

2014 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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December 31, 2013 PSALM ONE PRINCIPLES

I believe that parents should require their children to memorize, and repeat back to the parent at least once each week, the first Psalm. Its warnings about the evils of worldly pressures, the benefits of reading the word of God, and the consequences of a wicked life are foundational principles that should be instilled in every person.

A look at the first half of this Psalm will give you an idea of what I mean- "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. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Psa 1:1-3).

The first thing you notice is that life influences come from people who you listen to, who you fellowship with, and whom you seek to impress. Who you are is largely determined by who you allow into your inner circle.

This negative influence should be replaced by constant contemplation of Devine directives. This meditation will provide correct soul nourishment which will result in fruitful living and life success.

Make this a Psalm One year as you anticipate the most fruitful year of your life.

January 1, 2014 RESULTS OF READING

Many people will begin reading the entire Bible in a year today. Great idea; I commend you. Here are some things you can expect from your consistent reading of God's word.

A CLEAN LIFE: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psa 119:9). The Word of God in your heart establishes purity principles which guide your moral decisions- "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa 119:11).

A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE: "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psa 119:104). This understanding of what is really important will show you the "Path of life" ("Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" Psa 119:105) and bring Peace to your life- "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psa 119:165). Jesus described it as building your life on a rock so that life's storms could not undermine your foundation.

Bible principles also give you a way to ANSWER YOUR CRITICS: "So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word" (Psa 119:42). Culture and personality difference will cause people to see actions and attitudes from different perspectives. Let God's Word be the final decision.

The Word will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the word. Make the Bible's life changing instructions a part of your daily living.

January 7, 2014 TWO WOMEN

I called her “Buffalo” because her hometown was Buffalo, NY. A relaxing summer after high school graduation ended with an early winter storm and reminded her again of the harsh realities of a Buffalo winter. Florida was too far but the warm weather of Myrtle Beach would do just fine so at eighteen years old she left home and began her waitressing career on the coast of South Carolina. Nine years later, still earning her living as a waitress, she is married, has a child, and just graduated from nursing school.

The next lady I called “Cole”. She is finishing up her eighteenth, and last, year of teaching in public school. She still loves “her kids” and sincerely prays that the life lessons she has given them will be an asset as they grow into adulthood but bureaucratic restrictions have limited what and how she can teach to the point retirement seems the best option.

I met these ladies recently on a night out with my wife. Both were smart, attractive, and articulate and could be successful in almost any career choice but they chose to serve (Buffalo chose to serve as a waitress while she prepared to serve as a nurse and Cole chose to serve by investing her life in young people).

Jesus said, “The greatest of all shall be servant of all”. I believe greatness is not an “American Idol” but people like Buffalo and Cole who are willing to put this principle into practice.

January 8, 2014 MAKING SIN SERIOUS

The second man did not like God’s plan. Like most people, Cain did not mind being good as long as it made him feel good about being good. What he did not like was when sin became “exceedingly sinful” (Rom 7:13) and a serious situation instead of a personal or pleasurable choice.

Cain did not take sin seriously when he brought his offering to God. He was interested in impressing God instead of obeying God so he brought the fruit of his fields instead of the blood sacrifice required by God. He then became angry and pouty when God did not respect his gift and tried to get him to see the seriousness of the situation (Genesis 4:5).

Cain did not take sin seriously when he murdered his brother. When God questioned him about it he flippantly replied, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain actually seemed to blame God for his murderous actions because God had hurt his pride by accepting Abel’s correct offering instead of his self-decided offering. When you do not take sin seriously you want to lash out at those who do.

Cain did not take sin seriously when God punished him. In fact he complained that the punishment was worse than the crime because it involved real suffering; but the punishment came anyway! (Genesis 4:13)

We live in a society that finds it difficult to define sin but is constantly ready to defend sinful behavior. Cain should serve as a warning about not making sin serious.

January 14, 2014 MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION

When I offered her ten millions dollars she immediately said she would use it to help her sick father. That surprised me. When faced with a large influx of money most people talk about travel, personal comfort, or extravagant purchases. It is unusual to find someone whose immediate first thought is someone else's wellbeing.

Like my Master, I want people to have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10) so I often get people to look at why they do what they do. Then I try to move them from where they are to where God wants them to be. That was the reason for the question.

I had attended an early afternoon funeral and my non-breakfast has turned into a late lunch so I stopped at a local restaurant. Jenna was my waitress- Fresh out of school, she walked into this restaurant, applied for a job, and now (several years later) loves getting to know and serve people. The "million dollar question" was just an attempt to learn if there was anything I could do to help her move from ordinary into abundant life.

I did not have ten million dollars but I could pray for her dad to a God who is able to heal and who has a heart for the hurting. I could also commend Jenna for her compassion and encourage her to look for life changing opportunities in the obstacles her dad faced.

How about you? Would ten million dollars make you better; or simply richer?

January 15, 2014 LIGHTING YOUR LIGHT

Jesus said we were to be the "Light of the World". Where is your light shining?

Are you a "learning light" helping to illuminate the word of God by teaching and expounding the Bible? Are you a "chandelier light" which may simply look decorative but in actuality joins with other lights to brighten up a house of worship by singing in the choir, playing musical instruments, receiving the offering, or the countless other "small" things that enable the church service to function in a worshipful manner?

Maybe you are a "fellowship light" which brings people together in order for them to develop a sense of community- "If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another"? Or a "missionary light" revealing God to a dark world- "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47)?

In order for a light to produce light it must have a source of energy (fire for a candle or electricity for modern lights) and it must be placed in a visible position- "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house" (Matthew 5:15).

Is your light lighting? Or do you allow those around you to stumble in darkness and despair?

January 21, 2014 SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Every Christian has a gift given to them by the Holy Spirit. This gift is not based on abilities or human desires but on the grand plan, entrusted to the Holy Spirit, of building the Kingdom of God. If each Christian used their spiritual gift correctly then the Church would be a people changing, world shaking organization.

There are four lists of Spiritual Gifts in the Bible: Rom 12:3-8 (Prophecy, Ministry, Teaching, Exhortation, Giving, Ruling, showing mercy); I Cor 12:8-10 (Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, Faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues); I Cor 12:28 (Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, Miracles, Gifts of Healing, Helps, Governments, Diversities of Tongues); and Ephesians 4:7-16 (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastor/Teachers).

The purpose of the Roman Gifts is to manifest the Word and work of God to the world. The purpose of the I Corinthian Gifts is to enable the proper functioning of the Body of Christ. The purposes of the Ephesian Gifts: the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ; to develop Spiritual Maturity; protection from False Doctrine; to produce Christlikeness; and that the body of Christ may increase and be edified.

These are the gifts Christians receive in order to minister to one another and build the Kingdom of God. Every Christian has a gift and every Christian becomes a dynamic force for God when they properly use their gift.

January 22, 2014 WHERE DO YOU FIT?

Everyone wants to feel like they fit somewhere. Teenagers do what they do in order to become part of the “in” crowd. Parents try to “keep up with the Jones” in order to be accepted by the community. It is vital to realize that a sense of belonging is a driving force in almost everyone.

With that in mind, how can you find where you belong in the body of Christ? Preachers are good about telling people they should be doing what God called them to do but they seldom tell people how to find their Place in the Body of Christ. Thankfully, the answer is found very plainly in four simple steps listed in Romans 12:1-6.

You find where you fit first by Dedication (placing yourself at God's Disposal). Next is Evaluation as you determine what God has placed in your heart to do (The writer cautions us not to think too highly or too lowly of self). Following this is Synchronization as you learn where your talent or spiritual gift “fits” as you interact with other members of the Body of Christ. Finally there is Participation as you begin functioning so your part of the body is helping the rest of the body perform correctly?

Christianity is more than professing faith; it is performing faithfully by using the gift the Spirit has placed in your heart. Every part of the body is important and every part of the body is needed. Life is good when you “fit in”.

January 28, 2014 WRONG HUNGER

Sometimes you lose the diet battle because food is not the enemy. Comfort food seeks to scratch an emotional itch that has nothing to do with an empty stomach.

Sometimes the hunger is for a hug. Humans are designed to crave intimacy and companionship. This desire is placed within us so we will seek a relationship with others and with God. That is why sharing your life as you share your food with family members is much more satisfying than sharing a banquet with people with whom you simply share a roof- Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith (Proverbs 15:17).

The great king Solomon had access to every delicacy delight but he looked around and said, “I still hunger”. “Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11). Sometimes having it all means you have nothing that really matters!

The heart is a restless hunter seeking only God and food cannot scratch that itch- “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). Feast on God and see the difference it will make in your food and your life.

January 29, 2014 FOES

It is difficult to win life's battles when you do not recognize the foes you are fighting. Let me help you identify a few- foxes, flesh, and faith.

It is the “little foxes” that spoil the vine (Song 2:15). The “devil is in the details” and many life battles have been lost due to pebbles in shoes instead of mountains in the way. Walking victoriously is done a step at a time.

We are all subject to fleshly limitations and lusts that determine our abilities and control our motivations. We lose many life battles because the man in our mind sees only the man in the mirror. We can win with Christ when we let Christ win in us.

Finally, our life is largely controlled by our faith. Every person **needs** saving faith- “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: “(Ephesians 2:8). Every Christian needs sustaining faith- “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38). And every successful Saint needs serving faith- “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

What you believe determines what you do. Believe you are more than conquerors in Christ and defeat every foe, large or small, that life sends your way.

February 4, 2014 RIVER OF FAITH

I believe, like Abraham, not only in the promise of God but also in the power of the promise - He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Romans 4:20-21).

I believe the promises of God are like a river; beautiful on the surface while flowing with great power. If I simply sit on the shore and admire the river then its power will never function in my life. But if I "launch my boat" upon the river of God's promises then it will be the power of His current that will carry me to the desired destination.

Jesus said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). Believing does make God my "magic genie" to fulfill my whims and wants. I believe God always can but sometimes He won't. And when it is not His will then my want should want His will. This is not a "cop out" for failure; it is a submission to infinite wisdom and knowledge.

I believe when we are strong in faith it gives glory to God. I believe a relationship with God should change not only our character and conduct but also our circumstances. Riding the river of God's promises will cause us to see different scenery each day. And that make for an exciting life!

February 5, 2014 SPIRITUAL SALVATION

I am a Christian because of what it saves me from, what it saves me for, and what it saves me to- an abundant life, a joyful journey, and a ministry that matters. Christianity did not move me into perfect person neighborhood but it does enable me to continually growing in my knowledge about God, my abilities for God, and my understanding of God.

God the Father planned my salvation, God the Son paid for my salvation, but it is God the Holy Spirit who works in me to perfect my salvation. The Holy Spirit convicted me of sin, converted me into salvation, and made my body his sanctuary (What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 1 Corinthians 6:19).

It is this same Spirit working in me that endues me with wisdom, provides me with wealth, works through me the wonders of God, and bears witness in me that I am a child of God- The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (Romans 8:16).

The Holy Spirit makes me part of the body of Christ, helps me to pray as I should (Rom 8:26), and enables me to be victorious in life's situations. The Christian life is not trying to be better; it is allowing the Holy Spirit in us to demonstrate Christ through us. And that is something to be excited about!

February 11, 2014 REMEMBER

God created humans with a unique characteristic, Memory-We can relive the past in the present! Memories are stored in our hearts and minds and surface at unusual and unexpected times with a trigger as simple as a smell.

Memories also stir varied emotions. A child's laugh across the room can trigger a smile as we fondly think of childhood memories or break the heart of a parent who recently lost a child due to illness or accident.

As you make memories here are some things you need to remember:

Remember the joy of interacting with people. We live in an age of increased electronic isolation and it becomes easy to text instead of talk as each of us surround ourselves with a bubble of personal entertainment that avoids personal communication. If you have people who love you and who want to comfort, counsel, and care for you then do not pass up the opportunity. The memory of their love will last a lifetime.

Remember God early- "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Hearts become hard, habits become chains, and early choices have long term consequences. Putting God first at the first makes memories instead of regrets.

Finally, remember that God forgets what you can remember: "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17). Be at peace today as you remember that.

February 12, 2014 PIZZA PRINCIPLE

A new pizza place opened recently. It offered a pizza buffet so my wife and I decided to try it out. The pizza was mainly bread and the ingredients were not tasty. Several weeks later my wife said she wanted pizza again. Right across from the pizza place with the buffet was another pizza place that we thought would be more expensive. Surprise, they had a pizza meal for two that included a salad and drinks and cost about the same as the buffet place. And the pizza, "Mamma mia" it was good.

This is not a pizza commercial! Just wanted to point out something about relationships. We live in a society that pushes young people to believe that "buffet relationships" with many partners should be their ultimate goal. In the process they find they have partaken but they aren't satisfied. There is a craving deep inside them that remains unfulfilled.

Forty four years ago I married the lovely Princess Paula. We have not been involved in the buffet business because we are joyfully satisfied with the meal for two. We have found that getting to really know one another has brought a joy and satisfaction to our relationship that is beyond anything a buffet could ever offer.

God's plan for marriage is not only the right plan; it is the best plan. Use it to build your marital relationship and you will find the meal for two is really the best value after all.

February 18, 2014 CHRISTIAN LOVE

You do not have to be a religious person to know that Love is the litmus test of a relationship with God- "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2). That is why I continually examine my Christian service in the light of Love.

Love is the basis of my relationship with Christ- "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Love is the proof of new life in Christ- "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). And Love is the motivating force in my life - "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Love is a fruit of the Spirit at work in my life- "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith" (Gal 5:22). Love is the queen of graces and must occupy the prominent place in my life- "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13).

God loved me when I was hard to love- "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). That is the kind of love I want to exhibit in my life.

February 19, 2014 LOVE DEMONSTRATED

An ancient city was besieged, and at length obliged to surrender. In the city were two brothers, who approached the conquering general, and begged permission to leave the city before it was set on fire. They were told they could leave and they could take with them only as much of their property as each could carry. The two youths appeared at the gates of the city the next morning, one of them carrying their father, and the other their mother.

Paul told the church at Corinth, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (Love demonstrated by action), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1). Paul knew that announcing your love is never as meaningful as demonstrating your love.

Life is filled with opportunities to express our love for people; kind words, unexpected actions, and sacrificial service. Sadly, many people, when they have to make a decision about what is the most important thing in their life chose possessions or positions over people. Their love, as Paul said, is just a loud noise or an annoying tinkle.

Someone close to you is waiting for you to demonstrate your love for them (Even Jesus said, "If you love me then keep my commandments" John 14:15). Will you choose to choose them and fill their heart with love or will you only caress their ears with empty words?

February 25, 2014 PAY FORWARD

On my way home from a funeral visitation I stopped at a restaurant to pick up a take-out meal for myself, my wife, and my nephew. As I started to pay my bill the Lord directly impressed me to pay for the unknown couple behind me. Money was tight but I obeyed the Lord and received an awesome hug from a couple who evidently needed a blessing.

A week later, after a funeral, I went by a pizza place to pick up a meal for myself, my wife, and my nephew (do you see a pattern here?). When I placed the order the manager said I was her favorite preacher (blush, blush) and she wanted to bless me so she charged me less than half price for the pizzas- saving me almost exactly the same amount of money I had spent on that unknown couple!

The adventure of walking with God is awesome. Listen to another incident that happened during this time. A second Ice Storm was approaching our area and I realized I was out of propane for my backup heater. A quick trip to the propane dealer found him empty. I asked God for guidance and realized I needed gas for my auto. All the gas lines were filled except the very last one. Only at that line could I see the service station had an exchange program for propane tanks and I was able to get the last tank they had- Glory!

February 26, 2014 PROVISION

Sometimes God gives wealth and sometimes God gives work. My wife and I live on a low fixed income so we continually look to the Lord for provision. It is one of life's great joys to see how God repeatedly provides.

Sometimes this provision is a supernatural gift- several weeks ago a preacher knocked at my door and said someone had called him and told him to bring me one hundred dollars (Which was much needed at the time). My wife and I could fill a book with the times God has miraculously provided our needs. Sometimes God provides wealth.

The annual bill for insurance on my car and my wife's car is over one thousand dollars. That is an annual prayer item. I maintain numerous websites for church and mission organizations without charge to them. Recently my nephew contacted me about reworking the graphics and code structure for a commercial website. It involved a couple of weeks of intense hard work but the company was willing to pay one thousand dollars to get the work done- Is there a glory anywhere in the house!

Sometimes God heals through miracles and sometimes He heals through medicines. Sometimes God demonstrates His power by delivering from the lion's den and sometimes God demonstrates the power of people's faith by allowing the lions to eat. Sometimes God provides outside our efforts and sometimes God provides through our energy. But in every case God's plan is always perfect and can be trusted.

February 27, 2014 THREE ENEMIES

Here are three enemies Christians do not often consider- Idols, Ideas, and Idleness. John's final exhortation to Christians was "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). An idol is anything we put ahead of God; things like Joy, a Job, or Journeying. We go wrong when Life is about my pleasure instead of God's plan; when we begin to worship the wealth and honor of our Work; and Sunday becomes our day at the lake instead of God's day at His house.

Ideas are great servants but poor masters. When Christians go from Bible principles to personal ideas about how they think God should operate or think they are headed toward “Personal god-ness” (Every man does that which is right in his own eyes) or Pharisee righteousness (If you do not act the way I want or think the way I think then you must not be a “good Christian”).

Rest is an essential part of life (God made daily sleep necessary and a weekly day of rest a requirement) but abundance of idleness was part of the sin of Sodom (Ezekiel 16:49) and the main reason for King David’s indiscretion. God’s People are not freeloaders on the journey of life who simply show up in Church for an hour of worship each week. Every Christian is part of the body of Christ, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and to use their talents for God. Watching and working as we wait for the Master’s return is the Christian thing to do.

March 4, 2014 REFILLS

Today was a re-fill day. Needed cream for my coffee but the cream container had to be refilled. Putting trash into the trash can revealed a full trash bag needing a refill. Printing a hard copy of this article exposed an empty printer in need of refilling. Do you see the pattern?

A spiritual life sometimes needs refills also. Our recent ice storm revealed to many people the need of refilling our thankfulness for what we have instead of taking things like electricity and water for granted. It is easy to become cozy in our comfort and forget that one hundred million children around the world are homeless while many more live in accommodations worse than many Americans provide for their pets. A reboot of our gratitude for life's "common blessings" is a refill we all need.

My niece was in town recently so my wife and I decided to take her out for a meal. Little did we know that "monster jam" was in town and restaurant row looked like Christmas crowds. During the long wait I calculated that a family of five eating at this restaurant and attending the "monster jam" would probably spend three to four hundred dollars. When I consider that a staggering 1.3 billion people earn less than one dollar a day I realized how much I need to refill my praise for God's provisions.

When you are refilling items today make sure you refill your gratitude and praise priorities.

March 5, 2014 YET SPEAKING

I was in Tupelo Mississippi to help in the funeral service for a dear friend. A former church member invited us to stay at his home during our stay and my wife and I were excited about the time of fellowship with these friends. Our host had prepared fresh coffee and a sweet roll for breakfast but the lovely Princess Paula wanted something "salty" to go with the sweet roll.

Riding through the busiest part of Tupelo looking for a fast food sign I allowed myself to look at the traffic light a block down instead of the one I was approaching. When I looked up the traffic light I was at was red and I was already halfway into the intersection! Guess what car was directly behind me?

The Police car immediately turned on his lights and I pulled over ready to accept my ticket because I was as guilty as I could be. When the policeman asked me what I was doing in Tupelo I told him about being here to preach the funeral of a dear lady and I was out looking for a breakfast sandwich for my wife. He looked at me a moment and told me to drive more carefully in the future.

The Bible tells us that some people "though they are dead yet they speak" (Heb 11:4). This was a case where the "voice from the grave" provided mercy and forgiveness to a guilty sinner. Reminds me of the way Jesus works.

March 11, 2014 GO STRAIGHT

Thirty years ago, when we first began ministering in a small town outside of Tupelo, Mississippi the road from Tupelo to Birmingham was a two lane road through numerous small towns and the trip was excruciatingly slow. In recent years a four lane road bypassing these towns has made the trip much faster. The only hang up is a ten mile incomplete stretch which carries you through several small towns just before you join the interstate in Birmingham.

We recently left Tupelo after a funeral service late enough in the day until I knew I would arrive at this incomplete section during rush hour and then have to negotiate rush hour interstate traffic in the dark. Something I absolutely dreaded.

As I was about to leave the church a friend told me to ignore the exit sign at the end of the new freeway and continue going straight. Taking his advice put me on a section of incomplete freeway open only to cars. This brought me to within a mile of the interstate which avoided the towns and saved me enough time to avoid Birmingham traffic at night- Glory!

Anticipated worry can fill our life with anxiety and cause us to dread coming problems instead of enjoying the journey. Jesus said the best way to travel was to go the "straight and narrow". This trip reminded me again of the truth of this statement as I traveled in the light, avoided dreary delays, and arrived at my destination rejoicing in the goodness of our great God.

March 12, 2014 ONE LETTER

The famous writer, E. Schuyler English, once shared with his audience the following information about the letter "e". He declared that "e" is always out of cash and forever in debt. It is never out of danger and in trouble all the time. On the other hand, "e" is never in war but always in peace. It is the center of honesty, the beginning and end of ease, and the thing that turns haven into heaven. Best of all, love, mercy, grace, and the wonderful name of Jesus all contain an "e".

"E" is only one of the twenty six letters of the alphabet but it has a profound impact when it is present or when it is absent. Consider that when you wonder about your importance to, or your impact upon, those around you.

Jesus said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). A "jot" is the dot over the "i" and a "tittle" is the short line across the long line that makes a "t". He is declaring that God values even the parts that make up the letters in His Word!

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matthew 12:37). Every part of the letter and every letter of the word are important to God because they impact what is being communicated. Just remember, you cannot be great without an "e" in the middle!

March 18, 2014 SPIRITUAL CHECK LIST

Missionary Bobby Poole (Brazil) has a spiritual check list he uses to help people ascertain their “God Growth”. I believe this list can be a useful tool for each of us as we evaluate priorities in our life. Take the test today. Take it again in six months and compare your score in order to determine if you are making any progress and to identify any areas needing improvement.

On a scale of one to ten with ten being the best you can be and one being the worst you can be how would you rate yourself in the following areas: Your daily walk with God, your growth in love for God, your display of love for family, your love for and willingness to forgive others, your efforts to share Christ with friends and those with whom you regularly interact, and your perception of the fruits of the Spirit being manifested in your life? There are several other areas that could be added to this “test” but these will give you a good “snapshot” of where you are in your spiritual development.

Normally, we measure ourselves by our physical growth, mental development, financial accumulation, and social successes. Ultimately, however, the growth that matters the most is our spiritual improvement. We are commanded to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Are you consciously seeking growth in your relationship with God?

March 19, 2014 REFLECTED LIGHT

My neighbor across the street runs a trucking company. While he is away making a delivery he normally parks his car beside his shop.

Recently, he unintentionally parked his car in a position so that the morning sun reflexed off his windshield directly through my office window and onto my computer screen. My window blind made shadow “bars” appear on my computer screen and gave me a good thought about how “locked in” I am to computer work!

March nineteenth marks my fifty-second birthday as a Christian. Almost immediately God called me into the Gospel Ministry and I committed to walk with, and work for, the Lord. God’s grace has overlooked my multitude of mistakes, His mercy has manifested itself time and time again in providing my needs, and His power has enabled my ministry to accomplish anything that has been accomplished.

God is a wonderful God and it has been the joy of my life to serve Him. It did not take me long in my walk with God to realize that He is the light and I am simply to reflect His light. Like the light from my neighbor, I have sometimes annoyed people by shining into their life or angered them by showing the “bars” holding them captive. Always, however, my goal has been to awaken them by my light to see God’s love so that they would leave the darkness and enjoy “light walking life”. Pray with me that my light would always shine brightly.

March 25, 2014 PRAYER PAY

My nephew lives with my wife and I and we continually try to teach him that you do not pray FOR pay but that it pays TO pray. Prayer is not a demand for God's resources. It is a request to a loving Father who delights in blessing His children. Real prayer seeks God's leadership believing that God's gracious provision will end up better than our selfish planning.

As I was writing this a preacher friend called to share God's Blessings. A seventeen year old girl called his church asking to present her mission trip needs. He prayed about it and then asked the church to listen to her presentation and give as they felt directed by God. People's hearts were touched and a seven hundred dollar offering was given to the mission needs of this girl. The next morning a lady in the church called and said God had impressed her to tithe from her company as well as from her personal income and she was giving the church \$7,500.00! God provided a tenfold increase to the faith giving of the Church.

The Bible declares that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). Telling God our needs and then trusting Him to provide those needs in His own way allows God's power to work in us. As my nephew sees the truth of this his trust grows- Glory!

March 26, 2014 THE PROBLEM'S PROBLEM

The problem is not normally the problem. The fruit is not the root and if you "Barney Fife" it (nip it in the bud) you will probably only get a temporary cure. You need to "CSI" the problem (go beyond surface information) and get to the "Victoria Secret" of the problem (expose the inner secrets of the problem which normal people do not want exposed [hint to the younger crowd who think exposing their underwear is cool]).

Almost everyone knows that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart but many times we forget that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). So we deceive ourselves by looking at symptoms instead of sickness.

My doctor normally asks me to come by his office a week before I visit him to do lab work. Urine samples and blood work allows the doctor to determine if my "unclean" body function (urine) and my life sustaining function (blood) are operating as they should. In the same way problems in my spiritual life can be a result of my body's failure to get rid of bad things or of my "good" not functioning correctly.

Repeated regrets or frequent failures mean you have not found the problem of your problem. Jesus often exposed the real problem by asking the person if they really believed or if their request was the real need. Allow Him to get to the problem of your problem today.

April 1, 2014 FOUR LIVES

The Living Creatures seen by Ezekiel had four faces- Lion, Ox, Man, and Eagle. God used four Gospel to represent His Son- Matthew as Lion of the tribe of Judea, Mark as oxen servant, Luke as man, and John as God soaring like an eagle. In the same way, each of us has four lives that we are known by.

1. The Life the World Knows you by- Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit (Matthew 12:33). Your walk and your talk, your actions and your activities, define the world's view of you.

2. The Life Your Family Knows You by- Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right (Proverbs 20:11). Your private conduct, conversation, and compassion are all on display with your family.

3. The life you know yourself by- Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (2 Corinthians 13:5). We can sometimes hide the dark rooms and dusty corners of our life from others but not from ourselves.

4 The Life God Knows you by- I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings (Jeremiah 17:10). God knows us inside and out. That enables Him to help, and judge us, correctly.

April 2, 2014 FOUR JOYS

In three of the most famous parables spoken by Jesus he talked about a lost lamb, a lost coin, and a lost son. During these parables He expressed four joys that come to those who find lost things.

1) Joy for the Person finding the Lost. Finding something that was lost puts a smile on your face, a song on your lips, and a spring in your step.

2) Joy for Friends and Family- "One can endure sorrow alone, but it takes two to be glad".--Elbert Hubbard. When the man found the lost sheep "he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." (Luke 15:6). Recovering something we value brings rejoicing.

3) Joy for the Person who was found - As a young boy I once became separated from my family deep in the forest. I looked with despair as the shadows grew longer and night approached. I still remember the intense joy that came into my heart when I finally heard a distant call and realized that a lost boy had been found.

4) Joy in Heaven when someone is found- (Luke 15:7) "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance". Spiritual births bring hallelujah high fives in Heaven.

Seeking and saving the lost brings great joy. Find some of that joy this week.

April 8, 2014 JOY BEYOND

It was beyond description. What was done to Jesus was beyond description. He was beaten, battered, and bruised until Isaiah (52:14) declared him beyond human recognition. And in His time of greatest pain and suffering, when a kind word would have meant more than gold, He was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him;” (Isaiah 53:3).

How did He do it? How did He keep from lashing out when pain and rejection are all He felt? He could have called a legion of angels to His rescue and destroyed all those who taunted and tormented Him. How could He say, “Father, Forgive them” instead of “Angels, destroy them”?

The answer is found in Hebrews 12:2-“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”. Heaven’s hope and mankind’s salvation brought Joy that went beyond the cross and overcame present pain and intense isolation.

When your body is racked with pain; when you are forsaken by friends and family; when the present is so bad until it is almost unendurable; do you have a relationship with God that will allow you to patiently endure instead of spitefully retaliate? Do you have a joy that looks beyond?

April 9, 2014 WASTE TO A WONDER

On my best day I am a sinner saved by grace. The best I can do falls far short of the righteousness God requires. The purest things I do are so filled with hidden pride or selfish motives until, like Paul, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18).

That is why Easter is such a marvelous time to me. It not only gives me hope for the future but it also gives me help for the present- “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:11).

As the Spirit conforms me into the image of Christ it changes my heart and mind so that my motives and methods become acceptable to God and brings Him Glory. The Grace that saved me without works now allows the Spirit of God to dwell inside me so that my works turn from a waste into a wonder!

Media exposes and exploits the failures of a few. Real life living among Christians of many Churches and many countries has shown me the Spirit of God at work in common people producing amazing results. That is the power and promise of the resurrection.

April 15, 2014 CROSS WORTH THE CHRISTIANS

Is the cost worth the price? Is it worth what you get to give what you give? At the end of the road will it be worth the journey?

Christians believe that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. We believe that Jesus' death on the cross paid for every sin of every person for all time (For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord-Romans 6:23).

We also believe that the resurrection of Christ is God's stamp of approval on the payment Jesus made as well as the source of eternal hope for all believers (Jesus was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification-Romans 4:25).

The question is, "Was the cost worth the price?" Multitudes of people follow other religions and "other ways to god". Others ridicule and reject the Gospel message or "God is not in all their thoughts" (Psalm 10:4). Even among believers, thousands live lukewarm, indifferent Christian lives that stir cries of hypocrisy and heap scorn on the Church.

Was it worth the suffering and sacrifice Jesus gave for what God gets in return? Was the cross worth the Christians? It is when you remember that Real Love is not measured with an accountant's mind but with a loving heart- "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

April 16, 2014 MORE THAN A NECKLACE

Satan told God to go climb a tree so he could put Him in the grave and God said, "I will accept that challenge". Then up from the grave Christ arose with a mighty triumph over His foes. He turned death into a debt payment, the grave into Glory, and filled life with hope, help, and heaven.

The first ten verses of Romans chapter five gives seven glorious results of trusting the payment Christ made on the cross: 1) Peace with God, 2) Access to God by Faith, 3) Rejoicing in Hope, 4) Glorifying in Tribulation, 5) The Love of God is shed abroad in our Hearts, 6) We are saved from wrath, and 7) We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son and enabled to live for God by the Resurrected life of His Son.

All of these are wonderful and needful theological terms but they sometimes fail to express the simple truth that Jesus paid a debt I could not pay and then invited me into God's family and gave me an inheritance in God's fortune- Glory!

Sin exposes us (when Adam and Eve sinned they realized they were naked), separates us from God ("your iniquities have separated between you and your God" Isaiah 59:2), and robs us of our reputation, riches, and relationships (Prodigal Son). It needs more than "positive thinking" to combat its pull and penalty; It needs a Satan defeating, death conquering Savior! That is why the cross to Christians is more than a necklace.

April 22, 2014 THE NEW LIFE

The new life still has to deal with the old mess. The new heart given by God does not guarantee new circumstances; you live in the same place, go to the same job, and deal with the same debts. They did not change, you did.

The new life does not promise an escape from present problems; you may still be sick, still married to an insensitive mate, or still have the same rebellious children. They did not change, you did.

The new life changes who we hang out with but it does not change our hang-ups. That is why the “perfect church” is not perfect. The Church is made up of immature people (babes in Christ) growing to maturity as they learn to live the Christ life. They are growing into goodness but they still inhabit a human body adapting to walking with a divine God.

The new life does not eradicate what tempts you, eliminate what troubles you, or exonerate the previous worldly wrong you have done. It changes the content of your character but not the color of your skin. It makes you brand new but keeps you the same age.

Christ calls us to trust Him, follow Him, obey Him, and wonder at His glory. He has no unrealistic expectations about the difficulties we face. He simply gives us a new birth which changes who we are, what we are, and why we are so it can change where we are.

April 23, 2014 POUR BOLDLY

“You can do it. I know you can. I have confidence in you.” If you have conversed with me very much then you have heard this combination of statements used as a means to encourage you and let you know someone believes in you. I do not have money to give people but I can use words to encourage them to rise above who they are and become the great person God wants them to be.

It started when Uncle Ned told me to, “Pour Boldly.” My family was the “economically disadvantaged” family in our community. Uncle Ned and Aunt Sip helped us by providing excess milk from their cow. I would take a couple of gallon jugs across the woods to Uncle Ned’s home where the milk would be sitting in a large pan waiting for the cream to rise to the top.

Aunt Sip would skim the cream off to use to make butter and I would pour the milk into the jug to carry home. I always made a mess until Uncle Ned taught me to hold the pan about five inches above the jug and “pour boldly”. That produced a stream of milk just the right size to fill the jug without splashing everywhere.

Confidence enough to commit to a task was a life lesson for me. That is why I seek to instill confidence and encouragement in others. I believe people can do anything God wants them to do. They simply need to trust God and “Pour Boldly”.

April 29, 2014 CROSSROADS COMMITMENT

Lives are changed at crossroads! Choices are made that determine life directions and end in life destinations. And life has numerous crossroad intersections.

Multitudes of people live mundane lives because they fear crossroad commitments. At the door of greatness they choose to go backward instead of committing to the excitement of God's leadership- "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66).

How can we conquer this fear of commitment? How can we be great when it is easy to live lukewarm lemming lives "going with the flow?"

We fight fear by becoming absolutely confident that God's way is best 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" (Jeremiah 29:11).

We seize life's opportunities when we know if we commit then God will not "hang us out to dry" - "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So you may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Hebrews 13:5-6). We do not fear the future when faith believes there is an empty tomb after the cross.

When you come to a crossroads and "thine ears hears a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30:21) then make the "God choice" with confidence and expect great things.

April 30, 2014 BLIND REPAIRING BLIND

When the blind lead the blind there is a lot of groping in the dark! I am legally blind without my glasses. I not only cannot see the big "E" on the chart without my glasses; I cannot see the chart!

Recently the nose pad on my glasses broke and I needed to replace it. I found a pad in a glass repair kit that would work but the repair became challenging when I had to take my glasses off in order to repair my glasses. All I can say is that the video would have been a worldwide sensation on YouTube!

America has become morally bankrupt because we have pushed Godly standards out and invited Hollywood standards in. People with no standards are now setting the standards and the result is not a funny video.

Bad guys are now the "heroes". Sexual titillation is an expected part of ads and sexual deviation is promoted as expected behavior on TV shows. Sadly, "good" people across our nation are helping this process by eagerly transferring their wealth to sports and movie stars as they purchase tickets and items promoted by these "stars".

The cure for blindness is not to rail against the dark. Crying about broken glasses does not give a "blind" man sight. I can only see the beauty of the world God has created if I fix my glasses and put them on. Jesus said, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

May 6, 2014 FORGOTTEN WOMEN

Sometimes we forget the forgotten on Mother's Day. Ladies like my wife; a wonderful woman with a heart much bigger than her petite frame whom God chose not to bless with motherhood. Or single ladies who are devoted servants of God and some of the nicest people you will meet but who felt their calling in life did not include a spouse. Or Mothers who weep at cemeteries on Mother's Day instead of celebrating around a joyful table.

Well-meaning people with the best of intentions will try to include these ladies in the Mother's Day festivities with no concept of the heart pain hidden behind that pasted on smile. All I can tell you is that when I was a Pastor I did not mind these ladies taking a "vacation Sunday" on Mother's Day (They do not really need the "How to be a great Mom" sermon).

Before you get all self-righteous on me just remember that Mother's Day as a special day only began one hundred years ago (1908) and has no Biblical command basis. Husbands and children should honor godly Mothers every day; not just on a single day.

The Bible commands us to give "honor to whom honor is due" (Rom 13:7). No one deserves honor more than Mothers. Just consider in your celebration that in addition to superior Moms there are also sorry Moms, single Moms, separated Moms, sorrowing Moms, and non-Moms.

May 7, 2014 MORE THAN A DAY

I wonder what Peter's wife did while he trekked over the countryside with Jesus? The only time the Bible records Jesus visiting Peter's home was highlighted by Jesus healing Peter's wife's mother (Matt 8:14). Did Peter have children and, if so, did Peter's wife raise them as a "single mom" while Peter followed Jesus? Who took care of Peter and Andrew's fishing business while Peter was traveling with Jesus so Peter's wife (and family?) would have money to put food on the table?

It is easy to see the challenges faced by women who have alcoholic or abusive husbands. It is sometimes hard to see the obstacles faced by women with "good" husbands. Sometimes a workaholic is just as difficult to live with as an alcoholic. Sometimes sports / hunting addictions bring just as much isolation into a home as other addictions.

Honoring women is more than a once a year bouquet of flowers with a card. It is a partnership that builds a relationship (two become one). It is an invitation into your heart as well as your arms. It is communicating with your touch and your eyes as well as your words. It is prizing your partner as the "Rose of Sharon" and setting her apart as a "lily among thorns" (Song Sol 2).

A good woman's "children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her" (Proverbs 31:28). Make this honor more than words and more than a day.

May 13, 2014 RELIGIOUS RUTS

A rut is simply a shallow grave that feels good because it takes away the challenge of change. When I was growing up many of the roads around my home were sandy dirt roads with deep ruts. Once you started down a road the car would almost drive its self because it was almost impossible to deviate from the ruts.

When two cars met both had to use considerable effort to get out of the ruts and make enough room on the road to pass. If both would have insisted on staying in the ruts a mighty crash would have ensued (Can you say church fight over any changes in the style of worship?).

In some places the ruts were so deep until the bottom of the car would actually drag on the middle of the road. This impeded the speed of the car and had great potential for damage to the underside of the car. In the same way, some churches make very slow progress and do damage to those low on the totem pole of church hierarchy because they are locked in a rut that prevents people's potential from being used.

Jesus loved people but He had very little good to say about Pharisees locked in their religious ruts. The road Jesus traveled was not guided by the ground but by God and it did not add more laws; it expressed more love. It was not a rut; it was a revolution!

May 14, 2014 MEETING NEEDS

It is important to know how God meets people's needs. Many people live in poverty instead of abundance because they fail to realize God's methods of provision.

First, God tells us to Earn it- *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground;* (Genesis 3:19). God expects those able to work to work.

Sometimes God makes special Provisions- *And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat* (Exodus 16:15).

NOTE: When Israel again became able to provide their food "by the sweat of their brow" the manna ceased and God expected them to work- *And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more;* (Joshua 5:12).

We must allow others to be blessed as they bless us- *And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son* (1 Kings 17:13). Her faith led to continuous supply- *The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth*

Finally, we must use the resources God gives us wisely- After the feeding of the 5000 Jesus said unto his disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." (John 6:12). God's provision meets our needs even to abundance!

May 20, 2014 SINNER PRAYERS

A great forfeiture for an unbeliever is lack of communication with God. How horrible it must be to pray and realize that *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:"* (Psalms 66:18). God in His love and mercy does hear and answer some prayers made by Sinners but He is not obligated to do so in the same way He is with those who are part of His Family.

Sinners need to call on God for Salvation- *As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me* (Psalms 55:16) with faith to believe that God wants to save them. But they should do so while God is near- *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:* (Isaiah 55:6) and while God is calling them- *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:* (John 6:44).

Ignoring God can lead to disastrous consequences- *He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy* (Proverbs 29:1). It may even lead to a time God refuses to hear your prayer- *And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear:* (Isaiah 1:15).

Today is the day of Salvation (2Cor 6:2). Sinners need to recognize that walking without God is like walking in a mine field. Each step could have everlasting consequences.

May 21, 2014 MEMORIAL ROCKS

Some know about Celebration Rocks- When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time "the Pharisees said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:39-40). I call these Jesus' backup choir rocks!

Some know about Killing Rocks- When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus the Pharisees said, "Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? (Jesus) said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:5, 7). I call these Jesus' justice finder rocks.

But as we approach Memorial Day I want to highlight Memorial Rocks. When the Children of Israel crossed Jordan they were told to make a Memorial of twelve rocks in the middle of Jordan and twelve on the bank of Jordan (Joshua 4). A hidden memorial and a public memorial to honor God's deliverance.

Each Christian needs a "rock" of assurance in their heart they can return to in order to remember God's mercy in forgiving their "hidden" sins and trespasses. They also need a public "rock" (I add my Life Verse when I sign my name, I carry a pocket Bible to read while waiting) to testify of God's preeminence in their life.

Raise up a Rock in your life that will honor God so well until He will say, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this be told for a memorial." (Matthew 26:13).

May 27, 2014 WORLD CHANGING TESTIMONY

Don't you hate the hate the media has toward Christians? Aren't you tired of every preacher on a TV show or in a movie being portrayed as a sexual pervert or a hateful hypocrite? Wouldn't it be great if the lonely desperate people lashing out at imperfect Christians could feel the love and joy Christians feel when they meet with God?

Jesus came into a world of dictators, despair, and disease where religious law had become more important than people's needs. He could have demanded worldwide worship or set up a great kingdom but He chose to live in such a way until He could say "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

If we would change the world then we must use this same formula. Here are four principles that I believe will help you live a World Changing Testimony?

First, BEGIN IT RIGHT. That means you cannot be a Christian until you become a Christian. It is not about joining up or deciding to do better; it is about a born again conversion through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, LIVE IT "RELIGIOUSLY". Daniel changed an empire because his life choices displayed his devotion to his God.

Third, PRACTICE IT REGULARLY. Jesus, "as was his custom" went to church each week.

Finally, DO IT REPETITIOUSLY. Develop holy habits that remain the same in the boardroom, the back room, and the bed room.

Develop a testimony that allows people to see God through you. The impact will be world changing!

May 28, 2014 GRANDCHILD PRAYING

When did men begin to pray? When the first grandchild was born! *And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD* (Genesis 4:25-26). When a grandchild was born mankind knew there would be future generations to prepare for as well as present generations to care for so they began to pray.

People may pray toward different "gods" but prayer is now a worldwide action seen in all races and cultures. Even people who do not believe in god tend to cry out to god in times of crisis!

In order for a "cry to God" to be effective it must turn into communication. The first question a frantic mother asks a crying child is, "What is wrong?" In the same way, effective prayer learns to communicate instead of simply cry out.

Effective Prayer also reaches beyond God's ear into His Heart- *And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean* (Mark 1:40-41).

When God feels our hurt and hears our heart He is "touched with the feelings of our infirmities" (Heb 4:15). This is when great things begin to happen.

June 3, 2014 PRAYER POTENTIAL

Prayer has the greatest potential of any activity on earth because it touches the heart of God and moves the hand of God. Prayer is a lifetime privilege- *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day* (Luke 2:37) that is available anywhere and at any time.

Every area of your life should be bathed in prayer with the expectation that the God who knows the hairs of your head is willing and able to help with details as well as decisions. Pray about your partner (mate), your provision, your protection, power for living, and God's plan for your life.

Prayer does not need words- *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered* (Romans 8:26) so be careful what you say when you pray (Remember the Pharisee was condemned because his prayer was a boast while the publican was commended because his prayer was a plea- Luke 18:14).

Prayer should not simply be begging from God; it should be about becoming like God- *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;* (Philippians 3:10). This will release the powerful potential of prayer because it will change you instead of simply change circumstances.

June 4, 2014 STEWARDS

God calls us to changed behavior as well as committed belief. He expects everyone who follows Him by faith to use the personality, potential, and possessions He gives them in a wise way. Biblically this makes us "steward saints" walking by faith and working to be faithful.

Stewards should be "faultless"- *For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;* (Titus 1:7). Consistent character despite our human frailty.

Stewards should be frugal- *And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods* (Luke 16:1). Conscientious use of God provided resources.

Stewards should be faithful- *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful* (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Dependable discipleship.

Stewards should be facilitators- *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). Share wisdom as well as wealth.

Stewards should be finishers- *And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it* (Colossians 4:17). Believing in the mission enough to see it through to the end.

God expects His servants to serve Him well. Do not be ashamed at His coming.

June 10, 2014 ENEMY SEED

The fact that God is in control of everything does not mean that God controls everything. God controls the fact that you reap what you sow but that does not mean God sows what you reap; God allows you that privilege.

God gives men precepts and practices and tells them that, because He is a God of Love, these are the best principles to follow. He then gives the opportunity to choose actions and activities with the realization that choices have consequences.

It is understandable when God allows us to reap the consequences of the seed we sow but it is difficult to accept reaping what someone else has sown- child killed by a drunk driver, cancer from second hand smoke.

I certainly cannot explain "second hand reaping" but I do know God understands dealing with bad seed sown by others- So the servants came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this (Matthew 13:27-28).

Our first inclination about "tare trouble" is to deal with it immediately and harshly. God, however, understands collateral damage so He commands us to leave the tares alone "lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them" (Matt 13:30).

Enduring "enemy seed sowing" is not easy and sometimes does not make sense. Just remember that harvest is coming and there will be a terribly different outcome between bad seed and good.

June 11, 2014 REFLECTIONS ON RICHES

It is not wrong for the righteous to be rich- *And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold* (Genesis 13:2). Here are some principles to reflex on if God blesses you with riches.

Sometimes Riches come from being in the right place at the right time- *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Remain humble and thankful.

Real Riches come from God, not your abilities- *The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up* (1 Samuel 2:7). Never think you deserve the glory for the gold-*Thus saith the LORD, ... let not the rich man glory in his riches:* (Jeremiah 9:23).

The more you have the more you must care for - *The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep* (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Limitations to your riches may be because God seeks to bless you; not destroy you.

In the end, always choose righteousness over riches- *Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich* (Proverbs 28:6). It is not wrong to have riches as long as riches do not have you.

June 17, 2014 PURPOSE OF POSSESSIONS

The poor in spirit are blessed (Matt 5:3) but the poor in pocketbook are broke! Many of the great men of the Old Testament were people of prestige and possessions- *So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom* (1 Kings 10:23).

It is not wrong to be poor but it does not mean you are a better Christian because you are poor. Not everyone can handle the spiritual struggles that come with being rich- *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God* (Mark 10:25). God may love you too much to give you riches!

When Paul wrote his "charge to the rich" (1 Timothy 6:17-19) he warned about the pride of possessions ("be not highminded") and the pleasure of possessions (trust in God instead of gold so you can really enjoy what you have). Then he explained the purpose of possessions- to do good, to share, to build relationship (communicate), and to prepare for future days here so you will not be ashamed when you face God and give an accounting for the way you used your resources.

So walk with God and work for God and "remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). Then use your God given resources for God's glory and to build His kingdom.

June 18, 2014 BUS SIGN

Stopped at a traffic light in Alabama I saw a charter bus across the intersection. Normally, the illuminated window on top of the bus will list the ultimate destination of the bus. This one, however, had a sign that simply said, "I'm lost". I believe I would have to think hard before taking a trip on that bus!

Sadly, I know some churches that give the same impression. Instead of promoting the adventure and excitement of the Christian life, they give the impression they are as lost as the people they are asking to ride their "bus".

They talk about the Love of God but, if you ride their bus you find it full of bitterness, back biting, and battles. When you look at the problems in the "bus", you cannot help but be reminded of the statement of Jesus about the blind leading the blind. And who wants to ride a bus bound for a ditch?

My destination is Heaven. I want to live every day, in every way, in such a manner that people with me will know exactly where I'm going. If I pass a stranger on the road of life, I want them to see "Heaven Bound" instead of "I'm Lost". That means Christianity cannot be a religion I claim but a life I live.

Then, when I arrive at my destination, maybe my bus will be completely full of joyous passengers who have joined me along the way.

June 24, 2014 HIDDEN DIRT

It started when I spilled some coffee. The coffee ran off the counter and dripped between the cabinet and the refrigerator. The only way to get to it was to move the refrigerator out into the middle of the floor.

That is when we found all the dirt and dust behind the refrigerator. The refrigerator is too heavy for my wife to move and it took something like this to get me to move it. Once she saw the mess, my wife stopped what she was doing and spent the next half hour cleaning behind her refrigerator.

I told her I was sorry I had caused so much trouble. She said she was glad to get the opportunity to do a much needed clean up. Isn't she a wonderful wife!

Many people have places in their lives like this refrigerator. Everything looks good and works well but there is a hidden place in which dirt has been allowed to accumulate. It could be lies, lust, hatred, bitterness, or other "dirt balls" that has collected in a dark place. They are well hidden, hard to get to, and easy to overlook when you are doing your cleaning.

Regardless of where your hidden dirt is, don't wait for some accident to expose it. Tell Christ about it today. He'll be glad for the opportunity to clean things up- "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

June 25, 2014 NUMBERS

Our lives are governed by numbers- time, dates, phone, money, etc. Colors- All colors come from a combination of, or the absence of, the seven basic colors known as "Roy G Biv" (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet). Music is governed by numbers (Seven Notes: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti). Even Computer language is based on numbers (combinations of "1" and "0").

Nature also adheres to numbers – Watermelon rinds have an even number of stripes. Oranges have an even number of segments. Ears of Corn have an even number of rows. Stalks of wheat have an even number of grains. Bananas have on its lowest row an even number of bananas. Each new row decreases by one so each row alternates between even and odd.

Even birth is based on numbers: {Note "7" in each cycle} Potato bugs hatch in 7 days, canary in 14 days, hens in 21 days, ducks in 28 days, parrots in 42 days, and Humans in 266 days (38 x 7).

God knows the number of Stars- *God telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names* (Psalms 147:4). He also knows the limits of life - *Man's days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;* (Job 14:5). And at the end He knows exactly who is numbered as a Child of God- *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:15).

July 1, 2014 CHRISTIAN NATION

Pew Research lists 2.2 billion people around the world as Christians, 1.6 billion as Muslims, 1.1 billion as no religious affiliation, and 1 billion as Hindu. Numerous other groups are divided among the approximately 1.5 billion of the remaining world population.

President Obama said in a speech (June 28, 2006): "Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation – at least, not just. We are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, and a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers." This is a disturbing statement to the large portion of America Christians who are guided by their dedication to Christianity.

The word "Christian" occurs three times in Scripture. Faced with a President committed to diverse beliefs, a society guided by secular values, and a press dedicated to defeating Christianity, Christians in America must live our lives according to the principles found in these three occurrences of "Christian".

We must put our Faith on Display- *And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch* (Acts 11:26). We must transfer our Faith to others- *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian* (Acts 26:28). And we must not falter in our Faith-*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf* (1 Peter 4:16).

America's future lies in Christians being Christian. Will we allow God to Bless America through us?

July 2, 2014 CHRISTIAN CITIZENS

A Christian is a citizen of this world who also holds Heavenly citizenship. God has declared that this dual citizenship involves responsibilities toward government as well as God.

Christian citizens are to Pray for the leaders of their country- *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty* (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Do not talk about a government official you are not presently praying for.

Christians are to Pay for governmental services- *Then saith Jesus unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's* (Matthew 22:21).

Christians are to Practice obeying the laws of the land (that do not violate the laws of God)- *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation* (Romans 13:1-2).

Christians are to Participate in the governmental process- *Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king* (Daniel 2:49).

Christians should seek to change America at the ballot box, in the prayer closet, and by governmental service. Then God can really bless America.

July 8, 2014 HOPE FOR AMERICA

Sharing a house does not mean you are sharing life. It is not unusual for three or four televisions or smart phones to be in use in a home at any given time. Many meals are eaten at different times and in different locations. Communication is a text instead of a conversation. Under the same roof but totally disconnected from each other.

Sharing a bed does not mean you are sharing love. Music and media are teaching teens that sex is a single meaningless encounter or a necessary part of the dating process. Husbands and wives are so stressed out with work and family until they settle for release instead of romance. And people soon find the bed is empty even when full when you perform a physical act instead of seeking the joy of Adam "knowing" Eve.

Thank the Lord for the Christian Homes found all over America. Their kids are not perfect and their marital road sometimes finds a "bump" but they are the "glue" that keeps society from descending into total chaos. Movies and the media would have you believe that all families are dysfunctional or no good unless a "gay" person is making the decisions but it is the Christian Families in America who provide stability and foundation while building hope for the future.

Thank you Christians; your belief and behavior make more of a difference than you realize. Keep up the good work.

July 9, 2014 PRAYER FOR TODAY

Help me to use this day wisely, Lord, that there will be no hours misspent, no work undone, no love unexpressed, and no sad regret when evening comes. May all of my plans for today crumble before your perfect will so my daily walk will enable me to be held tightly to your hand. Fill my heart with eternity so I will not be troubled by present problems or unaware of primary priorities.

My desire is to bring gladness to someone who is sad, to bring hope to someone who walks in despair, and to enable someone to dream again. Make me a positive power to negative people and a light to those who walk in darkness. Help me to plant seed in others which will enable their future to be fruitful and serve to encourage them to be seed planters also.

Fill my heart with charity, my hands with needful work, and my deeds with kindness and generosity. Help me to do something today that will bring rewards, instead of regrets, tomorrow. Show me how to be a friend, how to win a friend, and how to show my friends the friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Remind me that years are fleeting and life passes as a tale that is told. Teach me the pure joy of living as I anticipate heaven's happiness. Above all, at the end of the day, when we share that first moment together, may I see a smile on your loving face.

July 15, 2014 VACATION LOVE

Helen Steiner Rice said True Love was sharing and caring, giving and forgiving, walking hand in hand while talking heart to heart. It was seeing through each other's eyes, laughing together, weeping together, and praying together. True Love enriches the soul, beautifies the life, and makes the heart sing. And it should always lead to trusting God together, loving God together, and thanking God for each other.

That is the romantic version. Here is the vacation version. True Love is going on vacation with your family for a week with no family homicides taking place! It is getting down to your last nerve and remembering that the child in the back seat asking, "Are we there yet?" for the hundredth time is the child you love and not the enemy. It is remaining kind and loving after spending money you did not have giving your family the vacation they begged for all year while listening to them whine and complain about wanting to be home every time something does not go the way they desire.

Real love in the real world brings together different personalities with different priorities whose main binding bond is the affection they have for one another. It is not perfect; sometimes it is not even pretty, but it endures because the force of love that draws us together is greater than the stresses trying to tear us apart. Or, as Solomon says, "love covereth all sins"-Prov 10:12.

July 16, 2014 GIRD UP

It is important that we Guard our mind ("as he thinks in his heart, so is he"), Guide our mind ("Let this mind be in you which was in Christ"), and Grow our mind ("Jesus increased in wisdom and stature") but did you know you should also Gird your mind ("Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" 1 Peter 1:13).

The phrase "gird up" is used six times in the Bible. Three times it is used to tell a person to bravely prepare to do a task as they are told to "gird up thy loins like a man". The other three times "gird up" is used to admonish a person to tighten their clothes securely so the clothes will not hinder them in their activity. This last way is how Peter uses "gird up" to talk about our mind.

Peter admonishes us to gird up the "loins" of our mind (Loins are the private parts of our body where waste is expelled and reproduction takes place). In modern language he would say, "Carefully keep the private areas of your mind so wrong thoughts do not become wicked imaginations and right thoughts lead to fruitful activities".

We mind our mind as we Gird up the loins of our mind. This enables us to live sober (think and act correctly) and have hope. Then we do not "mind" when Jesus returns!

July 22, 2014 LIFE GOES ON

“Life went on without me” is the sad thought of many people when they return to a place after an absence. The people who lived there saw changes take place gradually but you see them all at once and realize life has gone on without you.

Empty nest syndrome is partly about this. Most of the adult life of parents is occupied with the care of their children. Now the children have their own life and these parents must learn to live differently- for example, school activity calendars no longer control their coming and going. Things look different when you re-enter a world that has gone on without you.

Almost all of my life I served in a pastoral roll. Church started when I said start and ended when I finally shut up! My decisions and declarations influenced and informed a large number of people. My life revolved around the Church but always from the inside looking out.

Retirement has taught me that “Church goes on without me”. No longer being consulted or constantly called upon has freed me up to delight in church instead of being expected to take care of all the details. It is amazing how much fun worship can be when your main focus is worship.

I have often said that Church members need to walk in a Pastor’s shoes for a month. I found it is also good for a Pastor to walk in a Church member’s shoes.

July 23, 2014 HOARDED TREASURE

Poor people look at money as a possession they must jealously guard for themselves. Rich people look at money as a product that can be used to get other people to earn them more money. Poor people exchange their money for things to satisfy their hunger or desires. Rich people exchange the muscle of their money to obtain power and prestige which gives them more muscle money.

Church member “Christians” think of Christianity as their ticket to Heaven. They expect their “ticket” to shield them from pain and poverty during life’s journey and they accept the “extra cost” of being good and attending weekly church as long as they have “their” ticket. They rejoice when someone else gets a “ticket” but their main concern is to keep a firm grasp on their Heavenly ticket.

Christ Follower Christians realize the gift of salvation enables them to know God themselves so they can then show God to others. Salvation is not about “making it to Heaven”; it is about learning to serve God now so they can serve Him better later. Being good is not a duty but a desire. Attending Church is not a chore but a chance to fellowship with God’s people and worship God together.

Miserable Christians try to hold on to their religion. World Changing Christians happily give what they have received with the knowledge that facing God with harvested fruit is better than handing back hoarded treasures [See parable of talent in Matthew 25].

July 29, 2014 UNSPOKEN QUESTIONS

In-depth conversations with people through the years enabled me to “hear” numerous questions that were not verbalized. For example: Am I a person who can give and receive love? Why do I have so many self-doubts? Why do I repeatedly fail in the same areas of my life (lust, gossip, anger)? Why can’t I be as successful as other people? Does my life have value and meaning other than paying bills and being a good husband/wife? How can I feel secure in a world constantly being changed by circumstances beyond my control? When I die, what will happen?

I can be “religious” (and truthful) by saying the answer to all of these questions is a relationship with Jesus Christ but most people think that is a cop out instead of a real answer. Especially since many of the people who ask these questions claim to already have a relationship with Christ.

It is vital that Pastors preach the blood, the Bible, and the blessed hope but they must also recognize and address the unspoken questions in people’s hearts. And answers to these questions do not normally come from a hasty Saturday night search for a rip roaring Sunday morning sermon.

Jesus knew a husband hopping Samaritan woman had to admit her thirst before she could drink living water. He knew Nicodemus had to wrap his mind around being born again before he could be born again. People need real answers; Jesus has them, but Pastors need ears to hear as well as mouths to speak.

July 30, 2014 WATCH YOUR WORDS

Words are important because they inspire wonders, impart wounds, and illustrate your wisdom. Words also reveal who you really are (But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; Matthew 15:18).

Words have eternal consequences (Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. Mat 12:36-37) so either say nothing (In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. Prov 10:19) or pray to say the right words (The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: Isa 50:4).

Pray for your words to be GUARDED (Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Psa 141:3) and GRACIOUS (Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Eph 4:29) realizing your words display the reality of your religion (If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. James 1:26).

Speech can be either Destructive or Instructive so constantly consider the power of your words and remember “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.” Prov 18:21.

August 5, 2014

COUPLE COMMUNICATION

A couple can get into deep difficulty when they say the right thing for the wrong reason or a good thing with a bad attitude. Cutting, sarcastic, confrontational conversations do not let couples “feel the love”.

Because words can bind a couple together or bludgeon a marriage to death it is important:

1) WHY YOU SPEAK to your mate- Is your goal to build the relationship or to bring down the other person? Are you speaking from affection or accusation?

2) WHAT YOU SPEAK to your mate- Words are more dangerous than knives. Handle them with care. Adding fuel to the fire continues conflict instead of reconciling relationships-“ Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Prov 26:20-21). Will your words make your marriage better or your mate bitter?

3) HOW YOU SPEAK to your mate- Your tone and body language say more than your words. Sweet nothings will accomplish a lot more than loud lambasting (A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. Prov 15:1).

4) WHERE YOU SPEAK to your mate- Private communication does not need public exposure.

5) WHEN YOU SPEAK to your mate- Silence can be either wonderful or a weapon. The silent treatment generally leads to something a lot louder.

May Solomon’s saying be the goal of couple communications: “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue;” (Song of Solomon 4:11).

August 6, 2014

MY DESIRE

I desire that nothing will distract me from, defile me for, deny me to, or defeat me in God's service. I want to make openings, not miss opportunities, to help build God’s kingdom. God is my goal, serving Him is the aspiration of my life, and being available, able, and acceptable to seize God moments is my driving ambition.

I strive to bring light to a dark world ever mindful of the dark spots I continue to find in my own life. As a very imperfect person representing a completely perfect God I must constantly guard against the focus shifting to my failures instead of His Glory. He must increase and I must decrease.

Desire and devotion must convert into diligence and deed if this goal is to be accomplished. I must walk the walk as well as talk the talk by living a “Joy for John” life (I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. 3 John 1:4). I must also ensure that the man in the mirror is a help, and not a hindrance, to reaping a full reward (Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. 2 John 1:8). And above all, I must remember that the Savior’s delight; not Society’s demands, will be the final accounting of my actions and attitudes.

God rescued me and gave me new life. Will I waste it or will I use it to help rescue others?

August 12, 2014 FIGHT OR FORGET

Most people fight who they are when they should forget who they are (Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself... Matthew 16:24). Constantly examining who you are magnifies your problems instead of maximizing your potential.

It is interesting that the history of the early church immediately begins listing problems as well as victories- Selfishness (Ananias holding back part of his money in Acts 5), Bigotry (Greek widows neglected in Acts 6), Persecution (Stoning of Stephen in Acts 7), and Wrong ideas about God's gifts (Simeon thinking the ability to impart the Holy Spirit could be purchased in Acts 8). More amazing is the fact that these are the same problems new Christians face as they begin their walk with the Lord- the struggle with the desire to keep back part of themselves, with seeing others as the problem, with avoiding public exposure, and with seeking an easier way to be holy.

Denying yourself does not mean you live in a make believe dream world ignoring the problems you encounter. It means you turn control of your life (and the problems in it) over to God so He can make you into a "new creature" who is an overcomer of problems.

Stop focusing on who you are and begin sharing who HE is. Then watch as stumbling stones turn into stepping stones and inward peace settles in your heart.

August 13, 2014 TELLING THE STORY

It all depends on who tells the story. Take the creation of woman. Here is the way women like to tell the story. God created man. After seeing what a mess man made of his home and how he was always losing things God looked at what He had created and said, "I can do better than this!" so He created woman.

Here is that story the way men like to tell it. God created man. One day man invented duct tape and he was so impressed until he met with God. "God", he said, "I have invented this wonderful thing called duct tape and I have a rib I do not need. Would you make something that could help me from this combination?" God agreed and "Duct tape woman" came into existence; Ever since man has blamed all his problems on a defective roll of duct tape.

The way God tells the story. God created man and gave him a place to live, a job to do, and animals to keep him company. None of these filled the empty place in man's heart so God created woman to be man's companion, lover, helper, and friend. He made them different so the one that came from the two would be better than either one alone. Only then did God call creation complete and rest.

Moral: Sometimes the perspective of people influences their presentation of what God is really saying. A person's story can present God's story as a different story.

August 19, 2014 FEED YOUR FAITH

A person once told me, "If you feed you face but do not feed your faith you will have a big body, a small soul, and a disappointing life". Here are a few guidelines to help you daily feed your faith.

Remember that your top life priority is doing the will of God and accomplishing the work of God. Life is full of obstacles, as well as opportunities. Without God's guidance you will feel like you are driving through life blind; which is an accident waiting to happen! Find God's will and then face each day with confidence.

Reflect on God's Word each day. God wants to talk with you and you NEED to talk with God. Learn to listen to what God is saying instead of simply reading what God said. It is your quiet time with God that enables you to distinguish God's still small voice in the din of daily living so you can "hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it," (Isaiah 30:21).

Finally, Release your faith in order for God's word to produce works in your life. Do not simply invite God's words get into your mind; let them guide and motivate your daily living. It is through faith that people "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and stopped the mouths of lions." (Hebrews 11:33). Anything that can produce those kinds of results needs a place in your daily diet.

August 20, 2014 SOLID FAITH

What if what you believe is not what you are supposed to believe? What if your Faith is faulty? We live in a time when traditional values and core beliefs are being challenged and condemned. How certain is the foundation of YOUR Faith? Will it stand under intellectual examination and social disapproval?

Faith in your feelings and logic will lead to failure. Feelings change (Can you say, "Divorce") and logic can be better educated (I was told by my school principal that man would never go to the moon four years before I took part in the mission that landed a man on the moon).

Faith in your flesh will lead you to defeat. Faith IN your works is damning- For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: Gal 3:10) and Faith WITHOUT works is dead (Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. James 2:17). You can help yourself but you cannot save yourself.

Faith in your "faith" will dim in the harsh reality of life living- "Many a man will live and die for a conviction; but no man wants to be a martyr for a conclusion." Believing in your belief does not mean your belief is believable.

When the storms of life beat on your building you need a sure, solid foundation- "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:11).

August 26, 2014 FAITH FOUNDATION

Faith begins in hope (faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1) and is nurtured in the head (So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17).

Faith is not a “magic moment” of optimism; it is a behavior changing belief- “And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you” (Luke 17:5-6). Jesus was telling His disciples to use the little faith they had. Once they saw what a little Faith could accomplish then they would be amazed at how their faith would increase.

Faith is the beginning of salvation (For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Ephesians 2:8) and the end of salvation- (Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:9). Without Faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6) and, I think, impossible to survive life’s realities- “The Just shall live by Faith”.

Faith allows us to see the invisible, accomplish the impossible, and do the unthinkable (Heb 11:3, 11, 17). Families stumble and fortunes crumble but faith in Christ is a rock in a stormy sea. Trust Christ completely today.

August 27, 2014 BACKLIT BLESSING

Eight years of use had worn many of the letters off my computer keyboard. Not a problem normally because I “type without thought”. Increasingly, however, symbols are being used in passwords and I am not as familiar with symbol placement. Add to this the fact that my keyboard is in a pullout drawer which blocks the light to the top of my keyboard and it was becoming increasingly difficult to type the correct symbol.

Last week someone gave some extra money to our ministry so I decided to use a small portion of that money to purchase a new keyboard. Praise the Lord, I discovered they now make backlit keyboards with illuminated keys- Glory! What a difference that light makes.

The routines of life sometimes become so routine until we fail to notice the darkness that has crept into our life; darkness which manifests itself in things like a bitter tone, a disheartened spirit, or a suspicious mind. It is only when something forces us to make changes to our routine that we realize our vision has dimmed and it is difficult for us to make correct decisions.

Lukewarm living is easy but new challenges bring darkness complications unless we continually walk in the light. If your life has become difficult it might not be the devil; it might simply be darkness. And darkness soon teaches us that light must shine on all we do or mistakes will show in all we do.

September 2, 2014 THE DARK PLACE

[I am a half full guy but half empty glass people need to remember someone knows, and cares, about them]

In the night of my dark place the darkness is so thick until depression swirls around me like dense fog. The smile on my face hides the hurt in my heart and the weight of that hurt slumps my shoulders and drags the bounce out of my steps.

A constantly shifting glance prevents people from seeing the depth of darkness lurking just behind my eyes and well-worn words flow from my mouth so people hear familiar noises instead of the sounds of silence rattling like an echo through my heart.

My mental and physical energy level is past the empty mark and curling up alone in a corner is the most pleasant activity I can imagine. I do not desire to do bad but neither do I want to expend the energy to do good. Surviving the moment is my main goal.

I am expected to give answers to others at a time when I desperately want answers. All the bright smiley platitudes I dispensed to others faced with similar circumstances seem hypocritical and wholly inadequate now.

The only thing that keeps me going is the bright morning star hovering on the horizon. I know my darkness will flee when I stop wallowing and start walking in the Light. Jesus is this light and He is standing with open arms to grip me in His loving embrace. I hold to that hope.

September 3, 2014 LINKED

Most people take it for granted. They click or tap on a link on a web page or app and go to another page or another section in that same page. As far as they are concerned this “magic” just happens.

Let the voice of a web worker assure you that this action is not “magic” and it does not just happen. A link must be set up so the tap or click will cause you to go from where you are to where you want to be. And the link, or the place to which the link is carrying you, must have the correct address or you will go nowhere or to the wrong place.

This same principle is at work in personal and spiritual relationships. If both parties are not on the “same page” then no link will be established or you will arrive at a place neither party wanted to be. Sometimes this is just annoying but sometimes it can cause a small problem to become a large problem.

Communication means people must be linked (actually listening) and hearing the same things (Sometimes it is amazing to compare what is heard with what is said!). We are told in the Bible to “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge” (Proverbs 23:12). This simply means your heart, as well as your head, is needed in correct conversation. And it will amaze you at the places people can go if conversation connections are linked.

September 9, 2014 THE LETTER

On the wall in my office is a hand written letter from the first poet laureate of South Carolina, Archibald Rutledge. My seventh grade class had the privilege of visiting Hampton Plantation near McClellanville, S C while Mr. Rutledge was still alive. He was a gracious host and seemed to enjoy the young people scurrying over his home and the plantation grounds.

Five of us stayed on the porch talking to Mr. Rutledge while the remainder of the class toured a rice field. Mr. Rutledge took time to answer our questions as well as encourage us to do something great for our state. His genuine interest struck a chord with me and I can still picture his tall lanky body sitting in his chair while boys leaned against those giant columns and the girls sat on a bench.

Upon returning home I wrote a letter of appreciation for his kind hospitality. He wrote me a return letter, accompanied by several of his signed poems, encouraging me to express my thoughts in writing. That letter was a life changing moment for me.

I wonder if the mother who packed the two fish and five loaves that Jesus used to feed the five thousand had any idea of the millions of people who would eventually hear about that lunch. I wonder if Archibald Rutledge knew the impact of a letter. I wonder who you will meet today whose world can be made different because of your actions?

September 10, 2014 REBELLIOUS PARENTS

It is difficult for Rebellious Parents to raise submissive children. God is deeply concerned about rebellious children; but He is just as concerned about rebellious parents. God desires to bring children under His control and under the authority of parents but many times He must first deal with the rebellion in the actions and attitudes of parents "...Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house..." (Ezek. 2:8).

Rebellious Parents unwillingly and unconsciously transfer their rebellious attitude to their children by their attitude toward, and talk about, religious leaders. Children find it difficult to open their hearts and ears to a Pastor's message when the parents have "roast preacher" each Sunday after Church. And it is difficult to have confidence in "religion" when parents continually condemn ministers and ministries as successful only because they are flashy and fleshly. Standing for right should never be in doubt but being negative toward others simply because of their success instead of for scriptural reasons tends to throw a damper on any great work God does.

Rebellious Parents unwittingly foster rebellion when they tell their children that choosing a life of full time Christian Service is painful and financially impoverishing. Rebellious parents think worldly security if more important than Godly service.

The rebellion or submission of parents greatly impacts their children: "And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God" (Psalms 78:8).

September 16, 2014

THAT NOTHING BE LOST

“Jesus said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (John 6:12). After the feeding of the 5000 Jesus wanted nothing of that great miracle to be lost. How it must sadden Him to see things much more important than bread that are lost by men.

LOT LOST HIS FAMILY because he sought prestige and power above the plan of God (Gen:19-). Satan is trying to destroy our homes. We need righteous examples at home.

DAVID LOST HIS JOY (Psalm 51-). David was a man after God's own heart but his joy was stolen by sin (Bathsheba). The Joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh 8:10). Sin separates us from God.

THOMAS LOST THE REALTY OF HIS FAITH (John 20-). Thomas was a pessimist (John. 11:16) who was rebuked by Christ because he demanded to “see for himself” instead of walk by faith (John 20:25).

PETER LOST HIS TESTIMONY (Luke 22,23-). He boasted of his zeal for the Lord (Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.- Matthew 26:33) but he betrayed the Lord at the enemy's fire.

BUT THE SADDEST OF ALL IS THAT A MAN MAY LOSE HIS SOUL- *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mark 8:36-37). It is a great loss if you are lost

September 17, 2014

GAINING HARM

After long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss (Acts 27:21).

It hurts when you hurt but it hurts more when you know the pain you are experiencing is your own fault. This was the case in Paul's “I told you so” moment in this scripture. Prisoner Paul was being transported to a Roman jail. The ship he was on had been delayed until it appeared they would have to spend the stormy winter months in a small port that no one really liked.

The people in charge decided to ignore Paul's warning and attempt to sail to a better place for the winter. This decision caused them to “gain harm and loss” (Principle: bad decisions often lead to bad consequences).

Their bad decision was based on wrong advice (believed the master of the ship above Paul), putting comfort above caution (Port was not comfortable for winter), adopting a “mob mentality” (the more part advised to depart), and looking at the immediate instead of the long term (the soft south wind tempting them out of port was the harbinger of a devastating storm). Principle: it is easy to justify a bad decision if you really want to make it.

Listening to Paul's Godly advice could have changed this situation. Instead they rationalized their own reasoning and “gained harm and loss”. Remember that.

September 23, 2014 TEMPEST TRUST

And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away (Acts 27:20).

God must think it important if He ignores hundreds of years of history but spends a long chapter telling of Paul's ship wreck on the way to a Roman Prison. In this story a bad decision was made (to leave a safe port) and Paul's advice was ignored- "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives (Acts 27:10).

Disregarding God's leadership led to a life threatening storm in which the men on the ship lost control of their life (sails were broken so they were at mercy of storm), purpose of their life (had to jettison their cargo), and hope for their life- "all hope taken away". Sad situation for anyone.

But God had not forgotten or forsaken them! They just needed to listen to God's word (a message of hope through Paul), commit to God's plan (stay in the ship even when every impulse is to do something on your own [life boats]), do their part (eat when God said eat to gain needed strength), and trust God even when the ship was breaking up! (God used the broken ship pieces to provide flotation for non-swimmers so they could reach shore).

Tempest Trust believes God can deliver IN the storm as well as FROM the storm.

September 24, 2014 FLASHLIGHT FAITH

It came in the mail on a Monday; a small flashlight from a promotion company. I often get items like this and I usually put them in a drawer for future use. In this case the Lord told me to put it into my computer bag because I would need it. I wish I could say I immediately obeyed but I did not know of any time I would need it right now and it would just be extra weight in my computer bag.

As I started to throw the flashlight into the drawer the Lord spoke again in a different tone of voice and told me to put the flashlight in my computer bag. I seldom hear that tone from the Lord so I immediately put the flashlight into my computer bag.

This was on Monday morning. Monday night I began to have serious fever and pain issues in my leg. A bad day on Tuesday led to a Doctor visit on Wednesday morning before I left for a trip to Maine on Wednesday afternoon. Things deteriorated to the place that my arrival in Maine meant bed rest and extreme pain when I tried to walk.

As I lay in great pain in a strange bed in the dark trying to figure how I was going to find my way to the bathroom I remembered that flashlight. My bag was beside my bed and God's care was evident to my heart- Glory! It is a flashlight to you but it was a beacon of help and hope to me.

September 30, 2014

OTHER PEOPLE PROBLEMS

I had to put up a makeshift gate blocking the entrance to my front porch recently. Several neighbor dogs decided to use my front porch as a night time rendezvous and resting place. Did not mind the dogs as much as the fleas they leave as a reminder of their visit. Could complain to my neighbors but I like my neighbors more than I dislike the dogs sleeping on my porch and blocking an entrance we never use will normally cure the problem.

Everyone has to deal with “other people problems” from time to time. No man is an island and even if you were the ocean waves would sometimes bring other people’s trash onto your shore!

Other people problems come from a variety of reasons. Sometimes these problems are a result of other people’s carelessness (auto accident), cold heartedness (cutting in line ahead of you), callousness (taking advantage of you) or conduct (crime). Sometimes other people problems come because we listen to wrong advice, associate with the wrong crowd, or fellowship with trouble- *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).

And, like the dogs, sometimes other people problems are simply the result of natural circumstances. Just remember that God is able to work “All Things” together for your good; including other people problems. Trust in that.

October 1, 2014

GOD IS GOD

God is completely complete in Himself. His decision making process is based on “working all things after the counsel of his own will:” (Ephesians 1:11) without consulting any outside authority or power. God does not need to answer to man or explain His actions to man because man and God think on different levels (For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. Isaiah 55:8).

God does not exist for the benefit of man. Man exists for the pleasure of God-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). This means that God does not have to explain the “why” of who we are or what we experience- Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Romans 9:20-21).

God is God and He should be revered, worshipped, and obeyed but, because His very essence is Love, we can trust Him with our life as well as have faith in our future. And we can serve Him confident in the fact that He who knows the number of our years also knows the number of hairs on our head- Glory!

October 7, 2014 WATCHING GOD WORK

God desires the best for His creation so He always has a good plan; even in bad circumstances- And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). Here is an amazing example.

Recently my really bad leg problem was exacerbated by traveling 1200 miles to Maine. Circumstances became such until it necessitated a trip to a local hospital Emergency Room. The ER Doctor gave me an IV of antibiotic and told me to return the next night and get another IV to stabilize my situation before I left for my return to South Carolina.

The first ER visit we were the only people in the waiting room and received immediate attention. The second night Ambulance after Ambulance came up and hour after hour passed. Finally, the ER doctor came to the waiting room, examined me in the waiting room, and then told me they were so busy until it would be hours before they could administer an IV so he was going to give me several high powered antibiotic pills for my travel and a prescription for more when I arrived home. The IV would have helped me on the trip. The Pills helped me on the trip and, because I now had a week's supply, helped me get better when I arrived Home. I love how God works things Together for Good!

October 8, 2014 CANNOT FOOL GOD

You cannot fool God. He knows, and remembers, everything you do- And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face (Hosea 7:2). God knows not only what we do, but also the thoughts that we think- for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them (Ezekiel 11:5).

In fact, God not only knows what we do and think but also everywhere we go- If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there (Psalms 139:8). Even our "secret sins" are not hidden from God- Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance (Psalms 90:8). You may put on a front for everyone else but God sees behind your "mask" and knows exactly what is going on in your life.

The first step in solving any problem is admitting you have a problem. As long as you fool yourself into believing you can fool God you will only end up fooling yourself. Coming clean with God is the only way to become clean with God- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Saying, "My bad" is the way to allow God to do you good. Face your faults and find God's favor today.

October 14, 2014 KNOWN BUT STILL CHOSEN

“The knowledge of God’s infinite knowledge should fill the Christian with adoration. The whole of my life stood open to His view from the beginning. He foresaw my every fall, my every sin, my every backsliding; yet, nevertheless, fixed His heart upon me. Oh, how the realization of this should bow me in wonder and worship before Him!” [Pink, Arthur W. The Attributes of God].

God knew all there was to know about me and He still chose me- Glory! God saw my failures before I became His child and all the mistakes I would make after I became His child but He still chose me to be His child- Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether (Psalms 139:2-4).

Knowing that God knows all about me (Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do- Hebrews 4:13) allows me to be real with God. I still want to be perfect (Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect-Matthew 5:48) but I know my mistakes as I grow in Grace do not surprise God or cause Him to love me less.

October 15, 2014 FIRST FAMILY PRINCIPLE

Almost every type of knowledge relies on something called a “first principle”. This foundational principle is the “building block” on which subsequent knowledge is built. Families must use “first principles” if they desire to build on a solid foundation.

The first Biblical Surgery defined Family- *And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;* (Genesis 2:21). Adam was created without man or woman, Eve was made from man without woman, Jesus was conceived in woman without man, but the rest of us must have a man and a woman. Adam did not simply need a partner he could love; the human race depended on him having a companion who could share his love as they produced new life.

A family’s goal and guide are also first principles. The priority goal for a family should be to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;” (Matthew 6:33). The guiding principle for family should be to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38).

God thought family was so important until the first commandment He gave that had a promise was “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12). Use God’s design for your family and seize this promise.

October 21, 2014 ALWAYS

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

Always Pray- (Luke 18:1) "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Power in prayer comes from persistence in prayer.

Always be Thankful- (Ephesians 5:20) "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Praise in "all things" comes from constant confidence as we rest in God's care.

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

Always be ready to Testify- (1 Peter 3:15) "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." A heart that meditates on God has a mouth that testifies of God's goodness.

Always abound in the work of the Lord- (1 Corinthians 15:58) "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Do right always and you will always do right.

October 22, 2014 MERRY HEART

I often smile at people with my eyes. I look people in the eye, open my eyes wide, and try to add a "twinkle of joy" to my entire face as I approach the person. You would be surprised at how many times people will speak words of greeting to me simply because I smiled at them with my eyes.

The Bible tells us that a "Merry Heart" makes you feel better (A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: Prov. 17:22), look better (A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. Prov. 15:13), and live better (All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast. Prov. 15:15). Many times our words are misspoken or misunderstood but the manifestation of a "Merry Heart" is almost always accepted and appreciated.

Is it any wonder that LOL (Laugh out loud) has become such a common item in media communication? Even in the isolation booth of texting (Which is often used to avoid verbal and physical contact) people realize they need a way to express the joy of a "Merry Heart".

If your heart is merry then your face will show it and your life will glow it. And this cheerful countenance will enable you to communicate without conversation. Try it today and let your smile tell someone they are special to you and to God!

October 28, 2014 SEED FOR THE SOWER

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Isaiah was promised that the word of God would be “seed to the sower and bread to the eater”; grain for growth and nourishment for life. I remind myself of that on those “dry devotional days” when God’s Word seems to be just words and all those hard to pronounce Bible names hurt my head instead of warm my heart.

My dad thought work was a necessary part of his children’s growth. Sometimes this involved planting seeds by hand. Let the voice of experience tell you that short cutting this seed planting process by dumping handfuls of seed in a hastily dug hole at the end of a row yielded a shortly increased play time and a very painful punishment time.

In Jesus’ parable of the sower only one fourth of the seed was productive. That encourages me on those days when God’s word is more duty than delight. Devotions are not always fun but they are always fundamental to growth and nourishment.

October 29, 2014 CHOOSE GOOD OVER BAD

I can try to make you feel bad or good today. I can use this devotion to condemn the spiritual implication of Halloween (Promoting witches and encouraging young people to obtain candy by extortion- you treat me or I will trick you). I can deplore the continued downward spiral of morals in America (people are so evil until it is no longer safe to allow children to roam the neighborhood or accept candy from strangers). Or I can tell you again that God is ALWAYS going to win in the end which puts Christians on the winning side because greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world!

I am not suggesting that Christians ignore the world that is crashing down around them by pretending everything is alright. In a world that is going terribly wrong reality living means dealing with contrary circumstances, sudden spirit crushing crisis, and constant conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil. You cannot, and should not, ignore the evil around you; you simply need to continually realize you are more than a conqueror through Him that lives in you (Rom 8:37).

Just as many churches have turned the bad activities of this time of year into Fun Fall Festivals, so you need to look for ways to show people how to rejoice in the good instead of simply railing against the evil. Do not curse the night; light a candle!

November 4, 2014 POLITICS IN PERSPECTIVE

Some people will vote and try to make a difference while others will fail to vote and complain because there is no difference. Normally approximately half of the people in America are disappointed at the results of an election. These people become discouraged about politics because of their doubts about the winner, their disillusionment about the election process, and their anger that people could not see things their way and vote for their candidate. Here are a few things that may help you keep politics in perspective.

1) The ruling authority in a country is set in place according to God's Plans- "The Powers that be are ordained of God" Rom 13:1. God has a program to either punish or promote our country and His plan sometimes means He allows the "bad guys" to win. His goal is not to promote evil but to show good people the results of allowing bad (people or actions) to rule.

2) I cannot change the election but neither can the election change my commitment to God. The elected leader's policies may break my heart, corrupt my country, or cause me to be persecuted but they will not change my absolute allegiance to the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

3) The day after the election, I am still going to pray for the elected leaders of our great country, because that is what God told me I was supposed to do- I Tim 2:1-2. And I am going to try to be a good Christian citizen who loves his country, serves his God, and tries to make a difference.

November 5, 2014 FAILURE

Failure does not have to be fatal but Failure can be contagious and often becomes continuous. Frequent Failure develops fear of failure and this fear squeaks your voice, trembles your hand, depresses your mind, and infects those around you with the timidity of "let's stop trying".

Frequent failures cloud our vision, destroy our motivation, and fill our life with inner conflict. People often become frequent failures when their life lacks purpose, order, and accomplishment- Sleeping late becomes a habit, TV or the Internet becomes an obsession, and the insulation of isolation breeds a mind filled with despair, anger, and bad thoughts.

If your failures have made you a person of no Heart because you think you have no Hope and no Help let me share some good news with you- Failure is not fatal. Failures are sometimes building blocks to success: Edison failed to perfect the light bulb hundreds of times before his invention worked. I am extremely glad he did not quit!

Failures are also God's way of showing us that representing God is not the same as trying to BE God. The Bible shares failures in the lives of almost every Bible Hero so we will worship the God they proclaim instead of the person they are.

Do not let failures defeat you. If you are walking the path God has for you then you can be absolutely sure that the road will end where it is supposed to end; no matter how many mud holes you splash through on your journey.

November 11, 2014

DIFFERENT

There is within each of us the opportunity to be different and to make a difference. Being different begins with being “born again”. Being born again begins with the despair you feel when you realize there is something wrong on your inside that you cannot blame on your outside.

This despair leads to a decision to believe God’s Word about the sin within you and the salvation He offers through faith in the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. This decision culminates in a public declaration that you have turned leadership of your life over to God in the belief that He has pardoned your sins and now His power at work in your life can make you a new creature- For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:10).

Becoming different means you can now make a difference because the divine power at work in you is no longer the destructive person you once were. You are far from perfect and you must grow in grace and knowledge of God but each day is an opportunity to do better because each day the Holy Spirit of God is making you more like Christ.

Many people try to change by “turning over a new leaf” only to find the dirt on the back of the leaf makes things even worse. Christianity is not a new leaf; it is a new life that will make a difference that will make you different.

November 12, 2014

NOT OVERLOOKED

God does not overlook or undervalue anything you do for Him- *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister* (Hebrews 6:10). We know this in our head but sometimes living for God does not seem to work as we anticipated.

Sometimes, like Jeremiah the Prophet, we believe God will eventually do right but we get the short term impression that the “bad guys” get the goods and the “good guys” do not fare as well- *Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?* (Jeremiah 12:1).

The Bible realized that feeling our work does not matter would diminishes our confidence so it exhorted us to “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward” (Hebrews 10:35). God knew that knowing our work matters, matters.

Take time today to thank God for what He has done and is doing in your life. By faith, praise Him that even though you get discouraged because you cannot see the results you anticipated yet you know that your “labor of love” will not be overlooked or undervalued by a righteous God. Continue to do right believing that a thousand years from now you will rejoice in rewards instead of wallow in regret.

November 18, 2014

UNTHANKFUL TRAGADY

Unthankfulness is the second step on the road to being “abandoned by God”. The six steps to being abandoned by God are listed in Romans 1:21-24- Because that, when they knew God, [1]they glorified him not as God, [2]neither were thankful; but [3]became vain in their imaginations, and [4]their foolish heart was darkened. [5]Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And [6]changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: {“gave them up” is from Greek words meaning to surrender possession of; to abandon}.

Note that the first step down this tragic trail is to stop respecting God (Glorified Him not as God). Once God is simply a “vague power out there” it becomes easy to believe that blessings come from self-effort or chance; which leads to personal pride instead of providential praise. Thankfulness becomes simply hollow words from a hollow heart.

As you can see, taking God and His blessings for granted is a bad mistake (multitudes of divorced people can tell you it is also a bad mistake in relationships but that is another message). Which brings us to the point of all this- Are you a “take for granted” or a thankful person? The difference is destiny determining.

November 19, 2014

POWER OF PRAISE

Praise is not an obligation; it is an opportunity. Praise can lift our spirit, calm our soul, and allow God to really speak to our heart. Let me give you a recent example.

A Song (and the instruments that accompany the song) should bring Praise to God [Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings- Psalms 33:2] but they can also help bring forth the wonder of a “word from God”.

I was reading my Bible recently just before our worship service began. Suddenly, God illuminated a portion of scripture and I knew He had just given me the foundation for the message I was to deliver at a different church the next week. As I was trying to bring all my thoughts about this message together our worship began with some praise songs. The music and the message of those songs exploded the meaning of the message God had just given me and I spent the entire first song writing notes. I was not disrespecting the musicians. I was merely with God in a private place in public.

Praise music brought meaning to a message which, in spite of the unworthiness of the messenger, was greatly used of God to speak to people about living a life of courageous commitment. The singers thought they were simply doing their “part” in the program but God used the power of their Praise to help proclaim His Word- Glory!

November 25, 2014 THANK GOD FOR

I thank God that even though I have seen people fail God, I have never seen God fail people. I have wept over people's pain, worried over people's problems, and wrestled over people's perplexing personalities but I have never had a time that people's failures made me doubt God's faithfulness.

I thank God that even though I have not always been faithful to God; He has always been faithful to me. I am thankful that I cannot remember a time since I came to know Christ as my Savior that I have not experienced the wonder of His presence. I have been in some extremely dangerous and difficult places all over the world but I thank God I have never had to face them alone. Over and over I have experienced the peace of God's presence and the power of His deliverance. I thank God that walking with God means God walks with me.

I thank God that when my wife was raped and almost killed that we were able to experience His overwhelming care and support through the entire process. I thank God that when my wife battled cancer that God provided friends and finances and showered us with His healing touch.

I thank God that even though I am the least of His servants yet He continually overwhelms me with His love and mercy. He is a great God and I thank Him for choosing to choose me to be one of His children.

November 26, 2014 THANKSGIVING THANKS

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

I thank the Lord for the people in my life who have molded me, loved me, and allowed me to be a part of their life. They have loved me in spite of me! Surely, that is grounds for rejoicing.

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

I thank the Lord for loving me when I was unlovable and sending His dear son, Jesus Christ to die as a payment for my sins and shortcomings. He forgave my past, cares for my present, and builds a mansion for my future- Glory!

I thank God that God likes me to thank God! That is why we are commanded "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Make sure your Thanksgiving is filled with thanksgiving.

December 2, 2014 I AM BLESSED

I am blessed to live in a world where God meets needs, where friends unite around me, and where life's problems are more pesky than permanent. Around my "world" are people whose lives are controlled by drugs, drink, or debauchery. I joyously walk in the light while they awake the morning after thinking through squinted eyes and pounding head, "Why is my life so miserable?" I am blessed.

I am not rich but my wife and I have been blessed to be able to adapt to the limitations of social security living and even manage a shared meal at a reasonable restaurant with family or friends each week. Around me are people who constantly battle debt and harassing bill collecting phone calls. I face each new day with constant assurance of God's provision while they face each day with debt dread. I am blessed.

I am blessed that God has been merciful to me beyond anything I deserve. Around me are "self-made" men and women who daily battle a hollow heart and hope that is a faraway dream instead of a vital living reality. I am blessed.

I am blessed to live in a world of optimism and anticipation where I expect God to do marvels and miracles. Around me is a world of people who daily walking in despair, depression, and darkness; a world where being problem-free or debt free would be a luxury beyond words. I am blessed.

December 3, 2014 PERFECT GIFT

I once asked Adults to share their favorite, the most useful, and the most unusual Christmas gift they ever received. The answers were remarkably varied and very interesting. Almost without exception the gift mentioned was not remembered because of its value but because of the "Story behind the gift" that told of someone's special love or sacrifice.

You may be wondering about the gifts you are buying this year. Will the recipient enjoy them? Is the gift you are giving worth the crowds, the stress, and the cash you put into it? Is there some way you can enjoy giving gifts instead of dreading the entire process? Let me share the "perfect gifts" for you to consider.

On that first Christmas, God gave us a baby wrapped in love. This year give the gift of Love. Many people cannot give money, or the things money can buy, but everyone can give Love. Make it a point to express or show Love to someone every day.

Another gift you can give this Christmas is Forgiveness. God sent His Son to earth to provide forgiveness through grace (unmerited favor). Follow His example.

The perfect gift is not found in a store in the Mall. It is found in a heart filled with a desire to leave your routine (like the shepherds) and sacrificially give of yourself (like Mary) so those around you can realize your gift to them is not meant to win their approval but their heart.

December 9, 2014 WHEN SOMEBODY KNOWS

Nobody knows Nobody like Nobody knows Nobody. Somebody thinks they know Nobody but Nobody lets anybody know what Somebody knows about Nobody. Everybody could know more about Nobody if Nobody was not afraid that if anybody knew the real Nobody then Somebody would no longer like Nobody.

The Apostle Paul talked about knowing "that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Romans 7:18). This sense of self disdain finally led him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

That is the reason "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among men" (John 1:14). God revealed His leadership through clouds and fire (Ex 40:38) and His laws with a fiery hand (Deut 33:2) but He could only demonstrate His love by becoming a man so that mankind could know God "got it" because He experience the same feelings and frustrations they experienced.

The all-powerful God became a helpless baby who grew up to be "tempted in all points as we are tempted" (Heb 4:15). He knows about my battles and bruises. Knowing that God knows the dark places in my heart means He knows how to bring real light into my life. And knowing somebody knows the real me, and still loves me, means everything.

December 10, 2014 GIFTS FROM GOD

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the merchants who want to take Christmas out of Christmas would lose the gift buying money of people who know the true meaning of Christmas? That might happen if we could stop the shopping madness for a moment and celebrate again the gifts that our wonderful God gives US.

A Gift from God is the ability to enjoy God's blessings: "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

A Gift from God is a place of service which energizes your life and motivates your service: "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (2Tim 1:6).

A Gift from God is God so loving the world until He thought eternal life for mankind was worth giving His only begotten Son to die in their place: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Ro 6:23).

A Gift from God is a relationship with God by a simple act of Faith: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:" (Eph 2:8).

God's gifts are free. They only await you taking time to open them.

December 16, 2014 CHRISTMAS IS

Christmas is not the "winter school break". It is a celebration of the day in which Jesus Christ, the Son of God was born. It is not about presents, it is about His presence. It is not about shopping, it is about salvation. It is not about decorations, it is about desperate people who were living in darkness until the light of the world came from God to shine forth help and hope.

Christmas is about a virgin who had a child, the arrival of the long awaited Messiah, and a baby named Emmanuel, God with us. It is angels proclaiming, shepherds wondering, and wise men following stars. It is full inns and manger cradles. It is God's plan so perfectly played out until we cannot help but joyously sing.

Christmas is the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among men so God could know my blame as well as my name; my shame as well as my fame. Christmas means I now have an advocate in Heaven who hears me, a Holy Spirit in my body who helps me, and a loving Heavenly Father who hedges me. Christmas is God becoming a man in order to know my pain and to secure my gain- rejoice!

Christmas is God showing us how to have peace on earth and good will toward men. It is a baby's cry that was heard in Heaven and caused kings to tremble. Celebrate Christmas instead of winter and find the wonder again.

December 17, 2014 UNDERWEAR

Two presents I always receive from my wife at Christmas are some chocolate mints (love them!) and some underwear. When I open the pretty box containing underwear my wonderful wife will say, "I know it is not the most exciting thing you can receive but you need some more underwear." And I always agree because I always need more underwear.

Sometimes I get the feeling people like to put "God in a box" and treat Him like a gift of underwear. They like the pretty wrapped package of Christmas time and they acknowledge they "need" God to be a part of celebrating the birth of Jesus but chocolate mints are a lot more exciting than underwear!

Be real for a minute. Jesus was born in a stinky stable and laid in a feeding trough after His birth. His teen age mother and "never had a child before" father were alone in a strange place and were probably "scared to death". Their first visitors, probably after they had just finished cleaning up and were finally getting some much needed sleep, were unwashed shepherds who woke the baby and told strange tales of angels and announcements. Not nearly as romantic as we see on Church stages.

Christmas is not just adoring a new born baby; it is celebrating that God became a man. Take God out of the "underwear" box this year and make Him your chocolate mints. Savor the Savior and rejoice in the sweetness of His pardon and presence.

December 23, 2014 FULL INN

If the Inn would not have been full then Mary and Joseph would have stayed in the Inn instead of sheltering in a stable. Staying in the Inn would have meant the Shepherds would not have been able to “go unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us” because shepherds would never have been allowed in the Inn. God deals in details.

The reason the Inn was full was because “Caesar Augustus had issued a proclamation that all the world should be taxed”. This moved Mary and Joseph (and a lot of other people) from their hometown to the registration city of their ancestry. This was all done to fulfill the prophecy (Micah 5:2) about where the Messiah would be born. This prophecy was in turn used by the religious leaders in Jerusalem to direct the Wise Men on the final leg of their star guided journey. God deals in details.

A full Inn meant multitudes of people left Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus Christ and used the “gossip gospel” to tell people all over Israel about angelic proclamations of the birth of a Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord. Flickering hope began to burn brightly again. God deals in details.

Some of you may be dealing with “Full Inns” this Christmas season. You want God to “fix it” but God may be using your circumstances to accomplish great things. God deals in details; even yours.

December 24, 2014 MESSIAH'S MISSION

“The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable.” (Ralph Stockman). Jesus was born in the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) [Even our Calendar is numbered from that blessed birth-This is A D {year of our Lord} Twenty-Fourteen] and much of the last two thousand years of earth’s history relate in some way to that Bethlehem Baby. This means Christmas is not merely a celebration; it is a crucial part of God’s plan.

Matthew writes about the life of Jesus by calling his book “the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” This made Jesus King through the line of David and Heir of God’s Promises through Abraham; and turned the babe of Bethlehem into the long awaited Messiah.

David was a great king and God promised him a perpetual ruler upon his throne. Jesus came to complete this promise and men are now classified according to whether they bow before Jesus as King or continue to follow the rebellion of Satan.

Abraham became the father of a nation through a miraculous birth. In the same way Jesus calls all men to the miracle of being born again which inducts them into the family of God where they become heirs of the promises of God through faith.

Christmas is not simply about a manger; it is about a Messiah who came to change the world as He rules and reigns in the hearts of men- Glory!

December 30, 2014 DEATH BY CHOCOLATE

Recently, while picking up some Italian food for my lovely wife, I noticed a cake right beside the cash register (What a great marketing strategy!). When I inquired what kind of cake it was they told me it was called "Death by Chocolate". I may have to do some research but I am fairly certain there is a "law" that states you must buy a piece of cake if it is named "Death by Chocolate".

In the Jones Devised Version of the Bible the water in the River of Life is actually chocolate that you can scoop up to eat and never gain an ounce! I am pretty sure that when we view the DVD of creation the last thing God created will be chocolate- Once He created chocolate He simply said, "That is the peak of creation. Nothing else needs to be added!"

Flight of fancy aside; it is not "death by chocolate" but death from the consequences of sin that concerns me. Like chocolate, sin looks like cake but it is really named death and only the presence and power of Christ in my soul can help me realize "cash register cakes" are not the food I need to nourish my life.

When the Christmas decorations are removed and payments replace presents let Daily Bread (Jesus) be your delight. Then this coming year will be full of the joy of abundant life instead of "death by chocolate".

December 31, 2014 NEW YEAR SUCCESS

The Bible tells us when the New Year is supposed to begin (This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Exodus 12:2) and the blessings we should expect from a New Year (A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. De 11:12) but it does not detail the days of the coming year. Here are some principles to help make the New Year better for you and for those around you.

Love out loud- Jesus said a public proclamation of our affection for Him resonated in Heaven (Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. Matthew 10:32) and a sincere "I love you" is always appreciated.

Talk less; hear more- In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise (Proverbs 10:19). Two ears, one mouth- enough said.

Think window instead of mirror- True greatness is found in service to others (Mark 10:44); not promoting your "selfie". You impress people at a distance but you impact them close up. Jesus changed the world by living with disciples; not simply discoursing on morality.

Refuse to live lukewarm- Set a big Goal that only a Big God can accomplish and expect Great Things.