

2005 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 4, 2005 ALIVE IN 2005

Sadly, multitudes of people will continue to work and function in the coming year but their life will be dreary drudgery as they simply exist instead of really live. Some will seek to ease their pain in the destructive world of drugs and drink. Others will seek escape in sexual encounters or endless parties. Most will simply hide at work during the day and numb their mind in front of a TV at night.

This is not what you want for your life. You want your life to have purpose and meaning. You want to be able to look yourself in the mirror each morning and feel good about who you are and what you are doing. That will not happen by accident. You must realize that you cannot become what you want to be by remaining what you are and determine to make some changes in your life and your life style.

Here are three things that can help you change your priorities and purpose in the coming year. 1) Commit yourself completely and unreservedly to the Lord. He loves you and you can trust yourself to His will and His care. 2) Consistently share your faith with those around you. If you had the cure for cancer wouldn't it give you great joy to share it with others. Faith in Christ is more important than a cure for cancer. 3) Confidently face the future knowing that in life or in death you are more than a conqueror because of your faith in Jesus Christ. What an exciting life is ahead of you!

January 5, 2005 PUBLIC WORKS

For the past 5 years I have passed it twice a day almost every day. It is a big building and you would think it would be hard to miss. The problem arises from the fact that it is directly across the street from the county jail. For some reason I almost always look at the jail when I pass instead of looking the other direction toward the Public Works building.

I thought of this recently when I was giving directions to my home. I did not tell the person that I lived a couple of miles pass the Public Works building. I told them I lived a couple of miles past the county jail. Most people know where the jail is located but few know where the Public Works building is located; even though it is directly across the street!

Many of you pass at least one church on your way to work or school each day. Sadly, you could probably tell me if you passed a fast food restaurant but you would probably be hard pressed to tell me if you passed a church.

A new year of opportunities is upon us. Take the time to stop at church and see what is going on. If it is Bible believing, Bible teaching church then its activities will be much more important than anything going on at your local fast food restaurant. You might just be surprised what you will find when you take your eyes off the "jail" and look across the street.

January 11, 2005

THE GREAT GOSPELS

Harold Willmington in his "Guide to the Bible" gives some interesting facts about the Gospels. He shows that the Gospels describe Christ saving sinners under a tree, up a tree, and on a tree. In the Gospels Christ demonstrates His authority over nature by calming a raging sea and by cursing a fruitless tree. The Gospels pull back the curtain and allow us to overhear the voice of God coming from heaven above and the pleas of men coming from hell beneath. Within it's pages harlots are forgiven and hypocrites are condemned.

The Gospels record that Jesus performed 36 Miracles, told 38 Parables, prayed 19 Prayers, preached 16 sermons, made 45 Predictions, and fulfilled 37 Old Testament Prophecies. He converted 27 souls, gave 10 proofs of his deity, experienced 15 kinds of suffering, and appeared 10 times following His resurrection. The Gospels are indeed the "good news" about the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

Wouldn't it be wonderful this year if your Pastor spent the entire year preaching from the Gospel of Luke (or John or Mark or Matthew). What an exciting anticipation it would be each week to go to church knowing you would hear more about the greatest story ever told. And what an impact it would have on your life if you could realize that Christianity is about Christ instead of simply guidelines for what is right and wrong.

Jesus made an astonishing statement, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32). What if we believed that enough to actually teach about Christ every week for a year? I believe it would change our character, change our churches, and have a tremendous impact on our communities. Why don't we make this year the year of the Gospel?

January 12, 2005

STABLE STANDARDS

The word "standard" has a variety of meanings. A standard is a flag representing a nation to which soldiers rally in time of battle. A standard is a fixed unit used as a guideline to measure all other units. And a standard is a type of conduct expected of everyone within a certain area or school of thought.

Isn't it amazing the different standards that guide a person? A man who would murder another man at the drop of a hat would never consider hurting a kitten? Or a Drug dealer who would lead a nine year old into the horrible slavery of drug addiction without a second thought would think you beyond contempt if you broke your promise to him? Everything depends on a man's "standards" of morality.

What are your standards based upon? Are they based on your personality preferences? Are they governed by the things that empower you such as your money or your job? Do they come from the prevalent sentiments of society? Or do you get your standards from the eternal principles of the Word of God?

For a long time a "Foot" was the length of the king's foot. That made building a building very difficult when the king died! Today men are realizing that sliding standards sound like fun but they lead to fractured families, fighting fans, and trashy TV. We don't need standards that change with every whim in Hollywood. We need the stable standards found in God's Word.

January 18, 2005

EVIL'S ASSOCIATION

The first song in God's hymn book (Psalm one) tells us that a man is "blessed" if he does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, if he does not take a stand with sinners, and if he does not sit around with those who mock God's law. Paul goes even further than this when he tells us we are to "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thess. 5:22). The Psalmist exhorted us not to "hang around" with sinners. Paul tells us to "kick it up a notch" and to even stay away from activities and actions that would appear to be evil.

We are certainly not talking about trying to live in isolation like a monk. Nor are we talking about trying to live according to everyone's preferences (That would probably drive you crazy because there would be no way you could please everyone!). The commandment Paul gives is to make us aware of the impact we have on others by our appearance as well as by our actions.

I could go into a bar today, order a coke, sit there and drink it, and the word about the preacher being a hard down drunk would make it back to the house before I did! It would not be that I did evil, it would be that there was the "appearance of evil". Remember that this week when you are making choices about where you will go and what you will do; and remember that a ruined reputation is a heavy piece of luggage to carry.

January 19, 2005

VISITORS WELCOME?

I have the opportunity to visit in many churches during the course of a year because of my position. It is a great joy to see the wonderful talent that God has given many members of our churches. It is also wonderful to experience the friendship and fellowship that is a part of the family of God at worship.

My wife and I try to arrive in time for Sunday School because we think Sunday School is an important part of the service. It is a great blessing to see the quality of the teaching and to witness the dedication of the teacher. There are, however, several problems areas that we have noticed in almost every Church we visit.

1) No one is at the front door of the Church to direct visitors- Do we go into the church for an opening assembly? Where does the class for our age group meet?

2) At the beginning of the class, many times several offering baskets are passed around. What are they for- Class party? Benevolent Fund? Flowers for sick? General Fund?

3) What Scripture are you using to teach the Sunday School lesson- Many Sundays, if I did not know the Bible really well so I could figure out where the teacher is teaching from then my wife and I would sit the entire lesson "in the dark".

Make sure your visitors are remembered this Sunday. After all, you should really want them to be there!

January 25, 2005

Four GOOD GOALS

The new year has been so busy for me until I have not had the opportunity to look at any “new year’s resolutions”. In my prayer time recently, however, I took the time to stand back, look at my ministry, and try to determine what I needed to work on this year so I can be the Christian worker God wants me to be. As I prayed for guidance God led me to change my Bible reading for that day to the book of Colossians. In chapter one of that book, the apostle Paul tells the Colossian Christians that he is praying for four things in their life. Like a neon sign, God said to me, “These are goals I want you to attain also.”

The first Goal was that they would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Oh, how I long for that! I want every day of my life to be lived in the perfect will of God.

The second Goal was that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. How my heart just leaped when I read that. That is the cry of my soul each day.

Goal number three was for them to be fruitful in every good work. Over and over I look at my work and ask myself if I am making a difference for God. Am I simply going through the motions or do I produce fruit for the Lord?

The final goal was that they would increase in the knowledge of God. My soul craves this. My purpose in life is not simply to serve God but to know God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

I thank God for pointing me in the right direction with some good goals this year. I hope you will make them your goals also.

January 26, 2005

THREE PRACTICAL PRACTICES

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. (1 Thess 4:11-12)

Paul is giving the Thessalonian Christians some good advice about the way they should live their lives. 3 important principles are given for us to practice so we can go beyond “Sunday Morning Church Attenders” into Community Changing Christianity.

Paul uses an interesting word to begin his instructions. He tells us to “Study” to do these things. The word “Study” means to “make it your ambition to put these actions into practice”. For the next few weeks, this is exactly what I want us to do. I want us to look at how we can “study” to be quiet, to do our own business, and to work with our own hands.

Why should we worry about this? What difference does it make if these principles are practiced in our life? Paul answers these questions by declaring that practicing these principles will cause us to “command the respect” of non-Christian society around us while providing for the needs of the Christian community to which we belong. That, I believe, is something well worth “studying” to know how to do.

February 1, 2005 OUT OF GAS

Recently our denomination was blessed to have several Hispanic missionaries come to our area to begin mission works in order to reach our fast growing Hispanic population. In the true spirit of the Savior they represent, they have arrived without a "place to lay their head". Finding them lodging became a primary priority.

One of our churches has a mobile home for a Youth Pastor but they presently have no Youth Pastor so they volunteered to let one of the missionary families live in this home for awhile. The next problem was that the Youth Pastor mobile home was unfurnished. In stepped another church to provide the needed furnishing (Isn't it wonderful to see God at work!).

All of this led to the Pastor of the Church which has the mobile home and the Pastor whose church was furnishing the furniture having to borrow a truck to transport the furniture to the mobile home. All went well until they loaded the furniture and then ran out of gas on the way to deliver it! Sad preachers stuck on a deserted country road with a dark cold winter night fast approaching are a pitiful sight to behold.

Later it was determined that someone had stolen almost all the gas out of the borrowed truck the night before they borrowed it. Take heed. When you are attempting to do good Satan will try to discourage or defeat you in any way possible. The good news is that these preachers were rescued, the furniture was delivered, and these missionaries are happily living in their new home reaching people with the gospel of Christ. God wins again- Glory!

February 2, 2005 3 PRACTICAL PRACTICES (2)

"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

Last week we introduced "Three Practical Practices" that will help us improve our lives in the coming year. Today we want to look at the first of these practices- Tranquility of Spirit.

Paul told the Thessalonians to "Study to be quiet". There are two ways this statement can be viewed: First- To learn not to make noise (Literally, "To keep your mouth closed"). Wouldn't that be a great principle for people to practice!! The second meaning, "To seek to have a tranquil spirit" seems, however, to be the principle Paul is exhorting us to practice.

"Tranquility of spirit" means we are at Peace with God, with those around us, and with ourselves. This gives us quiet steady dependability in our lives which is what all of us should strive to attain. This "tranquility of spirit" is not something that just happens in our life. We must "study to be quiet" by making it our ambition to put this principle to work in all of the circumstances life throws our way. But what a difference it will make when people see "tranquility of spirit" operating in our life.

February 8, 2005

SECONDARY SERMON

It is always interesting when the Lord “hedges me in” so I maintain my free will while at the same time doing what He wants me to do. My wife and I had planned to go to a church having revival recently. Several circumstances too long to explain in this article caused us to end up going to another church instead. As soon as I arrived at this church I heard that the Pastor had just been called away to an emergency. Now I think I understand what God is doing.

I love God's sense of humor. The Pastor did not know I was coming to his church that night so he called a lay speaker from the Church and told him to speak at the service. So why all this “hedging” around to get me to the service if someone else was going to speak? As soon as the speaker began his sermon I knew the answer. Several months before this person had come by my office and I had given him a sermon outline to use sometime. That is what he preached that night. So I got to preach without preaching!

Next morning I was sharing this with my assistant and he suddenly burst out in laughter. “I was asked to preach unexpectedly last night and I used one of your sermon outlines also.” he said. So I got to preach in two different churches without preaching anywhere!

Many parents today are teaching their children lessons they learned in Sunday School as children. Many members tell their co-workers what their preacher preached the Sunday before. Like the ripples from a rock thrown into a pond, your work for God may reach places you had never imagined so do it well and do it faithfully.

February 9, 2005

3 PRACTICAL PRACTICES (3)

“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

The first Practical Practice we examined was that we “study to be quiet”. Today we want to look at Practical Practice number two- “Study to do your own business”. It does not say “mind your own business”; it says we are to “do our own business”. It is true that minding your own business is a good practice to practice and minding someone else's business is a bad practice that can lead to some hard circumstances- Prov 26:17 “He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears”. It may seem easy to grab a dog but it sure is hard to let loose!!

To “do your own business”, however, means you determine to handle your own affairs well. God has a plan for each person and when each person does his “own business” then society functions as it should. God gives each person a personality and a potential at birth. The world flourishes when we learn to blend these different abilities and attitudes into a working organism where everyone “does their own business” with energy and enthusiasm.

February 15, 2005 FEARING MICE

In basic training our Sergeant was a rough tough no nonsense type of guy. He would push us through the mud and the blood and call us “sissies” if we showed any fear. One day I was on “KP” and the Sergeant was inspecting the facilities. At the time I was making Jell-O for several thousand men. I had a huge vat of liquid Jell-O mixed up and I would simply dip huge trays into the vat, fill them with Jell-O, and then sit them in the large refrigerator to solidify.

When I dipped one tray into the vat I noticed something moving and saw that a mouse had been hiding in the tray and he was now a Jell-O covered mouse. The Sergeant was coming by at the time so I asked him what to do. He hastily backed away and said, “I don’t care what you do. Just keep that mouse away from me!”. Our rough tough Sergeant was afraid of mice!

Sometimes a man who would laugh at blazing guns will cower in the presence of a mouse. It is not always logical but it is a truth. Samson laughed at the armies sent against him but he feared the mouse of Delilah’s disapproval so much until he told her how he could be defeated. Peter drew his sword against the multitude who came to capture Christ but a mouse of a maid made him swear and deny he even knew Christ.

I don’t know what “mouse” fills you with fear; I just know that the same God who defeats Satan as a roaring lion can help you deal with the little things in your life that are overcoming you and robbing you of the victory. God wants you to triumph in life, even over mice!

February 16, 2005 3 PRACTICAL PRACTICES (4)

“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

The third Practical Practice commanded is to “work with your own hands”. Honest work renews the mind, refreshes the body, and eases the conscience. The reason so many people come home from work exhausted is because almost all work is done with computers or other machinery that leaves our minds exhausted at the end of the day. We waste hours sitting in front of a TV each night because we are too mentally tired to do anything else.

Try this for a month. Two nights a week leave your TV off and “work with your hands”- play board games with the kids, clean the closet, bake a cake for a neighbor, do woodwork, build those shelves you have always wanted in the closet. You will be amazed at how refreshed your mind will become, and how much better you will feel, when you don’t continually soak your mind in the sewage spuing from your TV.

Paul has given us three practical principles we are to practice- Endeavor to maintain a tranquil spirit, find your place in society so you can do your own business, and learn to balance your life with physical and mental activities. No wonder he declares that practicing these principles will command the respect of the non-Christian world.

February 22, 2005

NO UNEMPLOYED CHRISTIANS

In Christian Service there should never be any Unemployment! EVERY member of the Body of Christ is vital to the Mission God has given it to fulfill and it hurts all of the body when any of the body fails to function as it should. I know everyone is busy in today's society- some are busy doing important work, some are busy doing unimportant work, and some are busy just being busy! I'm not trying to add more work to your schedule, I am simply trying to get you to see that you need to prioritize your work with the knowledge of what is important for eternity.

We do not need Christians to be "no shows" at their job for God. That puts an extra burden on the other workers. Nor do we need Christians who "just show" and fail to get involved in God's work. That discourages and disappoints those who are trying to do all they can for God. What we need are Christians who show up, stand up, and speak up, so that the weak, the wicked, and the wayward find the help they need at God's house.

Every knee bent in prayer helps empower God's work. Every sermon or Sunday School lesson given allows God's word to work in the hearts and minds of people. Every nickel contributed, every pew dusted, every choir special sung, and every bulletin distributed is a needed part of God's work. There is something that everyone can do and there is something that everyone should do. Don't be an unemployed Christian. Find, and fill, your place in God's work this week.

February 23, 2005

UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS SAID

Sometimes the easy things are not so easy after all. My wife and I were celebrating our 35th anniversary and she wanted to go to a Greek restaurant. As we waited on our food to arrive I noticed the waitress at the next table. It was obvious from her appearance that she was Hispanic and it was obvious from her actions that she did not understand English very well. Orders that were easy for the other waitresses were very difficult for a Mexican girl taking orders for Greek items from American citizens speaking with a southern drawl!!

Churches need to consider people like this Hispanic girl when they conduct their services. Many things that are easy for people who speak "church" are very difficult for those who are not familiar with religious language. Remember that Jesus had to explain "born again" to Nicodemus and He constantly had to clarify the meaning of parables to His disciples. Sometimes things that are easy are not so easy if you don't understand what is being said.

When people fail to respond to the Gospel message maybe the problem is the understanding ear instead of the rebellious heart. Let's make it our goal to communicate in such a way until even "Greek" will be understood by those who attend our services.

March 1, 2005 PRE SIN SINS

The most consistent, and the most devastating, problem in Christian circles today is the practice of pre-sin sins. Pre-sin sins are those sins that precede, and lead up to, a sin. In almost every case the pre-sin sin is not thought of as a “really bad” sin so it is tolerated and ignored until it leads past the pre-sin into the “real” sin that people condemn.

Some examples of pre-sin sins are the lust that leads to adultery, the hatred that leads to murder, and the coveting that leads to robbery. Most people consider the pre-sin of lust that leads to adultery to be a “minor” infraction that is almost innocent. Consider, however, the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:28 “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Jesus considered the “pre-sin” to be equal to the “sin”.

Note also how the pre-sin of hatred is categorized- First John 3:15 “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” Murder does not just happen, there is a path of “pre-sin” that leads to the act. Hurt feelings lead to temper. Temper leads to hatred. Hatred leads to murder. Many people nourish and pet their “pre-sin” of hurt feelings when things don’t go their way and they use that to justify their temper. They really don’t think they are doing wrong until suddenly the monster of murder (whether physical murder or character assassination) jumps into motion and the “pre-sin” has become a “real” sin.

The weeds of wickedness are thorny briars with an awful smell. Remember, however, that they begin with a seed of sin that is so small until it is often ignored- and that is the problem.

March 2, 2005 DELIGHT IN GOD

Jonathan Edwards, the great American preacher, struggled with the assurance of his salvation during his early years. He was a good moral person who studied hard and was well liked by his fellow students. Over and over his friends would tell him that he should not doubt his relationship with God but Jonathan Edwards kept insisting something was wrong. Finally, one of his friends demanded that he explain what exactly kept him from feeling as if he were really saved. His answer is very revealing, “I do not think I am saved because I do not delight in God!”.

“Delighting in God” is the missing ingredient in many professing Christians today. They have pretty good morals and are well thought of in society but they do not really “Delight in God”. They do not desire to be in God’s Presence; they do not enjoy being with God’s People; and they do not crave God’s Plan for their life. They want to die with their “heaven insurance” paid up but there is no hunger to spend time with God and let God take control of their life.

Upon what do you base your hope of Heaven? The stock answer is believing that Jesus is the Son of God but can you really believe that Jesus died to pay for your sins and not have an overwhelming desire to spend time with Him and work for Him? Can you really be right with God if you do not delight in God?

March 8, 2005 PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

During my devotion time recently I asked the Lord to give me several principles that people needed to practice. Almost immediately the following three principles seemed to “pop” into my brain. I believe they are very practical; but very important. Hope they will help you.

1) DON'T WORSHIP YOUR WORK. Many people seem to get all their self worth from their work. If you are able, you should work, and you should enjoy your work, but don't turn your work into the only driving force in your life. Don't serve your work, make work your servant.

Work is wonderful when it allows you to be creative and make enough money to support your family. Remember, however, that your job is part of your life; not all of life.

2) DON'T FORGET YOUR FAMILY. The scriptures state that (1 Tim 3:5) *if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?* God recognized early, and stated often, the importance of family relationships. Yet, many people treat their family like dirt while treating the people who come into their work (whom they hardly know) with respect and dignity. Find ways this week to let your family know they are important to you and that you value them in your life.

3) DON'T BE WEARY IN WELL DOING. An increasingly sinful society and the demands of life cause many people to put their relationship with, and their work for, God on the “back burner”. More and more they find less and less time for Bible reading, periods of prayer, and church activities. God has promised that if we spend time with Him that it will bring refreshment to our exhausted life. Keep that in mind as you plan you week.

March 9, 2005 MARRIAGE MEMOS

Recently someone shared a number of short sayings about marriage with me and I thought they would be helpful to others who are married, or who are contemplating getting married.

A bridegroom is a man who spends a lot of money on a new suit that nobody notices.

A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple- French Proverb

An ideal wife is any woman who has an ideal husband

Chains do not hold a marriage together. It is threads, hundreds of tiny threads that sew people together through the years- Simone Signoret

Don't marry for money; you can borrow it cheaper- Scottish Proverb

It takes two to make a marriage a success and only one to make it a failure- H Samuel

Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.

Let the wife make her husband glad to come home. Let the Husband make his wife sorry to see him leave.

Marriage halves our griefs, doubles our joys, and quadruples our expenses.

Marriage resembles a pair of shears, so joined that they cannot be separated; often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing any one who comes between them. S Smith

“My wife is an angel” said one man. The other replied, “You are so very lucky, mine is still alive”!

And one final quote- When a marriage works, nothing on earth can take its place- Helen Douglas.
To which I add a hardy “Amen”.

March 15, 2005 43rd YEAR

March 19th will mark my 43rd year of being a child of God. It has gotten sweeter and sweeter as the years have gone by. The change that has taken place in my life is astonishing. I began my journey knowing little, and caring less, about the Bible but now I daily read, and weekly preach, the wonderful good news found in the word of God. I started out distrustful of Church members and of things “religious” but I now call complete strangers “Brothers” and “Sisters” and count it a tremendous privilege to be part of such a family.

I have found that a relationship with Christ satisfies every area of my life. Being a Christian is mentally challenging, emotionally invigorating, and spiritually fulfilling. It is a joy to wake up in the morning knowing I belong to God. It is a delight to work each day knowing that what I do has eternal value. It is peaceful beyond words to lay down each night with the knowledge that “To live is Christ and to die is gain”. Being a Christian is just great!

Christ is a rock that I stand on, a Savior that I trust in, and a Friend that I expect one day to see face to face. My relationship with Christ paid for my past sins, changed my present life, and put anticipation into my future. Christianity is not a “death insurance” policy I reluctantly carry just to play it safe. It is abundant life now and eternal life to come. I have served the Lord for 43 years now and the only thing I regret is that I did not begin the journey sooner.

March 16, 2005 FOUR QUESTIONS

My dear and lovely wife celebrates her birthday today. It is a significant birthday for her since it is one that ends in a zero (and that is all I will say about that!!). For some reason people tend to examine their goals in life more closely on a “zero” birthday. With that in mind I want to share with you four questions that will help focus your life.

1) Where do you want to go? Many people simply drift along on the river of life going where the current of circumstances carry them. You must know where you are headed if you plan to reach a specific destination.

2) How do you plan to get there? Plan a plan and then figure out how to work that plan. You don't lose 20 pounds by thinking it. You decide to regularly eat less and exercise more.

3) What are you doing about it? A dream becomes a nightmare if you do not put “feet” on it. Ask yourself every day what you are doing to reach the goals you have set for your life.

4) When will you start? Delay is deadly. You cannot change what you are if you do not start the process. The first step must be made before any other step can take place.

Don't “zero” out your life this year. Get busy finding, and doing, God's purpose for your life.

March 22, 2005 THE COST

Free may be free but that does not mean it is without cost. Somewhere along the line someone had to pay. This time of year as we look closely at the sacrifice of Christ on the cross reminds us about that in regards to the free gift of salvation offered by God. Salvation comes to us free and freely but it was tremendously costly to provide. It cost Christ the comfort of Heaven, the rejection of men, and the pain of crucifixion in order to purchase our "free" salvation. We get the good stuff because he was willing to go through all the bad stuff!

The amount you are willing to pay for something is directly proportionally to the value you place on it. I would not give you ten cents for a ticket to a professional basketball game but other people would sacrifice greatly for that same ticket. Again, it is a question of value.

Look in the mirror today and realize that God thought you were so valuable until He paid the largest price Heaven had to offer in order to redeem you and make you one of His own! What a shame it would be if you thought so little of this expense gift that is so freely given until you neglected to receive it and one day had to face God unprepared for eternity.

March 23, 2005 RESURRECTION REQUIRED

As I travel across the United States and into other countries, I find a multitude of religious beliefs. Everyone thinks their brand of religion is right and their "god" is the only true God. As I listen to the doctrines and observe the behavior of various religions I am struck by the good qualities I find in all of them. Naturally, the question I must ask myself is "What give me the right to believe that the religion I promote is any better than these other religions?" The answer goes to the very heart of Christianity.

If all religions are "equal" and followers simply chose the religious guidelines that fit their personality the best then it would appear that we need a course of study in our schools at the early grade levels showing the various strengths and weakness of different religions. This would give each person an opportunity to make up their own mind and allow them to chose the religious guidelines to guide their life that fit their own personality and preferences.

In order to make this fair, however, there would have to be one fact presented that would tip the scale completely toward Christianity. While all religions may have good teachings only Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead and ascended back to God. That changes everything! Now it is no longer just a set of guidelines to help me enjoy the short life I have on earth. Now it is about eternity and only Christ passed the resurrection required test!

March 29, 2005 REAL FAME

Little Richard was not so little after all. As we waited to board our flight to Nashville a large entourage of people were allowed to board the plane before everyone else. A few curious questions produced the information that this group was centered around "Little Richard". A few more curious questions revealed that "Little Richard" was a famous rock and roll singer.

When we landed in Nashville everyone had to wait until this entourage left the plane before we were allowed to deplane. Finally, my assistant and I got off the plane and headed to collect our luggage. When I rounded a corner in the baggage pick up area I bumped head on into "Little Richard" as he waited for his group to pick up their luggage. I don't know how he got his name but he was not so little. In fact he was as tall as I am.

I guess my claim to fame would have to be that I have not met a lot of worldly famous people! I don't normally find myself in those society circles. I have, however, met a number of missionaries, ministers, and dedicated Christian church members. Most of them are not "famous" in the eyes of the world today but I can tell you that when I "run into them" they stand very tall in my eyes. Their sacrifice and commitment is making a difference in the world today and will make them really famous in the days to come.

I don't begrudge "Little Richard" his fame or his star status. If people want to honor him for his musical ability then that is up to them. I'm just glad I have the happy privilege of regularly walking and talking with people who stand tall with God. They have real fame that is enduring and will still bring them honor a million years from today.

March 30, 2005 LIFT OFF

The plane rumbled and shook as it increased its speed down the runway. Suddenly the nose of the plane lifted off the ground and the ungainly rolling plane became an elegant flying bird as we soared away from Atlanta and began our journey to Nashville. Just as the plane lost its contact with the earth and started sailing on the wings of the wind the child in the seat ahead of me simply squealed with glee. Evidently this was her first flight and she was so excited to be airborne until she could hardly contain herself. Her excitement infected everyone and soon even the most travel weary veterans looked at each other with a smile on their face as they remembered back to their first flight.

I have never been to Heaven and it may be that the rumbling and shaking as I prepare to leave this world may be a little frightening and unnerving. I pray, however, that I will have the same joyful anticipation and gleeful enthusiasm that was exhibited by this young girl as I begin my Heavenly flight. After all, that "flight" will be taking me to my new permanent home where I will enjoy peace and joy with the Lord forever.

April 5, 2005 READY

Recently I saw two slogans on church signs that played off on the word “ready”. The message of each was so important until I thought I would share them with you.

“If you are not ready to forgive then you are not ready”. This slogan means, of course, that if you are not ready to forgive others then you are not ready to meet God and claim His forgiveness of your sins. It comes from the sermon by Jesus in which He declared, “If ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. (Mark 11:26). It goes past the cheap easy believing practiced by many in churches today. Instead, it demands a faith in God that changes your relationship with men as well as your relationship with God. Being ready to meet God is changed from an abstract religious principle you “believe in ” into a real life heart changing relationship that impacts the way you feel about, and act toward, other people.

The other slogan was a reverse of the way the thought is normally presented, “Jesus is ready. Are you coming?”. Normally it is written, “Jesus is coming. Are you ready?”. I like the new version! It warns us that the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is “ready” (near) and then asked the most important question in life, “When Jesus comes for His bride will you be one of those going back with Him?” That is something each of us should prayerfully and carefully consider.

Are you ready to forgive others with the same forgiveness you seek? Are you ready to fly away with the Lord no matter when He comes? Remember, if you are not ready when the Lord is ready then it will be too late to be ready!

April 6, 2005 THE LORD IS

Numerous times in scripture (162 in case you are interested) the phrase “the Lord is” is used. Several of these statements about the Lord declare marvelous and mighty truths. Let’s look at several of them.

The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. (Lamentations 3:24). What an acknowledgment. God is my allotment in life. Then another “the Lord is” verse declares that since God is my portion then that is all I need- The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalms 23:1).

The Lord is all I need because I can rest in complete dependence on Him- The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. (Ex 15:2). The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; (2 Samuel 22:2). The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1). Fear has to fly because the Lord is my helper- So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Heb 13:6)

Last, but certainly not least, the Lord is all I need because His character deals with my corrupt sinful nature and provides a way for reconciliation- The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. (Ps 145:8).

April 12, 2005 COME, LORD JESUS

Dr. Sidlow Baxter, in his classic overview of the Bible, "Explore the Book", gives three ways that Christians can hasten the return of the Lord. He states that hastening the return of the Lord is the duty of Christians based on Second Peter 3:12 "Looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?"

How can Christians hasten the return of the Lord? First we can daily LONG for His appearing remembering that He is coming for them who "Love His appearing" (II Tim 4:8). How sad it is to hear many Christians give the impression to the unbelieving world that they would rather live in this sin cursed world instead of depart for the joys of Heaven. There is something wrong with that picture!

Secondly, Christians can hasten the return of the Lord by daily PRAYING for His appearing, remembering that the last prayer of the Bible is "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20). I hear people praying for health, wealth, and comfort in this world but I can't remember the last time I heard someone earnestly pray for the Lord to return and take us home with Him.

Finally, Christians can hasten the return of the Lord by daily seeking to WIN SOULS. One day someone will win that final person who will complete the Church and God will tell Jesus the wedding is ready and He can go get His bride. Glory! What a day that will be!

Are you doing all you can to hasten the return of the Lord? Or have you "settled in Sodom" where you wallow in the mud with the hogs instead of longing to fly to the heights with the eagles?

April 13, 2005 SOCIETY'S STATE

People sometimes ask me how the moral and spiritual state of America dropped to such a low level in such a quick time. I tell them that my opinion is no better than their opinion but I can give them a divine opinion that describes exactly what is happening in Society today. It is found in Paul's letter to the Romans as Rome headed down the same slippery path of moral collapse that America is on today.

Romans 1:25-32 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

April 19, 2005 DIFFERENCE LOVE

One of the most haunting passages in scripture is First Corinthians 13:3 "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." This scripture declares that acts of goodness and even extreme sacrifice do not measure up if they are not motivated by genuine love.

The Government has tried to convince us for years that if you throw enough money at a problem that it will solve the problem. All of us realize how false this is by now. A good example would be many of the housing projects the government sponsors. Instead of elevating people to a better living, many housing projects are pockets of poverty and crime. Better housing without better hope turned to despair, disrespect, and drugs.

This example should show us that people do not need just money, they need loving concern that will enable them to use the money they have, or receive, correctly. That takes more than programs; that takes involvement on a personal level.

The perfect example of this is shown in God's Love for mankind. When man sinned, he incurred the penalty of death. God could have looked at the extreme cost of paying this debt and abandoned man to sin's eternal penalty. Instead, God actually became a man and suffered on a cross to pay this debt and make salvation available to all.

This is the kind of love God offers to you today. What a difference it would make in your life if you would accept this love. And what a difference it would make in our world if we all would demonstrate this kind of love.

April 20, 2005 BLINDED BY HATE

(1 John 2:11) But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

Hatred is a hard master. It controls the way you live ("Walketh in darkness") and the motivation of your life ("Knoweth not whither he goeth"). And by doing so, it slowly destroys your health, your relationship with other, and your joy.

But hatred does something even worst- it eventually blinds you! ("because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"). In a cave in the Smoky Mountains are some blind trout. When people began using the cave they thought it would be good to stock it with trout. To their great horror, they found that trout who live in the darkness of a cave all the time actually lose their sight.

When a person allows hatred to live in his heart it causes him to walk in the darkness of his own bitter spirit until he becomes blind like these trout. Hugging that hatred to your heart may seem a great comfort at first but how horrible it becomes as you increasingly find yourself blinded to the beauties all around you because of the cloud of darkness surrounding your life.

There is a way out of this darkness- He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. (1 John 2:10)

April 26, 2005 HOW GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

One of the benefits of being a Christian is that we are able to call upon a God who hears and answers prayer. But HOW does God answer those prayers? Does the answer come in some magical puff from Heaven or does God use other methods? During my time serving the Lord I have experienced 3 different ways God answers prayer.

1) Providential Provision- Many times God has miraculously provided the answer. Often He would do this by instructing someone else to provide my need. This is not a case of me subtly hinting that I had a need and then the other person feeling obligated to supply that need. That makes everyone involved feel bad. This provision came because I would tell God and God would lay the need on the heart of the other person. This way, when the provision comes, it brings Glory to God, a blessing to the person giving (It is more blessed to give than to receive) and a blessing to me as I see God answer prayer.

2) Providential Payment- God would lower my normal expenses for a time in order for me to accumulate the money required to purchase my need. The provision is no less real simply because it came over time instead of instantaneous.

3) Personal Provision- Sometimes God would answer my prayer by saying that He did not need to intervene in any way since He had provided what I needed already if I would simply use my resources wisely. Answers like this develop me as a person as well as provide my needs.

God uses many methods to meet our needs. The answer is available if the request is made. Many times, however, "we have not because we ask not" (James 4:2).

April 27, 2005 WHEN PRAYING WILL NOT HELP

Answered Prayer should be a normal part of the Christian life. God delights in hearing our prayers and, since He is a wonderful loving God, He also delights in giving His children the blessings they need. Sometimes, however, God lets us know that certain circumstances in our life are there for a reason and prayer will not change them. That is an important lesson to learn.

God's great servant, Moses, disobeyed God about striking the rock and circumstances were set in motion in his life that God said Prayer would not change- Deut 3:25-26 "I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter".

God's great apostle, Paul, was given a "thorn in the flesh" by God in order to perfect his life. Prayer would do harm instead of bring help in this situation. II Cor 12:8-9 "For this (thorn in the flesh) I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

If there are things in your life that prayer will not help just remember that God's eyes never leave you even when His ears will not hear you. Accept God's will and trust God's heart.

May 3, 2005 WICKED WISDOM MOM

Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. (2 Chronicles 22:2-3)

This is the time of year when we normally praise all the good qualities of a mom and ignore any bad characteristics she may have. Sometimes, however, we need to realize the tremendous influence for bad, as well as good, that can be exerted on a child by a mother. Such was the case with king Ahaziah as his mother counseled him to do wrong with the power he had inherited.

Why, you may ask, would a mother give her child wicked advice instead of good advice? The answer lies in the fact that a mother is still a human being with a sinful nature that must be redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Until that takes place a mother can be controlled by the desire for riches, power, and pleasure just like anyone else. Sadly, this wickedness in the mother can be imparted to the child by the natural respect a child has for his mother's advice.

Every mother should become a Christian believer because of the eternal good it will do for them. But they should also consider the great harm that can be done to their own children if their children's actions and wisdom are tainted by the mother's sinful nature. Why don't you give your family the best present they could receive this Mother's Day by allowing Christ to change your heart and mind so that you will provide a good example and good advice to your family.

May 4, 2005 PRAYER MEETING MOM

During the early beginning of the Christian Church several of its key leaders were captured by king Herod. He immediately put James, the brother of John, to death by the sword but kept Peter alive. He then had his advisors take a poll of the people and found that most people approved of what he had done. That led him to put Peter under guard until he could be executed in front of all the people following the holy holiday of Passover.

The possibility of losing two of its key leaders brought distress to the church so they began a constant Prayer Meeting asking God to intervene. No church buildings had yet been built so they had to meet somewhere to pray. Immediately the mother of John Mark volunteered the use of her home. That sounds like a good mom! Someone who is willing to serve and sacrifice so that the work of God can go forward.

Most men would simply think that it was nice that she offered a place to pray. Mothers know the real story. A constant prayer meeting at her home meant constant cooking (these prayer meeting participants had to eat!), constant cleaning (crowds produce disorder), and very little rest. Thank God for the willingness of Moms to give of themselves for their family and for the faith.

The "rest of this story" is that the prayer meeting worked, Peter was delivered, and the church went forward instead of suffering a major defeat in its infancy. And it happened because a Mom was willing to host a prayer meeting!

May 10, 2005 SERMON RESPONSES

I have been preaching for 43 years and I have learned that sermons produce numerous responses. Sometimes people get angry with me because the Word of God is sharper than a two edged sword (Heb 4:12) and it cuts them to the quick. Sometimes people rejoice greatly that the preached Word of God speaks to their heart in a special way or meets a particular need. Most times, however, they simply smile at the door, tell me it was a good sermon, and couldn't tell you what it was about a week from then if their life depended on it!

In one of His foundational parables (Mark 4:14-20), Jesus gave His disciples four basic ways that people would response to the Word of God. I try to keep these in mind as I preach each week. Amazingly, the first thing Jesus said was that Satan would come to some people and immediately take away the Word that was sown in their heart before it could take root. I "ponder" that a lot!

Secondly, Jesus said that some people would hear the Word but a hard heart would not allow it to put down roots so they would soon abandon its work in their life. Others hear the Word and start well but soon the everyday circumstances of life and the desire for worldly goods crowd out its impact and suffocate its fruit. Only the last group hear and receive the Word in such a way that it produces fruit in their lives.

In the same way that a blind man can be in the presence of light and still not have sight so a person can hear the Word of God and remain unchanged. And what a sad thing it is to stumble blindly into eternity when the light of the world offers you sight as well as light.

May 11, 2005 WARNING WORDS

As I read and study the word of God I keep coming across verses of scripture that speak to my heart about the seriousness of serving God. This is important for me because many people today seem to take their relationship with the Lord very lightly and, as a result, the testimony of the Church in the world today has been discredited. Here are a few principles we need to look at again if we are to retain our Christian testimony.

God has no favorites who can do wrong and get by with it- But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. (Colossians 3:25)

If you tell God you are going to do something then you had better keep your promise- When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. (Deuteronomy 23:21)

Failure to produce spiritual fruit should be a matter of tremendous concern- I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:1-2) Christianity is not a club you join. It is a cross you carry. If it does not change you then it will not change those around you; and that is a tragedy beyond words.

May 17, 2005 LAWN MOWER

It had been a busy week that was heading into a busier week end. As I was traveled home from work in order to pack my clothes and go to Greenville for three services in the upstate of South Carolina over the next 2 days I was thinking about my yard. My grass needed cutting badly and I knew I did not have a “grass cutting slot” in my time card anytime soon. Praise the Lord! When I arrived home I noticed immediately that someone had cut my grass for me- Glory! What a great blessing.

As I drove up under my carport I noticed a lawn mower sitting at the back of the carport. I assumed the person who had cut the grass had left his mower until he could pick it up later. When I entered the house I asked my wife who had cut the grass so I could call and thank them. She told me that the person who had cut the grass had also left the keys to the lawn mower and it was now my mower- Is there a Glory anywhere in the house!!

Only 2 weeks before my wife and I had begun praying for a new lawn mower to replace the 10 year old model we had been using that was becoming worn out. We were praying for God to provide us a new lawn mower in the next couple of years and He gave us one in a couple of weeks! And God did not give us an off brand special, He gave us a brand new John Deere- Glory! Excuse my English but “Ain’t God good!”.

This is just another time that God did “exceeding abundantly above all we could ask or think” (Eph 3:20) just because we prayed and sought His face. He is a wonderful God and I delight in being His servant.

May 18, 2005 TEACHER’S TEST

This is the time of year when students are trying to remember all they were supposed to learn during the year so they can pass all those tests headed their way. But what is the teacher had to take a test to see if real teaching had taken place? Here are 3 principles that would be part of such a test. Real learning only takes place when the Student can:

1) Rethink the Thought. If the learner can only repeat back to you what you have said then they are memorizing the message instead of learning the truth. A lesson must be given in such a way until the student can translate the truth being taught into something that “turns on a light bulb” in their mind.

2) Apply the Application. Knowledge in the head that can not be translated into activity in the life has little use- “Faith without works is dead”. If you want students to be “better people” then tell them what they must do in order to achieve that goal.

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

Multitudes of people go through church educational systems each year. They memorize answers about Noah, Jonah, and Paul but they seldom produce change in their community. Maybe that would change if Sunday School teachers were given this basis test about their teaching.

May 24, 2005 SPIT SIGN

Normally spitting in someone's face is a sign of extreme reproach and was used so in the persecution of Christ- Mt 26:67 "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands." On several occasions, however, Jesus surprises people by using spit in His healing process.

Once people brought a man to Jesus who was deaf and had a speech impediment. Instead of simply saying a word of healing, Jesus puts his fingers into the ears of the man. Then He spit on his finger and touches the tongue of the man before He prays and the man is healed. Unusual to say the least!

Another time He heals a blind man by spitting on the ground to make a mud ball to put on the blind man's eyes. He then tells the blind man to go wash in a certain pool and he will receive his sight. For another blind man, Jesus spits directly onto his eyes and the man begins to vaguely see. After a second touch by Jesus the man begins to see clearly. Strange healing methods!

Most times in scripture Jesus simply spoke a word and people were healed. Why did He use spit on these occasions? The common denominator in the "spit" cases is that these people did not approach Jesus for healing until they were brought or urged by others to come. They did not have enough faith to seek Jesus on their own so Jesus had to build their faith in the healing process by using spit as a physical sign. When people had enough faith to come on their own then a simple word was all that was needed for their healing.

Does Jesus need to "spit in your face" to get you to trust in Him? Or will you believe in His love and come to Him to have your needs met today?

May 25, 2005 DRAW NEARER

This is the time of year when many young people are graduating from schools and colleges. With great excitement, and an almost equal amount of fear, they venture forth into the "real world" of day to day living. They are leaving the "infant" stage of being cared for and instructed by parents and teachers and are entering the "young adult" period of their life which will demand that they make major decisions and begin to pay their own way. They must soon choose a job, a life mate, and a direction for their life.

If I could have any input during this transitional time it would be to inform them that they need God's wisdom and direction in their life now more than ever. I would encourage them to draw near to God with all their heart, mind, and soul because they are venturing forth into a world that will try its best to discourage, disgrace, and defeat them. Society will try to get them to abandon their morals and join the vast throng bowing each night before the god of pleasure, party, and personal gratification. While this may sound like fun, such activity will drain their pocketbook, damage their health, and leave life long scars on their life and reputation.

Near to the heart of God, under His protecting wing, is where you will find peace, protection, provision, and boundless joy. Live an abundant life, draw near to God.

May 31, 2005 BLESSED TO BLESS

... I will bless thee, ... and thou shalt be a blessing: (Genesis 12:2)

Recently the Lord blessed me with a new lawn mower (Glory!). Before I began telling anyone about this blessing from the Lord someone came by my office to visit. As he was leaving he said he had a special prayer request he wanted me to help him pray about. He said he had just been talking with a young lady who could hardly use her right arm and who was having to cut her 2 acres of grass with a push mower. He wanted us to pray for the Lord to provide a riding mower for this lady!

Seeing God at work, I told him about how the Lord had blessed me with a new mower much sooner than I expected and asked him if he would be willing to fix up my old mower so this lady could use it. He said he would be glad to work on it for her. He brought it by my office today on his way to give it to this young lady. The oil had been changed, everything had been checked, and the entire mower had been freshly painted. It almost looked brand new.

Many times God blesses us with finances or other things in order to see what we will do with what He has given us. If we are stingy and greedy then He knows we cannot be trusted to do what is right and good with the resources He wants to give us. If He observes that we can be trusted with blessings then He delights in blessing us in order that we may bless others.

“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.” (Luke 6:38)

June 1, 2005 MISSED BLESSING

My wife needed gas in her car so I drove her car to the post office instead of driving the office van. When I came out of the Post Office I noticed a young man with the hood up on his car. The weather had turned warm and his battery had decided to stop working. Normally I would have jumped into the van, pulled up beside him, and used the jumper cables I always carry to get his engine started. But I had driven my wife's car and all I could do was wish him well and pray for someone to come along with jumper cables that would help him.

Here was an excellent opportunity to help someone and try to show the love of Christ to them but I missed the blessing. The need was real and my desire to help was genuine but I did not have what I needed to help the need so I had to miss the opportunity.

Several times in life I have been approached by someone needing spiritual insight or spiritual wisdom. Later that day I would finally get around to doing my daily Bible reading and find that if I would have had my devotions at my regular time then God would have provided the insight or wisdom I needed. I had missed an opportunity to be a blessing because I was not prepared.

“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:” (1 Peter 3:15)

June 7, 2005 REIGNED IN HIS STEAD

“And when Samlah was dead, Shaul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead. And when Shaul was dead, Baalhanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead.” (1 Chronicles 1:48-49)

There was a time I could name all the presidents of the United States. It would be difficult for me to do so today. Age and apathy have caught up with me and it is hard to remember them all. I do know this, we have had some pretty good men as president during my lifetime and some pretty rotten scandals but, thankfully, we have weathered them all and still survive as a nation. Presidents come and presidents go but the country continues to sail on; in spite of who is president more than because of who is president.

In the first chapter of the book of Chronicles you can read time after time about someone who lived and died and then someone else “reigned in his stead”. They were “top dog” for awhile but eventually they died and someone else took their power and their position. I keep that fact constantly in mind.

Life is short and death is sure. One day someone else will do my job, live in my house, and serve in my stead. The question is not if it will happen but when it will happen. If all my “eggs” were in an earthly basket then the fact that someone else will “reign in my stead” would be devastating. Because of my heavenly hope it really does not bother me. After all, while someone else is “reigning in my stead” down here I will be reigning with the Son of God up there. And that is a swap I will make any day!

June 8, 2005 WHEN GOD GOES HOME

“I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.” (Hosea 5:15)

Hosea is a strange book of the Bible! It is built around the fact that God tells a preacher to marry a prostitute. Can you imagine the pastor of a big Baptist church standing up in the pulpit this Sunday and telling everyone that God had told him to marry a local prostitute? Can you imagine her reception the first Sunday she came to church as the Pastor’s wife? Such was the “pickle” Hosea was put in by the command of God.

Then, to add “fuel to the fire”, Hosea was told to preach a message that ended by stating that God was going home and leaving the nation to fend for itself. Boy, talk about popular preachers!

Can you conceive of what would happen today if God left America? No more divine protection. No more divine provision. Like multitudes of empires before us we would see how quickly and completely our glory and power would vanish if God left us to our own resources.

God does not want to “go home and leave us”. All He asks is that we admit our wrong doing and seek His presence. And if we will do that, He will take us home with Him when He goes!

June 14, 2005 GOD STILL DOES DO IT

Ps 83:18 That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.

I love preachers but sometimes they aggravate me. Once in a while I will tell a preacher about how the Lord has blessed me and he will act a lot more skeptical than he does elated. It is almost as if he cannot really believe that God still performs special acts for His children. I was thinking of this recently during my prayer time.

A multitude of things, including a recent bout of sickness by my wife, had stretched us very thin financially. As I was praying for God to meet my needs I decided to ask Him to do something so extraordinary until even preachers would believe God did it!

Around the middle of the day I was sitting at my desk working when I received a phone call from the office of the doctor who had conducted a heart test on my wife. It was the business manager of this office and her first words were, "Would it be alright with you if we cut the bill you owe our office in half?". After a moment of stunned silence I said it would be great and she told me the total of the new bill.

Because my wife's regular doctor was out of town this was a new doctor that we had never used before and we had received no kind of bill from him yet so we had not communicated with him in any way. I am still astonished at how extraordinarily extraordinary it was for us to receive this phone call. You can believe what you want but I believe God worked just because He wanted to do something special.

June 15, 2005 SOUR GRAPE FATHERS

"The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. If a man be just, ...he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD."

"If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things, ...he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him." (Ezekiel 18:1-13)

The cry throughout the land had become, "The problem is our parents!" as the younger generation blamed their father's generation for the troubles and trials they were enduring. God made it very plain, however, that blaming parents did not absolve the children from personal responsibility for their own actions.

The example and testimony of a godly father is wonderful and is to be commended but righteousness with God is not an inherited trait. Every man must answer to God for his own actions and attitudes. Bragging on your father for his goodness or blaming your father for his "sour grapes" does not change your own accountability to God.

June 21, 2005 I WONDER

I wonder who takes out the trash in Heaven and where the garbage dump is located? The word for "Hell" is the word used for the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. Will someone dump our garbage onto the heads of those who occupy hell?

I wonder if TV in Heaven will show reruns of history? I would be very interested in seeing what really happened during many incidents described in the Bible. Can you imagine what it must have been like on the day the entire world was flooded? And I want to see what happened during the "silent years" the Bible fails to describe between the time Jesus is left at the temple and the time He is baptized by John the Baptist.

I wonder what doctors, lawyers, and funeral directors will do in Heaven after spending their entire life learning an occupation that is not practiced in Heaven? I wonder if everyone will have a telephone and, if so, who will maintain them and operate the system? I wonder if the fruit from the tree of life will give juice or will water from the river of life be the only way to quench our thirst?

I wonder if we will walk everywhere or have a car that never breaks down nor needs gas! New Jerusalem is over a thousand miles wide, high, and deep so traveling those golden streets on foot would be interesting.

I wonder if many people who expect to end up in Heaven will be sadly disappointed at the judgment bar of God when they find that their good intentions and their good works do not meet God's requirements for entrance?

June 22, 2005 BREAK DANCE PREACHER

I knew something was up the way she was holding her head. The preacher and his wife had come by my office for some information and they were getting ready to leave. "Mike, I hate to share this but I need to tell you about my husband," she said. "He encouraged our young people to raise some money for the Children's Home and as a reward he said he would take them bowling. Everyone was having a good time until the last frame of the game. That's when it happened. Just as the preacher walked up to let go of his bowling ball the floor let go of his feet and he came down right on his back side. He had so much momentum until he ended up twirling around and around as the bowling ball streaked down the lane. All of the kids just laughed and hooted and exclaimed that they did not know the preacher had become a break dancer!"

I assured her that I would report his actions to the proper authorities and we all had a good laugh. I was thinking about it later and marveling about what a great joy it is to be part of the family of God. We can do good things for those in need, have good clean fun that involves all ages, and even laugh at our mistakes. We don't have to resort to cursing or sexual innuendos or drunken partying like those weird people on TV. We just enjoy life, rejoice in God's goodness, laugh about "break dance preachers", and bask in being children of God.

June 28, 2005 A CHRISTIAN'S IMPACT

About one o'clock in the afternoon I began to feel tired and I wondered why. As I sat for a moment and reviewed what I had done so far that day I began to understand. After my early morning devotional time I had gone to a local store and picked up breakfast for my ailing mother. On the way to work I had stopped for cards for several couples celebrating their 50th anniversary before I went to the post office and picked up the mail.

Once I arrived at work I made some sales from our book store to assist a church with its Sunday service, made several calls and copies for our State Home Mission board, recorded and deposited nearly ten thousand dollars from churches for various ministries, performed several activities for our National Media Commission, counseled someone about a need over the phone, showed several people how to obtain medicine, and worked on my Sunday sermon.

A liberal press and liberal politicians want to destroy Christianity and turn America into a godless society. They think Christians are the ones keeping America from becoming the enlightened utopia they long to achieve. I think Christians are the salt of society and if we are removed then society will become so rotten until the stink will reach to the Heaven these liberals do not believe is real.

I had the privilege of impacting many different areas of society today because of my Christian values. I know I am a very little frog in a very big pond but I sure am glad I can make a little difference because of the change Christ made in my life! What a horrible world it would be if there were no Christians and a sin sick society was the only hope we had!

June 29, 2005 LOCKED OUT

I had been in Gastonia, N.C. that morning so the four hour trip to this church had me arriving shortly after they began their evening service. It was a special joint service with several other churches and the parking lot was filled to overflowing so I had to park behind the family life center. Walking to the front door of the church I noticed a van parked in the middle of a drive way. As I got closer I realized it was a locksmith and he was working on one of the cars in the parking lot. Later that night I found that it was a lady I knew who had accidentally locked her keys in her car.

As I talked with this lady she told me she did not want to take her pocket book into the crowded church so she left it, along with her keys, in the car since her husband had another set of keys. During the service she needed to go out to the car so she got her husband's set of keys but she laid this set of keys on the front seat while she got what she needed and then forgot they were there until she closed the door!

She could see the keys and she desperately wanted them but she could not get them without some help. In the same way, People today know that a relationship with Jesus will change their life but the key always seems to be behind a "locked door". Aren't you glad the Holy Spirit has the wisdom and power to open that door if we will humbly call out to Him in prayer?

July 5, 2005 A HARMFUL HAIRCUT

Recently I took our van to the local Super Center to have our tires rotated. The nice lady at the check in station told me it would be an hour or so before it could be done so I decided to get a hair cut while I waited. Bad decision. Very bad decision. I assumed that a hair cut would be less expensive at a discount center. Wrong! It was the most expensive hair cut I have ever gotten.

Not only was it the most expensive haircut I have ever had but it was also the worst haircut I have ever received. I told the lady doing the haircut exactly what I wanted. As soon as she started I realized something was wrong so I asked her again if she understood what I had said. She assured me she understood my instructions completely and then proceeded to disregard everything I had said as she cut everything off she could cut. The only "lemonade" I could get out of this "lemon" was that I will not need to get another hair cut this summer!

I wonder if God feels as frustrated as I feel right now? He has given us very plain instructions about how to live life and, just like this girl cutting my hair, we completely ignore them. And when instructions are ignored consequences will come. God warns people about adultery. Many proceed to ignore God and end up suffering disease, divorce, and divided families. God warns about coveting but we get so caught up wanting "things" until we end up captives to debt.

God has told us what to do but we want to do what we want to do. And when instructions are ignored you can end up frustrated, or embarrassed, or saddled with consequences you really don't want to experience. Remember that this week as you read God's word about God's will.

July 6, 2005 KIND TO CLOUDS

One of my least favorite songs is "The Unclouded Day". I like clouds. I think they are neat and I sure hope we have some in Heaven.

I like clouds for the shade they provide. If you have ever picked butterbeans on a hot July day then you know exactly what I mean! It sure would have been miserable out there in the hot sun if it weren't for an occasional cloud.

I like clouds for the shapes they assume. Time after time I look at the sky and marvel at the majestic artistry of God as He rolls and tumbles clouds into a never ending tapestry of wonderful shapes. I can't even imagine the sky without God's cloud painting in it.

I like clouds for the showers they produce. Sure would be dry down here if we had day after day of unclouded skies.

I like clouds for the Savior they herald-Mark 13:26 "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory". Jesus was received up into the clouds when he left earth and He will return in the clouds so I am just going to enjoy the marvel and majesty of clouds and all they represent as I travel my life's journey.

July 12, 2005 THE HORSE IN YOU

A sculptor, chipping away at an enormous slab of marble, was asked by a curious observer, "What are you making?" "A horse," he replied. "How can you make a horse out of that?" the onlooker asked skeptically. "Well," mused the artist, "I simply take away everything that is not a horse."

If you are a Christian then God is at work in your life attempting to chip away everything that is not like Christ. It may not be pleasant as the chips fly all around you but if you will yield to His loving work the master sculptor will ultimately shape you into a living image of His Son. Your success as a Christian will depend on whether you fight God's efforts to shape you or you rejoice in the transformation that is taking place.

If God is going to release "the horse in you" then you must completely turn control of yourself over to His soul changing work in your life. You must trust God enough to give Him a blank sheet of paper with your signature at the bottom and allow God to fill in the details that are best for your life. That kind of commitment will take a trust in God that goes far beyond the show up at church on Sunday morning Christianity that many people experience. But the changes it produces will be the life transforming Christianity that so many people deeply crave and long for.

July 13, 2005 DEAL WITH WRONG, RIGHT

1) Talk good, instead of bad, about your enemies. Saying bad things about your enemies causes hatred and resentment to build up in your heart- Rom 12:14 "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not."

2) Don't let wrongs done by others make you do wrong- Rom 12:17 "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

3) Don't allow your anger to corrupt you worse than your enemy's actions-Prov 24:17-19 "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked;"

4) Trust God to even the score at the right time and in the right way-Rom 12:19 "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

5) Uncontrolled anger is the sign of an uncontrolled man- Proverbs 25:28 "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." So learn to be a real man by channeling your energy correctly- Prov 19:11 "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression."

July 19, 2005 NOT NEW BUT NEW

The perception about how Christianity works is wrong so the results of becoming a Christian do not turn out like many people anticipate. Many people come to Christianity with the “magic potion” perception. Their marriage is in trouble or the doctor just told them they have a dreaded disease or they are deep in debt so they come to God with the assumption that saying, “God forgive me” will suddenly solve all their problems. They soon find, however, that becoming a Christian does not keep your wife from running around. Nor does it cure your disease (although I certainly believe in the healing power of God!) or pay all your debts.

The Bible declares that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17). If the outward circumstances surrounding a man do not become new when he accepts Christ then what does become new? That is the marvel and majestic of Christianity. God knows that changing your circumstances will not deal with the real problems so when you accept Christ as your personal Savior God begins a supernatural work inside you that eventually has a transforming impact on the circumstances surrounding you. God does not make your circumstance new but He does make you new so you can begin having new circumstances! Glory!

People want the world around them to change. God wants to change the person so the person can change the world around them! That is what makes Christianity so different from other religions. Christianity is not about imposing laws to make everyone act in the same way. It is about Christ moving into a man's heart and making him a new creature so that he can impact the circumstances and conditions surrounding him. Nothing is new but everything is new!

July 20, 2005 GIANT KILLING STONES

Almost everyone knows the story of how the little boy, David, killed Goliath the giant with a slingshot. If you read the story closely you will see that David stopped at a brook on his way to battle the giant and picked up 5 smooth stones. I think the story of those stones is one all of us need to hear again as we battle life's giants of discouragement, disaster, debt, and disease.

These were smooth stones. God had used their daily tumbling and tossing with other stones in the river to smooth them out so they could fit in the slingshot correctly. Ever wonder why life is filled with so many people rubbing you the wrong way? Maybe God is smoothing you.

These were selected stones. Out of a river bottom filled with stones David picked these five (Just as God today chooses men at His will to do His work). These were sufficient stones. Goliath had 4 sons so David picked 5 stones to enable him to deal with all the giants. That should remind us that God will never send more “giants” our way than He provides power to defeat.

These were supernatural stones. Armies had stood trembling before this giant but God enabled a shepherd boy to defeat him with a single stone.

When life's giants cause nations to tremble just remember that God prepares the stones needed to defeat the enemy and bring the victory. Maybe the stone He is preparing is you!

July 26, 2005 WHERE ARE THE WORKERS?

I can not understand why any servant of God who is able to work is not faithfully engaged in working for God. The need has never been greater yet multitudes of Christian workers seem content to simply attend Church and have their own needs met instead of sacrificially serving in the work of the Lord.

I have seen that fact vividly illustrated in my denomination. We consistently have almost twice as many ordained ministers as we have churches. Yet, many times churches find it difficult to secure a Pastor. Many of these ordained ministers have been contacted numerous times about positions but there was always something that was not perfectly right so they continue to sit on the sideline while the sheep cry for a shepherd.

I believe with all my heart that God never calls a person into His service without providing a place for that person to serve. If a man claims he is called to preach and never finds a place to preach then he has missed his calling or he is not willing to serve where God wants or in the way God desires.

The fields are white unto harvest. Multitudes die each day without help or hope. God still works mightily through people yielded to Him. The problem is that we have too many workers who want to sit around the table and enjoy the fellowship and the feasts instead of laboring for their Lord in the harvest fields.

July 27, 2005 CAN GOD USE ME?

If God could use a Dove to tell Noah when to leave the ark then He can use you. If God could use Ravens to feed the prophet Elijah then He can use you. If God used a sparrow to preach on worrying about worry and a fish to pay Peter's taxes then He can use you. If God preached to wayward preachers with a donkey and a rooster then He can use you.

God is not nearly as concerned about our abilities as He is about our availability. It is not what we have that God can use. It is about what a mighty God can do with an insignificant person completely yielded to His will. It is not the hammer that builds the house, it is the hand that holds the hammer that accomplishes the work.

God used old men to lead nations, young men to defeat giants, and a baby born in a manger to save the world. Women were the first ones told to announce the resurrection, a young slave girl told her master where he could find a preacher to show him how to have his leprosy cured, and a business woman helped start the first European church. Many of God's best servants spent time in jail and He even used a murderer to lead His chosen people out of bondage.

Can God use you? Just give Him your heart and life and stand back in awe as you marvel at what God can do with a yielded vessel.

August 2, 2005 **WORRY'S SHADOW**

Worry gives a small problem a big shadow. In fact, the word "worry" is not found in the Bible. The closest you can come is the phrase "Why take ye thought?" as used by Jesus to censure people who were overly concerned about God's care for them- "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (Matthew 6:28, 30).

The thing I have noticed about a shadow is that the further you are from the light the bigger the shadow becomes. That is the same way with Worry's Shadow. Worry's Shadow drives us away from the facts of a problem so that we see only darkness and despair as we concentrate on what could possibly go wrong. Worry's Shadow destroys our faith in God's ability to deal with the problem and fills our hearts with paralyzing fear.

David was a warrior king who faced death on many occasions. Early in his life he realized that worrying about death would destroy his ability to function in a fight so he refused to allow Worry's Shadow to conquer him before he went to battle. His faith in God's care and protection were such until he could boldly proclaim, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." (Psalms 23:4)

Jesus said He was the Light of the world. Rest in Him today and allow His presence in your life to dispel Worry's Shadow so you can live the abundant life God intended for you.

August 3, 2005 **BOOK SHELF CHRIST**

I love a good book. My ultimate dream would be to spend most of my time reading and writing books. I love to learn information and I love to give information. Looking around at my crowded bookshelves at home and at work, however, revealed an interesting truth that also relates to my relationship with Jesus Christ.

Some books on my shelf (such as dictionaries and concordances) are only used when I need specific information. I seldom read them just for the joy of reading. In the same way, I sometimes tend to treat Christ as if He is a reference book only good for when I need something to help me obtain something I desire.

Some books on my shelf (such as Bible study and devotional books) are well worn and often used. I enjoy reading them so I use them a lot. Isn't that also what I am inclined to do with Christ? Do I seek Him most when I want to feel comfortable and cozy?

Some books on my shelf are practically brand new but covered with dust. I wanted to learn more about that subject so I bought the book but never took the time to actually read the book and make the corrections it suggested. I wonder if I treat some areas of my relationship with Christ the same way.

Consider your relationship with Christ today. Where would He fit on your book shelf? Is He the active Lord of your life or just a cozy comfort when you need some help?

August 9, 2005 BEEN DEAD, DIDN'T LIKE IT

I drove up behind a car recently that was sporting a sign which read, "I have been dead and I did not like it". I do not keep up with music or movies so this may have a meaning I am not aware of but it sure did speak to me. I wanted to ride up beside the car which had the sign and yell out my window, "Me too. I have been dead and I like being alive much much better".

Paul told the Ephesian Church that a person without Christ is dead in trespasses and sin. Been there, done that, and didn't like it. I didn't like the crowd I associated with when I was dead in sin. I've had Christians to fail me and sometimes even hurt me but I sure would chose the church crowd over the bar crowd any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

I didn't like the conflicts I had when I was dead. I didn't like the heartaches or the hangovers or the health problems that came with the "fun". The pleasure I obtained from sin did not come close to compensating for the misery I received or the grief I gave to others.

I did not like the consequences I faced when I was dead. Divorce, disease, and debt all hang around people dead in sin and wreck their life. Add to that the eternal consequences of facing God dead in sin instead of alive in Christ and you can see why being dead is a sorry way to live.

I have been dead and I did not like it. Thank God I have been resurrected to a new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

August 10, 2005 FREE WILL WORRY

God does not call us to simply be pawns or play things; He calls us to be participates in His purpose. He gives us opportunities to become active in His work and then allows us the freedom to use our own initiative in the fulfillment of that work. This tremendous privilege of having a free will that can work within the Divine plan is one of the great joys we have as humans. The worry I have is that sometimes this "free will" can be wrongly used and cause a lot of damage.

In one of the minor prophets (Zechariah) God tells about a time when He removed the wall of protection from His people because of their sinful actions and allowed the heathen to come in to punish them. The most amazing statement, however, is when God declares that the heathen did more harm to His people than He had intended!! God wanted them to punish His people a little but they punished them a lot.

America is heading down the slippery slope of abandoning God's guidance and directions at a break neck speed. God says that if He loves someone then He will have to chasten them when they do wrong. My biggest worry is that when God opens the gate and allows the heathen to come in and punish America that they will not know when to stop and we will see destruction and chaos on a scale we cannot imagine. Oh, if we could just see what is coming and mend our ways!

August 16, 2005 THE PILGRIM JOURNEY

Someone has rightly said, "The Christian life is a pilgrim journey, not a sightseeing trip." Never has that advice been more needed than today. Far too many churches are filled with far too many people who believe that Christianity is simply buying a "salvation ticket" at a church altar sometime and then trying to live a pretty good life until they finally must die and go to Heaven. They know little or nothing of discipleship and duty. They only want sermons about prosperity and pleasure so they never feel guilty about settling down in this world and never making an impact for Christ or for God.

The Bible declares that Pilgrims are to be people who exemplify purity- "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;" (1 Peter 2:11). They are to be an example to the world by having attitudes and actions that point toward God instead of fulfilling the desires of the flesh. Saints who live like sinners will never get sinners to want to live like saints.

Christian Pilgrims are also typified by the fact that they are looking for God's promises more than they are seeking for worldly pleasures- "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13). Christians are people with a vision of what God can do instead of a desire for what the world does do.

Are you a Pilgrim who is longing for God's Heavenly Kingdom or have you settled down in this sinful world with such satisfaction until you, like Lot's wife, would look back with longing at Sodom's pleasures if God came to deliver you from the coming world changing destruction?

August 17, 2005 OLD COFFEE

Recently we noticed that the water at our office did not taste good. Finally it became so bad until I started bring water from home to use in making my coffee each day (Several days later we saw an article in the local paper telling us that there was a problem with water in our area and people should boil their water before using it- Sort of like closing the barn door several days after the horse was already roaming free!).

I make a full pot of coffee each day and some days, because of my schedule, I do not drink all the coffee. Normally, I empty the old coffee, put the amount of fresh water I need in the pot, pour that into the coffee maker, and then place the empty pot on the heating area. When I started bring water from home I simply poured water from the jug into the coffee maker. The problem was that I then forgot to empty the old coffee out of the pot so the new coffee went into the pot with the old bitter coffee. The first cup told me something was bad wrong!

Mixing the old with the new is a bad thing according to Jesus and according to my coffee pot. Maybe the reason your life is still bitter even after you have trusted in Christ is because you have some left over "coffee" in the pot that must be poured out before you can start enjoying the fresh new brew coming into your life.

August 23, 2005 FAITH THAT MOVES MEN

If I am going to be a Christian then I want to be the best Christian possible. I want to have a faith that makes a difference in my life and is readily seen by those around me. I want to have the same kind of faith that was shown by the four men who brought their friend to Jesus to be healed.

First of all, this faith moved them to think of someone else. May God grant me a faith that looks beyond my personal happiness so that I can see the needs all around me. Secondly, their faith moved them to become involved. It was not enough to go to church and pray for this man who was sick. They decided to become personally involved in getting him to Jesus. Thirdly, their faith moved them past discouragement. When they arrived at the meeting place they found a crowd so large until they could not get the sick man to Jesus. Many people would have said, "We tried to do something but it did not work." These men refused to give in to discouragement.

Fourthly, their faith moved them to do what was necessary to get the person to Jesus. In this case, it meant climbing onto the roof of the house and digging a hole in the roof big enough to let the man down to where Jesus was teaching. May God give us a genuine faith that is willing to "shake things up" if that is what it takes to get a person to Jesus. Finally, their faith moved Jesus to take action by first of all forgiving the man of his sin and then healing him. Their faith helped this man find the spiritual and physical help he needed.

That is the kind of faith we need today if we are to move from pitiful little groups singing about our faith inside a nearly empty church into world changing congregations that draw men to trust Christ and live for God.

August 24, 2005 A WOMAN'S FAITH

When one of the leading men in my denomination wanted to describe our first missionary to India he talked about her faith- Strong faith, courageous faith, and persistent faith. Miss Laura Belle Barnard approached my denomination at a time when it had little mission conscience and asked for the opportunity to carry the good news about Christ to the multitudes in India. People often talk about her courage and her determination but it was her faith that drove her from her comfort zone and into a strange new land where she would need every bit of wisdom and skill God could provide her.

As I look at the description of her faith I realize how important it is for us to instill these same faith characteristics into this present generation if we are to continue to reach the World with the good news about Christ. We need men and women, boys and girls, who have a strong faith that will drive them out of their own little corner of the world into a place of God's calling. They will also need courageous faith which will enable them to envision and attempt great things for God. Finally, they must have a persistent faith if they are to overcome the obstacles and objections that friends and foes will put in their path.

Miss Laura Belle Barnard was a lady whose faith made a difference for thousands of people in her denomination and for multitudes in India. Do you have a faith that is making a difference for anyone?

August 30, 2005 TINY THOUGHTS

Have you prayed for the children in your neighborhood today? Every day 114 teens will run away from home, 44 will have an abortion, 376 will get drunk, 456 will be beaten, molested, or abused, and 58 will attempt suicide (one will succeed). You can talk about how bad kids are becoming or you can make it a policy to pray for the children in your neighborhood each day.

Sign on a lawn- "Your feet are killing me". I was recently reading a sermon by a preacher friend of mine and it reminded me of this sign. It was a powerful message about sinful behavior and its impact on a person's health, his home, his happiness, and his holiness. The reason this sign brought this sermon to mind was that the preacher who preached it got off the narrow road with God and started walking on the lawn of lust and, sure enough, the grass that he thought was greener began to die and it impacted everyone around him in a very negative way.

An ad for a travel agency- "Please go away". Normally when someone tells us to "go away" we get hurt feelings. If they were telling us to "go away" to a wonderful vacation home where we could have a great time of enjoyment, however, we would look at their statement in a different light. That is the difference Christ makes in the life of a person. Death is a sorrowful separation only because we miss our regular fellowship with our loved one. For them, however, they "go away" to a grand and glorious place where sickness and sorrow are known no more. No wonder preachers can stand over coffins and rejoice that someone has gone away.

August 31, 2005 SHORT SERMONS

Sometimes a short sentence can be just as good as a full length sermon (Don't tell the preacher I said that!!). Here are a few short sermon sentences I have picked up as I traveled. I pray they will speak to your heart in a special way.

TV is an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people you wouldn't have in your home.

If you want to stay out of debt your earnings must exceed your yearnings.

In this world of give and take not many are willing to give what it takes.

Trouble in a marriage often starts when a man spends so much time earning his salt until he forgets his sugar.

Movies have gone from being silent to being unspeakable.

The richest soil, if uncultivated, produces the rankest weeds.

Christianity is bread for daily use not cake for special occasions.

The only exercise some people get is jumping to conclusions, sidestepping responsibilities, dodging issues, passing the buck, and pressing their luck.

Christians show what they value most with what they do with what they value.

Many a wayward child has been straightened out by being bent over.

There is always free cheese in the rat trap, but there are no happy rats there.

September 6, 2005 WHERE WILL IT END?

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:17-18).

Peter is very concerned about what will happen to the Christians in Jerusalem during the upcoming destruction of the city by the Roman general, Titus, but he also must ask a question of those who have not accepted Christ- “What will be end be of those who obey not the gospel of God?”. History reveals that during the siege of Jerusalem Titus, for some unexplained reason, pulls away the armies surrounding Jerusalem for a short time. During this time the Christian in the city escape but the rest of the city remained. When Titus returns the city is destroyed and over one million of its inhabitants are killed and the remainder are sold into horrible slavery. Is that a preview of the soon coming rapture of the Church where the Christians will escape and the unsaved will be left to endure death and destruction under the Antichrist? What will the end be of those who obey not the gospel?

Peter's second question goes to the end of the end of the sinner - “Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”. When the sinner has come to the end of his life what will happen to him then? Before whom will he appear? The answer is obvious, he will appear before the God he has rejected and there give account for his life and actions.

If you continue on the road you are traveling, where will it end? God allows u-turns.

September 7, 2005 THREE OBSTACLES

One of the things that perpetually perplexes me about human nature is the large number of people who continue to refuse to accept God's free gift of eternal abundant life through faith in Jesus Christ. I have been a follower of Jesus Christ for over 43 years and I find it an absolutely fantastic way to live. Why would anyone not want the joy and peace I have?

After careful consideration I have concluded that there are three obstacles that block a person from becoming a follower of Christ. First is the “love of sin”. Some people enjoy the pleasures of sin so much until they forget about the pain and misery that comes with a sinful life style.

The second obstacle is “pride”. People hate to admit they are wrong and that they need help so they continue on the downward spiral of a sinful lifestyle. The final obstacle to a person becoming a follower of Christ is “unbelief”. The imperfections in Christians, the corruption in churches, and the unwillingness to accept the simplicity of God's offer of salvation by simple faith in the sacrifice of His son, Jesus Christ, all combine to raise a barrier to belief.

Sinful living produces an artificial joy, serving God brings fullness of joy. Don't let any obstacle stand in your way of accepting God's free gift today. A million years from now you will still be telling people that it was the best decision you ever made.

September 13, 2005 GAS EVANGELIST

As much as I hated it, I realized I was going to have to buy some gasoline. I was returning from a wonderful dedication service for a new church in North Carolina and the gas needle in my van was creeping toward empty. The price of gasoline at the stations I passed had varied but the lowest price I had seen in many miles was \$3.19 a gallon. The Lord kept telling me to wait so I trusted the Lord and watched my needle creep toward that red "E".

Now I have arrived at a place in the country where gas stations are few and far between. I was listening to a sermon as I traveled so I passed a country gas station without even realizing it until the Holy Spirit jerked my string and told me I had just passed my needed gas. I stopped in the road and looked back at the station. Now I could see a sign advertising gas for \$2.99 a gallon. I immediately turned around and got my gas where God had directed.

Several miles past this station I came to another station which was the last open station on my remaining trip home. Their sign advertised gasoline for \$3.19 a gallon. The parking lot of this station was full of cars waiting to get gas. I suddenly wanted to be a "gas evangelist" and stop at this station to tell everyone that if they would simply drive 3 more miles they would save 20 cents per gallon!

May God help me to always carefully listen to His guidance; and may He help me to be as excited about telling people about Jesus as I was about telling them about cheap gas.

September 14, 2005 EXCEEDING JOY

It is a joy when joy comes to visit. In fact everyone should enjoy joy when it arrives. Sadly, we live in a world where real joy is rarely seen and seldom experienced. People have gotten so accustomed to the artificial laughter of TV until many of them do not know how to enjoy anything that does not have a curse word or a sexual innuendo connected to it.

Jesus said He gave us His commandments in order that we might have joy. Most people do not connect receiving a commandment with joy. They think joy is the freedom to do what they please without constraints. Once they hear Jesus' commandment, however, they know how it can bring joy- "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

The Psalmist declared that you go beyond joy into "fullness of joy" when you get into the presence of the Lord (Psalm 16:11). He states that joy becomes complete (full) when you actually begin experiencing a living relationship with Christ.

The Apostle Jude goes even beyond this. He shows that joy can go to the ultimate stage and become "exceeding joy". This happens when a person is able to stand "faultless before the presence of His glory" (Jude 1:24) because of their abiding faith in the redemptive work of Christ. When there is no guilt and no barriers between people then there is perfect joy.

It is a joy when joy comes to visit. Is she a guest in your life today?

September 20, 2005 CURLY HEADED BOY

My wife and I had a meeting in Greenville to attend so we left a day early in order to spend some time on our beloved Blue Ridge Parkway. We are both old and out of shape but when we came to the “Devil’s Courthouse” overlook we decided to try the climb one more time. It is a good 20 minute climb that we huffed and puffed and made in 30 minutes!

When we arrived at the overlook the only other people there was a young couple and their child. We spoke to them and looked at the magnificent view before I took a picture of my wife to prove to my friends and relatives that we had indeed made that climb one more time. The child of the other couple was just beginning to walk and talk and wanted to know everything about everything and especially what I was doing when I took a picture of my wife.

It was a cute little child with long curly hair so I made a comment about what a cute little girl she was. That is when they informed me “she” was a “he”. Open mouth, insert foot!

We both laughed and made a few comments to each other and enjoyed some fellowship. I thought about it later and realized that in the “Devil’s Courthouse” of life Satan is always trying to get us to see things incorrectly so we will say or do the wrong things and then become ineffective Christians because we are not always perfect.

A mistake is a mistake. We all make them. Don’t beat up yourself, or others, over the fact that you sometimes call a curly headed boy a little girl. Learn to laugh at yourself and save your energy and efforts for the real problems you face in life.

September 21, 2005 SUCCESSFUL FAILURES

Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth are considered two of the most successful baseball players in history yet Ty Cobb was thrown out more times trying to steal than any other man in baseball history and Babe Ruth struck out more times than any man in baseball history. Two of the world’s greatest mathematicians, Albert Einstein and Werner von Braun, both flunked courses in math during their school years. People do not think about the failures these men had, they remember their successes.

The great apostle Paul had something like this in mind when he wrote these words, (1 Tim 1:12-14) “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

During Paul’s early years he persecuted the church, isolated himself in the desert, and failed to continue a relationship with the man who originally befriended him in the church. He could have allowed these failures to cripple him. Instead, he looked to Christ for forgiveness and strength and became a man greatly used of the Lord. Go and do thou likewise.

September 27, 2005 GOD'S WONDERFUL WORKS

When the Spirit of God came down on that great day of Pentecost it changed ignorant and unlearned fishermen into courageous preachers of the Gospel. Amazingly, when the Bible describes the message given by these Spirit filled men it does not say that they spoke the word of God to the multitude (although the sermon by Peter was based on Psalms 16:15-16 and pointed everyone to the prophecies about the appearance of God's promised Messiah). The Bible declares that when the Apostles preached to this vast throng of people from many different nations that the people said, "We do hear them speak in our tongues, the wonderful WORKS of God" (Emphasis added).

Sometimes the best Bible we can use is our testimony about the wonderful works of God in our life. With that in mind, let me share a recent "wonderful work of God".

Recently one of the Senior Pastors in our mission work in India died unexpectedly of a massive heart attack. After the first few days of numbing shock I began to look past my grief and consider what needed to be done now. One glaring need immediately became obvious, this Pastor left behind a wife and 4 girls. Indian Culture makes it very difficult for this lady, who had never had a job outside of the home, to obtain work. After a time of prayer, my wife and I decided to trust the Lord for \$100 per month to give to this family (That is what she would need in Indian economy).

Now here is the wonderful work of God. The day we obligated to trust God for this \$100 per month I received a letter from my insurance company saying they had been overcharging me for a year so they sent me a refund check for slightly over \$100- Glory! I'm glad I serve a wonderful God who still does wonderful works.

September 28, 2005 REST OF THE STORY

Recently someone came to me with some information about something a Pastor's wife had done that shocked me very badly. I knew this lady and I could not understand why someone of her character would have done what this person said. The person who shared the gossip just wanted me to know the gossip because when I told them to go to the person and make sure their understanding of what had happened was correct they said they did not want to get involved! (As if spreading gossip about a person is not getting involved).

I investigated the situation and found that the person sharing the gossip had heard only part of the story. Instead of doing a bad thing, this Pastor's wife was really doing something very good. The gossip was in knowing only part of the details. When you knew the whole story then everything changed.

A half truth many times ends up being a whole lie. Satan began using this tactic in the garden of Eden and it has been a favorite weapon of evil ever since. People hear something and then jump to a conclusion (usually wrong) based on partial information that causes them to give out wrong information.

I have a verse I quote to people about situations such as this- "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." (Proverbs 18:13). Don't let your folly be your shame; and don't let your shame be the wrongful destruction of someone else's character.

October 4, 2005 DOUBLE GIVING

The Pastor of one of our Free Will Baptist Churches recently told me about his gift to help the Hurricane victims. One of the companies in the town where his church was located said it would match any gifts given to help the Hurricane victims so his church decided to give their gift where this company would double it instead of sending it through the Free Will Baptist State Office. He asked me if that was alright and I simply said, "Glory! Anytime you can double your giving then I am all for it."

We do not have to wait for a disaster in order to be "double givers". There are many opportunities in our local community where we can "double give" to those in need around us. Determine that every time you buy something new to put in your closet that you will take something out that still has value and give it to someone who could really use it. Every time you are blessed with new clothes then someone else is blessed with new clothes. That's a double blessing!

Many grocery stores have 2 for 1 sales from time to time. Use this sale to fill an extra bag with "free" groceries and then share those groceries with a family in your community that is going through a bad time. I know that 2 for 1 means you get items for half price but you would normally pay full price so get two items and count the extra as your contribution to those in need this week.

There are many opportunities in life to be a "double giver". It just takes looking for ways to help those in need instead of looking down your nose at their plight.

October 5, 2005 HILARIOUS GIVING

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

I don't know about you but I love doing something that God loves. And the Bible declares that God loves a cheerful giver. So I want to learn how to be that kind of giver.

The word "cheerful" is the Greek word "hilaros" from which we get our word "hilarious". When something is hilarious it is more than amusing, it is uproariously funny. So God loves someone who gives with such delight until it does them good all over better than anywhere else!

How do you give with such delight? Because you know the results of such generous giving- He which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. It would be a delight for me to give a generous offering if I knew it would return bountifully to me!!

You also give with gleeful delight when you give to someone you love for a purpose you really care about. Adam Clarke says "cheerful giving" is giving done for the love of God and for the pity of the poor. It is not a dollar grudgingly given to ease your conscience or impress your neighbors.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. Give and it shall be given unto you. God loves a cheerful giver. Have a "hilarious" time this week. Open your heart and open your wallet; and then watch God open up the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing.

October 11, 2005

RIGHT RELIGION

"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27)

I am part of a religious denomination that puts great emphasis on evangelism. We believe that the primary need in the life of an individual is for them to be "born again" and become a child of God. The most discouraging thing to many of our people, however, is the shallowness of the commitment of many of these people. They "come in the front door of the Church and exit the back door" at an alarming rate.

Another item of concern in the lives of these "converts" is the ease with which they adapt to "church religion" that testifies about loving God but then they gossip about God's children and split God's family over the most trivial of issues. They "get religion" but many times the religion does not seem to make a difference in their actions and attitudes.

The apostle James said that if you really get the good stuff (Pure Religion) then it will manifest itself in the things you don't say (bridle your tongue), in the thing you do care about (those less fortunate), and in the way you live in society (You will look to better the world around you instead of allowing the world around you to bring you down to its level).

Right religion changes your heart, your tongue, and the way you look at the world. Don't settle for anything less.

October 12, 2005

PERFECT PREACHER

...Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. (Genesis 6:9) (God) spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; (2 Peter 2:5)

More and more churches go "preacher shopping" when they look for a Pastor. They want to listen to 5 or 6 different men and then try to choose the "perfect preacher" out of that list. What they fail to realize, however, is that preachers have bills to pay and obligations to meet just like anyone else. This generally means that by the time a church gets around to realizing that the preacher they listened to 2 months ago is indeed the best choice for them that this preacher has already been forced to make a decision so he could move his family and pay his bills.

People tell all kind of jokes about "perfect preachers" but let me share a real eye opening fact. The only preacher in the Bible that is described as "perfect" is Noah. Noah preached for 120 years and was only able to rescue the 8 member of his own family from the flood of God's judgment. That would not look good on most resumes!

Just because a preacher meets all your criteria does not mean he can get people in out of the rain! Seek God's face and then seek God's man. You may be astonished at the results.

October 18, 2005 WORTH YOUR SALT

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Luke 14:34-35)

Salt has been an important commodity throughout history. In a world without refrigeration it was the main way to preserve meat. In fact, it was so important until it became a method of paying workers- that is where we got the phrase, "He is not worth his salt".

Salt was not only used to preserve food, it was also used to flavor food (That is the way we generally think of salt today). And if you do not think salt flavoring food is important then try having a heart attack and going to the hospital where they put you on a salt free food diet!!

Jesus said that if salt loses its ability to flavor food then it is worthless. He went on to declare that this kind of salt was not even fit for the land (to kill weeds) nor for the dunghill (to destroy waste). That is salt that is surely not worth its salt!

Jesus uses this statement about the value of salt in the context of a conversation about the influence a person exerts on those around him. He is literally saying that if people do not have a positive influence on their society then they are worthless salt that needs to be cast away. That is a pretty hard statement for the son of God to make about men. No wonder He ends this sermon by stating that if we have ears then we had better use them to hear what He is saying.

October 19, 2005 THY WILL BE DONE

Longevity of life has taught me a few things about prayer. I have learned that God answers prayer on His time schedule; and His schedule is seldom my schedule. I have learned that the answer God gives to prayer often show He is a God with a great sense of humor (It is easy to pray, "Slow me down, Lord" until you see the blue light in your rear view mirror!). I have learned that God often ignores prayers that are silly (Help my team beat another team) or prayers meant to impress people instead of petition God (Isn't it amazing how many sermons are preached during a prayer!).

Probably the greatest prayer lesson I have learned, however, is to always pray for God's will to supercede my wants. It is easy to believe that because I want it then it must be right but having seen God finally give in to my pleading and give me what I requested has taught me that sometimes you get what you want but you don't want what you get.

True faith in praying means you not only trust in God's ability to answer prayer but you also trust in God's wisdom about the answer to that prayer. Maybe that is why Jesus taught us at the beginning of the "Lord's Prayer" to say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". That moves our prayers from telling God how to run the universe into joining God in His marvelous work- and that makes Christianity an exciting life to live.

October 25, 2005

EMOTIONAL STRENGTH

We live in a world full of turmoil. Hurricanes, earthquakes, wild fires, and natural disasters seem to dominate the news right now. And if it is not a report about a natural disaster then it seems that the news is filled with war, murder, bomb threats, or men doing unthinkable things to other men just for the joy of being mean! We almost feel assaulted by the bad news and wonder how we can endure the future with the present so filled with pain and problems.

In the midst of this chaos and confusion I am glad to report that God is still on the throne and there is still peace available for the child of God. Here are three things that give me emotional strength when life's problems try to sap my energy.

I am at peace with circumstances. I cannot control the weather, the wicked, or the warring but I can rest in the fact that "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28). Circumstances are not bigger than God and I can rest in His care regardless of life's storms.

I am at peace with Society. I do not have to prove I am the "biggest baddest dude" in town by constant conflict. It is great strength to know I do not have to have great strength since I have a supernatural strength living within me-"Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

I am at peace with my Savior. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21). I don't fret life and I don't fear death because I belong to the one who gives life and has conquered death. That provides emotional strength that is enough for anything life throws my way!

October 26, 2005

HONEY TOUCH

I recently spend a lot of time in the hospital with my sick mother. One of the good things about this bad time was the good coffee at the hospital concession stand. The problem I have is that I was drinking so much coffee until it started to develop a bitter taste. That is when I noticed the bottle of honey beside the coffee creamer. Normally I drink my coffee with just a little cream but I decided to add a little honey in order to cut the coffee bitterness.

One thing became immediately obvious when I started using honey; prepare to wash your hands after you handle the honey jar. It seemed I always got a little honey on my hand and that hand was sticky until I could get somewhere to wash the honey off.

Hospitals are bad places in a good way! They are full of sick people who need healing, help, and relief from pain. As I walked down the hall of the hospital with my good coffee and my honey sticky hand I began to think about ways I could be honey to the sick people all around me. I began to pray for God to help me relieve the bitterness that had come into the lives of these people because of physical problems and to fill me so full of His goodness and grace until everyone I contacted in the Hospital would get a "touch of honey" from His overflowing love in my heart.

I trust that you will make it your prayer today that you might touch the people around you with a "touch of honey" from the heart of God.

November 1, 2005 MINISTER'S DEVOTIONS

It is easy for a Minister to spend so much time with his ministry until he fails to spend time with his master! The urgent cries of his sheep, the endless crisis of his congregation, and the constant need to find sermon material every time he reads his Bible causes many Pastors to have shallow meaningless devotions.

How can you tell if a Minister's devotional life is inadequate? First of all, he is tired all the time- "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31). Many Pastors burn the candle at both ends and seldom get the necessary refreshment and renewal that comes from sitting at the feet of Jesus on a regular basis.

Secondly, a Minister's failure in his devotional life is exposed by shallow preaching and bitter attitudes. When a man does not get a message from the Lord he then must warm the leftovers in his heart and try to make a delicious sermon out of "3 day old chicken". Because the message is man made instead of God given then it has no power to change lives and encourage people. Unwilling to admit his failure, many Ministers will turn on their people and blame them with a bitter attitude when the ministry fails because the sheep don't thrive on husk.

One of the first lessons learned in the early church was that Ministers must not leave their time in the Word of God in order to serve tables. There are a multitude of things that need to be done but spending time with God is something that must be done if you are to survive as a Pastor and as a person.

November 2, 2005 MOTION OF DEVOTION

Sadly, sometimes it is possible to pray and read the Bible and walk away from your devotion time with the same cold heart you had when you entered into your personal time with the Lord. You went through the motions of devotion but you never warmed your heart at the fire of God's presence. You marked "have devotion" off your daily schedule of events but it did not impact your day in a positive way.

How do you change your motion of devotion into a meaningful time with the Lord? First of all, bring your mind as well as your body to your devotions. One of the devil's weapons is to throw darts of distractions at you during your quiet time. Jesus said we need to enter into a "prayer closet" where our minds can focus on Him instead of all our daily details.

Secondly, determine to warm your heart instead of read your chapters. God is more interested in meeting with you on a personal level than He is in your bragging about the number of chapters you read. Listen for God's voice as you read God's word.

Don't go through the motion of devotion. Your daily appointment with God is the most important time you spend in any day. Come before God's presence with all your heart, soul, mind, body, and strength and enter into your day with the fullness of Joy that only comes from a close encounter with God.

November 8, 2005 WHAT IS SIN?

The Bible lists many specific sins and people generally think of sin in the terms of particular actions. It is impossible, however, to list every thing that would be a sin in every situation so the Bible gives us several principles that give God's definition of sin. And, since God will be the ultimate judge, these definitions are the ones we need to know.

1) Dismissing Personal Belief- And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. (Romans 14:23). If you think something is a sin then it is a sin to you because it violates your concept of God's authority in your life.

2) Dishonoring God's Character- For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Rom 3:23). Sinful actions are those things that obviously violate the conduct required by God.

3) Disregarding Society's Needs- Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:17) Albert Barnes in his commentary on this verse says it far better that I can say it- "The highest privilege conferred on a mortal, besides that of securing the salvation of his own soul, is that of doing good to others--of alleviating sorrow, instructing ignorance, raising up the bowed down, comforting those that mourn, delivering the wronged and the oppressed, supplying the wants of the needy, guiding inquirers into the way of truth, and sending liberty, knowledge, and salvation around the world. If a man does not do this when he has the means, he sins against his own soul, against humanity, and against his Maker; if he does it cheerfully and to the extent of his means, it likens him more than anything else to God."

November 9, 2005 WATCHED WALK

Both incidents happened on the same day and both reminded me again of how important it is for me to maintain a consistent Christian testimony in every area of my life. The first incident happened when I walked into the hospital a little after seven in the morning. Because I have my ministerial badge, I normally just wave at the receptionist and go about my visitation. This morning the receptionist called me over and said the security guard wanted to know why I was late! That morning I had stopped to get gas and so I arrived at the hospital about 15 minutes later than normal. It had not dawned on me that the security guard and the receptionist had become so familiar with my routine until they knew if I was running late.

Later, I went by the hospital coffee stand for a cup of coffee. When I stepped up to the counter the clerk already had my coffee waiting for me just like I like it. The person behind me told the clerk that I must be special to receive service without telling her what I wanted!

Sometimes Christians are fooled into believing their "religious" life and their "normal" life are separate sections. I hope these incidents will remind them that the details of our daily walk with the Lord are under observation at all times and people watch how we live our Christianity in the work place as well as the worship house.

November 15, 2005 KEEP A STRAIGHT LINE

We had just finished basic training in Great Lakes, Illinois and I was headed back to South Carolina for a short leave before being shipped out for a tour of duty in Viet Nam. The father of one of the friends I had made in boot camp owned a taxi cab company in North Carolina. He had arranged to purchase a new cab from a Chicago dealer and several of us were going to drive it back to North Carolina in order to save the cost of bus fare.

We left after graduation Friday and drove all night. Just at daybreak Saturday morning, we were crossing the fog shrouded river bridge between Ohio and Kentucky. Suddenly, a truck came barreling out of the fog and it was on our side of the road! I don't know if the driver was asleep or drunk but he was headed straight for us and we couldn't do a thing. At the very last moment, the truck swerved away from us, bounced off the curbing on the other side of the road and continued on it's way. My friend and I just looked at each other in stunned silence; knowing we had escaped death by inches. If my friend would have jerked the wheel or swerved to avoid the truck we would have crashed. Only the fact that he kept a straight line preserved us.

Life throws many things your way. It's easy to panic and go all to pieces. The best advice I can give you is to keep a straight line by keeping your eyes on God. He sees the "trucks" coming your way long before you do. Just keep on the straight path with God and let him take care of everything.

November 16, 2005 MISLED MOUSE

Cold weather has arrived. One way that we know this is true is because the mice have once again tried to take up abode in our home. My wife is a "Princess". A Princess does not like mice, especially in her home, so I have put out my arsenal of mouse traps. So far we have fared pretty well in decreasing the mouse population of our part of the world.

Recently, one of those "smart mice" has been playing with my traps. He has been eating the pecans I put out for bait without tripping the trap. Something like this generally happens each year and the outcome is always the same. This mice may run back to his buddies and tell them about all the free food he is getting and what a great situation he has found but every year I always end up throwing out another dead mouse after a few times of resetting the traps.

When the Apostle Paul talked about preaching in such a way until "they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2Ti 2:26) I think he had someone like this misled mouse in mind. Many people think they can play with sin, enjoy the bait, and never get caught but all too late they learn that the bait was put out for a reason.

November 22, 2005 BLESSED BY SICKNESS

This is a hard article to write. It is absolutely true but it “preaches a lot easier than it lives!”. Like you, I live in a fleshly body that craves comfort and ease and finds sickness and trouble hard to accept. Yet, the Bible is very clear in stating that much good can come to our testimony and our life from faithfully enduring trials and troubles.

This Thanksgiving season as you endure your troubles and listen to others boast about being blessed with perfect health and abundant wealth just realize that you may be more blessed in your trouble than these boasters could ever imagine. It is certainly not wrong to thank the Lord for His care and provision but it is also necessary to remember that troubles are not a sign that God has forgotten or forsaken you. It is just that sometimes He can develop us more with sickness than He can with silver.

Afflictions cause us to be faithful in our walk with the Lord- “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.” (Psalms 119:67)

Troubles can develop us into someone with a great testimony for the Lord who will bring great honor to our God- “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;” (2 Corinthians 4:16-17)

Enduring tribulation enables us to be a help to others- “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:4)

November 23, 2005 TO COVET OR TO KEEP

I would guess that the least read chapter in the Bible is the 119th Psalm. It is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses to be read before you can put a mark by “read a chapter” on your devotional list. Interestingly, the longest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 119) and the shortest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 117) are separated by the middle chapter of the Bible (Psalm 118).

As we approach the Thanksgiving season the message of Psalm 119 is very important. It can be summed up in one verse- “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies and not to covetousness.” (Psalm 119:36). Throughout this Psalm the writer exalts the word of God and the commandments of God, instead of the gold of this world, as his ultimate goal. He realizes that understanding and applying the commandments of God to his life is worth more to him than the accumulation of possessions.

Most people who thank God this Thanksgiving season will talk about being thankful for health or wealth. Few will talk about the great privilege we have to read and study the eternal Word of God. Yet, a million years from now, as we walk on streets of gold with our new glorified disease free bodies it will be the Word of God that will be the center of our conversation and the object of our praise. Shouldn't it be our priority today?

November 29, 2005 DON'T QUESTION GOD'S LOVE

Satan tries his best to destroy, discourage, or defeat people. He is out to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). His greatest weapon is his tongue. As soon as a trouble or trial comes into a person's life Satan will immediately tell them to doubt God's love and care. This is exactly how he defeated Eve in the Garden and how he tried to defeat Christ at the beginning of His ministry.

Sometimes it is best to let God speak for Himself. If you ever have a reason to question God's Love in your life remember these words that the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write- Romans 8:31-39

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

November 30, 2005 BLIND MAN BATTLE

Sometimes life seems to come at you like you were a blind man walking through a battle field- Bombs drop on you from above, mines explode under you, bullets wiz by you, and tanks run over you! Like the blind man, you are in the dark about what life is bringing your way so it seems that you get clobbered from every side.

The good news about Christianity is that Jesus came to give sight to blinded eyes and show you the path of life that is abundant instead of abusive. When you become a follower of Christ the heavenly light shines in your soul and the Holy Spirit warns you about incoming or impending dangers so you can avoid them when possible and survive them when necessary.

Christ did not promise to immediately take us out of life's battlefields but, as the good shepherd, He did say He would guide us into peaceful places and guard us from the enemies attacks. Satan may still throw fiery darts at a Christian but Jesus has promised that the shield of Faith will quench those darts and help us to be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

Don't stumble around in the dark like a blind man on a battle field. Come to the Light of the World and discover the difference it makes in your life when you walk in the sunshine of God's love instead of waiting for a mine to go off under your feet at any moment.

December 6, 2005 GOD'S TIMING

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," (Galatians 4:4)

I had numerous things that I planned to do on my way to work so I left a little early. As I traveled, however, the Holy Spirit kept telling me to put off several of the odd jobs I wanted to accomplish. I kept thinking that I sure did need to get these done this morning since I knew I would not have time to do any of them when I left work. Finally, the Spirit said I needed to go to work right now so I stopped everything and went directly to work.

As I drove up in the parking lot another vehicle drove up beside me and we both exited our vehicles at the same time. The person in the other vehicle was from a sign company and he had come to change the sign beside our office building. As soon as I got out of my van he looked at me and spoke to me. Wonder of wonders, he was a man I had talked to in a church in another part of the state several months before. Because of this "chance" meeting I was once again able to talk to him about his relationship with the Lord.

Had I been a minute earlier I would have been in the building when he came up. Had I been a minute later he would have already been up the sign and probably not recognized me. The Holy Spirit knew exactly the time I needed to arrive at work in order to share Christ with this man.

The Bible declares that Jesus was born at exactly the right time, in exactly the right place, under exactly the right circumstances. What a great God we serve as He guides so many details so that they are timed just perfect.

December 7, 2005 INFAMY DAY

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the president said that December 7th was a day that would live in Infamy. This meant that it would always be a day of remembering a world changing event. Sadly, most people are so busy trying to get Christmas over before Christmas until they only recognize December 7th as the day that should conclude their Christmas shopping or bring their main Christmas parties to an end. A newscaster may mention the history of the day in passing but for most people it is just another busy December day.

I had the privilege of living in Hawaii for a little over 3 years. Infamy day was a big day in Hawaii. Too many monuments about the devastation of that day exist on the island to allow people to forget the horror of that Sunday morning surprise attack. For the People of Hawaii, Infamy Day is a day that must be remembered because what happened on that day is too important to forget.

People in the United States have become so busy fighting about what can or cannot be said about Christmas in public until they have forgotten how important it was that the Son of God would become a baby in a manger. How terribly sad it will be when December 25th, like December 7th, simply becomes another day of busy activity on our December calendar.

December 13, 2005 GIVING THE GIFT

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (Ephesians 2:8)

This Christmas season give the gift that keeps on giving- share with someone the wonderful news that Jesus was born in a manger to die on a cross in order that lost men and women could be born again into the family of God. Don't get so busy with the symbolic gifts you are giving until you miss the real gift that was given on that first Christmas Day. Here is a simple "ABC" method that will help you give the greatest gift anyone could receive this Christmas, eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

First, get the person you are talking with to Admit they have broken God laws. This is called sin and all of us are guilty of sinful behavior. Secondly, ask the person if they Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to earth to die as a payment for the sin debt of mankind. Finally, lead the person to Commit their life to God with full faith that if they call upon the Lord in faith then God will forgive them of their sins and enable them to live an abundant life as a child of God.

There are many gifts you can give this Christmas but none will be more needful or more meaningful than sharing the gift of eternal life through faith in Christ. And the good news is that it is the perfect "fit" for every person and is within the budget of every giver.

December 14, 2005 LIVING WITH GOD

What would you do if God asked you to take care of His son for a few years? Normally it is parents who ask God to take care of their children. What would happen if the "tables were turned" and God entrusted the care of His son to you? I think after the initial heart attack I would really do a lot of praying!

I can only imagine what Joseph must have felt when the angel told him that he was to be the earthly father of the son of God. No wonder that conversation began with "fear not". I know I would have been "sacred to death!"

How did Joseph feel each night as he prayed to God to help him take care of God! What was it like to try to teach the word of God to the Word of God? When do you tell the son of God to stop crying like a baby and act like a man? How do you tell the light of the world to blow out his candle and go to sleep? What would it be like to tell the creator of the universe that the bench he was building was not being built correctly?

Living with God is a challenge. I know because it is something I have been doing since I asked Jesus into my heart over 43 years ago.

December 20, 2005 HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO?

As I took my morning shower recently I realized that I was taking a shower in a different city on 4 consecutive days. I travel many miles each year in my work for the Lord and I focus on the "business" of Christian ministry almost all the time. The amazing thing, however, is that I, like you, find myself so busy at Christmas until I don't really have time for Christmas.

One of the most astonishing incidents in the story of the Birth of Jesus is found when the wise men stopped in Jerusalem as they searched for the Christ Child. When they asked King Herod where Christ was to be born the king called for the main religious leaders of the country. These spiritual leaders immediately told the king that the Bible declared Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. It is only 8 miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. These religious leaders were so busy being religious until they did not take time to go see the new born Son of God even though he was only 8 miles away!

The shepherds left their sheep in order to worship the newborn Son of God. The wise men left their country in order to bring gifts to the new born King. How far am I willing to go? Do I think tending my sheep is more important than visiting with the shepherd? Am I more interested in giving the right present to a child who has everything than I am in giving my gold and frankincense, and myrrh to the Son of God? If the wise men knocked on my door would I travel the 8 miles with them to Bethlehem?

December 21, 2005 Mickey Meal

It had been a long day of travel and church services and my wife said after the Evening Service that she just wanted to get a burger and go back to our motel and relax. There was a burger place right beside our motel so we decided to stop there and get our meal. When we walked into the building there was only one person there and he was walking out. As we passed him he looked at us very serious and said, "Good luck on getting any good food here."

I may have been born at night but it wasn't last night so we decided to try another burger place right down the street. When we walked into "Mickey D's" and started to order our meal someone walked up and said to order anything we wanted and they would pay for it. Looking around in surprise we found that it was a couple from the church where I had just preached. How great it was that God had directed us to a place where He could give us good food for free!

As I read the story about the birth of Jesus Christ I see over and over the directing hand of God. It is wonderful to know that the same God who directed wise men and shepherds is the same God working in my life and circumstances today. I pray that you will also see God at work in your life this Christmas as He guides and provides.

December 27, 2005 CHRISTIAN CORKS

We are about to embark on a new year with all of its potentials and problems. Christians can expect that an ungodly society, led by an increasingly hostile anti-Christian sector, will continue to attack everything that is godly and right. The sweet days of Christianity where Christians were loved, Church activities were honored, and God was respected have gone the way of the ten cent coke.

In the upside down world of modern American society one ungodly person who is offended by anything that is right has more authority in our courts than multitudes of people who still believe in decency, order, and righteousness. If one crazy person can hire one crooked lawyer who can find one corrupt judge then that person's opinion suddenly is more important than all the wants and desires of an entire community.

Pastor Robert Morgan said, "Success is simply going from one obstacle to another without losing your enthusiasm!" Christians will need to remember that in these last days in which we live. When it appears that Satan is winning all the battles and it would be easy to give up and quit trying just remember that God has called us to be "Christian Corks"; always bobbing back to the top no matter what drags us down.

Satan may win a few battles but I have read the end of the Book and God has already won the war-Glory! Just remember that Jesus said when we saw the world becoming self centered and anti-God to lift up our eyes because our redemption was drawing near. That should put a perk in any cork's bobble.

December 28, 2005 WIGGLE LINE WISDOM

Letters are formed from wiggly lines that make certain shapes. Words are formed from wiggly line letters that group together. Sentences are simply wiggly line words that join together to express a thought.

The difference between one letter and another letter is simply the way the wiggly lines mold into their shape. If all the wiggly lines were straightened out then they would all look alike and we would never be able to know what they were trying to say.

A new year is upon us. Each day will be the same twenty four hours but each day will be different because of the twists and turns that life's circumstances and situations will bring our way. If every day was the same straight line then life would be boring beyond belief. It is the "wiggly lines" of the ups and downs of life that speak to us and allow us to experience the triumph of joy and the sorrow of sadness.

The biblical song writer said, "This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24). Life is an adventure. Each new day is another opportunity to experience or to show God's love and mercy. Just remember that it is what happens when life gets wiggly that communicates to those around you who you really are and how much God impacts your life.