

2003 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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December 31, 2002 LIFE'S IMPORTANT ISSUE

One year ends. Another year begins. In the coming year Nations will rise and fall, multitudes of people will be born and many will die, and the must have toy of a week ago will be assigned to a corner of the closet; forgotten and unwanted. Wars and rumors of wars will trouble men's minds and consume daily news broadcast. And life will go on.

Debt, disease, divorce, disaster, and death will be the prevailing problems and will be the preoccupying issue in the hearts and minds of most people. Trying to make the money you want and need, trying to avoid or cure sickness, trying to keep your family together and functioning well, trying to keep abreast of weather warnings so you can avoid disasters, and spending your life avoiding death will occupy most of your energy and efforts. But, in the final analyst, are these the most important issue you will face this year?

One second after death the only debt that will matter is the one you owe God. One second after death disease will no longer concern you. One second after death the issue that will trouble you the most about your family is where they will spend eternity. One second after death you will realize that the greatest disaster you could ever face is having to face God unprepared. One second after death you will realize that death not only ended your life but it also ended your opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and get right with God.

Isn't it strange how a doctor's report of a possible problem seen in an x-ray can cause us to go to great expense and pain to make sure of what the problem really is while a preacher's proclamation from the infallible word of God about coming judgment rolls off our back and out of our mind. Many important issues will occupy your heart and mind this coming year. Of those issues, the most important one concerns your relationship with God. Will it be important to you or ignored by you?

January 1, 2003 NEW YEAR VISION

A new year looms before us. Will it be filled with thrills or scary with terror? Will it be a year in which you experience stunning victories or will it bring agonizing defeats? Will it be the best year of your life, the worst year of your life, or another year where you simply try to exist from week to week?

Gladly, I do not know the details of the year before us. There are, however, several permanent principles I can rest in as I venture into the unexplored year that stretches ahead of us.

1) Nothing in the New Year will take God by surprise. He sees the end of the year from the beginning and is fully aware of every obstacle and opportunity that the New Year holds. As long as I walk with God then nothing I face will be unfaceable.

2) God is the solid Rock and I can rest in His stability no matter what changes come in this new year. As time flows through this year it will undercut many people and principles that I thought were permanent and stable. Time after time I know I will shake my head as I see customs and character crumble beneath the onslaught of changing public standards but the tumultuous waters all around me will only add to the greatness of the Rock on which I stand.

Will you make this new year one in which you walk hand in hand with God or will you simply be dragged along by the river of time? Just remember this; Time will run into eternity one day so you had better spend your time getting ready for eternity.

January 7, 2003 THE GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT

Wouldn't it be great if you could get just the gift you needed as just the time you needed it! According to James 1:17 that is exactly what God is able to do- "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

God gives Good Gifts; things that will benefit and help you. This is not a gift from a distant aunt who is trying to be polite. It is just the gift you need from an all knowing, ever loving heavenly Father. God's gifts are not only Good, they are also Perfect. The word "Perfect" here means "Complete". God's gift has everything you need!

It is perfect because of its Source- it "is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights". It is perfect because of the Stability of the Giver- "With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning". He remains so steadfast in His love and care for you until not even a shadow of concern need ever be felt.

What are some of the Good and Perfect Gifts that God gives? Satisfaction- Ec 5:19 "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.". Eternal Life- Ro 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." And the Spirit's indwelling presence- Ac 2:38 "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

All good gifts come down from God. Disease, death, destruction, and disasters are all "gifts" from Satan. Who are you serving?

January 8, 2003 NO VARIABLENESS

The only time the word "Variableness" is found in Scripture is in James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." It is used here as a term of astronomy that equates the stability of God with that of the Sun.

In a day and age in which people thought the sun revolved around the earth this shows the amazing integrity of the word of God as it revealed that the Sun was stable and the earth was the one that moved. Once again God's word proves that it is trustworthy because it was given from an all knowing God instead of being thought up based on the limited knowledge of men. Think of the truth contained in this verse. God has no "variableness" in any circumstances. In the darkness of night when the sun is completely hidden from view and hope seems all but gone, the sun is still shining just as brightly as ever. And in a few short hours it will come back into view once again- Glory!

The earth may tilt away from the sun and the season may grow cold but the sun remains steadfast simply waiting on the earth to tilt back into a place of warmth; just as God patiently waits for us to see how cold it gets when we draw away from Him and how wonderful it is when His warmth returns.

Thank God for a stable God with "No Variableness".

January 14, 2003 THOUGHTFUL TRIO

The world is full of words. Words are used to excuse, accuse, bemuse, and confuse. Words blare from the radio in our car, stream from the TV in our living room, and cascade from the crowds as people try to get us to accept their point of view or buy the product they are selling. Into the midst of this waterfall of words let me throw three life changing questions that could change your life for now and for eternity.

1) Has the Lord been dealing with you recently? Has sickness or sorrow turned your thoughts from the frivolity of mind numbing TV programs to an awareness that the situations and circumstances of life are more than you can handle by yourself? Does your laughter ring hollow because of a sudden ache in your heart? Do your possessions suddenly seem unimportant as your conscience pricks your heart about death and judgment? Has God been getting your attention recently?

2) Down in your heart do you really want to be right with God? Are you satisfied with the way you are living now so that you have no desire to change your character and conduct or is there a deep yearning in your heart to make a meaningful life changing change? God knocks at heart doors and asks permission to enter. Do you long to hear Him knock on your heart or would you rather He just leave you alone to live and die as you please?

3) If you knew how to get right with God would you trust Christ as your Savior today? If someone told you that acknowledging your sinfulness, believing Christ paid your sin debt, and confessing your faith in Christ would change you from the inside out would you follow that plan and make those steps? Well, will you?

January 15, 2003 ACHSAH'S ANSWER

Achsah was the daughter of Caleb. As a wedding present she had been given a south land. She should have been happy but this south land was part of the Negev desert. It was good for wandering herders but not for a wife who wanted to settle down and raise a family.

What it needed was some water so the desert could be changed into a garden. So Achsah went to her father and asked for a watering hole to go with the land. Like all good fathers, Caleb gave her more than she asked for- He gave her 2 springs of water: an upper spring and a lower spring (One on each side of the land). Several important principles about how God works in our life are evident in the answer to Achsah's request.

1) Always desire something better- Achsah could have been satisfied with a desert but she knew things cannot change if they remain the same. She got more because she wanted more. Lukewarm gives God indigestion; He wants you to be the best you can be.

2) You have not because you ask not. Achsah could have spent her life wandering in the desert but she asked. Will Heaven reveal marvelous things God wanted to give us if we would have just asked for them?

3) God is able to give us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think; even if it means putting a spring on either end of our desert! God has a big hand and a big heart for His children

January 21, 2003 HAND PRINT

I keep a note pad in my bathroom at home. I also keep one beside my bed, in my car, and by the kitchen table. I never know when I will need to write down some inspiration or information.

Recently, I noticed that my note pad in the bathroom had the outline of a hand traced on it. My niece had recently stayed several days with us and she had evidently traced her hand one day while she was in the bathroom. It was very easy to tell it was her hand. It was smaller than the hand of either my wife or I and it was traced with purple ink (Her favorite color right now).

From time to time something special or unexpected happens in my life. That's when I begin to look around for the hand print of God. Sometimes it's so easy to identify until you would think it were drawn with purple ink. Other times the outline is so faint until you wonder if an angel simply laid their hand on the problem and all that remains is an imprint from stardust.

God is continually at work in the lives of His people; helping and guiding them. Sometimes He works through a dramatic miracle that shakes us to our very roots. Most times, however, it is simply the imprint of His hand on the incidents of life. Either way, whether in imprints or in powerful manifestations, He is showing us His love and care.

Learn to recognize the distinctive outline of God's hand as He continually protects and prods you. It will add an excitement and adventure to your life that will change your entire outlook. And rejoice that one day you will be able to grasp the hand behind the hand print and thank Him for His wonderful works on your behalf.

January 22, 2003 PRE PAID DEBT

The function of my job means that I keep the financial records of numerous ministry organizations. This record keeping demands a fair amount of time during the year but it is especially stressful when end of year reports must be completed. One of the ministries that is of special interest to me is the Free Will Baptist State Office financial statement because that is the one that supports me!

Last year at our state meeting in February we made some changes in our budget and I simply instituted those changes the first of March. When I figured up my report for the year I found that these changes had caused me to spend \$100 over my budget. We have no outside source to look to so that meant I would have to make up that difference. The problem was that Christmas and the end of the year expenses had cut me short.

Five minutes after I found this need an individual came in and said that God had impressed him to bring me a personal check for \$100- Is there a "Glory" anywhere in the house?

That God would meet my need is wonderful. That he would have burdened this person's heart to furnish the provision for the need hours before I knew I had the need is simply mind boggling. God paid the debt before I knew that I had a debt!

By the way, that is exactly the same thing Jesus did when He died on the cross for you. He paid for your debt before you were born so you could be born again many years later!

January 28, 2003 SPLIT LIGHT

When the church was originally being drawn up it seemed like a good idea; put the rest rooms at the back of the Sanctuary so people could get to them easily from inside the church. It looked good on paper but it turned out not to be so good in real life. The wall for the ladies rest room was only 3 feet from the back pew. Whenever someone was in the ladies room any sounds carried very loudly into the back of the church. The Ladies were not happy campers.

After several years of this the men finally figured that moving the rest rooms was the only way to restore peace and harmony among the women. They devised a plan that would relocate the rest rooms into the back of a large room beside the sanctuary. This would make them easily accessible while also making them much more private.

But you know how lazy men are. The area in which they wanted to relocate the rest rooms already had a light in the center so the men simply erected the wall between the men's room and the ladies room so that the light would shine into both rooms. I can almost see the men's sigh of relief at not having to run all kind of electric wire to finish this project.

A problem developed, however. The light switch was located in the ladies room. If you were in the men's room and a lady leaving the ladies room decided to cut off the light you were left in the dark. How do I know? Been there, done that!

Sometimes men, because of there own wisdom, their fleshly weakness, or their sinful wickedness think they can use God's Light without being connected to God's Power. It may work for awhile but sooner or later the light will go out and you will be left in a really awkward position.

January 29, 2003 SORE PREACHERS

It happened twice in a short period of time. I was visiting with two different Pastors and both of them could hardly walk. These were young preachers who were supposed to be full of vigor and vinegar and they were moving around like old men. And in both cases the reason was the same.

These young preachers had decided to play some basketball with a church group after a long winter of inactivity and now they were so sore until they could hardly move. In fact, one of them said he never knew he had muscles on his kneecap but he did now because even those muscles were sore!

Changing from a time of inactivity to a period of much activity had caused pain and discomfort. Remember that the next time people start complaining as soon as the Church decides to begin a new program. Everyone wants the fun and fitness that comes from playing basketball but no one wants the sore muscles that result when you first get into playing.

Jesus did not call us to sit on the seat of laziness and become Church couch potatoes. He said we were to go into all the world and stir things up for God. Sometimes that will mean dealing with new music, new programs, and new activities; and all of these will tend to make someone sore! Just keep up what you are doing and soon the soreness will turn to success and you will find the results are well worth the efforts and pain you endured.

February 4, 2003 TRUSTING TRIO

Paul declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. The problem many people have, however, is discerning what it means to believe.

Do you just believe in the church and what it represents? I know sometimes that I am ashamed of the way ministers and members of churches behave so that must not be it. Do you believe in Christianity as a religion? I am embarrassed sometimes at the actions and attitudes of people who call themselves Christians so that must not be it.

The Greek work for Believe here means to "Trust in, to rely on, to cling to". But what do you trust and how do you cling to it? Of course, as Christians, we believe that your trust must be in the sacrificial death and supernatural resurrection of Jesus Christ. But how does that change from a head knowledge to a life changing trust?

There are a trio of needs in true belief. First, there must be a personal Trust in God's word about the way God has provided. Faith cannot be second hand. You may change your opinions because of family, friends, or society but your heart will only change when you have a personal trust in a trustworthy God.

Secondly, Trust must bring you to the place of confident surrender. This is where many people hesitate in their trust of Christ. They want to believe that Christ will save them but they are not willing to surrender themselves into the will and work of God.

Finally, Trust is built on a Firm faith in Faith. Your feelings will change. Your character will change. Your friends will change. But your Faith must rest in none of these; it must rest in your belief in the truthfulness of God's word.

A personal Trust, A confident surrender, a firm reliance on God's word. That is what Saving Faith is all about. Is that the Faith you have?

February 5, 2003 PRINCESS PARTNER

My wife and I will celebrate thirty-three years of married bliss this week. The scriptures proclaim that, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD"(Pr 18:22). My wife has truly been my "good thing" from the Lord and I praise Him for His leadership in choosing her.

Most people know that I call her "Princess". Partly because she is so regal and partly because she tends to have a "Princess Attitude" about everything being just right - remember the old story about the way you discerned a real Princess; you put a pebble under 27 mattresses and the Princess was the one who said there was a lump in the bed!

My Princess has not only been the joy of my life but she has also been a tremendous partner in my ministry. Her unswerving devotion to things being done in a certain way has kept me from becoming a totally absent minded professor. Her willingness to accept the hardships, financial insecurity, and lack of stability of a Pastor have enabled us to devote our lives to ministry instead of misery. And her personal holiness and dedication to the Lord have enhanced our walk with the Lord and enabled us to fight the good fight of faith in our work for God.

When you have a Princess for a partner and you walk as a child of the King then life is indeed good. Praise God for a good wife and loving Heavenly Father.

February 11, 2003 FISHERS OF MEN

(Mark 1:17-18) *And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.*

Do you really want to show your love for someone. Then tell them about the greatest love ever displayed; the love of God for lost men.

There are 2 basic ways to Fish; Net Fishing (Many at one time- equal to preaching to a congregation) and Line Fishing (1 at the time- equal to personal Soul Winning). If you are going to be successful in obeying Jesus' command to be a fisherman then you must decide what kind of fishing you will do (You can do Both! But not normally at the same time.).

The First thing a fishermen must have is **A DESIRE TO FISH**. Do you WANT to catch some Fish or are you satisfied with growing Fruit instead of catching Fish?? Do you want to obtain Fish bad enough to go fishing?? (Or would you rather "eat" what someone else has caught?)

Secondly, there must be **A PLACE TO FISH**. You don't fish in the middle of a field! You have to go where the fish are located. Most of the time, you net fish in the ocean and line fish in rivers and lakes (Most of the time you Preach in Church and do Personal work in the highways and hedges)

Finally, there must be **EQUIPMENT TO FISH WITH**. Use your Testimony (What Jesus done for you) and a Text (The Roman's Road is good- No one is righteous- Rom 3:10; All are Sinners- Rom 3:23; The Wages of Sin is Death- Rom 6: 23 ; Christ loved us even as Sinners- Rom 5:8; You must believe and confess Christ- Rom 10:9-10; Assurance is based on God's Word Rom 10:13)

Have you been fishing lately? There are lots of good fishing "Holes" available if you want to take advantage of them. So show someone you love them this week by sharing Christ with them.

February 12, 2003 HARD LOVE

Sometimes Jesus makes it very difficult for us to just "Play the Christian game". One prime example of that is part of a sermon he preached as recorded in the gospel of Luke.

(Luke 6:27-36) But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

I have no problem loving my favorite people. Its pretty easy to love my friends. But loving my enemies and the people who despitefully use me; that takes God living inside. Does He?

February 18, 2003 NEVER FORGIVENESS

Mr 3:29 But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:

Never forgiveness; what a terrible thought. What a horrible condition. How awful it would be to never experience the sweet peace that comes from knowing your sins are forgiven. What a nightmare to face life without help and death without hope!

How can we even associate "Never Forgiveness" with the God of Love that is proclaimed in churches today? Who in the world could be wicked enough that God would not forgive them? What crime would a person commit that would cause God to cut them off from His Grace and Goodness? It seems almost impossible for such a thing to happen but as we look at Scripture we find there are two kinds of people that Jesus cannot forgive

First of all, Jesus cannot forgive someone who does not know about Him and therefore does not ask for His forgiveness- (Romans 10:13-14) For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? The reason Christians are missionary minded, testimony talkers, and preaching proclaimers is because they know that everyone needs to hear the good news about Jesus if they are ever to receive the eternal abundant life that He offers. We know the "house is on fire" and being so polite until you just stand and watch will not rescue those perishing in the flames.

Secondly, Jesus cannot forgive someone who knows about Him but refuse to trust Him. He knocks on the door but He never enters until invited. The forgiveness is readily available but it will never be given unless the person is willing to ask for it.

There are two kinds of people in the world today. Those who have already trusted Christ for forgiveness and those who need to be forgiven. Which one are you?

February 19, 2003 LOVE RULES

While riding with my wife recently, I asked her to share with me four words that she thought would best describe "Love". Her answer was so good until I wanted to share it with you.

According to Princess Paula Love is: (You know she is a preacher's wife when she illiterates her points!).

1) Truthful- Love means you are honest with one another. You don't use truth as a sword to harm but as a foundation to build upon. This turns a romance into a relationship and enables the years to draw you together instead of wedging you apart.

2) Trustful- Love means you can depend on one another. You are a person of your word and your mate has no need to worry about your actions when you are apart.

3) Thoughtful- Love thinks of the other. It is not self-centered or self-satisfying. I try to never get a cup of coffee without asking my wife if she wants a cup. In the same way that "little foxes spoil the vine" so the little things can make or break a relationship.

4) Tender- Love is not heavy handed and controlling. Several times I have seen people who thought love meant they treated their mate as a slave or a child. Love treats the person loved with respect and sensitivity while recognizing they have their own personality.

Real Love is the greatest ability God has given man. Make sure you love right- toward others and toward God.

February 25, 2003 UPSIDE DOWN SPOONS

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

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

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

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

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

February 26, 2003 RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORK

WHAT IS GOD DOING IN YOUR CHURCH THAT YOU NEED TO RESPOND TO?? Christ said that HE would build His Church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. The way He builds His Church is by sending people and opportunities to a Church.

Keep your eyes out for PEOPLE that God will send to your Church. The Holy Spirit knows what the body of Christ (The Church) needs and He will send in the right part at the right time to allow the Church to fulfill its mission for Christ.

These people may be Eyes (People of Vision), Hands (People to work), Feet (People of Service), and even Funny Bones (People with a sense of humor to allow us to take God seriously but still laugh at some of life's circumstances). But if they are sent by the Spirit they will be just what the Church needs at that time.

In addition to People God will also send OPPORTUNITIES. These are situations that God provides so that a congregation can accomplish His work. Your Church may suddenly find it has many widows (An opportunity to minister emotionally, financially, and spiritually). Or you may have an influx of other nationalities, or youth, or singles, etc. Just remember, these are not obstacles, they are opportunities. God wants to work in your Church. Will you respond to what HE is doing so He can build His Church?

March 4, 2003 SILENT ALARM

It had been a long hard day that was advancing into the night when I finally was able to leave the office and take my lovely wife to supper. We wanted something fast so we went to a local buffet restaurant. Suddenly, as we were preparing to tell the cashier our order, a policeman came bursting in and started looking us over very closely. Then he told the cashier to stop everything and get the manager.

When the manager came out the policeman pulled him into a corner and started gesturing at us. I looked at my wife and she looked at me and we both were wondering what in the world was going on. Finally, the policeman left and the manager came back and told the cashier, new at her job, that she had accidentally pushed the silent alarm and the police thought a robbery was taking place! And guess who the policeman thought was doing the robbing!

Around the turn of the century many people got all excited about Y2K and the coming of the Lord. In the three years since the new millennium began I seldom hear the Lord's return even mentioned in sermons. It is almost as if people have decided that if the Lord did not return before the year 2000 then He was not going to return at all.

Let me share some news with you. Some soon coming day you will be going about your normal activities just as my wife and I were doing. Then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the Lord will return and rapture His bride, the Church. Later He will come with a trumpet and with glory so that every eye can behold Him but that will be after the "silent alarm" has sounded and the Church is already gone.

I'm glad I was innocent when the silent alarm went off in that restaurant and I'm glad I'm living expectantly so that I will be ready at any time the Lord returns. Is that the way you are living?

March 5, 2003 HURT ARM

The best I can determine it happened one night because I was tired. I came home from work and was at my home computer trying to catch up on some Outreach Ministry work. In the middle of trying to write something I just fell asleep (No, I was not listening to my preaching at the time!).

When I awoke nearly an hour later I found I had been leaning on my right arm while I slept. Evidently, I bruised something or damaged a nerve because since then I have had extreme pain in my arm and have hardly been able to use it. And this at one of the most busy times in my year.

The Church is called the body of Christ. Each member of the body has a function to perform and if one member suffers then the entire body feels the effects. In my case, my body is still going but my effectiveness has greatly decreased. The same principle holds true for the church. If one part of the body is not able or willing to do its part then the church will go on but it will impact all areas of the work. In my case, it was such a silly way to be hurt. In many cases of hurt members of churches it is just as silly. Someone fails to say "hello" or something else as unintentional. But the damage is done and the body will not work well until the hurt is healed.

One final truth. I did not cut my arm off just because it was hurt. I expect it to get well and function correctly again. Remember that the next time you are hurt in church

March 11, 2003 CHALLENGE THEM

Preachers change their text and the manner of their delivery but almost all sermons fall into one of three categories. Some sermons are meant to Condemn sin and sinful actions. This is the most common theme and is the reason so many people think of church in a negative way (It is hard to be positive about the destructive effects of sin!).

Some sermons major on bringing Comfort to the weary and broken hearted. Life is tough and many people come to church needing to have the balm of Gilead applied to their aching heart so they can find the strength and courage to continue. A good text for a sermon like this is Hebrews 12:12-13 "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

But more and more I am noticing that less and less do I hear sermons that Challenge people. The average church is stagnate in its growth and plagued with personal problems because people are so concerned with the wrong they are doing or with the problems they are facing until they become like the dead sea; always taking things in but never giving anything out until the good water actually turns deadly.

Jesus amazed me with the way He would challenge people. He would walk up to a hated Tax Collector or a busy fisherman and challenge them to leave everything and come follow him. He seldom left people in their comfort zone as He required would be disciples to let the dead bury the dead or to sell all they had and come follow Him.

Preachers should never stop condemning sin or bringing comfort to people but they need to earnestly pray that God will sometimes give them a message of challenge. After all, you will never change if you stay like you are.

March 12, 2003 HEEDFUL HEARERS

Amazingly, Christianity is based on your ears and not on your eyes- "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God". Even the gift of Salvation is offered through the preaching of the Word rather than the performing of miracles. And when God wanted a way to describe His Son He called Him "the Word".

That is the reason such great stress is placed on Hearing God's message. Which leads us to the four kinds of Hearers of the Heavenly Proclamation.

1) Delighted Hearers- (Psalms 1:2) "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." These people do not have to be bribed or brow-beaten to get them to listen to God's word being preached or taught. They delight in what their ears are hearing.

2) Dull Hearers- Dull Hearers are those who hear but seldom heed what is being proclaimed. They may attend Church for months and years but their actions and attitudes remain unchanged because they hear without hearing.

3) Denying Hearers- These refuse to believe or accept God's proclamation about their sinfulness and their need of salvation.

4) Deaf Hearers- These have ears to hear but they hear not. The hardness of their heart deafens the music of God's Message.

How is your hearing? Have you heard any good news from God lately?

March 18, 2003 SUBSTANCE'S SUBSTANCE

God's definition of Faith still amazes me- "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is the evidence, the proof that brings conviction, of things that cannot be proven by normal human senses. You cannot see Faith. You cannot touch Faith. You cannot put Faith in a test tube and analyze it. Yet Faith in Faith produces enough evidence until it changes the lives of countless multitudes on earth and the destination of this same group for eternity!

Faith is not only the convincing proof of that which cannot be seen; it is also the substance of things we hope for. The "things we hope for" is the realization that Earth is temporary, Heaven is awaiting, and God wants to have a personal relationship with each of us. This is the driving force in the life of a Christian. It is the motivation that motivates us to move forward when the body, and society, screams for us to quit struggling and simply go with the flow.

What then is the substance of the Substance of the things we hope for? "Substance" comes from a Greek word meaning "To place under" and is used to describe a foundation or support. One writer described it as Assurance or Confirmation. In simple English, you cannot hang the hook of faith on the empty air of "I hope so" or "I wish it". Faith must be built on a solid foundation or it is just wishful thinking.

So what is the Substance that puts Faith on a solid foundation? "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Faith must be built on the rock of the authority of the Word of God; not on the sinking sand of your opinion, your feelings, or the standards of society. So read and study God's Word. It will put some substance in the things you hope for and turn your faith from a Sunday morning drudgery into a joyful abundant life.

March 19, 2003 BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Today is a VERY IMPORTANT DAY to me; it is my Spiritual Birthday. 41 years ago I knelt at an altar and asked God to forgive me of my sins. I didn't know much about the Bible or about God but I realized that I had sinned and that the results of those sins would be eternity in Hell. And I didn't want that!

Kneeling at that altar; convicted, confused, and crying, I didn't know what to do. I just knew I needed forgiveness and the preacher had asked me to come to the altar to be saved. As I knelt there, trying my best to get God to do something in my life, one of the Deacons of the Church leaned over and told me to "Trust Jesus". That simple act of faith changed me from a hell bound sinner into a Heaven going child of God.

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

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

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

March 25, 2003 RESPECT OF PERSONS

(James 2:1) My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

This is a very serious command because it list something that should not be part of our life if we have Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ- "Respect of Persons". The Greek for this phrase means to "Show no Prejudice or Partiality toward people" and describes the attitude of a child of God as being that of his Heavenly Father who loved the entire world so much until He gave His only Son to die so that Whosoever would might come and take of the waters of life freely.

James illustrates this principle by telling about some who accept a rich man because he is rich but reject a poor man because he is poor. Most people think themselves above this kind of "respect of persons" and declare they would never treat a person badly simply because the person does not wear the best clothes. But if you think this prejudice is dead ask a teen to wear affordable clothes to school instead of the latest fashion. Or ask dad to trade in his new SUV or fancy chrome pick-up for a fuel economy car that works well but does not impress the neighbors.

But "Respect of Persons" goes far beyond financial prejudice. It also raises its ugly head in racial prejudice and national prejudice. Christians in India, Brazil, and Japan may look different and even worship a little differently but they are just as dedicated to the Lord as American Christians. Many of them may be financially poor but they are spiritually rich with their zeal and dedication to the Lord. Being an American does not give us a corner on being a Christian.

Multitudes of people need the Lord. Many nationalities serve the Lord. Don't color your vision with the shades of prejudice- "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." (James 2:9)

March 26, 2003 ALWAYS

Throughout the Bible, God gives us many things that we should always do. Permanent practices that will bring joy to our life and power to our testimony. Here are a few "Always".

Always Pray- (Luke 18:1) And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

Always be Confident- (2 Corinthians 5:6) Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

Always be Thankful- (Ephesians 5:20) Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Always abide in God's Peace- (2 Thessalonians 3:16) Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.

Always be Ready to Testify- (1 Peter 3:15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

Always abound in the work of the Lord- (1 Corinthians 15:58) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

April 1, 2003 **WALKING AS A CHRISTIAN**

An often heard comment about Christians is that they should “walk the walk if they are going to talk the talk”. One of the most damaging traits of a Christian is to live the life of a hypocrite or a halfhearted church member. This damages the reputation of the Lord and delays the work of the Church. How then should we walk if we are followers of the Lord Jesus? Here are five aspects of the Christian walk that should be part of every Christians daily way of living.

1. **WALK CONVERTED**-(Rom 6:3-4) *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* If you try to walk like a Christian without actually being a Christian then you are headed for trouble in this life and a rude awakening at God’s Judgment.

2. **WALK CORRECTLY**-(Luke 1:6) *And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. God has given us an instruction book (the Bible) and He expects us to read and heed its instructions about daily living.*

3. **WALK CLEAN**- (Isa 35:8) *And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.* God is a Holy God and those who walk with Him and represent Him will also strive to live holy lives.

4. **WALK CALLED**- (Eph 4:1) *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,.* God has a plan that involved EVERY Christian. If everyone would do what God had called them to do then the body of Christ would accomplish tremendous good.

5. **WALK TO BE "CAUGHT UP"**- (Gen 5:24) *And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.* Live each day with the realization that this world is not your home. Live so you can make a difference down here and look with excitement to going up there!

April 8, 2003 MAKING GOOD CHOICES

Life is all about choices. Some choices are made by responsibility- if you do not get out of bed and go to work or go to school then you will not get paid or receive an education. Some choices are made by necessity- if you choose not to eat you will starve. Some choices are made by society- If you choose not to bathe then you will stink! Every day your life is directed, and, to some degree, your future is determined, by the choices you make. So what are some good choices you should make?

Chose how you will use your Abilities. It is not about the greatness of your abilities but about how well you use the abilities you have. One of the great stories in the Bible involves a woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair. She chose to do what she could with the abilities that she had.

Chose how you will use your Resources. Jesus told several stories about the amount of resources that were given to various people. In each case the problem was not how much resources the person had but how they used the talents entrusted to them by the master.

The most important choice of all, however, is your choice about serving God- Jos 24:15 ..., choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Life is full of choices. All of them impact you either now or for eternity. Make God's work and God's will the key ingredient in your choices every day.

April 9, 2003 RELATIONSHIP OR RELIGION

Christians should be able to say, "I would rather be in Hell with Christ than in Heaven without Him". A thought provoking statement that may be immediately rejected by some because it sounds so radical but it goes to the very heart of Christianity.

The true meaning of Christianity involves a genuine relationship with God through Christ. Sin is wrong not just because it is sin but because it separates us from God. Jesus died so that our sin debt could be paid. This was not just an accounting procedure put in place by a nit picking God who had to have everything His own way. The debt of sin had to be paid because it separated us from God. The place of sin's punishment was not the main problem; separation from God was the real issue.

The reason so many people today find Church to be dull and Christianity to be a dreary duty is because they believe Christianity is a religion to perform instead of a relationship to enjoy. Instead of a bride anxiously awaiting the bride groom they picture God as a really neat granddad who is supposed to give them pleasure and prosperity on earth before they are dragged kicking and screaming through death's door into Heaven.

Is your Christianity a life insurance policy with premiums that must be paid by a weekly visit to your local church? Or is it a living personal relationship with a God that brings peace to your heart, joy to your life, and hope to your future?

April 15, 2003 EASTER ABILITY

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

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

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

The two blind men responded to Jesus, "Yes, we believe that you are ABLE." They were then healed by the power of Jesus' touch. If we believe in God's ability then soon we will see God's power at work in our lives.

And remember, God's ability extended even unto raising Christ from the dead. Easter just shows us that God's ability is greater than any problem we may face. What a Great God we serve!

April 16, 2003 LIFE GUIDE

Suppose I came to a major cross road intersection where the road I was traveling branched off in two different directions. I have been warned that following one of these roads will lead to great joy and allow me to reach my desired destination but following the other road will lead to many troubles and trials and finally end up in a bog of despair from which there is no escape.

Both roads look the same from the intersection so I have no clue as to which one to take. Suddenly I see two men sitting on a bench under a tree so I approach them to see if they can give me directions. As I get closer and can see more clearly I notice that one of the men is alive and well but the other is simply a corpse sitting up on a bench!

Which one of these men do you think I should consult about directions in this important life decision? Obviously, the answer is the man who is alive and can actually help me.

Many religious leaders have come into this world. Some of them have been extremely smart and have left great teachings about how to deal with life and its problems and they have multitudes of followers. But this fork in the road is not just about being happy in this life; it is about being able to deal with death and what lies beyond.

Only one religious leader has journeyed through the valley of death and come back to give us directions. His name is Jesus and He is the one to point you down the right road to eternal life.

April 22, 2003 SHADOW'S SUNSHINE

Suddenly her entire world changed. A Saturday adventure to visit an aunt and enjoy some free time ended in a major accident with many broken bones and several serious injuries. Jobs and plans were put on hold as pain, surgery, and hospital routine replaced the daily duties of life.

When I visited this child of a missionary I expected to see tears, groans, and sorrows. Instead, I saw a pretty smile and a positive attitude that made her more of an encouragement to me than I was to her! And I also heard a great sermon from a hospital bed.

Someone had visited this young lady just before my visit and had shared some scripture with her as part of the visit. Part of the scripture told about dwelling under the shadow of God's wing and she was excited because she had never thought about God having a shadow before. She could really relate to God's shadow now because she had been to the valley of the shadow of death where she learned that our days are but as a shadow that is soon past but you need not fear this darkness as long as you dwell under the shadow of God's Wing. The shadow had suddenly become sunshine to her as she realized it was a place of God's protection and care instead of darkness and despair.

When a shadow suddenly darkens your day do you wallow in the pit of pity and the ditch of despair or do you abide under the shadow of the loving wing of God? The difference will be whether you look around at the darkness or look up at His covering care.

April 23, 2003 SHADOW WARNING

The day had been very long and included a quick trip to Charleston. It had rained the entire week but it looked like the sun would finally peek out as the day came to an end.

Tired and almost home I was beginning to relax a little when I came to a very dangerous curve. The road I needed to take branched off to the left just as you got into this curve and I was always a little leery about turning onto that road with almost no visibility.

Just as I started to make the turn I suddenly saw a shadow out of the corner of my eyes. I immediately hit the brake and stayed on the road I had been traveling. Good thing. The Shadow was caused by an 18 wheeler making very fast time coming around that corner. Had the sun not come out just when it did and caused that truck to cast a shadow then I would have probably been broadsided by that truck as I tried to turn onto the side road!

Amazingly, I had just left the hospital where the patient I had visited was rejoicing in being under the shadow of God's wing. I certainly did not realize when I started my trip home that the shadow of God's protection would make itself so evident in my life in such a miraculous way that very day.

Ps 36:7 How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

April 29, 2003 OUT AND OUT CHRISTIANS

The greatest honor that can ever come to a person is to be called a Christian. A million years from now no one will know, or care, who was the most valuable player on some ball team but those who bear the name of Christian will still be exulting as they are identified with the name of their savior. We live in a difficult day, however, and some Christians are making choices that gain them chaos instead of glorifying Jesus Christ.

Some Christians are Selling Out. They are trading their heavenly inheritance for a few moments of pleasure or an increase in their profits. Choosing fun or finances over Christ has filled their nights with parties and their purse with pennies but it has left their hearts empty and their testimony hollow. Like Esau, who sold his birthright for a bowl of beans, they are selling out their future rewards for a moments satisfaction right now.

Other Christians are Giving Out. Weary in well doing, they have been so busy working until they have had no time to worship so now they are exhausted in church instead of exalting in Christ. They think God and His work can only go forward because of their abilities so they work ever harder instead of waiting on the Lord to renew their strength and end up falling by the wayside at critical times.

But, thankfully, some Christians are busy Living Out their Christianity. Their actions and attitudes are governed by their relationship to Christ and each day brings greater opportunities to work and witness for the Lord. Instead of squeezing out a testimony in order to fulfill their duty their cup overflows with their joy in the Lord and people are blessed, and impressed, by their Christianity in action.

Do you want to enjoy the Abundant life? Start being an out and out Christian that lives out your relationship with the Lord.

April 30, 2003 TAXING INTEGRITY

A joyful triumph suddenly turned into a fiery trial of my faith and integrity. When I finished figuring my taxes I found that I was to get a refund of over one thousand dollars! I desperately needed the money right now and it seemed like pennies from Heaven. But then I looked closer.

Normally, I end up paying tax instead of getting refunds so I decided to look the situation over again before I got too excited. Everything was in order until I finally realized that I had forgotten to include my estimated tax payments into my total income for the year. They were paid by my office but only as a matter of convenience and were part of my salary package so they had to be included for tax and Social Security purposes.

The W-2 had already been sent. More than likely, no one would ever know about this if I simply let it slide. It would be a great deal of trouble to correct this problem. And if I left it alone I would get some desperately needed money.

Three things made me go to a great deal of trouble to give that money to the government. First, I have to look in the mirror each day. Secondly, I have to look at congregations each week and tell them that serving God is the only right thing to do. Lastly, I have to face God one day and give an account for the way I have handled the resources He has given me. And that thousand dollars would not be worth the look in His eyes!

May 6, 2003 SOUL SEEKERS

The Apostle Paul declared that he had a debt to share the gospel with all men and he did not want to stand before the Lord without making regular payments on this debt. God told the prophet Ezekiel that if a watchman saw death and destruction coming on people and did not warn them that the person would die in their sins but their blood would be on the hands of the watchman.

Cold and somber thoughts that should cause every Christian to want to share their testimony with as many people as possible. But how do you know what to do and when to do it in a matter as delicate as a man's decision about his destiny? Good soul seekers pray for three indications as they seek to witness for Christ.

First, they look for the right door to go through. The Holy Spirit is doing the preparation and pleading work in hearts and a good soul winner knows that he is just wasting his efforts without this wooing and drawing power. The wrong door will only place the gospel seed on stony ground instead of in good soil.

Secondly, a good soul seeker prays for the right words to say. He is not trying to sell insurance or manipulate the mind; his desire is to introduce this person to the love and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Words can either build bridges or erect fences so the good soul seeker prays earnestly for guidance.

Thirdly, a good soul seeker is very sensitive to the right timing as he gives his testimony. A person whose mind is so busy until it cannot hear, so proud until it dare not hear, or so rebellious until it will not hear will only cause the soul seeker to cast his pearls before swine. The good soul seeker looks for those who have ears to hear.

Are you a soul seeker or just a spectator saint? When your life trip is over will you tell the Lord you enjoyed the journey or will you introduce Him to the others you have won?

May 7, 2003 SINGER SUGGESTIONS

I am the one they talk about who not only cannot carry a tune in a bucket; but even has trouble finding the bucket! So I am not the best authority on providing help to singers- but, I like good music and I can tell you what I like to hear when I hear music.

I like a song with Clarity. Singers who mumble their words or who try to eat the microphone so that all the words come out blurred lose me very quickly. Paul declared that a trumpet that gave an uncertain sound would do no one any good. The same principle applies when singers sing.

Secondly, I like a song with Conviction. Choirs who sing about how happy they are as Christians with a frown on their face do little for me. A person's body language says almost as much as their words when they sing. This also applies to a singers tone of voice. Choirs that mouth their words while it is obvious that everyone's mind is somewhere else do little to cause me to worship the God they are singing about.

Finally, make sure your song has Content. A pretty melody is nice but if it has no message then it does not inspire or inform me. Say something if you are going to sing something.

Many church services have as much music as they have preaching. Don't just use the music as a filler until time for the preaching. Sing clear songs with passion and meaning. That way it may cause even those who just hum along to rejoice!

May 13, 2003 LIFE'S LENGTH

The writer of Psalms tells us we need to realize that life has a length; and a wise man draws wisdom from knowing the end is coming- So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Psalm 90:12). The Apostle James tells us that life is brief at its best- 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 (James 4:14).

Realizing that life is brief, our next question is whether or not we have any input on the length of our life. Do we live until we die unless a tree falls on us or is there something that makes a difference?

The Bible points out one main thing that shortens our life; wickedness- Prov 10: 27 The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. Ecc 7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? Walking in the ways of wickedness destroys our health, puts us in dangerous situations, and declares to God that we don't value the life He has given us or the mercy He has extended us.

The Bible also points out two ways for us to lengthen our life- 1) Leave wickedness and begin to do right- Ps 34:12-14 What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. 2) Follow the guidelines laid down by good parents- Ep 6:2-3 Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

Life has a length that you can extend or shorten. But it always has an end. So Life's most important question is not the duration of your life but your destination after death.

May 14, 2003 BEE PASTOR

While talking with a pastor before services recently we noticed that a bee had gotten into the Church. Like all good pastors, this one knew that a bee flying around during his services was not a good thing so he promptly found a broom and began trying to drive the bee back into the great outdoors. As I watched him fight this bee I thought about how symbolic he was.

Satan is like a bee when he comes to church. He is an uninvited guest. If he is not dealt with then he will try to distract everyone in the service so they cannot hear, and respond to, the word of God. He is also dangerous to leave in the midst because he might find someone he wants to sting and cause that person great harm (Some people even die from bee stings!).

So what should a pastor do when the "Satan bee" comes to church? He should be able to recognize immediately that a problem exists. He should take action even if it means he puts himself in a dangerous position confronting the bee. He should determine he is not going to stop until the bee is no longer a threat to his congregation. And he might even have to enlist some others to help him in dealing with the bee.

The "Satan bee" would like to come to your church this week. If he does, some will see only the honey he produces but a good Pastor will recognize his stinger- and stand against this bee as he proclaims the word and protects his flock.

May 20, 2003 UNTOWARD

In his great sermon at the beginning of the Christian Church the Apostle Peter made an unusual statement. Peter's sermon produced such conviction until numerous people asked him what they should do in response to the message he had just given them. After telling the people to turn from their sins and trust Jesus Christ as their Savior he told the crowd to "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40).

What in the world is an "untoward generation"? If I need to save myself from it then I need to know what it is. This is the only time the word "untoward" is used in the Bible. The Greek word translated "untoward" is used three other places in Scripture with the idea of being crooked. That makes sense. If I am "untoward" something then I am not headed toward it!

So I guess that means an "untoward generation" is a crooked generation that is not headed in the direction God wants it to go. Is that a good description of the generation we live in today? I believe even the most naive of us would have to say that our present generation is more and more "untoward" God.

We live in a generation in which people demand that I give them the right to believe and do wrong while these same people demand that I not be allowed the right to believe right (For example, they say that sexual perversion should be a right for them but it should be wrong for me to believe it is wrong). This generation is being taught that it is right to talk about any religion or religious leader as long as we do not mention the name of Jesus in public- any religion is right, they say, as long as it is "untoward" God!

My advice to you is the same advice that was given by Peter, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation".

March 21, 2003 GRADUATION

I had the great privilege of attending the graduation services for my niece recently. The newspaper had declared that the youngest person ever to graduate from this college would be graduating this year. I told my niece that this made a double honor for the college- they were graduating the youngest person to graduate and also the prettiest person ever to graduate!

The seats were hard, the crowd was crowded, and the ceremony was long but it was worth it to see the pride and joy on the faces of the parents and the graduates. Years of financial burdens and personal sacrifices were finally coming to a conclusion in this special event and tears and smiles were evident everywhere.

I could not help but compare this to the ceremony in Heaven some day when "graduation" from this life finally takes place. Several similarities will be evident. 1) Parents will be looking to see if they can find their children among the participants. 2) Some will receive more rewards than others because of the effort and energy they have put into their work. 3) The joy of an anticipated future will mingle with sorrow over being separated from friends that have been part of your life for so long.

Graduation is a time of accomplishment and acknowledgment. When you face the Lord in the final graduation what will you have accomplished for God? Will it bring a, "Well done" or "Not done" from the Lord?

May 27, 2003 FIREWORK FEARS

Normally I never use the back door to our Free Will Baptist Book Store. This day I had been using a paint stripper machine to brighten up the parking spaces in our parking lot and I needed to come in the back door to ensure that I did not get paint on the carpet. When I got to the back steps and looked down my heart skipped a beat.

At some time in the past few days someone had sat on the back steps and lit several boxes of fireworks, the remnant of which were still laying on the steps. It did not take a great imagination to see how easy it would have been for some of these fireworks to have started a fire in the old leaves blown up around the back of the store; or for some of them to have landed on the top of the store and began a blaze. I don't know who had used these steps for a launching pad but it certainly was a dangerous situation.

The Bible declares that "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, ... (James 3:6). Like the person with these fireworks, many times people will sit around talking loose talk without realizing that their gossip or the rumors they are spreading has the potential of starting a very damaging fire. They think they are just engaging in some harmless "fun" when in reality they may be throwing lighted matches into piles of leaves. One day one of those matches may start a fire that will end up doing tremendous damage.

I was not real happy to find that someone had endangered our Book Store for the sake of a few fireworks. And I do not think you would be happy if someone endangered your reputation for the same reason.

May 28, 2003 TEACHING TIPS

One of the greatest joys in the world is teaching someone something that will help improve their life. One of the most frustrating things in the world is trying to teach and feeling that you are not getting the message across to your students. Many times you need to build a bridge of involvement before the student really begins to grasp the lesson. Here are some ways that may help that involvement.

1) Plan an object lesson for the class each week for a month. Then ask someone if they will plan one for you for the next week. Then you do several more. Then ask someone else to do another. Slowly you begin to get more and more people involved.

2) Once a month, or once a quarter- Assign the parts of the lesson to various members. This will give you a break and get them involved (Sometimes the greatest teacher is having to teach!).

3) Give them a quiz without letting them know you are giving them a quiz. At the beginning of the lesson ask them to share with you what they thought was the most important part of the lesson as they studied it. At the end of the lesson ask them how they think the lesson can be applied to them, or to their family, or to the community.

The Bible declares that God teaches precept upon precept. Use this same method of teaching principle upon principle in order to slowly build lives and change character.

June 3, 2003 WHERE DOES GOD LIVE?

In my devotions recently I came across a passage that told me where God lives. God lives in the Acclamation of His people! - (Psalms 22:3) "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." What a great thought; and what a tremendous incentive for me to continually praise the Lord.

Being naturally curious, I decided to find other places where Scripture declares that God lives. Here is what I found.

God lives in the loving Actions of His People- (1 John 4:12) "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." God is manifested to others when they see God in what we do. God becomes real to us when we begin treating others as God would treat them.

God lives in the Attitude of His People- (Isaiah 57:15) "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." God dwells on high with those who think of themselves lowly! The place of pride is not the dwelling of God.

Most importantly, God lives in the heart of those who invite His son into their heart- (1 John 4:15) "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God".

Where does God live? He lives in the praises of my mouth, in the actions of my life, and in the humility of my heart. He wants to live in you. Does He?

June 4, 2003 SLOW SHOWER

My wife started complaining about a week ago. Something was wrong with the shower and she could not get the flow of water she was accustomed to getting. I told her I would look into it but I kept putting it off because I thought it might be a major problem. I assumed the problem was with our water pump or something was wrong with the pipe going to the shower.

Every time I would take a shower I would be reminded of the problem and begin thinking about how I could correct it. Today I decided to see if the head of the shower would unscrew so I could see if it was clogged. When I started to turn the head suddenly the water started coming out in full force. Something has caused the head to get between two positions and that was the cause of the decreased water flow!

I know that Jesus is the water of life and that He is always ready to supply all my needs at full force. I know that I thirst for the water of Life and want a full and complete relationship with the Lord. If that is not happening then I need to realize that the problem is not with God and, hopefully, not with me; it is caused by something hindering the full flow of God's Blessings.

This hindrance can be the actions of Satan (He delayed the answer to Daniel's prayer for 3 weeks) or the actions of adversaries (They closed a door for Paul) but if you will make the necessary corrections then the water will flow freely again- and life will be good!

June 10, 2003 THE DIVINE DESIRE

I learned many years ago that you can sell cars, tooth paste, or soft drinks by using sexy models but you must never use the word “sex” within a mile of God. Aware of that fact, I still want to make some comparisons (as the Bible does) between the relationship God has with His people and the loving relationship between a Husband and Wife.

The Relationship between God and His people is a PERSONAL relationship. This PRIVATE time with the Lord will produce Public commitment and comments but it is a relationship that is very sacred and personal. (I personally have serious reservations about the mental capacity of individuals who feel the need to go on nationwide TV talk show programs in order to discuss the intimate details of their sex life).

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

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

The Church is the Bride of Christ. That is a wonderful place of honor and joy as both parties share their most secret and sacred parts with one another. And what a joy to know that a wonderful new home is being prepared for us where we can spend eternal bliss together.

June 11, 2003 PECULIAR PEOPLE

One of the wondrous wonders of Divine Love is that God has chosen us for His special treasure. He loved us when we were unlovely. We were marred by sin, motivated by selfish desires, and mired in misery’s mud. Even the good works that we did were viewed by God as nothing but filthy rags. In spite of this, God chose us as His own and redeemed us from sin’s captivity.

He chose us to be His “peculiar people”. Not “peculiar” in the sense of “odd” but “peculiar” as used to designate something set apart for personal use. What a privilege to be God’s set apart saints; purchased by God’s grace, surrounded by God’s love, and destined for God’s heavenly home! This should make every Christian want to live right and every lost person want to become a child of God.

- (Deut 7:6) For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.
- (Titus 2:14) Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.
- (1 Peter 2:9) But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

June 17, 2003 UNANSWERED DOOR

My job demands that almost every Saturday I get up early in order to drive to some type of Church meeting. This Saturday had worked out just right. I attended a meeting on Friday night and had nothing scheduled until Saturday afternoon. And to put the “cream on the cake” it was pouring rain. What a delicious morning to sleep late.

Around 7:00am I suddenly heard a loud banging on the door. I staggered to the door, looked through the peep hole, and saw that the banging was on the door of the motel room beside my room. I headed back to bed but the banging continued. For almost 10 minutes this person banged on the door next door. Finally, I heard someone tell him that the people in that room had gone down stairs and he was to meet them in the breakfast room!

Since I was awake anyway I did get to work on this article! Two Bible truths came from my research. First the Bible declares that there are some times we knock on God’s door and He will not answer (Isaiah 1:15, Micah 3:4; Zech 7:11-13). Secondly, there are time God knocks on our door and we will not answer (Rev 3:20). In either case, an unanswered door is a bad situation.

Can you imagine the people who knocked on the door to Noah’s ark after the Lord had closed it and the rains began to fall? How they must have wished that someone would come to the door but they had waited too late. When God closes a door then no man can open it. Something for you to remember when you hear God knocking on the door to YOUR heart.

June 18, 2003 SAMPLE SAINTS

It happens seldom anymore because of my schedule but I used to enjoy going shopping with my wife. She would shop and I would sit in the food court drinking coffee, reading my Bible Chapters, and writing sermons or articles. I discovered a long time ago that I could spend time alone with the Lord in the midst of a crowd; and that I could share the Lord much more easily when there were people around than I could when I was by myself!

One of the tricks of the trade that I observed from the food court sellers as I sat drinking coffee was the practice of offering free samples to people who passed by. Some would eat the sample and keep on walking. Some would sample samples down the entire line and get a free mini-meal. But numerous people would buy a meal after tasting the sample.

Jesus said He was the bread of life. I have found Him to be sweet to my taste and nourishment to my soul. If I can live in such a way until others will see the joy and peace I have with the Lord then maybe the sample I share will cause others to want to know Him as I know Him.

One man said that Evangelism was one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. May God grant that we may share “samples” of the bread of Life everywhere we go so that others will “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

June 24, 2003 ENGINE TRAIN

On the way to church recently we were stopped by a train. It didn't take long to pass, however, because it was only four engines hooked together. Immediately I saw a problem.

These engines made a lot of noise but they weren't doing any real work. No lumber was being hauled so homes could be built. No groceries were being carried to feed the hungry. No passengers were being transported to a better destination. Just some engines traveling down the track making a lot of noise and stopping other people from going about their business.

These engines had tremendous power but no real purpose. They were simply ganged together, enjoying each other's company, and seeing whose horn would toot the loudest. People admired them as they raced up and down the track but they sure did waste a lot of good diesel fuel just being pretty instead of being productive.

God has blessed Churches in America with tremendous opportunities and resources. Isn't it a shame that many of them are so busy just being engines until they never do any real good for God. They could be building homes, feeding hungry souls, and carrying people to a better life but they are so busy enjoying themselves and tooting their own horns until they seldom get any real work accomplished. They are on the right track but they were meant for more than running up and down a track. Someone must get them to realize that engines are made to pull loaded cars and they should never be satisfied until they are accomplishing their purpose.

When your church meets this week end ask yourself this question, "Are we simply tooting our horn or are we doing a work for God that will make a difference in the lives of people?"

June 25, 2003 BRIDGE BLESSINGS

I rode over a river today. I did it while traveling 60mph and with no problems at all. I rode over the river on a bridge. Three things were immediately obvious about the blessing of the bridge.

Two hundred years ago I would have had to stop my wagon, look for a shallow place to cross, or prepare a raft to go to the other side. The bridge made my travel much easier.

Two hundred years ago there were few books and commentaries available to help Christians on their journey for the Lord. Thankfully, someone studied hard and wrote books and lessons so that those of us who travel life's roads for the Lord today can do so much faster and easier.

Because someone built a bridge I was able to travel over the mud and mire surrounding the river with no trouble. In the same way, the standards set by Christians in days gone by built a bridge that allows me to stay above the quagmire and swampland of loose morals and bad behavior that is so prevalent today.

Finally, taking the bridge allowed me to get to the other side! That is also what Jesus made possible in my spiritual life when He used an old rugged cross to build a bridge from man to God. Now anyone can cross that bridge and reach the destination of eternal life with God simply by believing in the "bridge" enough to travel by faith across it.

Life's road crosses many rivers. They stop progress or dirty lives unless someone builds a bridge. What are you doing?

July 1, 2003 CAR CORNER

Traveling down the road recently I came around a corner and there sat a car parked in the road! I was able to quickly pull over into the other lane and miss it. The car behind me had a much more difficult time because when he pulled over he came face to face with another car coming in the opposite direction. He was just able to pass the parked car and jerk back into the proper lane.

After I caught my breath I was able to figure out what was happening. The car parked in the road was either picking someone up or letting someone off at a church. Rather than pull into the parking lot they had decided to park in the road. This was definitely not a wise decision.

Sometimes people realize they need something in their lives that the Church has to offer but they don't want to get too close to the Church because they fear that will bring about a need for commitment. So they "park in the road" by sitting on the back seat of the church where they can slip in and slip out with little chance of being "caught". Or they make sure everyone knows they have come to church as spectators instead of participators. They want to enjoy the good singing or maybe get splashed with some goose bumps when a shower of blessing comes down but they don't want to become a vital working member of the church body.

This "parking in the road" can put people in a dangerous position. Over and over Jesus faced people like this and demanded that they make a definite commitment- either be for me or against me because if you are lukewarm I will spew you out of my mouth. Jesus made it very plain that to decide not to decide was to decide.

Come into the church parking lot and stop parking in the road. It is a lot safer place to park and it will be a lot more satisfying to your soul.

July 2, 2003 AMERICA'S UNKNOWN GOD

(Acts 17:22-23) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

America today would remind Paul of his visit to Athens' Mars' hill. America talks a lot about God but He is a relative unknown to many people. To them God is someone you blame for a catastrophe but call on in a crisis. God's name is a byword you use to curse other people but he is always described as a god of love.

The Unknown God of America is a personal private god who must be excluded from all public functions but is a god who will take everyone to heaven for eternal fellowship when they die. America's Unknown God would much rather you refresh your self at the beach each week end than worship him in a church.

This god is really neat because he does not seem to mind how you live, how you dress, or how you talk as long as you wear a cross in your ear or around your neck. And he expects to remain unknown because no one really has time to read a bible about him or spend time in prayer talking to him. The problem I find with America's Unknown God is that one day when they face him he will look at them and say, "Depart from me you workers of iniquity, I never knew you!"

July 8, 2003 DISCIPLE DEDICATION

Jesus did not make discipleship easy. He culled would be disciples very stringently. He knew that the most important decision in a person's life was not something to be made lightly or flippantly. He erected barriers for would be disciples to cross in order for them to show that they really meant business about the decision they were making. Instead of begging people over and over to come while the congregation sang 16 verses of "Amazing Grace" Jesus would tell would be disciples to make a sacrifice or take a stand that declared they really meant business about following Him.

Don't get me wrong. Jesus loved lost people and wept over them. His purpose in coming to the earth was to die for lost men. He was not against lost people getting saved; He just wanted them to make a real commitment instead of simply turning over a new leaf and hoping everything would be better in the future.

Many people today believe that since Salvation is freely given then it is also cheaply accepted and requires no real life changing commitment. These people believe there was a man named Jesus who died to pay their sin debt and they gladly acknowledge this fact because they want the assurance of God's presences in their problems and the peace of knowing they are going to Heaven one day. They assume, however, that this does not involve any radical life style change on their part. They don't mind being better as long as it does not hurt their fun or inconvenience them in any way.

Jesus called men to discipleship. He did not wash people in His blood in order for them to go right back to wallowing in the mud. A new heart was supposed to lead to a new creature in Christ. A decision was supposed to lead to dedication. Have you made that kind of decision?

July 9, 2003 FAIL NOR FORSAKE

De 31:6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Moses, the great man of God, and the leader God had chosen to bring Israel out of bondage and into the Promised Land was making his farewell speech. He warned the people about the penalty for disobedience in the beginning of his speech but he ends on a high note of encouragement and confidence.

He exhorts the people to "be strong and of good courage" and to "fear not". Good advice but how do you put it into practice in real world circumstances? The answer was very plain; "for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee". You need not fear when you walk with God!

It all sounded good but what if God couldn't, or wouldn't, live up to His part of the bargain? What if they started into the battles ahead of them and suddenly found themselves without God's help or guidance? They would be in a really bad situation.

Many times unsaved people will tell me they want to have their sins forgiven and become a child of God but they are afraid that they will not be able to win the battles after they begin the journey. My answer to them is the same answer that Moses gave the Children of Israel, God "will not fail thee, nor forsake thee"!

You can depend on God; and rest in His care- Glory!

July 15, 2003 GRASSY

I have averaged just over 1000 miles of travel per week for the past few weeks. The good news is that this week looks like it will be only 700 miles. If I am at home at all it is normally to leave early in the morning and arrive back late at night. My old fat body aches and my yard is overgrown with weeds because I have not had time to cut my grass.

Do you know my greatest concern about all of this? My greatest fear is that not only will my yard get grassy but that my quiet time with the Lord will also get “grassy”. I learned early in my Christian walk that my relationship with the Lord takes constant nourishment and upkeep or it will soon become weed infested. And the most important thing in my life now, and a million years from now, is my relationship with the Lord.

The only thing it took for my yard to become grassy was for me to be so busy until I did not have time to cut my grass. In the same way, neglect is the great enemy of my continued close relationship with the Lord. It begins with a morning so busy until I don’t have time for prayer and Bible study and ends with a night so tired until I either fall asleep in the middle of the Bible reading or force my way through the chapter without the ability to tell you a single thing I have just read.

The Lord willing, I will find time this week to cut my grass. And with God’s help and grace, I have been able to put my early morning appointment with God in a place of top priority. If your busy summer has allowed “grass” to spring up in your relationship with the Lord then let me encourage you to get things back in order quickly. After all, thick grass is where the snakes like to live; and that can be dangerous for you and for those around you.

July 16, 2003 GOOD BAD THING

It started out innocently enough. A Pastor was not feeling well so he went to his regular doctor. This doctor thought the problem may be related to something in the heart so he scheduled a visit to a heart specialist. Time and date were set and the Pastor went back to his normal duties until his scheduled appointment.

The day of the appointment the Pastor arrived at the Heart Doctor’s office a few minutes early for his morning appointment only to find that there had been a mix up and the Doctor would not even be in the office until that afternoon. If the Pastor drove all the way back home he would arrive home just in time to turn around and start the trip back so his whole day is now shot as he has to “waste” the morning waiting for an afternoon appointment.

He came by my office to kill some of that time. In the course of our conversation he mentioned he needed to go to a local building supply place in order to get something for his wife. For the past 3 years I have occupied an office that is very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter because the only vent in the room pours its air out of the door without getting into the rest of the room. He noticed that so he purchased a vent that would direct the air into the back of the room. What a difference!

Maybe life will throw you a curve today. Just remember that God can take bad things and turn them into good events if we just listen to His voice and follow His directions.

July 22, 2003 CHRISTLIKE CHRISTIANS

Sadly, today there are some people who “have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5). They follow the “Christian” religion but they know very little about the Christ whom it is established upon. To them, the standards of society as exemplified in American culture and preferences are the basis of their “Christian” values. For example, regardless of what the Bible declares about sexual and homosexual conduct, they believe it is right or wrong based upon news reports and the way it is presented in tv shows and movies. To them, if it is accepted by American Society then it is “Christian”.

Real Christianity, however, has Christ at its heart. Christians are people who have come to Christ realizing that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved except the name of Christ (Acts 4:12). Christ is not a way that may be as good or better than some other way; He is THE WAY and there is no other way that will lead to Heaven.

Having come to Christ these Christians now call on Christ for help. We make our prayers in the name of Jesus knowing this means more than just adding “in Jesus name” on the end of our prayers. We believe that Christ is in Heaven on our behalf and we can face anything that life sends our ways because He is providing the help and support we need.

Finally, real Christianity is about conforming to the image of Christ. You come to Him for salvation, you call on Him for help and strength, and you conform to Him by letting the mind of Christ drive your thinking and the heart of Christ drive your actions.

Christlike Christianity is one of the most marvelous marvels in the universe. Don’t get trapped into accepting a pale imitation that just makes you miserable. Real Christianity promises abundant life and everlasting life; and it surely will change your life!

July 23, 2003 HEAVEN QUESTIONS

Sharing your faith is one of the most important parts of the Christian life yet many Christians live with a constant guilty feeling of failure in this area. They want to tell others about the joy and peace they have found in Christ but their fear of saying the wrong thing or of not being able to answer questions causes them to shy away from sharing their faith.

Here are three “Heaven Questions” that are easy to remember and yet they deal with some of the most important areas of concern.

- [Are you a Christian?]- “If you died today and the guard at the gate of Heaven asked you what gives you the right to think you can enter into Heaven, what would you answer him?” Every answer except faith in Christ is, of course, wrong so you can show them the importance of trusting Christ for Salvation.
- [Do you have Assurance?]- “Do you ever wonder if you will really go to Heaven when you die?” Many people allow their feelings or emotions to dictate their salvation assurance. They need to clearly understand that “the Just shall live by faith”. Christ paid the price and we rest in that fact.
- [Do you witness to others?]- “When you get to Heaven do you expect to see others there that you have invited?” You cannot be Christlike without caring about the lost. Heaven is a wonderful place and I’m glad I’m going. Are you? Are you inviting others?

July 29, 2003 THE GREAT SATAN

America claims to be a Christian nation but it is known throughout the world as “the great Satan” because of the moral values we exemplify and export. There is something wrong with that picture!

On my first tour of duty in Viet Nam I was one of the first people to go into Sidney, Australia for Rest and Relaxation. The town accepted us like heroes. Everyone greeted us with a friendly smile and I was often invited into homes for meals and conversation. Nearly a year later, on my second tour of duty in Viet Nam, I really looked forward to going to Sidney again for “R and R”. When I arrived I found that People would spit on you in the street and treat you like you had the plague. Over a million soldiers had passed through Sidney since my first visit and their actions and attitudes had tremendously changed the way the people of Sidney looked at Americans.

If America is to be a light on a hill to show the world the way to avoid the rocks of ungodly living then we must get our own house in order. Christians must start living like Christians so that the purity of their lives, the prayers from their heart, and the pennies from their pocketbook will make a difference in their community; and eventually make a difference in the movies and TV shows coming from America.

It hurts my heart that people all over the world whom we are trying to help call America, “the Great Satan”. It hurts me even more to realize that in many ways that is exactly what we portray to them. America has great people with big hearts but if all the world sees of us are fast cars, nude women, money hungry business men, and arrogant “bad dudes” then we will never lead them to believe that Christ is the answer to their need. And that will be America’s greatest failure ever.

July 30, 2003 HEARTBREAKING FUNNY

Isn’t it funny how a man will go into a dark, dirty, smoke filled bar where he will pluck down his entire pay check buying beer and alcohol all the while exclaiming to all who will listen that the Church is nothing but a racket filled with money hungry preachers trying to get his money? And isn’t it funny that the same man will come home to a desperately sick wife and instead of calling all his drinking buddies he will get on the phone and call the local preacher asking for financial and prayer help?

Isn’t it funny how liberal politicians will wax eloquent in speeches and pass law after law to separate everything in America from any contact with, or mention of, God and yet these same politicians will be the first to call for prayer and divine intervention when the nation is faced with a crisis? They don’t want God until they need God.

Isn’t it funny how some Church Members sing about being ready for the rapture and how they can’t wait to get to Heaven where they will be with God forever and yet they look for any excuse to miss being in God’s house on Sunday? Eternity with God would be nice but if Sunday worship goes five minutes past twelve then anger replaces exaltation!

Isn’t it funny that there is nothing funny about all of the things we have talked about? It is simply heartbreaking to realize that God is as near as a whispered prayer but He is so far from many people until they will miss His calling voice forever.

August 5, 2003

WRONG RIGHT KEY

It had been a good time of fellowship. Two Pastors met exiting the hospital and decided to get a cup of coffee together. The closest place for a sit down cup of coffee and some fellowship was a nearby mall so they decided to ride together in the first Pastor's new truck. The coffee was good and the fellowship was great.

When they exited the mall and walked to the truck they found that the key did not want to work. Thinking because it was a new truck that he might have the wrong key he tried the other key on the ring. Sure enough it worked. When they got into the truck they found that neither key would work in the ignition. The Pastor was really aggravated that his new truck was already causing him problems. Just then the other Pastor looked around and began asking about some packages located in this truck. That was when they finally realized they were in someone else's truck!

The truck was the right color and in almost the same place they have left their truck. One of the keys had even opened the door. But it was not where they needed to be. The wrong key had worked but it was not the right key!

Many people are looking for the right way to get to God. Sometimes they try a key (socially accepted works, sacrificial giving, turning over new leaves, etc.) and it seems to work at first but when they try to start the power that will carry them forward they find they have the wrong key. They can sit there and keep trying keys or they can realize they are in the wrong place and move to the right vehicle. And wouldn't it be awful if God came back and found you sitting in the wrong vehicle instead of working for Him!

August 6, 2003

HOSE HANKY

Several years ago, before air conditioners were common in churches, a pastor and his family were driving to Church. Heat and humidity had already begun to cause perspiration to pour with every movement. Just as he got ready to leave the car the Pastor reached over into the seat, grabbed his wadded up handkerchief, put it into his coat pocket, and proceeded into church.

During the announcements and early preliminaries he noticed people looking at him in an unusual way but he couldn't figure out what was wrong. Soon after his sermon began he felt the need to wipe the perspiration from his brow. He reached into his pocket for his handkerchief and began to wipe his face. As soon as he did he realized something was wrong. He looked at his handkerchief and found that instead of stuffing a handkerchief into his pocket he had accidentally picked up his wife's panty hose! Now he knew why people looked so strange at him as he walked around with a pair of women's hose hanging from his pocket!

Most of us face some hot situations in life. Make sure that what you pick up to help your situation does not make a hot situation even hotter! Don't allow the advice of television personalities or flash in the pan counselor books to cause you to pick up "hosiery" that will make your situation worst and embarrass you instead of heeding the eternal unchanging word of God.

August 12, 2003 DOING RIGHT BY NOT DOING

I missed going to Prayer Meeting at Church recently. I was not mad with the preacher or with anyone else at the Church. I didn't decide to miss simply because I was lazy or tired. There was nothing on TV that I thought was more important than meeting with God's people and sharing a time of prayer and Bible Study. In fact, none of the usual excuses that people use would apply to this situation.

I missed going to Prayer Meeting because I loved the people of God so much until I put their welfare ahead of my own desire for fellowship and spiritual nourishment. You see, I had a really bad cold on Prayer Meeting night. My fever would have spread the cold and my coughing would have greatly disturbed the services so I gave up my enjoyment of the services for the benefit of the rest of the congregation; but I surely did miss being in service!

Sometimes we show our love for God and His people by what we do not do instead of by what we do. Paul said that he really enjoyed eating meat and saw nothing wrong in eating the good meat available to him but he gave up eating meat in order to help the weaker brethren. In the same way, we must realize there are some things we need to give up for the good of others.

Let's apply this principle. Some clothing worn to church may be comfortable for the person wearing it but it proves distracting and a hindrance to many others in the service. Sometimes we hear some really juicy gossip about a Church Member. The flesh cries out for us to tell others about this person's failures but if our talk is not part of the solution then we are only adding to the problem. Do you begin to see the picture?

Sometimes you show your love for God and His Church by what you do not do as much as by what you do.

August 13, 2003 ETERNAL MATTERS MATTER

Eternal Matters matter. Society is increasingly focusing on what feels good at the moment instead of what is important for eternity. And this narrow view of life has begun to impact even the children of God and the work of the Church.

When the 2500 Free Will Baptists Churches in American met in July for our annual convention we did not have a prolonged agonizing debate about ordaining homosexual men into the ministry. We simply looked at the eternal word of God and saw where God said that such behavior was sinful and needed to be condemned and we acted accordingly. We did not try to assess the feelings of the people involved in this sinful activity and try to find a way to tell them it was right for them at the moment. Telling them their sinful activity was all right might bring them "comfort" at the moment but it would be of no value when they stood before the condemnation of God. Eternal Matters matter.

It is amazing to see how many people are zealous to defend wrong acts between people by saying that "love" at the moment is more important than past denouncements and future judgments. Yet the God of Love the Apostle John writes about brings the Bible to an end by devoting an entire book to the revelation of God's coming judgment upon men who will not repent of their sinful behavior and give priority to eternal matters. God declares that Eternal Matters matter. Do they matter to you?

August 19, 2003 LAKE OF FIRE

One of the most horrible descriptions given for the final punishment of those who rebel against God and fail to accept the mercy and grace He so freely offers is the term "Lake of Fire". It is found only 4 times in the Bible; all toward the end of Revelation:

- Re 19:20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.
- Re 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
- Re 20:14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.
- Re 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.
- These verses show us the occupants of the Lake of Fire: The beast (Antichrist), the false prophet, the devil, the occupants of "death and hell" (Those previously assigned to a place of punishment who are now placed in a permanent punishment), and whosoever was not found written in the book of life (those who refused to accept God's pardon for their sins paid for by the shed blood of Christ).

They also show us the horror of the Lake of Fire: Cast alive into the lake (a living death), tormented day and night for ever and ever (never ending pain and vexation), and the second death (the first death is when the spirit leaves the body, the second death is when the soul is eternally separated from God).

Is this "lake of fire" of any concern to YOU today? Does it mean anything to your future and should you make preparation to avoid it? Up to you. Just remember, "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire".

August 20, 2003 HELL HELPERS

Some people believe that Hell is Figurative (Just a way to say God will punish those who do not obey Him). Some people believe that Hell is False (To them, death ends it all for those who disobey God). But those of us who read the Bible know that Hell is Fire and it is real because Jesus talked about Hell almost twice as much as He did about Heaven.

For a Christian, the Horror of Hell burdens us about a lost and dying world and the Hopelessness of anyone getting out of Hell once they get there motivates us to tell everyone about God's provided way out of Hell, faith in Jesus Christ. But the battle is difficult because Hell has its helpers also.

One of the best Helpers in Hell's army is Pride. Pride in their ability causes men to seek to work their way out of Hell while failing to realize that all their good works are as filthy rags before God. Pride in their social standing causes men to resist admitting they are sinners that need God's mercy and grace.

Another Helper for Hell is Pharisees. Self-righteous church people who are more concerned with their program than they are with people end up driving people away from the very God who holds out loving arms to receive them.

But the greatest Helper Hell has is called "Putting Off making a decision". The highway to Hell is paved with good intentions; none of which will make a difference in your destination!

August 26, 2003 GOD'S ERASER

Several times in Scripture God talks about "blotting" a person's name out of the book of life- "And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." (Exo 32:33). "Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they." (Deu 9:14). "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev 3:5). In both the Hebrew and the Greek, the word "Blot" means to "Rub out" or to "erase". That means that God's pencil has an eraser on it!

What would bring God to the place of saying He would erase your name from the book of Life? In the Old Testament cases, it was the continued rebellion against God's laws and the rejection of God's leadership that caused Him to look at His eraser. In the New Testament God is describing the last ages of the Church. To one Church He talks about erasing their name from the book of life, to another He talks about closing doors so that no one can open them, and, finally, He talks about people making Him so sick until He vomits them out of His mouth. In the end, Christ is seen standing outside the door of the Church knocking, requesting entrance.

Again, it appears that these people had turned away from God's ways to such a degree that the breach in fellowship caused God to look at the eraser end of His pencil. Remember this, when a person repents of sin and accepts Christ as Savior he is placed in the protective hand of God and nobody or no thing can take him out of that hand. The only way to get out is for that person to walk out themselves. This should never happen; and it never will, unless you start allowing circumstances or the pull of sin to distort or destroy your faith in Christ.

August 27, 2003 BAD BACKS

One of the most awful things anyone could ever do is to begin to follow the Lord and then fall away from the faith- (2 Peter 2:21) For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

Normally, it is one of three circumstances which causes a person to begin the Christian race and then fall by the wayside:

- 1) Some LOOK BACK- Lot's wife looked back while escaping Sodom. Jesus warned that "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62). These are people who allow the pull of their former life to draw them away from God and back into sin.
- 2) Some TURN BACK- The children of Israel came to the very door of the promised land but, instead of trusting God for the victory, "in their hearts they turned back again into Egypt," (Acts 7:39) and died in the desert instead of lived in the promised land. Fear overcame Faith and victory turned into defeat.
- 3) Some DRAW BACK- (Heb 10:38) "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Faced with trials and unexplained circumstances these people decided to return to ceremonies they could see instead of maintaining faith in the clear teaching of the Bible.

If you are looking back then you are not going forward; and that is a bad way to be looking when you meet God!

September 2, 2003 THE IMPACT OF A PERSON

At first he was only known to his family and a few close friends. But God's call was on his life, Christ's love was in his heart, and a work for God needed to be built. Soon his sermons, his caring personality, and his stand for God's word drew a group of people to attend the Church God led him to begin.

He was there when babies were born and when death paid its visits. Many were united in marriage under his ministry and many marriages were kept together by his counsel and sermons. He fed the sheep when they came to church and looked for lost lambs when they missed the services. And, best of all, many lives and eternal destinies were changed because of his clear presentation of the gospel of Christ.

One day his Lord said his duty was done and an angel escort came to carry him from the hospital to heaven. But his family needed comfort and people needed a way to express their love for his life and ministry so a funeral was held. The church was packed and the overflow rooms were filled. Testimony after testimony was given about the impact of this man and his ministry upon the lives of people.

Few knew him when he arrived but most of the city and surrounding community knew when he left. Preacher Buck made an impact because he was faithful to Christ who redeemed him and to the God who called him to be a shepherd of one of God's flocks. He made a difference in the lives of many because he lived for God. Do you?

Sept 3, 2003 REALITY CHECK

Don't run your mouth at work about how this country is going to pot because they are taking the Ten Commandments out of an Alabama Courthouse unless you have a copy of the Ten Commandments prominently displayed in your home. If the Ten Commandments are important (and they are!) then they should be a part of YOUR life.

Don't hoot and holler in Church about how the Atheist are taking over this country by taking prayer and Bible reading out of the public schools unless you have daily family prayer and Bible reading in your home. If prayer and Bible reading are important (and they are!) then they should be a part of YOUR life.

Don't cry and complain about how the moral climate in America is so bad until God will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah if He does not bring His judgment upon our country if you pay extra to have HBO and Showtime so you can watch "Sex in the City" and soft core pornography in the privacy of your own home. If godly moral standards are important (and they are!) then they should be a part of YOUR life.

Don't tell me you love God whom you have not seen and then spend all day running down your brother whom you have seen (I John 4:20). Being a Christian is important. Living as a Christian is paramount- My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (I John 3:18).

September 9, 2003 BUSH LEAGUE CATCH

When I was a young boy growing up in Poston's Corner we didn't have all the electronic games and artificial toys that children have today so we had to invent our own methods of play. Between our house and Mr Buster's home was a swampy area grown over with thick bushes. That's where many of the kids in the neighborhood played our own version of Catch.

Someone would be selected to be "it" and he would begin counting to 50. While he was counting the rest of us would start climbing the bushes in that swampy area. The rules of the game were very simple, if "it" caught you then you became "it". The only other rules were that you could not get out of the bushy area and you could not touch the ground.

That was many years ago when I had a lot more energy and a lot less pounds! If those bushes still existed today then I wouldn't have a chance because if I could manage to crawl out onto the bushes they would break off with me immediately!

I thought of that game the other day when I read (Ps 25:21) "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee." Today the two things that keep me from falling into the mud of moral failure or being captured by Satan are the integrity (righteous attitudes) of my heart and the uprightness (Holy actions) of my life. Integrity provides the spiritual energy I need to outrun Satan and staying away from the "junk food" of worldly activities keeps me from getting spiritually lazy and morally fat.

Satan is out to catch you. Keep your heart pure and your mind above the mud and you will find there is always another "bush" to jump to any time Satan gets too close.

September 10, 2003 COMMON LIES

One of the biggest lies making the circuits today is that there is no absolute truth (And the people who tell that lie believe it to be the absolute truth!!). The truth is that God's word is absolute truth. It is the same yesterday, today, and forever and will never pass away. Scientific certainties of today will be laughed at tomorrow but God's word will remain steadfast and truth.

Another common lie is that "it's your body and you can do with as you want". The truth is that you are brought with a price and your body belongs to God who redeemed it. You are not the "god" of your own life and fate. You must answer to God for the way you use, or abuse, your body.

It is also a deadly lie to believe that "you only go around once so you need to grab for all the gusto". It is true that you only have one opportunity at this life but if you think that death ends it all then you are horribly mistaken. After death comes the judgment; and after the judgment comes eternity somewhere- depending on the decision you made about God in this life. And that is the truth!

There are many other lies out there- "there is no hope for me to change"; "everyone else is doing it so I might as well join the crowd"; and "serving God means I lose all my fun". The truth is that all these "truths" are lies.

Don't build your life on untrue "truths". Look into God's word and find permanent truths that last forever.

September 16, 2003 DESIRES DELIVERED

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he will give thee the desires of thine heart. (Psalm 37:4). Isn't that a wonderful promise! God has declared that if we will "delight" ourselves in Him that He will give us what we want. If this is true (and it is a promise from God!), why do so many Christians live in spiritual and physical poverty?

Maybe the answer is found in the meaning of the word "desire". It comes from a Hebrew word meaning soft or pliable. It carries the idea of being yielded. It does not mean to be happy about the fact that God is God; it means to be submitted to God's design and plan in order that your desires are part of God's purpose.

This is very clear if you look at the verse before and the verse after this verse-(Psalms 37:3) Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. (Psalms 37:5) Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. The word "Trust" means to find a refuge in someone or some place and the word "Commit" means to roll your burdens onto something or someone. All of these show a reliance on, and a dependence in, God's care and ability.

What a joy and peace comes into your life when the desires of your heart are being met. No aggravation or frustration need bother you because everything you want is being provided. Can this be possible? Is it really something that we are able to obtain? The writer of this psalm in the inspired word of God said that if we would become pliantly yielded unto the Lord, that He would give us the desires of our heart. May you come to that place in your relationship with God today.

September 17, 2003 PRAYER FAILURES

There are reasons you fail to receive answers to your prayers. God wants to bless His children but sometimes there are hindrances that will not allow His blessings to flow.

- **DISOBEDIENCE**- Deut 1:43,45 "As I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord,...And ye returned and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear to you." Their disobedience was caused by disbelief (They believed the report of the 10 spies instead of God's Word and would not enter into the promised land.) If they had just had faith as a grain of mustard seed then they could have enjoyed the blessing of the Promised Land instead of waiting to die in the desert.
- **SECRET SIN**- Ps 66:18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." God will not grant us our request if He knows that we will use His blessings in the wrong way.
- **INDIFFERENCE**- Prov 1:24,28 "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded,...Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:" Zech 7:14 "Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts:"
If you ignore God there may come a time when HE will ignore YOU!!

September 23, 2003 ORDERED STEPS

(Psalms 37:23) The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.

I will have to admit that I was a little excited. I was staring my first day off in many weeks right straight in the face and it sure did look good. Visions of watching a ball game or of finding a good John Wayne western dangled deliciously before my eyes. Then the phone calls came.

A new singing group wanted a publicity picture taken. A thousand other people could have taken it but they wanted me; and, in spite of the fact that it would destroy my first free Saturday afternoon in a long time, I thought highly enough of the members of this group that I went to take the picture. After taking the picture I realized that we needed to pick up some much needed groceries and we were right at the grocery store.

Then a call came wanting me to take pictures of a youth conference taking place that night. So much for John Wayne. But when I took the pictures I realized that something I needed to leave for my co-worker could be left with his daughter at the youth conference and that would save me a trip to his home.

Wanting just a little free time with my wife I decided to take her out to supper. She asked her dad to join us at supper; which saved me a trip to his home since my wife had washed and ironed his Sunday clothes and needed to get them to him. And at the restaurant I noticed that one of the waitresses was a member of a local church; which meant I could give her some information her pastor had requested instead of having to drive miles out of the way that night to get it to him.

I'm glad God can take circumstances and turn them into opportunities when He orders our steps.

September 24, 2003 PUFFED OR POWERFUL

(1 Corinthians 4:19) But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

Paul was pretty blunt with people. For him, Christian living was pretty much "fish or cut bait". People who were puffed up with pride about their Christianity but who did not make a difference in their family or in their community did not impact Paul at all. Puffed up speech could never replace powerful Christian living.

People who stood up in Church and proudly proclaimed their love for God but then constantly squabbled with their family, neighbors, and other members of the church did not impress Paul. Paul felt that genuine Christianity involved more than saying the right things; it meant you lived the right way.

The Greek-English Lexicon translates the word "Power" here as "moral power and excellence of soul". It means that real Christians cannot help making a difference in their community any more than a burning candle can help bringing light when it is placed in a dark room.

The "moral power" of this kind of Christian does not come from his voice box but from his changed heart. He lives knowing that words tickle ears but a changed heart will help to change hearts.

September 30, 2003 PASTOR PRINCIPLES

Part of my job is assisting Churches to find Pastors and Pastors to find Churches. It is a difficult job because I cannot appoint anyone and if I suggest anyone I must always bear in mind that at the first sign of discontent pointed fingers will be headed in my direction. The double difficulty is that there are generally as many different desires for special qualifications for the Pastoral candidate as there are members of the pulpit committee!

Here are some guidelines that I believe should apply to ALL Pastors in ALL Churches. I can say that because they are taken from the Apostle Peter's description of a Pastor in I Peter 5:1-11.

The Pastor's Duties- Feed the flock which is among you. This means a Pastor's sermons are not to tickle people's ears, but to provide food for their development. He gains knowledge of what kind of food they need because he is out among his people on a regular basis.

Secondly, He must oversee the flock: Not as job but as a calling, not motivated by money but by a desire to see God's work go forward, and not as a dictator but as an example.

The Pastor's reward- when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.

The Pastor's attitude- Toward older Pastors, respectful and seeking their counsel. Toward fellow ministers, not prideful and boastful but building the kingdom of God together. Toward life's burdens (of which a Pastor will see plenty), cast them upon the Lord who cares for you. Toward Satan, wary of his traps, watchful of his temptations, and warning of his tactics.

A Pastor's duties are demanding and his character and conduct are under constant observation but he can count on God's strength, God's provision, and God's acknowledgment of His faithful service as he tends the sheep God has assigned him.

October 1, 2003 CONGREGATION RESPONSIBILITIES

Pastors have responsibilities to their flock but congregations also have responsibilities to the Pastor. Here are a few.

1) Help Him do his job well- One of the first church problems involved overworked ministers (Acts 6:1-4). The decision was to get others involved in the physical part of the work so that the ministers could do the job God had called them to do. The body of Christ works well when all of the body works.

2) Realize each Pastor has different gifts and abilities- (1 Peter 4:10-11) As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

3) Don't gossip about the Pastor- (1 Timothy 5:19) Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

4) Pay him well- (1 Timothy 5:17-18) Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

A good Pastor is a valuable treasure; treat him that way.

October 7, 2003 BACKSLIDER'S BENT

(Hosea 11:7) And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

"Bent to Backsliding" is the Prophet's way of saying, "They have a tendency to wander away from God and back to their old way of life". Given the opportunity to walk with God in a way that even angels envy they turn back to wandering in the wilderness among the thorns and briars. Granted the chance to walk in God's light they chose to turn back and resume their stumbling through the darkness of sin and self. What would cause such a "bent" in a person?

Note the last portion of the Prophet's message, "none at all would exalt him". The "bent to backsliding" was brought about by the person's refusal to put God in first place in their life. Wise man Solomon wrote, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways:" (Prov 14:14). Backsliding begins when the person starts considering their wants and desires to be more important than serving God. No wonder Jesus declared, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23).

Is this "bent toward backsliding" really such a bad thing? After all, we are just human and it's just natural for our sinful nature to attempt to draw us back into sin. It is when we consider the problems we encounter when we wander away from God- Defeat in our personal life, our work for God, and our witness for Christ. And, even more dreadful, God must turn from being our companion father into the painful position of being our chastising father.

If you are bent toward backsliding today let me encourage you to straighten up and put God back in His rightful place. It is a tough row to hoe otherwise!

October 8, 2003 A SILLY DOVE

(Hosea 7:11) Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.

In God's pleading with His people He often referred back to those who had once been faithful to Him but now walked in the way of the world. Ephraim was just such a case.

Once a part of God's chosen nation of Israel, Ephraim had decided to worship idols and seek their own way instead of the ways of God. Soon they had a form of godliness but denied God's authority over their life. And, as it always happens, the chastening hand of God began to make them miserable so they would see the need of repentance and of returning to God.

Instead of coming back to God where they could mount up with wings as eagles they decided to continue in their rebellious state and God ended up calling them "Silly Doves" without heart. Frightened and bewildered they rushed from one nation to another seeking relief and only finding more trouble. Are you living like a "Silly Dove"? Does life overwhelm you? Does the future frighten you? Are you constantly running from place to place seeking rest but finding promises of peace are only misty fog that melts in the harsh sun of daily reality?

Why don't you stop dreading life with the Doves and start flying with the Eagles? You will find a renewed heart from God is much better than a silly dove without heart.

October 14, 2003 GOD'S AMNESIA

(Hebrews 8:12) For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Isn't it wonderful to know that the God who knows everything about everyone will one day choose not to remember the bad things I have done! I call it God's Amnesia day.

All those times I allowed my selfish desires to lead me to do things that God did not approve of will be hid away in the sea of forgetfulness- (Micah 7:18-19) Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

How can a just and holy God have "Amnesia" about the wrong that I have done? It is easy to understand if you know the Character of God- (Isaiah 43:25) "I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." God's very character is love and He wants the very best for all of His creation. It is not His will that sin's wages be paid by our eternal separation from Him. His heart longs to forgive and forget.

But God's love cannot overwhelm His holy justice so the sins we commit cannot be simply swept under the rug. God has to have a way to have "Amnesia" that does not violate His character and His commandments. So the pure blessed Son of God paid our sin debt with His own shed blood and all who trust Him by faith can claim God's "Amnesia" on Judgment day- for God "has forgiven the iniquity of His people, He has covered all their sin." (Psalms 85:2)

October 15, 2003 CAN'T HIDE

A friend of mine once managed a small country store. One night he returned to the store after he had closed in order to check on some materials. Suddenly it became obvious to him that someone else was also in the store. Looking carefully revealed a broken back window so he decided to investigate further.

In the back of the building was a store room with no windows and only a single door entrance. When my friend looked inside this room he saw a man standing very still in the corner hoping to hide in a very open space but the bare wall offered no cover for him!

One day we will all stand before God as our judge. At that time we will know just how this man must have felt as God reveals His complete knowledge of us.

Our idle words will be open for inspection- (Matthew 12:36) But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

Our secret actions will be revealed for public view- (Luke 12:2) For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.

Like the man in this room we will feel totally exposed- (Hebrews 4:13) Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. No place to run, no place to hide; unless you are covered with God's robe of righteousness.

October 21, 2003 THEIR UNBELIEF

Does your attitude and readiness to worship mean anything when you go to church? After all, the Pastor is simply looking for a body count to keep the attendance number up and your tithes and offerings to keep the church programs functioning. The fact that you simply show up, go through the motions of singing the same old songs, and listen to the same boring sermons before you are finally liberated to do what you want to do on Sunday afternoon has nothing to do with the grand scheme of things; does it? Look at what your apathetic attitude can do.

It can limit the Lord's ability to perform His work- (Matthew 13:58) "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." After a triumphant ministry of healing and preaching Jesus finally came back home. Unable to get past a familiar face and their community prejudices the people hardened their hearts in unbelief and limited the ability of the Lord to bring the healing and comfort they so desperately needed. Church would not have been nearly as boring if they would simply have stopped looking for faults and started looking for blessings.

It can limit your reception of God's best for your life. The Children of Israel had experienced victory after victory as they marched toward the land God had promised them. One final scouting trip was all that stood between them and the promises of the Promised Land. But ten of the spies saw giants instead of God and "their unbelief" caused an entire generation to miss the Promised Land. God wanted them to have the blessing and they had everything they needed to obtain the blessing but "their unbelief" robbed everyone and they ended up dying in the desert instead of enjoying the fruits God had promised them.

Maybe the problem is not with the preacher after all. Maybe the reason things are not happening in the church is "their unbelief".

October 22, 2003 MAKE THE RIGHT TURN

Returning from a conference recently I decided to try a shortcut. The Church where the conference was held was located far out in the country and as I returned to the nearest town to get on the main road I came to a cross roads. I knew that if I turned right that I would get to the town but the road ahead looked so inviting until I decided to try it.

Half an hour later, after struggling through muddy roads and ending up "lost as a coon dog" I came back to the same intersection. Needless to say, I took the right road this time!

I came out of that situation with bad memories, a mud coated van, and the knowledge that inviting roads do not always lead you to where you need to go. I also came away with a half hour of my life wasted struggling through mud and mire when I could have been enjoying some much needed rest at home.

Walking as a Christian for many years has taught me that I need to stay on the road God has outlined for my life. Sometimes I come to an intersection and need to wait on the Lord for awhile in order to clearly understand which direction I need to go but most of the time the right way is obvious. Occasionally, however, another road looks so inviting until I feel like I just want to go a little distance down it in order to see where it will go.

Let the voice of experience tell you, wandering from God's path will always end up with mud on your life, bad memories in your mind, and wasted time in your service for God.

October 28, 2003 THE EYES

You noticed it as soon as you entered the gallery. It was a beautiful picture with many colors to attract the eye and stir the senses. The thing that stood out, however, was the eyes of the main character. They were the "piercing eyes" everyone talks about that were centered in such a way until they followed you everywhere you went.

I admire the artistry of the painter and think of that picture from time to time when I'm faced with difficult or dangerous situations. That's because I know that no matter where I am "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry." (Psa 34:15). There is not a place I go or problem I face that the Lord doesn't know exactly where I am and what I need. That's an encouragement to me!

It's also a help to me to know that "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (2 Chr 16:9). Isn't it wonderful to know that God is looking for way to bless me so I can show everyone how great it is to serve a living God.

Finally, whenever I'm tempted to sin, this picture reminds me that "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Prov 15:3). I can hide some of my sins from men but I know that God know even the thoughts of my heart. No matter which way I turn or where I go those eyes keep following me.

God's eyes are looking for you today. They see your goodness and they see your failures. That is why, like Noah, I'm glad that I have found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8) so that His eyes of judgment now see me pure and righteous because when He sees me covered by the blood of Jesus

October 29, 2003 HALLOWEEN

It began as a day to honor "All Saints", it became a night to honor witches and ghosts. The first day of November was set aside as "All Saints Day" to honor all the Saints who did not have their own special day. The Evening before this special day was called "Hallowed Evening"; eventually corrupted in old English to Halloween.

The customs associated with Halloween come from the Celts. The old Celtic calendar began the New Year on November 1st (The year ended with the harvest of their crops) and the night before became known as a time when witches and goblins roamed around trying to hold back the new year.

People began having New Year's Eve parties. At these parties they would dress up as witches or goblins to placate the demons. Eventually the serfs began to go to the main house demanding an offering (treat) from the landowner in exchange for protection from the demons during the coming year (or I'll trick you).

There are several reasons many Churches have changed Halloween to Family Fun Night. We don't believe its right to promote witches and demons. We don't think its right to teach children to demand a treat under the threat of a "trick". And, in the sick world we live in, it's just plain dangerous to allow Children to accept candy from strangers.

We make it a Family time at the church where they can dress up as "good" people, eat all the candy they want, and enjoy a good time of games and fellowship. We think that's the Christian way- defeating bad by making it good.

November 4, 2003 CUTE CANDLE HOLDERS

It all began innocently enough. Someone noticed that the Candle Holder was becoming a little dim and they thought that could be the reason fewer people were coming to look at the light from the candle. A committee was appointed and, after many meetings and much discussion, someone began polishing the Candle Holder on a regular basis. Just as predicted, several people who had not been coming to look at the light from the candle came to see the newly shined Candle Holder.

Sadly, it was discovered that the new people who had come to see the newly shined Candle Holder were people who used to help with another Candle Holder. Naturally, the newly shined Candle Holder group had boasted about the increase in their attendance so it was not long until the second Candle Holder group realized where their members had gone. If a shiny Candle Holder increases attendance then a shiny Candle Holder with fancy engraving should attract even more people. So, after countless committee meetings, the second Candle Holder group went on a great fund raising campaign. Soon they were able to completely rework their Candle Holder so that it looked better than any Candle Holder in the all the surrounding area.

Naturally, people from other Candle Holders came to see this newly improved Candle Holder; and some of them stayed with this group. So the whole cycle began again with even more escalation in money and effort being spent by other Candle Holder groups. Soon many people were so involved in having the best Candle Holder until they actually decided to remove the candle because it was so plain and the dripping wax caused such a mess.

Multitudes are dying in darkness today. They long for light to give them guidance, hope, and direction. Meanwhile, Candle Holder committees meet in order to find more ways to use their money and energy making their Candle Holder the envy of the community.

November 5, 2003 CIVILIZED CONDUCT

If it would anger you if someone came into your home and spray painted bad words or crazy sayings on the walls of your home then why do people think it is alright to spray paint these same kind of things on buildings and overpasses? If it would annoy you for someone to constantly peek in the window of your home to see what you were doing in your private moments what makes you think it is “entertaining” to become a television “peeping Tom” into the life of a person who some kind of claim to fame? (Matthew 7:12) Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

If you would not want someone to carve their initials into the front door of your home then what makes you think it is alright to carve your initials onto the door of an elevator? If you would not want someone throwing their trash and garbage all over your front lawn then what makes you think it is alright for you to throw trash out of your car window instead of putting it into a trash receptacle? (Luke 6:31) And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

Life throws us enough curves with the diseases, disasters, and difficulties that come our way. Jesus simple tells us that we can help make life a lot better if we will just show kindness and consideration to others- and receive it back in return.

November 11, 2003 GET THEM OUT

The waiting room was full as people patiently (that is why they are called patients!) waited for their turn to see the doctor. Beside me a lady was busily engaged in a conversation on her cell phone. She was speaking loudly enough (78% of people talk louder when they talk on the phone) until I had little choice except to listen to her side of the phone conversation.

It was obvious from her conversation that she was busy lining up people to vote in the election scheduled for the next day. It was interesting to hear the pressure she would put on people. She would call a plant and ask the manager what plans he had for letting the workers at the plant off so they could vote. Several times you could tell that the manager had really not thought about the election so the lady would tell him she would call back in 15 minutes so he would have time to think about it. In each case, when she called back, the manager would have a plan to let people off to vote. Very possibly, had this lady not called these plant managers, the people in the plants would not have been offered the opportunity to vote.

As I sat there, I could not help but think about what a blessing it would be to a church if we could get people in the church to exhibit the same energy, enthusiasm, and dedication in getting people to visit the church each Sunday as this lady showed. She thought voting was important enough that she needed to work at it even in the doctor's office. How important do YOU think it is that people come to church and hear the good news about Jesus Christ?

November 12, 2003 SEE BUT NOT SEEN

The morning was very foggy and the driving was difficult. I had already passed one major accident and, in spite of the fact that I was pushed for time, I was trying to be as careful as possible traveling to a Minister's Meeting. Suddenly something came hurling at me from the fog. As it whizzed past I realized it was a truck that did not have its lights turned on.

During the remainder of the trip I passed several cars and trucks that would suddenly loom out of the fog without any lights. I soon realized that the people driving these vehicles were making a classic mistake; they assumed that because they could see other cars coming at them that these other cars could see them just as easily. What they did not realize was that the reason they could see the other cars was because the other cars had their lights on while the other cars could hardly see them because they had their lights off!

Jesus said we were to be the light of the world so men would see our good works and glorified the Father in Heaven. Sadly, we find it so easy to see the faults and failures of those we are trying to help until we fail to realize that they can't see the help we want to bring their way because our light is not "on".

Like these drivers on a foggy morning we think that because we can see then we must be able to be seen. May the Lord help us to realize that without our light burning we are a potential problem instead of a helpful guide.

November 18, 2003 CERTIFIABLY SANE

When I was serving in Viet Nam one of the situations I was in required that I pay a visit to a psychiatrist (It just took me five minutes to figure out how to spell that word!). Although it was not the most extensive examination in the world, I did leave with the notation in my record that I was “certifiably sane”. Sometimes when I do something that makes my wife look at me funny I tell her that at least I’m sane. Her reply is, “You may be certifiably sane but you haven’t been certified recently!”.

Thankfully, I’m also “certifiably saved” because of my faith in Jesus Christ. Some things, however, make me wonder how recent my certification is. I’m not talking about flagrant rebellious sins; I’m talking about mistakes made by a new spiritual being dwelling in an old fleshly body. Sometimes the words of my mouth as I talk about others reveals a place in my heart that troubles me (Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks). Sometimes the look lingers until it edges perilously close to lust and I feel a wicked urge in me that I had hoped was long ago dead. I don’t worry about God but sometimes I sure do worry about me!

Then I remember God’s grace and I claim His mercy and I realize afresh that I am “certifiably saved” because my salvation is not based on the failings of my flesh but on the greatness of His Grace. I’m glad my sins are forgiven and I am a child of God today. I’m certified because I’m justified; and one day soon I will be glorified. What a joy to serve such a wonderful God.

November 19, 2003 GUIDANCE GLORY

It was just a cup of coffee but it brought the glory of God to my soul. Sunday Morning services had been “unusual” as a number of things went wrong. Although the service has been arranged I was unexpected by most of the people and unacceptable to some because I talked about the need of reaching souls in India instead of telling them how they could live happy and prosperous lives.

What was wrong? Was it me? Was something going on that I did not know about? Where was God during all this?

Sunday night my wife got ready for church early- and some of you doubt that miracles still happen! Many of you know that I am an old Navy man who drinks coffee with every meal. Coffee had not been available this day where we ate. The voice of the Lord kept nudging me to stop and get a cup of coffee since we had extra time. I kept arguing that even if I stopped the coffee would be old and cold this late in the day.

I did stop. The clerk said, “Let me make you a fresh pot of coffee”. (Glory!). The coffee was delicious but the most important part to me was the fact that God had gone out of His way to show that He was still leading me and providing for me.

I always tell people that if a cup of cold water gets you a reward than a cup of hot coffee gets you a double portion! This day it brought God’s hug to a hurting heart.

November 25, 2003 PRAISE DURING PROBLEMS

“But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel” (Psa 22:3). The amazing truth about this statement is that it is found in the middle of the Psalm that describes the agony of crucifixion; and is the Psalm that Jesus repeated while on the Cross. During this time of agony and pain Jesus still knew the value of Praise; even in the midst of problems.

Here are a few more ways Praise is profitable as we face the storms of life.

- Praise helps our Health- Prov 17:22 “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” Praise sucks the heart out of a problem before the problem sucks the heart out of us.
- Praise helps our Looks- Prov 15:13 “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.” A smile is a frown turned upside down that brings people to our side; instead of repelling them, at a time when we desperately need a shoulder to lean on.
- Praise helps our attitude- Prov 15:15 “He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.” Gripping grabs us like an anchor and drowns us in a sea of self-pity. Praise will lift our eyes from the problems to the problem solver so we can change from victims into victors.

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

November 26, 2003 BOUND TO THANK

2Th 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; Paul told these Christians that he was “Bound” to thank God for them. “Bound” is from a Greek word meaning under obligation to or in debt to. Paul is simply saying that the faith and love of these people was such until he felt an obligation to give thanks to God for them on a regular basis. I have some people in my life like that.

In addition to my other duties, I maintain an Outreach Ministry that distributes Bibles, Christian books, and other materials around the world as well as giving other assistance to Pastors and Churches. This is a total faith ministry that relies entirely on God to provide the finances we need in order to do the work He has called us to do. That is the reason I am bound to Thank God for some people.

I thank the Lord for a lady who cares for a home bound husband and yet supports this ministry each month. I thank the Lord for a widow who lives in another state but supports this ministry faithfully. I thank the Lord for a husband and wife on Social Security who sacrificially give each month. Their obedient giving has allowed us to share the Gospel with multitudes of people around the world. I am bound to say Thanks for that!

December 2, 2003 PROUD PERILS

Jas 4:6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

There are several things in the Bible that God declares that He hates- Among them are Wicked actions (Prov 6:16) and Hypocritical attitudes (Zech 8:17). It is easy enough to see why God would dislike these things and condemn them. It is thoughtful, however, to realize that the one person that the Bible declares that God resists (stands against) is a proud person!

It was pride in his beauty and power that lead to Satan's downfall and it is pride that brings many men to their doom. People will sit under the most sin condemning sermons imaginable and accept almost anything the preacher has to say but they will leave the church in a huff, never to return, if the preacher fails to shake their hand and they think they have been snubbed. Oh, the peril of a prideful heart.

It is pride that causes many people to refuse to come to an altar during the gospel invitation. Fearing someone may think them to be a sinner (we all are!) they steadfastly cling to the back of pews and stiffen their neck in pride; until that day they stand before God unprepared and unsaved and find that pride is poor insulation from the heat of hell.

There is another side to this coin. God gives grace to the humble. Grace is unearned, undeserved favor that God graciously bestows. It strikes at the very heart of pride because it is based on God's goodness instead of our abilities. And the very fact that it is a gift causes many to refuse to accept it. How can you have pride in something that God gave and you simply received?

God resisteth the proud but gives grace unto the humble. Which category do you fit in?

December 3, 2003 CHURCH CONFLICTS

One of the most heart breaking sights I will ever behold is viewing a church embroiled in bitter debate among its members. One of the most devastating defeats to the witness of the Church in the community and in the world is when it becomes a place where members spar with one another rather than spread the gospel. What causes this situation to develop? Two main items stand out immediately.

First, Unforgiving Attitudes that change people from brothers in the Lord to enemies of one another. Having been forgiven much by the Lord these people now hold bitter grudges among themselves over a small item of hurt pride or an innocent attempt to disturb part of their power base. Following closely behind Unforgiving Attitudes is Unbridled tongues. Instead of building up the brethren these people use gossip and assumptions to "share" how bad someone is; and, in the process, destroy all the confidence the lost world may have had in the testimony of this person. No wonder Paul warned the church that "if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." (Galatians 5:15).

The Church has a responsibility to stand firmly against Sin and sinful actions but it should do so as a body. That way it is the principles of the Bible and not my hurt feelings that prompts my stand. This will honor God instead of disgrace His church.

December 9, 2003 GIVING GUIDELINES

Tis the season for giving. Here are five guidelines that will help you enjoy your giving now and all year long.

1) Give freely; not for credit- (Matthew 6:3) But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

2) Give Wisely so your gift will promote good and not foster evil- (Matthew 7:6) Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

3) Give more than you are required to give- (Luke 6:38) Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

4) Give unselfishly; with an eye on eternity- (Matthew 6:20-21) But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

5) Give cheerfully so others will love to receive your gift and God will love you for giving! (2 Corinthians 9:7) Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

Finally, remember that the reason for this season of giving is because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

December 10, 2003 GRUDGE GIVING

(Deuteronomy 15:10-11) Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

Some people fail to realize that the main reason for their riches is in order for them to be able to give to those in need. Many affluent people have worked hard and possess the attitude that if everyone else worked as hard as they have worked then there would be no poverty in the land. The truth is that "time and chance happen to all men" (Ecc 9:11) and many people who struggle financially work harder than some rich people will ever think about working. Just remember, if everyone sat in the Boss's office then nothing would ever be produced!

God does not expect you to foster laziness or provide for con artist but He does give you riches in order that you might "Open you hand wide unto thy brother, to the poor, and to the needy in the land". Don't give with a grudge and miss the true joy of being able to share that which the Lord has blessed you to possess. Generously you have received from God; now generously give in order to show this same love of God to others.

December 16, 2003 MANIFESTED MESSIAH

(1 John 4:9) In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

For God so loved the world- Isn't that strange! The Lord God Jehovah can cause a universe to come into existence simply by speaking the word. In the universe there are billions of stars and planets that God could set His delight upon. Yet, He loved weakly humans on a speck of dirt called earth enough to allow His son to leave the splendors of Heaven and be born in a lowly stable!

God is adored by multitudes of angels and the host of heaven bow in worship at His feet. Yet He desired man enough so that even in the midst of their failures and sinful rebellions He sent His only begotten Son into this world in order to pay their sin debt- Glory!

There are many religions in the world; most of which are noble and noteworthy. But all of them require man to sacrifice something for their god. Only in Christianity does God manifest His love toward mankind by providing a way Himself for us to be forgiven of our sins. Amazingly, God then goes the next step and empowers us to become children of God so we can live up to the potential He gave us at creation.

Would you like to experience new birth and new life this Christmas season? Look beyond the glitter of the season to its real goal- the manifestation of the love of God through the coming of His son, Jesus Christ. He was born in order that you might be reborn; and that you might go beyond existence living to the joy of abundant living.

December 17, 2003 ABILITY GIVING

De 16:17 Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee.

My wife loves Christmas; she just does not care a lot about Christmas shopping. Don't get me wrong, my wife, like most women enjoys taking the time to shop. But it is different when you are shopping for the perfect present for someone else instead of shopping for the things you personally need .

One of the things I have to constantly remind my wife about when it comes to Christmas shopping is that we live on a very limited budget. She wants to give presents that nieces and nephews would like to have. I tell her we have to give presents that we can afford to give!

When God invented the giving system for the Church He designed it proportionally (a tithe) so that every man would give "as the Lord had prospered him". That made giving fair and functional for everyone. Christmas giving, or any giving, should be the same way. A two dollar gift from one person may be a greater sacrifice than a twenty dollar gift from another person; and it should be accepted that way.

Don't turn the joy of giving at Christmas into an overwhelming debt in January. Instead, let "Every man give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee".

December 23, 2003 CHRISTMAS MEANING

Phyllis Diller said, "Christmas is a time when everybody wants his past forgotten and his PRESENTS remembered." For many people that is what they think of at Christmas; the presents they will be giving or receiving. For these people Christmas is a commercial celebration that gladdens the boss as profits soar, that exhausts the clerks as more and more tasks are added to their already overloaded work load, and that frustrates consumers as they fight traffic and crowded stores in order to get that perfect present that no one seems to have in stock!

Erma Bombeck said. "There is nothing sadder in this world than to awake Christmas morning and not be a child." Some people look at Christmas from this point of view. Christmas is a family time that brings out the child in all of us as we anticipate and celebrate. To them Christmas is all about the excitement that shines on the face of a child as they open their presents on Christmas morning.

Isn't it strange, however, that we celebrate the birthday of Christ by giving gifts to everyone except Christ? How awkward He must feel on Christmas morning when everyone is so busy celebrating what they have received until He is pushed off into a corner and forgotten.

An unknown writer once observed, "He who has no Christmas in his heart will never find Christmas under a tree." Don't let the activities and obligations of this season overshadow the Love that God has for you in sending His Son into the world to be born as a man in order that through His death we could have our sins forgiven and become sons of God.

December 24, 2003 MAGNIFICENT MESSIAH

My wife and I once had the great privilege of visiting the Grand Canyon. We arrived around mid morning and stayed until mid afternoon. The first thing we did was try to see as much of the Canyon as possible by driving from one end to the other.

It was only when we stopped for our picnic lunch and sat and watched the view for a while that we began to really understand the great attraction the Grand Canyon has for so many people. When you sit and view the Canyon for a while you notice that it is always changing. As the sun rises or descends it causes the shadows of the many rock formations to change dramatically. The beauty of the Grand Canyon is not just in its vastness but in its constantly changing perception.

When I first became a Christian over 40 years ago I viewed Christ as a wonderful Savior who delivered me from the punishment of Hell. Through the years my love for Him and my relationship with Him has changed. Day after day He reveals things about Himself that make me simply kneel in awe and worship. Serving God gets better each day.

Sometimes I think I finally have "god in a box" but then He does something so wonderful or so merciful until I realize I haven't even scratched the surface yet. If all you know is the babe of Bethlehem then let me invite you to trust a magnificent Messiah who not only changes your future but also gives abundant life.

December 30, 2003 LIFE CHANGING FRIEND

One of the most troubling phenomenons witnessed by teachers at Christian colleges today is that many of the “Christian Leaders” among the students openly live with someone without being married- and don’t see the inconsistency between what they teach in Bible Study and the way they live off campus!

Many Church members will “Amen” sermons on holy living and the need of sexual purity but then go home and faithfully watch “Friends” each week- A show based on the sexual exploits of friends who have all managed to sleep with each other; and as many other people as possible! Is it any wonder that the young people raised in that environment think Christianity is a marvelous religion as long as it does not get in the way of what a person really craves?

Witnessing lives on TV and in real life like this have caused many people to lost their vision of true holiness and genuine Christian character. The Christianity they have witnessed makes a person respectable but it does not make them happy. Seeking real joy and finding only an empty shell at church they now wander thru life seeking to fill that big empty space in their heart with drugs, possessions, or as many sexual encounters as possible.

Christ came to forgive your past and prepare a place for your future. But He also came so He could change your life right now. Because He became a man He is able to really understand your needs and temptations and give the help you need to stop playing the game and start living the abundant life. And isn’t that the kind of Friend you have been looking for all along??

December 31, 2003 SATAN’S GOALS

Paul told the Corinthian Church not to be ignorant of Satan’s devices lest he should get an advantage over them (2 Cor 2:11). With that in mind I would like to share some ways in which Satan will try to attack you in the coming year with the prayer that “forewarned is forearmed”.

1) Satan will try to Ruin your Reputation. He is the “accuser of the brethren” and he will do all within his power to destroy your influence with others. He will also try to Corrupt your Character. Using social pressures and fleshly temptations, Satan will try to get you to begin compromising on what is right and good. Normally, the steps will be slow but the progress will be steady unless you refuse to allow the “worm into the apple”.

2) Satan will try to Trivialize your Time so you will spend your time preoccupied with the minor things of life instead of accomplishing God’s purpose and goal for your life. Day after day you will find hours to watch TV while you cannot find minutes to mediate on the Word of God or share God’s ways with others.

3) Finally, Satan will try to Fragment your Family in the coming year. He wants your children brought under the control of worldly view TV programs or mind numbingly violent video games so he will put you in separate rooms each night while he seizes control of the minds and morals of your children.

Don’t let Satan destroy you this year. Keep up your guard.