

## 2002 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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

January 1, 2002	BIBLE BLESSINGS	July 2, 2002	BOOK BOX
January 2, 2002	THE JAMES GENERATION	July 3, 2002	FREEDOM'S CHOICE
January 8, 2002	RESISTING TEMPTATION	July 9, 2002	SHARING THE SORROW
January 9, 2002	MAKING FAITH WORK	July 10, 2002	JUST A WORD
January 15, 2002	LEARNERS LEARNING	July 16, 2002	WRONG PAGE
January 16, 2002	YOU ARE A WINNER	July 17, 2002	CHESS CONSIDERATION
January 22, 2002	TEACHER TIT-BITS	July 23, 2002	AMAZING CHRIST
January 23, 2002	WALKER'S WORTH	July 24, 2002	AMAZING CHRIST
January 29, 2002	PERSONAL MESSENGER	July 31, 2002	APPEARANCES
January 30, 2002	CONTEMNED COUNSEL	August 6, 2002	PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY
February 5, 2002	OOPS	August 7, 2002	DEATH VALLEY FEAR
February 6, 2002	CITRIS	August 13, 2002	FIRE FAILURE
February 12, 2002	COLD CHRISTIANS	August 14, 2002	PROFIT VERSES
February 13, 2002	NEGLECT	August 20, 2002	TRAVEL REQUIREMENTS
February 19, 2002	SEX STANDARDS	August 21, 2002	POTTER PRINCIPLES
February 20, 2002	FENCED IN BY FAITH	August 27, 2002	HOG PEN PATIENCE
February 26, 2002	FEAR OF FLYING	August 28, 2002	PAUL ON PREACHERS
February 27, 2002	LOCKED IN	September 3, 2002	THE COUNTERFEIT FATHER
March 5, 2002	STRANGE SERVICES	September 4, 2002	GOD AND SIN
March 6, 2002	PASSING IMPACT	September 10, 2002	DOING YOUR BEST
March 12, 2002	FROST	September 11, 2002	TERRORIST TRUTHS
March 13, 2002	FIREWOOD	September 17, 2002	THRILLS THAT KILL
March 19, 2002	PERFECT HATRED?	September 18, 2002	SWINE SNOUT STANDARDS
March 20, 2002	THINGS FOR THOUGHT	September 24, 2002	WHAT MORE?
March 26, 2002	BUFFET OR BRING YOUR OWN	September 25, 2002	THORN TROUBLES
March 27, 2002	PROVIDENTIAL PENNIES	October 1, 2002	MORE THAN I THOUGHT
April 2, 2002	THE PATH	October 2, 2002	SING SONG SERMON
April 3, 2002	LIFE CHANGING FAITH	October 8, 2002	Worry
April 9, 2002	WILDERNESS WORD	October 9, 2002	REASONABLE SERVICE
April 10, 2002	TRUST AND CONFIDENCE	October 15, 2002	MIRACLE MISSION MAIL
April 16, 2002	BELOVED BELIEVERS	October 16, 2002	PRAYER PARTNER POWER
April 17, 2002	SUDDEN DEATH STABILITY	October 22, 2002	CAN I GET A TESTIMONY?
April 23, 2002	ROTTEN SEED	October 23, 2002	EFFECTIVE CHURCH MEMBERS
April 24, 2002	DEATH BENEFITS	October 29, 2002	TITHER'S TESTIMONY
April 30, 2002	PSALMS BLESSED MAN	October 30, 2002	WAGGED BY WORRY
May 1, 2002	UTILIZE THE WORD	November 5, 2002	ASSURED ASSURANCES
May 7, 2002	CROWN MOUNTAIN	November 6, 2002	PERSUADED
May 8, 2002	LIFE'S SONG	November 12, 2002	FIVE FINGERS
May 14, 2002	STRENGTH LIMITATIONS	November 13, 2002	BANANA PEEL SALVATION
May 15, 2002	BUILDING STRENGTH	November 19, 2002	WORD WORK
May 21, 2002	PROBLEM PERSPECTIVE	November 20, 2002	BREAKFAST BLESSING
May 22, 2002	GENERATIONAL TRUTH	November 26, 2002	OUTER SPACE PRAISE
May 28, 2002	PERSECUTION EXPECTED	November 27, 2002	PUBLIC PRAISE
May 29, 2002	BETTER THAN BIRDS	December 3, 2002	SAINTLY SIGNS
June 4, 2002	UNCAR GARAGE	December 4, 2002	SORRY SAINT SIGNS
June 5, 2002	THE SWITCH	December 10, 2002	CHAMAD CHRISTMAS
June 11, 2002	NEW SONG	December 11, 2002	MESSIAH'S MISSION
June 12, 2002	FATHER'S WILL	December 17, 2002	Flash Lights
June 18, 2002	TRAIN TROUBLE	December 18, 2002	SERVANT SAVIOR
June 19, 2002	BLINDED TO SEE	December 24, 2002	A CHRISTMAS DEVOTION
June 25, 2002	GAS MONEY	December 25, 2002	MERRY CHRISTMAS
June 26, 2002	DELIGHTFUL DEVOTIONS		

## January 1, 2002 BIBLE BLESSINGS

Looking for a way to change your life for the better in 2002? Try adding a daily regimen of reading God's Word. It will produce positive changes in your character and conduct that will be a blessing to you and to all around you. Here are just a few things that reading and meditating on the Word of God can do for you.

1) Produce a Clean Life- Ps 119:9 *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.* It has been wisely said that the Word of God will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Word of God. A daily "bath" in the word helps clean up the daily defilement you receive from walking in the world.

2) Give Victory over Sin- Ps 119:11 *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* Jesus used the word of God to defeat Satan's attacks and so can you. You do not have to live in defeat and despair, victorious living is found in applying God's Word to life's problems.

3) Generate a Deeper Understanding of Life- Ps 119:104 *Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.* Life is a puzzle. Disease, death, and destruction come knocking on your door when you least expect it. You can grit your teeth and try to bear it or you can allow the Word of God to give you hope and help in the midst of all circumstances.

4) Bring Peace to your heart and life- Ps 119:165 *Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.* It is the Word of God that produces Faith in our heart which leads us to trust Jesus Christ as our Savior; thus allowing us to have peace with God. It is the Word of God that gives us a Heavenly view of the chaos all around us; thus enabling us to distinguish between temporary problems and eternal potential!

God's Word can make a difference in your life. But only if you take the time to make it a part of your daily routine- then it will revolutionize your actions and your attitude.

## January 2, 2002 THE JAMES GENERATION

What goal would I like to see adopted by Christians for the coming year? Easy answer for me. The goal I would like to see Christians strive toward this year is for them to become the "James Generation".

The Bible book of James is built on the premise that "Faith without works is dead, being alone". In other words, a religion that stirs your mind without changing the way you live is utterly worthless. Putting our Faith to work is a principle I would like to see Christians live by in the coming year (and always!).

A "James Generation" would stop hiding inside Church walls and begin making a difference in their community. A "James Generation" would demand an end to ear tickling placebo devotions and expect Bible based, life changing, Principle packed, sermons. They would no longer go to Church just to learn how to feel good; they would realize that feeling good came when they denied themselves, took up their cross, and followed the example of Jesus in all areas of their life.

Society continues its downward spiral of blasphemous talk, sexual glorification, and self-indulgence. Yet, we have never had more churches; and never have they been better equipped to do the task assigned to them by God. The problem seems to be an abundance of talk with very little action. The only thing that will change this is if we become a "James Generation".

## January 8, 2002 RESISTING TEMPTATION

Temptation tempts us by sneaking into our mind and heart. Temptation tramples us by suddenly stampeding the desire for wrong desires into our life. Temptation taunts us by exposing the beauty and pleasure of sin and then singing her siren song of unmet needs. Temptation is a foe we all must fight. Here are some ways to win the battles.

1. **GUARD YOUR GOING-** (Prov 4:14-15) *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.* If you walk by the Devil's house you will be invited in!
2. **TRANSFORM YOUR THINKING-** (Rom 12:1-2) *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* Recognize Temptation as harm to defeat you instead of a help to delight you.
3. **EXERCISE SELF CONTROL-** (1 Cor 9:27) *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* The limits you put on your life will end up giving you more pleasure than the pleasure you limited would have given you.
4. **BE ACCOUNTABLE-** (James 5:16) *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, ....* Ever notice how easy it is to overcome temptation when others are watching? Remember that.
5. **RELY ON GOD'S HELP-** (1 Cor 10:13) *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* Don't allow sin's spotlight to blind you to God's search light that is pointing the way to avoid wrecking on life's rocks. God wants you to win and He will help you.

## January 9, 2002 MAKING FAITH WORK

Recently, I came across a simple statement by the apostle Paul that just exploded with meaning in my mind- (Gal 5:6) *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.* What a principle! The energizing force in Faith is Love. When I simply try to educate the mind of people who struggle with Faith I am dealing with the wrong need. It is not that they can't understand just as well as anyone else; the problem stems from a hindrance or blockage in their love relationship with God.

Faith comes by education (Rom 10:17) but its motivating force stems from love. Sometimes a person is abandoned or abused by their parents, a close friend, or a mate. Many times these people find it difficult to have the right kind of faith because they have been "burned" before by someone they trusted. Their mind will say they trust God but their heart is afraid to make that complete leap of trust which is the very foundation of faith.

This exposes the hindrance to Faith as fear; fear of total commitment or fear of lack of ability to build a lasting relationship. And these are exactly the reasons unsaved people give me as to why they are not willing to come to Christ for Salvation; they fear the changes that will take place in their life or they fear they can't "hold out" if they decide for God.

The answer to this fear is to understand fully the love that God has for you (*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:* (I John 4:18)). I pray you will truly see God's love today. It will cause your faith to work and your life to change.

**January 15, 2002**

## **LEARNERS LEARNING**

Paul talked about people who would be “ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Tim 3:7). Sadly, that seems to be happening in many churches today. Teachers and teaching resources are supposed to be better than ever but the moral climate continues to become increasingly worse.

I don’t think the problem comes from the fact that the Bible has suddenly become irrelevant or that God can no longer bring about change in the hearts and lives of people. I believe the main problem is that teachers are teaching in such a way that learners are not learning.

There are 3 test of teaching that determines if real learning has taken place. Keep them in mind the next time you prepare a Sunday School lesson or preach a sermon. Learning only takes place when the Student can:

1) Rethink the Thought. If the learner can only repeat back to you what you have said to them then they are memorizing the message instead of learning the truth. A lesson must be given in such a way until the student can translate the truth being taught into something that is understandable to them.

2) Apply the Application. Knowledge in the head that cannot be translated into activity in the life has little use. If you want students to be “better people” then tell them how they can achieve that goal.

3) Pass the Principle. If the student cannot pass back to you; and to others, the objective of the lesson then they have not really learned it yet. It becomes their own when they able to give it away!

Jesus said that men have become “dull of hearing”. Maybe if teachers will sharpen their teaching then it will help with the hearing.

**January 16, 2002**

## **YOU ARE A WINNER**

Evidently my Dad had it wrong. He told me that hard work would eventually pay off. Or providing a product that would benefit people would absolutely lead to success. But evidently my Dad did not know how the system really works.

So I am thinking about going into a new business. I plan to begin allowing people to give me a \$100 dollar bill every time they feel down. In return, I will give them back a stack of \$74 one dollar bills and say to them, “You are a winner!”. That stack of one dollar bills will make them think they have really hit the jack pot, (and when they finally do the math, it should really help their education!), and it will make me filthy rich.

Think of all the good I could do with money flowing in like that. I could buy groceries for the kids going hungry because their dad had given me all the grocery money so I could tell him he was a winner. Or I could buy clothes or pay rent for all the “winners”. Wow, wouldn’t that be great.

The only problem I have with this scheme is that I will have to face God one day; and I’m afraid He would not declare me a winner for taking advantage of people’s weakness- (Jeremiah 17:11) As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.

January 22, 2002

## TEACHER TIT-BITS

The Bible declares that Teaching is more important than performing miracles or being able to heal people- I Cor 12:28 *And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, AFTER THAT miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.* With that in mind let me share some Tit-bits about teaching that may help you in this extremely important part of the work of God.

Teaching is planting an acorn with the expectation that in the future many will rest in the shade of the oak.

Teachers should question more answers instead of answering more questions.

The higher your predictability, the lower your impact. For teaching to be exciting you must get excited about teaching.

Teaching is what you do; learning is what your students do. What is important is not what you do as a teacher, but what the learners do as a result of what you do (Example of music lessons. You don't go to the recital to hear the teacher play but to hear your child play!)

In the teaching of every lesson someone must suffer. If the teacher does not suffer before the class then the students will suffer during the class! If preparation is not made weekly then presentation will be made weakly.

**One Final Thought:** Ro 2:2-23 *Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?*

January 23, 2002

## WALKER'S WORTH

The sun had yet to peek above the horizon. It was bitterly cold and I hated getting out of the house but my van windows had to be scrapped off (one of these days I will have a carport!) so I could see how to drive to work. As I looked past the van toward the highway I noticed a person walking on the road. Closer inspection revealed a lady walking on this bitterly cold day as part of her diet program.

I had just finished my devotions in my warm house when I saw this lady walking. Somehow her courage and dedication brought shame and reproach to my hurried Bible reading and prayers. How would I have reacted if God would have told me to stand outside in the cold to show that I really meant business when I was spending time with Him? Was my dedication that day more a "sop" to God or a desire for a blessing than it was a commitment of my life and talents to the service of my God and my King?

Daily I tell God that I want to walk with Him that day. But what if that walk required a pre-dawn stroll in the bitter cold? The lady who was walking was seeking to lose a few pounds so she could look better to others and feel better about herself. What am I willing to do in order to do a better job of showing Jesus in my life and to become a better servant of God?

May God help me that my commitment to Him will push me to walk in the cold as well as read in comfort.

**January 29, 2002**

## **PERSONAL MESSENGER**

Recently the bank where we do business closed. Generous Free Will Baptists in South Carolina give over a Million Dollars a year to the work of God through our office so I thought it would be easy to find another bank. Bad thought.

Over a dozen banks later I was confounded at the attitude of banks. They simply didn't seem very interested in our money. They would read me their terms off a chart and say I could take it or leave it; and I promptly left it. Finally, I went to the bank I knew I should have gone to the entire time. In five minutes they changed their terms to meet the terms I wanted and we were busy signing papers.

Why didn't I go to this bank first? It is all the way across town and I hated the thought of fighting Florence traffic every day to make my deposit. Here is the "Glory" part. Not only did this bank agree to my terms but they provide a messenger that comes by my office every day to pick up my deposits and return my receipts! I'll bank with a bank like that.

When I first heard about Christ I knew I needed to accept Him as my personal Savior but, like a lot of people, I listened to Satan's lie that I couldn't live the Christian life. When I finally repented of my sins and trusted Christ I found a wonderful thing; the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in my body to give me the strength and wisdom I need so I can live for God (Excuse me but "Glory!").

Thank God for salvation and for the wonderful Holy Spirit who deposits my "prayer check" at the throne of God every day so I can live for God down here and be prepared to meet Him up there.

**January 30, 2002**

## **CONTEMNED COUNSEL**

*Ps 107:10-12 (Some) sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.*

Sitting in Darkness and in the Shadow of death, bound in affliction and iron- What a horrible way to live. Why would God allow such things to happen to His people? What would bring about such a state of affairs?

They rebelled against the words of God (Ignored what God told them) and Contemned the Counsel of the most High. The word "Contemned" here means to hold in contempt, to despise, disdain, or scorn. We could translate it, "They laughed at God's Advice".

Lesson for us to learn. When you refuse to listen to God the consequences can be catastrophic. You lose the Light of God's direction (sitting in Darkness), the dread of death becomes your constant companion (in the Shadow of Death), and habits and hardships capture your life (bound in affliction and iron).

So what are you doing about God's guidance in your life? Do you seek by prayer and the reading of God's Word to learn the path God has for you to walk or do you holding in contempt the counsel of your creator? It makes a difference, in this life and in the eternity to come.



## February 5, 2002      OOPS

A friend told me this supposedly true story. A woman was taking a shower when her 2 year old came into the bathroom and wrapped himself in toilet paper. He looked so cute until she ran and got her camera and took several pictures. When the pictures came back she and her husband decided to use them in their Christmas cards that year. Not long after they had mailed out the cards a friend called and told them to take a really hard look at the picture. That is when the woman noticed that in taking the picture of her child she had also included her nude reflection in the bathroom mirror! OOPS!

I wonder if that is the sort of thing the writer of Hebrews was referring to when he said, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in (God’s ) sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Hebrews 4:13)

What a shock it is going to be for many people when they find that everything about their life is completely exposed before God. They live life for the laughs but what will happen when they see that the heart of their heart is “naked and opened” before God?

Thankfully, God can change an “OOPS” into a “Glory!”. Jesus died on a cruel cross in order that whosoever will may come to God and receive a robe of righteousness to cover their nakedness and make them a part of God’s family. So if a sudden picture would expose you in an embarrassing way why don’t you come to Christ and let Him reflect His righteousness instead of your shame.

## February 6, 2002      CITRIS

In a recent Pastor’s workshop, Rev Jerry Norris shared with the Pastors six methods of witnessing. He called it “CITRIS” witnessing because that is the first letter of each method.

Witnessing for Jesus is one of the most important duties of a Christian so I thought it would be good to share these methods with the readers of this column.

Confrontational Witnessing. You confront the person to whom you are talking with the indisputable facts of a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun and you show them the only door to Heaven is Jesus Christ.

Intellectual Witnessing. Paul in the book of Acts many times would use a logical, scholarly approach to get men to see their need of turning from self to the Savior.

Testimonial Witnessing. When Jesus healed the Blind Man, the Blind Man then testified that this one thing I know, “I was blind but now I see!” One of the most effective witnesses is one who is testifying of something that happened to them personally.

Relational Witnessing. You build a relationship and then use that as a foundation for telling someone about Christ.

Invitational Witnessing. You don’t just share information you give the person an opportunity to respond to Christ.

Service Witnessing. You witness through your life and actions so the person will want to hear what you say.

## **February 12, 2002      COLD CHRISTIANS**

Why are so many Christians failing to make a difference in their family and community? I believe the answer lies in the fact that too many Christians have the wrong temperature; they are cold instead of hot. Instead of being an example of God's work they have become a need of God's work!

What would cause such a horrible condition? It begins when they lose their first love. They begin to covet what the world has instead of cry over where the world is going. This leads them to straddle the fence of life as they put one foot in God's camp and one foot in the world. Suddenly hot dedication has become lukewarm living.

Then the weeds begin to grow in their life—"the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and their life becomes unfruitful." (Mark 4:19). And when the fruit fails their principles begin to plummet. Things they knew were a sin while they were close to God they now think might be all right under certain circumstances.

Gradually, bad thoughts, bad language, and bad companions all sprout among the weeds and combine to defeat their Christian Life. Self needs and wants become the primary concern in their life and God's ways become an irritant and a nuisance. Christianity has changed from a relationship with God into a bothersome religion that they must endure to keep face in society and give them hope of Heaven some distant day.

Cold Christianity; the worst thing that could happen to a person (2 Peter 2:20-21). One final question. When God takes your temperature today, what will it read?

## **February 13, 2002      NEGLECT**

Love survives almost everything; except neglect. Troubles and tribulations seem to make love thrive instead of decline. Sickness and circumstances make love grow instead of withering it away. But Neglect, that is a Love Killer.

Love is such a weird animal anyway. It causes nearly normal Teens to go completely crazy. It makes sensible Adults act like crazed Teenagers. And it motivates people to agree to live with someone that gets on their last nerve and acts in a way that would be unthinkable for them to put up with in someone else. Yet, one of the few things that will wound this animal is to be neglected, disregarded, or shirked.

Amazingly, that same principle applies in a relationship with God. God comes to us in Love and expects us to return that Love to Him. No matter how much we serve or give or do it is all hollow to God unless done from a heart of Love. And the eyes of God see right through love that is faked.

If I never read my wife's love letters, if I never talked with her except when I really needed something, if I tried to spend all my time with others instead of with her; our Love would suffer and shrivel. If I never read the Bible, never pray except in an emergency, and seldom attend Church my relationship with God will begin to deteriorate and dry up.

Love survives almost everything except neglect. Are you neglecting it?



## **February 19, 2002      SEX STANDARDS**

I believe that the need of intimacy was recognized from the very beginning by God and He immediately made provision for the man by providing him a wife. I believe that God instituted this intimacy to be enjoyed within the boundaries of a Marriage relationship. I believe that if a man and woman marry and follow the sexual guidelines listed in the Word of God then they will be fulfilled sexually, physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially.

I believe that sexual relationships outside of marriage are wrong in any generation and any culture. I believe that pornography, perversion, pedophilia, and prostitution are wrong. I believe that sexually acts in marriage should be mutually agreed upon and regularly engaged in (I Corinthians 7:1-5)

I believe that Marriage is a public commitment made by a man and a woman for the fulfillment of God's plan for their life. I believe that if a man or woman is not willing to make such a commitment then living together will not correct the flaw or justify the wrong before God. I believe that Marriage should be a life long commitment of faithfulness and fidelity of a man and woman to each other, "until death do us part".

Society today has determined to use sexual titillation as a means to sell products, get viewers for TV programs and Movies, and appeal to the baser instincts of the human animal. If you fall into the sexual trap it will destroy your health, your home, and your holiness. Within the boundaries set by God it is a great friend. Outside those boundaries it is a ferocious foe. And every day you must make the choice about which side of the fence you will walk on.

## **February 20, 2002      FENCED IN BY FAITH**

Recently I went back to the Church I used to Pastor in order to allow my wife to attend the Ladies Meeting. After the service I drove behind the church in order to see how the remodeling work on the Sanctuary was progressing. That is when I noticed heavy equipment across the ditch cleaning up around a cemetery. When I came to the stop sign to go out onto the main road I noticed a new name sign pointing toward where the cemetery was being cleaned.

The question I asked my wife was, "What about all those graves outside the cemetery that are being driven over by the equipment making the fenced in cemetery more accessible. It appears that only the fenced in graves are important."

After thinking about it for a while, I began to realize that Christians are a lot like those fenced in graves. A Christian lives his life "fenced in" by the grace of God which limits the trials and tribulations that can come his way. At his death a Christian is "fenced in" by his faith as he goes to be with God while those without the fence face the terrible torment of their fatal choice.

Even when Christ returns in glory it will be the "Dead in Christ" who come with Him. Those "without the fence" will be left until the final judgment morning when they will be judged by the King of kings and Lord of lords.

I may be so poor until I will be buried outside the fence of man's cemetery but I'm glad I'm inside the fence of God's Love.

## **February 26, 2002      FEAR OF FLYING**

All his life he talked about wanting to visit Hawaii and see the beauties of this tropical island. Finally, friends and family decided to surprise him on his retirement with an all-expense paid trip to Hawaii. Imagine their shock when they presented him his gift and he began to wail in distress. Finally, he calmed down enough to tell them that the reason he had not gone to Hawaii before was because he had an overwhelming fear of flying! He was not prepared to follow his dream when it finally came true!

One thing I have noticed in my study of the life of Jesus is that He did not invite people to be saved! That was his purpose (The Son of man is come to seek and save that which is lost- Matt 18:11) but it was not His Invitation. His invitation always involved people denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Him. Jesus did not simply ask people to put their Faith in Him, He required that they commit to Follow Him.

I believe that many people will spend eternity apart from God because they are willing to BECOME a Christian but they are not willing to BE a Christian! They are willing to make a profession of faith in Christ but they are not willing to allow Christ to control their life and change their actions. To them salvation is simply granting God the privilege of their faith. But Christ always called men to abandon their life style and accept His life goals- Fishermen were to become fishers of men. Matthew would stop collecting taxes and begin giving out bread.

God wants you to be saved. You desperately need to be saved. But it is more than dreaming about Heaven. It is being willing to get on the "plane" and make the trip.

## **February 27, 2002      LOCKED IN**

The phone call came late at night; and as a very great surprise. The local police department was calling to tell the assistant manager that there was a person locked in the store where she worked and someone needed to come unlock the door! The shopper had come into the store right at closing time and no one had seen her when a last scan was made of the premises.

The store manager said that several announcements had been made over the PA system saying that the store was closing but the shopper had evidently ignored them. The Shopper was so busy with her shopping until she did not realize there was no one else in the store until she decided to leave and found the doors were locked.

Sadly, there is coming a day when people will not be locked in; they will be locked out! It happened in Noah's day when people ignored God's warning because they were so absorbed in their own concerns. Then came that fatal day when the rain drops started falling and their knocks on the door of the ark were ignored. Locked out, forever.

Soon it will happen again. God has sent warning after warning about His soon coming Judgment but people are so absorbed with life here until they don't stop to think about life here after. Suddenly, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, the door will close and they will be locked out. And when Jesus closes a door, no manager, or anyone else, can open it!

## March 5, 2002    STRANGE SERVICES

Been a strange week of services. Sunday night everyone showed up at the church I attended because the Pastor had recently passed away. Monday night the preacher did not show up at the Revival I attended. Tuesday night at another Revival things went pretty “normal”. Wednesday night no one showed up at the Church I attended but me!

Wednesday night when I arrived the Church was dark and cold and ten minutes after time to start it was still dark and cold. Can’t defeat me, I’ll go to another Church. Arrived at another church and it was dark and cold. Finally found some people back in the fellowship building but they were about finished with their brief service before having a fellowship meal and I didn’t want to barge in on that so God and I met together for Prayer in my van and I went home.

Reminded me of a short Revival I was in many years ago. God simply would not give me any messages to preach. I prayed and cried and begged and ended up every night simply giving a different version of my testimony. I don’t know what the people in that revival learned that week but this preacher learned that a messenger without a message is a mighty bad thing! I also learned that if everybody shows up but the Lord you are still in big trouble. In the same way I found Wednesday night that if no one shows up but you and the Lord you can still have a “Prayer Meeting” that is sweet and good.

I hope you have great services at your church this week. But remember this, if the Lord is not the honored guest then your church will be cold and dark; no matter how high the thermostat or how bright the lights.

## March 6, 2002    PASSING IMPACT

The air from the truck ahead of me brushed aside all the trash and paper and sent it sailing off the road. I thought to myself, “Even after its passage this truck did some good”. That was significant to me because my heart was sorrowing over the death of a Pastor and wondering about God’s timing.

The widow of the deceased Pastor decided to have normal Sunday Services since she knew her husband would have wanted it that way. I had the privilege of attending the Sunday Night Service. The young Assistant Pastor, who had suddenly been thrust into an extremely stressful situation, was led of God to preach a sermon that the deceased Pastor had preached several years before.

The Assistant Pastor said that God had used this message to speak to his Heart and he felt it could be used to speak to the hearts of the church during this sorrowing time. It was a great message about how David had encouraged himself in the Lord during a time of great personal tragedy and stress. The fact that it was first preached by the deceased Pastor only added to the impact and meaning of the message that night.

All of us are on a journey through life. After we pass, will we still have an impact for good or will we simply disappear from sight?... *by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.* (Hebrews 11:4)

## **March 12, 2002 FROST**

One day I will have a carport. Until I do many cold winter mornings greet me with a glaze of frost on my windshield. Like most people I am lazy and don't want to stay outside in the cold longer than necessary so I take an old credit card and scrape a clean place in front of where I sit to drive. Then I begin my daily drive to work with the heat turned wide open. Before many miles have passed my windshield is clean and I am beginning to thaw out.

One day God's Church will be called home and trials and temptations will be over. Until then a cold sinful world tries to put a "frost" over its vision and keep it from getting to work for the Lord. Thankfully, God's credit card (Grace) is available to make a hole in the frosted windshield and allows the Church to get on the road for God.

But the "driving" is still difficult and the vision is still impaired. What is needed is some hearts full of love that radiates the warmth of the Spirit that lives within the followers of Christ. Then the entire "windshield" will defrost and the vision will be clear so that the Church can see all the obstacles and opportunities around it instead of just seeing the road ahead. It is wonderful to be on the way to Heaven. It is even greater if we can work and witness for our king along the way so he will be able to give us a "well done" when we finally arrive at our destination.

Some churches are standing still because they can't see where they are going. Others are blindly traveling down life's road bumping into obstacles and running over innocent people because their windshield is frosted over. May they find God's Grace and turn on God's heat so their vision will clear and they can clearly see God's path for their progress.

## **March 13, 2002 FIREWOOD**

I stopped by a local grocery store to get some items. As I walked up I noticed a huge stack of firewood that reached from the door to the middle of the front wall. My immediate thought, "Boy, things are really getting rough when your local grocery store starts heating its building with firewood!". Of course, we know that the firewood was for sale and intended for use by others but it did give me a quick double take about this store.

Sometimes I wonder if people who visit in our churches might look at the way we do things and think we are still "heating with firewood". Don't get me wrong, I believe there is only one way to heaven (Faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ) and this message must never change. I wonder, however, if the methods we are using to convey this message aren't like clinging to firewood instead of enjoying the benefits and blessing of electric heat.

Seeing the words to a song on a projection screen instead of trying to squint at them in a heavy song book does not distract me from worship of God, it helps me. Reading the bulletin announcements on a screen before church instead of letting the preacher waste ten minutes telling them to me during the service gives me more time to enjoy the preaching of God's word; and I like that.

I used to have to cut and collect firewood in order to stay warm. I am GLAD things changed. I hope the church I attend will not waste all its time and energy using firewood when God had provided so many easier ways to heat his Church.

## March 19, 2002 PERFECT HATRED?

(Psalms 139:21-22) Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.

If you asked the average church member if they had a "Perfect Hatred" for God's enemies they would think you had gone completely crazy. Immediately, they would respond that they were Christians and that they did not hate anything. Sadly, this is a serious problem today; and a major reason the Church has become increasingly ineffective in changing the world for Christ.

As Christians, we realize and proclaim that the Love of God extends to everyone. We are to turn the other cheek and accept persecution for the cause of Christ with a meek attitude. But what we are not to do is to confuse loving the sinner with accepting an apathetic attitude toward sin and wrong. If our heart, like the heart of God, does not hate the consequences of sin in the life of a person then we are bound for defeat in our mission for God.

When God looked down at the sins of men, He did not see a minor fault that needed a little tweaking; He saw a situation so serious until only the precious Son of God, Jesus Christ could pay the debt and provide the redemption that mankind so desperately needed. How then should I respond to those who refuse to acknowledge Christ or openly deny Christ except to be grieved to the very depth of my heart? Grieved enough to hate sin and Satan with a "perfect hatred".

Ye that love the LORD, hate evil:(Psalms 97:10). Hate it enough to make a stand for God. Hate it enough to snatch sinners out of the flames of eternal fire. Hate it with a perfect hatred.

## March 20, 2002 THINGS FOR THOUGHT

Your Coffin may already be waiting for you in the local Mortuary! (James 4:14) *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

You will die with the same relationship you have with God right now unless you make a change- (Ecclesiastes 11:3) *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*

Blaming others will not take the blame from you when you face God's Judgment- (1 Corinthians 3:13) *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.* (Romans 14:12) *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Being wrong about eternity will make you eternally wrong- (Revelation 20:13) *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (15) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. ...and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

Thinking about getting right with God will not make you right with God. Think about that!

## **March 26, 2002 BUFFET OR BRING YOUR OWN**

Everyone knows that Free Will Baptists will be in charge of the marriage supper of the Lamb! For some reason they have always thought that meeting and eating were Siamese twins; eternally tied together! So it is not unusual for food and fellowship to be a part of a Free Will Baptist services.

I found myself in an unusual circumstance in one of those regular church dinners recently. A fifty foot food bar was laid out with some of the best cooking and desserts you could imagine. Plates were piled high before people were half way down the bar and the common complaint was the fact that there were far too many choices. But when I sat down with my assortment of delicious food I noticed that the man across the table was eating some not so appetizing looking food from a plastic container. The story was simple, a recent heart attack and doctors' orders had caused him to skip the buffet bar and stick to food that was good for his heart and his diet.

Satan has a huge "buffet bar" of lust, lies, and worldly pleasures laid out before men. Everyone seems to be eating and the food looks so delicious until it seems strange to bring your own. It is only when you accept the fact that Satan's food is bad for your heart and goes against God's orders that you realize the need of steering clear of the buffet bar.

Easter is the Super Bowl, World Series week for Christians. This is the week to which everything else in Christianity is tied. The cross paid the cost of our sins and the empty tomb stamped God's big "Paid in Full" on Satan's claim on our life. What a shame it is that in spite of God going to such lengths to show us the seriousness of sin we still eat at Satan's buffet and end up with heart problems that can bring about eternal death.

## **March 27, 2002 PROVIDENTIAL PENNIES**

It started with rising early to attend a ground breaking service at a church 3 hours from home. Two hours into the trip some coffee was needed so I stopped at a service station. Coffee was only 5 cents- Glory!

The services were very good at the Church but all of the services, singing, and lunch made for a 5 hour service. Now I have the 3 hour drive back home ahead of me. It had been a cold, wet day at the ground breaking and the drive back in a warm van made my eyes so heavy it was hard to keep them open.

Here was the problem, my wife's birthday was the night before and I had spent all my money taking her to supper. I keep a "hid away" twenty for emergencies when I travel but someone had needed that the week before and I had given it to them. Not realizing how broke I was I got some fries to munch on from the fast food place beside the service station. The cost came to \$1.04 but I only pulled 2 cents from my pocket. I started to reach for more but the clerk said that was fine and took \$1.02.

Then I got my coffee at the service station. Cost for a refill cup was 31 cents; which was exactly all I had left! Throughout the day God had "counted my pennies" for me so that I would have exactly what I needed. What a great God we serve.

Listen to God's voice all the time and He will always provide exactly what you need- down to the penny!



## **April 2, 2002      THE PATH**

If you don't know where you are going you will not know when you get there! He who aims at nothing normally hits it. When the blind lead the blind both will probably end up in the ditch. On and on I could go, but you get the picture. Some people have so much trouble in life because they are stumbling through life instead of heading toward a goal. Here are three things about life's path you need to know.

1) You have a Path to FIND- (Matthew 7:13-14) Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Anyone can go through the wide gate and down the broad way to destruction but the narrow way that leads to life is for those who find it. And you will not find it without seeking it. And you will not seek it until you realize you are going the wrong way.

2) You have a Path to FOLLOW- (Psalms 16:11) Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. Jesus always called men to "Follow me" because He was leading them down the Path of Life. And the directions down that path are available to all who will listen- (Isaiah 30:21) And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

3) You have a Path to FINISH- (2 Timothy 4:6-7) For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: When you find the path and follow the path you will look forward to the day you finish the trip because the destination to which it leads is eternal bliss beyond description.

Where is the path you are on leading you?

## **April 3, 2002      LIFE CHANGING FAITH**

Why has Christianity made so little difference in the lives of so many people? They claim to be Christians but they split churches if they don't get their way, they divorce at the same rate as non-Christians, and there is no noticeable difference between them and other "good moral" people. They live within the boundaries of society's expectations of a "church" person but their character and conduct never undergoes the life altering transformation preached by Pastors and looked for by the world.

The answer, I believe, lies in the "Faith" that these people have in God. Many people seem to believe that a man named Jesus died to pay their sin debt and they have been told that their belief in this fact now assures them of Heaven someday. They know that they are supposed to live differently because they have "accepted" Christ but they don't have the information nor the inclination to go beyond adopting superficial social standards as a result of this "faith".

The word Faith in the Bible comes from a Greek word meaning 1) A Personal Trust, 2) A firm Reliance, and 3) A confident Surrender. It goes far beyond believing historical facts about someone. It is a life changing, attitude altering, action applying, heart belief that changes your conduct and character as well as altering your eternal destination. It is so radical until Jesus called it being Born Again. Does your Faith fit this description?

## **April 9, 2002     WILDERNESS WORD**

(Luke 3:1-2) Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

One of the most important things that could ever happen in the life of a person or of a nation is that the Word of the Lord would be given to them. In a day of a multiplicity of Bible Versions and an almost uncountable proliferation of denominations and beliefs, it is extremely important that we receive a clear understandable Word from the Lord.

Note who the Word did NOT come to: 1) The Roman Emperor, Tiberius Caesar. He ruled most of the then known world and claimed to be god but the word of God did not come to him. 2) The Governors of Israel- Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, and Lysanias. These men ruled over God's chosen people in God's chosen place but the Word of the Lord did not come to them. 3) The High Priests of the Temple- Annas and his son in law, Caiaphas were the high priests in charge of the Temple services and the religious life of the Nation but the Word of the Lord did not come to them.

The Word came to a man wandering in the Wilderness named John. Doesn't it always? The People God chooses to communicate to are almost invariably those that have been placed into the Wilderness for some reason. Moses was set to become ruler of Egypt but he could not rule himself and it was only after he had tended sheep in the wilderness for 40 years that the Word of God came to Him. Paul was well educated in all the religious laws of his day but God had to send him into the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry so he could get the Word from the Lord that would transform the world for Christ. And even Jesus did not begin His public ministry until He went thru his wilderness school.

Are you in the Wilderness today? Maybe God has you there so you can finally hear a word from the Lord.

## **April 10, 2002     TRUST AND CONFIDENCE**

In recent months I have been seeking a more understandable way to define Faith. When I visited and preached in India I soon realized "Faith" was a word I used a lot but it was not always understood the same way by the person to whom I was talking. It soon became evident that the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is not faith. Both of them have faith. The difference is in the object of their faith.

A Greek definition of "Faith" as used by Jesus is "Trust and confidence that springs from your faith in God". I had to read that definition several times before I really began to grasp it. Using this definition you can say that the Object of your Faith is Jehovah God. But it is not enough to believe that Jehovah God exists. Faith as defined here means that your belief in God produces a Trust and Confidence that impacts your entire life.

The best illustration I can give for this is the example of a Trapeze artist. In order for him to perform as he should he must have trust and confidence that when he releases his hold on his trapeze and launches out into the air that the person on the other trapeze can and will catch him. It is an irreversible decision that is profoundly dependent on whom his trust and confidence is based.

You say you have Faith in God. My question is this, "What has happened in your life that can only be explained as a result of the Trust and Confidence that springs from your faith in God?"

## **April 16, 2002    BELOVED BELIEVERS**

I like the fact that God likes me! It is a joy to my soul to know that God so loved Mike Jones until He gave His only begotten Son that if Mike Jones would believe in Him Mike Jones would not perish but would have eternal life. God loved me when I was unlovable. The Holy Spirit continued to call me even after repeated rejections on my part. Jesus died to pay my sin debt even though I had nothing too offer God except the filthy rags of my self-righteous works. What a Great God!

It is this love of God that helps me understand that Salvation is not a reward for my Faith but a result of God's Grace. God chose me before I chose Him! John, the beloved disciple, had this in mind when he wrote to the Church. Five times he calls the Church "Beloved" and each time he gives an indication of how we should live as beloved believers in Christ.

1) The Beloved's Change: 1Jo 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

2) The Beloved's Confidence: 1Jo 3:21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

3) The Beloved's Caution: 1Jo 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

4) The Beloved's Compassion: 1Jo 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

5) The Beloved's Command: 1Jo 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

A Beloved Believer is the best honor given to man. Does it describe you?

## **April 17, 2002    SUDDEN DEATH STABILITY**

It had been a good day of services but a tiring one as I was doing another 500 mile week end. The Sun was hot, I was on the last 50 miles of this 200 mile segment, and the Sunday afternoon traffic was, as usual, bumper to bumper. We had finally cleared Columbia congestion and everyone was settling in to get sorted out around 70mph. I was going over the night's sermon in my mind while thinking I might need a cup of coffee to make it the rest of the way home.

Suddenly, I noticed a cloud of blue smoke just ahead of me. Then I saw cars and big trucks scattering into the median and sides of the road like a disturbed ant hill. I hit the brake to cut off cruise control when the car ahead of me suddenly darted into the median and left me with a view of an obstacle in my lane that occupied the entire lane. Someone had lost the bed liner out of their truck right in the middle of the road!

I added my tire smoke to the cloud of blue smoke hanging over the area and was blessed enough that the other lane was occupied with motorcycles that had pulled over leaving me enough room to squeeze between them and the bed liner.

In a second's time someone could have hit that bed liner and caused a multi-car crash and I could have been right in the middle of it. If so I was ready to meet God. Are You?

## **April 23, 2002    ROTTEN SEED**

The Prophet Joel records an interesting observation as he describes God's coming judgment upon his nation- "The seed is rotten under the clods" (Joel 1:17). The Seed was good seed but the circumstances were so bad until they had rotted instead of springing forth into life and fruitfulness.

Christians would like to think that all the seed they plant will spring up and produce much fruit but it simply does not happen that way. Sometimes it is the fault of the soil where the seed is sown. One of the most important parables taught by Jesus was the parable about how different soil conditions influence the growth of the seed that was being sown. Some fell by the wayside where the birds devoured them, some fell on stony ground where they had short lived lives, and some fell into land saturated with weeds which choked out their effectiveness. Only a few of the seed fell on good ground; and even those produced differing amounts of fruit.

Soil impacts seed; but so do seasons. Any farmer knows that you plant in the spring, cultivate in the summer, reap in the fall, and rest and prepare in the winter. God knew that preachers would have to go through these seasons so He instructed them to keep their sense of urgency in season and out of season- preparing the ground and keeping the weeds from suffocating the young plants is just as important as rejoicing when the fruit arrives.

Soil and seasons are significant but human "seed" also have the factor of self will. Some "seed" just make up their mind that they do not want to leave the familiarity and security of the dirt in which they are living so the sunshine's warmth makes them rot instead of bloom into a new life of fruitfulness. And it is sad beyond words to look across a field that should be blooming with beauty and smell only rotting seed.

## **April 24, 2002    DEATH BENEFITS**

We could hardly believe the crowd. Monday night at 8:30pm found this country café packed out. My wife and I had been to a local funeral home and decided to stop for a sandwich and coffee since we had not had a chance to get supper before we came to the funeral home.

A closer inspection of the crowd found that many of the other patrons that night must have had the same idea. I commented to my wife that while the family who had lost a loved one was in sorrow this small restaurant was experiencing a night to make the owner very happy. They were reaping the benefits of a death.

But they were not the only people who were benefitting that night. The lady who lay in a coffin a short distance from this restaurant was finally free from pain, problems, and troubles. Death had not destroyed her; it had enabled her to leave the confines of her human body and enter the bliss of Heaven.

The family who stood beside that cold casket also benefitted that night. They benefitted from the love and concern of many friends and loved ones. They benefitted from the comfort and support of the blessed Holy Spirit. And they benefitted from the hope that Christians have that the end is not the end for a child of God.

Jesus came to conquer death and turn it from a blight and a burden into the great blessing of eternal and abundant life. And that is a benefit to everyone!

**April 30, 2002**

## **PSALMS BLESSED MAN**

Happiness is sought by many but achieved by few. The word “blessed” in the Bible means “Oh, how very happy” and is used to describe the abundant life God desires for His children. But how do we become “Blessed”? Seven times the Psalmist tells us how to be a “Blessed Man”.

- 1) Happy in the man who avoids the wrong counsel and companions- Ps 1:1 ¶ Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
- 2) Happy is the man who is right with God- Ps 32:2 Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.
- 3) Happy is the man who has confidence in the Lord-Ps 34:8 O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Ps 84:12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.
- 4) Happy is the man who knows his part in God’s plan- Ps 65:4 Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.
- 5) Happy is the man who depends on the power of God- Ps 84:5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.
- 6) Happy is the man whom God loves enough to discipline- Ps 94:12 ¶ Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;
- 7) Happy is the man who Respects God enough to obey His word- Ps 112:1 ¶ Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.

Gods Wants to Bless you; but you must make yourself “blessable!”

**May 1, 2002**

## **UTILIZE THE WORD**

Rev Todd Parrish, pastor of Temple FWB Church in Darlington and Director of the State CTS (Youth Competition) board gave some good advice to the youth of our state before they began their competition for a chance at the National Competition. Most of these young people know more about Bible facts and trivia than any three adults in the average church; yet we are continually concerned that they transfer this head knowledge into heart action. That is why Brother Todd stressed three areas of importance in learning the word of God.

- 1) Gaze into the Word. Look closely at the word of God as a word from God instead of a source of interesting saying and information. Looking at a portrait of your aunt will not enable you to comb your hair correctly; you need a mirror for that!
- 2) Grasp the Word of God. If you memorize Psalm 23 and do not have a personal relationship with the shepherd of Psalm 23 then you have missed the most important aspect of the Bible. If you know how many times sin is mentioned in the Bible but you still allow sin to control your life then you are in sad shape.
- 3) Grow in the Word of God. Don’t just learn enough to satisfy the judges in the Youth Competition. Remember that God is the ultimate judge and the final score He gives you will be the one that really matters.

## May 7, 2002      CROWN MOUNTAIN

(Revelation 4:10-11) The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

How they sparkled and shone. Some were little more than bands of gold while others were so encrusted with jewels and precious stones until the gold was almost invisible. But how the mountain grew at the feet of Jesus as person after person cast their crowns before He who had left Heaven's glory to come to earth and shed His precious blood that sinful man might become a child of God and a citizen of Heaven.

The Bible lists 5 crowns that Believers can obtain- (1) The Proper use of your Talents Crown (I Cor 9:25). (2) The Pure Living Crown (II Tim 4:8). (3) The Personal Soul Winner's Crown (I Thess 2:19). (4) The Pastor's Crown (I Peter 5:4). And (5) The Perseverance under Trial Crown (James 1:2).

Sometimes I hear people say there will be no tears in Heaven. According to Scripture (Rev 7:17) God will wipe away our tears when we arrive and then will wipe away our tears at the end of the millennium when crying will cease forever (Rev 21:4). I wonder if the tears that are shed in between these times are shed by those who look at Crown Mountain and realize how foolishly they wasted the time and talents God had so graciously given them.

Preachers preach "Payday, Someday" to lost men on a regular basis. Maybe they need to preach "Crown Mountain Accountability" just as regularly.

## May 8, 2002      LIFE'S SONG

(Isaiah 26:3) Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

"Perfect Peace", the very words sound sweet to my ears. I used to live in a small town where I was five minutes from the bank, the post office, the grocery store, and the restaurants. Now I work in a town where you can spend a half hour fighting traffic just to get to the bank. I used to walk to work, now I drive to work in rush hour traffic at a crawl!

I am constantly amazed at the people who drive to work each morning that have "left their brain in bed". They dart and weave and constantly strain against traffic in order to get to work 3 seconds earlier. And then they are grouchy all day because of the stress that began their day.

Peace; the word means accord, agreement, or harmony. Harmony is a good illustration. People who sing in harmony know the song is made up of different parts at different times. They realize that out shouting everyone else or constantly getting ahead of the other singers will not make for beautiful music.

One man described Perfect Peace as a mind free from fears, agitating passions, and moral conflicts. Another definition could be someone who follows God's direction as they sing life's song. And what a difference it will make when life's song contains verses that are abundant instead of a battle.



## May 14, 2002     STRENGTH LIMITATIONS

A major problem in Christian circles today is the practice of taking a verse out of context and then making it say what we want it to say. How many people have you heard proudly proclaim that they “Could do all things through Christ which strengthened them” (Phil 4:13) and then end up with more failures than successes in their life? They failed because they tried to push the meaning of the verse beyond what God intended.

What it doesn't mean- I can't fly! I can't sing. In fact, I find it difficult to lose the 15 lbs of extra fat I'm carrying around each day! I also can't keep my hair from falling out or my body from deteriorating. Why, I can't even make people come to Church!!

So this is not a “Magic Verse” that allows me to become a god. It has tremendous promise but it also has its limitations.

What it really means- Look at the Context of the Verse- *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction* (Phil 4:11-14).

Paul usually earned his living as a tent maker while he did his mission work. Like anyone traveling from city to city, this was not a very stable living. Sometimes he would get along great; other times he went hungry! Sometimes he could buy a new suit and sometimes he couldn't even get patches for the suit he had!

It is in this context that he makes the statement of verse 13. He isn't saying he's superman through Christ; he is simply proclaiming that he is able to face anything life sends his way through the strength he receives from the indwelling Christ. And that is certainly worth knowing.

## May 15, 2002     BUILDING STRENGTH

The Purpose of Strength- To allow us to walk and work for the Lord- (Psa 71:16) I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.

The Peculiarities of Strength-

A) Perfected in Weakness- Strength does not come from Human effort or education; its source is faith in, and dependence on, God. (2 Corinthians 12:9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

B) Gained by Waiting- The Power of Patience. How we long to run ahead of God and accomplish things in our time and our way. How gently God calls us to His side to learn of Him and lean on Him as He delicately infuses His strength and purpose into the very core of our soul. (Isaiah 40:31) But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

The Person of Strength- Jesus Christ. (John 15:5) I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Knowing about Him will not help; we must Abide IN Him to find the source of abundant life and abiding fruit.

## May 21, 2002      PROBLEM PERSPECTIVE

First came the news that her son had been killed in the crash of his ultra-light airplane. Then, on the day of his funeral, just as she was getting ready to go to the church, her husband passed away and she had to leave him a corpse in the bed while she went to her son's funeral. Her husband's funeral, two days later, was on Mother's Day. Tell me again what kind of problems you were complaining about today.

Sometimes getting a perspective on our problems can be a real help. But many times we are so wrapped up in what is happening to us until we find it difficult to get any perspective beyond our own pain and trouble. In cases like that, let me give you two principles to cling to as you battle your burden.

First, God is Able. God is able to sustain you in any situation you face. Rest in His loving care. God is able to provide the power and wisdom you need to make changes that will change your condition. Look for His plan in your problem. God is able to turn a thunder storm into a drought breaking rain that brings forth future life giving fruit. Don't doubt in the dark what God has promised in the light.

Finally, remember that "this too shall pass". The problem is not permanent (Even if it lasts all your life you will look back a million years from now and consider it very small in the perspective of paradise with God). The problem with problems is that they attempt to kill our hope. Doubt brings despair and suddenly a problem has grown from a groan into a giant.

Whatever you are facing today, you and God CAN handle it. Just remember that God said He would never leave or forsake you. Underneath are the everlasting arms, rest in their strength and security today.

## May 22, 2002      GENERATIONAL TRUTH

Pr 30:11 There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. Is it possible that such a thing should happen? Will there be a generation of people who dishonor their parents and disregard the laws and standards of God? Surprisingly enough, it is a very real possibility.

**Nations forget God in a Generation-** (Ex 1:6,8) And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. In one Generation the children of Israel went from the palace to the pits! How quickly the nation of Egypt forgot God. In the same way, America has, in one generation, accepted God being kicked out of our schools, our society, and our standards.

**Churches can lose their vision of God in a Generation-** Jg 2:10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. In one generation the religious leadership of the nation died and "every man did that which was right in hi own sight." How horrible when the blind must look to the blind for leadership!

**God's punishment of sin can last a generation-** Nu 32:13 And the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed. A nation's unbelief led to an entire generation "wandering in the wilderness" instead of enjoying the pleasures of the promised land. Will it happen to us?

## **May 28, 2002     PERSECUTION EXPECTED**

Most people who attend churches today want to hear, "Something GOOD is going to happen to you" rather than "Be thou faithful unto Death and I will give you the crown of life"! Most church members are not interested in what it cost to be a Christian; their interest is in what they can gain by being one. "What shall we have therefore" has replaced "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me".

Christ told the Church at Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11) to faithfully endure; even unto death. That kind of perseverance is sadly needed today. People leave churches these days if someone fails to speak to them! Or if they don't like the singing. Or for almost any other reason you can think of. They have no loyalty to the church and the work of God; all they care about is having their needs met!

This kind of Church member wilts in the heat of persecution and runs off to a "church" where less is required of them. After all, they joined God's army because they had a problem they wanted solved and they liked the retirement plan offered by Christianity. They never expected to actually be called on to fight in God's battles or suffer as God's soldiers.

God is not looking for religious trouble makers who blame God for the trouble that comes their way as a result of their arrogance or anger. Nor is He looking for whiners who think that every head ache or back ache is the cross they have to carry for God. He is looking, however, for people who will stand for God and Right and endure the persecution that results from that stand.

In His last private conversation with His disciples, Jesus stressed a fact that we would do well to heed today- Joh 15:20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;...

## **May 29, 2002     BETTER THAN BIRDS**

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

In the middle of a passage teaching us to spend more time trusting God and less time worrying about our needs, God makes a great statement. He declares that He takes care of the birds and we are better than birds.

We are better than birds because God has given mankind dominion over the birds and all other creatures- (Genesis 1:26) And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

We are better than birds because man is indued with a soul; a privilege not given to birds- (Genesis 2:7) And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Birds have a life span. Man is created for eternity.

We are better than birds because the only begotten son of God, Jesus Christ, came from Heaven to Earth to redeem men, not birds- Is there a Glory anywhere in the house!

Feeling down today; remember that although birds can fly, and sing, and look simply beautiful; God said you were better than birds.

## **June 4, 2002      UNCAR GARAGE**

It became obvious as soon as we drove up. Some people had very generously allowed us to use their vacation apartment for a few days of rest and relaxation and when we pushed the garage door opener it was very obvious that our car would not fit inside the garage. I shrugged it off and did not think anything more about it until the next morning when I went for my morning walk. That is when I saw that everyone had to park their car in front of their garage instead of in their garage because all the garages were built too small for a car to safely enter.

The builder had built row after row of these fabulous apartment homes, each with its own garage, but everyone had been forced to use the garage as a mini storage shed because it could not be used to shelter their car. The builder had saved a foot or two on each garage and the owners had lost a valuable asset to their home and car.

Sadly, this same principle is being applied to lives today. People are so interesting in cutting corners and putting show over substance until they leave no room for God in their life. Oh, they have a place they show people to make them believe that God is part of their life but, in reality, its not big enough for God to enter and He must remain outside their home. They included God in their original plans but other things kept putting the squeeze on Him and soon, like the cars for the “uncar garage”, God was regulated to waiting on the sidewalk until they found a reason to use Him.

Re 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

## **June 5, 2002      THE SWITCH**

My wife found the switch to the light in the living room today. Not bad, we have only been living in this home for two and a half years!

When we moved into the home we put in a ceiling fan with a light attachment. Pull chains came down from the fan and my wife had always used these chains to turn the fan or the light on and off. As we were moving in, she decided she wanted a cabinet in a certain place. Putting the cabinet there covered the light switch so she did not know there was a light switch for the living room. It was only after she began quarreling about there being no switch that I pointed out to her where it was.

Sadly, some churches are like this. The people in the church have gotten so used to pulling strings to get things to happen until they have completely forgotten the real source of power. Some decoration or organization in the Church has hid the “power switch” and the Church has learned to function by pulling the right string the right number of times.

Offerings are received, revivals are held, functions are performed; but there is never any real evidence of a life changing, sin defeating, God. Someone desperately needs to share the real source of power so people will stop pulling strings and begin praying powerful prayers.

God is not dead, we just need to find the switch and turn the power back on.

## **June 11, 2002    NEW SONG**

I like it when Church is a melody instead of a misery. I like it when people stand around after church and glory in God's blessings during the service instead of gossiping about neighbors or gloating about ball team victories. I like it when people leave church with a song in their heart and a smile on their lips.

When I visited churches in Nepal and India, it was stifling hot with, at the most, a tin roof over a block building. The "hole in the wall" windows allowed some fresh air to come inside but they also provided easy access for critters, noise, and dust. No pews meant everyone sat on a hard cement floor; and large crowds meant everyone was crowded together. Poverty knocked at the door of almost every one present and hunger gnawed at the stomach of many.

But, how they sang! For hours as they waited for me to come share the word of God, they would sing about Scripture and about the joy that had come into their heart as a result of trusting Christ. The entire neighborhood heard their music; and wondered at their joy.

Many times, as I leave an air conditioned church with padded pews and soft carpet floors where people have droned out the first and last verse of a hymn and tried to stay awake during the message, I watch with wonder at the smiles that appear on people's faces as they leave. The same smile that was sorely missing during the service.

I believe that if the people in the Church get a warm heart and a new song on their lips then services will be a melody instead of a misery; and the community around them will take notice and want to be part of such a life changing movement- (Psalms 40:3) And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

## **June 12, 2002    FATHER'S WILL**

To know the will of God is the greatest Knowledge;  
To find the will of God is the greatest Discovery;  
To do the will of God is the greatest Achievement.

Will a father do the will of the Father; that is the big question today. There are many ways to define a successful father but I can think of nothing that would give a better definition than that of a man who consistently and continually does the will of the Heavenly Father.

A 19 year old man is suddenly thrown from the safety of home and school into the pressure of finding a job and performing the work that it requires. At the same time, he finds and marries the girl of his dreams. Suddenly, his carefree existence is besieged by house payments, car payments, insurance payments, and bills he never knew existed.

Then one faithful day his wife freezes his heart with fear and joy all in one overwhelming emotion when she announces that he is going to become a father. That is when it really hits him. He needs help and he needs it very badly!

This is the place where the wise father reaches out with all his heart to a loving Heavenly Father for strength and wisdom. And that is when he discovers that the greatest achievement of his life, as a man and as a father, will be in finding and doing the will of God in his life and in his leadership of his family.

## **June 18, 2002    TRAIN TROUBLE**

It was time for my every four year eye exam. Since I am legally blind without my glasses I figure getting an eye exam every four years is not a bad idea. And besides, I have to get them examined in order to get my driver's license any way.

On the way to the Optometrist I had to stop to allow a train to pass. It was long and time consuming and put me behind schedule. When I was almost at the Optometrist I had to cross the railroad track again. Guest what? That same train made it to the crossing just as I did and I had to wait for it to pass again!

Several lessons were learned. Sometimes a problem repeats itself in a very short time. Lesson two: Sometimes problems can be prevented if you listen to God's "still small voice"- I kept getting nudged to go the long way but I kept deciding to go the short way; which actually took longer! Lesson three: The second time you face a trouble it is easier if you learn from the first time- I knew exactly when the train was almost past: all of the last cars were loaded with pipes.

Paul told the Corinthians that God "comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." (2 Corinthians 1:4). Troubles are not only troubles, they are teachers; if we let them teach us. They can make us angry and bitter or they can develop us so that we can assist others. It depends on how we react to the "trains" that block our way.

I pray your troubles will be few today; but, if they come, I pray they will teach you about God's love and draw you closer to God's heart.

## **June 19, 2002    BLINDED TO SEE**

Optometrists do a strange thing; they make you blind in order that they can help you see. When I emerged from a recent eye exam into the bright morning sun I was almost totally blind. They dilate your eyes as part of the exam and that makes seeing in bright light extremely difficult.

Several things immediately came to mind. Driving through Florence traffic from the Optometrist office to my office was going to be an "exciting" experience- I sure was glad I was prayed up! And I had a very busy day ahead of me; most of it working on computers and reading reports, which would be interesting when I could hardly see.

Sometimes God does things that I am in the blind about. He will allow a sickness or a circumstance that does not make any sense to me. I want to learn the lesson; I am just not sure what it is that I am supposed to be learning!

During times like this I have learned to trust God's heart even when I can't understand what His hand is doing. Like the Optometrist who has to "blind" me in order to check my sight, I have come to realize that God sometimes must help me grow by using methods that seem to be hurting me while they are actually helping me.

If you are blinded by troubles or trials and you are stumbling through life, remember that God is still on the throne. Just hold His hand while you wait for your vision to clear.



## **June 25, 2002     GAS MONEY**

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

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

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

I made it to the Church and we had a good service. Following the service I talked with several people about how good God was; all the time wondering, in the back of my mind, how I was going to get home. Finally I started to get in the car and see how far God would take me. Just at that time one of the deacons walked up and told me how much he enjoyed the message. As he shook hands with me he passed me two dollars. Back then two dollars would buy you six gallons of gas!

I think of those two dollars often as I travel. God knows if a sparrow falls to the ground. He knows how many hairs there are on my head. And He knows exactly how much gas is in my car and how much money is in my wallet. As long as I'm going for Him, I believe He'll find a way to make sure there is enough gas in the tank to take me where I need to go. And it sure is great working for a "boss" like that!

## **June 26, 2002     DELIGHTFUL DEVOTIONS**

One Wednesday recently I had one of those "great" times in my devotions when it seemed the Lord was extremely near and His word just flowed with meaning. As I sat at my table with tears in my eyes and joy in my heart I knew the Lord was preparing me for something special. Suddenly, I felt like a kid at Christmas as I anticipated what God was going to do. I did not know what God had wrapped up for me but I could hardly wait to unwrap the "package" and see what God was doing.

I had planned to go to a certain church that night but as the day progressed God clearly and distinctly brought another church to mind. When I arrived at that church, the Pastor shared how much he needed someone to talk to right then and we had a wonderful time of fellowship. Then this Pastor asked me to speak in his place during services that night. What a time we had as I simply shared with these people what God had shared with me earlier in the day. And, you know what, the people in that congregation needed the message God had given me just as much as I had needed it.

Sometimes my daily devotion time with the Lord is so-so, sometimes it is pretty good, and sometimes it is just GREAT. But always, I know He is preparing to either bless me or make me a blessing to others. And that makes my heart leap with joy every time I come before His throne or open His book.

## **July 2, 2002      BOOK BOX**

I had to carry my wife to the Dentist recently. In the center of the waiting room was a book box. The first hour that I waited no one looked inside this book box. Finally, a young girl came in, went straight to the book box, opened it, and began to look through the treasure of books it contained. Soon all the children in the waiting room were busy looking through the box.

I am a child of God who is waiting for the soon coming return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. While I am waiting, I realize God has left us a book full of treasures and truths that needs to be explored. But many days it just sits in its place, gathering dust, while people busy themselves with must less important things. What if, like this little girl, I could open the lid and get people to see the wonderful things contained in this blessed book? It might cause such excitement until soon everyone would want to look into the book!

Citizens of the United States are blessed with the wonderful privilege of freedom of speech. It is a shame that we use that freedom to gossip, criticize, and complain. What a delight it would be, and what a difference it would make, if we used that freedom to open the lid of God's Book and show people some of the eternal truths and precious promises it contains.

One day heaven and earth will pass away but this word of God will endure for ever. Let's make it our business to use the freedom God has so graciously given us to share God's Book with all the other children around us. Who knows, it might just lead to them becoming our brother or sister in the Lord!

## **July 3, 2002      FREEDOM'S CHOICE**

Would I serve God if there was no Hell? Would I serve God if there were no Heaven? Would I chose to choose God if the choice I made had no implications past this present world?

God has given mankind one of the most awesome privileges available in the universe; freedom of the will. He placed mankind on the earth, set in motion certain circumstances and events, and then allowed these mere mortals to make choices that impact the work of God on the earth. Choices that even determine each person's relationship with the God of the universe!

Given this freedom of choice, what would I do if there were no eternal consequences to my actions? Would my love for God win the victory over the lusts and desires of the flesh? Would I work as hard if there were no rewards; would I sacrifice as much if it only mattered for time and not for eternity?

Heart searching questions that are not easy to answer. I can only say that the motivation for my life's work and the choices I make is based on my overwhelming love for God. I talk about Heaven and Hell sometimes but it is my desire to serve God; and to please God, that drive me on when tiredness and trouble come my way.

Make no mistake, there is a Hell to shun and a Heaven to gain but I hope you will chose God today because of his overwhelming love for you. I have never known anyone who choose God who told me later they regretted that choice!

## **July 9, 2002      SHARING THE SORROW**

During a recent service I shared the speaking duties with Congressman Todd Platts of Pennsylvania. During his speech, Congressman Platts gave an illustration that spoke volumes to me about really caring for someone.

Congressman Platts' dad passed away about a year ago. Shortly after his death and funeral, Congressman Platts returned to Washington to resume his duties. One reason he returned so quickly was because President Bush was coming to Congress to attend a meeting and he felt he needed to be part of that meeting. Following the meeting, as President Bush was being escorted back to his car; President Bush called to Congressman Platts and asked him to join him on his walk to the car.

During that short walk, and for several minutes at the car, President Bush conveyed to Congressman Platts his great sorrow at the loss of his father and sought to encourage him. With all that was going on at that particular time, Congressman Platts related to us how overwhelmed he was that the President would spend time seeking to ease the grief of a first year Congressman.

If you are going through grief or sorrow today, the President probably will not be able to spend any time with you. But sometimes a caring person is just as good as a caring President. The really important thing is that the person shares the moment and shares the grief.

Thank God we have a President who cares. But greater still, thank God that He has given us the privilege of sharing the sorrowful time with people all around us. We may not have the power and prestige of the President but we may be just as important to someone in need.

## **July 10, 2002      JUST A WORD**

Just a word was all it took. As she walked from her car to the door of a church she was visiting she noticed a lady walking by. The lady looked depressed so she smiled and said, "Hello".

Startled, the lady stopped and asked her where she was going. "To visit the services of this church," she replied. "Hump!", the second lady said. "You will not like it there. I have lived beside this church all my life and not one person from that church has ever invited me to attend their services."

The first lady smiled and said, "That's not the way it is at the church I normally attend. Our Pastor is a wonderful man of God and people are really concerned about other people. Why, we just think of ourselves as one big family."

Long story short. The second lady found out where the first lady normally attended church and visited the next Sunday. Soon she had trusted Christ as her Savior and now these two ladies are best friends as they worship and work together. And it all started because one person cared enough to say, "Hello".

I watched the glow in the eyes of these ladies as they shared this story with me recently. And I couldn't help but look a thousand years forward to the streets of Heaven where they will tell this same story over and over. I just wonder how many will miss it there because someone failed to say, "Hello" to them down here.

## **July 16, 2002      WRONG PAGE**

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

Sometimes husbands and wives, or parents and children, “sing different songs” because they're on the wrong page through failure to communicate. They “sing” with all the energy and effort they can muster but there will be no Harmony in the Home until they get on the same page. And it is hard to find the right page when you are in the wrong book!

This incident also reminded me that you need to address a problem as soon as it occurs. Sometimes we think pretending a problem doesn't exist will make it go away but the longer we ignore it the worse the “song” sounds. You need to stop long enough to correct the problem before the disharmony becomes disaster.

Finally, this incident revealed that a leader with the wrong information can cause a great deal of disorder. Even after the correction people were whispering instead of worshipping; and turning pages instead of turning their heart toward God.

If your life is all confused maybe you need to check the number of the song you are singing. Jesus can turn chaos into melody but it will only happen when you get on the same page with Him.

## **July 17, 2002      CHESS CONSIDERATION**

Waiting on my wife to finish a ladies meeting recently, I stopped by a local fast food restaurant so I could get a coke and use a table to write on. Interestingly, several men were in the kiddie picnic area of this restaurant playing chess.

What a refreshing sight. In this day of video games and reality TV about everything but reality it was great to see some people playing a game that stimulated their mind instead of simply stirring their emotions.

To some degree, I would like to see something similar happen in churches. People used to expect a preacher to preach long enough so he could develop a thought and help them to gain a deeper appreciation for, and understanding of, the word and work of God. Now they want a mini-sermon sandwiched in between all kinds of entertainment so they can leave church feeling really good but having not a clue about what to do with their teen age son in the back seat who is going deeper and deeper into drugs and the occult.

I think the time has come that Pastors need to stop running all over the world petting every person and trying to solve every situation. The Disciples said they needed time for prayer and the word. That is still the need today. People are tired of “pop corn preaching”. They need the nourishment of “meat and potatoes messages” that will last beyond the door of the church. May it begin this Sunday.

## **July 23, 2002      AMAZING CHRIST**

It still amazes me that the Christ who could walk on water would kneel with a bowl of water and wash the feet of the man who was about to betray Him. That kind of humility is seldom seen in today's Church where power struggles lead to constant bickering and division.

It is astonishing to me that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lamb of God who gave His life as a sacrifice for the sin debt of all of mankind. He could have roared with all His power and destroyed everyone on Calvary's hill but, like a meek sheep, he forgave his killers and yielded to death's call. In our day when men proudly proclaim with profanities their power where are the men who realize the true power of sacrifice and service?

Christ was the King who died like a criminal so that criminals could live eternally like a king! Christ could have demanded His rights; instead He made it right for everyone who had done Him wrong. His kingdom was not of this world but the people whom He wanted to bring into His kingdom were so God left the splendors of heaven to live in the squalor of earth as a mere man.

Christ is the only way to Heaven and the only hope for a sin cursed world. Why then do we find it so easy to tell everyone we meet about a victory by our favorite team and so hard to tell them about the victory that is ours because of Christ? His birth was amazing, his life was astonishing, his death was atoning, and his soon coming is anticipated. I am continually amazed by the amazing Christ.

## **July 24, 2002      AMAZING CHRIST**

It still amazes me that the Christ who could walk on water would kneel with a bowl of water and wash the feet of the man who was about to betray Him. That kind of humility is seldom seen in today's Church where power struggles lead to constant bickering and division.

It is astonishing to me that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lamb of God who gave His life as a sacrifice for the sin debt of all of mankind. He could have roared with all His power and destroyed everyone on Calvary's hill but, like a meek sheep, he forgave his killers and yielded to death's call. In our day when men proudly proclaim with profanities their power where are the men who realize the true power of sacrifice and service?

Christ was the King who died like a criminal so that criminals could live eternally like a king! Christ could have demanded His rights; instead He made it right for everyone who had done Him wrong. His kingdom was not of this world but the people whom He wanted to bring into His kingdom were so God became a man.

Why then do we find it so easy to tell everyone we meet about a victory by our favorite team and so hard to tell about the victory that is ours because of Christ? His birth was amazing, his life was astonishing, his death was atoning, and his soon coming is anticipated. I am continually amazed by the amazing Christ.

## July 31, 2002      APPEARANCES

It surprises people how little we know about how he looked. We don't know if He was short or tall, fat or thin. We don't know how fair his skin was or even the color of his hair.

Basically, all we know about His Physical appearance is that He (like me) “has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2). If we were describing Him today we would say it like this, “Jesus was just a plain sort of fellow”.

Yet, to every man who knows Him, He is exactly what they need. To the Artist, He is altogether lovely. To the educator, He is the Master Teacher. To the Philosopher, He is the wisdom of God. To the lonely, He is a Friend that sticks closer than a Brother. To the Sorrowful, He is a Comforter. To the bereaved, He is the resurrection and the life. And to the Sinner, He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

Even God had to take four books to describe His main characteristics. In Matthew, He is the King of Kings. In Mark, He is the Humble Servant. In Luke, He is the Perfect Man. And in John, He is the Bread of life, the light of the world, and the wonderful Son of God.

Take heart today, you don't have to be a movie star or sports hero for God to Love you. Remember, the Bible doesn't describe a perfect body for us to work toward but a perfect man for us to believe in.



## **August 6, 2002 PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Some survive for a short time on talent. Others get by because of their energy and zeal. Some even get by because of the complacency and unconcern of those to whom they are ministering. But how will such a Pastor feel if one day someone finally finds the courage or anger needed to say, "The king is not wearing any clothes!" and you are finally exposed for what you really are- a lukewarm preacher in a lukewarm church seeking only to survive another week.

But suppose your "luck" holds and talent, personality, or people's indifference allow you to continue year after empty hearted year? What if no one cares that the baptistry is dusty, the pews are increasingly empty, and the lives of church members mirror the values of society instead of the character of Christ? At the final accounting, when you face the ultimate judge, how will you feel when He looks you in the eye and tells you to "give an account of your stewardship"?

The most awesome responsibility in the world, next to that given to fathers and mothers to answer for their family, is the responsibility given to a Pastor. Men are crying, souls are dying. Will you fiddle away your time, talents, and energy saving your own skin instead of working to save souls from eternity apart from God? What a tragedy that would be for you; and for the countless multitudes that daily need God's pardon for their sins and His power in their life.

If, instead of the hireling I have been describing, you are blessed (like the vast majority of churches) with a good shepherd then you need to let him know how much you appreciate his courage, concern, and sacrifice. Remember that Pastor Appreciation Sunday is Sunday, September 8<sup>th</sup>. Shop early and shop often as you give honor to whom honor is due!

## **August 7, 2002 DEATH VALLEY FEAR**

It is one of those well known, often quoted, seldom practiced verses that seems to leap out at us from the Word of God- (Psalms 23:4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Fearing no evil as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death seems to preach a lot easier than it is to practice! After all, most people look at death as a last resort! How then can I fear no evil as I walk through this valley?

One of the most graphic illustrations in the story of "Pilgrim's Progress" is when Pilgrim approaches the valley of the shadow and suddenly two lions leap out at him. After much consternation and consideration Pilgrim finally decides to trust God and walk into the valley in spite of the lions. That is when the marvelous truth is revealed that the Lions are restrained and they cannot reach anyone who stays on the path given by God- Glory!

Approaching the valley also caused Pilgrim to look at his resources. He was equipped with the Sword of the Spirit- the Word of God, and he knew he could defeat any foe.

But the Psalmist does not tell us to trust in Satan's Restraints or the Spirit's Resources; He proclaims that he does not fear because God is with Him. Like a child holding the hand of his father, he found peace in the mere presence of the Heavenly Father. Aren't you glad He is with us, even in the valley!

## August 13, 2002 FIRE FAILURE

Why does the fire go out for some people? Why do some people begin the Christian life with such energy and enthusiasm and later become nominal Christians, then no-show Christians, and finally live and act as if they are non-Christians? What happened to their zeal for the Lord's work and worship? What caused their fire to die down?

In order to maintain a fire two ingredients are necessary- Fuel and Air. Fuel in the Christian life comes from fellowship with God and His children. Air is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in the Life of Christians ("Spirit" comes from a Greek Word meaning "Air"). The fire begins to falter when either of these ingredients becomes scarce.

I was raised in a home that was heated with fire wood. One of the first lessons I learned is that wood that is burned has to be replaced or the fire goes out! Guess who had to gather and prepare that firewood? My brothers and I worked long and hard many hot summer days in order to have warmth on cold winter days. I also learned that you cannot fake gathering wood or hope that wood will suddenly materialize and still stay warm when the days grow cold. In the same way, I have learned that I must keep working at my fellowship with God and His people or the "wood pile" dwindles and the fire dies down.

The air needed for my fellowship fire with God comes from being rightly related to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit lives within the heart of every born again child of God but His ministry in our life cannot function correctly if we grieve Him by the sin we do or quench Him by the good we fail to do. These things decrease the "air" and our fire begins to die down.

Is your fire still burning? Can you really say, "The longer I serve Him the sweeter He grows"? Maybe you need to knock off the old ashes, put on new wood, and open the door so the wind can blow your fire back bright again.

## August 14, 2002 PROFIT VERSES

Sometimes I just like to let the Lord speak in His own behalf. Financial times are difficult for many people right now. I could give you all sorts of sermons and suggestions but, instead, I would like to simply share some verses from the eternal word of God. Read and heed and stand in wonder at God's provision.

(Isaiah 48:17) Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God **which teacheth thee to profit**, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.

(Psalms 35:27) Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the LORD be magnified, which hath **pleasure in the prosperity of his servant**.

(Joshua 1:8) This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: **for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success**.

(Malachi 3:8-10) Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, **if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it**.

God cares about your body, your soul, and your spirit. Cling to His promises and His person - and wonder at His provision.

## August 20, 2002 TRAVEL REQUIREMENTS

One of the great privileges I have as I work for the Free Will Baptist of South Carolina is that of visiting the missionaries we support. Last year I had the joy of seeing how God is mightily at work in our ministry in India. This year my wife and I are visiting the works in Brazil so that we can more clearly report to the churches in our state what God is doing in Brazil and how our churches can more effectively be a part of reaching our Brazilian brethren.

One of the rules I have had to learn about traveling is that it is not simply going to an airport, buying a ticket, and going somewhere. When you travel to a different country several additional things are required. In looking at these requirements I saw a good illustration of what it takes to become a child of God.

The first thing I had to obtain was a passport declaring that I was a citizen of the United States. This passport contains my picture and other vital information and lets everyone know where I am from and who I am. In the same way, it is only when I am ready to declare to God and the world that I am a sinner in need of a Savior that I can begin the process of becoming a child of God (We call this conviction).

The second thing I must obtain is my ticket to my destination. This must be sent to the embassy of the country I plan to enter, along with my passport, so they will know I am serious about wanting to go to their country. This serious seeking would be called repentance- wanting to leave one country and go to another.

Finally, the country I want to enter issues a visa. At the border of that country, that is what the agents will look for. The “visa” for Heaven is firm faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And what a joy when the agent stamps that visa and you can enter that country!

## August 21, 2002 POTTER PRINCIPLES

One of the illustrations God uses to teach Israel about His concern for their actions is the well known story of the visit to the Potter’s House (Jer 18:4-6) where the prophet is told that God is working with His people in the same way that the potter works with clay. Several principles from the potter are important in our living for the Lord.

1) The Potter is personally involved with the clay- (Isaiah 64:8) But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Realizing that we are clay in the hand of the potter gives us tremendous confidence as we rest in the fact that it is not our own efforts and abilities that shape us; but the caring hand of the potter. We are not a “piece of dirt” being shaped by the circumstances of the World, we are clay in the hands of a loving potter.

2) The Potter must be trusted- (Romans 9:21) Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? The Potter’s shaping may not always make “sense” to us but we can always rest in His love. Paul wanted to preach. God allowed him to be “dishonored” by being put in prison. There God continued his shaping by letting him write nearly one third of today’s Bible!

You can resist God’s hand and become a marred vessel or you can yield to the potter’s touch and become a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the master’s use.

## August 27, 2002 HOG PEN PATIENCE

Sometimes I don't know how he did it. I really don't. The day the baby boy, the light of his life, came to him and said he wanted to pretend that he, the father, was already dead so he could get the money that was coming to him from the will must have been a hard day. I can almost imagine the hurt and pain in his heart as he divided everything he had worked so hard to obtain and placed the money into the hands of his sons.

Then those horrible days when the neighbors would just happen to drop by and tell about how his youngest boy was the life of the party as he dived head first into every kind of sin and shame. I'm sure there must have been many nights when sleep would have been so welcome as he tossed and turned and wondered why his son had gone so far from his childhood teachings.

But how did he stand it that day when he heard about the hog pen? Money all gone, now his baby boy was friendless, homeless, and trying to survive on hog husks. How his heart must have hurt. What a struggle it must have been each day to sit at his home instead of rushing to the aid of his child. And the inquiring looks from his neighbors as they described how desperate the boy's plight had become must have cut him to the very quick.

How did he develop this hog pen patience? How did he learn that there was no need to get the boy out of the mud until he could get the mud out of the boy. His heart hurt, his soul ached, but he waited with that hog pen patience until the day finally came when his baby boy came to himself and set out for the father's house. Then the party could begin and the joy could overflow because the "dead" son was now alive again.

God wants you out of the hog pen but He loves you enough to wait until you come to yourself and desire to live at the Father's home instead of in the hog pen. How low will you go before you look up?

## August 28, 2002 PAUL ON PREACHERS

The Apostle Paul was not only a dedicated preacher but he was also determined to transfer his zeal and vision to the next generation. He knew that Christianity, like every other "movement" is just one generation from extinction. In writing to one of his promising young preachers, Timothy, he listed Four guidelines that every Preacher, and every Christian, should follow.

1. Stir up your gift- (2 Timothy 1:6) Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. God gives us each a task and the ability to perform that task. Work at your work.

2. Study Down Bible knowledge- (2 Timothy 2:15) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. The only permanent thing on the earth is the word of God. Learn it to live and live to learn it.

3. Separate from Sinful behavior- (2 Timothy 2:22) Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't debate with sin, flee from it. He who wallows in the mud gets muddy.

4. Stand Fast til the end- (2 Timothy 4:7) I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:. In a changing world, hold steadfast to a changeless God.

## September 3, 2002     THE COUNTERFEIT FATHER

Most of us have heard stories about a child that learned one day that the man they had called father all of their life was actually not their real father. That same story may be played out in a spiritual sense in the very near future. Many people today believe that they are “Children of God” simply because they are born in America or because they are born into the Human Race but the Bible shows us the fallacy of this opinion

Everyone is born a Sinner by Birth- Ps 51:5 Behold I as shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Romans 3:23) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;. Men are not born as children of God who then go bad. They are born as sinners who simply follow their sinful nature to do wrong.

People show who their real father is by the actions of their life- John 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do...You don't have to teach a child to lie about stealing a cookie; he will just naturally do wrong deeds.

The saddest part of having a Counterfeit Father, however, is the final home he is helping you prepare- Matt 13:38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; vs 40-42 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

You don't have to be a child of this counterfeit father. You can be Born Again as a child of God and enjoy all the rewards and privileges that come with having a loving caring father- John 1:12 But as many as received him (Jesus), to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

## September 4, 2002     GOD AND SIN

The problem with rules is that they keep changing. In the early part of this century it was a sin in our denomination to drink Coca-Cola (Rumors about its ingredients) but now half of our preachers drink a coke for breakfast! Things that were an abomination in society 25 years ago are now laughed at on TV and accepted as normal by the corporate world.

I don't know all the answers but I do know 3 basic facts that guide my life in the midst of the changing standards of society.

1) God Pronounces Sin- Sin is a sin because God says it is a sin- period. God declares that sin is “falling short of the glory of God”. That simply means that man misses the mark of the way God wants him to live and act. Culture, circumstances, or changing values are not the standard; God sets that.

2) God Punishes Sin- Society sets rules and guidelines and then determines what will result if those rules are broken. Sadly, the process is run by humans who many times will corrupt judgment or compromise on right. God judges everyone by the same standard; and pronounces the same sentence for all.

3) God Pardons Sin- God pronounces what is a sin. God decides the punishment for that sin. But then, God steps off the judge's seat, pays the debt incurred by sin, and declares that man's sin debt is paid in full- Glory! The only catch is that the Pardon will only be given to those who accept it. Have You?

## **September 10, 2002    DOING YOUR BEST**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **September 11, 2002    TERRORIST TRUTHS**

September 11<sup>th</sup>, a day that will live in infamy. Terror came to America on a scale we had never seen and the changes from this attack will remain with us for a long time- Long lines at airport security, increased surveillance and suspicion, and even changes in the items you can take to a ball game.

What did the terrorist accomplish? They took the lives of a lot of innocent people. They destroyed several buildings and damaged another. They helped push America into a year long recession. And they cost America billions of dollars in cleaning up their wreckage, cleaning them out of Afghanistan, and making changes in nearly every public area of our life.

What did the terrorist fail to do? They failed to defeat America's spirit or resolve. When it came to America's heart they simply didn't get it! They forget that America can take a licking, keep on ticking; and come back stronger than ever. And they found that poking a sleeping bear with a stick is not a wise decision.

Where was God in all this? Waiting patiently for His people who are called by His name to humble themselves and prayerfully seek His face again. This attack should have been a wake up call for American's Churches and a stern warning to lukewarm church members about taking God's protection for granted. May it harden our resolve, soften our heart, and stir us to greater works.



## September 17, 2002    THRILLS THAT KILL

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:” (Genesis 3:4)

He was a wonderful person: Full of life, very outgoing, a people person. Life was good to him. He had a great job, a wonderful family, and seemed to be right in the middle of the American Dream. Then one day someone offered him an extra thrill in the form of crack cocaine. He knew the dangers but he thought he could handle it so he signed on for a little thrill. I remembered that when I heard about his death. His final months were spent alone, broke, with his health destroyed. The thrill had led to a kill. But that was just him. It won't happen to you. After all, “The serpent said...Ye shall not surely die”.

My friend told me about this one. She was a pretty, precious young lady. Good personality with a very good mind. She could have married well or possibly even climbed the corporate ladder to success. But someone convinced her that living a loose life style was the real way to a thrill. Long sordid story short, one day she found she had AIDS. A few short months later the thrill had led to a kill. But, of course, that will not happen to you. After all, “the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:”

His name was “Mac” and he was a friend. A brilliant mind was stored in his short little body and he was headed for the riches of silicon valley within the week. Computers were just beginning to bloom and he was set to ride the wave of success and riches. The night before he was to leave for his new life some “friends” took him out to give him a sendoff party. They told him that he just had to enjoy the thrill of alcohol before he joined the corporate world. The next day he was found face down in a river running through town. The thrill had led to a kill. But it won't happen to you. After all, the serpent said, “Ye shall not surely die”.

## September 18, 2002    SWINE SNOOT STANDARDS

How would you like to see a pig poking around in piles of stinking garbage with a solid gold ring encased with diamonds fastened to his nose? That is the picture drawn in Proverbs about a woman who fails to act like a lady in her standards of life-“As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion” (Prov 11:22).

What an awful picture. Pretty and precious covered with foul, disgusting garbage. Instead of being admired and protected this precious jewel is treated like a common piece of trash. And all because she failed to act with discretion.

One writer said that discretion is “good breeding and modest carriage”. In this scripture it refers to a lady who fails to act like a lady in her talk, her actions, and her demeanor. She talks trash, she dresses trashy, and she acts without modesty or civility.

This has nothing to do with the cost of her clothing, the extent of her education, or the location of her home. Modesty and discretion are the result of character; and character comes from the heart. Jesus said that wicked words and wicked thoughts come from wicked hearts. In the same way, jewels in swine's snouts come from hearts that need to be changed by the grace of God.

When the world looks at you today, will it admire you as a jewel or will they treat you as if you are a swine's snout?

## September 24, 2002 WHAT MORE?

The story is about the nation of Israel but I believe you can readily see the application could apply to modern day America. Listen to God's lamentation over a good nation gone bad- (Isaiah 5:1-7) Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

Can't you just hear the heart of God as He asks that searching question, "What could have been done more to my vineyard?" God has blessed America with natural barriers of protection, abundant natural resources, and the opportunity to model to the rest of the world the principles and practices of a righteousness nation. Instead, we have squandered our resources and developed a life style that glorifies sports, sex, spending, and shameless living.

When nothing more could be done. When people disregard God and have no respect for His guidelines then the Lord said He would take away the walls of protection and allow briars and thorns to grow up. Will it happen to us? Has it already begun?

## September 25, 2002 THORN TROUBLES

Have you ever gotten a thorn in your finger and couldn't get it out? It is a constant source of irritation; no matter what you do you always seem to end up hitting that particular place on your finger and causing it to hurt again.

Several times in scripture God talks about using thorns to get our attention and cause us to turn from a wrong course of action. Let's look at three of those thorn troubles.

1) **The Thorn of Punishment-** (Judges 2:2-3) And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

2) **The Thorn of Pride-** (2 Cor 12:7) And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

3) **The Thorn of Profit-** (Mark 4:18-19) And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Has God allowed a thorn into your life for a reason?

## October 1, 2002 MORE THAN I THOUGHT

I travel a lot so I joined an auto club in order to get help if I ever had car trouble. Surprisingly, one of it's greatest benefits has been something I did not think about when I purchased the plan; discounts at hotels. Being a member of this auto club has saved me the cost of membership many times over in hotel room discounts. The plan turned out to be much more beneficial than I had thought it would be.

Recently I purchased tires for our van. I was offered a protection plan and I started to turn it down but they said it would allow me to get the tires on the van rotated and balanced in any of their stores so I accepted it. After only a few thousand miles of driving a piece of wood punctured one of my tires so badly until it was beyond repair. Happily, I found that my plan not only balanced my tires but it repaired them or replaced them if they were beyond repair. The plan paid for itself ten times over in this one incident. It was much more beneficial than I thought.

As a teen age boy I heard one night that I was headed for hell apart from God. I came to Christ and accepted Him as my Savior in order to be redeemed from my awful debt of sin. After I became a child of God, however, I found that missing Hell was nice but gaining Heaven and having a relationship with a living God was wonderful beyond words. I thought Salvation was about my past but I soon found that it dealt much more with my future. It was much more than I thought; and the greatest decision I have ever made.

## October 2, 2002 SING SONG SERMON

Ezekiel 33:31-32) And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

I can almost hear them as they leave the Church, "Wasn't that a lovely sermon today. Our Pastor is such an eloquent speaker. I am so proud to be able to invite our neighbors to come hear him." Proudly they march out of the church, smug in the knowledge that they are better than their neighbors because they came to church and their neighbors did not.

The sermon was like a song to them. It tickled their ears and pleased their emotions but nothing really changed in their life as a result of hearing it. After all, a song is simply for entertainment.

No wonder they gossip about their neighbors as they leave church or look forward so much to an afternoon nap to help them get over the partying they did on Saturday night. The Word of God would have changed their hearts but a "sing song sermon" only stirred their emotions and was soon forgotten.

How about you? Do you pat your foot or change your life as you listen to a sermon?

## October 8, 2002 Worry

Worry is something that every individual encounters in their life. People worry over their future, their families, their finances, and their health. Many times they even worry over things that never take place. Physical complications can also be a consequence of worry. It's often not what we eat that causes ulcers, but what is eating us!

Worry often takes a little problem and explodes it into something large that blurs our vision. Did you know that if we were able to take 100 feet of fog from a city of seven blocks and place it into one glass, it would not even make one full glass of water. Little things that worry us are like fog that obscures our sight. God has control over every situation that we face. Worrying over a particular situation only makes things worse for ourselves and for others. Like sitting in a rocking chair; Worry creates a lot of motion, but gets you nowhere.

What is the answer to worry? How can I stop worrying? In his great sermon about not worrying, Jesus said the proper thing to do is to "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt 6:33). Worry is putting our problems ahead of God's promises. There are more than 8,000 promises in the Bible, and 85% of these promises are given by God to man. God has promised to us His provisions, His presence, and His power. Worry is lack of faith that God will do what He said He would do. John R. Rice said, "Worry is placing a question mark where God has placed a period."

Worry is a small trickle of fear that wanders through the mind until it cuts a path into which all other thoughts are drained. It is necessary to remember that God is our strength. Our efforts are little, but with God our efforts become great! We must not allow the words of others nor the circumstances of today to cause us to lose sight of God love and care. Worrying won't help; trusting and obeying God will.

## October 9, 2002 REASONABLE SERVICE

(Romans 12:1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Is it reasonable for God to require that I put Him first in all my life and actions? That is what would happen if I presented my body as a living sacrifice that was holy and acceptable to God.

Is it reasonable service that I give up my own wants and desires so that I can devote my energy and efforts toward serving and worshiping God? I get the idea today from most people that God is the one doing the serving and I am the one that is supposed to demand of Him all the health and wealth I need.

What is this that Paul is talking about when he tells me reasonable service is presenting my body as a living sacrifice? I thought it was my body and I should have the right to do with it as I pleased. The fact that my body is supposed to be the temple of the Holy Spirit should not have any impact, should it?

Reasonable service. Isn't that just showing up at church every so often, dropping a little money into the collection plate, and then living the rest of the week as if I had no one to account to but myself. Wouldn't it be fanatical for me to start to believe that reasonable service meant I really got serious about obeying and serving God? Why, that would make people believe that I thought God was really God!

**October 15, 2002**

## **MIRACLE MISSION MAIL**

Several recent events concerning Missions and the mail illustrate how God works His purpose in helping missionaries get to the right place at the right time.

One involves a lady who lived beside a preacher. I mailed out cards to all the Free Will Baptist Pastors in the state telling them that our missionary to Japan was home and would be glad to visit in their churches to share what God was doing in our mission work in Japan. When this lady who lived beside the preacher went to her mailbox recently she saw a card lying on the ground. When the postman had put the mail into the preacher's mail box he had dropped the postcard about the Missionary to Japan and it was lying on the ground.

The lady who found the card on the ground did not attend the church where the preacher who lived beside her was pastor but she did want to have the missionary to Japan speak at her ladies group. She just did not know how to get in contact with her. The "dropped" post card provided all the information she needed so she could call and arrange a service. Isn't it wonderful how God works!

A Pastor of a local church had ordered some prayer cards of various missionaries from our national office. When the cards arrived they contained several cards for a Korean Missionary who was in the area but was not scheduled to be at this church. Receiving the cards made the Pastor realize that he needed to invite this Korean Missionary for a service. Again God used the mail to provide an open door for a missionary.

God gives us road signs along life's path to help us determine the right way to go. Sometimes these signs are in messages. Sometimes He directs through a miracle. And sometimes He just delivers our directions through the US Mail.

**October 16, 2002**

## **PRAYER PARTNER POWER**

A missionary to Japan related the following story. While at home on furlough this missionary was visiting in a church service. After telling about the needs of the Church in Japan the missionary spent some time meeting and greeting the people of the congregation. One lady asked the Missionary if there was anything specific that she could do that would really help the work in Japan.

Caught a little off guard, the missionary thought for a minute and then replied that this person could help if they would pray each day for one of the people in the church in Japan. This person was one of those who would come to church one time and then miss three services. Then they may attend two services and miss the next five. This lack of faithfulness was a matter of real concern to the Missionary.

The lady to whom the missionary was talking took the need to heart and spent time in prayer each day for this person in Japan that was not faithful to the Lord and His work. Little did she know what was happening. About six months later, she received a letter from the missionary thanking her for her prayers. He informed her that within two weeks after he returned to Japan this unfaithful person had begun attending Church on a regular basis and was now one of the most faithful members of the Church.

Someone has truly said, "If you cannot go on your feet then go on your knees!". What mission work did you pray for today?

October 22, 2002

## CAN I GET A TESTIMONY?

Observing Christians in the work place has shown me something interesting about people sharing their faith in Christ. The first thing I noticed was that the further away from their conversion experience a person becomes the less likely they are to be an active witness. Most converts are won by new converts (That is why so many churches are dying. They have not had any recent converts and the present members have lost the excitement of sharing their faith).

Another thing I have noticed is that many churches have given up on sharing their testimony with others and they are now trying to build their church with programs, promotions, or praise songs instead of with new births. The number attending a service or the excitement of that service has replaced new converts as the barometer of a church's success. And when you use the world's methods to accomplish goals cherished by the world you get worldly church members; as evidenced by the dress, actions, and attitude prevalent in many churches today.

It has always been enlightening to me to realize that a testimony is simply telling others about something that you have witnessed or experienced. Maybe it is so hard for some people to give their testimony because nothing has happened in their life or church recently (If you don't think that is the case, let a fight break out in church this week and see how long it takes for them to share their "Testimony" with everyone they meet.). Oh, that God would do something "Godly" in our churches and among Christians so they would want to tell everyone they meet about the great God we serve.

Many preachers ask their congregation, "Can I get a testimony?" The world is silently asking that same question. What will your response be?

October 23, 2002

## EFFECTIVE CHURCH MEMBERS

Is there more to being a good church member than simply warming a pew and putting a dollar in the collection plate each week? Preachers always plead with you to become committed Church members. What do they want? Here are several ideas that can help you become an effective Church member.

**ATTEND.** No matter how good the preaching and the singing; they will not help you if you are not in attendance. Your weekly appointment with God and His people is not something that should be missed lightly. Include Church in your plans. Develop a weekly attendance practice. Make it a priority.

**ADVERTISE.** Invite others to attend church with you. Over 70% of people who attend a church for the first time do so because of an invitation from a friend or family member. If the Gospel has the power we claim then you should have no problem in finding something very good to say about your church and its services. Make people feel they are missing something very important if they do not attend services with the people of God.

**AGONIZE.** If the pastor asked you to speak this week you would want everyone you knew praying for you. Spend more time praying for your pastor than you do talking about him! Pray for those who sing. Pray for those who teach. Pray for those who attend. Pray that God will do something in YOUR life.

Good church members don't just happen; they are made. Make sure you do your best to be your best this Sunday.



**October 29, 2002**

## **TITHER'S TESTIMONY**

She simply glowed with excitement. My wife and I were at a church, sharing slides about our recent trip to visit missionaries in Brazil and, naturally, a fellowship supper was involved. The lady who stood in line with us was so excited until she could hardly contain herself as she shared how God had manifested Himself to her in recent days.

She had recently gone through a divorce from an abusive husband and was now on her own. Money was very tight but in the midst of praying about having her needs met God seemed to speak to her and tell her that she needed to begin tithing. She almost laughed when she thought about it. How could she give any to God when she did not have enough to meet her own needs. But the thought kept coming back.

She knew she needed to obey God so the next week she paid her tithes. The first few weeks everything went well but the third week she looked at her bills and knew that if she paid her tithes she would come up \$40 short. She weighed the money in her hand for a while and decided to do what she knew was right and put God first. Then she went to the place where she owed her bill so she could tell them she would be \$40 short this month. When she gave the clerk the money the clerk looked at the bill and said something looked wrong. When the clerk checked the bill it was \$40 too much (Is there a Glory anywhere in the house?)!

Next week this same lady had enough to pay all her bills but nothing left over for gas; that is, until she decided to wear some old clothes one day and found \$10 in her pocket. I told her I had seen God do things like that over and over. She said it was her first experiences with God's marvelous provision and it had just energized her testimony. And all because she started putting God's principles into practice.

**October 30, 2002**

## **WAGGED BY WORRY**

1 Thessalonians 3:3) That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

"Moved by Affliction". Pastor Danny Keen (Landmark FWB Church) pointed out an interesting truth about this verse. The word "moved" here means "to wag or to shake" and is used only this one time in scripture. Paul is literally telling the people of Thessalonica that worry about troubles and trials of life should not make us wag like a dog's tail. Instead, our faith in God's provision and plan should bring stability rather than shaking.

Have you been wagged by worry lately. There are many concerns in today's world. We worry about being shot if we walk out our door, we worry about paying last month's bills with this month's money, and we worry about a future that looks increasingly uncertain and war like.

God does not call us to bury our head in the sand and pretend that everything is great while all around us confusion and chaos reign. He simply tells us to not let these circumstances shake our faith in His love and provision.

We can twist all around in fear and panic like the violent twitching of a dog's tail or we can rest in a rock solid God who knows exactly what we are enduring and exactly what needs to be done. Dog is God spelled backward. I believe I will go forward with God instead of being wagged to a stop with worry.

## **November 5, 2002      ASSURED ASSURANCES**

When the Bible said that Abraham was persuaded of the promises of God (Rom 4:21) it declares that he was so persuaded until he “against hope believed in hope”. What a conviction! Christians today need that same kind of Assured Assurance as they face an uncertain world. Thankfully, the Bible gives us three important areas of life that we can have complete assured assurance about.

1) God’s Care: (Romans 8:38-39) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing that Satan, circumstance, or live can throw at us is able to overcome the love that God has for us. God loved us when we were unlovable. Jesus loved us and died for us when we were dead in trespasses and sin. Be assured that God’s love is one constant you can cling to in an ever changing world.

2) God’s Keeping Power- (2 Timothy 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. You should have an assured assurance about your salvation. The author of our salvation has already conquered death, hell, and the grave; never worry that Satan will be able to overcome you and pull you away from God. You can walk away from God but God will never walk away from you.

3) God’s Future Plans- (Hebrews 11:13) These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. What a privilege to know that we don’t need to know the future as long as we are walking toward it holding God’s Hand!

I have an assured assurance about God’s Care, my salvation, and the future. Do you?

## **November 6, 2002      PERSUADED**

The word persuade in the Bible is an interesting word. In the Old Testament it comes from a Hebrew word that means to prick or goad. In the New Testament the Greek word means to convince by argument. In the Old Testament the implication is that people are persuaded by physical motivation but in the New Testament persuasion is presented as more of a mental force.

The difference seems to be that in the Old Testament persuasion was used to get someone to do something that they may not want to do but that someone else wanted them to do. In the New Testament persuasion is often coupled with preaching the Gospel as preachers seek to change people’s mind about their sin and about their need of Jesus Christ as Savior. But it is always recognized that placing Faith in Christ must be an act of Free Will; not coercion.

With that in mind let me share with you three groups of persuaded people and ask you which group you are in.

1) Never Persuaded- The brothers of the rich man in Hell were not going to trust Christ no matter what was done (See Lu 16:31)

2) Almost Persuaded- King Agrippa (Acts 26:28) was close to trusting Christ but we never found where he actually did so.

3) Fully Persuaded- Thankfully, Some Trust God and walk in obedience to His word: Ro 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

## **November 12, 2002    FIVE FINGERS**

A Complete Church, functioning as it should has five “fingers” of ministry. If it is missing either of these fingers it will fail to be the complete hand God desires it to be.

Finger number one is Worship. This is the church looking upward toward God in adoration and praise. Sadly, too many Christians worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship.

Finger number two is Study of God’s Word. This is God declaring His will, His works, and His Way to his people.

Finger number three is Fellowship with fellow Christians. Fellowship is not simply eating in the same building or sitting together in the same church. Christians are all part of the body of Christ. They have different functions to perform and they need to work together if the body is to accomplish its job. Part of the joy of Christian growth is helping fellow Christians learn how to live and work for the Lord

Finger number four is Evangelism. God has called His people to declare His glory. In doing that they must declare that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Then they must point men to God’s payment price for their sins (the shed blood of Christ) and help them to see that peace in this life and partnership with God in the next life comes only from trusting in God’s provision and plan.

The fifth finger is Service. This is showing the world how God would act if He were living on the earth. That is why we are called Christian because we are to be Christ like and Christ spent His life showing forth the love and works of the Heavenly Father.

Are you part of a “five finger” church? If not, what can you do to help get all the fingers functioning?

## **November 13, 2002    BANANA PEEL SALVATION**

If ever a man had one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel, it was the thief on the cross when Jesus was crucified. His story remains an inspiration and a hope to countless multitudes of people and gives us some very important principles.

First, People must realize that Forgiveness is a gift you receive; not a right you demand. Salvation was given at the last moments of this man’s life but, as the other thief illustrates, it only comes from a repentant heart willing to turn to God and trust Christ as Savior.

Secondly, the road to Salvation is the same regardless of when you trust Christ. You must turn from the world and make a stand for Christ (He rebuked the other thief and looked to Christ). You must acknowledge that God has the right to judge you (Do you not Fear God?). You must acknowledge that you are a sinner (We indeed justly are crucified). You must acknowledged Christ the sinless Son of God (This man has done nothing amiss). You must Prayed for Forgiveness (Lord, Remember me). And you must accept the word of Christ by Faith (Even though you will still die on the cross yet today you will be with me in Paradise).

Finally, See that this Thief on the Cross got his Due Reward (We indeed justly- Sin has consequences even when forgiven!) and he had No Rewards to cast at the feet of Jesus- Wasted life.

## **November 19, 2002    WORD WORK**

Without anything God can make every thing. With absolutely nothing, God can make something. Listen to how God's creation power is described - (Psalms 33:6) By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

We picture God having to mix up something or put something together in order for creation to take place. In reality, God simply speaks and the creation work is done. I am reminded of the story often told about scientist who had grown so smart until they challenged God to a duel of creation. When they met for the contest the scientist scooped up a bucket of dirt to begin their creation process. God simply stated, "No, get your own dirt!" Creation means you start from nothing and end up with something. It does not mean you start with something and end up with something else.

The work accomplished by God's simple word is mind boggling. He blessed two fish and five loaves and fed 5000 people. He stood in the midst of a raging storm and simply said, "Peace, be still" and the storm stood still. And most of His healing miracles were done simply by speaking to the disease or the demon. Even in Salvation, Men are saved by Faith but Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. It is the foolishness of preaching the Word of God that brings about conviction and conversion; not the demonstration of abilities, talents, or miracles. It is the Word that does the work.

People often use their own failures and inabilities as a justification for not trusting Christ or as an excuse to fail to work for God. Remember, God can take nothing and make something by the simple power of His Word. Let His Word do a work in your life today.

## **November 20, 2002    BREAKFAST BLESSING**

It started out as a cold, rainy, miserable Monday morning and only got better. My princess does not like to get up early, especially on cold rainy days; and most especially, when she has to go to the doctor. But prodding and pleading got her up and ready and we made the trek through early morning commuters and early morning rain to the doctor's office.

The wait was short, the report was good, and a smile was beginning to flicker around the pretty mouth of a princess. I knew what was coming when I saw the sparkle begin to shine in those pretty eyes. In spite of the fact that it was pouring rain and my wife's favorite breakfast restaurant was all the way across town I knew the answer to my "where do you want to go for breakfast" question before I uttered a word.

What my wife did not know, however, was that my financial situation was extremely limited. In visiting several churches on Sunday I had given almost all I had to various offerings. I would just have to trust the Lord to make a way so off we went.

When I drove up to let my wife off at the door of the restaurant a pastor I know was arriving at the same time. He talked with my wife until I parked the van and then, just before we entered the restaurant, he told me he had been given a special offering on Sunday and wanted to share with my wife and I.

Breakfast was great, God is good, and I would rather be a child of God than anything else in this world.

## November 26, 2002 OUTER SPACE PRAISE

Psalms 150:1 ¶ Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

A disclaimer at the beginning. If you do not agree with my flight of fancy about this then I give you the right to be wrong and still love you! Seriously, Much of this cannot be proven conclusively but I believe something of this sort will transpire.

“Praise God in the firmament of his power.” Can’t you just see it now? We arrive in Heaven and spend a million years praising God for His salvation and His mercy toward us. We settle into our mansion, meet all our neighbors, and tour the celestial city. One day God asks us if we would like to go on a trip. Sounds interesting so we book aboard Heaven’s transportation system (Can’t wait to see what that will be!) and are soon transported into the vast “firmament of God’s power”.

We arrive in strange and wonderful places and see sights that are beyond the comprehension of mere mortals. This is where the really good part comes in. We get to tell the people we meet in these places about the wonderful works and mercy of God. We share about the fact that we were dead in sin and God reached down and saved us and gave us new life through the death of His dear son, Jesus Christ. People all around hang on to our words in amazement and almost unbelief.

Then we start to share about how God met our needs and kept us safe when we were living on earth. The crowd grows ever larger as our praise of God and His works flow. People nudge each other and sometimes even shout, “Glory!” as the realization of just how great God really is begins to sink in. Finally we leave and go to another place to do it all over again with the startling realization that praise to God is not a ritual we perform but a privilege we enjoy.

Why it sounds so good until I think I will start praising God now instead of waiting until I get to Heaven.

## November 27, 2002 PUBLIC PRAISE

Psalms 150:1 ¶ Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

Luke 19:37 And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen;

Those are the only two verses in the Bible in which the phrase “Praise God” are used (Although praise to God is the main theme of the entire Bible). Praising God in his sanctuary is fairly normal but note how and why the disciples praised God in public.

They praised Him Spontaneously. Praise just seemed to grow out of their heart as they began the last leg of their journey toward Jerusalem. Our public praise of God should be the same. It should flow unrehearsed and unpremeditated from our heart as we journey for the Lord. People who have to make themselves praise God do so from their lips and not from their heart.

Note how they praised God; with a loud voice. No, I don’t mean you must make a scene and act like a nut to praise God. I do think, however, that some praise should be audible enough that those around you will realize your joy in God and His work.

Finally, see the reason for praise; the mighty works of God. Surely there are enough of those to give us reason to praise God every day. May His praise pour from YOUR lips today.

## **December 3, 2002      SAINTLY SIGNS**

So many voices. All claiming to be right. How do you know the true from the false when so many whom you thought were true turn out to be false? Church members fail. Pastors turn out to be just as human as anyone else. National leaders reveal dark secret sides that shock and appall. What should you look for in a person in order to know that they are really a follower of God.

1) They Brag on God- (Malachi 3:16) Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. People who are followers of God and children of God will talk about God as a friend and father. God will not simply be mentioned in their preaching or their piety but in their every day conversation as they talk about how their world has been changed because of their relationship with God.

2) They Bear Godly Fruit- (Matthew 7:18-20) A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. I always tell people that if it quacks like a duck, looks like a duck, and flies like a duck then it better not come my way during hunting season! It is pretty obvious to me that putting an apple tree sign on a lemon tree will not change the face I make when I bite into the fruit. Christians act like Christians because they are Christians at heart.

3) They Believe God's Word- (Rom 1:17) For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Rom 10:17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. A Christian's attitudes and actions are built on God's word and not on afternoon TV shows. It is not what I think but what God says.

Met any Christians lately?

## **December 4, 2002      SORRY SAINT SIGNS**

Why do we have so many churches in America and so little change in people's hearts? Why doesn't the Sunday Morning crowd make a Monday Morning difference? Maybe the problem is that many church attenders have problems like the problems they are supposed to correct. Here are three signs that point toward a failing, ineffective Church member.

1) They Grumble about God's Program- (Num 11:1) And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. Delivered from captivity and on their way to the promised land; they still complained about God's man and God's plan.

2) They Gossip about God's People- Re 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. They are a much better representative of Satan than they are of God.

3) They Gravitate toward Gold and Pleasures- Lot choose the well watered valley of Sodom and lost his reputation, his family, and his relationship with the Lord. When Church is a chore and the world is your joy, you have a heart problem!



## December 10, 2002    CHAMAD CHRISTMAS

Do you think there may be some coveting going on at Christmas! The Hebrew word for covet is “Chamad” which means to wrongfully desire. Do you think there may be some “Chamad” connected with the presents that will be opened on Christmas day?

Do you think that many children will get certain presents not because they are needed, or even best for them, but because they desire to the point of throwing a temper tantrum a certain toy? The value of the toy is in the fact that it is like the one everyone else is getting.

Is it possible this Christmas that some people will charge things in December that they will be paying interest on in June just because they want a Christmas like everyone else has? Could keeping up with the Smiths put you in the poor house with the Jones!

It is not wrong to give or receive gifts. It is not wrong to want the very best for someone you love. It become “Chamad” when you let the prosperity or presents that others will receive control your actions, your attitude, and your pocketbook. Here are some guidelines from God’s Word to help keep you in check this Christmas season.

Ex 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Lu 12:15 Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

If you are prone to thinking just of yourself then remember this verse- 1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

May God bless you this year with a Christ centered Christmas instead of a “Chamad” Christmas.

## December 11, 2002    MESSIAH’S MISSION

Tis the season to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, to earth. A writer once said that, “The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable.” And even time itself is numbered from that blessed birth.

But why did He come? What was His mission? What did He hope to accomplish on earth and in the hearts of men? The answer is found in the two-fold office ascribed to Jesus in the gospel of Matthew as he declares he is writing “the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

David was a great king and God promised that a perpetual ruler would sit upon his throne and rule in righteousness. Jesus came to complete this promise of God by establishing an eternal kingdom which was not of this world but one that would be administered by an everlasting king on a new earth to come. In the meantime he calls on men to yield themselves to Him with a willing mind and a loving heart. Men are now classified according to whether they bow before Jesus as King or continue to follow the rebellion of Satan.

Abraham was the father of a nation. In the same way Jesus calls all men to be born again and become part of the family of God. A family in which every member is loved and finds fulfilment in doing the will of the father.

The Messiah’s Mission then is simple; to establish a kingdom in which we are all kin and properly related to God.

## December 17, 2002    Flash Lights

My father-in-law was putting some things in his attic several months ago and accidentally left his flash light up there. The next time he needed a light he realized it had been misplaced. He searched through all the drawers and closets in the house, and even crawled under the house trying to locate it but it was not to be found.

Finally, we decided it must be lost for good and bought him another for a Birthday Present; which is the week before Christmas. When he used his new flashlight to go up into the attic to get some Christmas decorations, guess what he found?

My father-in-law is not the only one who has lost a light, however. Jesus once asked his disciples, "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?" (Mark 4:21). He meant by this that men tend to lose the light of their testimony when they become too busy (hidden under a bushel) or too lazy (hidden under a bed) to let their light shine.

It is a constant amazement to me to see the number of Christians who are too busy to do anything for God; or too lazy to obligate themselves to Christian service. In the process of living they have lost the light of life; and have become a stumbling block of obstruction instead of a light house of guidance for people lost in the darkness of sin.

It doesn't have to be that way. Think back to where you lost your light, go back there, pick it up, clean it up, and let it shine again. God wants your light to shine, the world needs your light to shine, and you will never really be happy unless you shine your light. Find a dark corner where you can shine today. Someone desperately needs your light.

## December 18, 2002    SERVANT SAVIOR

Matthew tells about his birth from Joseph's side of the family. Luke gives the details of his birth from Mary's side of the family. John exhausts his vocabulary telling about his birth from God's side of the family. Mark simply ignores his birth.

Matthew shows the lineage of Christ the King. Luke shows the ancestry of Jesus the Man. John declares he was God because his beginning was before the beginning. Mark simply describes Jesus as a servant; and who cares about the blood line of a servant.

Merchants don't like Mark. Mark didn't talk about gifts and gold and glamor at the birth of Jesus; Mark thought we should celebrate what Jesus did more than when he was born. Merchants like the pageantry and presents of Christmas. Mark liked the person and performance of Jesus. Merchants like decorations. Mark liked doing.

Jesus declared in Mark that the greatest of all shall be servant of all. Today we believe that the greatest is the one who has the biggest pile of toys when the smoke clears on Christmas morning.

The babe of Bethlehem is a blessing to behold and deserves to be recognized. But coming to know the servant Savior who went about doing good will fulfill your life instead of emptying your pocketbook. So if you want this Christmas to be really special then get acquainted with the serving Savior Mark describes. You will be amazed at the difference it makes when you recognize the fact that it is more blessed to give than it is to receive.

## December 24, 2002    A CHRISTMAS DEVOTION

The story of the birth of the Christ child in Luke 2:1-17 is a wonderful example of some principles you need to apply to your own life this Christmas season if you would put Christ back in Christmas

1. "Everyone went to be taxed". Christmas is a time of financial burden brought about by someone else. This census tax involved everyone and caused a great deal of expense but from it God brought great joy. Make sure the joy stays in your giving this year.
2. "Everyone to his own city". Christmas is a time for family gatherings. It was crowded and someone may even have to sleep in the "stable" but don't allow a grumpy inn keeper syndrom to develop in your life.
3. "Her days were accomplished". Realize God has a Time Table. (Christ was born exactly WHEN He should be Exactly WHERE he should be!).
4. "Wrapped in swaddling clothes because of no room in the inn"- All things work together for the good to them that love the Lord. (The swaddling clothes were a sign to the shepherds).
5. "The Glory of the Lord shone round about them"- Time to see the marvels of God: Expressions of Love, Joy in the face of a Child, God's love manifest thru His Son.
6. "Praising God"- Time to sing and rejoice (Be Happy, the Savior is born)
7. "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us."- Time to find and worship Christ.
8. "They made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child"- Time to share Christ with someone.

God became a child in order that you and I could become children of God. Rejoice in that and have a MERRY CHRISTMAS.

## December 25, 2002    MERRY CHRISTMAS

MERRY CHRISTMAS. It has been a great pleasure and a tremendous honor to be able to share these short devotional articles with you for the past 12 years. I look forward (the Lord willing) to many more years of sharing how God is at work in my life and in my world. I believe the greatest adventure possible is living the Christian life, working for God, and anticipating the future bliss that will be ours when we finally see Him face to face whom so long we have known heart to heart.

I also want to express my appreciation for all the kind comments and positive response I have received from so many of you about how the Lord has used these devotional articles to minister in your life. They are written on a very busy schedule and must be limited to fit in the space provided but much time is spent in prayer and thought so that God can use them to speak to discouraged, distressed, and down trodden hearts.

I certainly do not have the means or method to give each of you who read this a special gift at Christmas (as much as I want to!) but I can tell you that many of the past devotional articles have been put into booklet form and I would count it a joy to be able to send you a copy- at no cost and with no follow up solicitation. Simply send your request with your name and address to Rev Mike Jones, Minister Ministry, P O Box 13673, Florence, SC 29504- and may God bless you with a GREAT Christmas.