

DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES written by Rev. Mike Jones for publication in the Florence (SC) Morning News. Articles were used on an “as needed” basis (When the invited guest minister did not submit an article for publication). This is the reason there are so many “gaps” in the dates.

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January 27, 1990

TREADMILL TRAVELERS

One of the latest "yuppie toys" is a treadmill for the home. It allows you to burn off those excess pounds in the privacy of your own home as you watch TV or listen to music. The concept is not all bad (No gnats or mosquitos or dogs; and you save the money for a fancy jogging suit that you'd "Have" to have to jog in public!) but somehow it goes a little against my grain to do all that walking and never get anywhere.

The sad thing, however, is that many people are on a "life Treadmill" where they simply exist day after day. They think they're accomplishing something, and they even find some happiness in various activities as they trudge thru life, but in the dark and lonely nights, when they lift their heads to look around, they find it's the same old grind. Sometimes the scenery changes and they begin to think they're making some progress but when they look a little closer they find it's the same rat race as before; someone just put a fresh coat of paint on the walls.

Like the people Paul told Timothy about, they are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth". Young people can tell you all the facts about drugs; but that doesn't stop them from taking them. Adults know about Aids and Abortion but that doesn't stop Adultery and Affairs. Each Generation seems to walk the same treadmill as the previous generation.

Is there no help or hope?? Must mankind continually struggle from the cradle to the grave calling the sad lament of Solomon, "Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity"? Must we labor through life traveling on a treadmill?

The Good News of the Gospel of Christ is that Change is not only Possible but it's also Available to anyone desiring it. Jesus promised those who accept Him as Savior not only Eternal Life but, also, Abundant Life. Christians have Peace with God because their Sins are Pardoned in Christ and they also have a Place in God's Plans. This means you don't have to plod through life on the same old Treadmill waiting for the day to come when you can no longer keep up the pace and fall by the wayside. Instead, you can have a life that means something now; and for eternity.

Will you stay a Treadmill Traveler, or will you join me in Running the Race for God?

February 3, 1990

THE MASTER'S VOICE

Graduation Day had finally arrived. It had been 11 of the most difficult weeks I had ever experienced but Naval Basic Training was almost over. All that remained was to pass in “graduation review”, receive my orders, and then I could go home for 2 weeks. The December weather was very cold in Illinois so it was decided to have the graduation parade in one of the huge hanger buildings.

All the graduates could not get into the hanger at the same time so we were lined up on the street and marched into the hanger one unit after another. We had to march down the entire length of the hanger, make a left turn, march the width of the hanger, turn left again, and then pass in review before the Commanding Officer and any relatives that had managed to attend.

Everything went well until we got inside the hanger and found the noise was deafening- the band was playing, commands were being given to every unit at the same time, hundreds of feet were “shuffling”, and the relatives were buzzing with excitement. Down the hanger we marched, perfectly in step, heads held high, straining to hear that first, “Column, Left Flank!” so we could all wheel in unison and show our stuff.

Closer and closer we came to the end of the Hanger and with keyed nerves I awaited the command (trying desperately to hear my leader over all the other noise) when, suddenly, disaster struck. I heard the awaited orders, “Column, Left Flank!” and I turned as smart and cleanly as I had ever done before--right into my own unit!!

I had heard the unit leader in front of us instead of hearing my own leader. I quickly regained position and completed the march without further damage but the whole length of the hall I felt like everyone's eyes were on me.

It taught me a very valuable lesson, however; always know where your commands are coming from. This has helped me considerable in my Christian life. Sometimes things are confusing and I hear lots of voices trying to tell me what to do (It seems someone is always writing a new book or coming out with a new theory) but I have learned to recognize the “Master's Voice” and, as long as I obey it, I never get out of step--- Jn 10:4b-5 His sheep follow him; and they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

April 20, 1991

WOODEN WORDS

One of the things I've always had difficulty forgiving my Dad for was the fact that we used a wood stove for heat while I was growing up but changed to oil heat as soon as I left home! Dad said he only enjoyed wood heat as long as he had boys to cut wood.

Cutting wood for heating purposes soon taught me to distinguish the difference between different types of wood. Pine wood is great to start a fire but it burns up very quickly. Oak wood is hard to start but lasts a long time.

I thought about this recently as I read Proverbs 26:20 "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."

Some of your words are like pine wood; anger causes them to blaze up quickly into a hot flame of destruction. Some of your words are like oak wood; they burn for a long time in people's hearts and minds (You can say "I love you" a thousand times and people may or may not believe you. You can say "I hate you" once and people believe you instantly).

James said that the tongue not only supplies the wood for the fire but also starts the fire. "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." (James 3:6).

Life has enough "normal" problems. Don't let your words become wood that adds fuel to the fire. Learn to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) so that your words will build up instead of burn down.

An anonymous poet put it this way
A careless word may kindle strife,
A cruel word may wreck a life;
A timely word may lessen stress,
A loving word may heal and bless.

April 27, 1991

WHY

My goal is to love Him with all my heart and serve Him with all my life. My greatest ambition is to see Him face to face whom so long I have known heart to heart. For Him I have sacrificed family, fortune, and friends. His name is Jesus; and He's my Savior, Lord, and friend.

In a world of advanced reason, marvelous scientific achievement, and an unprecedented access to various beliefs and cultures; why do I spend my entire energy and effort telling others about a man who lived and died nearly 2000 years ago as a common criminal.

Realistically, He was not the thing "Heroes" are made of. Many people in His Nation wanted Him to lead a revolt against a horribly oppressive and cruel government but He would not even defend His own innocence at His mockery of a trial. He did not hold a job during the last 3 years of His life and was so destitute until He had to ask a friend to care for His Mother. He was betrayed by His own disciple, denied by His closest friend, and ended up buried in a borrowed tomb.

Why then do I love Him so much?? Why is no sacrifice too great for Him?? Why do I endure all the hardships and heartaches that come with preaching the Gospel of Christ?

Because I believe Jesus is the Son of God. I believe He gave His life to give me (and you) the privilege of becoming sons of God. He didn't just give principles to live by; He gave power for new life. I believe Jesus is worth living for; because He's worth dying with.

January 25, 1992

EAT WORMS

My niece picked up a saying from somewhere that I use in my counseling from time to time. People will come into my office and tell me a tale of woe and worry that gets worst and worst the longer it continues. Finally I'll stop them and tell them my niece's saying, "No one loves me, everyone hates me, I think I'll eat worms." If you're ready to "eat worms" today let me tell you how good worms really taste.

Several years ago my wife was assaulted. In an hour's time our whole world was turned upside down. Because of the trauma of her experience, I had to rework my entire ministry. For a few months I was forced to stay home almost all the time. Since I couldn't visit as I should, Church attendance fell off drastically.

After several months of this I was sitting in my office one morning looking at my "can of worms". I trusted God and my wife was assaulted. I tried to care for my wife, as the Bible commands, and my church was about to die. Why was God giving me a diet of "worms"?

That's when God spoke to me and changed the thrust of my ministry. I learned that if God gives you worms you are supposed to build a worm farm! Now our little church reaches thousands and thousands of people each week because we've learned that if you have worms, you can use them to catch fish.

If you are in the midst of depression, trouble, or worry; take your eyes off the worms and look to God. He hasn't failed or forsaken you. He's given you an opportunity. Don't wallow in the mud, use the worms to catch fish.

February 1, 1992

DEVIL'S ALTAR CALL

What a sight it must have been-A golden statue rising 90 feet above the Babylonian Plain. Everyone who was anyone was there for the dedication activities. The music rang out and thousands upon thousands of people all bowed together in homage to this golden image; and the ruler it represented.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king, was very pleased with himself until someone came up and told him the three Hebrew children had not bowed to his image. His anger waxed hot and he commanded them to be brought to him so they could answer these charges.

That's when the "devil" decided to sing one more verse of his invitation song. Nebuchadnezzar told the three Hebrew children that the musicians would play one more time and if they didn't bow then they would be cast into the fire.

We all know the story. They didn't bow, but they didn't burn either. The Son of God went into the fire with them and delivered them from harm.

The Devil is playing another verse for many people today. His song of invitation calls people to compromise in their morals, in their business, or in their stand for God. What you must realize is this; the Devil's invitation is to escape the temporary fire of persecution for the eternal fire of punishment.

Don't listen to the Devil's invitation; no matter how many verses he plays. Compromise now will lead to catastrophe later. Hold on to God; and God will hold to you. Even in the midst of the fire.

August 28, 1993.

PRESENT PROBLEMS

Everyone seems to like two main parts of Christianity. The Past Sins that are forgiven and the Future Rewards that are promised. It's the other part of life, dealing with the here and now, which gives us trouble.

Flowery sounding sermons and pie-in-the-sky promises may make us feel better for a few minutes on Sunday morning but harsh reality has a nasty habit of intruding again; many times before you leave the parking lot. It's nice to talk about brotherly love until you find your car has been blocked in by someone who is determined to be the last person to leave Church!

Present Problems also have a way of washing away our best built sand castles. It's very easy, and even "religious", to stand before a Sunday School class and spout Pious Principles about how people should live their life. Death, Disease, Divorce, and Drugs, however, make many of your principles sound like just so much hot air to those people who are trying to live through these life shattering problems.

Can Christianity stand the harsh light of reality? Does it have real answers for real people with real problems in a real world?

Yes, yes, and a thousand times yes. Real Christianity is about a real Christ who dealt with real people who had real problems. He didn't just teach principles and precepts and then go on His merry way as if they had no pain or needs right now. He fed them and healed them and dealt with their demons. He saw their sins but He forgave their mistakes and pointed them past their problems into their potential.

That's the kind of Christianity that the world needs today.

September 4, 1993

MAJORITY MADNESS

If fifty million people say a foolish thing it is still a foolish thing. -Anatole France.

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. -Jesus Christ (Mat 7:13-14)

Madly the masses march over the precipice to crash on the rocks below. You would think that those at the front of the pack would shout back a warning to those behind. Nothing is heard, however, as men step blindly off the edge and fall to their destruction below.

Even if a warning was given its doubtful those behind them would hear it. That's because there is a tremendous amount of noise rising from the multitude as they march. This noise rises as a kaleidoscope of shuffling feet and murmuring voices. From the midst of this mass, however, an occasional Phrase can be heard that shows the priorities of the pack.

Phrases like "Liberty to please myself regardless of what it does to others". Or "Government is my god and I expect it to meet my every need". And above all rings the cry, "We're right because we are marching with the Majority."

Occasionally, small pockets of people can be seen pushing against this stream of humanity. They shout their warnings of impending doom and urge the masses to join them as they head for a new land of peace and prosperity. Most simply look at them with curiosity and wonder why they're not going the way of the majority. Others treat them with hostility because they're impeding their progress. But, through it all, the crowd continues their journey; laughing and smiling until that final blind step.

Are YOU marching with the majority?? Better check the road and see where it ends.

September 11, 1993 PRIME PRIORITY

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." Luke 4:42-43

The story is told of a lighthouse keeper who worked on a rocky stretch of coastline and who received his new supply of oil once a month to keep the light burning. Not being far from shore, he had frequent guests. One night a woman from the village begged some oil to keep her family warm. Another time a father asked for some to use in his lamp. Another needed some to lubricate a wheel. Since all the requests seemed legitimate, the lighthouse keeper tried to please everyone and granted them all.

Toward the end of the month he noticed that the supply of oil was very low. Soon, it was gone, and the beacon light went out. That night several ships were wrecked and lives were lost.

When the authorities investigated, the man was very repentant. To his excuses and pleading their reply was: "You were given the oil for one purpose - to keep that light burning!"

I receive calls and letters all the time from people wanting me to attend or support their organization. Most are extremely worthwhile causes. It used to bother me greatly that I could not attend or help all these people until I saw the verses at the beginning of this article. That's when I realized that when Jesus faced the same pressures I face He kept His Prime Priority in focus.

Jesus didn't spend His time freeing slaves or resisting the horrible Roman Government. His Prime Priority was to Preach the Gospel so that men would change. He knew this was the only way to bring about lasting change for slaves, Government, or other social ills.

Don't allow the good to replace the best. Keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is your relationship with Christ.

September 18, 1993 EYE LASHES

While taking a shower recently I got an eye lash in my eye. I tried rubbing it out and washing it out but nothing seemed to help. Finally, I had to get out of the shower so I could look in the mirror and find the eye lash.

Some problems in life are like that eye lash. They take more than superficial remedies to fix; you must get where you can clearly see the problem.

Take the horrible crime situation in America today. People are trying to defeat this problem with more jails or better education. But all this produces is less taxes to use for other needs and better educated criminals. When will we face the fact that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. If we don't build a moral foundation in people then winds of stress and peer pressure will drive them off course. If they get anchored to the rock, however, they are far less likely to drift into the cesspools of the world.

How about Peer Pressure, Work Pressure, and Social Pressure?? Again the answer is not found in rubbing our eye but in looking in the mirror. When a person denies him self, takes up his cross, and follows Christ, he will find these forces are constructive instead of destructive. But if we spend our time building our ego and trying to "keep up with the Jones" then we're in for serious sight problems.

How about You? Have you been rubbing your eye instead of looking in the mirror? Has there ever been a time in your life that you have faced the fact that you have sinned against God? Have you ever been sorry enough to turn from those sins and accept Christ as Savior? You'll be amazed what a difference it makes when you finally get that "eye lash" out of your eye.

September 25, 1993 MANURE MATTERS

Recently one of the members of my church moved into a new home in a very exclusive neighborhood. Construction work and the hot summer had destroyed the lawn on his new home so he began looking for a fast inexpensive way to bring his lawn up to the quality of his neighbors.

A farmer friend told him that a liberal spreading of chicken droppings would do wonders for his lawn and he would be glad to supply them for him. So my member borrowed a trailer and drove to the farm where the farmer used a front end loader to fill the trailer. It was only when my member arrived home, began spreading the manure, and saw all the neighbors come out to find out what had died, that he realized the added "complication" that comes with chicken droppings!!

The conduct of many religious leaders reminds me of this situation. They are supposed to help people grow and prosper in the things of God but they end up stinking to high heaven. Preachers molest the very children they are supposed to train. Religious politicians turn out to be just as crooked as the people they are trying to replace. And, many times, Christian co-workers are the most difficult to deal with.

Solomon said that "dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). That should tell Christians that manure does in fact matter. It's hard for a man's ears to hear our message when his nose is overwhelmed with the mess we've made.

What can we do? First, you can ask Christ to give you a clean heart. Jesus said that our conduct is a mirror of our inner character. Second, you should use God's plan for personal and professional growth. It might not be as fast and easy as manure but your neighbors will appreciate it more. Finally, you can live for Christ every day. After all, if Christianity is not worth living for; is it worth dying with??

October 2, 1993

LIMITING GOD

The car belonging to one of the Deacons in my church broke down and the garage loaned him a car until they could get his repaired. It happened to be a car they also loaned to the school for driver's education. As we talked after Church the daughter of this Deacon came up and asked if she could drive home. The Deacon said yes, handed her the keys, and whispered for me to watch.

As the family got into the car, the daughter adjusted all the mirrors, cranked the engine, and prepared to back out of the parking lot. But the car wouldn't move. She would put it in gear, mash the gas...and the car would just sit there. Finally the father could hold it in no longer. He burst out laughing and pointed to his foot. Since this was a Driver Education car there was a brake on the passenger side to be used by the instructor. The Deacon had been pressing that brake as his daughter tried to move.

Sad to say, that same sort of thing happens with God. He has everything loaded and ready for us to live a wonderful abundant life but our lives don't go anywhere because we keep our foot on the brake. Nothing is wrong with God's provision, God's plan, or God's Power; it's just that our failure to cooperate limits God.

The Bible says there are two main ways we limit God, Unbelief and Sin in our lives. Unbelief causes us to fail to acquire the blessings God wants to give us. It was said of Israel that instead of entering the Promised Land they "Turned back and tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 78:41). Their unbelief denied them the Promised Land and made them spend forty years dying in the desert.

We also limit God with sin in our lives. Isaiah 43:24 says that God is made to serve with our sins. By that he means that sin in our life causes God to cease working through us and begin working on us. Instead of helping God we must find help from God; while those we are supposed to help go lacking.

Don't limit God. Take your foot off the brake and allow God's work to go forward. You'll find it is a wonderful ride.

July 23, 1994 INTERRUPTIONS

Do you know what causes the greatest stress in your life? Oddly enough, it is interruptions. Most people can handle life when they get to do the normal things or they get to carry out their plans for the day. Stress comes when people, problems, or aggravations interrupt our orderly little world and cause us to continually re-write our schedule.

Jesus was also interrupted as he went about His ministry. People were always interrupting Him and asking Him to heal the sick, feed the hungry, bless the children, answer foolish questions, or even raise the dead. His example in dealing with the stress of these interruptions offers us great insight in handling our own stress.

1) Jesus always responded graciously to interruptions. To Him, People were always more important than programs. Sometimes I find that's not true in my life. I'm more interested in accomplishing my goals than in dealing with the interruptions of people.

2) Jesus dealt with interruptions as they came. He didn't bypass small children or sick women. By dealing with everyone on an equal basis He didn't allow the interruptions to pile up and increase His stress.

3) Jesus didn't allow the Interruptions to side track Him from His main goal. He dealt with the interruptions and kept going. Many people stumble on the interruption and end up sitting by the road crying because things didn't go as they wanted them to go. Jesus always kept His primary goal in mind.

4) Jesus always used the interruptions to reinforce His work. Instead of fighting against the interruptions He would find a way to teach a lesson or accomplish some good from the interruption.

5) Jesus would sometimes find times and places to avoid interruptions in order to have the quiet time He needed with God and friends. Sometimes it's alright to let the phone ring or to take a few days off simply to rest, reflect, and recharge.

Jesus lived in such a way that He utilized the interruptions as well as the opportunities that came His way. And that is the kind of life He calls us to enjoy.

October 5, 1996 THREE DOUGHNUTS

A friend of mine was on her way to meet her mother and her cousin to take care of some business. While on her way, she stopped at a store to get some things she needed. They had a bakery in the store and the fresh doughnuts smelled so good until she decided to get one each for herself, her mother, and her cousin.

When she got in the car with the doughnuts they smelled so good until she decided to go ahead and eat the one she had bought for herself. That one tasted so good until she decided to eat the one she had bought for her cousin because she didn't think he would be there when she arrived. Still hungry, she decided it would be best to eat the doughnut she had bought for her mother so there would be no complications if her cousin had already arrived.

After she arrived at her mother's home everything was fine until they decided to drive her car to take care of their business and questions were asked about the empty doughnut box in the seat!

The Lord has given each of us talents and abilities. And He has given us enough of them so that we can do for ourselves and share with others. What a shame that we become so absorbed with our own desires until we use everything for ourselves and leave nothing for those around us who are hungering to know the peace and the power of the God we proclaim.

October 26, 1996

OUR SIN AND OUR SERVICE

The thing that amazed him was how sticky it was. A mortar shell from the Viet Cong dropped into their midst and suddenly several members of his group simply ceased to exist. Blood and body parts flew everywhere. Oddly, the thing that struck him as the most surprising at the moment was how much blood was contained in a human body and how sticky it was.

When things calmed down he was finally able to wash the blood off his body but he is still having problems washing the memory out of his mind. I find that same problem prevalent among many Christians today.

Many people in our area have had a time in their life that they came to God and asked that the shed blood of Christ wash away their sin debt and bring them into a right relationship with God. The difficulty has come when they found it is one thing to give our past sins to God; and quite another to place our present lives on the altar as well. We thought that washing away the debts of the past would in some way remove the memories and character patterns that developed as we committed these sins.

Our failure comes because we stop at the Cross. The Cross is a great picture of God's love in dealing with His righteous judgment on our sin debt. BUT JESUS DID NOT STAY ON THE CROSS! He went to a tomb where He was resurrected from the dead and given a new life power.

Now we see that God has not only provided a way to deal with our past but He has also empowered us so we can live a new and different life. And that new and different life is what the world is longing to encounter. You see, if we would impact the world for Christ, we must do more than profess our Faith; we must practice Godliness.

November 3, 1996 THE BELLY AND THE BODY

Sometimes Aesop's Fables sound just like they came from the Word of God. And they help illustrate important principles.

One fine day it occurred to the Members of the Body that they were doing all the work and the Belly was having all the food. So they held a meeting, and after a long discussion, decided to strike work till the Belly consented to take its proper share of the work. So for a day or two, the Hands refused to take the food, the Mouth refused to receive it, and the Teeth had no work to do. But after a day or two the Members began to find that they themselves were not in a very active condition: the Hands could hardly move, and the Mouth was all parched and dry, while the Legs were unable to support the rest. So thus they found that even the Belly in its dull quiet way was doing necessary work for the Body, and that all must work together or the Body will go to pieces.

The Bible declares it this way, (1 Cor 12:20-22) But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

Some people think the mouth is the most important part of the Body of Christ. Others lean toward the hand, the knee, or the feet. Yet few seem to realize how important the Belly is to the well-being of the entire Body.

So the next time you are tempted to think you are not a major player in the work of God in your local Church try disregarding your stomach for a few days. You will find you are a lot more important than you thought you were.

March 8, 1997

HOLDING OUT

All the water in the world
However hard it tried,
Could never, never sink a ship
Unless it got inside.

All the evil in the world
The Blackest kind of sin
Can never hurt you one least bit
Unless you let it in!

Many times people talk to me about not being able to “Hold out” and live the Christian life. They sound as if living for Christ is like living in a fort under siege! They seem to think that the Christian life is a constant struggle against an enemy that is stronger and wiser than they are and each day they survive without being overrun by the forces of sin is nothing short of a miracle.

If that is what you call an abundant life of joy and peace then no wonder you have difficulty getting people to become converted to your cause. After all, who wants to become a soldier in an army that is expected to give up everything that could be considered fun in order to drill all day and fight all night in a lifelong battle that there is little hope of winning.

Let me tell you what Jesus really does for you. Not only does He pay your sin debt with His shed blood, but He also sends the Holy Spirit to live in your yielded heart to enable you to become a new person. And that is the way we are empowered to be victorious over the sin that is trying to get into our life and destroy us. We are filled with the Spirit so there is no room for the sin to occupy.

It is not our self-effort of “Holding Out” that gives us the victory. We are victorious because our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and His presence acts as a block to sin and temptation. Life is not a struggle against sin; it is a yielding to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our life. And that is what turns it from agonizing endurance to abundant life.

April 26, 1997 THE NAIL

He had lived in Haiti for a number of years but now his company was transferring him back to the States. He had a wonderful home in a great location and he was only asking Ten thousand dollars as a selling price but the economic conditions were so bad in Haiti at the time until no one could come close to meeting his price.

Finally, someone offered him Five thousand dollars. He didn't want to take it but his transfer time was almost upon him and it was the best offer he could get. After trying several times to get the buyer to up his price the man finally said he would take the Five thousand dollars if the new owner would allow him to keep the ownership of one nail in the house. The buyer didn't see what that would hurt so he agreed.

Several years passed and the man retired from his job in the states. He wanted to return to Haiti for his retirement so he contacted the man to whom he had sold the house and asked him about the possibility of purchasing his home back. By now the economy of Haiti had increased greatly and the house was worth much more than its original price.

After several unsuccessful attempts at purchasing the home the original owner said he wanted to claim the nail he owned in that home and he wanted it to be over the front door of the home. It was in the contract and there was nothing the present owner could do.

Each week the original owner would hang a dead animal on that nail over the front door and allow it to rot. Finally, the present owner could take it no more and ending up selling the home to the original owner.

Many times Satan will approach you and offer you a great deal on some fleshly pleasure. All he will ask in return is that you allow him to keep the ownership of one single nail in your life....

May 10, 1997

SECOND HAND FAITH

(John 4:39-42) And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. {40} So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. {41} And many more believed because of his own word; {42} And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

The Disciples were worried about lunch; Jesus was concerned with saving a town. While the Disciples were out shopping, Jesus was leading the town's most infamous citizen to abandon her promiscuous ways and trust Him as savior. What a way to get a town's attention!

The Samaritan woman then went all over town sharing what had happened to her. Her excitement and enthusiasm were so compelling until many in the town had no choice but to believe that meeting Jesus would indeed change a person. But their faith was built on someone else's experience.

Others in that Samaritan town wanted something deeper than that. They invited Jesus to stay for a two day revival. When it was over their faith was not built on a second hand testimony but on the change in their own heart that came as a result of hearing the word of God for themselves.

Some people have a living, vibrant, trial enduring faith. Others have just a form of godliness. The difference is determined by the source of their faith.

Is your faith built on what your Pastor, your parents, or your friends say? Or do you have a personal faith built on the work of the word of God in your own heart?

July 26, 1997 TRAM LAW

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

Recently I carried my wife to get some dental work done. While she was at the dentist I decided to go to the Post Office to mail our Church newsletter and then go to the bank to arrange for the money to pay for the dentist! When I drove up in the parking lot at the dentist office a song was playing on the radio about the names of God and I wanted to see if I recognized all of them.

While I sat and listened to the song conclude, I looked in the mirror. My car was situated in such a way that the mirror framed the front of the local Wal-Mart. As you know, when you look at something in a mirror you see it backwards [That is the reason the word “ambulance” is spelled backwards on the front of an ambulance. When it comes up behind you and you look in your car mirror then you will be able to read ambulance correctly]. That's why when I looked in the mirror I noticed the tremendously helpful (?) information that Wal-Mart spelled backward is Tram-Law.

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

The problem with looking in mirrors and seeing things backwards is that it gives you the wrong perspective on life and the problems you face. This can lead to wrong actions and thought patterns in your life. Especially if you start looking at human answers for spiritual problems. In the same way that I'd get some confusing directions if I asked people in town for directions to the local Tram-Law store!

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

August 9, 1997

LOSE IT ALL

What would you lose if you lost it all?? Suppose your wife got in a wreck today and she and all your children were killed. Suppose, as a result of that wreck, you were sued and you lost your home, your job, and all your finances. Suppose, finally, that when you went to get another job to try to get back on your feet the physical exam you were required to take found you had a life changing disease called cancer.

That is about what happened to a man called Job in the Bible. He lost his family, his fortune, and his health in one giant swoop. But as we read through his story we find that there were several very important things that he did not lose even when he lost it all.

Job did not lose "The Core of his Character"- (Job 2:3) "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." In spite of all Job lost he retained his honesty, his righteousness, and his self-respect. He did not allow his circumstances to corrupt and destroy him.

Job did not lose "His Respect for God"- (Job 1:20-21) "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped, {21} And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." Job still realized that God was on the throne and he could still trust God's heart even when he could not see God's hand.

Job did not lose "The Testimony of his faith"- (Job 13:15) "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:". Job's testimony about his continued confidence in God in spite of extreme circumstances has been an inspiration and an encouragement to millions through the ages.

During the course of life every man comes to a cross roads in which he either takes up his cross or denies his Lord. When Job came to this place he knew what was important. Even when he lost it all, he did not lose the all that mattered.

August 23, 1997

BABY BOGGLERS

These are some questions we will attempt to answer during our Bible Study this coming Wednesday Night. You might find them thought provoking.

- 1) Will the Babies of the Saved go up in the Rapture?? How about Babies of the Unsaved?
- 2) What was the age limit on the babies Herod Killed? Why?
- 3) How old does a baby have to be in order to go to hell when it dies?
- 4) What baby was named: "The Glory is Departed" "This is not my Child" "God is among us"?
- 5) What baby's cry eventually saved a Nation?
- 6) What diet distinguishes a Baby?
- 7) Christian Babies are to desire what kind of milk?
- 8) What conduct Distinguishes a person as still a Baby Christian?. What characteristics did Jesus expect when He said, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."
- 9) What baby was so excited about meeting his cousin until he leaped for joy even before he was born?
- 10) What Baby was so anxious to be born until he was identified as being the first born even though his twin brother was born first?
- 11) What baby was called to preach before he was born?
- 12) What baby was filled with the Holy Ghost from the time of his birth?
- 13) When does a Baby receive its soul? What happens to the souls of aborted Babies?
- 14) Where will babies play in safety during the millennial Kingdom?
- 15) When did mothers have boiled baby for breakfast?
- 16) What man's wives had a baby war in order to win his affection?
- 17) When does an old man become a Baby??
- 18) Is a Baby born with a nature toward good that is soon corrupted by Society; or is a Baby born Bad?
- 19) What does the Bible mean when it says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6)

August 30, 1997

HITLER, GOD'S MAN

Sometimes Scripture is confusing as well as controversial. Take, for instance, Romans Chapter thirteen verse one-“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

This verse is easy enough to preach and follow when you have a good government. But what about when the leader is a real tyrant. How can we justify saying that the God of Love and Mercy ordained wicked and evil leaders? How can we preach submitting to powers that trample liberty, purity, and the greater welfare of the people under foot?

Two things make this possible; and at the same time show us that God's word can be believed and obeyed even when it appears there is no way it can make sense.

First, we must realize that being subject to higher powers does not disallow our duty as citizens to attempt to make our government as good as it can be. Being in subjection does not always mean being in agreement! Submission does not mean slavery.

Secondly, the Bible points out over and over that God often uses “hired razors” to do His work. Sometimes the building program of God requires that someone do the dirty work of laying foundations. God certainly does not want any of His children to do this dirty work so he allows bad rulers to rule badly in order that later the good part of His plan can be brought to completion.

Take the example of Adolph Hitler. God allowed a horribly wicked man to rule in order that, among other things, the holocaust could bring about a Jewish State and Russia could be brought to super power status. Both are part of God's final plans to set up the thousand year rule of Christ on earth.

Remember, in government as well as in life, God works ALL THINGS together for the good to those who trust Him; and are willing to wait for His plan to be completed.

October 25, 1997

RUMORS

Leviticus 19:16 *Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people:*

Gossip has suddenly become fashionable. "News" shows that expose secrets and open hidden doors are now among the most popular programs on TV. Everyone shakes their heads over the trashy gossip "newspapers" that adorn Check Out counters; and spend their lunch hours talking about what they saw in the one "cousin Clem" purchased. Everyone seems to be trying to find out something bad about everyone else; and the juicier the gossip the better they like it.

While this type attitude is to be expected (although certainly not condoned!) by the wicked world, I am saddened to report that it is becoming increasingly popular among the people of God. Preachers talk about other Preachers, members talk about other members, and the world looks on with wonderment as the church "Bites and devours one another, and is consumed one of another" (Gal 5:15). Most Church splits, many Church problems, and some decline in attendance can be attributed to this very problem.

Church Rumors can also having a major impact on a Business. The latest one making the rounds of Churches today is that Procter and Gamble is giving it's profits to the Church of Satan and that it's symbol is a secret Satanic Symbol. IT IS TOTALLY UNTRUE but many Churches are now supporting boycotts of Procter and Gamble Products because someone gave them an anonymous petition.

Rather than ignore this, Procter and Gamble has sent most churches a packet containing signed affidavits showing this rumor to be false. It's sad that they had to spend this much money denying something the churches should have checked before they jumped on the Rumor bandwagon (They also included a "stick" along with the "carrot" in their mailing; a promise to prosecute anyone caught spreading this untruth).

Another popular UNTRUE Rumor is that Madelyn O'Hair is trying to get all religious broadcasting removed from Radio and TV. It started nearly 10 years ago and, despite the fact that every major Christian magazine has exposed it as untrue, I still receive 3 or 4 request a year to sign a petition about it.

When you hear a rumor the best thing you can do is check the facts. Remember, "the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5). It's hard enough to live in a world where people are continually spilling gas; we certainly don't need anyone playing with matches.

November 29, 1997 TOMBSTONE TESTIMONY

It began partly from curiosity and partly as a result of my “job.” As a Pastor, I have to visit cemeteries on a regular basis; either helping with or attending funerals. And one of the most prominent features of a cemetery is the tombstones.

At first I just noticed them as obstacles to be avoided, but then I began to start looking for the messages on the tombstones. Some contain just the bare facts; name, date of birth, and date of death. That's helpful to some degree because it allowed me to determine how old the person was when they died (Lots and lots of people die very young!!).

If it was a husband and wife tomb it might also contain the wedding date of the couple. That allowed me to see how old they were when they were married (Sometimes people marry VERY young) and how long one lived after the other's death.

Sometimes, however, the tomb will also contain a short saying or a poem. Those are the ones that allow me to see how the person was perceived by their loved ones. In many of them you could almost feel the aching heart of parents for small children or the longing of a husband for a lost wife.

Tombstones indeed have a testimony. Among other things, they tell us that everyone has to die, that many die a lot sooner than they expect, and that those who are left behind will reflect on the way you've lived.

When the tombstone is placed over you will your family rejoice in the life you've lived and look forward to seeing you again in Heaven? Or will it be just cold hard stone over a wasted life and missed opportunities?

January 17, 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 for ever. 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??

March 14, 1998 GETTING A WIFE

I read recently of a man who put a sign by his mail box that read, "Wife Wanted". Seemed like a pretty poor idea until I looked at some ways people got wives in the Bible.

1. Purchase a piece of property and get a wife as part of the deal. --Boaz (Ruth 4:5-10)
2. Find a prostitute and marry her. --The Prophet Hosea (Hosea 1:1-3)
3. Find a man with seven daughters, and impress him by watering his flock. --Moses (Ex 2:16-21)
4. Find an attractive prisoner of war, bring her home, shave her head, trim her nails, and give her new clothes. Then she's yours. --Deuteronomy 21:11-13
5. Go to a party and hide. When the women come out to dance, grab one and carry her off to be your wife. --Benjaminites (Judges 21:19-25)
6. When you see someone you like, go home and tell your parents, "I have seen a ... woman; now get her for me." If your parents question your decision, simply say, "Get her for me. She's the one for me." --Samson (Judges 14:1-3)
7. Agree to work seven years in exchange for a woman's hand in marriage. Get tricked into marrying the wrong woman. Then work another seven years for the woman you wanted to marry in the first place.--Jacob (Genesis 29:15-30)
8. Kill any husband and take HIS wife. (Prepare to lose four sons though.) --David (2 Samuel 11)
9. Wait for your brother to die. Then take his wife. --Onan (Gen 38:8. See Deut 25:5-6)
10. Have God create a wife for you while you sleep. Note: this one will cost you a rib. --Adam (Genesis 2:19-24)

Just goes to show that people sometimes get married for various and strange reasons. My advice, however, is that you pray that God would lead you to the one God has for you. That way you will know she is the right one that will be an helpmate for the journey instead of a heartache for life - (Prov 18:22) Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

March 21, 1998 THE POWER OF PRAYER

USA TODAY had a very interesting article in its March 12th 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.

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 has 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 Counselors 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 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 King 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 18, 1998 MUSIC MINISTRY

MUSIC CONVEYS A MESSAGE. Advertisers have known for years that if you put your message in a song then you will put it into the mind to stay (Think about how many times you find yourself humming the words of a commercial without any thought). This message in Music can Teach us (the Books of the Bible Song); Calm us (Jesus Loves me); and Encourage us (Just a little Boy David) [Notice that I chose songs that even the small children know so you can see that Music also transcends all age groups].

That is why it is so important that you chose the right music for your mind. Music that glorifies wrong behavior, stresses rebellion against moral and social standards, and fills your mind with vulgar language cannot help but have a negative influence on your attitude and conduct. I am not saying that it is wrong to have different tastes in music. You simply need to be aware that if you walk through mud that some of it will cling to you; and who wants mud spread all through their mind!

Here are some ways that Music can be a Positive influence in your life:

1. When seeking for the Will of God: When Elisha was asked to give the king advice about how to defeat the Moabites he allowed music to help in the process -II Kings 3:15 *But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.*
2. When faced with a "bad Spirit": I Sam 16:23 *And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.*
3. To Defeat your enemy: II Chron 20:21-22 *And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.*

Music is also a good way of expressing happy feelings- James 5:13 *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.* I pray you will be blessed today to such a degree until everyone around you will see the smile on your lips and hear the song in your heart. You will be amazed at what a joyful song will do for you; and for those around you.

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 emphasis 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 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 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 20, 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 solist 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 28, 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 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 25, 1998 FUNNY

A Lady in Kansas emailed me the following article. I thought it stressed some very important points about the value we put on temporary items as compared to eternal values. I hope it will speak to your heart about what is really important in your life.

Funny how a \$10.00 bill looks so big when you take it to church, but so small when you take it to the supermarket.

Funny how big an hour serving God looks and how small those same 60 minutes seem when spent playing golf, fishing or playing bridge. Funny how people will wait in line, pay big money, and sit for 3 hours to watch a movie while telling everyone they would go to church except they just can't sit for an hour.

Funny how we get thrilled when a football game goes into over-time, but we complain when a sermon goes past noon.

Funny how laborious it is to read a chapter in the Bible and how easy it is to read 200-300 pages of a best-selling novel.

Funny how we believe what newspapers say, but question what the Bible says.

Funny how people crowd to get a front seat at any game, but scramble to get a back seat at church services.

Funny how we cannot fit a gospel meeting into our schedule with a yearly planner, but we can schedule for other events at a moment's notice.

Funny, isn't it? Funny how difficult it is for some people to learn a simple gospel well enough to tell others, but how easy it is for the same people to understand and explain gossip about anyone. Funny how we can't think of anything to say when we pray but don't have any difficulty thinking of things to talk about to a friend.

Funny how everyone wants to go to heaven, provided they do not have to believe, or think, or say, or do anything.

Is it really "Funny" the way we trick ourselves into believing we are fooling God with excuses and lifestyles that don't even fool us?

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 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 awhile, 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.

September 12, 1998 SALVATION SIGN POST

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 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.”

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 24, 1998

SQUEAKY DRYERS

I guess I should not complain. After all, we purchased the dryer shortly after we were married, almost 29 years ago. But it is located just outside my office door and for the past few months it has increasingly been a source of irritation to me. It began with a small little “squeak” every now and then as my wife would dry clothes. Week by week the “squeak” became more and more frequent; and the volume became more and more unbearable.

After helping one of the men of the Church do some work recently, I decided that since I was in my work clothes I would go ahead and either fix the dryer; or “bite the bullet” and replace it. I pulled the dryer away from the wall to see what I needed to do and noticed a small trap door on the back of the dryer. I unloosed one screw and the door opened to reveal the cylinder post for the dryer drum. It looked rusty so I put one glob of household grease on it and tried the dryer. Now it works whisper quiet!!

I could have kicked myself for enduring that irritating noise for so long when it took less than a five minute job to correct it. In the same way, I often find myself putting off dealing with other “squeaky” areas in my life because I think they will be long and involved. More often than not, however, they could be solved very quickly if I would just take time to deal with them.

I don't know what is “squeaking” in your life but I do that God has just the “grease” you need to bring things back into quietness and order. But the longer you procrastinate the worst the “squeak” will become. Why don't you pray to God for a way to deal with your difficulty today so you can enjoy peace and “dry clothes” all at the same time!

October 31, 1998

UPSIDE DOWN SPOONS

I did not have any sisters so my three brothers and I had to take turns washing dishes. I don't like washing dishes. When I married a wife I gave up washing dishes on a regular basis except during an emergency or sickness. My wife is very understanding about my dislike for dish washing and she tells me that she doesn't try to preach for me and I don't have to wash dishes for her!

After we were married for a few years, I decided to "butter" her up by washing the dishes for her one afternoon while she was visiting her mother. I expected her to come in and really rave about how thoughtful I was for washing dishes for her. Did she deflate my balloon. Instead of telling me how nice I was, the first thing she did was tell me the spoon I had washed were lying in the drain the wrong way. So much for buttering up your wife!

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

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

If sin is continually defeating you today, maybe you're facing the wrong way. Turn over and let the sin drain out of your life. After all, God does not want to simply wash you from pass sins, He wants to help you live pure in the present. And that is the life of peace and joy you have been looking for.

November 7, 1998 WATERFALL WARNING

Recently our church surprised my assistant pastor and myself with a Pastor Appreciation Gift. It was a very welcome and wonderful act of kindness and was greatly appreciated by both of us.

During the presentation, the chairman of the Deacon board shared a dream he had the night before. He told the Church that he had gone to bed knowing he would be giving a short speech before he presented us our gift but he just couldn't seem to find the right words to express what he wanted to say.

He said his dream started out as a boat ride on a river. As he looked around he found many of the church members in the same boat with him; and with many other boats all around him. Everything was pleasant and joyful until suddenly he was able to pull away from the scene and look further down the river. There he found dangerous rapids full of rocks and whirlpools. And as his vision stretched even further he saw that the gentle flowing river suddenly turned into a swift torrent just before it plunged over a gigantic water fall.

In his dream, he watched in horror as boats entered that torrent and plunged people to destruction over that waterfall. In his mind he looked back at the boats with all his family and friends and wanted desperately to tell them of the impending dangers. Suddenly, he saw people racing along the bank beside the boats yelling warnings to them. As he looked closer he saw that these people were his pastor and assistant pastor.

There were few dry eyes in the church as he presented us with our gift and told us that the real reason he appreciated the pastoral leadership of the Church was because it used its time and effort to try to steer his family and friends into the calm waters of salvation instead of allowing them to remain on that river of destruction.

May God help every pastor to faithfully guide his congregation so they will avoid the rocks and rapids that life sends their way. And may they continually warn them of the destructive "waterfall" that is at the end of every man's river.

November 14, 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 inabilities to get life to work. Come to God and let Him "repair" you today.

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 aggravates 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 much function 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.

January 2, 1999 DAY OF THE DIET

More diets begin on the second day of January than on all the other days of the year combined! Everyone wants to “pig out” during Christmas and New Year's Day but they know the dreaded “day of the diet” is coming.

All of the exercise equipment and exercise videos they purchased for Christmas must now be put to use. With fire in their eyes and determination on their lips they begin to shed those unwanted pounds. The good news is that some people will remain steadfast for as much as a week!

If it wasn't for people's tendency not to admit defeat, you could pick up used exercise equipment for a song in February. And I could probably clothe a third world nation with all the clothes people have in their closet that are just a little snug. They steadfastly refuse to discard them because they are going to be able to wear them one day. They eventually come in handy when you're dusting the house or changing the oil in your car.

Let me give you some common sense advice that will help you with your diet, as well as with your spiritual life. The Bible states that it is “The little foxes that spoil the vine” (Song 2:15). Most people's pounds come from their snacks between meals and not from the meals. Go for a week without eating anything between meals and see what a difference it will make. Remember, losing an ounce a day means you lose two pounds a month; which translates into twenty four pounds a year! And that is the goal of most people.

In the same way, you can deal with those little sins that keep you depressed and discouraged. After all, most people are not tempted to rob banks, they are tempted to talk about their neighbor or allow anger to control them or some other “little” sin. Learn to guard against these “little sins” in your life and you will find that the big ones seem to take care of themselves.

You can lose those pounds; and you can be a victorious Christian. Simply do it a step at a time. The change in life style will lower the size of your pants and increase the size of your testimony. And isn't that what you really want?

October 20, 1999

SPIDER WEB SECURITY

In days gone by, a daredevil attempted to climb one of the tallest buildings in New York using only his hands and feet for grips. From crack to crack he climbed as he worked his way ever higher. A large crowd gathered below to watch as he laboriously made his ascent. Suddenly, everyone heard a blood curling scream as this man plunged to his death.

When police were examining his body they noticed his hand was tightly clinched. Upon prying it open, they found he was clutching a handful of spider webs. Time and dust had made the spider web look like part of the building. When the climber grabbed it he made a life ending mistake.

Life is tough. Sometimes it feels as if you, like this man, must climb a great building with very limited resources. Marriage is not like the movies, your kids turned from happy bubbly babies into heart attack producing teens, and your money keeps making itself wings and flying away.

Day by day you struggle on this upward trek; and sometimes it feels as if your energy and enthusiasm are about gone. During these tough times it becomes all too easy to grab something without testing it first- Maybe I'll be lucky gambling today, maybe this one hit of drugs will provide the energy I need without hooking me, maybe an affair is what I need, ...

Sadly, as this climber found out, this can lead to disastrous results. Be careful of those spider webs you grab.