

2008 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 1, 2008 NEW YEAR OBJECTIVES

I was listening to a sermon by Rev. Carroll Bazen, Pastor of Grace FWB Church of Lake City, recently and he made a comment that stuck out as great objectives for a Christian for the coming year. He said a successful Christian life was one in which people learned to Nail Down some things and Put Down some things. That is good preaching.

A Christian needs to “Nail Down” some things as we enter this new year. We are presently engaged in an all out war in America with a small minority who are determined to erase all references to Christ and Christianity from public view. They shout long and hard that public policy should be to do anything possible to not offend one person even if what is requested offends hundreds of thousands of Christians. The offended Christians do not matter; the only thing that matters is the possibility of this single person feeling offended.

Christian need to “Nail Down” that they are saved by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and because of that fact then they will remain firm in their beliefs and their Christian behavior no matter what others may say or do. It is time Christians stood up instead of shut up and declare that we are much more interested in being what God would have us be than we are in being what a few loud mouthed unbelievers want us to be.

Christians also need to “Put Down” some things. We need to put down the remote and pick up the Word of God. We need to put down quarreling and bickering about the color of carpet in the Church and pick up the banner of love and concern for a lost and dying world. We need to put down living for pleasure and pick up living for God and good.

My advice to you this new year is to Nail Down some things and Put Down some things and make living for God your priority.

January 2, 2008 A SPIRITUAL PERSON

Lewis Sperry Chafer in his great book “He that is Spiritual” describes a Spiritual Person as “one who experiences the divine purpose and plan in his daily life through the power of the indwelling Spirit.” Wow! What a tremendous goal guideline for a Christian as we begin a new year.

He goes on to say that the character of this Spiritual Person will be shown as they live out Christ in their daily life and the cause of this new life will be the unhindered indwelling Spirit. He summaries by saying that “True Christian character is simply the fruit of the Spirit manifested in the life of the believer”. This fruit of the Spirit is found in Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”.

This is the “Secret to Victory” that is desired so greatly by dedicated Christians. Christianity is not a result of developing character through the energy of our flesh (In fact, Paul states very plainly that the “flesh” is the enemy of the Spirit’s development of our life). True Christian character is produced IN the Christian but not BY the Christian, it is the result of allowing the Sprit of God to produce His Fruit in our life. What a relief! Change in my life is no longer my feeble efforts. Change comes when I yield to the Spirit at work in my life and allow Him to produce His fruit in me- Glory!

You can try your best to be your best this year; and end up failing once again. Or you can yield to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to produce His character transforming fruit in your life. The choice should be obvious.

January 8, 2008 GENUINE CHRISTIANITY

The unregenerated person would not be saved if he ceased from sinning; he would simply become a better moral person and less of a stench to society. In order for this person to become a child of God he must be born again by the redemptive work of Christ and made into a new creature by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. A person does not become a Christian simply by determining to stop some activities (such as drinking and partying) and begin other activities (such as attending Church and reading the Bible). Genuine Christianity is a result of a supernatural work of God whereby God's holy demands for righteousness are met through the sinless sacrifice of Christ. A person is "saved" when faith is produced in their heart that Jesus Christ died as a payment for their sins and that He was resurrected from the dead by the power of God (Which resurrection power becomes available to them to enable them to live this new life they have entered into with God).

A Christian is not spiritual simply because he abstains from worldliness. Christianity is not about what we stop doing; it is about what we become because of our yielding to the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit who now lives within us. A dead leaf may cling to the branch of a tree throughout all the winds and storms of winter but it will fall to the ground when new life begins to flow through the "sap" of the tree in the spring. Old habits and attitudes may cling to the Christian as they develop but if they allow the life giving "sap" of the Holy Spirit to flow through their life then old things will pass away and all things will become new; and this is the wonder of Christianity.

January 9, 2008 ANESTHETIC SINS

Have you broken your new year's resolutions yet? Most people have managed to "slip" by now and some have already "abandoned ship". Why is it so hard to do the right things we want to do and why is it so easy to fall back into the bad habits we are trying to avoid? The answer is not easy (if it were I would write a book and become a multi-millionaire!) but I think I know the reason for at least part of the problem of backsliding into wrong actions and attitudes. It is something I call "Anesthetic Sins".

People slide back into sinful and harmful behavior because they find in them an anesthetic to deaden the pain and hurt of an empty life. The life part of life is so stressful until people seek escape in food, fantasy, or foolishness. The sad part of this "escape" is that most of the time we see, and try to deal with, only the "fruit" of the problem (our sinful behavior) instead of getting to the root of the problem which is an empty hurting heart.

It is absolutely crazy for a drunk (substitute your "anesthetic sin" here) to be a drunk. Being a drunk empties your bank account, corrupts your morals, and destroys your health; very few people are dumb enough to do that deliberately. Yet many people get drunk week after week to escape from reality or dull the ache in their life. Oh, how I wish they could experience the life changing joy that comes when the Holy Spirit moves into a person's heart and begins to fill the empty places with God's love and peace. Just remember what Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." (John 15:11).

January 15, 2008 BEING LIKE JESUS

I am a Christian. I am a believer in, and a follower of, Jesus Christ. I believe that faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only way to be justified before God and that Jesus is the only door to Heaven. I know about my future destination (Heaven) and I am excited at the prospect of those things that await me; it is the day to day living in this life that concerns me.

More than anything, I want to be like Jesus in my heart, soul, mind, body, and strength. Jesus is my Lord and Savior and I want my life to please Him and show Him. As I meditated upon how to do this I realized that three things stand out in the life of Jesus in His relationship to God. If I can get these three things right in my life then I will be a long way toward my goal of being like Jesus.

First, Christ was willing to GO where His Father chose for Him to go- God had only one Son and He was a missionary. If I am to be like Christ then I must be willing to hold my possessions lightly so I can easily walk away from them in order to go to the places of God's choosing.

Second, Christ was willing to BE whatever His Father chose- The King of Kings who was adored and admired in Heaven became a carpenter who was despised and rejected of men on earth. Being like Christ means I must give up my rights in order to do His will. It sounded hard at first until I realized God loved me and would never ask me to be anything that was not right and good.

Third, Christ was willing to DO whatever His Father chose for Him to do. That needs no explanation, just obedience.

January 16, 2008 ABIDING IN CHRIST

As Jesus neared the end of His life on this earth He had some marvelous private conversations with His disciples. After washing the feet of the disciples and easing their fears about His soon coming death, Jesus shares one of the great messages in history as He tells His disciples about the benefits and blessings of abiding in Him in the same way a branch would abide in a vine (John 15). In this great discourse He tells about three results of abiding in the vine.

First, when you abide in Christ Prayer become powerful- *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.* (John 15:7).

Secondly, when you abide in Christ Joy becomes constant and wonderful- *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.* (John 15:11).

Thirdly, when you abide in Christ Fruit becomes perpetual- *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.* (John 15:16).

Abiding in Christ is simply becoming connected to Him and then allowing the Holy Spirit to support you as you rest in the strength and life giving nourishment of the vine. And, oh, the wonderful results of such a union.

January 22, 2008 YOUR IMPACT

It is a known fact that many times it is hard to really know a known fact! Most people assume that Jesus would enter a town and slowly begin moving through the town trying to reach as many people as possible with His message. But it did not happen that way. Jesus was pretty smart (He is God after all!). He would enter a town, find the one key person in that town that if converted would shock the entire town, and then proceed to introduce Himself to that person.

It happened in a town called Sychar. Jesus knew that talking to the mayor or the town banker would have won Him approval among the elite in town but winning them as converts would have caused but a small ripple in the fabric of the town. Instead, Jesus sat at a well, talked with the most notorious woman in the town, and then sent her back with living water in her soul and a town changing testimony on her lips. Soon the whole town was buzzing about Jesus.

Occupied with His coming crucifixion, Jericho could have been just a pass through town on the way to the Jerusalem's cross for Jesus. Instead, He stopped on His way to the tree to call a man up a tree and shake a town with the resounding conversion of the most notorious tax collector in the area. Jesus knew how to get people talking!

Maybe you think of yourself as too bad for God to love or too isolated for God to notice. Cheer up; you may be just the person Jesus is looking for! Just imagine what an impact it would have on your family and in your community if your life was turned around by you becoming a follower of Christ. Another good reason for you to come to Christ today.

January 23, 2008 WHY GOD LOVES YOU

The question asked by many as they are approached with the wonder of the Gospel of Christ is "Why would God offer this great treasure to me?" They feel unworthy of the great gift God is offering them and unable to live up to the challenges presented by the new life they would begin if they accepted God's wonderful gift of forgiveness and redemption. Basically, they look in the mirror and ask the heart searching question, "Why would God love me?"

The answer to this question is both exciting as well as life changing. God loves you because you are Significant to God and you have Potential for God. Please understand that God's Love (God loved us when we were unlovable) and God's Grace (Unmerited and unearned favor with God) are part of God's nature and these provide the impetus for God wanting to have a relationship with you. Do not get the idea that I am implying that God is simply trying to add a "trophy" to His trophy case when He invites you to become His child because you have significance and potential.

You are Significant enough to God until He would allow His only Son to leave Heaven, live on earth, and die as a man to pay the sin debt you incurred because of your sinful nature and your sinful conduct. That is pretty Significant! You have Potential for God because He looks beyond the sinful person you have become and see the justified son of God you can become through the life transforming power of the Holy Spirit that comes to live in your heart when you become a Christian. How wonderful it is to know that God sees us in this way!

January 29, 2008 GET TO KNOW GOD

Disregard God and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded; with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. Worst than that, you end up wasting your life and losing your soul. Knowing God and knowing about God are the most important subjects for consideration that any man at any time in any place can pursue.

J. I. Packer in his classic book "Knowing God" list 5 things about God that each person should consider and purpose to learn about.

- 1) God has spoken to man, and the Bible is his Word, Given to us to make us wise unto salvation.
- 2) God is Lord and King over his world; he rules all things for his own glory, displaying his perfections in all that he does, in order that men and angels may worship and adore him.
- 3) God is Savior, active in sovereign love through the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue believers from the guilt and power of sin, to adopt them as his children, and to bless them accordingly.
- 4) God is triune; there are within the Godhead three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and the work of salvation is one in which all three act together, the Father purposing redemption, the Son securing it, and the Spirit applying it.
- 5) Godliness means responding to God's revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and service. Life must be seen and lived in the light of God's Word. This, and nothing else, is true religion.

I wish I had been smart enough to have said all that! Please make it your business this week to seek to know God and then to know more about God. It will be the best investment of your time you could possibly make.

January 30, 2008 ENEMIES OF GOD'S PLAN

(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) (Philippians 3:18-19).

I cannot think of anything that would be worst than for God to say I am an enemy of His plan and purpose. In the slang of the kids that is "big time bad news". Let us see what causes this and what we can do to correct it.

Note first that this is a common situation- "Many walk" and a sad situation "tell you even weeping". Note also that it is a specific situation- "they are the enemies of the cross of Christ". They may believe in God and start doing better but they only seek ease from guilt and acceptance by society instead of being willing to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Christ .

Finally, look at the description of those who are enemies of God's plan: 1) Pleasure Driven "god is their belly". 2) Character Corrupted: "Glory is in their shame". 3) Occupied with wrong goals: "who mind earthly things". 4) Destined for destruction: "Whose end is destruction". None of these sounds good to me.

The good news is that God provides a way for enemies to become children of God- "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight:" (Colossians 1:21-22). God waits with open arms for His enemies to come to Him and become His children. Won't you make that decision today?

February 5, 2008 THE DEPENDABLE GOD

"God cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse" A. W. Pink

God does not need to mature or develop. There is nothing that needs to be added to Him and nothing needs to be taken from Him. He does not need to get stronger or wiser as time goes by. God's Character is, has always been, and will continue to be completely faultless. He never becomes less truthful, less merciful, less just, or less good. God has never done wrong and He will never do wrong. God has always done right and He will always and at all times do right. What a great peace comes to us when we rest in the love of such a stable God- "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Malachi 3:6)

In a world of change and chaos where economic recession and political upheaval bring doubt and dread to our heart and mind, we need to remember that God is dependable and steadfast. He is a rock in the midst of a stormy sea and we can rest with complete confidence in His love and care- "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." (Psalms 18:2).

God is the perfect God who has always been, and will always be, completely and absolutely perfect. We should never doubt His love or His provision. He is the great "I Am" who will never be the weak "I Was"! What a great and wonderful privilege to serve such a stable and dependable God.

February 6, 2008 ABSENT ALTOS

Is your attendance at church important? Picture this scenario.

The choir would have been a tremendous blessing to the service but all the Altos decided to miss church this Sunday. Because the choir did not sing as it should the congregation lost focus on the service and their minds wandered during the sermon. Since the Pastor was obviously not making contact with the people during his message he failed to preach with power and persuasion. Because the preaching was so poor the lost man who had come to church seeking something to change his life did not feel any conviction and so was not converted.

This lost man went home without Christ and the inner anger he felt drove him to curse his children and beat his wife. The oldest boy in the family finally grew so frustrated until he picked up a gun and shot his dad. Seeing the police cars and ambulance at the home caused a person who sang Alto in the choir of the local church to investigate the situation. As she gazed on the dead body, the weeping mom, and the struggling boy, she asked herself, "Why couldn't our church have done something to help this family before the situation got this bad! It is such a shame those people at church don't care for others as they should."

Many life changing events start with a decision that seems so small at the time. Affairs can begin with a look. Divorces can begin with a word. And shattered families can begin with absent Altos. That is why it is important to let God direct your steps as well as your destination.

February 12, 2008 LIFE'S MEANING

Ecclesiastes is one of the most profound books you will ever consider that is found in the most profound book ever written- the Bible. Most of the other books of the Bible are written to show us the ruin of man, the redemption of Christ, the regulations of religion, and the reason God does the things He does. Ecclesiastes was given to us by a wise man who was inspired by God to write about the doubts and unexplainable things of life that occupy much of our thoughts but are seldom mentioned in public (and almost never in church!).

Ecclesiastes tells us that the cycle of life and death happens for the wise and the wealthy just as it does for the wicked and the worldly. It tells us there is not always a rhyme or reason to things and "time and chance happen to all men" (Ecc 9:11). It shows us that God's ordering of things is inscrutable and can never be completely known by mankind because God has planned it that way- "(God) hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Ecclesiastes tells us that God wants us to walk the path He has given us with joy, to learn wisdom from the sorrow that comes the way of all humans, and to realize that death and judgment are coming to everyone. Then Ecclesiastes points out that God is the one who walks with you down life's path, who holds you during life's sorrows, and who will judge you at life's end. Keep that in mind and Life will be good.

February 13, 2008 WHEN LOVE CAME

"Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:7-8)

People sometimes ask me why I am willing to give up fame and fortune in order to serve as a shepherd to people who have a bad habit of acting just like people! They talk about me, quarrel at me, anticipate more from me than I can give, and then expect me be right there with a kind attitude, a wise word, and just the help they need when something comes along to disturb their life.

I wish I could say I did it because I am a Saint and it is the right thing to do. Sadly, I find many of the same faults in myself that I quarrel about so badly in other people. I get tired and frustrated and just plain human more times than I like to admit. I do what I do because God loved me when I was unworthy of His love and I want more than I can say to be able to share the love God has given me with others.

I could write all kinds of "cute" things about love today but most people would simply ignore them or use them to try to force someone to more adequately meet their needs. Instead, I just want to remind you that we love God because He first loved us (I John 4:19) and if we say we love God and do not love others then we are a liar (I John 4:20).

February 19, 2008 WORDS OF THE WISE

"The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." (Ecclesiastes 12:10-11).

The "tools" of a preacher's trade are words. Of all the methods God could have chosen to show men His Goodness, His Glory, and His Goal for their life He chose to use preaching- "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21). That means a preacher must know how to use his words correctly if he is to adequately represent the God of the Universe. Note what this means in our scripture.

Wise words are acceptable words- suitable words that people understand. Wise words are truthful words- Truthful not just in content but also in application. For example, the statement, "If you go to church you will eventually die" is a true statement (It is appointed unto all men to die) but it implies a wrong application (Your death would be caused by attending Church). In reality, Church is the place that helps prepare you for death and shows you how to live until that time. The Application needs to be as truthful as the Statement.

Wise words are also "goads" to push us in the direction God desires us to go and "nails" that bind our life and our society together to keep things from falling apart. They are the right words because they are given by our "shepherd" whose voice the sheep know and who loves his sheep. I pray these are the kind of words your preacher will preach to you this week.

February 20, 2008 POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Why do you want the Power of the Holy Spirit on your life? Many times people seek for the power of the Holy Spirit on their life in order to get something that makes them "better" than other people or that enables them to demonstrate more self glorifying abilities than others in their church or community. No wonder God fails to answer their prayer!

The Power of the Holy Spirit is meant to enable us to witness or to establish us in holiness or to energize us for humble service. It was never meant to boost our personal ambitions or to stroke our human ego. The Holy Spirit is God and God's goal is always to use His power to declare His glory and to demonstrate His justice. Men are wrong when they seek to obtain God's Power for their own benefit instead of seeking it so that God can empower them to accomplish His work and will on the earth.

Jesus was very plain about how to get the Holy Spirit to work in your life- "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13). If it is "not happening" for you then you need to examine the motives behind your prayer. It may just be that the Holy Spirit needs to work ON you before He can work IN you and the words of James may apply more than you realize- "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." (James 4:3)

February 26, 2008 PROMISES

Sometimes it is best to let the “Boss” do the speaking. This is what God said He would do. Will you let God do what He said He would do?

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. (Matthew 21:22)

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14-15)

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:7)

The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. (Psalms 34:17)

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:24)

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. (Jeremiah 33:3)

Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. (Psalms 50:14-15)

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (Psalms 84:11)

February 27, 2008 RIPPLE RESULTS

Recently we learned that my wife would soon have surgery on her hand. The surgery is relatively minor but it will take place in a hospital surgical facility and, since we are part of that large portion of America that cannot obtain insurance, it will be very expensive. The morning after we learned of my wife’s upcoming surgery we put that need on our prayer list. Less than two hours later someone called telling us they wanted to help us with that need- Glory!

Here is how that all came about. Brother Todd Smith, SCFWB Executive Secretary, sends out a weekly email containing news and prayer requests. In a recent email he asked people to pray for another pastor in our state named Jones. A pastor in Mississippi received the email and shared with his church the need to pray for a “preacher Jones” in South Carolina. A lady attending that Church knew my wife and I so she called concerned that I was going to have surgery. After we cleared up the confusion, this lady asked about my wife’s health and I shared about her upcoming surgery. This lady then said she had planned to send me some money to help with the surgery so now she would send it to help with my wife’s surgery- It is marvelous to see how God preplans prayer answers!

I do not know your need today but I do know God may already have “thrown the rock in the pond” so that the “ripple” will arrive even before you begin praying- Isa 65:24 “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” What a great God we serve.

March 4, 2008 DRIP DISASTER

It all started with a drip. Our non drip faucet suddenly began to drip unless you turned the handle in a certain direction. After a while it became annoying to try to remember to leave it in that position all the time so I decided to replace the “O” rings in order to make our faucet non drip again. That is when the problems began.

Our home is a mobile home. The faucet they installed was the least expensive non drip faucet available. When I tried to remove the “O” ring assembly a major piece of the faucet which happened to be plastic broke. Okay, now I have to replace the entire faucet. Did you forget, we live in a mobile home? The faucet is attached to the sink in such a way until the sink must be replaced as well as the faucet. Need I remind you, we live in a mobile home? The sink was very small so my wife wanted to get a deeper sink since we had to replace it anyway. Did I happen to mention that we live in a mobile home? The counter top was so small until in order to replace the sink a larger opening had to be cut. The space needed was so small until none of my saws would work so I had to use a woodworking knife to do most of the trim work- Long hard day.

Like my faucet, sin can begins with a little “drip” in your life and then escalates into a major problem very quickly. And the more you try to fix it yourself the worst things will become. Better call “plumber Jesus” for Help. He always has exactly what is needed to fix exactly what is wrong.

March 5, 2008 FOLLOWING GOD LIKE JESUS

Several years ago there was a “fad” among young people asking them to wear WWJD bracelets and continually ask themselves the question “What would Jesus Do?” For those of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ that is a normal occurrence. Here are some things that we know that Jesus always did.

Jesus always sought the Will of the Father- “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” (John 6:38). “Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (John 4:34). Is God’s plan for you your plan for you?

Jesus showed us the Love of the Father- “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” (John 15:9-10). Jesus did not just show us love on the cross, He showed us the Love of the Father in everyday situations. That is something all of us can do.

Jesus followed the example of the Father- “Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” (John 5:19). If people accused you of living like Jesus would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Jesus obeyed the Father, loved the Father, and showed the Father. Do You?

March 11, 2008 KNOWING AND DOING

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself". (John 7:17)

Jesus lists two very important ingredients here about living life. If you want to KNOW then you must be willing to DO.

Many times I find myself with so much work demanding my attention until I come to a stand still trying to figure out where to begin! The battle begins to rage in my mind- "Should I do this or should I do that?" And I end up arguing with myself instead of accomplishing anything.

That is when I need to start applying the Principles Jesus talked about in this verse. I know I need to visit people but I cannot figure out which person to begin with. All I have to do is pick someone, anyone. While I'm on the way to visit them I will always pass a home or remember a person that I need to see and then I will find things falling into place.

I know that Sunday is coming. I know that sermons have to be prepared. I can sit and wonder what to preach and end up throwing something together at the last moment or I can take my Bible into my prayer closet and find out what God wants so I can begin making preparations.

Knowing something needs to be done is not enough; you must actually start doing those things. Remember that about the changes you want to make in your life. Remember that in witnessing and working for the Lord. And especially remember that when it comes to making your decision about eternity. It does no good to know Christ can save you if you are not willing to do anything about it.

March 12, 2008 PERFECT PEACE

We live in a world of troubles and trials. Families are breaking apart, violence is escalating, government is out of control, and we cannot do something as simple as find our car keys! Wouldn't it be great if there was a way to face all of life's circumstances with peace and stability? Thank God, Isaiah 26:3 gives God's prescription for a life of perfect peace- "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

This verse contains a Promise, a Prescription, and a Provision. The Promise is very straight forward. Resting in God will keep a person in a state of perfect (constant) peace. The Prescription to obtain this Promise involves changing your thought process. You used to think only of self and circumstances. Now your mind is "stayed" (centered) on God; His power, His Presence, and His Providential oversight of life's circumstances.

The Provision for this Promise is a constant confidence in God. You trust that God is working all of life's circumstances for your good and His glory (See Rom 8:28) so you can remain confident no matter what the circumstances.

People get seasick when they start thinking about how the boat is rocking and then they start watching the waves; which only adds to the problem. Unable to find stability, the mind triggers terrible sickness in the body. When I was living aboard a ship I would lift my eyes to the horizon and find a place of stability. That always solved my problem.

Perfect Peace is not the absence of problems. It is "stable horizon" we can focus on that enables us to remain well in the midst of life's tossing sea.

March 18, 2008 COMING TO CHRIST

I did not become a Christian because of family expectations or pressures. At the time of my conversion no one in my immediate family was a follower of Christ and church attendance was not part of my family's weekly plans. My family's week end plans normally revolved around resting, recreation, or visiting in the homes of other relatives. We did not mess with that "church crowd" and, sadly, they pretty much left us alone also.

We were not really "bad" people. My brothers and I got into plenty of boyhood mischief but not a lot more than the other kids in our neighborhood. Our parents were not part of the correct social circles in our community but they were good parents and they did the best they could with the limited income my dad received while my mother stayed home and tried to keep 4 boys from killing themselves or someone else!

Then one day our next door neighbor extended an invitation to me to attend a revival at the church he attended and he added enough of a bribe (I will let you play with my boys Sunday afternoon) so that I accepted his invitation. I did not understand a lot of what was going on at Church but I did understand very well when the preacher started talking about the empty place in my heart that existed because sin separates me from God. Some wonderfully divine way, God worked past my ignorance and allowed me to understand enough to repent of my sins and accept His magnificent gift of salvation through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ and that night I became a Christian.

I am still in awe of how God worked and what God accomplished when I became part of the family of God. It just reminds me anew of the importance of sharing the pardon and power of God with everyone in the community.

March 19, 2008 TELLING YOUR TESTIMONY

Today is my 46th Birthday! I was born again on Monday, March 19, 1962 at an altar in New Prospect Church (For my physical age, add 14 – that is how old I was when I became a Christian- to the 46). These years that I have served the Lord have been the most wonderful and exciting adventure I could imagine. The journey has been great, the destination is out of this world, and the people who are traveling with me, while not perfect, are constantly being transformed into "saints" through the work of God in their life.

Rather than repeat my testimony in this devotion I thought I would encourage you to write out your testimony and share it with others. I got this idea from the Apostle Peter who wrote in his last letter - "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. ...I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." (2 Peter 1:14-15).

Do you find it hard to tell your testimony to others? Write it down and put a copy in letters and cards to these people. When you die do you want to make sure your family knows how important your faith was in your life? Write out your testimony and instruct the Pastor to read it at your funeral. Do you want to experience peace and confidence about your relationship with the Lord? Writing out your salvation experience may be exactly the right way to bring the reasons for, and the results of, your faith into focus.

The most important event in my life was the day my sins were forgiven and I became an heir of heaven. If you feel the same way, then write it down and pass it on.

March 25, 2008 LOVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

One of the greatest struggles faced by the average Christian is the daily battle with sinful actions. Like the apostle Paul they find that “the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (Romans 7:19). How a Christian longs to live perfect and do right all of the time. May God help you today to realize something that will help you in this struggle?

Becoming a Christian pays your sin debt to God but it does not eliminate the sinful nature within you. Jesus did not tell His disciples to “pray a magic prayer so you will never sin again”. He called His disciples by saying, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24). Real Christianity involves a “daily denial” of sin and self.

What actually changes when a person becomes a Christian is their attitude toward sin. They, like Lot, may live in a corrupt and sinful society but because of their new relationship with Christ these sinful actions around them now “vex their righteous soul daily” (2Peter 2:8). And that is the key. When sin occurs in our life it causes sadness instead of gladness in our heart. That is true because we are developing the character of Jesus in our heart and, like Him, we now “... love righteousness, and hate iniquity;”. (Hebrews 1:9).

Christians do not become sinless but they do sin less because their heart has been changed and is being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. No longer are they being “conformed to the world because now they are being transformed by the renewing of their mind.” (Rom 12:2). Glory! What a wonderful change takes place in our heart because of Christ.

March 26, 2008 YAHWEH

God revealed Himself to His chosen people by the name, Yahweh; which is also translated “Jehovah” and “the LORD”. He described Himself by this name as the great “I AM” which means He is complete in and of Himself. He is the reality behind all reality. He is the underlying source of all that exists and that functions. He is self-existent, sovereign, and entirely free from restrictions. He is totally independent of anything outside Himself. He is; and He needs nothing or no one to help or complete Himself.

Knowing that God is absolutely complete in Himself is a good thing but it does not impact us in the way that it should until we realize that if God is complete in Himself then He can provide all I need so He should be all I want! This was the truth that Jesus was attempting to convey when He summarized man’s first responsibility to God by asserting, “The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.” (Mark 12:29-30). We can only love God in this way when we are convinced that the complete God is what we need to complete us; therefore, all that I seek in life is found in a totally committed relationship with God.

You will never be successful in your Christian life until the great “I AM” becomes more than a spare tire. You must have faith in Yahweh as your “LORD” before you can experience the peace that passes understanding that has been promised by God.

April 1, 2008 SIN'S FOOL

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)

When sin comes into your life it "clocks in" and begins to accumulate its death wages. Sometimes the wages are immediate and graphic. Sometimes sin's wages come so slowly until they are hardly recognized until death's cold clammy breath is felt on your neck. But sin's payday always comes sooner or later.

People die in different ways. Some die young and some die old. Some die instantly and some die gradually. Some slip into death gently and easily while others suffer terrible and painful torments.

Not only do people die in different ways but different parts of people die; and this is where Sin makes a fool of so many. Most people have heard enough sermons until they immediately associate the wages of sin with the eternal pain and punishment that follows death. But engaging in sin is like buying a house; it is not just the mortgage payments that empty your bank account each month. Buying a home means you also have electric bills, insurance payments, taxes, and so forth.

In the same way, Sin does more than bring death to your soul. Sin decimates your body, kills your innocence, slowly strangles your dreams, and chokes your spirit. Sin enslaves you and weaves a tangled web of deceit and disgrace as it sucks the very life from all that you are. And then it laughs out loud as it drops you into the darkness of eternal punishment.

Thank God that Jesus paid the debt of sin and conquered death. And it gives His gift of eternal life to whosoever will come and request it. Glory! What a wonderful God!

April 2, 2008 SIN'S SLAVERY

Disclaimer- Do not do as I did. Get the lesson but be careful of the practice.

I live very close to the County Jail. Recently my wife and I started out to visit someone and noticed a woman walking along the road looking cold and miserable. I knew there was a possibility that she had recently been released from jail but I still decided to stop and offer assistance. She thanked us profusely when she got into our warm car. I asked if her car had broken down and she said she had just been released from jail.

I asked her where she was going and she said she needed to get home to her mother who was recently released from the Hospital so my wife and I decided to go out of our way to help. As we rode along and talked I asked about jail conditions (bad food and boring days), home life (lived with mother), and spiritual life (I read my bible a lot in jail and I am thinking about going to church). Pressing the matter of a decision for Christ only led to excuses. As she got out of the car, my wife and I noticed that she went directly to the beer joint located next door instead of to her home to see her mother.

I was reminded again of the terrible consequences of sin. Sin is a terrible taskmaster who destroys a person's body, mind, and spirit before it ultimately dooms a person's soul to eternal pain and punishment. Good preachers do not preach against sin in order to earn a living; they preach against sin in order to save a life. May that happen through your Minister's message this week.

April 8, 2008 WHAT CAN SATISFY?

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; (Ephesians 5:18)

Man's greatest need is that man is seldom able to discern man's greatest need! Created in the image of a complex and infinite God, mankind has needs and desires that vary from day to day and from time to time in his life cycles. One day the temptation to lust may overwhelm a person while the next day the desire for material goods (coveting) may become the greatest need. A twenty year old man may long for success and adventure while a sixty year old man may desire peace and stability.

Seeking to satisfy these needs often lead men to destructive behavior such as becoming "drunk with wine". The problem with trying to satisfy our needs with wine is that the momentary satisfaction soon wears off and our drunken behavior often leads to hurt and heartache for family, friends, and even innocent bystanders.

The Bible proclaims that the way to combat this negative behavior is to be filled with the Spirit. Instead of yielding to wine's destructive power a person needs to yield to the constructive and satisfying control of the Holy Spirit. This will bring about a change in attitude (you will have God's melody in your heart and God's praises on your lips which will satisfy the inner hungry of your soul) and your actions (you will learn to accept your place in God's family so you will be at peace with yourself and with others which will satisfy the hungry of your heart).

The greatest need in your life can never be found in anything in this world. The secret to the abundant life you are seeking is found in a right relationship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. So do not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit this week.

April 9, 2008 COMMITTED OR GIFTED

The wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time is a recipe for disaster. A lesson that churches apparently find difficult to grasp.

Churches are full of "burned out" Christians because preachers talk about the need of "commitment" almost every sermon but seldom preach about finding and using the gift God has given you. So earnest dedicated people feel compelled to volunteer to do things that they have no skill or "heart" for and they soon come to the place they dread coming to church and serving the Lord because of the stress involved in being a square peg trying to fit into a round hole.

Amazingly, when they come to the pastor or church leaders and tell them about their situation they are told it is a lack of commitment on their part and they should just "try harder". Soon the frustration and failure of the wrong person in the wrong place overwhelms them and they quit the position (and some times the church!).

When will we learn that it is not a question of commitment but of giftedness that determines our success in God's work? Read again what God's word declares- "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." (Rom 12:4-8)

April 15, 2008 MINISTRY MONEY

One of the biggest misconceptions held by many church members is that they hire a preacher to do a job for them. They think that because they pay his salary then a preacher should be at their beck and call twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, in order to meet all their expectations and felt needs. They expect him to visit them, all of their family, friends they know at work, and anyone else they may have the opportunity to “volunteer” the preacher to go see. He is also to manage the church effectively while ensuring that the youth of the church are completely satisfied with the entertainment they receive at church each week and the other age groups in the church have all their needs met. Finally, he is to prepare and preach a new and tremendously exciting sermon three times a week that will answer every question people have while stirring them to do great things or lead them to repent and get right with God. Then, in his spare time, he is to be a great husband and father, in order that his wife and children will be the best people in the church who never have a problem or show any “human” failures.

In reality, a true man of God is someone who receives a salary from the members of his local congregation in order that he might devote his time and energy to fulfilling the ministry to which God has called him. He is not a “hiring”; he is called to be a shepherd (John 10:11-13). He is a man of God sent to the people of God to do the work of God; and that is the reason he gets a paycheck each week.

April 16, 2008 PITFALLS OF PREACHERS

I love Preachers. I have spent, and continue to spend, a great deal of time with Preachers and I think they are some of the most dedicated and self sacrificing people on this planet. I think every young boy should be able to call at least one Preacher his hero. Sadly, most Preachers are usually under paid, overworked, and seldom shown the appreciation and honor they deserve.

In spite of my great love for Preachers, I am not unaware of their failures and foolishnesses. Here are several pitfalls that Preachers seem to fall into with an amazing degree of regularity. May they read, heed, and avoid these dangers today.

Potential pitfalls for Preachers include no vision, no visitation, and no victory. A Preacher who loses the vision of what God is trying to accomplish in his ministry will simply show up each service, preach a sermon; and watch as his church stagnates and dies. A Preacher who isolates himself in his office, or worst, on a golf course or in a fishing boat will soon lose contact with, and compassion for, his people. A Preacher who becomes lukewarm in his own prayer and Bible Study time will find it impossible to preach with energy and enthusiasm; and, if he is not careful, he will begin to look to “wildfire” to replace the fire of God in His heart and message.

The scriptures declare that “A faithful man shall abound with blessings:” (Proverbs 28:20). They also say “Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit:” (Proverbs 28:10). May your Preacher be blessed as he avoids every pitfall.

April 22, 2008 JOINING THE CHURCH

One of the greatest honors a person can receive is that of being allowed to join a local church. Having become part of the Body of Christ via the New Birth this person now has the privilege to become part of a local family of believers where they can use their talents to build God's kingdom and help God's people. Here is the process of membership we use at the Church I attend.

- Get acquainted before you join the family. The Bible tells us to "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (I Tim 5:22). A person should attend a church long enough to observe worship styles, church goals, people personalities, and Pastoral leadership before they decide to become a member. This gives them time to get to know the Church and for the Church to get to know them.

- Meet with the Pastor or a representative in order to understand the requirements for membership. In our Church we have a new member form available at the entrance to the Church and on our web site- www.lebanonfwbc.com -that people fill out before meeting with the associate pastor. Basic requirements for joining our church include being born again, baptized by immersion, willing to follow the faith and practices of our church, and declaring that you will support the church with your gifts and your talents.

- After this meeting the associate pastor will introduce you to the church, share some of the information he has learned about you, and ask the Church to vote to receive you into membership. You will then be welcomed into the Body of the Church where you can use your abilities to build and bless the work of God.

The goal of every person should be to get right with God and then serve God in a local fellowship of believers. I hope that is your goal.

April 23, 2008 SANCTUARY GUIDELINES

The house of God should be a Holy Place for a Holy God. Because of growth problems, the Church I presently attend had to remodel half of the family life center and move into this new "sanctuary" while we prepare for additional buildings. I try to remind people that this area that was formerly a basketball court is now a Holy Place set aside to worship the great God of the universe and it should therefore be treated with reverence and respect.

Here are some guidelines we have established in order to encourage people to properly honor this newly established Holy Place.

- Please do not bring food or drink into the Sanctuary (cleanliness and consideration for others).
- Please dress modestly and appropriately for God's House.
- Please cut off all cell phones during service (Parents may consider keeping their children's cell phones during service- I see those little hands busily sending text messages during service!).
- When possible, Families are encouraged to sit together. Worship should be a time when the entire family draws near to God and near to each other.
- Please visit rest room facilities BEFORE Services begin. A child that needs to go to the rest room every ten minutes has a medical problem that needs to be under a doctor's care lest it do them harm mentally (school) and physically (unable to participate in outdoor activities).

Hope to see you as part of our growing church this week. Fellowshiping with God's People in God's house is absolutely the best way to spend a Sunday.

April 29, 2008 GOD KEEPS RECORDS

The “organizer” in me likes the fact that God keeps records. The Human part of me sometimes wishes God did not keep such accurate and detailed records! But, like it or not, God is a good “accountant” and He has access to complete information about me.

Some of the information God keeps about me is a comfort to me for it lets me know He is aware of every detail of my life; which means I can always be assured that He knows every need I have- Mat 10:29 30 *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

Some of the information God has access to about me causes me a little discomfort. God knows every idle word I say and will one day call for an accounting of these words- Mat 12:36 *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*

Most important of all, however, is the fact that God’s record books have an entry beside the name of every person for all time that declares where each person will spend eternity- Rev 20:12 *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.* Rev 20:15 *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

God keeps records and these records are absolutely accurate. What does the information beside your name reveal?

April 30, 2008 SELF ACCOUNTING

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10). So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (Romans 14:12)

One day we will have to stand before God and give an account of ourselves to God. What will be included in this “self accounting”? God is the judge so He will have His own set of standards but He has revealed numerous items for this accounting that should cause us to “sit up and take notice”.

We will have to account for the use of our Tongue (Including idle words-Matt 12:36, lying and angry words- Eph 5:25-26, and denying words- Matt 10:33); our Talents (God gives each of us “talents” to use for His work. We will be rewarded according to how we use those talents and if we fail to use those talents then God will reject us [Faith without works is dead being alone]- Matt 25:14-20); our Time (We are to “redeem the Time” (Eph 5:16) and “Past the time of our journey here in fear of God” (1 Peter 1:17)); our Tithe (Robbing God of His money- Mal 3:8, and misusing the resources God has given us- Acts 5:1-11); our Troubles (Troubles sometimes correct us- Heb 12:5-11 and sometimes give us the ability to comfort others- 2 Cor 1:4); and our Trust (The Just shall live by Faith- Rom 1:17).

Every one shall give account of himself to God. What will your life and lips reveal on that accounting day?

May 6, 2008 PETER'S MOTHER IN LAW

Luke 4:38 41And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.

It had been a very busy day. Jesus had taught the multitude and then asked Peter to launch out into the deep where he caught the vast catch of fish. Finally, Christ had called Peter and Andrew, James and John to full time discipleship.

Now Peter has invited everyone to his home for supper only to find that his wife is busy caring for her very sick mother. Stunned, Peter simply stands there until Jesus comes over, lays His hand on Peter's mother in law, and, suddenly, the fever is all gone. Now she can rise and help minister to Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd.

Note the spiritual lessons in this story. First, life sometimes brings trouble and stress. Something inside this lady had gone wrong and now her body was being consumed with fever. And to make a bad situation worst, suddenly her home was invaded by a huge crowd of hungry men. This is a clear representation of what sin does in the life of a woman (or man). Sin consumes our life and destroys our ability to establish relationships.

But what a change takes place with a savior comes on the scene. Suddenly the fever is gone and this mother can do her part in serving the Lord and His people. That is exactly what happens when salvation comes into the life of a woman (or man). Soul healing takes place and relationship service begins.

May this Mother's Day bring healing to your soul and body and the joy of family and friends to your home.

May 7, 2008 GOD'S WONDER WOMEN

On this Mother's Day, wonder at the fact that at a time when women were abused, misused, and ignored, God saw fit to include four women in the line of Christ (Matt 1:1-17); each of which had questionable character!

Tamar (vs 3)- The woman who schemed to have a child by her father-in-law, Judah. She acted like a prostitute in order to continue the line of God. Surely, God is the Friend of Sinners.

Rahab (vs 5)- A Gentile of bad reputation who decided to trust God and take God's side against her own nation. What courage and conviction was shown by this woman. How wonderful that we as Gentiles can come for shelter to the Great God of the Jews.

Ruth (vs 5)- A Moabite woman who trusted in Naomi's God for supply and direction. She was willing to leave home and friends in order to be part of God's plan. What a joy to know that even though we have been excluded by others we can be included by God's Grace.

Bathsheba (vs 6)- Defiled by the King who had her husband killed. Then she watched in agony as the child of this act slowly died; yet, she still rose to a place of honor and privilege. God can take even broken vessels and make them fit for the Master's use.

Many mothers think of themselves as "plain Jane" instead of "wonder woman". But when God is in their heart then greatness for God is just an act of faith away. May God bless you as a Mother to be exactly what He wants you to become. If that happens, then many will wonder at what you have accomplished for God.

May 13, 2008 BLESSING WITH BLESSINGS

Getting Blessed by God is a fairly easy endeavor- Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: (Matthew 7:7). If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:11)

Many times the main reason people do not receive the blessings they crave is because God is concerned about two things: 1) What will the Blessing do to the person receiving it? 2) What will the person receiving the Blessing do with the Blessing they receive?

I love children and I certainly would like to give them ice cream if I had ice cream to give. I would not give them ice cream, however, if it would spoil their supper (Mad Moms are not a pretty sight!), if it would be harmful to their health (Some people cannot handle milk products), or if they wanted ice cream all the time instead of eating the nourishing fruits and vegetables they need to grow strong minds and bodies. God thinks about some of these same things when it comes to giving blessings to His children.

The Dead Sea is dead because water flows into it but does not exit except through evaporation; which leaves all the harmful salts and minerals behind. God would hesitate to bless someone if He knew the blessing would make the person more selfish instead of more serving- Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:3)

God wants to bless His children but He wants His blessings to be a blessing. So do not get discouraged or disgruntle. God knows what you need; and He always does right.

May 14, 2008 THE GIVING GIFT

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) And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. (Luke 6:31)

The openness of your hand will many times determine the amount of God's Blessings given to you. God blesses His children in order to bless them but He also blesses His children in order for them to be a blessing. God expects us to be a witness of His love and generous heart by sharing with others in the same loving and gracious way that He has shared with us.

My wife and I try to be generous in our giving to our church, to missions, to help those in need, and to other organizations that we feel help God's Kingdom or God's world (We give to some "non religious" organizations such as rescue squad or cancer society because we want to be good citizens as well as good Christians). I say this for no praise because I assume all Christians give with a generous heart and we are extremely small givers compared to some whom God has blessed to give very generous gifts.

The reason we give is because God has been extremely generous to us and has led people to give to us time after time when we were in great need. We do not have much but we want to bless others in the same way we have been blessed. We feel this helps others and pleases God; which is a pretty good principle to guide your life.

May 20, 2008 BORN AGAIN BENIFITS

When a person is “Born Again” by the Spirit of God a wonderful life changing process begins. First of all a Born Again person changes from someone dead in trespasses and sin into a new creature who has been “quickened” (given life) by God. No longer is he under the penalty of sin. The wrath of God because of the sins committed by this person has been appeased by the death of Christ and this person is now Justified (Just as if I had never sinned) before God.

But Justification is just the beginning. When a person is Born Again by faith in Christ the Holy Spirit moves into this person and begins to instruct them in how to walk with Christ in a new holy life (Sanctification). The ways and wishes of God now become more and more clear and dear to this child of God as he devotes himself to serving God and daily denies his own sinful selfish ways.

All of this will one day end gloriously when this Born Again child of God is brought into the very presence of God where they will receive a new body and live in a new home. We call this Glorification because all the trials and troubles are over and these believers in Christ now live in the purity and peace of God’s glory.

So a Christian is someone who has escaped the penalty of sin, is escaping the power of sin, and will one day escape the very presence of sin. He is someone who has been justified by the blood of Christ, someone who is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, and someone who will one day be glorified in the very presence of God. Good stuff being a Christian. I am glad I am one.

May 21, 2008 SOUL HEALING

“I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.” (Psalms 41:4)

Amazingly, this is the only place in the entire Bible where the phrase “heal my soul” is found. The word “soul” as used in the Bible means “the living part of a person” and refers to the fact that when God created man He “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7). The soul is the eternal part of man that exists even after his fleshly body has ceased to function.

In light of the fact that the eternal abode of the soul is either a place of painful punishment or a place of perpetual pleasure, it should be obvious why people would want God to “save their soul”. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to realize that Heaven is much better than the alternative!

But why would a person cry for God to “heal their soul”? The word “heal” is a Hebrew word meaning “to cure or to make whole”. According to the rest of this verse the Psalmist had sinned against God and it had brought “sickness” to his soul. Now he is asking for forgiveness and cleansing by God so his soul would return to health and happiness.

If life has lost its joy and you seem to just exist from day to day it may be you, like the Psalmist, need to cry out to God, “Heal my soul”. Life is good when your soul is “well”.

May 27, 2008 CARRY CHILDREN TO CHURCH

Your child is going to get their life principles from somewhere. Sadly, most children now are getting these life principles from TV, Movies, and video games. I think you should make sure they get these life principles from the Word of God. The only way to do that is to determine that you are going to take your family to a good Bible Teaching Church each week. Here are four reasons you should attend Church with your children this week.

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

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

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

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

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

May 28, 2008 GOD’S EXPECTATIONS

So many voices telling us how we should live and what we should do. The most important voice we will hear on this subject is the voice of God. Here are some things God expects of you.

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

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

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

God expects you to SOW- He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalms 126:6)

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

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

Are you meeting God’s expectations??

June 3, 2008 DANGEROUS DECISIONS

This is the time of year when many people are making life changing decisions- Who to marry, College or Career choices, or what to do during the summer. Many of these choices will have life long consequences so they need to be made prayerfully and carefully. Here are four times you should be extremely careful about making any Decision.

1) Be careful making a major decision when your emotions are in turmoil. Overactive emotions almost always lead to wrong choices. Try to make no major decisions within 3 months of the death of a loved one. Do not let the excitement of momentary emotions cause you to do something in the back seat of a car you will regret the rest of your life.

2) Be careful making a major decision when you are Angry- An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression. (Proverbs 29:22). Calm your soul, collect your thoughts, and then do what is best for the situation instead of lashing back and making poor choices that can lead to dangerous and damaging results. .

3) Be careful making a major decision when you are Discouraged. Discouraged people often do not think realistically and the resulting decision can remove them from a good marriage, a good job, or a great opportunity.

4) Be careful making a major decision when you are not at peace about the Decision. I have almost always regretted decisions I made when I did not feel the peace and direction of God about the decision.

God declared that "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5). Decisions have consequences. "Flipping a coin" will help you make a choice but depending on God's wisdom and direction will help you make the RIGHT choice.

June 4, 2008 DOWNWARD STEPS

The Apostle James said that, (Jones Translation) "Each person is tempted when his own evil desires lead him to make a downward decision. This downward desire eventually gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:14-15). Basically, James is saying that some decisions lead you in the wrong direction where you end up with really bad consequences.

Inside these verses are the four downward steps that destroy many people's happiness, reputation, peace, and even their life.

The first Downward Step is TEMPTATION - Something excites our Desire for the downward life. (This is not Sin; it is the inclination to do wrong-you can not keep the bird from flying overhead but you can keep him from building a nest. And you can keep out of his flight path!)

The second Downward Step is PARTICIPATION- The temptation is embraced by our mind and emotions and we yield to the wrong that Satan has tempted us to do.

The third Downward Step is DOMINATION- Sin begins to control our life. "Recreational" Drugs eventually turn from a joyful high into a harmful jailer. A "little" uncontrolled anger eventually leaves bruises on your wife and children and turns a loving home into a miserable mess.

The fourth Downward Step is CONDEMNATION- Sin, when it is full grown, produces denial, despair, disgusting behavior, and, eventually, death. When you give in to sin it slowly but surely destroys you Physically, Emotionally, Mentally, and Spiritually.

Downward decisions can lead to a long hard fall. Ask God for wisdom and directions in order to think right, live right, and die right.

June 10, 2008 MALCHAM

"I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him." (Zephaniah 1:4-6)

In this passage we find several reasons that God brings wrath instead of blessings upon His people. As we watch with increasing anxiety the destruction of our way of life by the economic earthquake of ever increasing prices and the moral collapse of society in America then maybe it is time for people to ask God where we have erred from His ways. Zephaniah gives us those reasons.

Simply put, God declares that His Blessings have ceased because society has begun to follow the directions of other gods (Baal). This happened because they are led by priests who secretly believe in darkness (Chemarims) instead of light. They show this in their worship of the "host of heaven" instead of the God of Heaven.

The "kicker", however, is the fact that they worship and swear by the Lord while at the same time swearing by Malcham (a "god" who promised them blessings if they would sacrifice their children to him). Does this sound like America as we sacrifice a generation of youth upon the altar of mom and dad both having to work all the time in order to build bigger homes and have more things?

God's answer is simple. Seek the Lord and enquire for Him. In simple English, come back to God and God will once more bless and guide you.

June 11, 2008 PRAY FOR FATHERS

We live in a world that places a tremendous burden upon Fathers. They are expected to work long and hard so they can make a lot of money and then come home rested and refreshed so they can spend a large amount of "quality" time with their wife and kids. Sounds good on TV talk shows but it is much more difficult in real world living. Here are some helpful hints to assist Dads as they lead their household.

Remember that God gave you children instead of robots. They will not be perfect (even God's children give Him problems!) but they have tremendous potential if you can point them in the right direction: "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth." (Psalms 127:3-4).

Children have different personalities; take time to learn each child so you can guide them in the way that fits who they are- "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6).

Finally, remember that God did not say for you to make sure your child was always entertained but He did say to give them room to grow as you guide them in God's ways- "ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4).

I am praying for you Dad that you will receive wisdom and strength. God wants you to succeed and He will give you the help you need if you listen to Him and submit to Him.

June 17, 2008 OPINION IMPACT

As long as I can remember my opinion has had an impact that reached far beyond by abilities, my experience, or my wisdom. I began preaching at the age of fourteen and quickly learned that God's call on my life greatly impacted people's perception of what I say and do. Other fourteen year old kids could get mad at a bad call at a ball game but I was a preacher and preachers are only allowed to get mad if it is righteous anger about sin!

I also learned when a preacher expresses himself about almost anything; whether people agree or disagree, the opinion expressed by the preacher will usually produce some sort of response. That is the reason the apostle James declares that if a man offends not in word, the same is a perfect man (James 3:2).

The main "tools" a preacher uses are words and words have an impact through their sound, their source, and their significance. The tone of his voice, the testimony of his reputation, and the truthfulness of his message all play a vital roll in the impact of a preacher's words.

You may not be a preacher but those around you listen to what you say about people, politics, and problems. You are helping to shape opinions and attitudes almost everywhere you express yourself- from waiting in line at Wal-Mart, to gossip around the office water cooler, to talking about family and friends in your living room. Words are like knives, they can be used to heal and help a person (like a surgical knife) or they can be used to destroy or kill a person (like a murder weapon). But words always have an impact for good or bad. Keep that in mind.

June 18, 2008 STUMP FLOWERS

My wife likes to browse through antique shops. I don't. I am at the point in my life where most of the antiques I see are things I was raised around so they hold no special awe for me. Besides, I am in the "let us get rid of as much "stuff" as we can stage" instead of wanting to bring anything more into our home. But, I digress.

Recently, while my wife browsed through an antique shop I sat on the porch in an old rocker trying to move enough so that the people who came to the shop would not think I was one of the ancient items for sale! In the yard beside the shop was a stump from a tree that someone had cut in years gone by. From several cracks in the top of that decaying stump beautiful flowers had sprung up and added bright colors to the stump and the yard.

Several lessons immediately came to mind. Sometimes you must learn to bloom where life puts you. I imagine these flowers would have preferred a better situation but they did their "job" in spite of being on a stump instead of in a flower bed. Secondly, these flowers used the rot and decay of this dead tree to produce life and beauty. They took what they had been given and turned it into something better- a good motto for anyone.

Some people do not catch the same "breaks" that other people catch; they end up on stumps instead of being pampered with care and concern in some person's flower bed. The good news is that God cares about these "people" flowers and is aware of every detail of their circumstances. (See Matt 6:28-30)

June 24, 2008 VICTORIOUS LIVING

What Problems do TO us depends on what Problems find IN us. When a mighty storm struck Jesus and the disciples as they crossed the sea the disciples panicked while Jesus slept. When Jesus finally was awakened and calmed the storm He told the disciples that the problem was not the storm; the problem was their faith. Storms always expose our internal weaknesses or exalt our victorious faith.

How do you grow to a place of victorious living in the midst of life's storms? Here are two principles to stabilize you.

First- Rest in the fact that God will provide the Help you need WHEN YOU NEED IT. God does not allow you to "store up grace" for an emergency ahead of time because that would cause us to look to our own efforts. Instead, God tells us to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). God gives us what we need for each trial just at the time we need it.

Secondly, Rejoice in God's pre-preparation- God always prepares us FOR what He is preparing FOR US. No problem ever takes God by surprise. God has been teaching and training you as you journey through life so that when you come to a time of need God has everything in place you will need to survive and succeed in the problem - "your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask him" (Matt 6:8).

Never doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light. Jesus may seem to be asleep but He is always with you in the boat and He can calm the storm with a word! Keep the faith, brother.

June 25, 2008 ACTIVE MISSIONS

Many people are more in love with the IDEA of Missions than they are with the MISSION of Missions. They are much more interested in paying someone to go to Africa and preach the gospel to Black People in Africa than they are in inviting a Black Person to sit beside them in church and hear the gospel for free! They believe someone ought to do something about the morals, manners, and eternal destiny of today's youth but please do not bother them; their work schedule is heavy and their favorite program just came on TV.

Jesus did not tell his disciples to arrange a conference and invite someone to share heart wrenching stories and slides about missions. He commanded His followers to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). And when the early disciples decided to settle in Jerusalem instead of obeying this command God allowed such persecution and pressure to come on the church until they were scattered abroad (Acts 8:4) [Ever wonder why churches have so many problems and splits? Notice how much harmony and enthusiasm you see in a church when people are being saved on a regular basis].

If you are a believer in Christ then you are on a mission. You may never go to Africa or India but God expects you to do what you can, where you are, with what you have. Sit down with your family some night and ask them what they would do if they had been sent from India to this Community in America to share the Gospel (It is called "missions in reverse"). Then do what you know God wants you to do.

July 1, 2008 AMERICA'S HOPE

I just returned from the Post Office where I mailed Camp Applications for some youth to attend Church Camp. I also mailed some information to help the clerk of the South Carolina State Association of Free Will Baptists fulfill his duties. There was also a letter containing information that will assist one of our missionaries continue to do his work for years to come. The final package was some material to help a pastor in his ministry through an outreach ministry that I maintain.

My life is consumed with doing work for Christ and His Church. I am glad. I think the only hope for America is the life changing gospel of Jesus Christ. As I write this we just finished a week of Vacation Bible School at my church. It was a tremendous success as God ministered in great ways to a large number of people each night. It was also a great blessing to me to see how God bonded and blessed the men and women in our church as they put forth an extraordinary amount of effort to help young people learn how to love God and each other.

A concerted campaign is underway in America to expel Christianity from every area of public life. Some people give you the idea that the AIDS epidemic is nothing more than a common cold compared to the evil of people praying and preaching in public! All I know is that Christianity has made a life changing difference in my own family and in a large number of people across this country and around the world.

I do not believe America's Hope is a society in which people are morally bankrupt and are guided by nothing except self interest. I am going to stick with what I have seen work for years, the life changing message of hope and help found in Jesus Christ.

July 2, 2008 MAKE A DIFFERENCE

You can scream at the dark or you can light a candle. Here are some ways each of us can make a difference in America.

Get to know your neighbor. It is amazing how your perception about those around you will change when you take the time to do more than look at your neighbor from behind drawn blinds. I live in a community where people regularly invite people over for fried fish or coffee and cake; and it is a good place to live.

Turn off the things that are depressing and polluting you. Have at least one or two days each week when you do not watch TV or listen to Radio. Put good music on your CD player and listen to refreshing music as you read a book, play games with your family, or simply talk together as a family. You will be amazed at the difference it will make.

Give at least 5 compliments this week. Let someone go ahead of you in a line. Give an anonymous gift to someone just to make them feel better. Break a gossip circle by refusing to pass it on. Pray for the president and the congress (I think we all will agree that they need it!). Visit someone in a nursing home. Spend more time helping people than you do griping about situations. Read a chapter in the Bible each day and find a principle you can apply to your life that day. Take your whole family to church and discuss the sermon (instead of dissecting the preacher) at Sunday Lunch.

If things are to change in America then someone must make a difference. Will you be that someone?

July 8, 2008 PRAYING FOR THE HURTER

The book of Second Corinthians is the most personal book written by the apostle Paul. In this book Paul shares about his pains, his problems, and his personal doubts and anxieties. In his other books Paul deals with doctrinal definitions or church problems. In Second Corinthians Paul pours out his heart as he deals with personal accusations about his character-“For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” (2 Cor 10:10) and his ministry-“we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord:” (2 Cor 4:5).

At the end of this great book, when Paul could have written with bitterness and anger, he shows the heart of a true servant of God as he expresses his desires for these people who had demeaned his character and conduct. Listen to what he prayed for these people.

He asked God to give them a pure life: “Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; ... that ye should do that which is honest, ” (2 Corinthians 13:7). He asked God to make them perfect: “this also we wish, even your perfection. (2 Corinthians 13:9). And he asked God to help them live in peace- “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

All of us face hurtful situations. Sometimes the hurt comes from rejection by family and sometimes it comes from rebukes at work but regardless of where it comes from we are tempted to strike back instead of return kindness for cursing. Read again Paul’s prayer and follow his example; it is what Jesus would do (Matt 5:44).

July 9, 2008 CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

You have a “circle of influence”. You are not an “island unto yourself”. Your actions and your attitude have a profound influence upon those around you; from the way people feel when you arrive (or leave!) to the worth people develop in their character because of something you said to them or did for them. Here are three ways you impact others.

Your standards help or hurt others. Paul said that if eating meat would cause his brother to stumble in the faith then he (Paul) would no longer eat meat. Paul was aware of the many eyes that watched how he lived.

Your personality will encourage or discourage those who come in contact with you. That is why wise king Solomon said, “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go:” (Proverbs 22:24). I personally like to be with “positive people” who believe they can “do all things through Christ who strengthens them”. Negative vibrations encourage people to be discouraged and defeated.

Finally, and this is so important, your relationship with God will greatly impact those around you. When God allowed Satan to attack Job it was Job’s family that first felt the impact of Satan’s wrath. Ask the children of drunks, drug users, and divorces if they have experienced this principle! Almost always, the people around you suffer when you do wrong.

Who you are impacts those around you. Will they suffer or rejoice because of you?

July 15, 2008 FINANCE FAILURES

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (2 Corinthians 9:7-8)

If God is able to supply your needs so that you can “always have all sufficiency in all things” why does your pay check end before the month ends? Why is it so difficult for so many people to make ends meet even when they pray earnestly?

Here are a few questions you need to ask yourself when you begin to doubt God’s ability or willingness to help you in your finances.

Do I really need the things I am seeking? Do I need these things now (delayed gratification is a principle God continually stresses)? Will these things I desire bring me closer to God or will they entice me away from service and commitment to God?

Is God afraid to trust me with more because I have misused the resources God gave me previously? The verse at the beginning of the article shows that God “makes all grace abound” to those who are “cheerful givers”. Do you use scriptural principles in obtaining and disbursing your finances realizing that you must give account to God for everything He has entrusted to you (Remember the parables of the talents.)?

Is God trying to test your faith (Remember the principle of delayed gratification)? Is God trying to change you or move you to a different job or location through this?

Rest assured that God loves you and He is able to meet your every need. But He wants the best for you so that the goods that He gives you are good for you. What a great God!

July 16, 2008 MONEY SLAVERY

Sadly, even though this is the twenty first century, more and more people are learning what it means to become a slave and a captive. They are captured and controlled by overwhelming and unexpected debt. Sometimes this captivity comes because of a change of circumstances- loss of job, extreme medical bills, or unexpected catastrophe. Many times, however this slavery to debt and impending financial ruin is a self inflicted wound brought about by overwhelming desires and unwise choices.

Here are the two ways the Bible declares that a person can become a financial slave.

1. If you borrow money then you become “enslaved” to the person or institute that loans you the money- *The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. (Proverbs 22:7)*. Be extremely careful about the debt you incur. Remember the mid eastern parable of the camel- First the camel stands outside the tent. Then the camel puts its nose into the tent. Then the camel puts his neck into the tent. Finally, the camel occupies the tent while you freeze beneath the stars.

2. You can become a slave to obtaining money or spending money- *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)*. Many people have lost their holiness and their happiness because they allowed themselves to be defined by what they possessed or how much they earned.

Jesus came to set you free. He will provide for our needs and protect us from greed. Listen to His warning and learn proper perspectives about possessions from His word today.

July 22, 2008 VICTORIOUS LIVING

Christian living should be victorious living. Down in the mouth, disgruntle, discouraged Christians do not “cut it”. If I was a non believer and I looked at the attitude and actions of many Christians I would ask them to please not contaminate me with what they have! Sure, Christians have problems and troubles but they are more than conquerors through Christ (Rom 8:37) and they should live like they really believe the truth of that statement! Here are some victories that Christians should claim each day.

1> The Holy Spirit living in a Christian gives us Victory over Self- *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* (1 John 4:4). We can make positive changes in our life and attitude because the Holy Spirit gives us strength and direction.

2> Our Faith in God plan and pardon gives us Victory over the temptations and trials we encounter in the World- *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* (1 John 5:4-5).

3> The Resurrection of Jesus gives us Victory over the sting and fear of Death- *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.* (Heb 2:14-15).

Christian living should be victorious living. Is that the way you live?

July 23, 2008 THE MASTER’S VOICE

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: (John 10:27)

We were transferring files from our old computer at church to a new computer. When we installed our church membership program on the new computer we needed the password in order to set up the program and get everything to work. Numerous phone calls led to the realization that no one whom I could contact at that time knew the password. I tried every password combination I could think of related to the church and nothing worked.

Finally, I simply looked up and told the Lord I really needed His help if I was to complete this project. Suddenly, a familiar voice spoke a word to me (that had nothing to do with the church or anything connected to the church). I typed it in and watched the program open like a rose.

The funeral service was in Camden but the burial was outside of Timmons ville. On the way from Camden the Lord kept telling me to go a way that I thought was the long way. I kept telling the Lord that there was a shorter way but He insisted that I go His way (He does that a lot!). Imagine my surprise when I found that the long way to the church was the short way to the cemetery! God just chuckled.

People ask me what the Master’s Voice sounds like. I simply tell them that if you are one of His sheep then you have heard Him speak to you so much until you recognize His voice; and you learn that obeying His voice is always the best decision.

July 29, 2008 WHY A WIFE

According to the word of God there are three main reasons God saw a need to add the creation of a wife for Adam to His completed creation plan. Man needed someone to cooperate with him, to communicate with him, and to co-habitat with him.

God declared that man needed a helper “meet” for him. He needed someone who would cooperate with him as he did his God assigned task but who would also challenge him to look at things differently. Joining a man and a woman with their different temperaments and talents was just the right mix.

Man also needed someone who could communicate with him on a level beyond that of the animals. He needed someone who could rejoice with a man in his victories, weep with him in his defeats, and share with him in his daily discoveries. Women also think differently than men (I know I got an “amen” on that one!!) and men needed that perspective in order to invoke discussion that would lead to many of mankind’s discoveries.

In order to obey God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply”, mankind needed a mate that was capable of reproducing. God did not put the sexual drive in mankind simply to provide pleasure for the man. God expected fruit from this union of man and wife and He made the process so powerful and so pleasurable until it was an easy “task” for the man and woman to fulfill (Remember, it was only after sin entered that the woman began having “sorrow in bringing forth children- Gen 3:16).

No wonder the Bible declares, *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.* (Proverbs 18:22)

July 30, 2008 GIVE GOD A CHANCE

O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. (Psalms 34:8)

God is a great and good god. Like anyone who truly loves someone else, God wants things to go well for the person of His affection. The problem most people have is they do not give God the opportunity to do good in their life.

Give God a chance to Bless you- *And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.* (1 Chronicles 4:10). God wants the very best for you. That does not mean you will never have problems but it does mean that God will always work things together for good in your life if you will let Him (Rom 8:28).

Give God a chance to Guide you- *For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.* (Psalms 48:14). God will never lead you into any place that His power cannot get you out of! If you will listen to God’s directions then you will always be assured of God protection and provision.

Give God a chance to Save you- *As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me.* (Psalms 55:16). God loved you enough to send His only Son to die as a payment for your sins. He is preparing a wonderful place called Heaven for all who become His children through faith in Jesus Christ. Give yourself a chance by giving God a chance.

August 5, 2008

WHAT DOES A WINNER LOOK LIKE?

I heard a statement recently that struck a cord with me- “Winners need to know what a win looks like”. We live in a changing society. Job security is a thing of the past. People in far away places control how much I pay for gas. Morals in America continue to sink lower and lower. God is being chased out of everywhere except the Local Church; and many of these Local Churches seem to spend more time quarrelling than they do converting souls into the Kingdom of God. If this is winning, what does losing look like?

Many people define winning as boasting (we beat you), bucks (“show me the money”), or bigness (We had the largest crowd ever). Sadly, these measures of success and winning have crept into the church and are being used as methods of defining ministry.

Here are three ways to Measure Success (adapted from a message by Warren Wiersbe) that I think will help us to realistically look at what a winner is supposed to look like.

- 1) Am I where God wants me to be? God measures success by what I do where I am with what I have. I am not in competition or comparison with others. God simply expects faithful service and obedient living from His servants.
- 2) Is God glorified by my life and ministry? God looks at motives more than actions. Am I building up myself or am I building God’s Kingdom.
- 3) Can God commend my work at the Judgment? False results come when we manipulate people and manufacture success but one day I will stand before the righteous judge and He will render a perfect judgment on my works- Makes you want to pray harder and do more, doesn’t it?

August 6, 2008

GOD CHECKS CHURCHES

Churches are the house of God. They are supposed to operate in order to tell people about God, to show people how God works in the life of people, and to prepare people to be ready to stand before God’s judgment one day. Since God is the “owner” of the Church, I wondered what kind of “check list” God would use to determine if a church is functioning correctly. Then I remembered that God did just such an examination when He sent His last messages to individual churches in the book of Revelation.

After telling each church about its good and bad points God pointed out a problem designed to bring about self examination and, hopefully, repentance changes. These four problems could easily be framed into four questions: Is your Love Right? (Rev 2:4 The Ephesus Church had lost their first love and needed to get back on track), Is your Doctrine Right? (Rev 2:14 The Pergamos Church had allowed self serving principles to replace God given directives), Is your Work Right? (Rev 3:1-3 The Sardis Church had become so busy being busy until they missed serving God), and Is your Wealth Right? (Rev 3:14-19 The Laodicea Church had become so “rich and increased with goods” until they felt they no longer needed God and Jesus was outside the Church seeking entrance!).

If God sat on the back pew in your church this Sunday with a clipboard and a check list would He smile a lot or would tears begin flowing down His eyes? If you know the answer, what will you do about it?

August 12, 2008 APPLE TREES

The branches have few leaves and there are few branches but this year my two apple trees produced a dozen apples. The tree trunks are hardly bigger than my thumb and the trees are hardly higher than my head but my two apple trees produced a dozen apples this year.

I never have been handsome. I was never athletic; I was always the guy chosen last that everyone tried to put on the other team. I have always worked hard but it was always the guy who came after me who reaped the financial benefits from my labors. I am just a plain sort of fellow who when you read his name in the newspaper obituary you will stop for a moment and think, "seems like I ought to know that name from somewhere, let me think. Oh, well, I wonder if the Braves won last night". But, in spite of all of that, God has allowed me the great privilege of seeing fruit produced from my life and ministry.

You may not be the biggest tree in the forest and you may not have all the natural talents and resources of other people but God can still use you to produce fruit in His Garden. God simply ask you to be available for His use and faithful to the job He has given you and then leave the results to Him- "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5).

Do not be discouraged and do not quit. God can use even you if you will abide in Him. Oh, did I tell you that my two little apple trees produced a dozen apples this year?

August 13, 2008 GOD'S SUNSETS

Things were just winding down from a raid into North Viet Nam and I was standing on the deck of a ship watching the sun sink on the horizon. If you have never seen a sunset on the South China Sea then you have missed one of life's treasures. Flashes of gold and silver mingle with every shade of red and orange that the eye can imagine in a constantly changing barrage of beauty and brilliance. Even the most hardened of individuals find themselves unable to stop and marvel at God's setting sun light show.

As I stood there mulling over death and destruction and watching the sun go down I was reminded again of the stability and faithfulness of God. Mankind sometimes seems bound and determined to destroy themselves and everything around them as they continually look for better weapons of war and more reasons to use them. God, on the other hand, faithfully and consistently shows us beauty and growth as He uses every means available to display His magnificent character. And He does this sunset after sunset.

In the midst of debt, disease, drudgery of work, and even death you can still feast your eyes on the beauty that God displays each day. Take a few minutes and watch God shepherd the clouds across the sky in every changing patterns and pictures. Marvel at how God plants wildflowers beside a bank of green shrubbery and trees just so you can see a display of beauty as you dash through life. And do not forget the sunsets.

God displays the beauty of His character everywhere. Take time this week to soak it in and let it refresh your soul.

August 19, 2008 BACKSLIDING BEHAVIOR

No one plans to Backslide away from God. But it happens a lot more than any of us would like to admit. Here are four stages a person normally goes through when they develop a Backsliding Behavior.

First a person becomes SPOTTED BY THE WORLD- James 1:27 "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." You stray away from God and the mud from the hog pens of the world splashes up and gets on your garments.

Secondly, you cultivate a FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD- James 4:4 "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." The glitter and glamor of the world begins to sparkle in your eyes so you look for opportunities to spend more time with the World.

Thirdly, you develop a LOVE FOR THE WORLD- 1 John 2:15 "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Time, energy, and devotion are now given to the world and its pleasures instead of to the pursuit of holy living for God. Your source of joy is now worldly amusements instead of Godly fellowship.

Finally, you get to the place you CONFORM TO THE WORLD- Rom 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Your actions, your attitudes, and your affections are now controlled by the world system instead of the Holy Spirit.

The good news from all of this is that you do not have to stay in the hog pen. The Father is sitting on the porch awaiting your return right now.

August 20, 2008 HOW TO CATCH A MONKEY

Do you know how to catch a monkey? He's so fast until it's almost impossible to throw a net over him. When bananas are put out as bait for him, he will figure out a way to steal the bananas and run away laughing. But in spite of all this a monkey is very easy to catch.

Anchor a large jar with a small mouth opening to a place the monkey can see. Put an apple in the jar and sit back and wait. The monkey will come along, put his hand in the jar, grasp the apple, and then be unable to remove both his hand and the apple. Unwilling to let go of his prize he will sit there while you capture him.

This is one of those cases where man and monkey show similar traits. Time after time, Men, also, have been caught in a "greed jar". One man actually drowned when he fell into the water and refused to let go of his money belt as it dragged him beneath the water. Another man escaped from his burning house but ran back in and was later found with his burned hand grasped around his wallet. And there are numerous cases of bright intelligent people who lost family, friends, and jobs because they were caught with their hand in the "cookie jar".

Is it any wonder that God made the last of the ten commandments, "Thou shall not covet"? Get your priorities in order. Don't let money make a monkey out of you.

August 26, 2008 WATCH YOUR STEP

I know that “the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” (Psalms 37:23) so I am interested in observing how people “step through life each day”.

It was early in the morning and I was on my way to the hospital. Ahead of me I saw a woman crossing the four lane road and entering a dirt drive way leading to a run down mobile home. Her steps seemed angry and choppy as she clutched her pocket book in one hand and a gallon of milk in the other. It was evident that she had come from a country store across the road. Having to get up and get out first thing in the morning had been added to her already overloaded daily duties. She was not a happy camper and her steps conveyed the anger in her heart.

As I entered the lobby of the Hospital I looked up the stairway leading to the second floor and an elderly woman slowly trudged up the steps one weary step at a time. She would step up a step, rest for a moment, and then will herself to take another step. I do not know what sick relative or serious situation awaited her at the top of those stairs but I do know that climbing those stairs was an added challenge to her day.

I arrived in a hospital room where I sought to bring comfort and care to a young man whose life had suddenly been turned upside down by the pains in his chest and the anxiety of a heart test. I tried to walk with joy and confidence because both were greatly needed that morning.

I do not know what today holds for you but I do know that God is still in control and you can walk with confidence knowing that God orders your steps and delights in your way.

August 27, 2008 AQUAINTED WITH MY WAYS

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. (Psalms 139:1-3).

The 139th division of the Psalms reveals that God is aware of everything that happens in my life. This is a good thing when something bad happens to me and I need to know that God is aware of my situation. It is a little frightening when I realize that God sees everything I do all of the time!

Not only is God aware of what I do but David declares that God is “acquainted” with all my ways. “Acquainted” implies that God is aware of what I do in a much more intimate way than simply passing by and seeing me do something. “Acquainted” means God also sees my motives and my hidden agendas—scary isn’t it?

I read recently that we are changed by the Holy Spirit only as we respond to His leading. If that statement is true (and I believe that it is) then we can trace the lack of change in our life directly to rebellion against the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Because God is “acquainted” with me, then the Holy Spirit knows exactly what I need to change in order to become the great person God desires. It is up to me, however, to follow the leadership of the Spirit and allow Him to mold me and make me into that God honoring person.

God knows who you are and what you need to be. Let Him do something great in your life this week.

September 2, 2008 GOD KNOWS

One of the stabilizing factors in my life has been the knowledge that God “knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10). I am convinced that nothing happens in my life that is beyond God’s control or out of God’s care. God is out for my good and every circumstance of my life will be modified, muted, or managed by God in such a way until God and I both will eventually smile about life’s happenings (Rom 8:28).

That does not mean, however, that I understand or enjoy all of life’s twists and turns. Often things will happen and I will find myself looking with questioning eyes toward heaven and muttering under my breath, “You aren’t taking a nap, are you, God?” That is when God gently but firmly reminds me that His ways are not my ways and His thoughts are not my thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Sometimes it is much easier to understand and accept that a single tragic incident can be used of God to shape and mold our life than it is to deal with a long term burden such as a constantly sick husband or wife or a mentally or physically handicapped child. We know God can heal and help but years of tear drenched prayers have not changed the situation and we do not know how much more “character” we need to develop! We try not to question God but we find ourselves increasing doubting our own spiritual understanding; and sometimes we even distrust our own spiritual standing with God.

I do not have all the answers to your questions but I am absolutely convinced that God “knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10). There I stand and in that truth I rest.

September 3, 2008 LIVE LONG AND PROSPER

As a human, I like it when I prosper in life. As a member of the family of God, I like it when I see other children of God prosper in life. Here are some guidelines that will help you prosper no matter who wins the election or what happens to the world economy.

When God is with you; and you are with God, then circumstances will work together for prosperity and good- “And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.” (Gen 39:3). (See also Romans 8:28).

When you live according to Biblical Principles then God is able to make you prosper- “Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.” (Deu 29:9)

When you trust God’s guidance more than men’s knowledge then God is able to make you prosper- “And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.” (2 Chr 20:20)

When you “delight in the law of the Lord; and meditate on his law day and night” then you will be “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; your leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever you do shall prosper.” (Psa 1:2-3).

My prayer for you- “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” (3 John 1:2).

September 9, 2008 SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

You do not realize the value of language until you go to a place where everyone speaks another language. It is so frustrating when you know what you want but you are unable to convey that information to the people around you. That is almost exactly what it feels like for a non-Christian to be around Christians.

The goals of non-Christians are different from those of a Christian- Ro 8:5 *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.* A non-Christian's thoughts are centered around things like pleasure, profit, or personal pursuits. A Christian's goals, however, lead toward glorifying God, gaining goodness, and getting others to know the wonderful joy and peace they have found in a relationship with Christ.

The Understanding of a non-Christian is different than the perception of a Christian- 1 Cor 2:14 *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* When a Christian talks about the "things of the Spirit" (the Holy Spirit's gifts, and teachings, and revelations) to a non-Christian it is like talking to them in a "foreign" language. They hear what the Christian says but it does not make "sense" because spiritual principles do not compute with natural perceptions.

Sometimes this frustration over not being able to understand the goals and principles of the Holy Spirit causes non-Christians to become angry and irritated with followers of Christ. Because we follow a different leader and speak a different language then they find Christianity strange and scary. But what a change takes place when they accept Christ and learn to "speak the language".

September 10, 2008 LIFE GOALS

What do you want out of life? Some people's goal is to be debt free- a commendable and Bible based Goal; *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.* (Romans 13:8), but one not easily attained by most people. Other people goals include achieving a certain objective in sports or in business, reaching a certain social standing, or securing enough prosperity to allow you to do what you want to do when you want to do it.

Goals are important- "He who aims at nothing normally hits it". Goals provide energy and meaning to life- *Where there is no vision, the people perish: ...* (Proverbs 29:18). But you must believe you can achieve a Goal or you will end up wandering through life and never really accomplish anything- *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.* (James 1:6). Foggy Goals lead to a reactive life where you always respond to life's circumstances and situations instead of an achieving life where you attain victories and maintain some control over life's happenings.

I have some personal and physical goals I want to reach but my main goals in life relate to my relationship with God and my service to Him. My seven life goals are: To be justified by the blood of Christ, purified by the power of the Spirit, edified by the teachings of God's Word, dignified by constantly growing Christian character, unified with fellow believers in worship and work, satisfied with the presence and peace of Christ, and glorified one day with God. That is who I am and that is where I am going; what about you?

September 16, 2008

PARTNERING WITH A BLESSING

God has allowed me to associate with a church that is experiencing showers of blessings. Souls are being saved on a regular basis. People are being baptized on a regular basis. So a large number of people are attending our church and we are experiencing explosive growth (We have already been forced to move from our Sanctuary into the Family Life Center and now that temporary facility is so full until we are having to become innovative with our seating- some of our people are actually being forced to sit on the front seat!).

God is using our dynamic young Pastor in a mighty way and it is a tremendous honor to be part of this great work that God is building. I tell people, however, that it is not a show to enjoy, it is a Blessing that they should determine to be an active participant in. Here are several ways that I encourage our people to partner in the Blessing (Ways that will also help you to do more where you attend Church).

First of all, do not miss the Blessings- Be here each service to enjoy and participate in what God is doing. Second, Share the Blessings- I tell our people to tell others about the good things God is doing at Lebanon FWB Church every chance they get. Third, Invite others to be a part of the blessing. God did not call me to be a "salvation salesman" and I have little success at trying to make people make a decision. It is not hard, however, to invite people to a growing, thriving church where the presence of God and the power of God are manifested in each service. As one man said, "It is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find an abundant supply of bread!"

Finally, and this is so important, Do everything YOU can to do to make sure the Blessings continue. God is doing a great work; let us try not to get in His way! Let's partner with the blessing and enjoy what HE is doing.

September 17, 2008

END WELL

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. (2 John 1:8). As I approach the end of my race for the Lord, I want to make absolutely sure about at least two things- I want to run until the race is over (The Promised Land is right across the river. I am too near home to end up discouraged under a juniper tree instead of celebrating at Jordan's Crossing!) and I want to be better at the end than I was at the beginning (God always looks for growth and maturity in His people). I guess I can say I want to run the entire race and receive a full reward.

I also pray that the Lord will help me with three areas of my life that I have noticed as problem areas in other Seniors- I do not want to become Bitter in my life or in my talk; I do not want to become a Beggar in order to get the things I need (I expect God to take care of me even unto old age- Ps. 71:9); and I do not want to allow anything to bring me into Bondage as my body, my mind and my emotions age (I have seen numerous older people become addictive to wrong desires or things as they neared the end of their life).

They have entire TV shows about people who thought they had won but ended up "dropping the ball" just before the goal line. When my life story is shown on Heavenly TV I want the viewers to congratulate me on a race well run and I want my Master to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

September 23, 2008 BABY CHRISTIANS

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. (Hebrews 5:12-13)

One of the greatest problems facing the Church today is the unwillingness of Christians to grow beyond the “baby” stage into mature Christians. People want to be born into God's family so they can get their names on the Heavenly Inheritance roll book but they show little or no desire to grow into mature Christian Disciples. As a result, many Churches stagnate and fail to grow because the teachers and leaders in the Church have so many “babies” to take care of until they spend all their time and energy in the “nursery” of the Church instead of trying to reap a harvest in the “vineyard”.

“Baby” characteristics are easy to see in the average Church. Babies have not yet learned to care for themselves so they need to be cleaned often (Many Christians need constant trips to the altar to confess sins and renew dedications because they never seem to be able to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ). Babies love to be sung to and petted (Need I say more!). Babies whine for milk but meat gives them problems (The average Christian in the average church wants an exciting sermon; not a life changing message from God). And Babies cry when anything does not go their way- Most new churches in America today are the result of a split among Christians instead of a vision from God!

What is in your diet- Milk or Meat?

September 24, 2008 ATTENDING CHURCH

Here are 4 reasons you should attend a Bible Believing, Gospel Preaching Church this week.

1) God COMMANDS that we “not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhort one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25). I just figure that if God tells us to do something then we ought to do it!

2) There is COMFORT in attending Church. The Church is the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27) and it delights Him when people come together to worship His Father and fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ. And what a comfort it is each week to hear a message from God that shows me how to triumph in life even as we face the trials and temptations of daily living.

3) There is CHEERFULNESS in attending Church- I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. (Psalms 122:1). Christians enjoy going to the "Father's" House and eating at His table so they come to church with a smile on their face and a song on their lips (Sometimes a “grumpy dwarf” will show up at church but if they will allow the Holy Spirit to work it will not belong until that frown is turned upside down).

4) Finally, there is a CHANGE that takes place when you attend Church each week. You grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and watch in wonder as your vocabulary changes, your goals expand, and you become a new creature in Christ (2Cor 5:17).

I plan to be in Church this Sunday. Hope to see you there.

September 30, 2008

4 THINGS TO KNOW

We live in a constantly changing world where a strong wind can almost double gas prices and where foundational financial institutes can suddenly crumble and collapse. People used to go to bed with confidence that the coming day would bring security and accomplishment. Now they awaken each morning hoping the nightmare will end when they open their eyes! In the midst of this turmoil and chaos there are 4 things you need to absolutely know if you are to have peace in the midst of the storms.

1) YOU MUST KNOW WHO YOU ARE TRUSTING FOR YOUR ETERNAL DESTINY- (2 Tim 1:12) *For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.* Is your future hope build on the ROCK (Jesus Christ) or have you built on the sinking sands of human philosophy?

2) KNOW WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF YOU- (James 2:20) *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* God expects your faith in Jesus to change who you are and what you do. If Christianity is simply talk but not walk then you did not get the good stuff!

3) KNOW THAT PRAYER WORKS- (1 John 5:15) *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.* Prayer is not magic but it is mighty. Knowing God answers prayer will change your prayers; and your life

4) KNOW THAT YOUR OWN WILL DETERMINES WHO RULES YOUR LIFE- (Rom 6:16) *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?* Circumstances bring challenges and personality present problems but who you yield to will determine who controls your life.

Knowing what you need to know is vital in a constantly changing world.

Oct 1, 2008

THE LIGHT LIFE

The pattern God used to create the world is the same pattern He uses to create a new creature through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Initially, a person has to realize they are “without form and void” (They have no purpose and their life is empty and meaningless). This happens when the Spirit of God “broods” over the person and enables them to realize they are in darkness and despair.

That is when God wondrously declares (Through His word, His workers, or the witness of the Holy Spirit), “Let there be light”. This life giving and transforming light is directly from the person of God (In creation it was not until day four that God created the sun to assist the earth in its growth). Nearly 4000 years after creation, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, declared “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”. (John 8:12) and we saw this transforming power of God at work in our very midst.

When the Light shines in a person's life their life is transformed in three wonderful ways; just like the world was transformed during creation. First, God bring order and structure to a life that was without “Form”. Secondly, God begins to “Fill” the person's life with the things necessary for that person to be the new creation God intends for them to be. Finally, God enables the person to be “Fruitful” as the fruits of the Spirit are manifested in their life and they share the good news of Christ with others so they too can see the Light.

God wants to change you from a wasteland into a wonder. Allows His light to shine in your life today.

October 7, 2008 VESSEL VALUE

The great heart cry of every committed Christian is that he would “know how to possess his vessel (his body) in sanctification and honour;” (1 Thessalonians 4:4). Lukewarm, non committed Christians see God only as a “Hell escape” provision they must endure while on earth. Those who have a real relationship with Christ want desperately to please Him in all they think and do. In order for this to happen, a person must realize things about their “vessel”.

First, you must realize they are a “Chosen Vessel”- *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:* (Acts 9:15). Regardless of what you may think about your talents and abilities a person must realize God has chosen them and “God don't make no junk”.

Secondly, you must seek to be a “Clean Vessel”- *If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.* (2 Timothy 2:21). God wants to honor you and use you but a dirty vessel means the Holy Spirit has to stop working through you and begin working on you.

Finally, if a “vessel” is to have value it must admit it is an “Earthen Vessel”- *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.* (2 Corinthians 4:7). It is not the vessel that brings the blessing; it is what is contained in the vessel that does the work!

Are you a clean vessel waiting on the Master to use you, or are you a dirty dish sitting in the sink desperately in need of cleaning so you can be filled and usable?

October 8, 2008 THE UNIQUE RESOURCE

Time is a unique resource. It cannot be saved or hoarded as you can with other resources. Time is perishable; once it reaches its expiration date then the opportunity to use it has passed. This means that time can only be used during its “time”. It cannot be recovered, recycled, or put in a storage container for use when you have the desire or opportunity.

Time is unique in the fact that it is irreplaceable. No matter how much you want of it; the quantity of time will not increase. There is no substitute for time so we should treat time as one of our most precious resources.

Time represents the passing of life so what you do with time determines what you do in life. Yet many of us never realize the value of this unique resource and we spend much of our time “wasting time”. In fact, of all the resources God has given us, Time is probably the one most people manage (or mismanage) the worst.

The Bible tells us that we are to “redeem time”- *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* (Eph 5:16); *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.* (Col 4:5). The Greek word used in these verses for “redeem” means to rescue from loss. God realizes what a unique resource He has given us when He gave us time and He does not want us to “lose time”.

Time is a perishable resource given to you by God. No matter what you do, one day your time will run out and you will face God to give an account about how you have used your time. Will that be a time of rejoicing or a time of regret?

October 14, 2008 PUTTING A HOLE IN GOD'S HEART

A grieving heart finds little joy in life. Sadly, as a Pastor, I have watched families and friends grieve over the loss of a loved one more times that I care to remember. No matter how pretty the weather or how lovely the sunset these people see only darkness and gloom as the vapors of the valley of death seep out into their world and wrap their hearts with bone chilling coldness.

The Hebrew word used in the Bible for “Grieved” explains grief with graphic intensity- “Sorrow that brings pain” or “Sadness that carves a hole in your heart”. It is this last definition that I want to use today to help us see how sinful living impacts God and “puts a hole in His heart”.

The first time God is described as being “grieved” is Gen 6:6 “And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” This grief eventually hurt God so much until He decided to “end it all” for mankind; until Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and an ark was built to survive the flood.

Again God is described as being “grieved” when His liberated people continually rebelled against Him after they were delivered from Egypt- “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways:” (Psalms 95:10). The rebellion of His people eventually lead God to allow the nation to die in the desert.

Do not put a “hole in God's heart” with your sin and rebellion. God wants to glory over you with goodness instead of grieve over you with punishment. But God can only do what you allow Him to do based on your behavior and belief.

October 15, 2008 MOVING GOD'S MERCY

And Israel put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. (Judges 10:16).

People ignored God's laws and moral standards. The Nation began slipping into economic and moral anarchy. God sent preachers to call the people to repentance and renewal. The people decided to continue serving pleasure and profit so they ignored the preachers. The moral and social standards of the nation got worst (Sound familiar?).

Finally, God allowed the nation to go into captivity so the people could see the seriousness of their sin. Things became so bad until a national leader testified about the hopelessness and helplessness of the nations situation by declaring, “The increase of our land is given unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.” (Nehemiah 9:37).

But God was in Heaven looking down upon His people. His righteous judgment had brought captivity and calamity to the nation. Now His loving heart heard their cries of anguish and despair and “the soul of God was grieved for the misery of Israel” and He stirred the heart of a man to lead the nation out of captivity and into a place of blessing.

Our nation is in distress. God is calling us to put away the strange gods among us and begin again to serve the Lord. Only that will stir the mercy of God and allow Him to bring us back to a place of prosperity and blessing.

October 21, 2008 SELF IMPROVEMENT

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

Unless you have a tremendous ego, you realize you need to improve areas of your life. The first step in that process is to take a realistic look at what is presently going on in your life. Determine the things that need improvement and then determine to work to improve these areas. Warning; realize that some things cannot be changed; such as physical abilities (I am tone deaf. I can train myself to sing better but I will never be able to sing like a person with natural singing abilities). Do not use this, however, as an excuse to avoid the hard work of changing the things which can be changed: Here are some questions you should ask yourself as you begin this process.

1. Do the clothes I wear and the way I groom myself promote Christian modesty and character?
2. Does my language ever bring reproach to the cause of Christ? Do I find myself talking about people's problems and personalities when I should be praying for these situations?
3. Are my feelings easily hurt so that I lash out at others? Do I become so upset and worried over life's problems until I spread gloom instead of the gospel? Do I constantly break the 10th commandment by craving the life style and processions of others?
4. Do I find myself wasting time and money? Do I fail to accomplish what I should in a day's work?
5. Am I constantly thinking and talking about myself and my accomplishments? Do I constantly insist on having my own way?

Take a long look in the mirror. Then ask God to help you become the wonderful person He created you to be.

October 22, 2008 HALF A SORROW

"A shared sorrow is half a sorrow. A shared Joy is twice a Joy"- Anon. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2).

One of the wisest men who ever lived (Solomon) said it this way, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

Even in creation, God said that every thing was good until He looked and saw the lonely heart of man and declared, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Genesis 2:18). God knew that mankind needed someone who could share his feelings and his failures so He made a suitable helper (woman) who was able to cry when man sorrowed and laugh when man rejoiced. Suddenly the night did not seem so dark or lonely and the successes of the day took on new and energizing meanings.

Church is not just about worshiping God; it is also about working together as a body of believers in order to support the weak and to rejoice in the victories of God's people. Church is about sharing sorrows so many ways until they seem to disappear. Church is about "little blessings" becoming great victories as they multiply in meaning and bring encouragement to the entire family of God. Church is about people allowing God to work through them to help other people. Is that what happens at your church?

October 28, 2008 ALWAYS PLEASE GOD

Salvation is a heart grieving (repentance), soul believing (faith), life changing (born again) experience. It is not about being better or joining a church, although this should happen. It is a radical change in a person's life brought about by the realization that they have failed in their duty to others, to themselves, and, most of all, to God.

This realization brings them to understand that the heart of their problem is the problem of their heart. Their self centered desires and behavior produced attitudes and actions in their life which defiled their life and destroyed their relationship with God and others. Now they recognize that only a power beyond themselves can produce the long term changes they seek. This is when they come to God and ask Him to totally transform their life by forgiving their past and providing the power they need to have a new future.

God mercifully and graciously forgives them of their sin debt and invites them into a new life of abundant living. But here is where the "bump in the road" comes for so many. They assume "accepting Jesus" is simply a "get out of jail free card" which enables them to turn over a new leaf and start down the same road with a fresh beginning. In reality, God now calls them to begin the self crucified life that was exemplified by Jesus Christ.

Jesus summarized His life and ministry in a simple statement, "... I do always those things that please the Father" (John 8:29). When people ask me how to live the victorious Christian life I tell them to learn to let God direct their life instead of being controlled by their own understanding and desires. It sounds simple but it still amazes me to see how few people (even in churches) set as their goal in life to "always do the things that please God".

October 29, 2008 HALLOWEEN POLITICS

A difficult choice has to be made. This is my last article before Halloween but it is also my last article before the election. I really want to warn people about the dangers of dressing up as witches and demons and using threats to obtain candy but I am very concerned with the upcoming election and its impact on the foundations of America. Finally, I came to realize that both problems need to be addressed with similar admonitions.

There are a lot of people who pretend to be something they are not at Halloween and during an election. They dress up to convey a certain image but underneath they are the same people they have always been. Beware of the "wolf dressed up in sheep's clothing" this time of year.

Everyone knows there is a lot of "candy" up for grabs right now and some people will do weird and silly things to get some of that candy. People will beg and threaten and go to a lot of trouble just to get everyone to give them some candy because they know that a little bit from everyone will add up to a lot in the end. Just remember, the free candy they want is candy YOU have to pay for.

The main thing that disturbs me about Halloween- and Politics; is that everyone seems to be more concerned with getting and distributing "candy" than they are about vital moral issues. People are willing to excuse any behavior in order to "trick or treat" and they also seem willing to accept really bad moral standards from any person or party that is willing to promise less taxes and more prosperity.

Halloween and Politics; two similar events that we need to prayerfully and carefully consider.

November 4, 2008 ELECTION THOUGHTS

There are two kinds of people in the United States today; those who will vote and those who will pass up one of the most wonderful privileges given to any citizen. There are two kinds of people in the United States today; those who can complain about the results and the repercussions of the election because they voted and those who have no right to complain or gripe because they were so lazy or so unconcerned until they did not exercise their right to vote.

Under the pressure and scrutiny of the public eye people often make decisions and declarations that are "politically expedient". In the isolation of the election booth these people make choices that truthfully reflect the genuineness of their character. Jesus said, "... out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. (Matthew 12:34). If He were living in America today I believe He might paraphrase this sometimes to "the true test of a man's character is whether he votes for moral values or for money values in an election".

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1). I believe that sometimes God gives us great leaders in order to bless His people and I believe that sometimes God gives us what we deserve in order to help us see the error of our ways. Either way, God does right.

Regardless of the outcome of this election I plan to pray for our president and keep on serving God. But I also plan to vote; so I can quarrel and complain about the government when it does not operate in the way I think a government should operate! Thank God I live in America where I am allowed to do this.

November 5, 2008 HUNGER

One of the responsibilities of a Pastor is to seek to produce a hunger for the word of God in the heart of his congregation. A good Pastor wants his sheep to hunger for green pastures where they can be energized and renewed as they feed themselves on the eternal word of God.

That led me to wonder, what makes a man hungry? Lack of food makes a man hungry. Sounds simple but it is true that if you allow enough time to pass without getting something to eat then you will become hungry. That is why we have church and bible study on a regular basis; people should be hungry to hear God's word by the time they return to God's house.

Exercise makes a person hungry. When I live my Christian life and do my Christian duties I find myself constantly in need of the instruction and the encouragement of the word of God. When I get slack in my Christian life I find little desire to read and study God's word.

Aroma makes a person hungry (walking into a room where biscuits are cooking or steak is frying almost always starts the hunger pains growing). Prayer is called an aroma before God. When I talk to God in prayer it almost always leads me to want to read God's word so that He can talk back to me.

Idleness (...an idle soul shall suffer hunger-Proverbs 19:15) also produces hunger but it is for the wrong food. When I fail to pray and live for God I find myself feeding on entertainment instead of inspiration; and it just does not satisfy.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6). May you want the word today; and may your cravings be satisfied.

November 11, 2008

CHAIN LINKS

In 1858, a Sunday School Teacher named Mr. Kimball led a Boston shoe clerk to give his life to Christ. This shoe clerk was named, Dwight L Moody, who became a Pastor and an evangelist. Dwight Moody preached a Revival in England where an evangelistic zeal was stirred in the heart of Frederick B Meyer, the pastor of a small church.

This evangelistic zeal in the heart of F B Meyer caused such a stir until he was invited to come to America and preach a series of message on American college campuses. During these meetings a student named J Wilbur Chapman was converted. Wilbur Chapman became active in YMCA work where he employed a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to do evangelistic work. Billy Sunday held a revival in Charlotte, North Carolina that so stirred a group of local business men until they planned another campaign where Mordecai Hamm would come and preach. In that revival, a young man named Billy Graham heard the gospel and yielded his life to Christ.

The ripple effect of Christian testimony and witness is often amazing. Time after time when you read the life story of some “famous” Christian you find that some dedicated Sunday School teacher or Christian worker serving faithfully in an obscure place with little recognition was the first link in the chain of their success.

Has God called you to a small place where you receive little recognition or glory? Do you think your efforts are having little impact so you are tempted to do less than your best? Just remember that the seed you are sowing today may become a gigantic oak in days to come. Be steadfast and faithful. God sees what you are doing; and He may want to use you to start a mighty miracle.

November 12, 2008

PURPLE ROOMS

Maybe the reason I find it so difficult to serve God sometimes is because I am painting the room purple when God really wants it blue. Let me explain. My wife is a neat freak. I thought she wanted me to bring her flowers and whisper sweet nothings in her ear in order to build our relationship. After years of frustration and failure I discovered she is much more interested in me getting a hair cut than she is in me whispering in her ear! Her world revolves around a clean kitchen, a sparkling bathroom, and rugs that are vacuumed each week. I discovered that if I am going to bring joy to her life then the best place to start is to be neat myself and then offer to help her get her housework done.

God declared “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Many times I believe people try to do the things they assume God wants them to do while in reality God had a different agenda the entire time. As a result, God does not smile as we think He should so we become frustrated and disillusioned.

It may be a big help to your Christian walk if you would spend some time with God finding out “what color He wants the room painted” before you rush off to buy paint and started slapping purple paint everywhere. After all, it is God's “room” we are painting and He is the one we want to please.

November 18, 2008

SALVATION STABILITY

There are basically four doctrines that people within the Christian community use to identify the stability of their salvation relationship with God. Since the Salvation decision is the single most important decision in a person's life then I felt it was important for us to look at these stability concepts regarding the permanence of your Salvation decision.

1) Repeated Regeneration- A person can be saved and lost and saved and lost depending on how "good" they are at any particular time.

2) Repentance Renewal- When a saved person sins they will be lost unless they "repent" of that sin before they meet God.

3) Ridiculous Righteousness – A person can come to an altar at five and "accept Christ" and then live like the devil for the rest of their life safe in the knowledge that they made a "profession" of faith as some time in their life.

4) Resting Relationship- Salvation is based on continued faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. In this relationship a person is not saved by works but is saved by the Grace of God in order to bring glory to God and to perform good works as directed by God. This person does not have to continually try to be righteous; they rest in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Please be aware that these are broad brush strokes on the "canvas of Salvation Stability" which contains a vast number of very fine and delicate lines. The subject is important enough, however, to cause me to endure the criticism from an article like this if it will get people to dive deeply into the word of God and see for themselves the wonder and stability of the glorious gift of salvation that is ours through faith in God's son, Jesus Christ.

November 19, 2008

CHRISTIAN

The word "Christian" is found only three times in Scripture. Looking at these scriptures will give us an idea of what we should expect as a Christian and what we should look for in those who claim to be Christians.

1) Christ like Character and Conduct- Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. Paul told the Corinthian church that they were his "epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:" (2Co 3:2). When you live with or around a person it will not be long until you know if they are a Christian.

2) Committed Faith in the Sacrifice and Resurrection of Jesus Christ- Acts 26:28 *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* A Christian is persuaded that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for his sins, who rose from the dead, and who is coming back for His people some glorious day. You do not just believe there "was a Jesus"; you get in the boat with Christ and sail away from the shore of this life toward a Heavenly country.

3) Persecution and misunderstanding from those who are not Christians- 1 Peter 4:16 *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.* A Christian is in the world but not of the world. He has a different "King" so he is looked upon with suspicion and fear by those who serve the god of this world.

Do people see in your life the characteristics of a Bible Christian?

November 25, 2008

THANKSGIVING THANKS

Thank the Lord for Thanksgiving. Yes, I enjoy the season; cool days, crisp mornings, and magnificent splashes of colors that awes the eyes and stir the senses. I also like the food and fellowship; the smell of baking bread, the table loaded with more than you can possibly eat, and the family getting together to celebrate another year of love and blessings. But most of all, I enjoy the “Thanks” of thanksgiving.

I thank the Lord for the people in my life who have molded me, loved me, and allowed me to be a part of their life- *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;* (1 Thessalonians 1:2)

I thank the Lord for the victories I have experienced because of His power and provision- *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.* (2 Corinthians 2:14)

I thank the Lord for loving me when I was unlovable and sending His dear son, Jesus Christ to die as a payment for my sins and shortcomings- *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Corinthians 15:56-57)

I thank God that God likes me to thank God! - *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.* (Hebrews 13:15)

If I could give you any advice today it would simply be *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). It will do you, and those around you, good.

November 26, 2008

SPIRIT FILLED THANKS

One of the marks of being “Filled with the Spirit of God” is to be a thankful person- *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;* (Ephesians 5:18-20). Thanks always for all things- that takes being Spirit filled!

One way to “bring the Spirit” to a Church Service is to sing praises and thanks to God- *It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;* (2 Chronicles 5:13). The Spirit came on the day of Pentecost when the people were in one accord; praising and thanking God helps bring about that unity.

When people are filled with the Spirit and offer praise and thanksgiving to God it “heals” them on the inside and makes them a blessing instead of a burden- *A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.* (Proverbs 17:22). Who wants to be around or take advice from a “grumpy grouch”. A person’s praiseful spirit helps them be a much more effective worker and witness.

Be a Praiseful Person this week. It will bless you and it will bless those around you.

December 2, 2008 ABOUT CHRISTMAS

Christmas is not about a shopping holiday; it is about a Savior's Birth! It is not about presents, it is about His Presence. Christmas is a celebration of God coming from heaven to earth in order that man may go from earth to heaven. Christmas is about God becoming the son of man in order that men could become sons of God. Christmas is not about football, family gatherings, or festivals to celebrate the winter solstice. Christmas is about a baby being born in Bethlehem who would change the world by changing the hearts of people in the world.

Christmas is a time to *Give thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* (Colossians 1:12-17)

The reason for Christmas is because *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). It is a celebration of God's love, of Christ's coming to earth, and of hope and help for all of mankind. It is not just a holiday; it is the birthday of God's Son and my savior. Keep that in mind this Christmas season.

December 3, 2008 GOD NEEDS YOUR HELP

The situation developed at the front door of the Hospital where I was about to visit some patients. An elderly man had just picked up his wife from a hospital stay and loaded her into the car. He had left the car running in order to keep it warm for her and some way in the process of loading her into the car the doors to the car had gotten locked. Now the lady and the key were both locked in the car.

Due to age and medicine, the lady in the car was unable to understand that her husband needed her to push the button to unlock the door to the car. It was heart breaking to watch this husband plead with his wife with all of his patience and ability and yet watch as she looked at him with total incomprehension about what he wanted her to do. It was a simple task for this lady to lay her hand on the button and unlock the door but no amount of pleading and begging could get her to push the button.

The Bible declares that Jesus stands at the door to our heart patiently knocking and pleading for entrance in order to save our soul and bless our life. I know it must be extremely frustrating to Him that so many people simply sit and stare at Him instead of opening the door and allowing Him entrance. Oh, how His heart must break as He watches us suffer and miss going "home" simply because we will not unlock the door to our heart and let Him in.

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

December 9, 2008 MAN MISTAKE

God made it very simple in the beginning. Anything is allowed except one thing (Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). With everything but one thing man wanted the one thing that would take away every thing so he disobeyed God and ending up hiding in the bushes instead of walking with God. When I see people make really bad decisions today I try to remember that their genes came down from Adam!

Next came the excuses and man became a master of excuses- 1) Adam blamed Eve and Eve said Satan make me do it (It was someone else's fault). 2) Aaron created a golden calf to worship while Moses was on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments. When Moses confronted him he told Moses that he had simply cast the people's gold into the fire and a calf came out (Ex. 32:24). (Circumstances lead me to do wrong). 3) When Esau sold his birth right for a bowl of beans he blamed his hunger for his trespass (Gen 25:30). (My overwhelming Passion persuaded me to do wrong).

Adam found that disobeying God puts you out of the garden of blessings into the fields of briars. Eve found that listening to Satan words now meant she had to start listening to her husband instructions even as she moaned with pain in the birth of children (Gen 3:16-19). Both found the way into the garden of God was now blocked.

What a horrible story. And it would end so tragically if it were not for the fact that "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). Aren't you glad Christmas is about Christ?

December 10, 2008 MY MISTAKE

The holidays had come. Abundant food everywhere. Coffee and choice of sweets for breakfast- Glory! Trying to get into the pumpkin cake I looked at my wife and asked, "Who was the crazy who wrapped this cake up so strangely until it is almost impossible to get into?" She smiled her pretty little pixie smile and said, "I believe it was YOU who wrapped up that cake".

"Oh," I said. "You mean it was the handsome, intelligent, and fabulous crazy that lives with you who wrapped up the cake." Amazing isn't it how a mistake does not seem nearly as bad when it is YOU who makes the mistake!

The word "mistake" is not found in the Bible. The word "error" is found only 13 times and many of those times it is used to describe a false doctrine. One interesting time it is found, however, is in the earliest book of the Bible, Job- *And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself.* (Job 19:4).

Job had several "friends" who came to comfort him in his sickness but ended up chastising him by implying that his problems were because of some wickedness or sin in his life (Which was exactly opposite of the factual reason; he was persecuted by Satan because he was the most righteous man of his time). Job was now telling his friends that if he made a mistake then he would live with that mistake.

I have made many mistakes; from wrongly wrapping cake to wrongly accusing people of errors. Thank God that He loved me enough to point out the mistakes and then pardon my transgressions because of the sacrifice of His son. And that is the real heart of what Christmas is all about.

December 16, 2008 CHRIST AND CHRISTMAS

Take Christ out of Christmas? What planet did you come from? The reason for the season is the celebration of the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Merchants and the Media have seized upon the generosity and good will that flows so naturally from this celebration of God becoming flesh and tried to make it nothing but a “blip” on the yearly economic calendar. Take Christ and all He means out of the picture and see the empty hollow holiday you have left.

The presents that are given at Christmas are given to symbolize the gift that God gave on that first Christmas morning. Take away the giving of gifts at this time of year and listen to the Merchants and Media squeal. The decorations and festivities were originally intended to symbolize various aspects of the celebration of the Birth of Christ. Without Christ all you can decorate for is a weird nosed reindeer or a generous fat man who warns you to earn any gift you receive by being good (which would disqualify many Merchants and Media!!).

The Apostle Peter said Jesus was “a rock of offence” (I Pet 2:8) to those who disregard the word of God. My love for, and commitment to, God supersedes the wishes of a few people who want me to stop celebrating one of the greatest events in the history of the world; the birth of God’s Son. If this offends some people then so be it. I can only encourage these people to stay in their undecorated homes, empty of any Christmas gifts, and stop offending me while I celebrate the wonderful love of God which was shown in the birth of His Son.

December 17, 2008 WICKEDNESS CORRECTION

Thine own wickedness shall correct (discipline) thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts. (Jeremiah 2:19).

Jeremiah lived in a tumultuous time of foreign war, economic upheaval, and political turmoil (sound familiar?). The sinful actions and attitudes of the nation had caught up with the nation and the “let’s play and never pay” attitude of the people had produced a harvest of havoc in families, in finances, and in moral values. Babies were killed as sacrifices to pleasure, the elderly were no longer honored, and “eat, drink, and be merry” was the guiding principle of much of society.

Like Jeremiah, we live in a troubled time where sinful practices and principles have become the law of the land. Like the religious people of Jeremiah’s day Society has turned away from the Bible and begun to do that which feels right in its own eyes. And like the nation of Jeremiah’s day our nation is suffering the chaos of moral collapse and financial ruin because of our wicked ways.

People need to again be told that “it is an evil thing and bitter, to forsake the Lord thy God, and to not fear Him”. It is an evil thing and bitter when a few fanatics tell the vast majority we can no longer honor God on His birthday. It is an evil thing and bitter when schools are told to condone and celebrate “mother earth” but remain utterly quiet about Father God. I greatly fear that “our own wickedness shall correct us”.

December 23, 2008 GIFT GUIDELINES

One of the most difficult decisions some people face during this Christmas season is determining what gift to give. When people have all they seem to need or when you do not know a person well enough to know what they need then it is very difficult to get a gift for that person. It is not that you do not love that person and desire to give them a gift but you do not know what is appropriate or needed. Here are some "Gift guidelines" that may help.

Be aware of the Potential of the Gift. A gift can be a tremendous blessing as it shows love and concern but it can also be a tremendous burden if it insults, injures, or invites a person to think or act wrongly. A gift should not empower a person's weakness (no alcohol to an alcoholic), promote a person's wickedness (subscription to Playboy), or develop a person's worldliness (violent video games or movies).

Be Practical in your giving. Employ the principle of giving used by the Wise Men: 1) Gold- Money gifts to help with needs 2) Frankincense (perfume)- personal gifts for the individual 3) Myrrh- Service gifts that involve sacrifice (IOU to baby sit or wash your car, etc).

Realize the Preciousness of your gift- *A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.* (Proverbs 17:8). When people sense the love in your gift then they will delight in your care for them and your gift will multiply in meaning.

Do not allow the pressure and "politics" of gift giving to steal the joy that comes from sharing with others this Christmas. And always remember that God's gift to you is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 6:23)

December 24, 2008 MISSING CHRISTMAS

If we are not careful then Christmas simply becomes a time when we feed our Greed, neglect those in Need, and overdo our Feeds. Of course, it was never meant to be like this. Christmas should be a time of peace on earth and good will toward men. It should be a commemoration of God becoming a man which should bring about a time of joy and jubilation.

Sadly, for most people, the Christmas season is now equated with intense shopping, increasing stress, and unending sports on TV. It is now a time of riotous parties, no available parking at the mall, and the unspoken desire in the hearts of many people for Christmas to finally be over so life can get back to "normal".

My main concern is not that the Atheist will kill Christmas; we seem to have done a good job of that on our own! Darkness cannot win over light unless the light is producing so much smoke and smudge until it stops itself from shining. This seems to be exactly what is happening in our society today.

God gave us Christmas. No government or group can take it from you. But if you are so busy with your inn full of people until you do not have room for Jesus then you will miss the message from the angels and overlook the manger with the Christ child. And Christmas will just be a busy time instead of a blessed celebration.

Don't miss Christmas this Christmas. May it be a time you are filled with God's love and centered on God's Son, Jesus Christ. MERRY CHRISTMAS.

December 30, 2008 IMPACT OF THE KINGDOM

God was extremely good to the Church where I serve as Assistant Pastor in 2008. We had great growth (We had to move out of our Sanctuary into our Family Life Center in order to accommodate the increase in attendance) and God blessed with many new believers, many baptisms, and great manifestations of God's Glory and Power. We anticipate even more blessings and increase in 2009 as we continue to stand in awe of God doing a "God thing" at our Church.

The motto of our Church is "A Church where God's Kingdom Impacts Your Life". With that in mind, we are surveying our congregation with several questions at the beginning of this new year. I thought the questions were important enough until they would be of interest to my readers as well as my congregation.

1) How did Lebanon (Put your church here) cause the Kingdom of God to impact your life in 2008? If the answer is, "I am not sure" or "I cannot pin point an answer to that question" then that means we have failed in our growth goals for your life.

2) What can we do to help you live the challenge of allowing God's Kingdom to impact every area of your life on a regular basis?

3) The Bible declares that the Kingdom of God is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17). Are you more righteous now than you were a year ago? Does your life have more peace and Holy Ghost Joy now than at this time last year? Is the Kingdom of God being produced in your life?

Jesus preached the things "pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1: 3). May God help us as Christians in this coming year to stop "attending church" and begin "building the Kingdom of God".

December 31, 2008 MASTER MOMENTS

I began writing devotional articles for this newspaper in 1989. If you do the math on that it means that I have written over 1000 devotional articles during that time (20 years times 52 weekly articles per year) [I also write another devotional article each week for another "unnamed" paper which brings the total to nearly 2000]. Some of those articles have found their way onto people's refrigerators and into people's lives; while others have found their way to the bottom of the bird cage!

I am a preacher by calling so some of the articles have been mini sermons and Bible lessons but the articles people respond to the most are the ones where I share how God is at work in the every day details of my life. I "made a deal with God" at the beginning of my ministry. I told Him I would try to be a good servant for Him if He would be a good Master for me. Looking back it is easy to see that He has done a better job with His part than I have with mine (!) but it is those "Master Moments" where He does something extraordinary through or for me that seem to be of the greatest interest to people.

As we begin a new year I ask for your prayers that I will always be a good servant and a faithful Christian. In return, I promise that I will try to share as many "Master Moments" with you as I can as I continue to live the most exciting life possible; the life of a followers of Jesus Christ.