

2011 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 4, 2011

DAILY DUTIES

The New Year is the time of year that people decide to do something about their weight, their finances, and their relationships. It should also be a time they evaluate who they are, where they are going, and how they expect to get there. Here are five Daily Duties that will provide a solid foundation for a successful and enjoyable life.

Daily Bread- *Give us this day our daily bread* (Matthew 6:11). Eat to live; do not live to eat. Regulating your daily diet will decrease your weight and increase your health.

Daily Work- *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). When everyone works then the work is easier for everyone. A strong work ethic is part of a successful life.

Daily Worship- Every day should start and end in the presence of God. If you are not walking with the Lord each day then you are on the wrong road!

Daily Testimony- *My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long*: (Psalms 71:24). Make a way each day to tell people the way to God, the works of God in your life, and the wonders of God that await you some day.

Daily Cross- And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23). Submit to God's plan and commit to God's ways each day.

Every day is a new day to do great things for God. Make each day count.

January 5, 2011

ENOCH EXAMPLE

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him (Genesis 5:22-24).

A good example to emulate as we begin this New Year is a man of the Bible called Enoch. It was said of Enoch that he walked with the Lord. A remarkable characteristic for anyone!

Here are some other notable qualities of this great man. Enoch was a family man whose son lived the longest lifespan of any recorded man on earth (969 years). Enoch was part of the ancestry line of Christ (Luke 3:37). Enoch was a prophet who foretold the future coming of the Lord (*And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints*, Jude 1:14). And, most wonderful of all, Enoch was "translated" into the presence of the Lord without having to walk through the valley of the shadow of death (*By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God*. Hebrews 11:5).

In order to walk with God Enoch had to be in agreement with God- *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?* (Amos 3:3). In order to prepare his family for the long term impact of their life he had to instill godly values and faithful foundations. And, in order to have a long term relationship with God, he had to learn to please God. Follow Enoch's example this year and make it the best year of your life.

January 11, 2011

1-11-11

Today is the second of three unique days this year. We began the year on 1-1-11. Today is 1-11-11. And later this year we will have an 11-11-11. Someone will probably make something mystical and paranormal about this event but as far as I can tell it is just the cycle of the calendar. However, there are some things about days that should concern us and cause us to contemplate.

The Bible teaches us to “number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalms 90:12). This means we are to consider the frailty and briefness of life so that we can do what we can, and what we should, in the span of time allotted to each of us.

We should also consider the companions of our days and the conclusion of our days- *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever* (Psalms 23:6). A day can be a terribly long time when spent in pain and problems and it would be absolutely horrible to end our days in eternal punishment.

My profession (minister) has given me the “privilege” of spending a considerable amount of time in grave yards. One of the things that is immediately obvious as you walk in a cemetery is the fact that Death is no respecter of age or bank account. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, all have an appointment with death. I began preaching at a very young age and I am now in the sunset of my life but I never remember a year that I did not find a tombstone in a cemetery with a person who had died at the age I was that year. Today is the day to do something about your relationship with God.

January 12, 2011

RETURNING CHURCH JOY

Has your church attendance grown boring and tedious? Do you dread going to church instead of looking with excitement toward another Sunday of worshipping with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Here are some ideas that will help you change boring into blessed!

Find where God is trying to work in your church. After all, you go to Church to meet with God! If you cannot find a place where God is working in your church then you should pray for, and work toward, Revival in your church. If that does not work then you should find a church where God is working and begin attending there.

Pray for God to use you to do His work in the Church- Every person has something they can do to help in the ministry of their church: pray, sing, give, keep nursery, clean up trash, teach, assist teachers and leaders. Church is not a spectator sport; it is a way of life that develops you into part of the Kingdom of God.

Be willing to do whatever it takes to obey God's will- The Bible declares that Jesus endured the cross because of the joy that was set before Him. True joy comes from a surrendered life submitted to God's will.

Praise the Lord for the accomplishment of His will because you trusted and obeyed- Believe that God will use your commitment and service to do great things; and then rejoice when you see what God brings about through your efforts.

Make it your goal this week to be able to say with the Psalmist, *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD* (Psalm 122:1)

January 18, 2011

THE LONGEST BIBLE CHAPTER

The One Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm is the longest chapter in the Bible. Because of its length it is not read as much as it should be. It is an alphabetical or acrostic Psalm. It is divided into twenty-two parts, answering to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Every section is divided into eight verses; and each verse begins with the letter of the Hebrew alphabet which forms the title of the part (The eight first verses have an “aleph” prefixed, the second eight have a “beth”, and so on for the rest).

The theme of this great psalm is the Declarations of God and how taking heed to the teachings and precepts of God will produce changes in the character and circumstances of a person. This is exactly the changes that most people are looking for. They want to change from what they are into what they should be and they want to know how to enjoy benefits and blessings in their life situations. Well, this is the Psalm for you!

Here are three verses from this powerful psalm that show some of the wisdom and insight found in this great portion of God’s Word.

The Word of God provides a defense against bad decisions and corrupting character flaws- Ps 119:11 *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

The Principles of God are of greater benefit than any Possession- Ps 119:127 *Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.*

The inner Peace that allows a person to handle any situation of life comes from trusting the leadership of God- Ps 119:165 *Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*

January 19, 2011

SHORTEST CHAPTER

It is interesting to see the thought process of God as He inspired people to transcribe His written communication to mankind, the Bible. The King James Bible has 23,145 verses in the Old Testament and 7,957 verses in the New Testament. This gives a total of 31,102 verses. Contrary to popular belief, the middle verse in the Bible is not Psalms 118:8 {*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man*}. Because there are an even number of verses then the middle two verses are Psalm 103:1-2- *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:*

There are 929 chapters in the Old Testament and 260 chapters in the New Testament. This gives a total of 1,189 chapters. Psalm 117 is the middle chapter of the Bible, being the 595th chapter. It is also the shortest chapter in the Bible with the longest chapter (Psalm 119) being found almost next door.

Since the Shortest chapter in the Bible is also the middle chapter in the Bible it would do us well to look at the center thought of the Bible- *O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD* (Psalms 117:1-2). This verse calls for everyone to Praise the Lord (And isn’t that what the Bible is all about!). It says the reason for this praise is the merciful actions of God toward us and the unchangeable Word of God given to us. Wow, what a great truth in this shortest chapter.

January 25, 2011

SEVEN INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

For a number of years I had the responsibility of helping develop churches and Pastors. One immediately obvious fact was that many Pastors and Churches play a spiritual form of “Russian Roulette” each Sunday. They simply show up at church each Sunday with the hope that THIS will be the Sunday in which vast crowds of people suddenly find their church and fill their pews. And Sunday after Sunday they greet the same people where they preach the same sermons and get the same results.

When I was given the opportunity to meet with Pastors and Church Leaders in order to help them produce positive change in their Church I shared these Seven Ingredients for Success. These ingredients will also work in an individual life. Give them a try!

- 1) Inspiration- *Where there is no vision, the people perish:* (Proverbs 29:18). If no one knows where you are headed then you are probably headed nowhere.
- 2) Motivation- A dream without feet becomes a nightmare! You must own the vision and the vision must own you.
- 3) Education- You cannot do it right if you do not know the right way to do it. Illuminate the road and people will not fear to begin or stumble while travelling.
- 4) Dedication- Inconsistence fuels chaos. The road to most goals leads through valleys and over mountains. Be prepared to travel through both before you begin the journey.
- 5) Perspiration- Hard Work produces happy results.
- 6) Multiplication- Success fuels growth and growth fuels success.
- 7) Celebration- Expect to be successful and look to the Joy that awaits you. The Joy of the Lord is your strength. Celebrate small victories as you travel toward Triumph.

January 26, 2011

FIVE QUESTIONS

In my nearly fifty years of helping Christians grow, I have determined there are five questions that especially trouble new Christians. As I read through an old “Discipleship Journal” magazine recently I found that the Navigators Organization has a list that corresponds closely to my list. That made me believe this list may be something we need to publish and seek to encourage others to discuss.

- 1) Am I really totally forgiven just because I believe in Christ? Can going to Heaven really be that simple?
- 2) Does God hear me when I pray? Will He answer me? Will the answers be consistent?
- 3) I keep blowing it. Does that mean I am not really a Christian? I do pretty well with most things but one or two sins defeat me regularly. Why can I not conquer these sins?
- 4) How can I know and do God’s will for my life? Will God make His will plain or is there some secret formula you have to learn?
- 5) There are so many religions in the world. How can I know my truth is the right truth? I do not want to get to the end of life and find I was on the wrong road!

There is no subject more important to a person than the discussion about their relationship with God. A person’s relationship with God determines their character, their conduct, their companions, their calling, and their conclusion.

An individual’s concept of God acts as an anchor point from which all other areas of that person’s life emanate. In plain English, you become what you believe. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the foundation of your Faith be correct. May these questions help build that foundation.

February 1, 2011

RULES FOR RIGHT

One reason for conflict among people is the perception people have about what is right. Perception about what is right is often based on a person's preferences (Bar-B-Que in my community has a sweet taste. Go thirty miles north and it has a much more "tart taste". Naturally, those people up north are wrong!); on a person's prejudices (My Dad was a Ford mechanic for twenty five years. Hence, anyone who drives a Chevy is not well informed!); and on a person's personality (I want to arrive early for an event. My wife wants to arrive on time or late. We have had some "interesting" discussions in our forty one years of marriage!).

Another factor in determining what is right is Motivation (A man walks down a street when suddenly a stranger leaps from an alley, plunges a knife into him, and steals his wallet. Rushed to the hospital this man has emergency surgery by a doctor he has never met before. Two strangers plunge a knife into this man; one to harm him and the other to help him- Motivation).

All of these factors can influence a person's perception of right and wrong. That is why it is so important to have an unchangeable standard to depend on- if the architect uses a standard of 13 inches in a foot and your builder uses 12 inches in a foot then you will be disappointed in your new home.

Christians believe the standard that can be trusted, and must be depended upon, is the Bible- It is an Eternal Standard: *Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven* (Psalms 119:89) and a God Given Standard: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:* (2 Timothy 3:16). It is the right that will make your right be right.

February 2, 2011

ANGEL WORKERS

One of the main goals in my life is to put Angels to work. I realize that Angels are busy in Heaven rejoicing about God's character and commandments- *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word* (Psalms 103:20). I know they are also busy protecting children- *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* (Matthew 18:10) and visiting the earth on different tasks for God- *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* (Hebrews 13:2).

These are all God directed Angel tasks. I want to do something that involves ME in the process of producing work for angels. I can do this when I lead people to trust Christ as Savior. This causes Angels to observe those who rejoice because I led someone to accept Jesus Christ as Savior- *I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth* (Luke 15:10). It also puts Angels to work taking care of new Christians- *But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?* (Hebrews 1:13-14). Finally, it makes sure Angels have a lot of reaping work to do at the end of time- *And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other* (Matt 24:31).

February 8, 2011

REGENERATION

The Bible plainly declared that a Man must be “Born Again” (John 3:3). In the light of the moral mess to which America has descended it is difficult to argue with people’s need of being regenerated. My astonishment is about the conditions people impose on those who desire this Regeneration. Here are a few common ideas about Regeneration.

- 1) Repeated Regeneration- These people believe you can be saved today, lost tomorrow, saved again the next day and so forth. They have no assurance and no peace.
- 2) Repentance Regeneration- This group believes if you sin and fail to “repent” of that sin then God will forsake you. Salvation becomes a constant struggle to make sure you have repented about every mistake you make.
- 3) Ritual Regeneration- These believe that Church membership and church rituals constitute the heart of religion so regeneration is obtained by Church activities.
- 4) Rigorous Regeneration- This is probably the most popular group. They teach that Regeneration is based on the good works a person does. When will they listen to the words of the Apostle Paul- *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness* (Romans 4:4-5).

Real Regeneration is a work in the heart of a person performed by the power of the Holy Spirit as the person exercises Faith in the sacrificial death and resurrection life of Christ. It is a work of God’s Grace and not of man’s efforts. Being Born Again is begun by Faith and “the Just shall live by Faith”. It is not a hard life of religious rules and the strain of constantly working to be “good enough”. It is rejoicing in the finished work of Christ and resting in God’s love and care.

February 9, 2011

SHIPPING COST

Part of the Ministry of “Minister Ministry” is distributing Bibles and Books. When I began this Ministry I wanted to help minister to those who minister to others. One way to do that is to provide materials to struggling churches and missions so they can be successful at the work God has called them to accomplish.

Recently I was mailing a box of Bibles to a new Church in Nigeria. Nigeria is the home of many internet scams so you have to be very careful in responding to pleas for needs from Nigeria. But, when you find a real need, then response can provide encouragement and enlightenment that can be a tremendous blessing by allowing the light of the Gospel to penetrate the darkness of physical and spiritual poverty.

Minister Ministry is a faith ministry that does not solicit funds. We trust God to provide and then we spend the money we receive very carefully. When the Mail Clerk said the cost of mailing the Bibles was \$184 I had to take a deep breath. Knowing the need was real I told the clerk to ship them. When I turned to leave an anonymous man standing in line said he wanted to help and gave me \$40. Is there a Glory anywhere in the House!

In the next few days several people stopped me in various places and said God had put on their heart to give something to Minister Ministry. In less than a week God brought in enough to pay for shipping the Bibles and have \$6 left over that can be used to purchase more Bibles. What a great and wonderful God we serve!

February 15, 2011

SHOWING LOVE

Love shows we are Disciples- *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another* (John 13:35). Love for fellow Christians is one of the greatest methods of testimony available to the Christian Church today. Fighting, bickering, and gossip make the church look like heathens. Praying for one another, caring for one another, and forgiving one another will enable us to have a successful witness to the world.

Love must be Demonstrated-

1) To God: *If ye love me, keep my commandments* (John 14:15). *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him* (John 14:23). You spend time with, and seek to please, someone you truly love.

2) To the World: *But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth* (1 John 3:17-18). The best way to make an impact on the un-churched is to feed them when they are hungry, care for them when they are sick, comfort them when they are in trouble, and do not retaliate with vengeance when you are mistreated by them- *But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you* (Luke 6:27-28).

Life changing Love is not a funny feeling in your stomach; it is a holy walk in your life and a helping hand in your attitude. Make that kind of love your goal this week.

February 16, 2011

THINKING THINGS

- You come to Church to hear the Gospel; you leave Church to tell the Gospel.
- If you want to whisper in church, whisper a prayer.
- The Lord has gone to prepare a place for us and left us here to prepare ourselves for that place.
- Deal with the faults of others as you would have them deal with your faults.

Everyone makes mistakes; fools practice them- It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling (Proverbs 20:3).

If you fed your body with food with the same regularity that you feed your soul with spiritual nourishment would you still have a weight problem? [Karen Carpenter of the singing group "The Carpenters" had access to all the food she wanted but she died of starvation because she was anorexic. Are you "spiritually anorexic"?]

According to research by the George Barna group only 37% of the people in America who own a Bible read it somewhere other than at Church- *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:* (1 Peter 2:2).

If a Christian is not walking in the Light he is living a lie- *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin* (1 John 1:6-7).

If you have no joy in your life then one must wonder if you have Jesus in your heart- *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full* (John 15:11).

February 22, 2011

A CONFIDENT END

Sooner or later Death pays a visit to every home. It may come suddenly with no warning or time to prepare. It may camp out in a sick room for an excruciatingly long time before that last labored breath is taken. But it has an appointment in every home; including yours! When this black shrouded guest arrives in your life here are some things you need to know.

A Christian can face death with confidence because of their relationship with Christ- *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

A Christian is promised God's personal escort as he passes through death's darkness- *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me* (Psalms 23:4).

Death for a Christian brings rest and rewards- *And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them* (Revelation 14:13).

Death for a Christian carries him to a prepared place to fellowship forever with God- *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also* (John 14:1-3).

A Christian can face death with joy and jubilation. A non-believer, however...

February 23, 2011

BEGUILING BADNESS

The word "Beguile" is not an often used word in normal conversation but it appears several times in the Bible. It means to use treacherous cunning or skillful deceit and applies to someone who used their charm or their conversation to deceive or mislead someone.

The Bible warns about people who "beguile" with their Words: *And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.* (Colossians 2:4). An example: *Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life:* (Ezekiel 13:22).

It also refers to those who "beguile" with incorrect Worship: *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,* (Colossians 2:18). Worship designed to stir you emotions instead of worship God beguiles you into worshipping wonders instead of God.

Probably the most common method to "beguile" is the use of human Wisdom: *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ* (2 Corinthians 11:3). This beguiling wisdom normally revolves around three devious statements by the Devil. 1) God's rules are designed to keep me from enjoying the best life has to offer. 2) God made me this way so I cannot help what I do. 3) I have plenty of time so I will live for myself while I am young and then grab God's hand just before I die.

The results of being beguiled by "skillful deceit" can be deadly; ask Eve!

March 1, 2011

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

When it comes to teaching many teachers need to rethink the thought. A fundamental principle of teaching is that the higher the predictability, the lower the impact- *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* (Matthew 7:28-29)

Teachers need to question more answers instead of answer more questions. "True teaching is not that which gives knowledge, but that which stimulates pupils to gain knowledge" (John Milton Gregory). The purpose of teaching is not what you do as a teacher but what your students do as a result of what you have taught them (You do not go to a piano recital to hear the teacher play. You go to see what your child has learned!).

You must believe that your teaching can change people if your teaching is to change people. Teaching is exciting when the teacher is excited about teaching and is convinced that the knowledge being imparted is vital and necessary. Teaching is planting seed with the belief that the coming fruit will give life changing nourishment.

In the teaching of every lesson someone must suffer. Either the teacher will suffer in the preparation of the lesson or the students will suffer in the presentation! The greater the investment the greater the interest- *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips* (Proverbs 16:23).

If students can attend twelve years of public school and not know how to read then something is wrong with the system. If students can attend Sunday School all their life and yet not know how to translate Bible Principles into real life situations then something is wrong.

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? (Romans 2:21)

March 2, 2011 CHURCH CONDUCT

When you enter the House of God remember it is your Desire to Honor God, your Delight to Worship God, and your Duty to Serve God- *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.* (Psalms 100:4)

Keep this prayer in the front of your Bible so you can silently pray it when you enter the House of God- "Gracious and Merciful God, I thank you for this opportunity to come to your house in order to seek forgiveness for my sins and to worship and praise you. May the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Please give those who lead us in song and worship today the abilities and insights they need in order to help us in our worship of you. Anoint the Minister today so that he would speak with power, passion, and persuasion in order that sinners may be drawn to you and Christians may learn how to more effectively serve you. Manifest your Glory today in such a way until positive change takes place in the life of each person present so that we leave today with the glow of God on our lives and the testimonies of Christ on our lips."

Be Christian in your conduct. Look for the lonely and share words of encouragement. Give visitors your hand, your help, and your seat. Look for blessings of God to rejoice in rather than mistakes of men to complain about.

Now you can leave Church with the knowledge that "The LORD will bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD will make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD will lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

March 8, 2011 THE INNER ANGER

A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones. (Proverbs 14:30).

Envy is an inner anger, driven by jealousy and coveting, which resides in the heart of a person and “rots” away the foundation of a person’s character. This covetous cancer denies enjoyment to life, decays trust and love for those closest to us, and destroys the peace of our soul.

Envy covers the spectrum of life. I have seen people envy other people’s Possessions, other people’s Power, other people’s Praise, other people’s Partner, and even other people’s Preaching! It was envy that motivated the religious leaders to seek the death of Christ (*For he knew that for envy they had delivered him-* Matthew 27:18). It was envy that caused Joseph’s brothers to sell him into slavery (*And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,* Acts 7:9). And it was envy of another’s popularity that moves men to argue against God’s Word- *But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming* (Acts 13:45). Is it any wonder the Bible proclaims that *where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work* (James 3:16)?

Envy opens your soul door to jealousy and resentment. Envy’s angry brings meanness into your mouth, a critical attitude into your character, and bitterness into your life. The only cure for this “inner anger” is the heart peace that comes from faith in God’s love and care- *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* (Hebrews 13:5).

March 9, 2011 OBTAINING MONEY

Money can be obtained through contributions: People give money to causes, concerns, and charities/churches.

- 1) People give the Minimum when it is their Duty to Give. There is no Urgency to give and there is no Ownership in giving.
- 2) People give the Most when it is their Delight to Give- *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7). A need or cause touches a person so much until the desire to help fix the problem or meet the need motivates them to give abundantly.

Money can be obtained through commerce:

- 1) Men make money by giving of their time or efforts. A secondary branch of this is that men make money by employing other men to make money for them. In each case, however, the money is dependent on the time and efforts of men.
- 2) Money makes money. In its simplest form this is interest paid by others to use your money. Another way for money to make money is to invest it. Generally, the greater the risk of losing your money the greater the rewards you receive for the use of your money.
- 3) Products and Ideas make money. Your wisdom or your work produces a product that others are willing to pay to reproduce. You initially invested time, energy, and, possibly, resources but now others are willing to pay you in order to use your product or your idea. Concepts are generally the most profitable- a copyright, a franchise, or an idea that builds on your idea (Think operating system for a computer or social network, Facebook).

Another Way to obtain money is through Cooperation with God. We will look at that next week.

March 15, 2011

LIVING WITHOUT LIFE

During the Korean and Viet Nam wars one of the primary instructions given to soldiers about being captured was that they must never give in to depression and self-pity. Many soldiers disregarded the information when captured and actually died from simply "giving up".

Sadly, this same "malady" has invaded many people in today's world. They are bombarded by death, disaster, and destruction every evening on the news. Job security is a thing of the past to most people as companies are constantly being sold and re-structured. And hardly a family is immune from divorce or drug problems.

Life has lost much of its meaning to many of these people. They simply exist from day to day and end up each night "numbing" themselves in front of the TV before finally falling into the bed for a few hours' sleep. The next morning they wearily drag themselves out of bed to face another dull depressing day. For these people Life has lost its motivation and enthusiasm and they have become part of that vast multitude of the "**living without life**".

The "Good News" of the Gospel is that Jesus came to give us LIFE; and Abundant Life at that! Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ puts meaning and motivation into your life. No longer do you live dominated by selfish pleasures and sinful practices. You now serve a loving Lord who promises that your work has eternal value and that He is in control of the circumstances of life ensuring that all things work together for your good! Each day is the day that the Lord has made and you can rejoice and be glad in it!

May this be your proclamation today- *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living* (Psalms 116:9).

March 16, 2011

OBTAINING WEALTH (II)

Last week we learned that Wealth can be obtained from gifts, exchanging time and energy (work) for payment, allowing money to produce more money, or producing products or ideas that others are willing to pay to obtain or use. Today I want to look at the Profit that can be ours when we partner with God.

First note some facts about a financial partnership with God:

- 1) The Purpose of the authority to obtain wealth is to confirm God's covenant with His people- *But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day* (Deuteronomy 8:18) (The word "Power" is from a Hebrew word that can mean "ability or authority").
- 2) Partnership provision is based on obedience- *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it* (Isaiah 1:19-20).
- 3) God observes our heart as well as our pocketbook when we partner with Him- *For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* (1 Timothy 6:10)

God Partners with us to provide Wealth through His Blessings - *The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it* (Proverbs 10:22) in order to bear witness of His constant Kindness- *Nevertheless God left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness* (Acts 14:17). (Next week "A Profiting Partnership")

March 22, 2011

SALT WATER IS NOT FRESH

Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, (Deuteronomy 5:7-9)

I may worship God in many places and in many ways but I cannot worship God in all places and in all ways. God has declared that the true Worshipper must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. I cannot worship God in a place where the cross is replaced, where the truth is defined by the experiences of man instead of the expressions of God, and where prayers are made to “mother earth” or to the “great mystical force of the universe” instead of to the true and living God.

I can love people of all creeds and colors and seek to build a relationship with them that will allow me to share with them the love of God and the wondrous gift of salvation offered to whosoever will through Jesus Christ. I cannot do this, however, at the expense of bowing before their gods and allowing “tolerance” to replace Truth. Jumping into the quicksand with a person in order to share your love may seem noble at the moment but it leaves you and the other person with no foundation in rapidly sinking sand!

When Truth allows error to mix with Truth then Truth ceases to be Truth and becomes error. A fountain cannot yield both salt water and fresh (James 3:12).

March 23, 2011

A PROFITING PARTNERSHIP

When Ida Scudder set out to begin the now famous Vellore Christian Medical College in India during the end of the Great Depression she was asked how she, as a woman, expected to accomplish such a huge task. Her reply, “First ponder, then dare. Know your facts. Count the cost. Money is not the important thing. What you are building is not a medical school. It is the kingdom of God. Do not err on the side of being too small. If it is the will of God to open our college then it has to be done.”

When God created man He immediately realized that something was missing in order for man to be happy and productive. God then created man a partner who could bring joy to his life and enable him to obey God’s commission to populate the earth (Gen 1:28).

This first characteristic of God revealed to mankind that God desired for man to be completely happy and to have what he needed to complete any task given him by God. One of the most tragic lies distributed by the Devil has been his vilification of the character of God that has caused generations of people to see God as some tyrant who keeps His subjects in poverty and misery and makes demands on them that they cannot fulfill.

What a difference it would make if people could see how much God wants to partner with them so they can have Abundant Life as well as everything they need in order to become the best they can be for God. What a testimony it would be if people could see *that the LORD was with you, and that the LORD made all that you do to prosper in his hand* (Genesis 39:3).

March 29, 2011

OBEDIENCE IS OBEYING

1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

In this passage of scripture King Saul learned a lesson that desperately needs to be learned by Christians today- Obedience is required. Christians want to come to church at their convenience, have an entertaining emotional worship service where they tell God He is absolutely the Lord of their life, listen to a sermon about how much God wants them to be happy, and then leave church to live a “respectable” life which brings them social prestige and personal satisfaction. Obeying God in daily activities and actions is not high on their list of priorities.

When will we learn that God does not call people to “make a Decision for Him”. He calls them to “become Disciples of Him”. It is not just about having Faith to believe Jesus is the Son of God. It is about that Faith producing Works which will carry forth the plan and purpose of God.

People are normally Obedient as long as it is Pleasurable, Profitable, Popular, Painless, Convenient, and Sensible. They tend to look for ways not to be Obedient when Obedience produces Pain or Persecution. Compete Obedience is thought of as an option reserved for “really” dedicated Christians but not required for “normal” Church Christians.

God calls everyone to obedience. It is not a choice; it is a command- For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it (Matthew 8:9).

March 30, 2011

PROFITLESS PROFIT

Sometimes Profit turns out to be a loss instead of the Blessing you craved. Here are a few examples of Profit that does not Profit.

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death (Proverbs 10:2). A bank of “badness” does not bring profit to your life. Take the results of Loose Morals. Loose Moral behavior brings disgrace to your life, disease to your body, descendants for you to support, doubt into your mind (The fact that you cheated on someone who loved you makes you believe that others will cheat on you), deception into your vocabulary (You will regularly lie to family, friends, God, and yourself), and darkness into your soul. Those few moments of passionate pleasure sure do run up a huge bill in a hurry!

Sin takes you further than you intended to go, keeps you longer than you desired to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay. It starts out as a small delight but ends up as a horrible destruction- *For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind:* (Hosea 8:7).

Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death (Proverbs 11:4). Money can buy you protection and physicians but it cannot deliver you from the judgment of God. Life must have meaning as well as money or, as Jesus said, *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Matthew 16:26).

One final wage that is not worth it is the wages of sin- *For the wages of sin is death;* (Romans 6:23). Do not face this “payday” without accepting God’s Gift- *but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

April 5, 2011 PRINCIPLES

At Birth our Creator gives each of us potential and personality. At the New Birth the Holy Spirit gives each Christian a Spiritual Gift to be used for building the body of Christ. At Death we must give account to God for the way we have used the resources He has given us. This is the most important principle you will learn about life.

People react to temptations differently- one man's worm is another man's bait. People react to pressure differently- Watching the way families deal with the prolonged death of a loved one is a tremendous revelation about the character and personality of people. Even Christians are different. Each Christian is a different part of the body of Christ and the toe many times does not understand the viewpoint of the finger. Christians act and think differently because they have different jobs for the same Master. This principle will save you many hours of frustration and anger.

God loved us when we were unlovable. God commands His people to share His love with those who reject His call and murder His messengers. Love does not make sense. Love can be caught in a glance, grow in the most unlikely of places, and wither among the best life has to offer. There is no formula that will manufacture Love and no plan that will guarantee Love's success. Learning that principle will continually bring hope to your journey while keeping your heart from breaking and your soul from enslavement to bitterness.

It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment. You cannot escape either death or judgment unless you accept the eternal life offered by Christ whose blood pays the penalty for your sins. That is the most important principle about death you will ever learn.

April 6, 2011 PINHOLE PRESSURE

It was a beautiful September Day, the birds were singing, the hint of fall coolness hung in the air, and the smell of fresh cut grass rose heavenly as I cut my lawn and wondered at the greatness of God's creation. Suddenly my lawn mower began to spit and sputter as if it was out of gas. The tank registered a quarter tank but I got my fuel container and filled the tank anyway.

That seemed to fix the problem as the mower immediately cranked up and ran smoothly. I cut grass for another fifteen minutes and suddenly the same thing happened. Talking to people who repair lawn mowers revealed the problem was probably the fuel filter, the fuel pump, or the gas. I replaced all three and it worked great the next time I cut my grass; until I was about half completed when the same problem began.

Frustrating Fall led to a winter of discontent where every repair solution proved futile. Spring arrives with growing grass and with me at a total loss as to what to do. I decided to search the Internet one more time. This time I discovered a forum discussing this very issue and providing exactly the answer I needed- Glory!

The lid on my gas tank has several pin holes on the underside and one pin hole on top. This allows necessary air to get into the tank. Close inspection showed the hole on top was clogged with dirt. Pushing a pin through the hole solved the problem!

If your life is starting and stopping and you are frustrated with your progress you might want to check for blockages that are keeping the Holy Spirit from working in your life. You may be surprised at the results.

April 12, 2011 BETRAYAL

Life can be full of ups and downs. Friends who praise you one day can suddenly bad mouth you and even betray you on another day. Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are” (Heb 4:15) so He experienced this same gut wrenching betrayal by friends and society. On Sunday the crowds treated Him like a “rock star” with adulation so intense until they even threw their coats in the road for Him to ride His donkey over. On Thursday they cried for Him to be crucified as they mocked and jeered Him. Talk about an up and down week!

Judas Iscariot was a disciple of Jesus. “Iscariot” means “inhabitant of Kerioth” which was a town in southern Judea. This meant that Judas was not from the same area as the other disciples. For some reason, Jesus “took to Judas”. In spite of the fact that Matthew was very well experienced in handling money as a former tax collector, it was Judas who was selected to be the treasurer. Jesus went way out on a limb for Judas but now Judas betrays Jesus to the authorities for the price of a slave! How that betrayal must have hurt.

Betrayal is from a Greek word meaning “to surrender”. It comes from the idea of exposing someone to capture by their enemy. Almost all of us have felt betrayed by someone we love or trusted as they have “surrendered” us to emotions or enemies which have broken our hearts and destroyed our joy. Easter lets us know that Jesus felt the same emotions and pain we feel.

You are not alone with your hurt and pain this week. Christianity is not just about “Heaven one day”; it is about Help Today. Jesus knows and He cares. Let Him comfort and help you right now.

April 13, 2011 LEADERS MAKE CHOICES

Leaders make choices and then deal with the consequences of those choices. Followers become followers because they do not have the courage to face the consequences of choices.

Very seldom do Leaders get to make a choice between “black and white”; even a Follower can make that kind of choice. Leaders must make crossroad choices loaded with all sorts of implications based on the wisdom they possess and the information they have received. They accept that many lives may be greatly impacted by their decision because they realize that most of life’s problems must be lived, not solved.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was offered the kingdoms of the world if He would perform a simple act of satanic worship. Jesus’ goal was the winning of the world but not at that price so He declined and chose the different road of glorifying God through miracles and Kingdom centered messages. Now the consequences of that choice loom before Him as He labored in prayer in a lonely garden.

Jesus knew that the next 18 hours of His life would be the most painful ever experienced by a human as He suffered extreme physical pain from the Romans, the mocking from religious leaders, and the final abandonment by His Heavenly Father. In that agony known only to those who must make painful decisions and then live with the consequences Jesus cried out, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

Jesus knew that if He was guided by the will of God then the choice would be right and the consequences would ultimately work out for the best. Leaders make choices. Smart Leaders make choices based on God’s will. The difference can have eternal consequences.

April 19, 2011 RESPONDING TO THE GOD MAN

It began at a tree and it now ends at a tree. God had come to earth and now men wanted to kill Him because they were confused by His teachings, unsettled by his miracles, and afraid of His power. The crime for which He was crucified; claiming to be a king, was the one thing He continually refused to do! He acknowledged He had a Kingdom not of this world (John 18:36) but He called Himself servant of God or son of man while on the earth. The mockery of a trial and the political maneuvering behind the scenes only highlighted the depth of depravity that existed even in the highest religious circles.

The religious and political leaders saw Christ as a threat to their power base. They could not grasp that His goal was not to conquer mankind but to die on a cross for mankind. Controlled by self-interest and suspicious of Christ's motives because of the corruption in their own souls they could not comprehend the pure love that would endure death in order to bring life to those who did not deserve, and, in many cases, did not desire the grace being given them. The light shined in the dark but the dark could not comprehend it.

I wonder, and worry, about me. What if Christ would have waited until the twenty first century to come to earth? What if the political and religious leaders declared Him a threat to society and religious values and sentenced him to death. Would I be part of the "crucify Him" crowd or part of the "weeping at the Cross" crowd? What if God came to earth as a man and we were so confused by the man until we missed God?

April 20, 2011 EASTER VICTORY

Peter compared Satan to a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet 5:8). This "roaring lion" who is the enemy of God and of mankind uses all of his skills and ingenuity to attack men, to drive them away from God, and to ensure that the eternal souls of men are sentenced to everlasting destruction. The war for the souls of men is waged daily, the enemy's tactics are down and dirty, and the outcome of the battle produces either blessings forevermore or eternal bondage in darkness and despair.

Satan's tactics almost always fall into one of three strategies: 1) Keep men from believing in God (all the way from Apathy to Atheist), 2) Kill our Faith in God by lying about the character of God (If God really existed then earthquakes would not happen and Aunt Susie would not have cancer), and 3) Corrupt our Belief in God (God is a holy God but my fleshly desires and personal preferences are more important than God's rules- thus making you god above God!). Satan began lying about God and the Consequences of disobeying God to Adam and Eve and he has not stopped since.

God could have launched a fierce debate with Satan in order to repudiate Satan's lies. Instead, God became a man who hung on a cross and proclaimed, "See how much I love you." Then Christ was resurrected from the dead in order to show God's complete and everlasting victory. The "roaring lion" was defeated by the "lion of the tribe of Judea"- Glory!

Happy Easter- God's Greatest Victory and Satan's greatest defeat! What a great and glorious day.

April 26, 2011 WHEN GOD GETS MAD AT YOU

And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, till he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. (Jeremiah 52:2-3).

The phrase “anger of the Lord” is used 32 times in the Bible. It normally signifies big time trouble ahead! There are numerous reasons God “got mad at people” but let me list just the first four times the “anger of the Lord” was used so you will get an idea- (1) When Moses tried to get out of God’s call on his life [Ex 4:14]. (2) When Israel complained about God’s provision [Num 11:10]. (3) When Miriam and Aaron rebelled against the authority of Moses [Num 12:9]. (4) When God’s people allowed worldly association to drive them away from the worship of God [Num 25:3].

The consequences of God “getting mad at you” can be very tough. Zedekiah’s example shows us that when God becomes angry at you- He rocks your world, He reorganized your Priorities, He permits Enemies to surround you, He brings Famine to empty you, He allows Family and Friends to suffer because of you, and He lets you finish in the Darkness (Zedekiah watched his family slain just before his eyes were put out).

Of course, God does not like being “mad at you”. His Mercy and Compassion are extended each day- *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness* (Lamentations 3:22-23). It is up to you to choose continued rebellion and the anger of God or confessing repentance and the blessedness of God’s compassion and fellowship.

April 27, 2011 WORST TRANSLATION

I have probably twenty translations of the Bible in my library. I think the King James Version is the best translation and I use it for my daily Bible reading, my Bible memorization, and my preaching. I think the worst translation of the Bible is a lukewarm Christian because that is the “Bible” most people read each day.

People become the wrong kind of testimony for God because they Sell out, Sleep in, or Socialize around. Judas walked with the Lord and earned enough respect to be the treasurer for “Jesus and Company” but he decided gold was more important than God and no one will even name their dog “Judas” any more.

The “Big Three” among the disciples were asked by Jesus to watch with Him while He prayed on the night before His trial and crucifixion. They fell asleep, not once but twice, and never gave the support to Jesus that He craved on that special night. Their testimony continually rebukes those of us who allow fleshly needs to overcome spiritual duties.

Peter was the “head foreman” at “Jesus and Company”. His courage and zeal were well known by the rest of the Disciples. As Jesus was being tried Peter was socializing around a campfire in the courtyard. You know the story- little girl cried, Peter denied, Jesus sighed.

Lukewarm Christians not only harm the work of God; they also make God sick- *So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth* (Rev 3:16). Every man will answer for his own sins and his own soul but what a heartache it would be if you knew that your life pointed men away from God instead of toward God! Do not be that kind of Bible Translation.

May 3, 2011 GUIDANCE GUIDELINES

Everyone has some “core values” guidelines that govern their conduct. Here are a few Guidelines given to me by my Mother (and Father) that have helped shape me into what I am today.

- 1) Obey your Parents- My family seldom attended Church until I became a Christian at age 14 so my parents did not teach me this as a religious principle. They did however teach me “religiously” that as long as I put my feet under their table then I would obey their orders! My Parents believed in “my way or the highway” long before it became a popular slogan.
- 2) Your Friends define you- We did not know “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psalms 1:1); but we did know “if you lay down with dogs then you will get up with fleas”.
- 3) You are responsible for your actions- “If you make your bed hard then you will have to lie in it” was Mom’s way of saying, “They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same”. (Job 4:8).
- 4) Give and Expect Respect- We learned you do not have to be rich or famous in order to treat others the same way you want to be treated.
- 5) Family is more important than fortune- Dad did not make much money and Mother thought her time with her children was more important than the things a job would purchase for them so we lived in a converted barn, raised a garden, and enjoyed life better than most people around us.

You can let TV, video games, and the latest electronic gadgets define your child or you can give them eternal core values. One way or the other something will guide their life.

May 4, 2011 MOTHERS

There are many famous mothers in the Bible. Eve was the mother of all living people (Gen 3:20). Mary was the mother of the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Sarah became a mother for the first time when she was past ninety (Gen 17:17). Rebekah was a mother who had two nations struggling in her womb (Gen 25:21-23). Hannah was a mother who loaned her first child to God before He was born (1Sam 1:26-28).

There are other mothers who are famous for the wrong reasons. The two cannibal mothers who ate one of their children and then quarreled about eating the remaining child (2Kings 6:26-29). The king’s mother who counseled him to do wrong so that he suffered God’s wrath upon himself and the nation (2Chronicles 22:2-3). Lot’s wife who is a perpetual monument to the cost of disobeying God (Gen 19:26, Luke 17:32).

Most people (thankfully) do not consider that the reason they exist today is because their mother rolled around in sweaty sheets with their dad as lovers as a prelude to the sweet mother she is today! To most people a mother is someone who could kiss a hurt away, always make sure you were fed and clothed, and be there for you in all of life’s struggles. In many people’s minds the title “Mother” exempts her from being a person with problems and heart aches all her own.

The Bible exposes Mothers in their glory and in their shame. God wanted us to know that sometimes Mothers need mercy and forgiveness just as much as they need adoration and praise. This Mother’s Day, instead of just telling your Mother she is great and then asking for another serving of ham why don’t you pray for her and love her as a person as well as a mom.

May 10, 2011 FRIENDS

One of the greatest treasures of a person is a Friend. Children do weird things and act in strange ways as they grow up because they want to be included as a Friend. Husbands and wives seek to be more than partners and lovers; they only reach real happiness when they are Friends. No matter how much you get paid you are not satisfied in your work unless you have friends around you. "Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by doubling our joy, and dividing our grief"- Joseph Addison.

You may meet a Friend by accident but you will not become a Friend by accident- I went out to find a friend, but could not find one there. I went out to be a friend, and friends were everywhere. *A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother* (Proverbs 18:24). Dale Carnegie said, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you".

The test of Friendship is loyalty- *A friend loveth at all times* (Prov 17:17). "Fair-weather Friends" who abandon you at the first sign of stormy weather are not real friends. When everyone else is going out a true Friend will be coming in.

One of the greatest statements that can be made about a person is that they are "The Friend of God". Abraham earned this distinctive title by his complete Faith in God's word (James 2:23). Jesus said being Friends with Him was contingent upon complete Obedience- *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you* (John 15:14). Friendship with God means you trust God and God can trust you. That is a pretty good definition of Friendship for anyone.

May 11, 2011 DIVINE DISPLAY

It all began when a widow was moved by the Lord to do something extraordinary. The Pastor had just returned from a mission trip to Brazil and had shared about the need of land for a new church in Brazil. He challenged the church to pray about attempting to raise \$10,000 before Christmas in order to help purchase this much needed land. He then asked the church to join him at the altar as we prayed for the salvation of several people he had met while on this mission trip.

When the closing prayer was completed one of the Church widows asked the Pastor if she could say something. She shared that God had spoken to her heart during the prayer and she was impressed to trust the Lord and give a One Thousand Dollar Gift to this need. Almost immediately others said they were also impressed to give various amounts and in less than ten minutes the entire Ten Thousand Dollars was raised- Is there a "Glory" anywhere in the house?

If you could have been at this service and felt the Divine moving of the Holy Spirit during this time of spontaneous and sacrificial giving you would have realized that the ten thousand dollars was the least thing that happened in that service! The most important event on this special morning was the display of love and sacrifice among the people of God for those of another race and culture who needed to find the same pardon and peace that these people had experienced because of their trust in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we simply go to Church. Sometimes God comes down and displays His Power and Love. Those are the days you leave church more in awe of God than in anticipation of your place in the restaurant line.

May 17, 2011 WHY WE ASSEMBLE

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25).

More people attend churches in America each Sunday (258 Million- Gallup Research) than attend all professional and college sporting events in a year. Church attendance has shown a modest increase in America for each of the last three years in spite of rising fuel prices and a sagging economy.

Why do families leave the comfort of their warm bed in order to attend church services? Some do so out of habit and tradition- Their family has “always” attended this church and they enjoy the comfort of the worship and words that their church offers. Some attend church because a guilty conscience motivates them to seek a place of forgiveness and love. Some attend Church because they are seeking the “ultimate knowledge” that will change their life (With the hope they will never become “ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” -2 Tim 3:7).

Some assemble to Seek God. Sometimes they seek God for selfish reasons: to obtain good feelings, to be blessed by God, to secure needed health, or to “put God under obligation to them” in case they have a special need later. Most times, however, they seek God in order to know Him better and learn to follow Him in a more perfect way.

The Bible tells us to congregate in order to consider how we can “provoke” love and good works from others. Adding this to meeting with God each week and you have good reasons to join millions of other people in not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.

May 18, 2011 SENTENCE COUNSEL

Sometimes a sentence can be as effective as a Sermon- Remember that Jesus dispelled an angry mob seeking to stone an adulterous woman by simply saying, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” (John 8:7). Here are some sentences that I hope will warn and encourage you.

DOG ADVICE SENTENCES:

1. If a dog bites you once it is his fault. If he bites you twice it is your fault (Do not put yourself in the position to make the same mistake twice).
2. Do not stop your car for a barking dog (Do not allow criticism to keep you from doing the job God has called you to do).
3. *He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears* (Proverbs 26:17). Sometimes you meddle with something that will bite you when you try to turn it loose.
4. It is the hit dog that barks (Complainers often use complaints to cover their chagrin at being exposed).

When you cannot believe the word of a man then it is difficult to believe the words of a man- A man's character impacts our belief in his message.

“Nip it in the bud”- Barney Fife. *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil* (Ephesians 4:26-27). (A bird may fly over your head but you do not let him build a nest there).

“Duties are ours. Events are God's”- Richard Cecil. Do your job with all your might (“Men do less than they ought, unless they do all that they can”- Thomas Carlyle) and leave the results to God.

May 24, 2011 HOW WILL YOU BE REMEMBERED

When people stand around in small groups at your funeral wake, what will they remember about you? People are normally very generous and kind during a time of death and most of them will speak good things about the recently deceased but what will they think in their inner thoughts about the real you?

It is interesting to read God's impression of people. There were positive people like David who was a "man after God's own heart" [Acts 13:22] and Abraham who was a "friend of God" [James 2:23]. There were also negative people like Ahab who was called the worst of the wicked- *But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel* (1 Kings 21:25-26).

But the question is, "How will YOU be remembered?" Will Church members say in their heart, "Thank God, that gossiping tongue is finally silent" or "The church will greatly miss that person because they were such a vital part of our body of believers"? Will family members say, "Maybe now there can be some harmony and happiness in the family" or will many tears of sorrow be shed because of your loving and serving heart?

May your life be lived in such a way until God can say this about you at your death, "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13).

May 25, 2011 IN MEMORY OF A CHURCH

Normally, on Memorial Day, we honor the memory of fallen soldiers and celebrate their ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country. As a veteran, I have nothing but respect and honor for my fallen comrades. Today, however, I want to use this time to commemorate a recently deceased church.

The Spiritual Church, which is the body and bride of Christ, is part of God and will never die. The Local Church, however, is a physical gathering place for believers and it can cease to exist under certain circumstances. Recently I saw this happen when a local church dwindled to the place it could no longer function and had to be closed.

There are numerous factors that can lead to the death of a church. Some churches die of Dignity (They become so intent on the religious forms they follow until they forget the God they represent). Some die of Division (Which is a strange thing to say about people who are supposed to be following the example of Jesus Christ). Some die because of the introduction of false Doctrine (Worldly wisdom replaces Biblical Standards). Others die because of a lack of Devotion (Jesus condemned the church which had "lost its first love").

I do not know which, if any, of these factors led to the death of this church but I do know some good things we can celebrate about the life of this church. Because of the ministry of this church many people walk with God and have better lives. Educational and missionary organizations benefited from this church and denominational leaders were nurtured in this church. I do not know why it died but I know it impacted many during its life and I celebrate that today.

May 31, 2011 DUNG HILL TO THRONE ROOM

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. (Psalms 113:7-8).

The Psalmist declares that God lifts the needy out of the dunghill and sets him in the throne room with princes- Glory! What a glorious illustration of what happens in the life of a person when they are born again and become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

God is not a merchant with a product we buy; He is a King with a pardon we receive. This pardon not only eliminates the sins of my past; it elevates me from the slavery of sin into the family of God. This Pardon from God give me (1) Peace with God, (2) The continual Presence of God, (3) Power through a relationship with God, (4) the ability to make Prayers to God, (5) Participation in the Body of God, and (6) a Prepared Place by God. No wonder I want to spend my life making joyous Proclamations about God!

This change from the dung hill to the throne room allows me to experience the “Three Cheers” of God- (1) The Forgiveness Cheer- *Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, **be of good cheer**; thy sins be forgiven thee* (Matthew 9:2). (2) The Companionship Cheer- *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, **Be of good cheer**; it is I; be not afraid.* (Matthew 14:27). (3) The Victory Cheer- *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but **be of good cheer**; I have overcome the world* (John 16:33).

June 1, 2011 ECCENTRIC PREACHERS

“Do not sacrifice you hearers’ souls to your own reputation. Be fools for Christ’s sake if need be, that you may gain the careless ones. As men take pearls out of oyster shells, so may you be willing to accept from God whatever of precious truth he sends you. Despise not the heavenly treasure because of the earthen vessel. Lose not an opportunity of being enriched because the gold came from common earth” (Charles Spurgeon “Eccentric Preachers”).

Doubt is no longer the problem in America. People are willing to believe almost anything about the supernatural (as long as it comes to them via their iPhone or the Internet!!). The task of Christians is to get them to believe the right things. Sometimes this takes thinking, and acting, “outside the box” by proclaiming the same truths using different methods.

One of the first lessons Jesus taught His Disciples was that they could not stay where they were and still go with God. His call was always, “Follow Me and I will change the way you look at things as well as change your life {Example- from Fishermen to fishers of men}. In order to do this Jesus was so “eccentric” until the crowds proclaimed, “We never saw anything like this before” (Mark 2:12).

Churches should want to be in touch with; but not in tune with, today’s culture. Four years ago the church I attend thought “the world will come to an end” if we use projector slides in the service. Today they cannot conceive of a service without videos, slides, and electronic input.

Vance Havner declared, “We are not judged so much by how many sins we have committed but by how much light we have rejected”. May we use every light source available in order to bring men from the darkness of sin into the hope of Heaven.

June 7, 2011 WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

Sometimes people allow circumstances to give them wrong information. An old farmer drank his first bottle of soda pop while on a train headed for a big city. As he took his first swig of the soft drink the train roared into a dark tunnel. The farmer cried out to his wife, "Don't drink that soda pop, Martha, it will make you blind as a bat!"

Many people form their opinion of Christianity based on the sensational reporting of the news media. When the news media reports that one Christian Minister out of over one million Ministers in America does wrong they give the indication that this is a common and prevailing problem. In reality, the overwhelming majority of Christian Ministers are under paid, over worked, and completely dedicated to sacrifice and service for the God they represent.

Jesus told his disciples to lift up their eyes and look (John 4:35). That is good advice. Look past your TV or your Cell Phone app this week and see what real Christians are doing. Orphans and widows are being cared for. The sick and the elderly are being visited and encouraged. Drunkards and prostitutes are being changed by the Gospel into great Fathers and Mothers.

I began preaching at the age of fourteen. I turn sixty-four in a few weeks. During those fifty years I have traveled widely, been exposed to many religious beliefs, and met literally thousands of Christians. In every country to which I have traveled there have been "bad" Christians and "good" Christians but in every country the few "bad apples" have been a trivial number in comparison to the dedicated Christians who are devoted to God and making a positive difference. Sometimes Christians goof up but a world without Christian actions and input would be horrible beyond description.

June 8, 2011 ENJOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

"God has set His people apart for His enjoyment and His employment"- Warren Wiersbe.

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Revelation 4:11).

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

Worship and Work are the twin foundations of a growing relationship with the Lord. If you truly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who shed His blood as the payment for your sins then you will not only adore Him but you will also apply yourself to the Christian duties that are part of your spiritual relationship.

Some Christians today seem to think that Christianity is going to Church on Sunday and maintaining a socially acceptable lifestyle the rest of the week. No wonder some churches are dying and young people do not think Christianity is relevant to the confusing and chaotic world in which they live. They are looking for something to really believe in and they cannot find it when the people who represent it do not believe in their belief enough to practice what they preach during the week.

Almost every church has overworked Nursery workers, a lack of skilled Bible Study teachers, and a multitude of community outreach tasks that desperately need committed workers. What a difference it would make if those who simply attend began adding works to their Faith.

When God created Adam He would come down each evening and enjoy great times of fellowship and worship but this always happened after Adam had completed the daily Garden tending tasking given to Him by God. Worship and work were both part of the relationship.

June 14, 2011

FATHER'S WILL

To know the will of God is the greatest Knowledge;

To find the will of God is the greatest Discovery;

To do the will of God is the greatest Achievement.

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

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

Then one faithful day his wife freezes his heart with fear and joy all in one overwhelming emotion when she announces that he is going to become a father. That is when it really hits him; he needs help and he needs it very badly! Solving world problems with the rest of the "good old boys" around a camp fire may be fun but being a father is serious!

This is when the wise father reaches out with all his heart to a loving Heavenly Father for strength and wisdom. It was alright to wander in the world before but now he holds a little bundle of a baby in his arms that scares him much more than the biggest bully he has ever faced.

Prayer and reading God's instruction book, the Bible, are vital as you assume the responsibilities of fatherhood. Follow God's will for your life and He will keep you safe as well as provide the right guidelines for the child walking in your footsteps.

June 15, 2011

DIVINE RELATIONSHIP

God does not need what man does but He longs for what man provides; relationship. God can create anything He wants with a word but only the free will of man can form a relationship that loves God with the entire heart, soul, and mind. This relationship is why God formed man, seeks man, and redeems man. It is so sacred a relationship until it is compared to a marriage relationship.

The Relationship between God and His people is a PERSONAL relationship. PRIVATE time with the Lord will produce Public commitment and comments but that intimate time with God is very sacred and personal. The Relationship between God and His People is PLEASURABLE (Both parties receive joy from their union). It should be PRODUCTIVE (God expects new believers to be born as a result of this union). It should also be PERMANENT- Divorce is Deadly in your relationship with God (See Heb 10:26).

But the key to this relationship, as in all relationships, is that it must be a PARTNERSHIP. Just as we need God for forgiveness, guidance, and life; so God needs us as a way to express His personality. Without the redemption of sinners and the relationship that ensues there would be no way for God to clearly show the main attributes of His character-Love, Mercy, and Grace. By walking together with God we are blessed and the holy character of God is exposed.

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

June 21, 2011

THE JESUS WAY

Jesus did not say, “I will show you the way” or “I know a way”. Jesus said, “I AM the way”. Christianity is not about principles; it is about a person. It is not a religion; it is a relationship. It is not beginning again; it is being born again. It is not turning over a new leaf; it is receiving a new life.

We enter the Jesus way upon confession of needs; not completion of deeds. Christianity is about giving God nothing in order for God to give you everything. It is the realization that poverty of soul cannot be healed by the wealth of the world. It is becoming so tired of wallowing in the mud until you risk it all to walk on water.

The Jesus way is walking by faith and not by sight. It is seeing the invisible, attempting the impossible, and becoming part of the incredible. Christians are victors instead of victims as they rest in God’s care while He works all their circumstances together for good. They are peacemakers instead of troublemakers who turn the world upside down in order to bring in a kingdom where righteousness is right and the lamb can lie down with the lion.

Christianity is about having such an abundant life until passing through the shadow of death is simply a transition to eternal bliss. It is a cross that turns into a crown. It believes that Christ came down from heaven in order for people to go up to heaven. It is finally seeing Him face to face whom so long you have known heart to heart. It is arriving in Heaven and finding you have finally come home.

June 22, 2011

WORST JOB IN HEAVEN

[Disclaimer: I am aware that the angels who remain in heaven after the satanic rebellion are completely loyal to God and obey Him without question. The opening paragraph is simply a “fanciful illustration” to help you see an important point]

I can almost see him sitting around with the other angels as they unwind from a hard day’s work. “I have got to have the worst job in Heaven,” he complained. “You guys get to protect children, fight in God’s army against the forces of evil, and even announce the birth of the Son of God while I spend my days killing the first born in Egypt or surprising someone with an unexpected visit. I am telling you, the job of Death Angel has got to be the worst job in Heaven!”

I wonder what you would consider the worst job in Christianity. Mother Teresa as she daily wiped the dirt and disease from the sick and dying in Calcutta? David Livingstone as he struggled with climate and lack of convenience in order to tell the people of Africa about Christ? Or a faithful wife who weekly deals with verbal abuse from a husband simply because she desires to go to church each Sunday?

The Holy Spirit chooses where He wants to place Christians in the body of Christ (1Cor 12:11). Some are placed in positions of great prominence and others are given places of less honor. But each part of the body is vital in order for the body to function {with no desire to be crude, think about what would happen to your body if your bowels failed to function!}.

Whatever job God has given you, remember that it is part of God’s plan. That makes it a great job that deserves your best.

June 28, 2011

AMERICA'S WRONG ENEMY

It is easy to understand that the “way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov 13:15) but it is sometimes difficult to comprehend when life for a child of God becomes “bitter with hard bondage” (Exodus 1: 14). The Children of Israel were minding their own business and prospering in Egypt when a ruler was appointed who forgot their past accomplishments and saw them as a threat to his programs and prosperity. They were made slaves under harsh treatment simply because they were Jews and not Egyptians.

Sadly, Christians are now painted as a threat to those who want to live in moral degradation and worship humanistic wisdom. America has forgotten the Christian ethics and energy that for many years shaped and defined this country. Instead of asking people to do great and good things so we can rise to a new standard of excellence, we are being told we must “tolerate” the lowest moral standards and accept a philosophy which declares if it is right then it must be wrong!

Christians are told they can talk about the sexual frolics of politicians at work but they must never mention anything about their Christian values because that might offend someone. It is alright to text sex at school but woe unto the child who seeks to “corrupt” his schoolmates by praying or reading his Bible!

When Egypt began persecuting the people of God it eventually brought the wrath of God and the decline of the nation. America is putting herself in that same position. The thunderstorms of God's wrath can be heard in the distance. There has never been a greater need for Christian courage and convictions. In these troublesome times may God bring forth Christian Heroes who will hold high the banner of God's love and mercy.

June 29, 2011

WHERE ARE YOU?

Bible Teacher, Warren Wiersbe states that there are four kinds of people in the church- 1) Those who make things happen, 2) those who watch things happen, 3) those who criticize what happens, and 4) those who do not know what is happening. He describes these as workers, spectators, complainers, and clueless. Which category would describe you?

Jesus said the seed of the Gospel was received in four different ways. Some heard the Gospel but only in a surface way so they quickly lost what they had heard. Some put down roots upon hearing the Gospel but the shallowness of their commitment produced no growth so they soon withered away. Others heard the Gospel and began to walk like a Christian but the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust for worldly things soon choked out their commitment and they became pretty plants instead of fruit bearing trees. The final group heard the Gospel, believed the Gospel, and committed to living by the Gospel so that fruit soon appeared. What has the seed of the Gospel done in your life?

The Word “Christian” is found 3 times in the Bible. The first time it is used as a descriptive phrase to identify those who lived like Christ (Acts 11:26). The second time it is used to describe a conversion to the beliefs of Christianity (Acts 26:28). The final time it is used as an exhortation for those who bear the name of Christian to remain faithful to their calling and commitment in the face of trials and sufferings. Therefore, we can say that “Christian” is used to describe a lifestyle, a system of belief, and a core value system worth suffering and dying for. Would that describe your Christianity?

July 5, 2011 THE GOAL OF YOUR GOAL

When I became the Free Will Baptist State Executive Secretary I wanted to accomplish four goals: 1) Strengthen the bonds between our Pastors and Churches, 2) Extend our Mission support, 3) Publicize the Performance of our Churches, 4) and Enlarge our denomination's ability to build the Kingdom of God. I summarized these goals with four words: MOTIVATION, PARTICIPATION, INFORMATION, and EVANGELIZATION.

In order to accomplish these goals I tried to visit all of our Free Will Baptist churches (122) in South Carolina during my first year in office. I also visited each of the International Mission families (6) who claimed South Carolina as a home base (Serving in Brazil, Japan, Spain, and India) in order to understand the needs of our missionaries on a personal basis. And I increased the size and circulation of our State Denominational newspaper by including more local church news and events. God greatly blessed during my years of service and I can never adequately express my appreciation to the wonderful Free Will Baptist people of South Carolina for their support and prayers.

The goal of this article, however, is not simply to allow an old man to reminisce about the blessings of his past. I wanted readers to know that things went well and much was accomplished because I had goals, I worked very hard to accomplish those goals, and I trusted God to bring those goals to completion.

Sadly, this is not something I see among Pastors and Churches today. Many of them seem content to meet each week with the same crowd; doing the same thing and getting the same results. There is no energy or enthusiasm in the sermon or the service. Yet, everyone wonders why their church is dying. The answer is very simple, "Where there is no vision, the people perish".

July 6, 2011 WALLS

The book of Nehemiah contains information about the last historical events listed in the Old Testament. Earlier, God had miraculously brought about the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the Temple. Now Nehemiah becomes burdened about Jerusalem and the need for the walls of the city to be rebuilt in order to provide protection and stability to the "holy city". The book of Nehemiah is about the building of these walls.

One of the great problems in Christianity today is the number of church people who claim to "believe" in Jesus Christ as their Savior but behave just like the world around them. They have a "temple" where they worship but the rest of their life is lived in defeat and discouragement because they still have "broken walls" surrounding their life which allows the enemy of their soul to come and go without hindrance.

An example of "broken walls" in the life of a person would be someone who has no self-control (Anger, lust, excessive spending, ...)- *He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls* (Prov 25:28). Although these people profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ the "broken walls" in their life dishonors God, disrupts their family, disturbs their peace, and discourages their life.

The main material used to build the new walls for Jerusalem was the material that had been in the old walls before they were destroyed. In the same way, God takes the broken parts of a yielded life and uses the power of the Holy Spirit to manufacture a new creature able to live in peace and victory because of the new creation you become in Christ. Through Christ things that previously defeated you now enable you to be victorious- Glory!

July 12, 2011

REASONS FOR THE RAIN

When God began talked to Job about suffering and troubles He used many illustrations to show His power. One interesting reference God used was His reasons for brings rain.

By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud: And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy (Job 37:10-13).

God gives Job three reasons for rain: 1) Correction, 2) Fruitfulness of His land, or 3) Mercy. Correction refers to the fact that several times in scripture God uses drought (lack of rain) as a method of coaxing people into the realization that they had failed in their relationship with God (For example- The 3 year drought by Elijah's word in order to bring the nation back to God {I Kings 17-18}).

Fruitfulness is a reference to God's care for His land and His people- *Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest (Jeremiah 5:24).*

Rain given in "Mercy" shows the marvelous love of our great God for everyone- *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:45).*

The next time you hear the rain beating upon your roof realize that God is speaking. What is He saying to you!

July 13, 2011

WOMB, WORM, AND WICKEDNESS

Job 24:20 The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree.

The first of the "wisdom books" in the Bible is the book of Job. It is the story (really a poem in its original format) about a righteous man and the reasons for the disasters and sufferings in his life. Throughout history it has served as a consolation and comfort to multitudes of people who have wondered why bad things happen to good people.

In defending himself against the false accusations of his friends, Job shows great wisdom about matters of life and death. Toward the end of his dialogue with his friends Job declares several things about the death of the wicked that are worthy of our consideration.

First, Job declares that when the wicked die "the womb shall forget him". No one can describe the anguish of heart that comes to family members when a loved one dies without being born again into the family of God. Instead of looking forward to a glad reunion in Heaven the family must now "forget" this person and receive no comfort for their grief.

Job then proclaims that "the worm shall feed sweetly" upon the wicked. This not only refers to the decay and destruction of the fleshly body but it also is a reference to the eternal misery of the wicked- Jesus declared that the wicked abide in a place "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44).

Finally, Job announces that "wickedness shall be broken as a tree". The righteous shall receive rewards at the end of their life journey. The wicked will be like a broken tree with no fruit and no future. Life choices certainly make eternal differences.

July 19, 2011

RESTITUTION

Restitution is seldom preached about in Church but it is often thought about in daily life. Restitution means to give back, to pay back, or to restore something to its original worth. It is a principle that everyone likes but few want to practice.

When Christ returns to the earth it will be a time of “Restitution”- *And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things*, (Acts 3:20-21). Until that time the Bible gives us some much needed principles about Restitution.

1. If a person is caught STEALING: ... *he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double.* (Exodus 22:3-4). Wouldn't it be great if thieves were required to restore double what they took?
2. If you USE ANOTHER'S PROPERTY WITHOUT PERMISSION: Ex 22:5 *If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.*
3. If your actions HARM OTHERS: Ex 22:6 *If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.*
4. Responsibility if you BORROW SOMETHING: Ex 22:12 *And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof.*

What if our justice system was based on restitution (where people worked to repay victims) instead of retribution? What would happen if our goal was to build character, instead of simply incarcerate, those who did wrong? We might change the world!

July 20, 2011

UNBELIEVER QUESTIONS

If I were an unbeliever I might ask these questions. What will you do today that will let me know that you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God? When I observe you in your daily conduct and conversation what will lead me, as a total stranger, to come to the conclusion that Christ occupies the throne of your heart and God directs the actions of your life? If I put you on trial for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Many people claim the “Avoidance Defense” when asked these questions. Avoiding drunkenness, adultery, and bad language makes you a good moral person but these traits testify of your character instead of God's goodness. Your strong will power to make right choices makes me admire you but it does little to help the wickedness that lives in the darkness and depravity of my sinful heart.

Why can you talk freely to a stranger like me when your team wins a “nail biter” or a news story stirs your outrage but you never have enough courage or conviction to talk to me about what you claim is “God's good news”- *Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;* (Psalms 107:2).

I see you with the “religious people” at church on Sunday but I also see the way you treat the waitress at the restaurant after church and I wonder if this is the way a person acts after a special meeting with God- *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

My life is a mess and I truly desire change but do I really want what you have?

July 26, 2011

CHARACTER CHANGING

Most of the time people look at the fruit of their problem instead of seeking the root that causes the problem. Soon they find that dealing with rotten fruit removes the stink for a little while but if the root remains then it is not long until a bad fragrance again causes discomfort and dismay. Here are a few questions that can be used to get a person to expose the root that is causing their problem.

1. What is the most annoying thing your Husband /Wife; Son/Daughter does? (Reveals your character, your ability to have relationships with others, and the state of your family life)
2. If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be? (Reveals your stability and your “escape plan process”)
3. Who is the first boy/girl you ever kissed on a date? (You will be surprised at the amount of Intimacy issues I can discover in discussing this answer)
4. What is your favorite book of the Bible? (Reveals your spiritual maturity as we talk about why this book is your favorite)
5. What do you like the MOST about yourself? (Getting to the heart of your problem)
6. What do you like the LEAST about yourself? (Root of your problem that is producing the fruit that you have come to talk about!)
7. What are you doing to CHANGE? (Finally, we can begin to move forward as we get you to see that only God has the power to produce permanent change in your personality).

I stand amazed as I read the Gospels and see the methods of the Master as Jesus dealt with people. He would look into eyes and see into hearts; and then expose the root, instead of the fruit, of the problem. And the confrontation would be life changing!

July 27, 2011

PASTORAL QUESTIONS

Summer months are normally the most active time for Pastors to relocate. The process of finding a new Minister can be nominating committee exhausting and even church dividing. Here are five questions that may help you determine the right leader for your church:

1. Do you want a God called Preacher or simply someone that meets several vocal members' desires? (People with children want someone who majors on youth. People with shut in parents want a Pastor who visits a lot. Deep thinkers want profound messages while others want someone who stirs their emotions very deeply each service.)
2. Is this your church to run or God's church to build? (Sounds harsh but you will be surprised at the “power plays” that take place in a church when “no one is in charge”.)
3. Do you want your ears tickled or your heart changed? (God said He would build His Church. Do you want a man of God preaching the word of God or do you want someone to make you feel “warm and fuzzy” each Sunday?)
4. Are you looking for the cheapest preacher you can find or do you think the souls of your family and friends are of more value than gold? (If you get what you pay for will the eternal results be worth the new carpet you purchase with the difference!)
5. Every congregation has a unique personality. Will the vision and methods of ministry of the new Pastor build up the body or constantly cause conflict? (John the Baptist thundered out his message at the commerce crossroads. Jesus went about doing good and preached to crowds that gathered to see the power of God displayed).

God has a plan and God has a man. May you know the plan and find the man- and do a great work for God in your community.

August 2, 2011

A MAN OF THE WORD

A man of God must be a man of the Word. This means he must:

- 1) Love the Word of God- *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* (Psalms 119:103).
- 2) Labor in the Word of God- *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* (2 Timothy 2:15).
- 3) Lecture from the Word of God- *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine* (2 Timothy 4:2).
- 4) Live by the teaching of the Word of God- *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation* (Hebrews 13:7).

The Word of God is important to the Man of God and the People of God because:

- WE GROW BY THE WORD- I Pet 2:2 *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*
- WE ARE CLEANSED BY THE WORD- Ps 119:9 *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*
- WE DEFEAT THE DEVIL THRU THE WORD (Jesus used the Word of God when he was tempted and Paul said the Sword of the Spirit was the Word)
- WE ARE SAVED BY THE WORD (As it produces faith in Christ)- Jam 1:21 *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your soul.* Rom 10:17 *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

When you are judging Ministers and Churches you use one standard- Their adherence to, and their proclamation of, the Word of God.

August 3, 2011

QUESTIONS ANSWERS

The Bible is more of a Question Book than an Answer Book. There are a million questions I want to ask God about creation but God simply states, “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth” (Gen 1:1) and then paints the creation story in broad strokes with few details.

God did not try to “bring me up to speed” about creation. He revealed what He wants me to know and then expected me to have Faith. I have no right to demand an understandable answer that requires God to “run His program by me” and become accountable to me. He is GOD and I am His created servant.

We are living in a time when everyone wants to base their God beliefs on what makes sense to them- *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes* (Judges 21:25). They think of God as a “jovial genie” who they can command with an earnest prayer if they need something; not as a God to be served and obeyed.

Instead of preaching a gooey feel good religion Preachers need to re-emphasize the uniqueness of God- *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.* (Isaiah 55:8), the stability of God- *For I am the LORD, I change not;* (Malachi 3:6), and the authority of God- *Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29).

God is our creator, savior, and judge. We may not like what He commands or understand what He does but we must always believe He is God and His actions come from a heart of love. And that is the answer to all of your questions.

August 9, 2011

COMMANDER ORDERS

The Last Order given by the Leader, Commander (Isaiah 55:4), and soon coming King of Christianity was to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). He did not say, as some want to preach and practice today, “Be prosperous, be happy, and settle down in this wicked world”. His command was to be actively evangelistic to everyone everywhere.

This command for evangelistic effort required people to make a definite decision concerning their belief in Christ. Neutrality is not permitted nor accepted in a person’s decision about walking with Christ (Luke 9:57-62) and everyone knows that the last message of Christ to the church stated that He would spue lukewarm followers out of His mouth (Rev. 3:14-16).

We live in a time of tremendous evangelistic opportunity. While one on one witnessing about our faith in Christ is still the best way to reach those around us; we must also recognize that the opportunity to reach multitudes with the Gospel is available to almost everyone.

Here are a few methods you may want to use to expand your Gospel Outreach: Direct Mail (Personal letters, postcards, or mass mailing to your community), E-invites (emails), Billboards (several people could go together for this), Newspaper ads (announcements and letters to the editor), Radio and/or TV ads and announcements, Yard Signs (Politicians use them to great advantage), and Social Media (Webs, Facebook, Twitter, etc).

Methods are available; men to use these methods are the missing ingredient! What would you think of a man who held a life preserver in his hand while someone drown mere feet from where he stood? What will God think?

August 10, 2011

CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

Jesus was always challenging people with questions because He knew that the most thought provoking thoughts are the ones that develop in your own mind instead of those accepted from the proclamations of others. Here are some “starters” to stir your thought process and, hopefully, lead you to a great thought that will be life changing for you and for others.

You have heard what the ministers, the media, and the multitudes say about Jesus. Ignoring what you are expected to say or what you have been taught to say, what do you really believe about who Jesus is and what He did? Is Jesus simply a great man with a great plan or is He actually God who came to earth to live among men?

Knowing that your belief determines your behavior, list the three most important things you know for sure. How are these principles impacting your daily life and future plans? Is there anything you believe strongly enough until you would die rather than renounce your belief?

If you could see any of the miracles performed by Jesus or hear any of the sermons preached by Jesus; which one would you choose? Would seeing that miracle or hearing that sermons change the way you live and think?

When was the last time you had a “laugh out loud” time of Joy with God? When you and God spend time together, who does the most talking? When life is chaotic and you are getting advice from everywhere can you identify the voice of Christ in the crowd of comments (John 10:4)?

Is God in your daily thoughts- *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts* (Psalms 10:4)?

August 16, 2011

BUILD THE BODY

The duty of a Church is to Glow, Go, and Grow. Sometimes, however, churches allow people problems to cause them to lose sight of God's purpose and they spend their time fighting friction fires instead of delivering men from eternal fires. Here are three principles that will help handles many of these troublesome details and, hopefully, get your Church refocused on Glorifying God, Proclaiming Christ, and building your local body of believers.

1) None of us is as smart as all of us- The Church is a Body. Working together this body can do a great work for God but each individual part can never work correctly without the help of the rest of the body.

2) You reap what you sow- Criticizing the Church and its leadership decreases their ability to impact your town for Christ [When tongues of Christians are set on fire from Heaven thousands are saved (Acts 2) but when they are set on fire from Hell they bring great destruction (James 3:6)]. Praising the Church draws people to the Church. Praying for the Church and its leadership empowers the Church for greatest (This is God's Church, He said HE would build it. Invite Him to do that). Proclaiming the Word of God will not return void.

If you are not satisfied with the harvest at your church then you need to examine the seed being planted!

3) Expectations determine outcome- Jesus said, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Mark 9:29). A Big God can do Big Things but even Jesus was limited in His hometown by the unbelief of the people (Mark 13:58). Do you attend with anticipation?

God calls Churches to "let their little light shine", go into all the world to proclaim Christ, and become fruitful for God. Do not lose sight of your goal.

August 17, 2011

STRATEGY OR TACTICS

Many people fail in life because they energetically tackle life problems without any life Strategy. Strategy is an overall view of a problem; the way to reach a time and place when things will be different than they are now. Tactics are the methods used to complete that Strategy.

Another way to describe this would be to say Strategy is your vision and Tactics are your methods of fulfilling that vision. Leaders are people who see the "big picture" (Strategy) and then develop tactics to reach that goal or correct that situation. Contrast that to multitudes of people who when they see a problem, immediately try to correct that problem but, failing to realize the interconnectivity of problems, instead of looking for leaks they end up constantly rearranging furniture on the Titanic as it sinks beneath the waves.

God deals with many individual character flaws and sins in the Bible and he expects us to be serious about His corrective process. In order to correct our sinful actions however, we must see God's strategy of Heart change instead of merely engaging in our own feeble self-efforts tactics.

When God called the Apostle Paul He led him into the desert for three years in order to show him His strategy for reaching the world. Paul came out of the desert experience single minded in his desire to go to the Gentiles and preach Christ as God final answer to man's sinful heart. Paul strategy was not to change Gentiles with Jewish customs and laws; he called men to be "Christ Followers" and then allowed the Holy Spirit to change their heart in order to produce a change in their life.

Paul's strategy turned the world upside down. What is your strategy doing?

August 23, 2011

LOVE SHOWS CHRISTIANITY

Love among Christians is not an option; it is a Biblical Necessity- *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death* (1 John 3:14).

It is a lie to say you love God and hate the Brethren-*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* (1 John 4:20).

With the birth of the Christian Church everything changed. Suddenly, masters and slaves, rich and poor, educated and illiterate were sitting on the same pew and calling one another “brother”. If Christianity was to make the transition from the meeting place to the marketplace then Christians had to move from toleration of each other into genuine love for one another. This is the reason Peter wrote in his first epistle- *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:* (1 Peter 1:22).

The Greek words for “love” in this verse show Peter is telling the Church to stop simply liking fellow Christians and ask God to produce a sacrificial love for them. This “fervent” love makes fellow Christians precious to us because they are precious to God. This love realizes that when one part of the body is in pain then all of the body suffers. This love treats others with the same mercy and forgiveness that God extends to us. It is the character of God at work in our life and it is world changing.

August 24, 2011

ENJOYING LIFE

I have learned is that life is better when life is better. I know there are benefits to troubles and trials as we grow and learn to depend on God’s strength but I still have enough of a fleshly nature until I enjoy enjoying life. Here are some benefits that Christians should recognize and enjoy.

Life is enjoyable when we have Peace. As a Christian we have Peace WITH God- *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:* (Romans 5:1); as well as the Peace OF God- *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.* (Colossians 3:15).

Life is enjoyable when we feel Safe- *The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe* (Proverbs 18:10).

Life is enjoyable when we feel confident about God’s plans for us- *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end* (Jer 29:11).

Life is enjoyable when we anticipate Future blessings- *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also* (John 14:2-3).

God commands us not to “trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim 6:17). If you are not enjoying life then you may be trusting in the wrong things!

August 30, 2011 CREATED BY GOD

Have you ever wondered why God did not begin the Bible by saying, “This is the way you have a relationship with me”? I believe a person’s relationship with God is the most important information in life so I have often wondered why God did not make that His first instructions to mankind. Recently, I realized that God had indeed done that very thing.

As almost everyone knows, the first verse in the Bible declares, *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth* (Genesis 1:1). I finally realized that this verse not only declares that God created us but it also states that God created us. Let me share another Bible verse that may make my meaning clear- *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created* (Revelation 4:11).

Do you see it? Our relationship with God is based on the fact that He is God who created us and we are His created beings who worship and serve Him. We fail to have a right relationship with God when we view him as the “wonderful heavenly grandfather” who exists to spoil us regularly and get us out of the troubles we cannot handle instead of viewing Him as our creator to be worshipped and served.

God created us to do whatsoever pleases Him! Sinful actions are wrong because they are rebellious acts against the leadership and character of God and proclaim the throne of our heart is occupied by self instead of by God. God loves us and desires a relationship with us but it always comes back to our belief in who created us and why we were created.

August 31, 2011 WORD WORK

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

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

The power of God’s word is mind boggling. He blessed two fish and five loaves and fed 5000 people. He stood in the midst of a raging storm and simply said, “Peace, be still” and the storm stood still. And most of His healing miracles were done simply by speaking to the disease or the demon. Even in Salvation, Men are saved by Faith but that Faith is founded on belief brought about by hearing the Word of God. The work of the Word is a vital part of the work of creating a new creature in Christ.

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

September 6, 2011 TERROR

Ten years ago Terror came to America and the world has never been the same. No longer do we zip through airports as if they were a taxi stand down town. Now we deal with long security lines, body searches, and greater difficulty in obtaining visas and passports. Years of terrorist wars have left our military exhausted, America's financial coffers empty, and few who will admit that they feel safer today that they did ten years ago.

The early church knew something of this constant anxiety as they faced severe persecution and brutal martyrdom. No wonder Peter felt compelled to proclaim, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;" (1 Peter 3:14).

The only reason Peter could encourage his fellow believers to not be troubled by Terror was his belief in the fact that Jesus Christ had conquered Death. How do you terrorize a man with the fear of death when he knows death is not the end of the road!

Peter knew if he died that he would leave earthly poverty for Heavenly riches, earthly friends for Heavenly family, and religious symbols of worship for walking in the very presence of God. I will give you ten dollar bills all day if you give me thousand dollar bills in return! That is the way Peter was looking at the terror of Terror. He knew that the things he was giving up if he was attacked by Terror were of small value compared to what he would be gaining.

I cannot guarantee that terror will not come to America again but I can guarantee that God will never leave us or forsake us. That is a truth that is greater than Terror.

September 7, 2011 BROWNIES

My wife has to stay with her dad much of the time because of his mental circumstances. When she is home she is so tired and has so much "catch up" work to do until she never gets to do anything extra. Recently she was home for a few days and decided she wanted something sweet to eat so she baked a batch of brownies.

After my nephew, Andrew, and I got over the surprise that she still knew how to operate the oven (thankfully, she does not read my articles!), we really enjoyed the hot fresh brownies. The next day my wife returned to her dad's home and Andrew and I had a great idea. We felt that if we ate all the remaining brownies then my wife would be inclined to make more when she returned home. Alas, sometimes even good plans fail!

Many times in life I have worked and schemed and laid out my well intentioned plans before the Lord with full assurance that God would surely see things my way and do what I wanted done. Most of the time the Lord simply laughed and made me eat humble pie instead of fresh cooked brownies (see Psalms 2:4).

As we travel life's journey we meet opportunities, obligations, and obstacles. Trusting God means we believe His wisdom about situations even when He sees what we consider an obstacle as an opportunity and directs our paths accordingly. I try to remember that on any given day gardeners are praying for rain next door to golfers who are praying for a sunny day and God is wise enough to answer these prayers correctly. So trust God's leadership. You may not always get brownies but you will always get the best.

September 13, 2011

COVENANT COMMITMENTS

Don't you hate it when someone makes a promise and then fails to follow through (Think "promises of politicians")? God feels the same way about the promises we make to Him- *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed* (Ecclesiastes 5:4). God expects us to say what we mean and mean what we say. Check your compliance with these Covenant Commitments you should have made.

The Covenant to guard your thoughts- *I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?* (Job 31:1). In this day of easy access internet pornography and blatantly sexual movies and TV programs you must make a constant and consistent effort to keep your thoughts pure and your imagination in check.

The Covenant to honor your marriage- *Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant* (Malachi 2:14). "Forsaking all others I will be faithful to you in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth, til death do us part". Marriage commitment is not just until lust runs out or until familiarity dampens excitement.

The Covenant to walk with God- *And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book* (2 Chronicles 34:31).

Don't you hate it when someone makes a promise and then fails to follow through?

September 14, 2011

LAST CHAPTERS

Growing up I was sickly and wore thick glasses (can you say Geek?). That meant I was always the last person chosen for teams at school. When the scars from that try to do damage to my confidence I remember that Jesus said one day, "The last shall be first" (Matt 19:30). Thinking about that recently I started considering some things found in "last chapters" of Bible Books. See how many you can get right from this quiz I made up (If you need answers email me at Mike@MinisterMinistry.com. We have a no obligation, no solicitation policy).

What book of the Bible ends with the statement- "The Lord is there"?

The last two verses of one book of the Bible are the first two verses of the next book of the Bible. What are these books?

The Bible only talks about embalming two of God's people and they are both in the last chapter of this book. Who are they and in what book are they found?

The last chapter of this book list three daughters of a man. Their names translate into "Dove", "Cinnamon", and "Cosmetic Container" (Thought to be a way of saying "source of beauty" or "the most beautiful"). Who is the man and what book is this from?

What last chapter of this book contains God's famous "Gourd Sermon"?

What last chapter declares the wonderful news that God will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea?

What last chapter honors the industry and example of a godly woman?

What last chapter in this book is the same as the first chapter?

Final question- When the last chapter of your physical life is written, what will be written about your eternity?

September 20, 2011 RENEWAL

As I was working on a sermon recently I noticed the same problem in several areas at once. I like to listen to music as I work but I noticed my iPod battery was weak. Then when I needed to look up a reference from John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" on my Kindle I noticed that its battery was low. Finally, as I sat in front of my computer trying to do something creative I realized I felt "brain dead" and knew my "battery" was also getting low!

It was easy enough to plug my iPod and Kindle into their recharge unit and a good night's rest help renew some of my depleted strength. Thinking about all these things running down, however, caused me to remember another problem I had witnessed in recent weeks. Battered by storms, a wildly fluctuating stock market, and ineffective leadership in Washington, people are walking around with a dazed look on their face and a little bit of panic in their eyes. Hope is not gone but it seems to be effectively hiding from many people!

The word "renew" is found in six verses in the Bible. Two verses refer to renewal for the Kingdom of Israel and another verse talks about repentance renewal (Heb 6:6). The remaining three verses are about renewal of our relationship with God (Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me- Ps 51:10) and renewal of spiritual strength (But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint- Isa 40:31 {also Isa 41:1}).

If your battery is low and your hope is fading recharge by cleaning up, calming down, and confidently clinging to God. Your renewed energy will boast you and benefit others.

September 21, 2011 DEATH CANNOT CELEBRATE

For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth (Isaiah 38:18).

Sometimes you add 2 to 2 and get four. Sometimes you add 2 to 2 and get 22. Things do not always turn out the way you think they will. You would think this verse is a negative verse of remorse at the finality of death. Instead, it is sandwiched between two verses that make it part of the positive practice of celebrating God and life now because once you die then it is too late!

The verse before this verse brings forth the good news that God "in love to my soul has delivered it from the pit of corruption by casting all our sins behind His back" (Isaiah 38:17). Celebrate life because God is on our side and He has made a way for us to be on His side!

The verse after this verse tells us to celebrate life because it is the way to transfer the truths of life from generation to generation- *The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth (Isaiah 38:19).*

The Bible declares that "today is the day of salvation" (2Cor 6:2) but it also proclaims that today is the day of proclamation and celebration. You may be surrounded with problems and pains but the God who knows when sparrows fall and who clothes flowers in astonishing beauty in spite of their brief life span (Matt 6) loves your soul and understands your heart. Don't wait to get to heaven to celebrate, enjoy, and proclaim God's goodness. Celebrate today!

September 27, 2011 MINISTERS

One of the great burdens of my life has been to help young preachers become great preachers. I believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important information ever presented to mankind and I want the messengers who deliver this message to be the very best they can be. For years I have “put my money where my mouth is” by providing free meals, free materials, and free mentoring to those who are involved in ministry and missions. My biggest regret has been my lack of funds and my insufficient ability.

Here are three areas that I believe would make a difference for young ministers. Get a Mentor whom you trust. Someone who can listen to you “blow off steam” and then gently say, “OK, now let’s get back to work”. Someone who can keep pointing you in the right direction with a word of encouragement or by looking you in the eye and saying, “I think you need to re-think that decision”.

Prepare a message, not just a sermon. Study to show yourself approved unto God and to man. Stand before people with the realization that you are the one standing between them and a miserable life; as well as eternal separation from God.

Look for growth in the body of believers you shepherd. Never become satisfied to simply show up each Sunday, have a service, and then go home. Determine that your people will continually grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Preach with energy, effectiveness, and empathy. Preach as a dying man to dying men.

I would rather be a preacher than president. October is Pastor Appreciation Month. What a great time to determine to pray for, praise, and raise the pay of your Pastor!

September 28, 2011 ENJOY GOD

Religion is a lot like sex, if you get it a little bit wrong it is really dangerous. Many People use Religion to Endure life, seek to Escape from Life, or try to Avoid Life. God wants us to Enjoy Life by Expanding our Life to include Him so we can become the great person God designed us to be. Christ promised forgiveness to the sinful, rest to the weary, comfort for the sad, hope for the hopeless, and life to the dead. That should bring some enjoyment into your life!

Some people believe God is just like we are except He is more powerful, has more wisdom, and is able to do more things. To these people he is not a God to be worshipped but a greater power that we try to curry favor with; and there is no joy in always have to “butter up” God in order to stay on His good side. What a great joy to the Christian to realize Christ not only paid for my sin but He also prays for me. This means I can have abundant life here as well as eternal life there!

Some Christians fail to enjoy the Christ Life because they sell out, give out, hide out, or walk out. Jesus calls us to abundant life as we talk out, live out, send out, and invite in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. You cannot scare me with Heaven so do not threaten me with death. To live is Christ and to die is gain. A Christian has a new heart, new hope, new help, and a new home. Heaven is real, life is good, Enjoy.

October 4, 2011 FREEZER STORY

I was sitting at my computer writing newspaper articles I (like this one!) when the Lord spoke to me and told me to go to my store room and crush the aluminum cans I planned to sell later that week. I tried to be as polite as I could but I told the Lord I needed to finish the article I was writing and I could crush the cans later.

The Lord would not take “no” for an answer so I finally walked out to the storage building and began crushing cans. With an attitude that was not as good as I like to maintain I was crushing aluminum cans with great energy when I suddenly noticed the way my freezer was sounding. It would make a weird sound for a short time and then stop.

Curious about what was going on I opened the lid of the freezer and immediately noticed that the top packages of vegetables we had worked so hard this summer to put up were beginning to thaw out. I carried those packs to my house where my wife began cooking beans for supper and I was able to locate a freezer to store my other vegetables while we made arrangement to get a new freezer.

If God would not have sent me out to the storage building when He did then we would have lost all our freezer food (bad news!). By the way, if you are wondering why God said, “Go crush cans” instead of “Go check the freezer” listen to this. I told this story in church Sunday and a widow came to me after church and said she had been looking for someone to help her by crushing her cans. I love God’s sense of humor and the way He works!

October 5, 2011 WARNING ABOUT WORDS

As a Preacher my constant prayer is for God to “Give me something to say and help me to say it well”. I remember well the warning about words from Jesus: *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned* (Matthew 12:37).

Here are ways words are not used well; by preachers or by anyone else.

- 1) Idle Words- *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment* (Matthew 12:36). When you talk just to talk you end up saying things you do not need to say.
- 2) Angry Words- *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire* (Matthew 5:22). Angry words are like striking a match around gas; the explosion may be unexpected and deadly.
- 3) Bitter Words- *Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words:* (Psalms 64:3). Bitter words cut deep and last long.

Jesus made the astonishing statement that your words reveal your “heart” (*O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*- Matthew 12:34). When speakers; whether preachers, politicians, or just people, lash out in anger and bitterness at their audience they say more about themselves than they say about their subject.

I pray God will help you today to keep your foot, and your feelings, out of your mouth so you can have something to say and to say it well.

October 11, 2011 SEEKING TO BE GOD

The problem with most people is that they do not seek to Find God nearly as much as they seek to Be God! That was the original problem in the Garden of Eden when Satan told Eve the reason she should desire to eat the forbidden fruit was because “God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil “(Genesis 3:5). Eve did not need to seek God, she saw Him every evening when He came down to walk in the garden with Adam. Satan convinced her that being with God was not nearly as appealing as BEING God.

Do you know why you like to “day dream”? Do you know why pornography is so addictive? In these imaginary worlds you become “god” of all that goes on- In your “day dreams” everyone thinks you are great and you are in complete control of all of your circumstances. Pornography uses your imagination to convince you that you are extremely desirable and people will do anything you want them to do. In both cases, you are a “god” to be respected, obeyed, and greatly loved- and that is the secret desire of every person!

Amazingly, the Gospel declares that “as many as received Christ, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:” (John 1:12). Accepting the good news of the Gospel makes us children of God who walk daily with God until one day we will live forever in God’s Home. The very thing Satan falsely promised would come through rebellion and disobedience God now provides through Grace and Faith!

October 12, 2011 TWO STATEMENTS

There are two life changing statements in a relationship- 1> “Will you marry me?” (Can we join our lives together?) and 2> “I Do”. The first statement expresses a desire for two to become one. The second is a statement of surrender!

The Bible often uses the illustration of marriage to exemplify our relationship with God. In order to have a relationship with God you must first declare your need for God and your desire to join your life with God. You do this by telling God, “I am a Sinner”. This proclaims to God that you do not just have a problem; you ARE a problem. This shows God that you do not seek Him as a prostitute for a moment of temporary relief but as a partner for a lifetime of change.

The second statement we must make to God is, “I surrender, Lord”. In a real life battle you ask your enemy to give you his sword before you ask him to give you his hand. In the same way God asks you to yield Him your heart before you give Him your body. Christianity is not about asking God to forgive your past and help make you a better person in the future. Christianity believes that the death of Christ paid a sin debt you could never pay and the resurrection of Christ allows the Holy Spirit to take up permanent residence in your heart in order to make you a new creature in Christ. It is no longer a matter of “trying to be better”. Instead, it is surrendering to the power of the Holy Spirit as He works from the inside to make you different on the outside.

Are you willing to forsake all others and surrender completely to God? There is a great life ahead when you do.

October 18, 2011 ACCOUNTING

It is hard to get where you are going if you do not know where you are at! One of the things I urge churches to do as they seek to grow and be better is to keep an accurate count of attendance for every service at the Church. Designated counters count the attendance, log it into a notebook, and the secretary enters the weekly figures into an Excel spreadsheet. In just a few months I can determine if that “good crowd” you are having each Sunday is going up, going down, or remaining static.

When I carry money to India to build a new church or support our boys home the exchange rate of dollars and rupees is of great importance to me. If the rate of exchange is up then we can get many more rupees for our dollars and do much more work. If the rate is down then it greatly decreases the value of our dollars and it is much more difficult to build and bless.

One of the illustrations Jesus used was about a Master who gave his servants an equal amount of money to take care of while he was gone (Luke 19:11-27). When the Master returned one servant had increased his money tenfold and was rewarded with the oversight of ten cities. One had gained fivefold and was rewarded with five cities. One had hid his money and gained nothing so the Master took the money and left him with the same thing he had gained; nothing.

It is important to be able to account for that for which you are accountable- LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am (Psalms 39:4).

October 19, 2011 HARVEST

October is “harvest time” for many farmers. Beginning early this year they worked long hard hours plowing, planting, and caring for their crops and now they get to reap the rewards. These farmers have a crop because they determined what they wanted to plant, where they wanted to plant it, and how they were going to care for it.

Anyone can raise a field of briars and weeds; just be so lazy or so busy until you neglect plowing and planting. In the same way laziness and busyness can develop lukewarm and non-fruit bearing Christians. Here are some questions to help you check on the harvest being produced in your relationship with the Lord.

Are you building your life more and more upon the principles of the Word of God? Are you more and more thirsty for the things of God? Remember David’s desire: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psalms 42:1).

Are you making a consistent effort to grow as a Christian by becoming more like Christ in thought and actions- “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18)?

Are you concerned more and more with the Spiritual and Physical needs of others- “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7)?

Increasingly aware of your own flaws, are you more and more willing to forgive others- “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matthew 6:14)?

Harvest does not just happen; it takes desire, determination, and a vision of what you want your crop to be. You reap what you sow; what are you harvesting?

November 1, 2011 LIFE TESTS

We were going to my wife's dad for supper and she had baked a cake to carry. When we started to leave she decided some ice cream would be good so we stopped by a grocery store to purchase some. I was in a hurry so I went immediately to the frozen food section, found the kind of ice cream she wanted, and went to the express lane to check out.

Immediately ahead of me in line was a girl who looked very young. All she had was a six pack of beer; and she looked very nervous. When it came her time to check out the clerk asked for her ID. She said she had forgotten it in the car. The clerk then said she couldn't sell her the alcohol without an ID. The young girl put the beer on the counter and walked away.

That is when the manager of the store walked up and told the clerk that she had passed the test! He had sent in a "ringer" to see if the clerk would follow proper procedure.

I wonder how often we are faced with similar situations in our spiritual lives. Maybe it is an unexpected visitor that is actually an "angel unawares" (Heb 13:2). Maybe the Lord will allow the hungry, thirsty, naked, or even those in jail to ruin our routine and add stress to our already overburdened life. They are actually a test; but they look so much like real life.

Life's journey allows us to cross the path of many people. Sometimes they are a test sent from God. But the test is easy to pass, just remember that "the way you treat the least of these my brethren, is as if you have done it unto Christ" (Matt 25:34-40).

November 2, 2011 WE WOULD SEE JESUS

A young preacher had just graduated from Divinity School and accepted his first Church. Week after week he tried to impress the people with the depth of his understanding of the Scriptures or the modern relevancy of his message. And week after week he left the pulpit with a feeling of failure.

One Sunday when he arrived at the pulpit and started to put out his notes he saw a sign taped to the top of the pulpit. It contained a simple statement, "We would see Jesus" (John 12:21). Hurt and bewildered, the young preacher stumbled through the message and made it back to the parsonage. Waves of anger washed over him that someone would be so callous. This was followed by waves of depression and anxiety. He tried to lie down and get some sleep but that simple statement kept pounding in his mind, "We would see Jesus".

Finally he rolled off the bed into a kneeling posture. There tears of repentance washed through his soul as he acknowledged his pride and arrogance. What a change the new day brought. Instead of strutting among the people he looked for ways to show them Jesus by serving and loving them.

Day after day this young preacher sought to manifest Christ and help the flock God had given him to shepherd. Several weeks passed. Then one Sunday, when this young preacher entered the pulpit, he found another sign taped to the pulpit, "Then were the Disciples glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20).

November 8, 2011 IN THE END

In the end it is not about you. Even if you have a brilliant mind and billions of dollars at your disposal; your appointment with death cannot be avoided. Even if you do something really crazy and have your “fifteen minutes of fame”; in the end you are soon forgotten as the next idiot (excuse me, celebrity) takes your place and your “fame” fades as you slide into eternity. Even if you do all the exercises and take all the vitamins and use every method at your disposal to be as healthy as possible you still cannot prevent the end from arriving. In the end the person with the most toys takes none of them into eternity; “As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand” (Ecclesiastes 5:15).

In the end it is all about the beginning. If you believe you came from nothing then you will have nothing to look forward to at the end. If you believe there was a higher power involved in your beginning then you realize this is who you must answer to in the end. When death casts its dark shadow upon you it will bring despair or delight depending upon your belief.

I have been there at the end for more people than I like to remember. News, sports, and TV entertainment lost their appeal as the end approached. Social status, financial gain, and even food were no longer items of concern. In the end people wanted me to hold their hand, speak about eternity with confidence and calmness, and confirm the surety of their hope. In the end God, and their relationship to Him, was all that really mattered.

November 9, 2011 GLORIFYING GOD IN THE DARK

Showing the Glory of God is not always an easy thing. Sometimes it takes suffering or sickness in order to reveal to others the greatness of God's Glory (Remember, it is only when it gets dark that we can see the wonder of the stars that surround us).

Jesus and the Disciples came to a man who was born blind. He had been blind for 40 years. The disciples asked if the sins of the parents or the sins of the man caused the blindness. Jesus said the sickness was to show the Glory of God. He then healed the man. Would you be willing to be blind for 40 years in order to show the glory of God?

Jesus had a good friend named Lazarus. Lazarus became sick and his family sent word to Jesus to come and help. Jesus told His disciples that the sickness was for the Glory of God. You know the story. When Jesus arrived Lazarus had died and had been buried for four days. Jesus tells them to open the grave. He then calls Lazarus to come out of the Tomb and everyone said, “Glory!” The story of Lazarus brings Glory to God all over the world but we would never have heard of Lazarus if he had not been sick and died and was then resurrected by Jesus. Would you be willing to endure sickness and death to bring Glory to God?

The greatest desire of every person should be to be part of something that will bring glory to God. What unexpected, and sometimes unwelcome, event will God allow in your life that will bring Glory to Him? Do not be discouraged. In eternity, your revelation of God's Glory will make you a “star”.

November 15, 2011

DIFFERENCE DAYS

This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalms 118:24). Realizing that each day is a good day because it is a God given day should make us determine to use every day to make a difference in our world. Sometimes that difference impacts many people and is long remembered. Sometimes that difference is simply bringing a smile to a child or a clerk. Either way, make today a day that makes a difference.

People remember certain days because they have special meaning to them- Birthdays, Wedding Anniversary, and Catastrophe Days (For everyone, like 9-11, or individual, like the day their parent, spouse, or child died). Rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with them that weep (Rom 12:15) and know that on this day your laughter or your tears are important in the life of another.

Here are some other days that can make a difference in your life and in the life of those you come in contact with:

1. Grace Day- A day in which you seek to do random acts of kindness for no other reason except to do good for another person.
2. Gossip Free Day- a day you determine you will not “go up and down as a talebearer in the land” (Lev 19:16). Seek and speak only good about others.
3. Gospel day- Share your Christian testimony with at least three people
4. Get together day- Someone you have wanted to spend time with but you keep putting off making the contact.
5. Growth day- Stretch your mind, your body, and your soul with a challenge that will make you consider and deeply think about different viewpoints.

This is the day that the Lord has made. Make is special so that you can rejoice and be glad in it.

November 16, 2011

JOYFUL GIVING

Let me begin with this disclaimer. I do not want your money, I want your happiness. I do not get paid for these newspaper articles and the organizations I represent will probably never receive a penny of any money given by the readers of this devotion. I believe, and have seen in actual living, that “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35) and I simply want to make your life better by sharing about the Joy of Giving.

Giving to God is an act of worship, a deed of obedience, and a demonstration of gratitude. It is also shows God that your heart is not controlled by coveting. God wants the best for you and He knows it is “more blessed to give than to receive”.

Here are some ways that you can make your giving blessed, as well as joyful:

1. Give first- On the first day of the week give God the first fruits of your income. It will please God and give Him the opportunity to prosper you as He observes your dedication to His will and work.
2. Give wisely- Jesus did not go through the Promised Land healing everyone. He understood the principle of using His resources wisely. The father of the Prodigal Son did not give him food and clothing until the Prodigal “came to himself” and left the hog pen. He knew the principle of “not casting his pearls before swine” (Matt 7:6).
3. Give quietly- If you get your “feel good” from the adoration you receive instead of the joy you give than giving loses it blessedness; and its reward from God (Matt 6:1-4).

May God fill your life with prosperity and plenty so that you can be a blessing as you share with others.

November 22, 2011

PRAISE FOR PROBLEMS

I talking with a good friend recently and he told how his relationship with the Lord drastically changed when he prayed a desperate prayer and received a definite answer from the Lord. I thought as I listened to his story, "How biblical this story is!" Over and over in the ministry of Jesus it was the desperate cries of those in need which brought a demonstration of God's power and healing.

The ruler, Jarius, would probably never have approached Jesus if it were not for the extreme sickness of his daughter. The woman with the issue of blood would never have subjected herself to the buffeting of the crowds in order to touch the hem of Jesus' garment unless she had become desperate from a prolonged sickness and an empty pocketbook (Luke 8:43).

I have enough "human" in me until I desire to live a pain free and trouble free life. Yet I know that it was only after Job had lived through the "trials of Job" that he could declare, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5). When you have nothing left but God and you find that God is enough it changes you to the core of your being.

I am not asking you to pray for pain and persecution. I am telling you that a loving God is aware of your situation and He may be allowing the pressure to build in your life so that you will finally cry out in desperation to Him. In that moment, when you go beyond knowing about God to being intimately acquainted with God, you will praise God for the problem; and find a joy that passes understanding.

November 23, 2011

TOO BLESSED TO BE STRESSED

In the midst of an economic recession and government oppression it is easy to entertain personal depression or to be tempted with moral transgression. I chose instead to see the rose among the thorns and the rainbow in the storms. God did not die (He is not even sick!) and "the most high still governs in the affairs of men" (Dan 4:17). No need to be down and out when God promises I can go up and over. So this Thanksgiving season I praise my Great God and thank Him for the people whom He has brought into my life.

The Psalmist said we were to "Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Psalms 30:4). I thank God that He is not a "namby pamby", "wishy washy", change with every new fad, Ruler. He is a holy God that is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). He is a Rock that I can stand on and a God I can count on. I praise God for His stability in an unstable world.

I also thank God for the Saints of God that God has allowed to touch my life. The Apostle Paul said, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you," (Philippians 1:3). I understand what he means. Much of what I am today is a result of people who sought me, brought me into their fellowship, and taught me to go higher. They looked beyond my very plain exterior and saw something in me that caused them to invest energy, effort, and time into helping me become a better person. I thank God upon every remembrance of them.

May God put a smile on your face, success in your life, and a song in your heart as you bask in His blessings.

November 29, 2011

PRESENT PRESSURE

Overheard as I was leaving a church service the second week in November, “I have GOT to get my Christmas shopping done this week so it will not worry me during Thanksgiving activities!” And this was from Christian ladies who are supposed to know the “reason for the season”. Is there no end to the Christmas shopping madness that descends like a plague each year upon our Country?

People buy presents with money they do not have for people who do not need in order to meet some mystical standard which declares that love can only be shown by emptying your pocket book (and bank account and savings and future retirement!). Hundreds of dollars will be spent on two year old children who cannot use; or even understand, the gift that is given in order for people to take a picture and brag about how much they love their child- who will then be neglected in months to come as the parents try desperately to work out a way to pay for all the presents they purchased.

I find it hard to find God in all this. When God sent His son into the world he was placed in an animal feed trough and received not one single physical gift to celebrate His birth. It was almost two years after his birth that wise men came to see him and gave Him gifts; and these gifts were to enable Him to be carried to safety from a king’s wrath.

I hope you will enjoy this Christmas season as you celebrate the birth of God’s Son with family and friends. Just do not use His birth as an excuse to justify society’s pressure to turn this occasion into a commercial bonanza for merchants and a financial and spiritual catastrophe for you.

November 30, 2011

CHRISTMAS GIVING

If Christians are to help put Christ back in Christmas then they must take the lead in ending the constantly escalating gift giving madness. It is certainly not wrong to give a needed gift but it is like “casting your pearls before swine” to allow media pressure or the coveting of children to force you to spend money you do not have. Beginning this year let’s use the formula that was used for Gifts to Jesus.

There are four gifts linked to Christmas in the Bible (Three from the Wise Men and one from the Shepherds). Use the standard of giving no more than four gifts to any one person.

The Wise Men gave gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt2:11). Gold represents a gift that is special and expensive. Frankincense was used in religious activity and represents a gift that helps build the spiritual life of the recipient (Bible, Religious book, Bible game...). The Myrrh was a common herb used in daily life and in the burial of an individual. This could be represented by gifts of clothing, household items, tools...). I call these a glamor gift, a growth gift, and a gadget gift.

The Shepherds did not have a physical gift to give but they gave the gift of testimony- “When they saw Jesus they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child” (Luke 2:17). This gift can be purchasing a bike for an evangelist in India in the name of a child, giving an offering to the Church building fund in the name of a person, buying a fruit basket for the person to carry to someone in a nursing home or in need. I call this the true meaning of Christmas gift.

God’s gift changed people. May He give you wisdom to give the same way.

December 6, 2011 A SAVIOR IS BORN

Christmas means Joy: Christ came so that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). This abundant life is ours when our heart believes in Christ, when our mind thinks like Christ, when our life is surrendered to Christ, and when our joy is found in a relationship with Christ.

Christmas means Peace: Right now I am resting in the hand of God but one day I will rest in the heaven of God (And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand-John 10:28. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you -John 14:2).

Christmas means God became a Man: Now I have help in Temptation- For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). Now I know that God will not put more on me than I can bear- There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Christ came so we could be victorious through Him and for Him. Take the baby out of the cradle and put Him in your heart today. Christmas is joyous beyond words when you let the reason for the season become the savior of your soul and the Lord of your life.

December 7, 2011 CHRISTMAS BLUES

Sadly, many people battle Christmas Depression and Winter Blues during this time of year. Thanksgiving and Christmas are tied so closely together with family until it is difficult during this special season for those who have recently lost a loved one. Add to that the increased financial pressures of Christmas activities, the prolonged time inside while the weather is cold and dark for longer periods of time and the stress of holiday crowds at the mall /restaurants and you get a ready-made formula for depression and the "blues".

I wonder if Mary and Joseph felt a lot like you may feel right now. Just as Mary was about ready to give birth to her first child she and Joseph were forced to leave home, travel to a strange place, and end up with not one hotel room for their weary bodies. And finances had to be tight with Joseph unable to work while having to provide for a wife and a newborn baby in a strange place.

I hope they have "thought subtitles" on the DVD of this when we get to Heaven. I really want to see what was going on in Joseph's mind as he looked up at Heaven while asking himself this question, "If this is the way God treats the birth of His Son then we might be in for a harder time than I had anticipated!"

The thing to remember is that God had a Plan and that plan was working the entire time. Not a single circumstance took God by surprise. He had predicted the place of the Birth of Jesus many years before the actual event. If you will keep in mind that God has a plan and you get to be part of it then it will turn your frown upside down and give new meaning to those Christmas songs constantly blaring at you.

December 13, 2011 GOD BECOMES FLESH

Christmas is about God becoming a man. It is about the Son of God coming to earth to live among men; and eventually die for men. That makes Christmas more important than family togetherness, fabulous trees, or fictitious tales of fat men and flying reindeer. Christmas means the Son of God became a man in order for man to become a son of God (As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:” John 1:12).

He who was all powerful yielded himself into the total helplessness of a baby. He who arranges for all food to exist became a baby totally dependent on others to feed him. He who is light was announced at night to lowly shepherds as they watched their flocks.

He who came to earth seeking a pure clean bride was born to her who was found with child before she was married. He who is now building mansions in Heaven to provide a place for His followers was born in a town that did not have a single room for him. He who created worlds with only His words was born as a baby who could only cry in hunger or defilement. Oh, how He loved you and I!!

No wonder the apostle John began his “Christmas story” with the profound phrase “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Christmas is about God becoming a man and revealing the way to God, the truth about God, and the life God wants us to live (John 14:6-7). It is not a holiday; it is a holy day of celebration- rejoice and be glad!

December 14, 2011 WHY NOT TO GO TO CHURCH

It is almost time for those people who only attend Church on Easter and Christmas to begin planning for their Christmas visit. It is going to be difficult for some of you this year since Christmas day is on Sunday and church does not fit in with your “family tradition” of opening presents and “celebrating Christmas” with family and friends. In order to help you with your decision let me give you several reasons you should NOT go to Church.

Do not go to church expecting to see perfect people acting perfectly perfect all the time. Church members are simply sinners saved by the Grace of God who are trying to grow each day in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Some members are babes in Christ, some are lukewarm believers, and some are struggling each day to put what they know in their heart into practice in their life. If you are looking for lack of perfection as an excuse to keep you from attending Church until Easter then you will probably find what you are looking for.

Do not go to Church expecting to hear only songs that you know by heart. New songs and new methods of singing are constantly being used in Churches as they seek to find better ways to exalt God. And really, would you listen to a radio station that played the same five songs over and over all day long?

Do not go to Church seeking only a familiar sermon about shepherds, wise men, and stables. Pray for a Sermon that will not only tell you about the Gift God gave on that first Christmas but will also tell you how you can accept that life changing Gift. That will make this the most exciting Christmas service you have ever experienced.

December 20, 2011 THE WAIT IS OVER

The story is told about a great Viking king who decided to build a boat so big and so strong until he would rule the world. He ordered the best craftsmen to build it from the strongest materials and equip it with the most weapons ever on a boat. The entire countryside came to see this marvel on the day it was to be launched. Swiftly it slid down the ramp into the sea and just as swiftly slid beneath the waters! The king had given the boat everything except the ability to float!

God gave mankind everything he needed to be successful- resources (Garden of Eden), relationship (woman), and rules (which had consequences if disobeyed). You know the story- man sinned and has been trying to keep his head above water ever since. God knew the only way He could help man was to become man so the Bethlehem baby was added to the equation and suddenly everything changed.

Christmas means Christ came down from Heaven in order that we might go up to Heaven. Christmas means Christ became poor so that we might become rich. Christmas is Christ becoming a servant so that we might become sons. Christmas is Christ being born so that we might be born again. Christmas is God becoming a man and showing us how to walk on water.

A little Girl was drawing on the beach when a man came by. "What are you drawing?" he asked. "A picture of God." she replied. "But no one knows what God looks like." the man said. The Girl replied, "Wait five more minutes and you will!"

Our "Five Minute" wait is over. Christ is born. God became a man and dwelled among us- Glory!

December 21, 2011 GOD MANIFESTED

The Apostle John gave four reasons why the Son of God, Jesus Christ, became a man and was manifested in the flesh. This is the reason for the season.

- I. **TO REVEAL HOW GOD WOULD LIVE LIFE-** I Jn 1:1-4 *that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life; (for the life was **manifested**, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the father, and with his son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*
- II. **TO PAY THE DEBT OF SIN-** I Jn 3:5 *and ye know that he was **manifested** to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*
- III. **TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF SATAN-** I Jn 3:8 *he that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the son of god was **manifested**, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*
- IV. **TO REVEAL GOD'S LOVE-** I Jn 4:9 *in this was **manifested** the love of god toward us, because that god sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him.*

As the world celebrates the Birth of the Babe of Bethlehem let us not get so wrapped up in the PARTY until we miss the PEACE, the PARDON, and the PERSON of Jesus. Accept God's Gift and have a MERRY CHRISTMAS.

December 27, 2011 POSITIVE PRINCIPLES

The beginning of a new year is the time people examine their life and determine to make the next year a better year. Here are some Positive Principles that will help you become the great person God intended you to be.

- 1) **DEVELOP A LIFE PLAN THAT WORKS IN YOUR LIFE:** Difference that does not make a difference is just different. While it is true that “You can never become what you want to be by remaining what you are”; it is also true that “Change that does not produce good change is not good change”.
- 2) **DETERMINE TO GROW YOUR PLAN AS IT GROWS YOU:** Today’s activities prepare us for tomorrow’s accomplishments. Experience is only gained through experience. When you make a mistake “Never beat yourself up; always pick yourself up”. Make each goal a stepping stone to your next life goal- When you stop living you start dying.
- 3) **ANTICIPATE GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** What you can do should never be confused with what God can do through you. You and God make an unbeatable team [“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”- Philippians 4:13].

The flea riding in the elephant’s ear looked out and saw every obstacle pushed out of the way as the elephant walked through the jungle. He looked at another flea and said, “Wow, we are powerful!” Join with God and receive the power to do great things.

I am Excited about the Future God has planned for you. Here is my prayer for you in the coming year (taken from a prayer by the Apostle Paul) “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;” (Colossians 1:10).

December 28, 2011 A LIFE CHANGING YEAR

The coming year will be one of profound and, possibly, life altering change. I do not put any importance in “Mayan Calendars” but I am able to recognize storm clouds on the horizon (Matt. 16:2-3) and include an umbrella in my accessories that day. A nasty year of politicians fighting instead of leadership leading while people continue to struggle to make ends meet stares us in the face. But the coming year can be a good year if you team up with God.

Here are some values to help you stay on God’s “good side”:

- 1) Be careful where you get your earful- Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful (Psalms 1:1). If you listen to, lean on, and laugh with the wrong crowd your mind will be filled with wrong thoughts and values. And when you think wrong you believe wrong and behave wrong; which will hinder your relationship with God.
- 2) Walk with, and work for, God but do not try to be God- You cannot understand all God does and you do not think the way God thinks (Isaiah 55:8) so do not try to second guess what God is allowing in your life. You do not need to know what God knows; you simply need to know that God knows. That is called Faith
- 3) Choose to choose God’s way over the world’s wealth- Lot chose the wealth and prestige of Sodom over a relationship with God. It cost him his fame, his fortune, and his family. Choosing God means trusting God’s timing, resting on God’s Character, and obeying God’s voice. Good choice; ask Abraham.