOGS AND KIDS	November 4, 1998	ONE SIN, WHAT A PRICE
May 16, 1998	COMING UP SHORT	November 10, 1998	DIVINE DIRECTIONS
May 19, 1998	MOTHER'S PRINCIPLES	November 11, 1998	SELFISH PRAYING
May 20, 1998	LOST KEN DOLL	November 17, 1998	SERMON FAITH
May 26, 1998	KNOW THE BIBLE	November 18, 1998	WRONG PAGE
May 27, 1998	GOD'S NEAT, LET'S EAT	November 24, 1998	REPAIRING DAMAGED LIVES
May 30, 1998	CHRISTIAN CONDUCT	November 25, 1998	MARGIE'S CASSEROLE
June 2, 1998	BELONGING TO YOUR BELIEFS	November 28, 1998	EXPECTATIONS
June 3, 1998	TROPHIMUS TROUBLE	December 1, 1998	ELISE'S MINISTRY
June 9, 1998	THE DIVINE DESIRE	December 2, 1998	Flash Lights
June 10, 1998	BELONGING TO YOUR BELIEFS	December 9, 1998	THREE PROPS IN PROBLEMS
June 16, 1998	JINGLE BELL GOOF	December 15, 1998	BAKED CAT
June 17, 1998	FIVE REALITIES OF SIN	December 16, 1998	THINGS I'VE LEARNED
June 23, 1998	MOTIVE DOES MATTER	December 22, 1998	SURPRISING GIFTS
June 24, 1998	DOGWOOD DIFFICULTIES	December 23, 1998	GOD'S CHRISTMAS GIFT
June 30, 1998	DOLLAR DISCIPLES	December 29, 1998	SUCCEEDING AS A SAINT
		December 30, 1998	THINGS THAT DISPLEASE GOD

**January 6, 1998**

## **WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN?**

There are three basic kinds of “Christians” in the world today. If you are a Christian, which group would you be classified under?

I. CRISIS CHRISTIANS. This is the person who doesn't have time for God or His work until some Crisis comes along. As long as the bank account is big, their health is fine, and their family is doing well they don't need to serve God. But as soon as a crisis comes along to mess up their play house they come running to Church expecting God to put everything back together again. They will make great promises and put on a good show but as soon as the crisis dies down they put God back in their emergency compartment until the next crisis comes along.

II. CHURCH CHRISTIANS. These are also called “Sunday Christians”. They dress in their finery each Sunday and faithfully attend Church. They smile at everyone and wear a smug mantle of self-righteousness on Sunday but as soon as Monday comes along they are back to doing their own thing. They have a form of godliness but it never seems to reach their work ethics or their family life. Church to them is just one other item on an already busy agenda. They go to church to be respectable but they certainly would never take it too seriously.

III. COMMITTED CHRISTIANS. This is the minority group that believes the Bible is the word of God, that Jesus Christ is not just their Savior but also their Lord, and that God's will in their life is the most important obligation they have. Christianity is not a game they play; it is a life they live. They don't blow a lot of trumpets but by their lives they draw a tremendous amount of people to believe that God is real and Christ is their answer.

Three kinds of Christians. Which group would your family and friends say you belong in?

**January 7, 1998**

## **ATTEND CHURCH IN 98**

Now that you've spent all your money giving your children presents for a moment; don't you think it's important to give them principles for a lifetime. They will get these life principles from somewhere. I think you should make sure they get them from the Word of God. The only way to do that is to determine that in 1998 you are going to take your family to a good Bible Teaching Church each and every week.

Here are 4 reasons you should attend Church each week.

1. **GOD COMMANDS IT**- “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut 6:6-7).

2. **IT CAN LEAD YOUR CHILD TO SALVATION** - “That from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim 3:15).

3. **IT FORMS A SPIRITUAL HERITAGE IN THE CHILD**- “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (II Tim 1:5).

4. **JESUS WANTS YOU AND YOUR CHILD IN CHURCH**- “Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:14).

Don't just give your Children food, clothes, and toys. Give them Principles that will last for a life time- “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6).

## **January 13, 1998      GOD IS STILL THERE**

A lady in my church recently related a story that really spoke to my heart. The local church in the community in which she was raised was the first Free Will Baptist church established in South Carolina and tradition dictated that it be called the Mother Church.

For a number of years this lady's mother played the piano at that church and its services were a part of her weekly life. Then the relocation of marriage moved her into another area, and another church. Her mother died, her family moved away, and she lost most of her ties with her early home place.

As is the case in many of our rural communities, not only did this lady move away, but most of the other young people in the community relocated also. Dwindling attendance and some divisive problems finally brought the Mother Church to a standstill; and eventually closed its doors.

Every so often this lady would return to her home community and ride by this church on her way to visit her mother's grave. Each time she would pass the old Mother Church she would remember the good times she had encountered there in her childhood. One day it just struck her that she would like to go back inside that old church and pray one more time.

The door was about to fall off its hinges. The windows were broken. The pews were scarred and the pulpit chairs were full of rat nest. Slowly she walked down the aisle and knelt on a dusty altar. And there, in her words, "The glory of God fell on me and I felt a renewal in my soul".

The Church has been battered and scarred in recent years. Promiscuous preachers, Money driven ministries, and preoccupation with survival in a rapidly changing world have caused many to look at the Church as if it were an old worn out building about to fall down. Let me emphatically tell you, however, that if you will make your way past all the dust and decay to an old fashion altar you will find that God is still there; and He still is able to meet the needs of your soul.

## **January 14, 1998      DEDICATION**

Every Christian should desire to be the Dedicated Child of God that God wants them to be. Yet, many times this is not the case. What does it take to be "sold out" for God??

First, there must be DETERMINED DESIRE. If you are going to be committed to God's work and will in your life then you must really want God to be first in everything you do. Sadly, many only want God to Bless them with ease and comfort on the earth and one day take them to Heaven. They have no burning desire to be all they can be for God.

Secondly, becoming a dedicated Child of God requires an ACT OF THE WILL. You must will to will to want to put God first in your life. It is not just a mental thought you think about; it is a deliberate choice on your part. Flesh, friends, and even family will oppose you but you must make a definite choice to commit your all to God.

Thirdly, commitment requires a STEP OF FAITH. You don't wait until you understand everything or until you can see far enough into the future to believe that everything will be alright. "The Just shall live by his faith" is one of the most important statements in the Bible and one you will learn the meaning of as you walk closely with God.

Finally, There must be CONTINUED PERSEVERANCE. This is not a moment's decision but a lifetime commitment. It means burning your bridges and casting yourself completely on the Lord. And knowing a joy beyond description!!

**January 20, 1998**

**DOCTORS**

While waiting in the waiting room of the doctor's office for my mother to complete some test recently I heard some interesting observations. One lady in particular wanted the receptionist to know that she did not want to see a certain doctor because he had not given her the medicine she wanted the last time she saw him. Listening to her comments, and the comments of others in the waiting room, I began to see why many ministers now call themselves doctors.

Doctors, like ministers, are regularly accused of being in the business for the money. While most ministers' salaries are not even in the same world with most doctors, I can tell you from my acquaintance with numerous doctors that there is no amount of money in the world that would drive them to give the physical and emotional efforts they give. Most doctors, like most ministers, serve because of a compelling urge in their heart. There are some money hungry doctors, like there are some money hungry ministers, but the salary to most of them has little to do with their calling in life.

Doctors, like ministers, are expected to be one hundred percent successful one hundred per cent of the time. Sadly, Doctors, like ministers (see the parable of the seed in Mark 4), have great successes, heart wrenching failures, and a lot of helped but didn't completely heal. Most of the time the failures are not the Doctors fault. The patient will not cooperate or "time and chance will happen to all men" but the Doctor, like the minister, is expected to always come out victorious.

Let me encourage you to pray more for your Doctor and your minister than you talk about them. If you do, you might find that they will be a lot more like what you expect of them than you ever thought possible. Then they may be just the help you need when your emergency comes along.

**January 21, 1998**

**FATHER'S VIEW**

I was waiting for the barber to complete the long line of men ahead of me so I could get a haircut. As I usually do, I had carried a notebook and Bible with me in order to keep waiting time from becoming wasted time.

Just before the barber got to me a young man and his small child came in. His little boy looked to be 2 or 3 years old and was cute as a button. He was sitting in his chair patiently waiting like the rest of us when we all heard a rumble outside. Everyone looked out the window and saw a long line of big trucks loaded with equipment driving past the barber shop.

As the father was looking at the trucks he glanced down and saw that his son was looking also but all he could see was the top of the buildings across the street because he was so small. He reached down, picked up his child, and held him in his arms so they both could marvel as the big trucks driving by the window.

Sometimes the problems of this world seem so big and scary until I am almost overwhelmed. That is when my Heavenly Father reaches down, picks me up, and allows me to see what is really going on.

Safe in the arms of God I can see that all the rumbling that I feared is actually a time of excitement and joy to be shared with God. Limited to my view it sounds like I will be overwhelmed but safe in God's arms I know it is just part of the march of history toward God's final fulfillment.

## **January 27, 1998      WHAT GOD EXPECTS**

Here are several “cute” things that God expects from each Christian. I hope you will look past the cuteness and allow these expectations to bring you to commitment.

God expects us to GROW- (2 Pet 3:18) But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

God expects us to GO- (Mat 28:19) Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

God expects us to GLOW- (Mat 5:14) Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

God expects us to SOW- (Mark 4:14) The sower soweth the word.

God expects us to SHOW- (1 Pet 2:9) But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

God expects us to KNOW: First, we should know that we are Saved- (2 Tim 1:12) For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Secondly, we are to seek to know Christ in the greatest personal way no matter what the cost- (Phil 3:8-10) Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Are you meeting God's expectations??

## **January 28, 1998      OIL CHANGE CHRISTIANITY**

Christianity is not just about what you believe; it is about how you behave. Every doctrine in the Bible comes with a duty to be performed. If your worship place does not affect your work place then you are not learning what you should at your church.

I went to get the oil changed in my car recently. The place was busy so I went inside to drink a cup of coffee and wait. While I was waiting a lady came up and asked to talk to the manager. As I listened, she explained that she had left her lights on while she was shopping in the stores beside the oil change location and now her car wouldn't crank.

In spite of the fact that it was obvious that the manager was almost overwhelmed with all the paying customers he had in his establishment, he told his men to continue working while he took his personal truck and went to start this lady's car. To further complicate matters, the manager found when he got in his truck that he did not have any jumper cables. He offered to go back to his home and get his personal set but I had a set in my car that I loaned him.

The manager could have claimed his busy schedule or the absence of jumper cables would not allow him to help this lady. Instead he treated this lady the way he thought a Christian should treat her- and I am thankful, for this man is a trustee at my Church.

## February 3, 1998      STRANGE SCRIPTURES

From time to time as you read through the Bible you come across a scripture that makes you scratch your head. Here are some verses that have made me ponder long and hard.

--(Ezek 20:24-25) *Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. {25} Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;*

--(Jer 7:16) *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.*

--(Isa 45:7) *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.*

--(Mat 16:20) *Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*

I don't understand what God is speaking about sometimes but I'm glad I'm not supposed to! --(Isa 55:8-9) "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. {9} For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." I simply need to trust God's goodness and love even when some things don't make "sense" to me.

Men want God to prove Himself to them either by a supernatural miracle or by a special understanding of the mind- (1 Cor 1:22) *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:*.. God keeps reminding us throughout the Bible that He will never "jump through our hoops" in order to keep our scheme of Him within the wall of our humanly designed box. God is God; our duty is to trust Him to do right even when we don't understand everything. And that is what makes faith such an adventure, and life so exciting, for the child of God.

## February 4, 1998      LOVE IN ACTION

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

The amplified Bible translates this verse like this- Little children, let us not love merely in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth (in practice and in sincerity).

In real life it translates this way: Christians, don't just think about or talk about your love for other people; instead, turn your talk into actions that demonstrate what love is all about.

This week marks my 28th anniversary. For 28 wonderful years I have been married to a fine Christian lady. During that time together she has shown me the truth of this verse over and over. Our life together has not been just a few emotional moments of romantic talk. Instead, my wife has over and over proved her love to me by her consistent actions and attitude. Truly, she is a virtuous woman of great price, far above rubies. (Prov 31:10).

I deal with broken marriages and broken homes almost every week. The circumstances will change but the reasons remain fairly constant- People will talk about how much they love each other but they are unwilling to put those pronouncements into practice. They talk a good love but they remain unwilling to do the practical things that make love work. And love that is merely words will never build a home or capture a person's heart.

## **February 10, 1998      ABOUT ADULTERY**

It suddenly seems as if everyone is dismissing the sin of adultery as being so innocent and common until it is not worthy of being considered wrong any more. I get the impression from some people that adultery is simply a spicy little game that people play and is of little or no consequence in real life situations. Let me tell you why I still stand adamantly opposed to adultery.

First, and most important, Adultery is consistently branded as being wrong by God- (Exo 20:14) “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (Lev 20:10) “And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

Jesus stood against adultery. When the adulterous woman was brought before Jesus he condemned the self-righteous attitude of the men who had brought her to him. But he did not tell the woman that Adultery was all right; he told her to go and avoid this sin from this time forward.

Peter described men who advocated loose living as men who “Have eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: {15} Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray,” (2 Pet 2:14-15)

Paul was even more plain about the seriousness of a life controlled by sexual sins- “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor 6:9-10)

Adultery destroys a person's home, their health, and their reputation. It is the sin that God consistently used to describe people's sin of abandoning Him. It is wrong for anyone, including you.

“Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” (Heb 13:4)

## **February 11, 1998      LOVE DEMONSTRATED**

An ancient city was besieged, and at length obliged to surrender. In the city were two brothers, who approached the conquering general, and begged permission to leave the city before it was set on fire. They were told that only they could leave and they could take with them only as much of their property as each could carry. The two youths appeared at the gates of the city the next morning, one of them carrying their father, and the other their mother.

Paul told the church at Corinth, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”(1 Cor 13:1-3)

Life is filled with opportunities to express our love for people. Sadly, many people, when they have to make a decision about what is the most important thing in their life, chose to load themselves down with possessions instead of people. Their love, as Paul said, is just a loud sound or an annoying tinkle.

Someone close to you is waiting for you to demonstrate your love for them. Will you choose to choose them or will you think only of yourself??

## **February 17, 1998      I DON'T GAMBLE**

From time to time people ask me what I think about video poker or state lotteries. They talk about the money they generate and about how nice it would be to suddenly win \$10 million dollars. I reply that some things are more important than money.

I don't gamble because of the example of the men who crucified my Savior- (John 19:23-24) Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. {24} They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

I don't gamble because of who it makes me trust- I believe "my God shall supply all my needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:19). I don't want to waste my time trusting in "Luck", Chance, or the Publishers Clearing House to meet my needs. I learned a long time ago that in order for people to pay off gambling prizes then they have to take in more than they are giving out- and I don't plan to be one of a crowd they are picking clean in order to give something to a single person.

I don't gamble because of the families and careers I have seen gambling destroy during my years as a pastor. Over and over I have seen people who thought they could control their gambling habit sit forlorn in my office and say they would have been better off putting their money in a pile and setting it on fire. At least then they would be at zero instead of owing debts that it is impossible to pay. Even professional sports have learned about the dangers of gambling and have forbid their players to get involved- ask Pete Rose if gambling hurts.

I don't gamble with money; and I certainly don't gamble with my soul. I know I am a child of God and God will provide for me. Do you??

## **February 18, 1998      CHILDREN'S CHURCH**

Rev John Driggers gave a seminar in our church about the Children's Church ministry and his key points were well worth passing on. More and more churches have, or are beginning, a ministry for children during the main preaching service. These guidelines will help this ministry be successful.

First, and foremost, make each **MESSAGE ABOUT CHRIST**. The Goal of Children's church must be to evangelize and edify the young people; not just to entertain them for an hour while their parents are in church.

Second, **MAKE EACH WEEK COLORFUL AND EXCITING**. Don't let them believe God is dull !

Third, Use many **MOTION SONGS** in each service. Children like songs that involve them; and they remember the message of the song much better when they tie it to something they do.

Fourth, Make sure each child is taught to regularly **MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE**. It is the word of God hidden in their hearts that will develop faith and keep them from sin. They need to know that the principles they learn are founded on the Word of God.

Finally, **MOLD THE CHILD FOR CHURCH**. Use rules and examples that will help the child learn how to get the most out of the worship service when they graduate. Talk and Teach in such a way until the child can hardly wait until it is time for him to graduate to big church.

## **February 24, 1998      WHEN GOD IS WITH US**

While praying for people recently, I noticed that I was continually asking the Lord to be with them- during sickness, death, family problems, work situations, etc. Later I began to think about that and wondered when the Bible says the Lord is with us. Three cases immediately came to mind.

When we WORK and WITNESS for Him- (Mat 28:19-20) “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: {20} Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” What a joy to know that I do not have to do the work of God alone. I'm afraid when I go by myself but I can have great confidence when God goes with me. One of the great truths I have learned in life is that I can do all things with Christ to strengthen me. Aren't you glad He is with you when you work and witness?

When we WORSHIP Him- (Mat 18:20) “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”. It is wonderful to know that we do not come to Church just to meet with various people; we come to spend time with the Lord God of Hosts. Church is not just a group of people meeting together to discuss matters of common interest; it is a Holy place where we meet a Holy God and learn of His will for our life. Church is not a place to show off our clothes or enhance our reputation, it is a place to fellowship with God and His family.

Finally, and this is such a comfort, God is with us when we WALK through the Valley of the shadow of death- (Psa 23:4) “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Is God with you today??

## **February 25, 1998      THE RIGHT TIME**

I had a friend once who, when I would ask for the time, would say, “It's just about that time.” I still don't know exactly what that meant but it did help me to realize that some people look at time differently than other people.

With that in mind, let me share three things that it is time for. You can't use them to set your watch but I hope you will use them to check your priorities.

It is time to WAKE UP- (Rom 13:11) “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” Too many in the church are asleep on duty (Remember the disciples who were supposed to pray with Jesus). As a result, the devil is destroying families, churches, and individuals. A wake up call is needed or there will not be anything to wake up to.

It is time to SHAPE UP- (1 Pet 4:17) “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” Under normal circumstances you will often let things go and not be so particular. But when special company is coming you need to put everything in order. Well, the judge is coming, and he will make a careful inspection so you better start getting things straight in your life.

Finally, it is time to LOOK UP- (Luke 21:28) “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”

## **March 3, 1998 CHRISTIAN LOVE**

I love Christ. He is a wonderful savior who gives forgiveness to the sinful, rest to the weary, comfort to the sad, and hope to the dying. But I know that Love that is simply talk is no more than hollow sounds and useless words (I Cor 13:1). My love for Christ must show itself in the marketplace, as well as in the church, if it is to be effective. If I want other people to love this Christ that I love then I must constantly realize that the convincing power of a Christian life is of far greater effect than all the learned discourses of scholars or all the sermons preached by preachers.

That is why I must examine all I do for the Lord in the light of Love.

Love is the basis of faith in Christ- (1 John 4:19) We love him, because he first loved us.

Love is the proof of new life in Christ- (1 John 3:14) We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Love is the mark of being genuine- (1 Cor 13:2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

Love is the motivating power in service- (2 Cor 5:14) For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

Love is the cause of obedience- (John 14:15) If ye love me, keep my commandments.

Love is a fruit of the Spirit at work in my life- (Gal 5:22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Love is the queen of the graces and must occupy the prominent place in my life- (1 Cor 13:13) And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The Bible describes God's Love as - Great, world encompassing, Free, Inconceivable, Unselfish, Unchanging, Inseparable, Everlasting, Unquenchable, Stronger than death, and Perfect. That is the kind of love I want to Know, and to Show, in my life.

## **March 4, 1998 THE COMPUTER CHRIST**

A Friend shared this illustration with me. For those of you who know anything about the importance of saving your files as you work on your computer it will be very relevant. For the rest of you I hope you will get the point anyway.

Between moments of dispensing wisdom, it seems that historical religious leaders had also learned software programming. One day, a great contest was held to test their skills. After days and days of fierce competition, only two leaders remained for the last day's event: Jesus and Mohammed. The judge described the software application required for the final test, and gave the signal to start writing code.

The two contestants feverishly typed away on their keyboards. Routines, classes, applets and applications flew by on their screens at incredible speeds. Windows, dialogs, and other intricate graphics began forming on their monitors. The clock showed that the contest would soon be finished. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning flashed and the power went out. After a moment it came back on -- just in time for the clock to announce that at last the competition was over.

The judge asked the two contestants to reveal their finished software. Mohammed angrily said that he'd lost all he had in the power outage. The judge turned to the other competitor.

Jesus smiled, clicked a mouse, and a dazzling application appeared on his screen. The judge was clearly impressed at what he saw and declared Jesus the victor.

When asked why the decision was made, the judge pointed out the unique characteristic that set Jesus apart from all the other leaders:

Jesus saves.

## March 10, 1998 ENCOURAGEMENT

Rev Carroll Bazen preached a sermon at our Church recently about “Encouragement” that seemed to minister to many people. I want to share the verses and the instructions with you; and let you know that he made up a book mark with the verses on one side and the instructions on the other side that we would be glad to send to anyone requesting it (Free).

Here are some things you can do when you are going through tough circumstances:

- 1) You can pray about the situation and let God handle it.
- 2) You can read the Word of God and apply it to your life
- 3) You can try to see where God is working in your life through your situation
- 4) You can worry about it and let it drain you spiritually
- 5) You can call on us to pray for you in your time of need- We care

These are the encouragement verses he used:

(Isa 41:10) Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

(Psa 55:22) Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.

(Psa 23:6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

(Phil 4:13) I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

(2 Cor 4:8) We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

He finished by keying on the 3 “I wills” of Isaiah 41:10- (1) I will Strengthen you. (2) I will Help you. (3) I will Uphold you with my right hand. God said He would give us strength, stability, and security. That should encourage anyone.

## March 11, 1998 HE DIDN'T DO IT

It is always good to be able to say, “I didn't do it” when someone accuses you of doing something wrong. It is also very interesting to see some of the times in the Bible that it is stated that a person did not do something that almost everyone would assume that they would do. It just goes to show that assumptions are not always correct- which is a statement that it would do us all good to consider carefully on a regular basis.

John the Baptist did not perform miracles- (John 10:41) *And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true.* John was a tremendous preacher. He was able to attract huge crowds from all backgrounds. But his ministry was limited to wilderness preaching and water baptism. He was not a wonder worker; but if you preach like John you don't need miracles with your message!

Jesus did not Baptize- (John 4:1-2) *When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, {2} (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,).* This is surprising. John baptized everyone and Jesus baptized no one. Sometimes something you just know is true, isn't. Remember that.

Paul did not preach for money- (Acts 20:33) *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.* Paul was after men's good, not their gold. He could have demanded pay befitting his exalted status; instead, he made earthly tents that he might lead men to Heavenly mansions. Sometimes your greatest influence can come from what you give up instead of what you gain.

One final thought- Jesus did not sin- (1 Pet 2:22) *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:.* He lived as a man, was tempted as a man, and died as a man. But he did no sin that he might die for our sins. I sure am glad He didn't do it so I could gain forgiveness for the fact that I did do it.

## **March 17, 1998 MISSING MEMBERS**

One of the ladies in my church shared this antidote with me that illustrates an important principle (Thanks, Miss LeAnne). It seems several pastors had bats in the belfry of their churches and were discussing how to get rid of them.

The first pastor said he captured the bats and carried them into the woods where he released them, but they beat him back to the church. The second pastor said he put his cat up in the belfry to frighten the bats but he had never heard from his cat again. The final pastor said he captured all the bats, baptized them, dedicated them to the service of the Church-and he hasn't seen a one of them since!

It is interesting to note that if every American attended church, there would be an average of nearly 1000 members per church. The present average is less than 75 members per church. Even among those who claim to be fundamental Christians, only 68% attend Church regularly. Like the bats in the belfry, many seem to think that their commitment to religion frees them from the responsibility that such a commitment entails. They want to be counted in the membership but they don't want to be counted on when it comes to regular attendance or faithful service.

The Bible declares that we are to "Not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhort one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Heb 10:25). In this wicked world that we live in today we need the fellowship and moral guidance of the Church more than ever. We can't afford to be missing in action when there is so much work to be done and so little time in which to get that work accomplished.

Don't be "batty" about church attendance. Be in your place this week and every week. You will find you will get a blessing as well as be a blessing; and you will be amazed at the difference in your mental and emotional attitude when you start the week in God's house with God's people.

## **March 18, 1998 THE ROCK**

The story is told about a young man who had a dream one night. In his dream the Lord came to him and told him that his purpose in life was to go out each day and push on a huge rock in front of his home.

When the young man awoke he went out to that huge rock, looked at it with a great deal of skepticism, and decided it would indeed take a miracle to move that rock. But God had told him to push and that was what he was going to do.

Day after day, week after week, this young man went out and pushed on that rock. Many days he got discouraged and wanted to quit but then he would remember God's command and go back out and push on that rock.

One day he was very tired and very discouraged. He looked at that rock and realized that for all of his pushing he had not moved it an inch. He cried out to God in despair, "Why, God, have I worked all this time and you have not helped me move this rock?"

Then he heard the voice of God gently say, "Son, I didn't tell you to move the rock. I told you to faithfully push on it each day. I could move that rock without your help any time I wanted. The purpose of that rock was not to be moved but to develop faithfulness in you."

Most people have a rock somewhere in their life. It can be used to defeat and discourage; or it can be used to develop them into a faithful servant of God. What is your rock doing?

## **March 21, 1998 THE POWER OF PRAYER**

USA TODAY had a very interesting article in its March 12<sup>th</sup> edition. It stated in this article that “apparently there is some power in prayer. AIDS patients who were prayed for - even those who did not know it - were healthier a few months later than equally ill patients who received no prayer”. I am glad this national newspaper is finally realizing what Christians have known for centuries.

One of the ladies in my church recently shared with me an incident about the power of prayer in the life of her son that I found very encouraging. Her son was a dedicated Christian when he went into service. Before he left for boot camp he prayed with his mother for the Lord to guide and protect him and to give him a witness among the other people in boot camp. But when he arrived at boot camp and began to read his bible each night he was persecuted intensely. In his letters to his mother he asked that she keep up her prayers for him.

Shortly after receiving the letter telling of her son's persecution, and after a time of earnest prayer, this mother went to a state conference meeting for her denomination with a group from her church. During the meeting the pastor of her church saw a former class mate at seminary. By “Chance” this class mate was the chaplain at the boot camp where this young man was stationed. He told the pastor he had been looking for young Christians at boot camp that he could encourage and he would look up this young man.

From that time on the chaplain would pick up this young man each week for a time of fellowship and church service. This greatly increased the testimony of the young man and gave him the encouragement he needed to continue his stand for God.

Prayer does indeed change things. Instead of complaining about your problems all the time why don't you bring them to the Lord in prayer? You will be amazed at the power of prayer.

## March 24, 1998 STEALING SONS

I recently took my wife to a nice restaurant in order to celebrate her birthday. Right after we were seated I noticed the people in the table sitting beside us. From time to time their conversation was very lively and very loud. It was impossible not to hear that the son had been going into his mother's "cookie jar" and had been taking money the mother had put up for an insurance payment.

They had nearly finished their meal when my wife and I arrived so they left when we were about half finished with our meal. As they were leaving I noticed that the mother put several dollars on the table as a tip. I also noticed that the son waited until the mother had turned her back and then he slipped the tip into his pocket. I was extremely tempted to stick my nose into this family's business and tell the mother what the son had done!

I at one time counseled a mother and son about some problems they were going through. Several issues were involved but the one that still sticks out in my mind is the fact that the son never returned change to the mother even when she asked for it. It also came to light during our talks that the son would often go into his mother's pocket book and take what he wanted; without any consideration for the feelings, or the upcoming bills, of the mother.

I don't know about you but sons who steal from their parents like this make me want to take them across my knee and apply the board of education to the seat of learning!

I think about that on Sunday Mornings when the offering plate is passed and sons rob from their father week after week- (Mal 3:8) Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

## March 25, 1998 PRACTICING YOUR PROFESSION

It is not what we eat but what we digest that makes us strong.

It is not what we gain but what we save that makes us rich.

It is not what we read but what we remember that makes us learned.

And it is not what we profess but what we practice that makes us Christian--- Author unknown.

"Unknown Author" brings up a very important point about practical Christianity. It is not your talk; but your walk, that will have the greatest effect influencing people for Christ and salvation.

If that is the case, and you know it is, what are some ways you can practice your profession for Christ so that others will want to know the Savior that you serve?

(Eph 4:32) Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

(Eph 5:2-4) Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,...{3} But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; {4} Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

In my years as a Christian I have learned that people judge Christians by their love and by their Character. Make sure both of these areas are under the control of Christ in your life.

## **March 31, 1998 PURPOSE OF PROPHECY**

Many times it seems that some Christians want to be on the Planning Committee for the Lord's Return instead of the Welcoming Committee! They are so busy trying to determine when and where the Lord will return until they are not making the needful preparations to be ready for His return, no matter when it may be. Peter wrote about the Purpose of Prophecy in his second epistle and I think we need to keep these purposes firmly in mind as we go about our Christian duties here on earth.

In Second Peter 3:11-14 Peter tells us that the Purpose of Prophecy is not to entertain us but, instead, it is to enlighten us in order that the Coming of the Lord will:

A) Prompt us toward Holiness- "*seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*" - vs 11 (See I John 3:2-3). If Prophecy simply stimulates your mind without changing your morals then it has failed.

B) Push us to Witness- The way to "Hasten" the coming of the Lord is to win His Bride [Matt 24:14] Witnessing saves the Lost and hurries the Lord- Can't ask for two greater incentives than that!

C) Prepares us to meet God vs 13 "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." When He returns we want to be found of Him:

---1. IN PEACE- Peace With God and the Peace of God reigns in our heart

---2. WITHOUT SPOT- As a Bride adorned for her husband (Washed in the Blood)

---3. BLAMELESS- Resting in the righteousness of Christ, we are not working to be saved but working so that whenever the Lord returns we will be busy doing His will so He can say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joys of your Lord."

I don't know when the Lord will return but I sure want to be ready to welcome Him when he does come back.

## **April 1, 1998 LIGHTING THE WAY**

When I visit in the homes of people I like to ask them about their favorite portion of scripture and their favorite hymn. I also ask sometimes if they have a poem or short story that has meant a lot to them that they would be willing to share with me. This gives people an opportunity to share what God is doing in their life and allows me to get some small measure of their spiritual growth.

Recently, a lady I was visiting shared with me a well worn poem that had meant a lot to her. It also spoke to my heart and I asked her if it would be alright if I shared it with our Newspaper family. It did not have a title or author but I really liked its message.

Jesus, Light of the world.

When I am afraid and unsure, comfort me with  
the light of Your Presence.

When loneliness chills me, warm me with  
the light of Your love.

When I don't understand and my thoughts are unclear, fill me with the light of Your  
wisdom.

When I seem spent like a candle consumed, replenish me with the light of Your life.

Then, so filled with Your light, use me,  
So that I, with You, may be light for the world!

## April 4, 1998 INCOMPLETE THOUGHTS

I was told once in a conference that the longer people live together the less likely they are to finish sentences. Personal observation of long time marriages have proven this to be a fairly accurate statement. In fact many couples have a tendency to let each partner say alternating parts of sentences so it seems that they are one person talking with two voices!

As a Pastor, I do a great deal of counseling. One of the first rules I had to learn was that I couldn't think ahead of the person with the problem. Your mind operates much faster than your mouth (I know someone will have something to say about that!). A Counselor must not allow his mind to jump to conclusions about what he thinks the person is going to say and become so engrossed in how he is going to answer until he misses what the person really says. When that happens the Counselor begins to counsel his own perceptions instead of the real problem.

Many times I hear people quote Romans 8:28 when a bad situation comes their way. No matter how tragic a situation they will tritely say, "Just remember that all things work together for the good". That is a good thought but it is an incomplete quoting of scriptures. The verse really reads like this, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The any situation being good is only promised to those who love God, and to those who are walking in His plan for their life.

Easter is a wonderful time of year. I hope it will also be a time when we come to realize that often Churches and Preachers unintentionally give out incomplete information. Week after week they tell people that Jesus died for their sins and urge them to come to Christ for forgiveness. What they fail to realize is that the early Church grew from a local phenomenon into a world changing power when it began preaching the Resurrection as well as the Cross.

Jesus did not come just to die for your past sins. He was also raised from the dead so that you could have new and abundant life. The Resurrection takes an incomplete thought and turns it into a completed sentence full of hope and the promise of help. Is it any wonder Easter is such a time of rejoicing!

## April 7, 1998 CAKE CONCERNS

I once received a small layer of a wedding cake as a gift at the conclusion of the reception. It was beautifully decorated and I looked with great anticipation on having a piece with my coffee the next morning. My anticipation turned to anguish, however, when I sat down to my first slice. The frosting was very thick and very sweet; a person would need many cups of coffee if he ate much of that icing.

The real disappointment, however, was the actual cake. It was very dry, hardly done, and appeared to be so old until it tasted spoiled. I tried to gag down several mouthfuls hoping that the sweet icing would offset the taste or I would get to a better part. Finally, I had to admit defeat and throw it away.

Easter is a time of new dresses, fancy decorations, and pretty pastels. But when we get past those sweet decorations and look at the real world of problems we face today it makes me think of that spoiled cake. All the decorations in the world can't change the fact that we live in a world where drug controlled youth, sex seeing adults, or morally impaired citizens have corrupted the cake.

Easter is meant to move us from the graveyard of despair into the upper room of victorious change. In order to do that we must move past the decorations into the truths of the Resurrection (Paul said in I Corinthians 15:12-21 that if Christ is not raised from the dead , then Gospel preaching is vain (vs 14), Christian Faith is vain (vs 14), Our sins have not been forgiven (vs 17), and we do not have eternal life (vs 18-21). All of these depend on the resurrection of Jesus from the Grave).

Because "He is not here, for he is risen" (Matt 28:6), then we have reason for rejoicing, thanksgiving, and celebration. And that celebration includes the icing and the cake!

## April 8, 1998 EASTER ABILITY

In Matthew 9:28 two blind men came to Jesus and asked to be healed. Jesus said to them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" Their healing was based on their faith in His ability.

The Scriptures say a lot about the Abilities of the Lord:

- 1) He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. Heb 7:25
- 2) Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling. Jude 24
- 3) He is able to succour (Assist) them that are tempted. Heb 2:18
- 4) And being fully persuaded that, what he has promised, He was also ableto perform. Rom 4:21
- 5) God is able to make all grace abound toward you. 2 Cor 9:8
- 6) I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. II Tim 1:12
- 7) Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us. Eph 3:20

The two blind men responded to Jesus, "Yes, we believe that you are ABLE." They were then healed by the power of Jesus' touch. If we believe that God is who He says He is and that He has the power to do what He says He will do when we trust Him then we will be a most blessed people.

God's ability extended even unto raising Christ from the dead. This is not a theory we believe; It is a Power we claim.

## **April 11, 1998 JESUS IS THE CHRIST**

How would you like it if someone who did not care for you personally or professionally was given the task of approaching your boss in order to secure a raise for you? PBS recently aired a special about the Christian religion. The special brought together as commentators people who apparently did not believe the Bible or the claims of Christ. Somehow, in their unbelief, they were supposed to explain the faith of Christians.

I wonder if PBS would like to be forced to use representatives of ABC, CBS, and NBC to appear before Congress to solicit their operating budget for the upcoming year? These representatives would be related to PBS in the fact that they all used the medium of television but you can be sure their priorities and methods of securing income would be different.

Let me tell you about the Jesus I know. I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe He was crucified to satisfy God's righteous demand for the payment of my sin debt. I believe he was resurrected from the dead on the third day by the power of God. I believe He ascended to Heaven and will one day return to claim His place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords as He sets up a righteous kingdom on this earth.

I was not brought up to believe this. I was not brain washed into believing this. I did not buy into believing because of my profession. One day the Holy Spirit brought conviction of my sinful state to my soul and I knew I was a sinner separated from God. God produced faith in my heart that allowed me to accept as fact that which I could not feel or explain. As a result of that faith my sins were forgiven and I became a child of God who now has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Ask me, PBS, and I will tell you that Jesus is not a person to be explained away; He is a Savior to be accepted and worshiped. And that makes Easter more than bunny rabbits and new dresses. That makes Easter the celebration of the greatest event in the history of the world.

## **April 15, 1998 PARENT PRINCIPLES**

1) Children are a gift to Parents from the Lord- (Psa 127:3) *Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.* A Gift brings both Joy and Responsibility.

2) The Chief Responsibility of parents is the teaching and training of their children- (Deu 6:6-7) *And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: {7} And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.* (Eph 6:4) *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

3) Parents are expected to administer corrective discipline to their Children- (Prov 19:18) *Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.* (Prov 23:13-14) *Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.* {14} *Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.*

4) Parents are to plan for the future of their children- (Prov 22:6) *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* (2 Cor 12:14) ...*the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.*

## April 21, 1998 LAUGH LESSONS

I don't know of any great spiritual truth contained in the following little laugh lines. I simply know that (Prov 17:22) "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones." Sometimes we need to stop being so serious for just a few moments and enjoy life. Then when we get back to the serious grind of living we can do so with more vim and vigor.

Next week I will talk to you again about life, death, and serious situations. Right now it is time to remember the words of the wisest mortal man to ever live- (Eccl 8:15) "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun."

There are lots of self-help tapes out there. Someone told about buying one called "How to Handle Disappointment" When he got home and opened the box it was empty! -Jonathan Droll

Did you hear about the man who turned his life around. He used to be depressed and miserable. Now he is miserable and depressed. -David Frost

A Child is growing up when he stops asking where he came from and begins refusing to tell you where he is going.

They say kids bring warmth into a home, and I tend to believe it. I get hot every time I see the phone bill!

Charlie Brown- Sometimes I lie away at night, and I ask, "Where have I gone wrong?" Then a voice says to me, "This is going to take more than one night."

A Milwaukee minister, who declared that there are 947 sins, was besieged for copies of the list!

One final thought that is more serious than silly- If you want your ship to come in, you must build a dock.

## April 22, 1998 FACING FEAR

Life is filled with many fears. Among the most common is the Fear of Other People- Prov 29:25 *The fear of man bringeth a snare.* (If that is your problem then you need to memorize Psalm 27:1 *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?* ).

People also fear the Unknown; what might happen. These people need to remember (Prov 18:13) *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*

Other people are captive to fear of Death. They are consumed with the fear of sickness or sudden disaster. These people need to remember that Jesus came to (Heb 2:15) *deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

When Death comes to call in your life think on the wonderful words of Psalm 23:4- *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me!!*

There is one fear we all need to have, however. It is the fear of missing the joys of Heaven- (Heb 4:1) *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.* The Children of Israel were at the very door of the Promised Land and decided to turn back because of fear of the enemy. And because they followed fear instead of faith they died in the desert. Don't follow fear.

## **April 28, 1998   CHRIST TO CHRISTIANS**

Christians celebrate Christ. We go to Church. We try to live clean. But our greatest asset is the fact that we talk about and celebrate our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the center of our worship services, our sermons, and our activities. Christianity is not just about trying to be better people as we attempt to make a better world; it is about faith in the son of God who came to earth as a man in order to die for our sins.

Why would we give up our sleep on Sunday mornings to go to Church in order to sing about and talk about a man who lived and died nearly 2000 years ago? Why would we study a book written thousands of years ago and attempt to apply its teachings to our lives today? Our answer is based on the fact that we believe the Bible was written by God about Jesus for us.

Here are just a few of the reasons we love Christ so much.

-Christ became all that we were so we could be all that He is.

-He, who had all of Heaven, became poor so that we who are poor could have all of Heaven.

-He, who was immortal, became mortal; that we who are mortal, might become immortal.

-He, who was always in the presence of His father, was forsaken by His Father so that we, who had forsaken God, might always be in the presence of God.

-He, who was sinless, became sin; that we, who are sinners, might become sinless.

-He, who was hope, gave up hope; that we, who have no hope, might have all hope.

Christianity is not just ten rules to make you a happy person. It is not just the hope of heaven someday. Christianity is the joy of living each day with Christ in a relationship that grows sweeter and sweeter as we move toward that glad day when we will dwell together around the throne of God in the Home Christ has prepared for us. What a day to look forward to!

## **April 29, 1998   BECAUSE I CAN, SHOULD I?**

A teacher recently asked me to help her with some discussion on the question, "Because I can do something, should I?" I translated the question this way in my mind, "Because I have the power to do something, does that give me the right to do it?" Or, as the young people will probably want to translate it, "Are there any limits to my freedom?"

I believe that Freedom (Because I can) must be governed by at least 3 guidelines or the Freedom will turn from a friend into a foe.

What are the Consequences of my Freedom? I have the freedom to jump off a bridge if I so desire but the sudden stop is a killer!! Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Freedom without awareness of consequences is dangerous.

What are my Responsibilities with my Freedom? I have the freedom to swing my arm any way I want; but my right to do so ends at your nose! Freedom without responsibility becomes anarchy and chaos. The purpose of Laws and Government is to ensure that men take responsibility for their Freedom.

What must my Considerations be with my Freedom? I have the Freedom to go a week without bathing but it would be very inconsiderate of those around me. When "every man does that which is right in his own sight" then no one really gets to enjoy the true blessings of Freedom. That is why the golden rule is still, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

It is also important that we remember that the strings on a fiddle only find the music within when they give up their Freedom in order to be confined to the purpose of their life. Jesus taught that if we came to Him we would be "free indeed". It sounds like bondage but, in reality, it is the freedom your heart has been searching for all along.

## May 2, 1998      FINAL ORDERS

“One last thing”. That is the way she would say it. Having told us about everything she could think of, mother would stop at the door on her way out and say to us, “And one last thing...” We knew that these were her final orders; and we knew that these were the ones we had better pay attention to or suffer dire consequences when she returned.

Jesus did something like that. Just before He ascended to Heaven He looked over at His disciples and basically said, “And one last things...” These final orders of our Lord are tremendously important because they form the marching orders for the work of God during Jesus' stay in Heaven. The orders are easy to understand when you examine them the way any good Reporter would investigate a situation.

What- “You shall receive Power” Power here means “ability, efficiency, and might” and insinuates that everything needed to do the job God wants done will be provided.

When- “When the Holy Ghost is come upon you”. The ability and the instructions to carry on their task will be given by the Holy Spirit that will come to live in the body of the believer.

Why- “You shall be witnesses of me”. Their job would be fairly straightforward. They were to tell everyone they could, every time they could, that Jesus was the Son of God who had come to offer them eternal abundant life.

Where- “Both in Jerusalem and in Judea and unto the uttermost part of the world”. Their mission was to be local in origin but global in vision.

How- First, Get in Tune with God- “Wait for the Promise of the Spirit”. Take time to line your life up with God so you will not misuse or abuse the power He gives you. Secondly, Get in Fellowship with one another. You know the old joke. What kind of car did the Disciples drive? A Honda- They were all in one Accord! God will use many different personalities, with many different emphases but the common bond of one message about one Savior coming from one Spirit empowered body would have a tremendous impact on the world.

The final orders of Jesus were among His most important. Are you busy obeying?

## **May 5, 1998      WAVE WARNING**

The FAA inspector put it all into perspective when he made this statement, “I have seen many incidents like this one but I have always had to interview the widows of the pilot because no one has ever survived before!” Sort of makes your knees shake, doesn't it?

My brother and a friend were flying a small plane when they saw a friend in the field below digging a well. They looked over the field and didn't see any light poles so they assumed the field was clear for them to buzz their well digging friend. As they began their descent the friend digging the well looked up and recognized them. Suddenly, he began to wave his arms frantically. My brother assumed he was waving at them and continued his descent.

What my brother didn't know was that the farmer who owned the field knew someone at the power company and they had agreed to stretch the lines across his field without putting a pole in the field to hinder his cultivation. By the time my brother and his friend saw the light lines across the field they were too late to avoid hitting them. The small plane struggled and struggled and finally snapped the light lines.

Slowly and painfully the plane made its way back to a landing strip. The cowling over the engine was battered shut so the engine was trying to overheat. The light line that had broken was jammed into the wing and was dragging on the trees they were barely clearing. Both men knew that if the line wrapped around a tree it would bring the plane crashing down.

Inch by inch they made their way back to the strip until they finally managed to land the plane. Safely on the ground they looked over their crippled plane and realized how close they had come to death because they ignored the warning of their friend's wave.

Week after week I see people flying too low and I try to warn them of the danger headed their way. I wave and wave but they continue their downward descent...but that is another story.

## **May 6, 1998      MARY'S MOTHER**

Was she dead?? Was she uncaring and unconcerned? Or was she one of the “unsung multitude” that watch friends or family become famous while they labor in obscurity? We really have no way of knowing because the Scriptures are completely silent on the subject of Mary's Mother. We don't know her name, her family background, or anything about her character (In case you're interested, we also know nothing about Mary's Father except his name (Heli) and that only because Luke lists the genealogy of Mary when Jesus began his ministry).

Whatever the reasons, we do know that when Mary was told by the angel that she would be the mother of the Christ child she immediately went to see her cousin Elisabeth with the good news instead of going to tell her mother. And when these two mothers-to-be of divinely predicted children met, the baby leap in the womb of Elisabeth and she was filled with the Holy Ghost; while Mary uttered her marvelous Magnificat of praise to God.

We don't know about Mary's Mother but we do know that God always provides Friends or Family for those who do His work (Mark 10:28-30). If God has called you to a difficult task in life just remember that even if family forsakes you, God doesn't. Somewhere there's an “Elisabeth” that shares your Hurt and your Heart. Don't feel forsaken, God truly cares for you.

## **May 12, 1998    FEEDING HUNGER**

One of the ladies in our Church is about to begin teaching a weight loss study program at our Church entitled the “Weigh Down Diet”. I am not much for fad diets and quick weight loss schemes. Most of them don’t work and seem to do more harm than good. Thousands of dollars that could have been spent on getting the Gospel of Christ to a lost and needy world has been tied up by Christians in exercise machines that double as clothes racks. Or it has been spent on high priced fat free food that tastes like cardboard and generally last about a week before the person eating them goes screaming into a restaurant demanding a big mac and fries!!

The “Weigh Down Diet” deals with the real problem with weight gain. A person has two empty “holes” in them- their stomach that nourishes their physical body and their heart that nourishes their spiritual and emotional needs. The problem most people have is that they have tried to feed spiritual needs by putting something in their stomach. They are feeding the wrong empty space; which is why they never get enough and continually gain weight.

Many people eat when they are depressed, or lonely, or under stress. Then they feel guilty about their lack of control and eat more to try to fill that empty hole; never realizing that no matter how much you put in your stomach it will never fill the empty place in your heart! That empty space requires a proper relationship with the Lord instead of another helping of ice cream.

Don’t feed the wrong hunger in your life. It causes health and weight problems. Learn which hunger needs to be filled and put the proper food in that empty space. You will find your pants fit better, your prayers get answered, and your life is a lot more enjoyable.

## **May 13, 1998    DOGS AND KIDS**

A Pastor said he almost cracked up one time when he heard one of his members pray the following prayer, “Lord, Please make me the kind of person my dog thinks I am!” Later, as he reflected for a while, he began to think it was a pretty good prayer after all. It is hard to fool your dog with your excuses and busy time schedule. All the dog knows is that you show love to them or you don’t take time for them.

Our children certainly are not dogs but they can sense the same things in your life that your dog can feel. They know if you never have time to go outside and play with them. They know that when you forget to feed them properly or take the time to give them a bath that it is not just the food you are forgetting; they are the ones being forgotten.

Children know that a Christian home must provide a balance of both correction and praise in order to help a child develop strong moral character. They know that dad must do more than come by every now and then and run his hand through their hair if they are to learn not to “chase cars” and chew up the morning paper.

Children learn quickly that one of the most hurtful experiences a person of any age can endure is to be ignored. “I’ll have time for you some day, boy. Right now, don’t rub against me or lay down by my chair because I want to watch this TV program or read the paper.”

Dogs, and children, see the real you. Treat them kindly.

## May 16, 1998    COMING UP SHORT

One of the local restaurants has an extremely nice lady as cashier. She and I are always talking about reading or traveling or church activities while I pay my bill. Recently, we were talking while I wrote out my check and really got involved in the conversation. Later that week I needed to write another check and noticed that the check I had written her was still in my checkbook!

I went back by later and asked her if she had come up short in her deposits recently. She seemed surprised that I would know that she was short. I asked her if she was short a certain amount and she said that was the exact figure. Then I laughed as I handed her the check and told her we had been talking so much until we had failed to realize that I had not given her the check I had written out.

I was telling this to another lady in a restaurant recently and she said she had also come up short not long ago. It hadn't been a very busy night but when she added up she found herself \$40 dollars short. She just couldn't imagine how she had made that big of a mistake until she was looking for something in her purse the next day. She had taken \$40 from the cash register to get change and the coins and dollar bills were lying in the bottom of her purse!

Coming up short is not a strange thing; in fact it is common to everyone- "All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God" (Rom 3:23). The good news about this bad news is that it can have a happy ending also. Jesus knew this was a debt we would always come up short on so He paid the debt for us! Isn't it marvelous that God would love us that much?

## **May 19, 1998    MOTHER'S PRINCIPLES**

I not only had the best mother in the world (which is what every child should be able to say) but she was also very tough (she had to be to live in a house with my dad and 4 boys) and very smart. She encouraged her children to learn as much as they could about as many things as possible by urging us to love reading and to enjoy exploring new ideas (Which is probably the reason all of her children did well in school).

Mother did not just haphazardly go through life and hope that her children would "luck" out and be good. She had a set of principles that she expected us to learn and live by as we grew into adults. These principles have been by guide for many years in my personal life and in my ministry as a pastor. If you don't have any guiding principles for your family then let me suggest you adopt these.

1) Salvation is the most vital decision in your life and it only comes through repenting of sins and accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

2) Morals, Standards, and Pure Living are extremely important in daily living.

3) Hard work is necessary but life is made to enjoy- don't be so serious until you never have any fun.

4) Order is better than disorder. For a long time I wondered if the only reason for this one was to get me to clean up my bed room and wash dishes but later I learned it is tremendously important in every area of life.

5) Use things and love people; don't love things and use people. Mom was "death" on prejudice and hoarding. She believed that accepting people and sharing your resources was much more important than accumulating possessions or attaining a position in life.

Thanks Mom, for instilling eternal principles in my life; and for making teacake cookies every now and then!

## **May 20, 1998    LOST KEN DOLL**

My brother was home from Elgin so we decided to take Mother out to supper. Of course, my brother had to bring his granddaughter with him (I don't believe in re-incarnation but if I could come back I would come back as a grandchild-Those children have got it knocked!!).

After supper we were all going our separate ways. As I started to leave I noticed that my brother hadn't left yet and so I went over to see if anything was wrong. Hannah, the grandchild, had been playing with a Ken doll the entire time we were in the restaurant and now she couldn't find it. She was not a happy camper and she was letting everyone know that life could not go on until that Ken doll was found.

We searched the Restaurant, including looking in the dirty dishes that were taken up from the table, and could find no trace of "Ken". Now granddaughter is VERY upset.

We were scratching our heads at how a Ken doll could just "walk away" when the grandmother remembered that we had stood outside the restaurant for a while saying good-bye and Hannah had sat in a rocking chair while we talked. Sure enough Ken was sitting in the rocking chair right where Hannah had put him. Now Hannah is happy; and if Hannah is happy then everyone is happy!

Many people have family members that are unsaved and bound for hell apart from God. If I could just get them as concerned as Hannah then I believe there would be a lot more rejoicing in church each Sunday.

## **May 26, 1998    KNOW THE BIBLE**

In 1950 the following test was given to 83 college students. Most of them failed it. Rather than waste my time condemning these young men of nearly 50 years ago I gave this test to the Adults and Teens at the Church I pastor. Many of them failed it!! Which really goes to show what a good job I have done in teaching them the Bible! How well will YOU do? (Don't cheat!)

1. Name the Four Gospels:
2. Which book of the Bible contains the Lord's Prayer?
3. Name the 2 greatest commandments:
4. How many books are there in the Bible?
5. What does the word "Bible" mean?
6. What does the word "Testament" mean?
7. What does the word "Prophet" mean?
8. What was the original language of the Old Testament?
9. What is the first book of the Bible?
10. Where are the Beatitudes located?
11. What is the last book in the Bible?
12. Name 3 kings of Israel-
13. Name 2 Old Testament Prophets-
14. Who was the "forerunner" of Jesus Christ?
15. Have you ever read the Bible through? Have you ever read the New Testament?

16. How many Bible Chapters would you guess you have read in the past month? Answers here ranged from several "0" to 5 or 10 to 300 (That is 10 a day!). Just so you will know I have read 5 chapters a day for my devotion for years (Not including Bible Study and Sermon Preparation)

Hope to see you in Church this Sunday as we study the Bible together.

## **May 27, 1998    GOD'S NEAT, LET'S EAT**

My nephew was visiting with me recently. I always try to encourage people who stay in our home to take part in our worship of the Lord so I asked him if he would like to ask the blessing on our lunch. He said he would be glad to and then prayed the following prayer, "God's neat, let's eat"!

I told him that his prayer expressed a good sentiment but I felt the Lord would be pleased with a little more expression of our worship and thanks. He then proceeded to pray a good prayer that brought joy to our heart and honor to God.

One night a preacher friend visited with us after church. My wife and I normally wait until after Church to eat so we prepared some sandwiches and asked him to join us. He said he had already eaten but he would sit with us while we ate.

Wanting to be polite, I asked him to ask the blessing on the food. He proceeded to pray a ten minute prayer that not only blessed our food but also all our missionaries around the world!! I told him the bread was getting stale by the time he finished!

I think God expects us to be much more reverent than "God's Neat, Let's Eat" when we pray to Him. I don't think, however, He expects us to be unaware of the circumstances surrounding our petitions. I learned a long time ago that the best prayers are not sermons about people's needs but rather supplications to an almighty God who delights in hearing the prayers of His people. Remember that at lunch today.

## **May 30, 1998    CHRISTIAN CONDUCT**

In order to viably demonstrate Christianity to a lost and dying world there are three qualities that every Christian must have.

First is PASSION. Christianity is not a mind game a person attempts to play. It is not simply the acknowledging of certain facts coupled with the belief that these facts are logical and true. Christianity involves a New Birth in order to become a New Creature that dies to self and takes up their Cross that they might live the Christ Life. That cannot be accomplished without an intense feeling taking place in a person.

Please don't get confused about this. There must be Facts in order for you to build Faith which will bring about the Feelings I have talked about; but many people seem to be nothing but dreary robots full of facts that never affect their life. I contend that a person cannot live a successful Christian life without developing a Passion for the Lord and for Life.

Secondly, Christianity must be PRACTICED if it is to be the kind of religion intended by God. Christianity is not a suit you put on each Sunday, it is a life you live each day. It must be practiced in the bed room as well as the board room; in the play room as well as the prayer room. Christianity is not a title you claim; it is a God like character you exemplify.

Finally, Christianity is built on POWER. The Power of the Blood sets us free from sin's debt. The Power of the Cross sets us free from sin's captivity. The Power of the resurrection sets us free from the fear of death. The Power of the word delivers us from Temptation. The Power of the name of Jesus rebukes and controls Satan. The Christian life is not a pitiful, puny, performance based on feeble human abilities. Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit- the most powerful force in the world. If their life does not demonstrate that power then they will be ineffective in winning others to their belief.

Christianity involves Passion, Practice, and Power. Is that what you have?

## **June 2, 1998      BELONGING TO YOUR BELIEFS**

You are what you are because you do what you do. You do what you do because you believe what you believe. You believe what you believe because you heard what you heard ("Faith comes by hearing"- Rom 10:17). You heard what you heard because you listened to what you wanted to listen to--(Jer 7:13) "The LORD spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not;"

Whether we want to admit it or not we are products of our beliefs. Some cultures believe that cats make great pets while others believe that cats make great stew! Some people believe that someone somewhere owes them a living so they spend all their time and energy seeking to get someone else to provide for them. Other people believe that "If a man will not work neither should he eat" (2 Thess 3:10) and so they spend their days working so they can have the resources they need to enjoy life.

The doctrines you believe will determine the duties you perform. That means it is extremely important that you establish your beliefs on the rock of a relationship with Christ instead of on the shifting sand of manmade opinions. And the only way that will happen is if you determine that Church attendance and Bible Study should be a consistent part of your week.

What you listen to will determine what you hear. What you hear will determine what you believe. What you believe will determine what you do and what you do will determine what you are. Do you want to be fashioned by some unseen writer of a TV series or talk show or do you want to develop eternal life values that will stand the storms of this life and carry you into a wonderful eternity with God? Every week you make that choice; and every week you belong more and more to the beliefs you are forming by the choice you make.

## **June 3, 1998      TROPHIMUS TROUBLE**

(Acts 21:27-31) "And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, {28} Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. {29} (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) {30} And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. {31} And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar."

A Rumor caused a riot!! Someone saw Paul walking with Trophimus in the City and ASSUMED that Paul had brought this Gentile into the Temple. Once the rumor started it swept like wildfire through the city until "all of Jerusalem was in an uproar". Paul was arrested and eventually ended up staying in prison for several years in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and, finally, Rome and it all began because someone THOUGHT they saw something that became a city wide rumor riot.

Guard your tongue. Some times what you think is so, isn't. Be careful how you pick up rumors and then spread them. A little match can start a big fire that burns many people.

## **June 9, 1998      THE DIVINE DESIRE**

A Preacher once said- "Religion is a lot like sex. If you get it a little bit wrong it is really dangerous". I learned many years ago that you can sell cars, tooth paste, or soft drinks by using sexy models but you must never use the word "sex" within a mile of God. Aware of that fact, I still want to make some comparisons between the relationship God has with His people and the sexual relationship between a Husband and Wife.

The Relationship between God and His people is a PERSONAL relationship. It is a relationship that takes place in the heart of a person that affects the way that person looks at God, themselves, and others. (I personally have serious reservations about the mental capacity of individuals who feel the need to go on nationwide TV talk show programs in order to discuss the intimate details of their sex life).

The Relationship between God and His People is PLEASURABLE (Both parties receive joy from their union). It should be PRODUCTIVE (God expects new believers to be born as a result of this union). It should also be PERMANENT- Divorce is Deadly in your relationship with God (See Heb 10:26).

But the key to this relationship, as in all relationships, is that it must be a PARTNERSHIP. Just as we need God for forgiveness, guidance and life, so God needs us as a way to express His love and mercy. Can you imagine the eons of eternity in which the Love, Mercy, and Grace of God could not be demonstrated? Without the redemption of sinners there would be no way for God to clearly show the main attributes of His character.

The Church is the Bride of Christ. That is a wonderful place of honor and joy as both parties share their most secret and sacred parts with one another. But it is just the beginning of the joyous fellowship we will share together with God through the endless ages.

## **June 10, 1998      BELONGING TO YOUR BELIEFS**

You are what you are because you do what you do. You do what you do because you believe what you believe. You believe what you believe because you heard what you heard ("Faith comes by hearing"- Rom 10:17). And you heard what you heard because you listened to what you wanted to listen to-- (Jer 7:13) "The LORD spake unto you, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not;"

Whether we want to admit it or not we are products of our beliefs. Some cultures believe that cats make great pets while others believe that cats make great stew! Some people believe that someone owes them a living so they spend all their energy seeking to get someone else to provide for them. Other people believe that "If a man will not work neither should he eat" (2 Thess 3:10) and so they spend their days working so they can have the resources they need to enjoy life.

What you listen to will determine what you hear. What you hear will determine what you believe. What you believe will determine what you do and what you do will determine what you are. Do you want to be fashioned by some unseen writer of a TV series or do you want to develop eternal life values that will stand the storms of this life and carry you into a wonderful eternity with God? Every week you make that choice; and every week you belong more and more to the beliefs you are forming by the choices you make.

## **June 16, 1998 JINGLE BELL GOOF**

The funeral director had come to the place in the order of service where he asked the widow if there was any special music she wanted at her husband's funeral. Her answer was immediate, "Oh, I know that one. He told me over and over that he wanted us to sing 'Jingle Bells' at his funeral." The funeral director looked at her for a few moments and asked if she was sure that was what she wanted and she was adamant that that was what her husband wanted.

More than a few looks were exchanged during the funeral service when "Jingle Bells" was sung by the soloist between devotional messages by the pastor. At the grave site a close friend of the widow simply had to ask why she had chosen that song. The widow explained to her that her husband had requested that song over and over. The friend replied, "But he always said he wanted us to sing 'When they ring those Golden Bells' at his funeral." "That's it!" proclaimed the widow. "That is the one he wanted. I knew it was something to do with bells!"

I was at a funeral once where the Elvis recording of "Are you lonesome tonight?" was the special music. Another time, albums of the 'Grateful Dead' were piled on the body of the deceased before the coffin was closed. And numerous times people have chosen to be buried in the nude in order to follow the admonition of Job 1:21 "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither."

I try to strongly encourage people to remember that it is "appointed unto man once to die" and preparations need to be made. These preparations include listing your favorite music and favorite scripture in a place that relatives can easily find. It also includes making preparations to be able to meet God without fear of punishment or rejection. This kind of preparation will help prevent goofs at the funeral and groaning at the judgment bar.

## **June 17, 1998 FIVE REALITIES OF SIN**

Don't blame it on God. Blame it on Sin. God does not destroy your family; sin does. God does not hold you captive to drugs or drink; sin does. God does not rob you of your money and reputation and health; sin does.

It is Sin that destroys your peace, depresses your mind, and decimates your body. It is God who sets the captive free, who heals the broken hearted, and who pays the deadly penalty of sin imposed on us by listening to Satan.

Why then do people today exalt Sin and sinful behavior while at the same time acting as if God, prayer, and Bible reading are the main sources of their troubles? Why do so many love Sin and hate God? Don't they realize that playing with Sin is like stepping into a den of serpents? And don't they realize that the only cure for the bites of those serpents of sin is to look at the cross on which the Son of God, Jesus Christ, hung and died?

Let me share with you five realities of sin that I hope will help you to see how horrible sin is; and how wonderful it is that our God gives us victory over Sin's punishment and power.

Sin Defies God. Sin Defiles Us. Sin Dishonors all. Sin Defeats Christians. Sin Destroys Sinners.

In the garden of Eden mankind had everything he needed for a life of joy, fulfillment, and happiness. Wonder of wonders, he chose to choose sin and thousands of years of misery have followed. Men today still must choose- God or Sin. Don't choose wrong.

## **June 23, 1998 MOTIVE DOES MATTER**

The day is beginning to fade into the dusk of night as you walk down the street. Suddenly, a man jumps out from behind a building banishing a knife and demands all your money. Afraid and confused, you hesitate and the thief becomes more and more excited. Suddenly, he lunges at you and you feel the sharp pain of the knife as it plunges into your body. Slowly, the dusky light fades into darkness as you slip into unconsciousness.

Finally, a sound penetrates the pain and darkness as you struggle to understand where you are and what is happening to you. An unfamiliar face leans over and declares that he is a doctor and that he must perform surgery on you in order to prevent you from bleeding to death.

Two men, both are strangers and both plunge a knife into you. One to take your life; the other to save your life. The difference is the motive that drives the person yielding the knife.

The Bible declares that “the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7). As mere humans, we develop a perception of people based on their outward appearance. Then we attribute certain characteristics and motives to that person based on our perception and prejudices. Only God, however, is able to look beyond the exterior and see the true motivating force of that person's heart.

That same faulty judgment is often seen in our perception of God. Many people tend to perceive of God as being legalistic and narrow minded because of the necessary guidelines and organizational details He has given mankind. The truth about God's motives, however, is revealed in His word- “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” (Jer 29:11)

Don't fear and fret. The only reason God plunges His “Knife” into you is to save you from the vicious attack by Sin or Satan. Rest in God's love; He is a great surgeon.

## **June 24, 1998 DOGWOOD DIFFICULTIES**

My brother was moving his trailer into a wooded lot several years ago. When he began cleaning up the lot he came upon several small dogwood trees. He didn't want to destroy them so he dug them up and set them aside. Several days later he came by my house and brought them to me. I was busy at the time so he just leaned them up against the house. For a week those dogwood trees sat beside my house with little dirt on their roots as the hot sun beat down upon them.

Finally, I decided I had to either plant those trees or throw them away. Because of the excavation work during the construction of the parsonage there are only a few inches of top soil on the ground before you get to a very hard clay soil. I dug down a few inches, got tired, and decided the trees would have to sink or swim in the holes as they were. Then the water hose wouldn't reach all the way to the trees so I just shot some water at them and hoped it landed around the roots.

As I went to get the paper today I realized I needed to cut those dogwood trees back. They were so big until they were obstructing the mail box.

Some of you have had some very difficult circumstances in your life. Sometimes you have wondered if anyone really cared for you as life has dealt you one bad situation after another. Isn't it wonderful to know that God cares for us and can make us grow even if the people who are supposed to provide for us fail in their responsibilities. I think of that each year as the blooms from my dogwood trees brighten up the entire neighborhood.

## **June 30, 1998 DOLLAR DISCIPLES**

I recently gave everyone who came to our church a dollar. No, it was not a prize for winning a contest. Nor was it a promotion to increase attendance (No one knew they would receive the dollar until I announced it during the sermon). It was simply a means of turning spectator Saints into active Christians.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told the story about “A certain nobleman {who} went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.” (Luke 19:12-13). I told our Church that I wanted them to pretend that I was the Lord and that the dollar they received was the “pound” they were to invest until the Lord returned. And to make it really interesting, I told them that the “Lord” would return the next Sunday morning and ask them what they had done with the “pound” that had been entrusted to them.

One lady bought a box of brownie mix with her dollar, made brownies, and carried them to a sick and lonely lady. One person used their dollar to copy a paper on the need of moral values for children that was then distributed to as many people as possible. One person left their dollar in a gospel tract as an extra tip. Numerous people used their dollar to buy postcards or stamps so they could send notes of encouragement or comfort to others. Several combined their dollars and filled a Missions quarter folder—thus learning how to work together to reach the world for Christ. And on and on it went.

It was amazing how big the ripple became as a result of throwing those dollars into the pool of life. Just like it will amaze you to see how God can use what you have if you are willing to look for something good you can do in order to turn from a spectator into a participator. And what a difference that will make when YOU give account for your “pound”.

## **July 1, 1998 DUTIES TO GOD AND GOVERNMENT**

One Lady had the joy of having her first child in a Florence hospital on the same day as another lady was having surgery in a Georgetown hospital. And it was my happy privilege to be able to have prayer with both of them before the doctors did their work. But that meant a lot of driving and a lot of time spent on the road and in hospitals.

Finally, I arrived back home. As I walked in the door the phone was ringing to alert me of a death—and the day's work was getting pushed further and further behind. Details were finally dealt with and I could sit down to try to dispense with the pile of work on my desk that had to be completed that day.

I was just getting started when suddenly an alarm bell rang in my mind and I remembered that a runoff election was being held on this day. Honesty will force me to admit that the thought of skipping my duty this time did enter my mind. But I knew that, since most people would not participate in a runoff election, my vote would be very important so I took 15 minutes and voted.

I'm thankful I live in America where I have some small say in who does the business of government. Many times the people I like do not win and I'm stuck with other people's choices; but, at least, I had the privilege to vote for the one I thought should win. That is important to me because I learned long ago that Government, and God, require my active participation. In both cases, the rewards are worth the efforts.

## **July 7, 1998      PRIORITY PRINCIPLES**

Jesus said that man's entire obligation to religion could be summarized in 2 principles- Love God above everything and Love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:29-31) *And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: {30} And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. {31} And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

But how does that work in real life? How can we show our love TO GOD? Jesus made that simple enough- (John 14:15) *If ye love me, keep my commandments.* We show God we love Him truly by doing what He tells us to do.

How, then, do we show the love OF GOD to those around us? Again, Jesus said it would be easy enough for those who were not Christians to know those who were true followers- (John 13:35) *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

These two principles will guide you to a wonderful and fruitful life. But they must be practiced and not just talked about- (1 John 3:18) *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*

Do you want a GOOD week? Look for opportunities to put these two principles into practice and you will be wonderfully surprised with the difference it will make in your life.

## **July 8, 1998      IN PRAISE OF PETTING**

Jones 16:3 (in the devised version) "Everyone loves a little bit of petting every now and then". This is the favorite verse of many people in our Church!! Including the Preacher! If it is your favorite verse also then you might want to learn the following guidelines. You will be surprised at how much petting you will get if you put them into practice.

Don't React- Initiate- (Luke 6:31) *And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.* Don't do unto others AS they do unto you; do unto them as you WANT them to do to you. The Bible tells us that (Prov 18:24) *A man that hath friends must show himself friendly:*. In the same way, a person who wants petting must be willing to pet others first.

Don't expect love; give love- (Eph 5:25) *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;* Many husbands simply response to their wife and family. They never offer sacrificial unconditional love to those around them. They are so busy expecting love for themselves until they don't realize that even God did not ask for our love until He had first expressed His love for us- (1 John 4:19) *We love him, because he first loved us.*

You will be amazed at the rewards that come from an unexpected bouquet of flowers or an offer to wash the evening dishes while your wife watches a little TV. You see, your wife already know "Jones 16:3"; she is waiting on you to learn it.

## **July 11, 1998     HOW TO CHANGE PEOPLE**

Don't you wish you could get your husband, wife, child, boss, or whoever to change? Wouldn't you give almost anything if they would start treating you with respect, appreciating your work, or doing something as simple as picking up their clothes instead of throwing them all over the floor!

A primary truth that has been known and exploited for years is that your belief system determines your behavior- What you believe determines what you do. Cola companies and car companies have uses this principle in their advertisements to build empires. Politicians use it all the time as they try to put their "Spin" on anything that happens so your belief about the incident will favor their particular party.

As Christians, we know the power of belief also. In the very beginning of the Bible we learn that dealing with Satan is not a Power encounter, It is a Truth Encounter. Satan's power does not reside in his physical abilities but in the lies that he proclaims. In the Garden of Eden Satan did not attempt to overpower Eve; he simply used deceptive words to build unbelief. And this change of belief caused Eve to change her behavior; which has had eternal consequences.

So in order to change behavior you must find a way to change a person's beliefs. If you use force or intimidation (threats or nagging) to change a person's behavior it will only be for a short time and will normally bring you to despair or depression as you see your way fail over and over again. They must start believing that picking up their clothes is a good thing for them and not simply a way to get you off their back.

The wonder of Christianity is that the Word of God produces Faith in a person which, in turn, causes a change of behavior. The failure of modern day Christianity is that it has tried to change morality through laws and intimidation. When will we get back to plain powerful preaching? That is what produces Faith in an all-powerful God; and that is what changes people.

## **July 14, 1998      FINGER FAITH**

The overcrowding that comes with growth has compelled us to add another Class Room to our church. Wishing to be as frugal as possible with our limited resources we decided to do as much of the work as we could ourselves. Most of the men who attend our Church are managers or office workers. The best way to describe our building program is that it has been "Interesting".

While preparing to lay the foundation for the room we needed to drive a nail into the wall of the present church in order to hold a sting as a reference. The Assistant Pastor and another member were assigned this task. The Assistant Pastor was using a sledge hammer to drive the nail and the other member was trying to hold the nail in place. The other member now has some very bruised fingers!

I wish I could put it down to ignorance but both men went to college; and the one with the bruised fingers is the principal of a local school. I'd really like to blame it on faulty equipment but it's hard to say a sledge hammer had a broken part. I finally had to say it was just foolish faith!

The problem began when a Deacon said something to the Assistant Pastor as he was swinging the hammer. That caused him to take his eye off the target and hit fingernail instead of regular nail. First lesson, don't let others distract you in your work for the Lord.

After the fact, both men acknowledged that they had doubts about the situation but went ahead anyway. Second lesson, Blessed are those who know they are in trouble and have enough sense to admit it.

One final lesson- faulty faith leads to hurt fingers. Make sure your faith is in the proper person (Jesus Christ) or you will end up hurting in the future.

## **July 15, 1998      FAITH'S FRUIT**

Jesus said that faith without fruit is a faulty faith- (John 15:5) *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

Almost everyone knows that they are supposed to produce "Fruit" as a Christian; but many don't know exactly what that means. This brings confusion and doubt. Let's look at several "Fruits" that are expected in the Christian life.

1) Souls Won to Christ- (Prov 11:30) *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*

2) Christian Character produced by the Holy Spirit- (Gal 5:22-23) *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

3) Change in behavior caused by your beliefs- (Mat 3:8) *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:*

4) Success and accomplishment in your work for God- (Phil 1:22) *But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.*

5) Lips that bring praise instead of problems- (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.*

Fruitless branches are cut off. What are YOU producing?

## **July 21, 1998 MISERY MUSIC**

Lam 3:63 "Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their music."

I remember a song title from my younger days, "Killing me softly with his song". That is the lament of the writer in this verse of the book of Lamentations. The sorrows and pains of life had brought distress and discouragement that almost overwhelmed the writer.

Instead of offering help and comfort to him, his associates were going about their normal business ("sitting down and rising up"). And to make it even worst, instead of offering encouragement and inspiration to the writer these friends were "killing him softly with a song". He had become a derision to be mocked in song when he really needed a friend that would pick him up and help him get started again.

Perhaps you too have felt the "misery music" of people who brought you down instead of picking you up in your time of trouble. Rather than a melody of mercy you have been subjected to a hymn of hatred that produced grief in your heart instead of relief in your mind.

Someone accurately said that "Life is a grindstone and whether it grinds a man down or polishes him up depends on the stuff he is made of." Don't let the "misery music" of others steal your joy and quench your desire for life. Rest in our Rock, Jesus Christ. His songs are always full of support and strength that will bring peace to your heart just as if you were a babe listening to the calming tunes of a loving mother.

When you hear "misery music" take courage in Christ for "True courage is like a kite; a contrary win raises it higher." - J Petit-Senn.

## **July 22, 1998 BIRD NEST BELIEFS**

I don't know why a bird decided to build her nest in the hanging plant beside our back door. Every time someone used the back door the bird would fly away so it took a long time to build her nest. When my wife watered plants the bird must have thought the weather was really weird when it would "rain" so heavily without a cloud in the sky!

But, in spite of all those struggles, perseverance paid off and 3 baby birds came chirping into the world. They've flown away now but they left behind them the joy we received from watching them come into this life and develop their wings; as well as several valuable principles.

First, I learned that if someone is really determined to produce new life then it's pretty hard to stop them. I try to keep that in mind when I'm out trying to win someone to commitment to Christ. Interruptions and inconveniences should not detour me from the most important business in all the world-telling someone the wonderful news of salvation through faith in Christ.

Secondly, sometimes the people you are attempting to reach are in very difficult locations. There were numerous other plants this bird could have chosen but once she made her choice then the birds had to be born where they were laid.

Finally, the singing of the new born birds was worth all the effort of the mother bird. Just like winning souls will put a song on YOUR lips and joy in your heart.

## July 28, 1998     PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

Many Christians seem to want to be on the Planning Committee for the Lord's Return instead of the Welcoming Committee! They are so busy trying to determine when and where the Lord will return until they are not making the needful preparations to be ready for His return; no matter when it may be. Peter wrote about the Purpose of Prophecy in his second epistle. We need to keep these purposes firmly in mind as we go about our Christian duties here on earth.

In Second Peter 3:11-14 Peter tells us that the Purpose of Prophecy is not to entertain us but, instead, it is to enlighten us in order that the Coming of the Lord will:

A) Prompt us toward Holiness- "*seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*" - vs 11. If Prophecy simply stimulates your mind without changing your morals then it has failed.

B) Push us to Witness- The way to "Hasten" the coming of the Lord is to win His Bride [Matt 24:14]. Witnessing saves the Lost and hurries the Lord- You can't ask for two greater incentives than that!

C) Prepares us to meet God- vs 13 "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." The way to prepare for the Lord's return is to get Saved and then live a life of service and purity. Prophecy preaching should stress that.

I don't know when the Lord will return. I just know that the welcome mat is out at my home and in my heart.

## July 29, 1998     PERSEVERANCE

"Dreams"

Author Unknown

*I've dreamed many dreams that never came true,  
I've seen them vanish at dawn,  
But I've realized enough of my dreams, Thank God,  
to make me want to dream on.  
  
I've prayed many prayers when no answer came  
tho' I've waited patient and long;  
But answers have come to enough of my prayers  
to make me keep praying on.  
  
I've trusted many a friend that failed  
and left me to weep alone;  
But I've found enough of my friends true blue  
to make me keep trusting on.  
  
I've sown many seeds that fell by the way  
for the birds to feed upon.  
But I've held enough golden sheaves in my hands  
to make me keep sowing on.  
  
I've drained the cup of disappointment and pain;  
I've gone many days without song;  
But I've sipped enough nectar from the roses of life  
to make me want to live on.*

Rev Joe Moore shared this poem with me as one of his favorites. I hope it will inspire and encourage YOU today to continue in the task God has given you.

## **August 1, 1998 FIREMAN FUNCTION**

The three new recruits reported to the fire station for their first day of work. The captain lined them up in a row and began their indoctrination. He looked at the first recruit and told him that his job was to keep the fire engine washed. The public looked at that engine every time they went out on a job and he was to keep it sparkling.

Next, he looked at the second recruit and told him that his job was to keep the floor of the fire station clean and shining. Every visitor who came to the station would look at the floor first and he was to make sure it was mopped and swept each day. Finally, he looked at the third recruit and told him that his job was to make sure everyone's uniform was clean and neat. Everyone knows that a sloppy fireman is a sorry fireman so he was to keep clean pressed uniforms available for everyone.

Then the Captain looked at these recruits and asked them what their function was. Number One said, "My function is to make sure we have the cleanest fire engine in town, Sir".

Number Two said, "My function is to clean the floors every day, Sir"

Number Three said, "My function is to assure we are the best dressed unit on the force, Sir".

"No, No, No!" said the Captain. "Your Function is to fight Fires! Those other things are simply jobs you do while you await the need of your real function."

There are a lot of Church members who seem to think that it is more important to wash the windows than it is to fight the fires raging all around them. They are good people and they work hard at sweeping floors or washing "fire engines". Their problem is that the main thing is no longer the main thing in their life. And won't it be sad to face God one day and have to say, "Every house in our town burned down but we have the cleanest Church you have ever seen!"

## **August 5, 1998 HINDERED FROM OBEYING**

(Gal 5:7) "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"

Sometimes Christians get sidetracked in their living for the Lord and end up off course so badly until they no longer look to truth as their guide. And that is a bad place to be!

Here are 3 enemies that you need to avoid as you attempt your run for the Lord.

1) The Flesh- (1 Cor 9:26-27) "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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." Don't allow your desires to divert you from your run for the Truth. Eve found out how badly that turns out!

2) Your Feebleness- (Jer 12:5) "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Don't faint in the way because you have not waited on the Lord before you begin the race (Is 40:31)

3) Your Foes- (Psa 18:29) "For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." When Jesus's enemies cornered him on a cliff (Lu 4:30) He simply walked through them. When He is on our side we can run through a "troop" of trouble and still pursue the truth.

Don't let anything hinder you from obeying the Truth.

## **August 11, 1998 CHRISTIAN CRITERIA**

Rev Carroll Bazen recently preached a sermon at our church about 3 standards that will help you live a successful Christian life. I wanted to share them with you because living a successful Christian life is what every true Christian wants.

1. NEVER LOSE YOUR DESIRE FOR GOD- (Rev 2:4) “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” Keep a “hot heart” for God and for His work; remembering that lukewarm living makes God sick. Things of this world will attempt to steal your heart and dim your desire for God. The way to combat this is to be constantly thankful for what God has done and expectantly prayerful about what God will do in your life.

2. NEVER STOP LOVING PEOPLE- (John 13:34-35) “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. {35} By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” One day the entire world will be consumed with fire and everything that man has made will be destroyed. The only thing that will survive this future fire is the souls of men. Don't waste your time loving the temporary while missing the joy of caring for the eternal.

3. NEVER LOOK BACK- (Luke 9:62) “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” There is nothing behind you but death, decay, and destruction. Like Paul, you should say (Phil 3:13-14) “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

## **August 12, 1998 BEATITUDE ATTITUDES**

Jesus taught us in the Beatitudes that we must change our concepts so that we look at life from a spiritual perspective instead of a fleshly view. When we begin to look at life through spiritual eyes we will see:

Our NEED- is spiritual instead of physical. We see ourselves as “Poor in Spirit”.

Our REPENTANCE- We “Mourn” over offending God.

Our SUBMISSION- We realize how helpless we are so we rest in His strength as one of the “Meek”

Our HUNGER- Instead of filling ourselves with the husks of the world's pig pens we “Hunger and thirst after righteousness”

Our MERCY- Having been shown such great mercy we become “Merciful” to those we deal with.

Our PURITY- Longing for God causes us to forsake sin as we desire to be “pure in heart”.

Our UNITY- Because God loved us so much we now long to share that love with others. That turns us into “Peacemakers”.

Our SUFFERING- Because the light in our life exposes the darkness all around us we are persecuted. Amazingly, this persecution brings joy to our life because it conforms us more to HIM!

Jesus said that to follow these principles would make us “Blessed”; a word meaning “Greatly Happy”. Are You?

## **August 15, 1998 HALL SNAKES**

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

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

When I returned, I couldn't find the snake! After looking for a while, I found him behind the bedroom door. I tried to hit him just hard enough to stun him so I could get him out of the house because I didn't want to get a mess on the carpet. That's when my wife awakened and asked me what I was doing. When I told her, she was not as a happy camper!!

We got the snake out of the house without causing too much of a mess but my wife never walked down that hall again without turning on the light. We tried to locate where the snake got into our home but it was several years later, while moving, that I finally found the hole in the hall closet through which the snake had entered.

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

## **August 18, 1998 TO VALUABLE TO WASTE**

Imagine you have a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. The problem is that it carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out every cent, of course!!

Each of us has such a bank. Its name is TIME. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against "tomorrow". You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so you get the utmost in health, happiness, and success!

To realize the value of ONE YEAR, ask a student who failed a grade. To realize the value of ONE MONTH, ask a mother who gave birth to a pre-mature baby. To realize the value of ONE WEEK, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper. To realize the value of ONE HOUR, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet. To realize the value of ONE MINUTE, ask a person who missed the train. To realize the value of ONE SECOND, ask a person who just avoided an accident. To realize the value of ONE MILLISECOND, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Yesterday is history

Tomorrow is mystery

Today is a gift

That's why it's called the present!!

(Eph 5:16) Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

## **August 19, 1998 PROBLEM MOVING POWER**

We finally had to have "bigger barns". So much material had collected around the Church until we felt it was dangerous to keep it stored at the Church. We decided to purchase a pre-fabricated metal building for storage. A committee was appointed, a price was negotiated, and the building was purchased.

When the person delivering the building arrived with this large metal house on his trailer (12 feet by 16 feet) I had serious doubts about the fact that he had not brought any help with him. I asked if he needed me to contact any of the men in the Church to aid him but he assured me he could do it alone.

I then proceeded to watch with wonder and amazement as he used a battery powered wench to pull the building off his trailer. Before the building dropped he placed several pipes under the building. Once it was on the ground these pipes enabled him to use an iron bar to move the building exactly where I wanted it. Then he used a jack to raise the building enough to remove the pipes and put in the foundations blocks. In less than an hour this man had unloaded the building, set it up, and was leaving.

You may be facing some problems in your life today that appear so big until you seriously doubt your ability to cope with them. The good news is found in (Phil 4:13) "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This verse does not say, "I can do all things" and then stop. It states that "I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST" who provides the strength for me.

Like the man who brought our building, you need to learn to work with patience and planning so you can make use of the supernatural power provided by the Holy Spirit living within you. This system will turn your overwhelming burden into a wonderful Blessing. If you don't believe it, comes look at a storage building that 50 men could not have manhandled into place but it was easily moved by one man who looked beyond himself for strength

## **August 25, 1998 SORRY PROPHET STORMS**

What do you do when the Preacher is the Problem? Where do you look for help when the problem solver is the source of the problem? How do you make people well when the doctor is carrying the infection?

Read the first chapter of Jonah. God gave specific instructions to His prophet but Jonah decided to do his own thing and go his own way. The problem was with the prophet; but his rebellion rocked the boat for a lot of other people. In fact, when Jonah ran from the assignment given to him by God the sailors in the boat with Jonah suffered almost as much as Jonah. And isn't that the way it happens in a lot of Churches when the preacher falls?

Because of Jonah's sin the sailors had to suffer Physical Discomfort (A fierce storm tossed their boat), Emotional Distress (Intense Fear gripped their heart), and Economic Difficulties (all of their cargo had to be thrown overboard). These same problems beset members of a church when their shepherd develops a wolf's heart or a pig's life style. Disappointment, distress, and discouragement storm through the flock and rock the confidence, and contributions, of many of the members.

How did the Sailors return calm to their journey? They Exposed the Problem (Determined who was wrong and why it angered God), Acknowledged the problem was beyond their abilities to correct (They tried to fight the storm but failed), and, finally, Expelled the Problem (Threw the Preacher out until he was willing to get back in God's Plan). The results of these actions were Revival among the Sailors and Renewal for the Prophet.

Sadly, some prophets fail to live right. Sadder still, such prophets bring storms and troubles to others as well as to themselves. It is wonderful that God's grace can restore such prophets and return them to their mission. But wouldn't it be much better if they obeyed God correctly and brought sunshine to their flock instead of storms?

## **August 26, 1998 PREACHER PRACTICE**

*(2 Tim 3:10-11) But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.*

Sometimes it appears everyone knows how the preacher is supposed to live except the preacher! Having been a preacher for over 36 years, and having struggled with this attitude, let me share 9 traits with you that Paul wanted Timothy to remember about his life and ministry. Nine traits you should use as a measuring rod for preachers- and for members.

- 1) Doctrine- What I believe
- 2) Manner of Life- What I do as a result of what I believe
- 3) Purpose- What I strive to accomplish with my work
- 4) Faith- My Relationship to God
- 5) Longsuffering- My ability to stick to something
- 6) Charity- My Concern for others
- 7) Patience- My ability to bear up under pressure
- 8) Persecutions- The trouble that comes my way as a result of my righteous living and my powerful preaching
- 9) Afflictions- How I deal with the bodily weakness or physical circumstances that hinder my life and work.

Are these the kind of attributes you look for in a man of God? Or are you more concerned with his relationship with you than you are with his relationship with God

## **September 1, 1998     SALVATION SIGNPOST**

Ever been on a new road and started having doubts about whether it was the road you were supposed to be on? I have. Sometimes the map is not as clear as it should be so you take the direction you think you should take and hope you made the right choice. Boy, it sure does feel good when you finally come across a sign that tells you that you are on the right road and headed in the right direction.

I remember the night I got saved. I was not raised in Church and I did not understand all the language used by Church people. All I knew at the time was that my heart was overwhelmed with the burden of my sinful life and I wanted to find the peace and forgiveness the preacher had been talking about so I came to the altar and knelt as he had instructed in his invitation.

I didn't know HOW to pray; nor did I know WHAT to pray. Soon several people leaned over my shoulder and told me to "let go" of everything. I didn't know what to let go of but I sure was willing to let it go. Then several leaned over me and said for me to "hold on". I didn't know what to "hold on" to so I grasp that altar so hard until my knuckles turned white.

Finally, the deacon who lived beside me came to where I knelt and asked me if I had trusted Christ as my Savior yet. Suddenly, the lights went on just like it does when you finally see the signpost on a new road. Instantly, my heart was filled with peace and joy and I knew my sins had been forgiven and I was now a child of God because I had trusted Christ as my Savior.

If you are still wandering around looking for the right direction for your life let me point you toward the signpost you are looking for- (1 John 5:11-12) And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

## **September 2, 1998     ABUNDANT LIFE BARRIERS**

Jesus said, I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

Many people who claim to be Christians are unable to truthfully claim that they also are living an abundant life. Why is this? Warren Weirsbe lists five secrets to a fruitfully satisfying life found in the teachings of Jesus in John chapter 15. He explains that the secret of real living is bearing fruit. The secret to bearing fruit is to abide in Christ. The secret of abiding in Christ is found in obeying His commandments. The secret to obeying is learning to Love Christ. And the secret of Loving Christ is getting to know Him.

Using this formula, it would seem that the abundant life must begin with a faith generated knowledge of Christ. It then must progress into a life that is radically altered because of the application of this knowledge in the actions of the person.

Several things, however, act as barriers to the abundant fruitful life. Attitudes such as Pride (God resisteth the proud, but gives grace unto the humble- James 4:6) keep God from working in a life altering way in us. An unforgiving spirit will short circuit God's ability to work in us and through us (But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive you your trespasses- Matt 6:15). And a lack of devotional life will crimp our knowledge of Christ and change our relationship to one of conviction instead of comfort.

Don't let barriers block your fellowship with God. That fellowship is the basis of the Abundant life; and the abundant life is what causes us to always be winners in Christ.

## **September 8, 1998      BLOUSE BENEFIT**

I dropped my wife off at a department store while I went to an office supply store to purchase a web program to help with our new web site- [www.graceandglory.com](http://www.graceandglory.com). When I returned to the department store my wife had found a blouse that was "simply beautiful"; and was on sale for half off! Naturally, there was no way we could not purchase it.

When my wife handed the blouse to the sales clerk she exclaimed, "Oh, I wish I would have seen this. I have a cream colored skirt and I need something to go with it. This would be exactly what I needed." As the clerk rang up the sale you could tell from her tone and her talk that she felt really bad that she had missed the chance to get the right colored blouse at an unusually good price; especially since it was right under her nose the entire time.

Solomon wrote, "They made me keeper of the vineyards but my own vineyard have I not kept." (Song 1:6). I am amazed sometimes when I see how easy it is to become so busy trying to do for others until you never have time to enjoy the blessings God has placed all around you.

I learned early in my ministry that I was like a sponge. I can squeeze and squeeze in order to provide for others but if I don't take the time to relax and allow the living water to soak into my soul then I will soon run dry. And when you squeeze a dry sponge you only damage the sponge while providing no water for parched souls.

That new blouse looks simply stunning on my wife. Too bad that sales clerk was so busy until she missed the joy of wearing that blouse with her cream colored skirt. Oh, by the way, when is the last time YOU sat at God's feet long enough to refresh your soul?

## **September 9, 1998      WORRY-LESS FAMILY**

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

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

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

2) Trust God to be there when you can't- "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

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

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

5) Joyful confident living comes from strong family relationships- "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

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

## **September 15, 1998 COUNTING STARS**

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

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

It used to bother me when I thought about the fact that at 11am on Sunday Morning millions of people, in thousands of church, were all praying to the Lord at the same time. But that is no big deal to a God who knows the name of 1 sextillion stars. (In fact, God not only hears the prayers of all these people, He bottles them up for the perfume of Heaven- Rev 5:8.)

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

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

God does not just have a wonderful memory about names; He has a loving heart for people! He is concerned enough about you until He knows the number of hairs on your head. He even know every time a sparrow falls to the ground; and you are much more valuable to Him than sparrows (Matt 10:29-30).

So the next time you feel down and wonder if you can count on God, look up at the stars; God knows them, and you, by name.

## **September 16, 1998 BEEPER BOUNDARIES**

Due to the wonderful generosity of a local computer company, I have the use of a beeper. It has proved an invaluable aid to my visitation ministry and I try to remember to pray regularly that the Lord would return a tenfold blessing to this company because of their kindness.

The Scope of the ministry the Lord has called me into dictates that I sometimes travel to other states. The range of my beeper is from the mountains to the sea in South Carolina and from Raleigh to Augusta as you go north and south. Once I get out of this area I no longer receive messages. The beeper is still functioning correctly and the signals are still being sent but I'm out of receiving range.

I hope the spiritual implication is obvious to you. Many people live good and productive lives. Everything about them seems to function correctly. Yet, when God sends a “signal” to them about His will for their life they never seem to receive it. Somehow they have gotten out of range and God's message goes unheeded.

Normally, if I get a beeper message it is important. Someone is in the hospital, or a marriage is breaking up, or someone needs something very important from me. If I miss the message it may produce very bad consequences.

If you have not heard from God recently your problem may be that you are out of range of God's signal. And the messages you miss could have tremendous impact on you; and on those around you.

## **September 22, 1998 MARRIAGE MOMENTS**

Monday mornings are very busy for me. Each week I write 3 newspaper columns, record 5 radio programs, and prepare at least 2 sermons and a Sunday Bible Study lesson. In addition, I manage a growing church with the normal compliment of sick people, sinners in trouble, seniors in need, and saints that must be encouraged and edified. And, in my spare time, I operate a faith ministry that gives away thousands of books, bibles, and tapes all over the United States.

Monday mornings are my time to get everything in order, meet with my assistant pastor to plan our week, and catch up on my backlog of mail. That is why when my wife stuck her head into my office door around 8:30am and told me she wanted to invite me to carry her to breakfast that my first reaction was to ask her if she was still dreaming! But one look at that lovely face of hers stirred me to buzz my Assistant and tell him we would meet later.

I stacked the mail back on the desk, closed the office door, and told my wife she had a date. We went to a local restaurant to eat and found that everyone else had already eaten breakfast by 8:45am so we had the place to ourselves. We ate a long leisurely breakfast during which we said more with our eyes than we did with our lips. When we left the restaurant I took the long way home so my wife and I could continue to talk as we looked at all the new homes being built and rejoiced in the beauty of the day.

It was almost 11:00am when I finally got back to the office, and I had to work into the night in order to get my work done, but I wouldn't trade that breakfast for anything. My wife and I have been married for over 28 years. Each year our love has grown and each year we rejoice more and more that God brought us together. Part of the reason for this is that we learned early in our life that marriage is not days you endure but moments you seize.

That same principle works in your relationship with God. Christianity is not a dreary religion that drags you down with rules and regulations; it is wonderful moments of life changing joy that you share with God. And those moments just keep getting sweeter the longer you serve Christ.

## **September 23, 1998 LAUGH LESSONS**

I don't know of any great spiritual truth contained in the following little laugh lines. I simply know (Prov 17:22) "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones." Sometimes we need to stop being so serious for just a few moments and enjoy life. Then when we get back to the serious grind of living we can do so with more vim and vigor.

Next week I will talk to you again about life, death, and serious situations. Right now it is time to remember the words of the wisest mortal man to ever live- (Eccl 8:15) "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun."

--Did you hear about the man who turned his life around. He used to be depressed and miserable. Now he is miserable and depressed.

--There are lots of self-help tapes out there. Someone told about buying one called "How to Handle Disappointment" When he got home and opened the box it was empty! -Jonathan Droll

--They say kids bring warmth into a home, and I tend to believe it. I get hot every time I see the phone bill!

--Charlie Brown- Sometimes I lie away at night, and I ask, "Where have I gone wrong?" Then a voice says to me, "This is going to take more than one night."

--One final thought that is more serious than silly- If you want your ship to come in, you must build a dock.

## **September 26, 1998 DEADLY SINS**

Church tradition lists 7 deadly sins: Pride, Covetousness (greed), Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger, and Sloth (laziness). They are called “deadly” because they are so common; and because they are so easy to fall into.

Angus Wilson, in describing the awful sin of Envy, gives a good general illustration of why men would fall into these “deadly sins”- All the seven deadly sins are self-destroying, morbid appetites, but in their early stages, at least, lust and gluttony, greed and sloth know some gratification, while anger and pride have power as their source, even though that power eventually destroys itself. Envy, however, is impotent, numbed with fear, never ceasing in its appetite, and it knows no gratification, but endless self-torment. It has the ugliness of a trapped rat, which gnaws its own foot in an effort to escape.

In reality there are 4 major “types of sin” that we need to recognize:

1) Innate Sins- The sin nature all men inherit because of the original sin of Adam- (Rom 5:12) “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

2) Wrong action Sins. The bad that we do because of the sin nature we possess- (Rom 3:23) “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” Men sin because they are sinners. Environment and Circumstances may play a part in the fervency and frequency of sin but no one has to teach a person to do bad, it comes naturally.

3) Failure Sins. The good we know to do but fail to do- (James 4:17) “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

4) Personal Sins. Sins that may not be wrong for others but they are for us because we think they are wrong so doing them would be an act of rebellion against God- (Rom 14:23) “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”

Regardless of how you categorize sin it is important that you realize that sin is serious and that God has provided a way to deal with the sin in your life- (Rom 6:23) “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

## **September 29, 1998 I'VE SINNED, WHAT NOW??**

David made a tremendous observation in Psalm 32 about sin in the life of a person. First he noted that the happy state of spiritual contentment (Blessed) can only come when the person comes to grips about his sin with God and with himself- (Psa 32:1-2) Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

Secondly, he shows us several attitudes toward our sin and the corresponding results: You can HIDE your sin, try to pretend it did not happen, and live with intense guilt and anxiety - (Psa 32:3-4)  
When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.

You can also BLAME someone else for your sinful behavior and use that as an excuse for your sin as Adam did with Eve. This is the most common response once our sin is exposed.

Or you can do the right thing, and the best thing, and acknowledge your wrong- (Psa 32:5) I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

Once David was willing to deal with his sin on a sincere level several things happened- God began again to answer his prayers and provide divine protection from the storms of life- (Psa 32:6) For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. And breaking the sin barrier allowed David and God to return to that special relationship they had before (vs 7)

What are you trying to do with YOUR sin? Remember this, Sin will find you out and sin will take you further than you want to go. The answer to the sin problem is simple- (1 John 1:9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

## **September 30, 1998 GOD HATES THAT**

I decided early in my Christian life that anything God liked was something that I wanted to like and anything that God disliked was something that I wanted to stay away from. That is why I made a list of things in the Bible that God Hates so I could make sure to avoid those things.

--God hates anything that tries to replace Him- (Deu 16:22) *Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth.*

--God hates Corrupt Character- (Prov 6:16-19) *These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*

--God hates hate- (Zec 8:17) *And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.*

--God hates customs that replace personal commitment (Rev 2:6) *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.* (Rev 2:15) *So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.* (The Nicolaitanes became an “elite” group in the church that eventually controlled it. Note that their Deeds changed into a “Doctrine” in a short while. God hates it when people use His Church to build their kingdom).

## **October 6, 1998 TAXIDERMIST TRUTHS**

Recently, I drove by the parsonage of a local church and noticed that the Pastor had a sign outside advertising Taxidermist services. I almost ran off the road laughing so hard. I know a lot of preacher who spend their time stuffing the dead!

According to Ephesians 2:1-2 a person who is unsaved is considered “dead” in sin- “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” That is an apt description of many people who sit in pews on Sunday Morning. Like a corpse, they are dressed in their best finery but, like the dead, there is no breath of life or holy function about them.

Many preacher seem to think their business is to make these corpses look at realistic as possible; and some have become quite expert at making them look so alive until it is almost impossible to discern they are simply mannequin men. But the saddest part of all is that most people are happy about the situation because it keeps everything “neat and in order”.

It is true that living men make mistakes and messes; but it is also true that a church full of corpses never accomplishes anything for God or man. Jesus came to raise men from the dead and give them new life. A taxidermist simply tries to make a dead body look at realistic as possible. Which is the mission of YOUR Church?

## **October 7, 1998 WATER BUCKETS**

It all began rather innocently. Someone noted that people were going across the road to a neighbor's well each Sunday Morning in order to get water. Seeking to help the situation, they decided to bring a bucket of water to Church. Thinking the best place to put the bucket so everyone could see that the water was available was at the front of the church, they put the bucket of water on the table in front of the pulpit.

Now this person has a mission in life; bringing a bucket of water to Church each week for the people to drink. Soon the water bucket became a fixture in the Church and everyone expected it to be in its place each Sunday Morning.

Next comes a new pastor to take over the leadership of the Church. The first Sunday he noticed that it was very distracting to have people come to the water bucket directly in front of the pulpit for water during the sermon. He tried to ignore the situation but as the days got hotter the traffic became regular; and he doubted people's ability to hear his sermon with all the distractions going on.

He thought it would be a simple matter to move the bucket to another location in the Church. Did he have a lot to learn about water buckets and Church tradition!! By the way, everyone wished him well at his new church.

(Jer 2:13) For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

## **October 10, 1998      STUMPS**

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

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

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

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

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

## **October 13, 1998      ROACHES, SPIT, AND POTATO BINS**

While traveling with my brother and his wife we decided to stop for a quick sandwich. We all ordered bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwiches and were ready to enjoy a time of refreshment before we continued on our journey. When my sister-in-law started to take a bite from her sandwich I noticed a big roach hanging from her lettuce! I know that most of that sandwich was still good to eat but somehow all of us lost our appetite right about then- (Gal 5:9) “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”

While standing guard duty one night I saw one of our officers come back aboard ship highly intoxicated. Soon I passed by the officer’s kitchen and saw that one of the stewards had been forced to get up at 2am and fix a steak for this officer. As I watched the steward he would spit on the steak, say very unkind words about this officer, and turn it over. Then he would spit on the other side as he repeated the process over and over. This officer was normally well liked but I did not have any desire for his steak, or his reputation, that night- (Eccl 10:1) “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.”

During the beginning of the Tet offensive in Viet Nam one of the men in my squad was caught hiding in the potato bin reading pornography while he was supposed to be on guard duty. At first we thought he would simply get a “slap on the wrist” but when he came up for trial we learned that being away from your guard position in time of war was a capital offense, punishable by death or life in prison. The punishment was severe but this man’s unrestrained lust could have meant the death of many people- (Prov 25:28) “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”

## **October 14, 1998      A Nation's God**

Officially, America has no God. Everyone has the right to worship (or abstain from worshiping) who and what they please. Yet, one of the most basic laws of human nature is that everyone will worship something. There are lots of “Forces” out there vying for our attention. Let me point out several principles that are important in the God a nation chooses to follow.

1. CHOSE THE RIGHT GOD- “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.” (Psalm 33:12). If I were going to chose a God I’d chose one with a proven track record of love and concern that would do me good and not harm. For several hundred years the majority of people in America have found this to be the Lord God.

2. CHECK OUT YOUR GOD'S GUIDELINES- “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Prov 14:34). Part of the Joy of serving God is the peace and tranquility that comes to a nation who follows the moral and spiritual guidelines He gives. Chaos comes when men disregard God and “Every man does that which is right in his own sight” (Jud. 21:25).

3. PICK A GOD BIG ENOUGH TO ENCOMPASS EVERYONE- “But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” (Acts 10:35). A Nation’s God must be broad enough to welcome every race and class into His “Fold” while being narrow enough to exclude the frivolous and the foul until they are ready to mean business about serving Him. God wants everyone but He requires that they also want Him.

A Nation is made up of people. People don’t serve a God by accident; a decision must be made. When God runs a survey of YOUR heart, who will He find is the God of your part of this nation?

## **October 20, 1998      UNDER THE TENT**

The late September sun boiled down as if it were the middle of July. The fact that most of the people were dressed in black only added to the intense heat and made each moment stretch into a never ending time zone. They came to the grave side service to show their respect for the recently departed because they were family or friends but the afternoon sun beating down upon them was trying to squeeze the concern out of them as surely as it squeezed out the sweat that ran through their make up or soaked their suits.

Those who were able to stand or sit under the shade of the tent were almost comfortable, especially when the occasional breeze would bring it's blessed relief. Watching the agony of those standing in the intense heat compared to the comfort of those who were seated under the tent made the preacher's word that much more meaningful- (Rev 7:14-17) "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them (Literally, pitch His tent among them!). They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Standing at that grave side on a hot September afternoon showed me as clearly as possible the fate of all men. Either they are under the tent with God in a place of relief and rest or they are standing outside, dressed in their very best, but still suffering without God's comfort or peace. When the "Heat is on" the place to be is under the tent with God. And there is plenty of room, all you have to do is move away from the crowd and step into the shade.

## **October 21, 1998      SYMPTOMS OF UNBELIEF**

(Heb 11:6) But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Many people who say they have faith in Christ show by their lives that they have all the symptoms of unbelief. In the Carnal Christian these symptoms include bickering and division (I Cor 3:3), an unwillingness to accept any responsibility in the work of God (Heb 5:12), and morals that conform to the world's standards instead of to the principles of God.

But there are other symptoms of unbelief that are evident in the life of far too many Christians today.

First would have to be their lack of Prayer. "Ye have not, because ye ask not." (James 4:2). If we really believed that God could hear our prayers and would answer our petitions then we would bombard Heaven with our cries. Instead, we try every scheme in the world to get what we want and only pray as a last resort- and even then we have such little faith until we are greatly amazed if God does answer the Prayer!!

Another Symptom of unbelief is our lack of Patience. Instead of trusting God to work in His own time we decide that someone must do something; and, like Abraham, we find that running ahead of God brings lifetime consequences.

A final Symptom of Unbelief is our lack of Power. We don't trust God for power so our lives are mere shells of Christianity that bring shame to us; and to God.

## **October 27, 1998      TEMPTATION LIMITATIONS**

Want to know a GREAT truth? God puts limitations on your Temptations!! You thought Satan could tempt you as much as he wanted and in any way he desired but that is not true. You are God's peculiar treasure (I Pet 2:9) and that means you are "hedged" about with a barrier that Satan cannot pass without the permission of God (See Job 1:9-12).

Also consider the tremendous truth found in I Cor 10:13 "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Look closely at what that states, "Who will not suffer (allow) you to be tempted above that ye are able,". God know YOUR limits and He only allows the trouble to be big enough to build your character without overwhelming your faith.

Every time a temptation comes your way God also puts a "Safety Valve" on it - "but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." I remember one time when my thought life was going off in the wrong direction and suddenly the phone rang. It was a "wrong" number but I knew it was actually the Lord putting me back on track. Or on another occasion when I was having a "Pity Party" and sinking deeper and deeper into depression. Just then the doorbell rang; one of the neighborhood kids needed help to put the chain back on their bike. The glow in their eyes and the heartfelt hug after I repaired their bike sent me back to the office with a bounce in my step and peace in my heart.

Don't be discouraged or defeated. Your temptation has limitations and you will be able to handle anything that comes your way- (1 John 4:4) "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

## **October 28, 1998      WATER WILT**

My wife loves plants. Almost every room in the house has at least one plant, and most rooms have numerous plants. It takes a lot of time and effort for my wife to care for these plants but she is very conscientious about being sure they get sunlight and water.

Several weeks ago she found a petite hanging basket on sale so she decided to put a small plant in it and hang it up. My wife is very short and she had me hang this plant very high in the wall in an area of the house we don't normally look at.

While talking with me the other day she suddenly shouted, "Oh No! I've killed it." I followed her gaze as we both remembered that new hanging basket for the first time in many days. It was a sad looking sight as it lay limp and wilted in its basket with its leaves starting to turn brown.

I thought the only thing to do was empty the basket and start again since this plant looked well on its way to that great "garden in the sky". My wife however had other plans. She trimmed the dead leaves, added some much needed water, and went about rescuing that plant from its sure death.

I don't know who has neglected you so that you are all wilted down but Jesus loves you even more than my wife loved that wilted plant; and He has just the kind of water you need to cause you to flourish and bloom again. That is because Jesus does not use tap water; He uses living water, and that can restore you no matter how wilted and worn you are.

## **November 3, 1998      CHRISTMAS CONSIDERATIONS**

While getting my hair cut recently my lady barber started talking to a friend about Christmas. Both of them said they needed to have a yard sale or house cleaning in the next couple of months in order to accommodate all the new toys their children would get at Christmas. That immediately reminded me of a story in the Bible- (Luke 12:16-21) And Jesus spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Everyone in the Barber Shop agreed that Children today had too many toys and it just compounded the problem to consider all of the new toys that they would get at Christmas. But everyone seemed perplexed about what to do to remedy the situation. Several suggestions were finally given that seemed to make sense to most of the people there.

One lady said that her parents were instructed to buy the grandchildren only one present and then to put any extra money they wanted to contribute into savings bonds for the children. Another said her parents did the same thing except they contributed some each year to a college fund savings account for each child.

One told about the joy children received from a year's subscription to a magazine for their age group. And some mentioned that their gift was a trip to a favorite place; this was especially appreciated because it involved personal participation by everyone.

This Christmas you can let the stores convince you that you absolutely have to have a pet rock or a certain named doll or you can use a little common sense and get those you love a gift that will really mean something to them. Just don't build bigger barns and wonder why God calls you a fool.

## **November 4, 1998      ONE SIN, WHAT A PRICE**

People sometimes tell me, "Oh Preacher, don't be so hard. After all it's just one little sin. What harm can one sin do?"

Why don't you ask Adam about the price of one sin. One bite of the forbidden fruit caused him to exchange the joys of paradise for the drudgery of earning his living by the sweat of his brow. It brought him spiritual death; and, eventually, the murder of his second born by his first born. It also brought the penalty of sin onto the entire human race. One sin, but the price was so huge until it can only be called incalculable.

Ask Moses about the cost of one sin. Moses had defeated Egypt with only the power of God at his disposal. He had delivered his nation from bondage and was leading them through the desert toward the Promised Land. Over and over they tried his patience until this "meekest man on all the earth" (Num 12:3) became so angry until he disobeyed God and smote the rock instead of speaking to it. Moses realized the cost of that one sin as he sat on a lonely mountain looking over at the Promised Land; knowing he could look at its beauty but he could never live there.

Sin will take you further than you want to go and sin will cost you more than you want to pay. The good news is that while - "the wages of sin {singular} is death; the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:23). The cost of a single sin is extraordinarily high but God has paid the price for each and every sin and He offers pardon and forgiveness to everyone who turns from sin and trust the savior, Jesus Christ.

## **November 10, 1998    DIVINE DIRECTIONS**

It all began with an early morning phone call to tell the man his brother was in serious condition in the Georgetown Hospital. He and his wife got ready as quickly as possible and made the trip to Georgetown. As soon as they arrived they found his brother was serious enough to need to be transported from the Georgetown hospital to a Charleston hospital.

Age and medical conditions made it very difficult for this man to drive in strange places. He did not know how to get from where he was at to the Charleston Hospital so he and his wife stopped and had prayer.

As I stood in his yard several days later and listened to him tell it you could see the wonder in his eyes. He said he did not remember any of the trip; it was almost as if his truck drove its self. Somehow it turned at every right place until he found himself going over the Cooper River Bridge. But even then he was about to panic because he had no idea how to find the hospital his brother was in.

He described it like this, "That truck just kept going until suddenly it turned into a parking lot. We looked up and there was a hospital. When we walked in they sent up right up to my brother's room." And then he said, "I could not tell you today how to go from Georgetown to Charleston; and I have no idea how to find that hospital again!"

Isn't it wonderful to serve a God who still cares about the welfare of His people! And isn't it marvelous to know that God knows the path we take even if we don't. Why don't you call on Him today; and then determine to follow his leadership. He will guide you exactly where you need to go; and you will find yourself greatly enjoying the ride.

## **November 11, 1998    SELFISH PRAYING**

I have often said that if I could get my members to pray with the same zeal and intensity in church that they pray with during the ninth inning of a baseball game or during the final two minutes of a football game then we would have one of the most spiritual churches in our area! I know God is concerned with many areas in our life. But, realistically, I don't think God is as concerned with whether or not the Atlanta Braves win the World Series as He is that people have their spiritual and physical needs met. (Or, if He is, he has put the wrong angel in charge!).

This selfish praying is one of the main reasons people do not see their prayers answered on a consistent basis- "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." (James 4:3).

Another example of this type of selfish praying is when people ask me to pray for them to win the lottery. They always add the stipulation that they will gladly give God part of their winnings. I don't waste God's time or mine with such foolishness. These people aren't interested in the few dollars they would give God; they are only interested in getting something for nothing by gambling.

God WANTS to answer Prayers. He just doesn't want to do you harm by fulfilling selfish request. So use your intensity to pray right- and then rejoice in God's wonderful answers.

## **November 17, 1998 SERMON FAITH**

What makes a man get up before a congregation of people week after week believing that what he says will make a difference in the lives of those people; both now and forever? What is it that motivates a minister?

I know the first answer many would give is that he is motivated by money- although that would not motivate him to become a minister in my denomination! Thankfully, many ministers are now being paid a reasonable salary; but I have met very few who could not be making much more in another profession.

Some would say a man is a minister because of the lack of work involved in his duties (You know, who wouldn't want a job where you only work 3 hours a week). My average work week is over 65 hours- and, according to the latest survey, the average for all pastors is 55 hours a week. Most pastors look with longing at those people who go to work at 8am and get to come home at 5pm.

I think there are three main reasons a man stands in a pulpit each week and delivers God's message to the people. First of all is His Calling from God. The fire of God burns in his soul and he cannot remain faithful to God, and himself, if he does not proclaim the word of God.

Secondly, there is his faith in the Word of God. He is confident that it has the answer for every need of mankind. He does not have to rely on his own abilities or intellect; he can depend on the "sword of the spirit" to pierce into the depths of a man's soul and show him his need of change.

Finally, a Pastor always remembers that God uses the "foolishness of preaching" to accomplish His work. And that really helps on those Sundays when a Pastor feels like his sermon has failed and the best thing he can do is crawl up under a rock and hide!

Pray for your Pastor this week; and be there Sunday Morning when He proclaims the Word of God. After all, it is a message from God.

## **November 18, 1998 WRONG PAGE**

At the beginning of our service recently the Song Leader announced the opening hymn number and the piano player began playing another song! It seems the Song Leader unintentionally reversed the order of our songs and announced the second song first. It was just a funny little moment for us but it reminded me of some real life situations.

Sometimes husbands and wives, or parents and children, "sing different songs" because they're on the wrong page thru failure to communicate. They are all talking but they are not listening to what is really being said. And there will be no Harmony in the Home until people begin to speak the same language.

This incident also reminded me that you need to address a problem as soon as it occurs; or else the music and the song will never match. Sometimes we try to pretend a problem doesn't exist and hope that it will go away. But the longer we ignore the problem the worst things become. You need to stop long enough to correct the problem before the disharmony becomes disaster.

If your life is all confused because it's on the wrong page just remember that Jesus can turn chaos into melody if you'll let Him. Get on the same page with God today so you can make beautiful music now; and look forward to singing the right song in that heavenly choir!

## **November 24, 1998 REPAIRING DAMAGED LIVES**

You could almost hear the panic in her voice. The secretary of another church in the area was working on the church bulletin on her computer and she couldn't get it to come up properly. I talked to her on the phone for a while and then went to where she was working. When I arrived I found that she had been using the same disk to record her files on for a long period of time and the disk had become corrupted. Now all of her files were "linked" together.

After much work and manipulation I was finally able to get the disk repaired enough to save some of her files. I then took the disk home with me so I could work on recovering the remaining files. As I was working I received a phone call from a church member desiring to talk about a problem she was having with someone else.

After I hung up the phone I realized that the computer problem and the personal problem were a lot alike; both were caused by failure to completely deal with past problems and both were complicated by being tied to other problems. Sounds like a lot of people I know.

The Good News I proclaim is that God is able to deal with the "corrupted files" in your life. I know that many times we pile problems one on top of the other until everything is so "linked" together until we don't think anything can be done. Just remember that Jesus took a woman who had been married five times, and was now living with a man, and transformed her into a village changing evangelist!

Your life does not have to be inoperative and ineffective. God has just what you need so you can have the peace you long for to enable you to become a productive part of God's plan again. Just don't sit at home frustrated with your own inability to get life to work. Come to God and let Him "repair" you today.

## **November 25, 1998 MARGIE'S CASSEROLE**

Her name was Margie and she had just moved into the community. It was a wonderful country community but, like a lot of communities with long term residents, it was a little suspicious of newcomers. When the invitation came to attend a community supper Margie was fearful that she might not feel at ease but she decided to make her favorite casserole, go to the meeting, and see what happened.

As soon as she walked in she knew she was in trouble. Everyone else had brought a full meal, including dessert, and there she stood with her small casserole. Her first inclination was to beat a hasty retreat but one of the ladies came up and said she would put her casserole on the table with the rest of the food.

Soon the meal began and everyone stood around commenting on how good everything was; while ignoring Margie's Casserole. That was when Mrs. Opal did her thing. She walked over to Margie's casserole, which was untouched, got a big spoon full and proceeded to tell everyone that it was the best casserole she had ever eaten.

Margie helped serve dinner to Mrs. Opal's family recently following Mrs. Opal's funeral. With a tiny tear in her eye she told me the story of the casserole. And with wonder in her voice she told me what a difference it had made in her life in that community. A life made different by an act of Christian Love.

## **November 28, 1998    EXPECTATIONS**

Do you ever wonder why you feel “down and depressed” all the time? Maybe it's because you have set standards for yourself, or for others, that you, or they, cannot meet. Things never work out the way you want them to work and that develops feelings of anger and bitterness in your heart. Your problem is that your expectations are beyond what can be realistically expected in real world living.

This is a special problem for highly motivated individuals or for people whose life is spent helping others. They expect that their sacrifice will accomplish more than it does. When things do not work out like they think they should then depression and frustration sets in (The name that was coined for it during the past few years is “Burn out”. You become so disappointed that you are not accomplishing what you want until you decide to quit trying to accomplish anything).

Let's look at Five Goals in a person's life that can cause great distress because they are based on **UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**- This causes you to set a goal that it is impossible to reach and then you feel bad because you did not reach it!!

(1) I have the ability to change another person. God has given each of us a Free Will. That means you can influence a person and you can example the right model for a person but they must make the decision to change. Trying to force them only angers them and aggrevates you.

(2) I have the Capacity to help everyone. If you try to be everything to everyone you will soon be nothing to anyone.

(3) There should never be a limit to what I can do. Even Jesus acknowledged that, although provision was made for everyone to be saved, yet many will travel the wrong road.

(4) I am the only person available to help. Christians learn they are part of the Body of Christ. Each part functions with, and for, the rest if the body is to function correctly.

(5) I must never make a mistake. The Bible states in First John that the very act of saying we do not have sin is in fact a sin!

These are expectations that **ONLY GOD** can accomplish; and even He can not accomplish them in the way some people expect them to be accomplished!

Strive to be the best you can be. Remember, however, that you cannot do everything and you cannot be everywhere. So stop trying to take God's place. Instead, seek to fill your place in God's Plan. That is where you will find the peace and abundant life you are seeking.

## **December 1, 1998      ELISE'S MINISTRY**

Mrs. Elise was special from the first time you met her. Her smile was infectious and her personality made you think that no matter who you were, you were one of her favorite people. She was a wonderful lady with a family that she loved; but her love extended far beyond her family. When she lived in a neighborhood, the entire neighborhood was drawn to her home. When she had to move to an apartment her apartment became the center of many community activities. And when she finally had to move to a nursing home she set up "shop" in her room and it became her own little ministry area.

But I remember Mrs. Elise for far more than her personality. I remember the impact she had on so many people. For several years she taught a Sunday School class at our Church. When she taught, however, she did much more than impart Bible knowledge to the young people she taught; she invested her life in them. Many of her students are grown and married now and they still talk about lessons learned and classes attended during the few years she taught here. She fulfilled the dream of every good teacher, she made a lifetime difference in her students.

And then there was her mail ministry. If all the letters and notes of encouragement that she wrote were put end to end I believe they would circle the globe! Even when arthritis came to cripple her fingers I would still receive barely legible notes of encouragement on a regular basis. And like the other things she did, this ministry also caused many to emulate her and multitudes of people are encouraged by a letter or note of encouragement each month.

I believe that one good example is worth a hundred sermons. That is why I talk of Mrs. Elise today. She made a long term difference in a great number of people because she thought that living her Christianity every day was much better than just talking about her "religion". A lesson I hope we all can learn and apply.

## **December 2, 1998      Flash Lights**

My father-in-law was putting some things in his attic several months ago and accidentally left his flash light up there. The next time he needed a light he realized it had been misplaced. He searched through all the drawers and closets in the house, and even crawled under the house, trying to locate it.

Finally, we decided it must be lost for good and bought him another for a Birthday Present. When he went up into the attic to get some Christmas decorations this year, guess what he found?

Jesus once asked his disciples, "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?" (Mark 4:21). He meant by this that men tend to lose the light of their testimony when they become too busy (hidden under a bushel) or too lazy (hidden under a bed).

As a pastor, it amazes me to see the number of Christians who are too busy to do anything for God; or too lazy to obligate themselves to Christian service. In the process of living they have lost the light of life; and have become a stumbling block instead of a light house that guides men away from danger.

It doesn't have to be that way. Think back to where you lost your light, go back there, pick it up, clean it up, and let it shine again. God wants your light to shine, the world wants your light to shine, and you need to shine your light. So shine today.

## **December 9, 1998      THREE PROPS IN PROBLEMS**

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

1) PRAYER- Paul said he "besought the Lord" three times about this problem. He didn't just say a nice little "now I lay me down to sleep" prayer; He really prayed and poured out his heart to God. When problems plague you spend time talking with God. Tell Him your hurt and your doubts; as well as your desire for help. You'll be surprised what a difference it will make when you talk WITH God instead of AT God.

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

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

### **BONUS GAME:**

Looking for a quick little game for those Christmas parties. Here is one I made up for our Ministers and Wives Christmas get together. In their case, I gave the list below to 4 men and asked one to prepare a title, one to prepare an introduction, one to prepare a 4 point outline, and one to prepare a conclusion using the words they were given from the list below. Then I asked people to give each of them 4 numbers between one and thirty. The people who were giving the numbers had no idea what word went with the number.

You could use it to have 4 or 5 people prepare a sentence that incorporated all the words they were given from people's numbers- Example 19, 28, 17, 11- The thing I remember the most about Christmas is how the Camel (19) pulled the little red wagon (28) to Bethlehem (17) to carry the gifts (11) given to the new born savior. Hope it helps.

- |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1) CHRISTMAS         | 16) CAVE             |
| 2) SHEPHERDS         | 17) BETHLEHEM        |
| 3) WISEMEN           | 18) HEROD            |
| 4) INN               | 19) CAMEL            |
| 5) TAX               | 20) DONKEY           |
| 6) ANGELS            | 21) GLORY TO GOD     |
| 7) GOD               | 22) PEACE TO MEN     |
| 8) MARY              | 23) SANTA CLAUS      |
| 9) JOSEPH            | 24) REINDEER         |
| 10) JOHN THE BAPTIST | 25) COOKIES AND MILK |
| 11) GIFTS            | 26) REDEMPTION       |
| 12) LIGHT            | 27) EMMANUEL         |
| 13) SHEEP            | 28) RED WAGON        |
| 14) MANGER           | 29) STAR             |
| 15) HAY              | 30) PASTOR PRESENT   |

## **December 15, 1998    BAKED CAT**

While visiting with one of my senior saints recently she told me an interesting tale. Her clothes dryer is getting old and has developed a bad habit of the door popping open during the dry cycle. This causes the dryer to cut off and prevents the clothes from drying as they should.

As she was going to the kitchen for a cup of coffee the other day she noticed the door had popped open. She knew the clothes had not had time to dry so she closed the door, restarted the dryer, and went for her coffee. When she got her coffee and walked back by the dryer she heard an awful noise.

Afraid that the dryer was tearing up she opened the door to cut it off; and out popped her cat- very warm and very angry!

People are a lot like this cat. They will many times look for a delightfully warm location to escape from the pressures of life; unaware that it can become dangerously hot. It will look so inviting and so comfortable until they, like Goldilocks, will fall asleep and awake to find themselves in a bear's bed.

Everyone needs a place to escape from the stress and strife of life. Christians find that the time they spend in a "prayer closet" brings peace to their heart while prodding the heart of God. They also find that studying and meditating on the Word of God brings peace and direction to their life. And, surprisingly, they find that acts of kindness and service to others actually energize them instead of exhaust them.

Be careful which door you jump through when you are looking for comfort and escape. Some doors can be so nice for a while but can suddenly turn into a really hot situation. If you don't believe it, come meet a cat who will not go into the same room with the dryer anymore.

## **December 16, 1998    THINGS I'VE LEARNED**

One of the men in my Church recently send me a list of things "I've learned". I wish I could share the entire list but space constraints allow me to share only a few. I've learned:

-that you cannot make someone love you. All you can do is be someone who can be loved. The rest is up to them.

-that it takes years to build up trust, and only seconds to destroy it.

-that you can get by on charm for about fifteen minutes. After that, you'd better know something.

-that you shouldn't compare yourself to the best others can do.

-that you can keep going long after you can't.

-that heroes are the people who do what has to be done when it needs to be done, regardless of the consequences.

-that money is a lousy way of keeping score.

-that sometimes when I'm angry I have the right to be angry, but that doesn't give me the right to be cruel.

-that just because someone doesn't love you the way you want them to doesn't mean they don't love you with all they have.

-that no matter how bad your heart is broken the world doesn't stop for your grief.

-that we don't have to change friends if we understand that friends change.

-that two people can look at the exact same thing and see something totally different.

-that no matter how you try to protect your children, they will eventually get hurt and you will hurt in the process.

-that your life can be changed in a matter of hours by people who don't even know you.

-that the people you care about most in life are taken from you too soon.

## **December 22, 1998   SURPRISING GIFTS**

Several years ago a lady gave my wife and I a wall hanger that was covered with artificial fruit. Although it was nice, and appreciated by us, it was not something that we had longed for. Enclosed in the box with the wall hanger was a note, however, and it changed our entire outlook on this present.

The hanger that the fruit was attached to was an antique corn dryer. The corn dryer was rare; and expensive. It changed a plain present into a special gift.

If you are having problems finding the right gift, or if the pressures of Christmas shopping are getting you down, let me share a few helpful hints to make your shopping a lot easier.

Give a gift that will enrich the person receiving it. Don't just try to finish your list, seek something that will fulfill a need in the life of the person to whom you are giving the gift- We still have the corn dryer. Its value is not in its value; its value is in the heart of love that shared such a treasure with us.

Give a gift to someone who doesn't expect it; or who can't afford it- (Deu 15:11) "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." You will receive as much joy from the giving as they will from the receiving.

Finally, remember that Christmas is not about your presents, it is about His presence. If you leave Christ out of your Christmas celebration then Christmas will seem like a time of artificial fruit that has no taste and brings no joy. Look beneath the artificial hollowness of a stressful holiday season and find the true treasure that is the real reason for the season.

## **December 23, 1998   GOD'S CHRISTMAS GIFT**

It began in a beautiful garden many years ago. The sun was bright, the birds were singing, and peace and joy reigned supreme. Suddenly, the cold breath of sin slithered into the garden as Satan brought doubt into Eve's mind, Defeat into Adam's actions, and Death into the life of all men. But God was not defeated!! He promised that a Savior would come to destroy the works of Satan and to deliver men from the bondage of sin and death.

For nearly 4000 years men looked with Anticipation for this promised Messiah to come. Year after year they cried out to God to send the deliverer to set them free from the tyranny of sinful men and from the bondage of sinful desires that controlled their actions and destroyed their peace and prosperity.

The Day finally arrives!! In a stable in Bethlehem, God comes to earth as a new born babe. Beside His manger bed sits an unmarried woman and an unemployed carpenter.

Can this be the long anticipated one? Is this the one to defeat Satan and set us free from the bondage of sin and death? Yes, Yes, God has become flesh. Help and Hope have been born. Shepherds and wise men alike find that WHOSOEVER shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.

That is your gift from God this Christmas; redemption and eternal life through His son Jesus. Open God's present first this Christmas and find the joy your heart seeks!!

## **December 29, 1998    SUCCEEDING AS A SAINT**

My Assistant Pastor, Rev Carroll Bazen, recently prepared a message on 5 things you need if you are to succeed in your Christian Life. They were so relevant until I thought sharing them with you would be helpful.

If you are to succeed in the Christian life then you need:

1) Forgiveness and Acceptance from God. You can never find happiness or fulfillment if you are alienated from God. That means repenting of sins, trusting Christ as Savior, and believing that you are now a Child of God. This brings pardon for your sins and peace for your heart.

2) A Consecrated Body. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is to be kept Wholly for God and Holy unto God if you are to succeed in your Christian walk.

3) The Anointing of the Spirit on your life and work. To try to do the work of God without the anointing of God is like trying to empty the ocean with a pitchfork. You will work yourself to death and never accomplish anything. The Bible command to be filled with the Holy Spirit is not an option; nor simply a denominational doctrine. Only divine unction produces divine results.

4) A Purposed Heart. A Successful Christian is one who had made a deliberate choice to follow God's Plan. His heart is fixed on doing the will of God always; regardless of changing circumstances or persecution problems.

5) A Concerned Spirit. Luke warm living makes God sick. A successful Christian has a fire burning within that breaks their heart over sin and opens their mouth to warn others of the wrath to come. A contented Saint will not accomplish much for God.

I pray your goal is to be a successful Christian in 1999. If you follow these principles then you will have a far greater chance of succeeding at your goal.

## **December 30, 1998    THINGS THAT DISPLEASE GOD**

The last thing any true Christian wants to do is to do anything that displeases God. Like Jesus, We want always to do those things that please the Father (John 8:29). That is why it is good to know 4 things that displease God.

1) Holding a Grudge Displeases God - (Prov 24:17-18) "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." God will punish the wrong. We are to forgive and groan with them; not gloat over their problems.

2) Complaining about how God works His plan in your life displeases God- (Num 11:1) "And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp."

3) Unrepented Sin in our Life displeases God- (2 Sam 11:27) "And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." David wanted to forget his sin without dealing with it but that didn't suit God.

4) Keeping People from Coming to God displeases God- (Mark 10:14) "But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." God's heart is broken over sinner; Christ died for them. Don't stand in their way.