

1996 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

These devotional articles were published on these dates in local newspapers. Newspaper guidelines limit them to no more than 300 words. © Mike Jones (Permission is given to use these articles in not for profit publications). Mike@ministerministry.com

January 2, 1996	STRENGTH IN MY SOUL	July 3, 1996	FREEDOM'S LIMITS
January 3, 1996	EXPLORING THE BIBLE	July 10, 1996	BEDROOM FASHIONS
January 10, 1996	EARNING PRAISE	July 17, 1996	TEAM SPORTS
January 16, 1996	PILLOW Pillars	July 24, 1996	CONFUSING CARDS
January 17, 1996	RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORK	July 31, 1996	STEAM STANDARDS
January 24, 1996	CONTENTMENT	August 14, 1996	FOLLOW THE LEADER
January 31, 1996	TOO MUCH HONEY	August 21, 1996	ROTTEN CORE
February 6, 1996	A GOOD WIFE	August 27, 1996	PART OF THE BODY
February 7, 1996	TWO FLOORS	August 28, 1996	PERCEPTION
February 14, 1996	LOST LOVE	September 3, 1996	A TALE OF TAILS
February 21, 1996	NO PROTECTION	September 4, 1996	PROFESSING CHRIST
February 27, 1996	BUSH LEAGUE CATCH	September 10, 1996	TRAIN GUARDS
February 28, 1996	DECISIONS	September 11, 1996	BAND-AIDS AND ASPIRINS
March 5, 1996	AN EATING INVITATION	September 17, 1996	RING THE BELL
March 6, 1996	GIVING GRATITUDE	September 18, 1996	FAILED WARNING
March 13, 1996	DUTY DEBT	September 24, 1996	PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION
March 20, 1996	THE PURPOSE OF HIS COMING	September 25, 1996	GRACE GOALS
March 26, 1996	THINGS TO GO TO JAIL FOR	October 1, 1996	READING YOUR MIND
March 27, 1996	SALVATION REQUIREMENTS	October 2, 1996	REST STOP CHURCH
April 3, 1996	ALWAYS ON TIME	October 8, 1996	SIGNS OF THE SAVED
April 10, 1996	GOD CURSES	October 9, 1996	LOVE'S CHARACTER
April 17, 1996	GODLY GROWTH	October 15, 1996	BAD BOOMERANGS
April 24, 1996	LEARNING FROM CIRCLES	October 16, 1996	GUN SHY DOGS
May 1, 1996	WEIGHTY PROBLEMS	October 22, 1996	DIFFERENT VEHICLES
May 8, 1996	STATIC CALLING	October 23, 1996	RIGHT RELIGION
May 15, 1996	GOOD INTENTIONS	October 29, 1996	AFTER DEATH VOICES
May 22, 1996	THE PRINCIPLE PERSON	October 30, 1996	ALWAYS AND ALL WAYS
May 29, 1996	PLANNING AHEAD	November 5, 1996	OUR COUNTRY'S CHAOS
June 5, 1996	THE NEIGHBOR'S SMELL	November 6, 1996	PICTURE OR PAIN
June 12, 1996	ANTS IN THE AC	November 12, 1996	CHARGING CAPPUCCINO
June 13, 1996	PHONEY PAGER	November 13, 1996	KINGDOM CITIZENS
June 18, 1996	RESTORING AMERICA	November 19, 1996	COOL WHIP COVER UP
June 26, 1996	SUMMER GUIDELINES	November 20, 1996	WHEN GOD SAYS NO
		November 27, 1996	INSPECTOR CONDUCT
		December 3, 1996	FLOWER PERSUASION
		December 4, 1996	ROUND ABOUT ROUTE
		December 10, 1996	THE GOOD OLD DAYS
		December 11, 1996	OUT THE IN
		December 17, 1996	GOLD OR BREAD
		December 18, 1996	MEANING OR MONEY?
		December 25, 1996	CHRISTMAS LIGHTS
		December 31, 1996	DANGEROUS TIES

January 2, 1996 STRENGTH IN MY SOUL

On my desk as I write this article is a letter from a lady in Wyoming who is leading a Bible Study with some of the literature I write and who needs technical help with some in-depth questions being asked by her students. Beside it is a letter from a lady in upstate South Carolina who wants me to send some literature to her son-in-law who was imprisoned for murdering his wife's (separated) boyfriend. Beside that is a request from a lady at the beach for us to put her sister in California on the prayer list since she may have cancer.

Add to that the fact that one of my members mother lies at the point of death, another member is laid up with a broken leg when he desperately needs to work, and numerous other members are either laid off, sick, or fighting family problems. And that doesn't count the fact that my mother and my father-in-law both decided to get sick this week.

Somehow, in spite of all these circumstances; and a hundred others I didn't tell you about, I must be able to stand up this Sunday during two Preaching Services and a Bible Study Lesson and encourage the depressed, comfort the broken hearted, exhort the lukewarm, and win the lost. I don't know about you, but there is no way I could even attempt all of this without the promise from my "boss" that He will give me wisdom and strength in the very core of my being- In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strenghtenedst me with strength in my soul (Psalm 138:3).

Why don't you let Him do the same for you during 1996!

January 3, 1996 EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Why don't you determine this year that you are going to explore the Bible from beginning to end? Studying the Bible will put wisdom in your mind, morals in your living, strength in your soul, and hope in your outlook.

The Bible is composed of 66 books- 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Most of the Old Testament was written as a history of God's dealings with His chosen people; or prophecy about the Messiah God would send; or songs and wisdom gathered from fellowshiping with God.

The New Testament is divided into Gospels, Epistles, and a book of Prophecy. The Gospels were written as a Testimony about Jesus and most of the Epistles were written by preachers answering questions or solving problems. The Prophecy book simply reveals how God's plan will ultimately end.

The difference between the Bible and other books, however, is that it is Divinely inspired and is a "living" book. The Holy Spirit takes the words of the Bible and pierces them into the depth of your soul and spirit so that they become life changing words. So make it your goal this year to read every chapter in the Bible.

January 10, 1996 EARNING PRAISE

No man should feel he has earned thanks for doing what in any event he could have been compelled to do. Yet, many people seem to think they earn praise from God for doing things in life that they are supposed to do anyway.

They think that reading their Bible, Praying, Witnessing, and going to Church should earn them some special respect from God that will manifest itself in some reward from God. Evidently they don't realize that these are things they should NORMALLY do.

But, while it is not praiseworthy for us to do our normal duty, it is punishable if we fail to do those things we are supposed to do. Take the example of Parents, no one gives parents special recognition for feeding and clothing their children. They are supposed to do this. But they can be punished if they neglect to provide these basic necessities for their children.

Praise comes when we go beyond our duty and go the "extra mile". When the ten lepers were healed nine of them continued on to the priests to fulfill their duty. But one turned back to thank God for his healing. And that is the one that earned special recognition from Jesus.

Are you a Christian that wants to do the least you can do; don't expect any praise from God. Real Commitment is what brings a smile to God's face.

January 16, 1996 PILLOW PILLARS

(Gen 28:17-18 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. {18} And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

Jacob has just left home on a journey that would gain him a wife and change his life. At the beginning of this journey he stopped to spend the night and rolled some stones together to put his blanket on for a pillow.

During the night he had a vision about Heaven and received a Blessing from God. To commemorate this event he took the stones he had used for a pillow and piled them together into a pillar so he could use it at a place to mark a commitment to God.

Many Christians today are asleep in the pews instead of active in the work of God. They need a fresh vision of Heaven and a spiritual Blessing from God. That would turn their pillows of ease into pillars of dedication; and maybe bring the Revival this country so desperately needs.

When you go to Church this week are you looking for a place to rest your head or a chance to dedicate your heart to becoming active in the Work God has delegated you to do? Turn your pillow into a pillar and find out how wonderful the Christian life can really be.

January 17, 1996 RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORK

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

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

These people may be Eyes (People of Vision), Hands (People to work), Feet (People of Service), and even Funny Bones (People with a sense of humor to allow us to take God seriously but not ourselves). But if they are sent by the Spirit they will be just what the Church needs at that time.

In addition to People God will also send OPPORTUNITIES. These are situations that God provides for a congregation to do His work. Your Church may suddenly find it has many widows (An opportunity to minister emotionally, financially, and spiritually). Are you may have an influx of other nationalities, or youth, or singles, etc. Just remember, these are not obstacles, they are opportunities.

God wants to work. Respond to what HE is doing.

January 24, 1996 CONTENTMENT

The German Philosopher Goethe lists nine prerequisites for contented living:

- 1) Health enough to make work a pleasure.
- 2) Wealth enough to support your needs
- 3) Strength enough to battle difficulties and overcome them
- 4) Grace enough to confess your sins and forsake them.
- 5) Patience enough to toil until some good is accomplished
- 6) Charity enough to see good in your neighbor
- 7) Love enough to be useful and helpful to others
- 8) Faith enough to make real the things of God
- 9) Hope enough to remove all anxious fears of the future.

The Bible's list of things to make us content is far shorter!- And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. (1 Tim 6:8)

The Basic truth is this- Contentment is not found in what you have but in what you are. That makes you content regardless of the circumstances- Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content (Phil 4:11).

This kind of Contentment is ours when our heart is fixed firmly on the Lord and we are confident of His care- Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Heb 13:5).

January 31, 1996 TOO MUCH HONEY

I have found that using honey instead of sugar on my morning cereal helps me avoid that "sugar low" about ten each morning. You know the one I am talking about, you eat a big bowl of cereal at seven and by ten you feel like you are starving.

Recently, as I was pouring my honey on my cereal, the top of the honey container came off and a big glob of honey fell into my cereal. I tried to eat it anyway but it was so sweet until it almost made me sick. And that reminded me of a Bible Principle.

Proverbs 25:16 "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." So the Bible says what I found out that morning, a little honey is good but too much honey makes you sick.

And then the Bible goes on to describe the spiritual principle it is talking about- Prov 25:27 "It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory." In plain English this means that a man who is preoccupied with promoting himself will tend to make those around him want to throw up!!

Have enough respect for what God is doing in your life to do what needs to be done but never spend too much time in front of the mirror looking at all your accomplishments. Too much honey makes you sick

February 6, 1996 A GOOD WIFE

(Prov 18:22) Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

Today marks my 26th Anniversary. On that cold February night 26 years ago I remember leaving the Church and taking my wife by her home so she could change clothes and pick up a suitcase. As I sat in the car awaiting her return I thought to myself, "What in the world have I done!"; and was tempted to just drive away (Later my wife told me she was also tempted not to come back out of the house!).

We were married on a Friday night and I began Revival on Sunday. And that is the way it has been most of these years. She has listened to the same sermons (For 26 years this wonderful woman has had the same Pastor because when her Pastor resigns she has to resign with him), heard the same jokes, and tolerated (with a smile) constantly being used in illustrations.

She has endured not having a home to call her own (We've always lived in parsonages). She has moved from state to state as God's plan unfolded in my life and ministry. And she has always been expected to be a little better, and do a little more, because she was the Preacher's wife.

She is a jewel above jewels, a Princess among ladies, and a gift from the Lord to someone as unworthy as her husband. She is indeed a good thing that the Lord has favored me with and I rejoice that the Lord has given us these years together.

February 7, 1996 TWO FLOORS

While visiting the Lake City Hospital recently I noticed the elevator had only 2 buttons; one for the first floor and one for the second floor. When you get into the elevator at the Lake City Hospital you are either going up or going down!!

The application should be obvious to everyone. Like the elevator, Life has only two "buttons"; and if you are not going up you are going down. That means that when you come to the end of life you are going to one of two destinations- Heaven or Hell.

If you push the second floor button you enter an area of sickness, disease, and death. Oh, they have good nurses, doctors, and aides on that second floor but the main reason people are on that floor is because they are sick or they are visiting someone who is sick. And how symbolic that is about people who don't know the Lord; they live among the sickness and sorrow of a sin controlled life with death continually thrown in.

But push that first floor button and see what happens. You come to a place where you can leave the hospital and go out among the beauties of life. That's exactly what happens when you chose Christ. He brings you out of the place of sickness and sorrow into abundant life.

Two buttons on the elevator; which one will you push?

February 14, 1996 LOST LOVE

Have you ever had someone talk to you and really butter you up for a while. They told you about your good points and how much they liked you; and then the other shoe fell! Then they said that sentence (and life) changing word "But".

God did that same thing to the Church at Ephesus. He begins by telling them all the good things He had found in the Church but then He makes a heart cutting statement, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4).

What an awful situation, when you lose your love. The joy goes out of your life and your relationship. Work that was formerly a delight suddenly becomes a drudgery. Excitement and enthusiasm turn to stress and weariness. What a burden it is when you lose your love.

Does this describe the way you feel about Church worship and work? Do you look for excuses to miss instead of long for the opportunity to sing, worship, and listen to God's word proclaimed? Has the joy gone from your relationship with Christ?

God's way of restoring this love is three-fold: Remember how things used to be, Repent of putting other things ahead of your relationship with God, and Return to full fellowship with God. And when your Love FOR God returns the Love OF God will be great.

February 21, 1996 NO PROTECTION

It was raining fairly hard so I dropped my wife off at the door to the mall and then found a parking place so I could watch for her return. While I was waiting I watched people scurrying out of the Mall trying to keep from getting wet. Some used umbrellas, some tried to run as fast as they could, and some walked as if getting wet was not such a big deal.

One man in particular got my attention. I saw him exit the mall and run to his car. Just as he arrived at his car he suddenly turned around and headed back for the Mall. He wasn't gone but a minute before he returned to his car. This time with the umbrella he had evidently forgotten in the mall!

Because he forgot his umbrella he had to make two trips in the rain with no protection; and he was really wet by the time he returned with his umbrella.

Jesus told a story about a man who made it to a wedding feast but was thrown out because he didn't have the Wedding Garment. That should be a warning to us to make sure we have our protection (Salvation) when we face God. It would be horrible to make it to the feast and then be rejected because we didn't remember our "umbrella".

February 27, 1996 BUSH LEAGUE CATCH

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

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

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

I thought of that the other day when I read (Ps 25:21) "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee." Today the two things that keep me from falling into the mud and being captured by Satan are righteous attitudes (integrity) and actions (uprightness). And these are maintained by my relationship with Jesus Christ and my fellowship with His people in Church.

Don't let Satan catch you. Keep your heart and mind above the mud by staying in Christ Jesus.

February 28, 1996 DECISIONS

(My Assistant Pastor, Rev John Keen, wrote this week's article for me. I appreciate his help and input).

We live in an age where everyone wants to be their own boss, do their own thing, and make their own rules. Children are being given more opportunity to make their own decisions and act as if they were the boss.

Recently I asked a tenth grade class when they felt they should make a decision and when they felt their parents should make the decisions. The following are some of the responses I received: "I think a parent should draw the line." "I think the parent should make a child's decisions." "I believe a parent should allow a child some space; however some kids are not able to make their own decisions." "I can make up my mind on what I want to do or not to do." "Decisions from a parent can carry you far in life." "You are mature enough to make your own decisions when you get out on your own." "Daddy made me and I'm glad he did."

What do the above response all have in common? With one exception all the kids realized the need for parental authority. May all parents be just as aware of this great responsibility of TRAINING UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO. Responsibility should not be given in order to make one responsible; responsibility is given to the responsible

March 5, 1996 AN EATING INVITATION

What if I spent all week preparing a great Sunday Dinner? I looked all week for the right vegetables and got only the freshest. I labored long and hard on homemade biscuits. I selected only the best cut of meat and cooked it at just the right temperature for just the right time. I also whipped up the best apple pie you have ever seen and even made homemade ice cream to put on it.

And then I invited you to meet me at my house on Sunday for lunch. You arrived on time, we had a little polite conversation, and I invited you into the dining room to see the meal I had labored all week to prepare. Your eyes would grow big from seeing the table loaded with so many good items and your mouth would water from the fresh aroma that tickled your nose.

And then I would make my proclamation, "I'm glad you came to see what I prepared. You can go home now!" What a letdown. What a waste of my effort and your time. What a disappointment to see all that food and then not be invited to eat any of it.

That is the way I feel about a sermon that does not give you the opportunity to respond. It's like the preacher spent all week preparing a meal just for you to admire for an hour. Once the hour is up you go home hungry and probably end up filling your stomach with corn husk or the hog slop of this world.

If you are going to invite me to a meal then I want to eat what you have prepared. If you are going to invite me to Church then I want to have the opportunity to respond to God's invitation.

March 6, 1996 GIVING GRATITUDE

Some way they always seem to find us. Our church is on a back street that ends in a dead end. The people I invite to attend our services can't seem to find our church no matter how good the map I draw, but these people find it without fail.

They are always in an emergency because their car broke down, they just lost their job, someone is sick, there is a death in the family, or they got off the train in Florence thinking it was Florida (Honestly, one said that!!). And they always want the price of a hotel room and some extra for food. And almost always they would be willing to work but some back problem, neck problem, or other non-provable malady keeps them from doing anything you ask them to do to allow them to earn the money they want.

A few of the times the problem is real and the needs are genuine. Most of the time, it is just a racket they run to allow them to avoid the responsibilities of life as they wander from place to place.

But NEVER, out of all the times I have helped people like this, never have I ever received a card or call saying Thank You for your help. Even from the cases I thought were genuine. That hurts me deeply; and makes me wonder how God must feel about the way I take His blessings for granted each day.

March 13, 1996 DUTY DEBT

Many people think of God as the “big accountant in the sky”. They think He has a big accounting book in which He keeps score on the way men live and then sorts them into categories accordingly. To these people, men fall into one of three categories:

1) People who do enough good works to be justified before God and earn the title of righteous.

2) Those who do not do good works or whose bad deeds cancel out their good. These are called the wicked

3) Then there is the intermediate class who are on the verge of being good but who need to make just one or two more changes in their life. These are the lukewarm group who are just not quite living up to their potential but a little encouragement will probably get them over the hump.

When will we ever realize that we cannot put God in our Debt by doing good works. God's relationship to us is a relationship of love; and it is impossible to pay for the gifts of love. Our Debt is not a Duty we perform but a Devotion we give. And that devotion demands more than “Bribing God” with good works. It is a commitment of our all to Him as shown in the words of Isaac Watts: “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

(Eph 2:8-9) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

March 20, 1996 THE PURPOSE OF HIS COMING

Christ did not come to teach a new Philosophy. He did not come to set up a kingdom (By this world's concept of a Kingdom). His purpose for leaving Heaven and coming to Earth is very straight forward; He came to Save men from sin's bondage.

(Mat 18:11) For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

(Luke 19:10) For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

(1 Tim 1:15) This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Salvation implies Deliverance, Safety, Preservation, Healing, and Soundness. It includes Justification, Redemption, Grace, Propitiation, Imputation, Forgiveness, Sanctification, and Glorification. Salvation delivers us from the Penalty of Sin, The Power of Sin, and, eventually, the Presence of Sin.

Do you just follow the Teachings of Jesus or have you realized His Purpose in coming to earth, to save YOU.

March 26, 1996 THINGS TO GO TO JAIL FOR

God's men have always been "Jailbirds". All through the Bible we find God's man taking a stand and being put in jail as a result. I wonder today if we still have that kind of conviction and if we are willing to make that definite a stand?

As I read through the Bible I find 4 principles that God's Men were willing to go to jail rather than compromise on:

1) Joseph was willing to go to Jail rather than compromise his Morals. He decided it was better to be in Jail with God than in bed with Satan. In a day in which people take moral principles so lightly do you have Bible based Morals that you would go to jail rather than violate?

2) Daniel was willing to go to Jail rather than stop praying. When prayer is taken out of school and many fail to even thank God for meals are you so committed to daily prayer until you would go to jail rather than stop.

3) Jeremiah and John the Baptist had to go to jail because they would not stop preaching against sin. The Public and the Powers say that you must not rock the boat but we know we must obey God rather than man.

4) Paul was put in jail because he delivered a demon possessed girl and cost her master some money. Are you willing to go to jail in order to oppose Satan's work? Are you willing to make a public stand for God and against sin?

The work of God is the most important work in the world. Are you committed to it to such a degree until you would go to jail to continue standing for God??

March 27, 1996 SALVATION REQUIREMENTS

If a person is to become a child of God and escape the eternal penalty of Hell there are 5 things that must happen.

1) God Must Will it- (John 6:44) No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. God must seek you before you can seek Him.

2) Jesus Must Provide the Way- There is no other sacrifice that God will accept as payment for your Sin except the Shed Blood of Jesus Christ- (Acts 4:12) Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

3) The Holy Spirt must Bring it- It is the Holy Spirit that Convicts us, Converts us, and Enables us to live as New Creatures. Without this work of the Holy Spirit in our life we would continue in our wicked ways until death claimed us.

4) Christians must Tell it- (Rom 10:14) How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? We are to be Witnesses of what God has done for us.

5) YOU must Respond to God's Invitation- God invites, He does not force. It is not God who sends people to Hell, it is people who continue to reject God that seal their own fate. What is YOUR Choice?

April 3, 1996 ALWAYS ON TIME

Sometimes when sickness, sorrow, or circumstances over whelm us we tend to believe that God's clock must be either broken or slow. We know that God loves us and we feel that if something would not have delayed Him then He would have healed our sick, changed our circumstances, or kept our loved one from dying. But we know it is a big universe and we try not to blame God when He fails to be where we want Him at exactly the time we want.

Of course, those of us who know God know that His clock is not broken or slow. In fact, God is never a tenth of a second off in His timing. It is not that God is late, it is that God uses a calender instead of a wristwatch to keep time!!

In other words, God takes the long view. 483 years before Jesus made His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, Daniel had prophesied about His coming. For nearly 400 years after the temple was built God did not speak to His people. Wars and disasters came and went and many thought God must have forgotten them.

But then one day, on exactly the day that God had said, Jesus came through the gates. God's Clock was still running and His plan was still working. Remember that when you doubt.

April 10, 1996 GOD CURSES

We live in a day and age when men count it fun or fashionable to curse God or to use God's name in a curse. Cursing has become a "normal" way of talking to many people. Today I want to share some "Curses from God" as we look at some things that God said were supposed to bring a curse on men. They are taken from Deut 27:14-26.

"Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother"- Lack of respect for parents brings a Curse.

"Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way"- Misusing the helpless brings a Curse.

"Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife, his mother-in-law, his sister, or with any manner of beast"- To be controlled by sexual passions brings a Curse (And if I were writing the book, appearing on a TV talk show to tell about such perversion would bring a Curse also!!).

"Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbor secretly"- Lack of love for those around you so that you use and abuse them brings a Curse.

"Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them"- Failure to follow God's Word as the guide for your life brings a Curse instead of a Blessing.

April 17, 1996

GODLY GROWTH

As I read through the Bible I write down notes about what the Lord reveals to me during my reading. I thought I would share some of these notes with you in the hopes of encouraging you to spend more time in the Bible yourself.

Deut 1:9 "I am not able to bear you myself alone"- Growth demands that you include more leadership. Many problems in a Church, and some Pastoral changes, are the result of stress and fatigue brought about because of lack of cooperative leadership- One man is only able to do so much. Active participation in leadership is NECESSARY if a church is going to continue to grow.

Deut 1:10 "The Lord Your God hath multiplied you"- Jesus said HE would build His Church. Good Growth will always come from God and He will provide the necessary ingredients to deal with it (Leadership, buildings, equipment, etc). Oh, if we could only learn to let God grow us instead of manufacturing our own plans and schemes!

Deut 1:18 "I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do"- People need, and respond to, clear cut plans of action. We need to get clear directions from God, tell others what God said, and then do what we were told!!

April 24, 1996

LEARNING FROM CIRCLES

Have you ever thought you were simply going around in circles?? Good news, God has a place where He will tell you to stop going in circle and start going forward- Deut 2:3 "You have walked around this mountain long enough; Turn you northward"

The Children of Israel had started on their journey for the Lord but, after delivering them with great demonstrations of His power and might, God had commanded them to encircle Mount Sinai and learn His law. The adventure had turned into a daily routine.

Has it been that way in your Christian life? Did you start out with a wonderful deliverance and great emotional stirring in your heart and soul? Then did you come to a place where it seemed you were going around in circles instead of going forward?

Sometimes we get so excited with the journey until we forget the purpose of the journey is to build a relationship with the Lord so we can demonstrate Him to a world that desperately needs to see Him.

But there is coming a time when the circles will cease and the journey resume. Then you will see the wait was worth it.

May 1, 1996 WEIGHTY PROBLEMS

Ask anyone and, if they will be serious, they will be able to easily tell you how to lose weight. It's as simple as can be. The way to lose weight is to eat less and exercise more!!

In spite of knowing that fact, the weight loss industry is still a multi-Billion dollar industry. Why do people know what to do and yet spend billions of dollars on weight loss products?

The answer is three fold:

1) People are looking for something to MOTIVATE them into losing the weight. That's why videos and books about weight loss sell so well.

2) People look for a QUICK FIX to their weight problem. They want a pill or product that will take weight off in 5 minutes that they have spent months and years putting on.

3) People also want a weight loss device that will not demand any SACRIFICE from them. Almost every home in Lake City has an exercise machine gathering dust. It was purchased with the hope that just having it in your home would suck the weight off you!!!

Just like we know how to lose weight and fail to follow through, so we know how to be successful as Christians but we fail to be Motivated, look for a Quick Fix instead of a Commitment, and are unwilling to Sacrifice to achieve our goal. And, like the weight, the problem remains.

May 8, 1996 STATIC CALLING

It poured rain during the night. When I got up the next morning and tried to use the phone it was nothing but static; I couldn't even call the phone company to tell them I had phone problems! I had to go to Florence for a meeting and to visit in the hospital so I decided to wait until I came back home and see if the problem had corrected itself before I tried to get someone to call and report it.

Shortly after I returned home there was an urgent knocking on my door. When I opened it there were two policemen looking at me with inquiring faces. I asked them what I could do for them and they said they were responding to a 911 emergency call from my home. I assured them it was not me but they called back and the computer said it was my phone and my address.

I was baffled until I called the phone company shortly after they left and mentioned to the lady at the phone company what had happened. She said that the static on my line had probably caused my cordless phone to dial 911!

Sometimes the drudgery and details of life cause me to cry out to God as if I am in a tremendous emergency. Time after time God has to settle me down and tell me that it is only static. And when static calls 911 it only causes a lot of trouble.

May 15, 1996 GOOD INTENTIONS

I met someone recently who said, "Preacher, I intended to call you last week but never got around to doing so." I told them not to feel too bad because I was used to good intentions that were not followed through.

Many people tell me during the week that they intended to attend the services the previous Sunday but something came up and they didn't get around to doing so.

Some tell me they intended to begin a daily time of Prayer and Bible Study but the activities of the day seemed to always crowd in and they never got around to doing so.

Others tell me they intended to share their faith with a world that is desperately in need of the good news about Christ. Still others tell me about intended plans to visit the sick and shut in or give to help the needy. But in each case they just never got around to doing so.

There is an old saying about the road to Hell being paved with good intentions. If that is so then a lot of people are in the road paving business; regardless of their real occupation!!

May 22, 1996 THE PRINCIPLE PERSON

One of the most misunderstood principles about Christianity is that we serve a Person and not a Program. A Christian is not someone who has adopted a new creed to live by but someone who has welcomed a living, loving Savior into their life. To accept Christ as Savior means you trust Christ to provide a pardon for your past and then provide a means for you to continually developing a living relationship with Him.

That is why some people find it so hard to understand, or believe, the good news about Christ. They think He cannot save them until they are able to develop the will power they need to become everyone's idea of a Christian. Thinking they cannot meet this standard (and they can't), they assume salvation is only for a special elite group. If they could only grasp that God is not calling them to meet a standard but to accept His Son as their personal Savior.

Christianity is a burden instead of a Blessing when we simply try to live according to a new set of laws. It is an abundant life when we accept a Savior whom we love; and long to serve. And that is exactly the reason a lot of people fail as Christians; they try to become a Christian instead of simply accepting Christ.

May 29, 1996 PLANNING AHEAD

Recently I visited a friend's home at Santee. It is a two story home with the living quarters on the second floor and storage on the bottom floor. While we were looking for some tools in the storage area I noticed that the water pump was located directly under the living room.

As I looked at the pump I realized that someone had to do some advance planning for that pump to be where it was. And if that advance planning would not have taken place then someone would have been in big trouble if they had built the home and then realized someone had to drill a well under the already constructed home!

Many people are graduating from schools and colleges right now. Whether they want to admit it or not, they are now busy building the structure of their life that will affect the way they live for the rest of their lives. Many of these structures will turn into disasters when they finally realize they didn't remember that water was necessary.

If they want a life that is peaceful and productive then they had better plan to put in the "water pump" first. This "water pump" is the living water of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And it is the one thing you need to be sure of before you do any other building.

June 5, 1996 THE NEIGHBOR'S SMELL

My wife was pulling the weeds out of the shrubbery around the Church while I helped the Air Conditioner repairman try to repair the Air Conditioning unit at the Church. During a break I decided to fix my wife a cup of cold water and get her to rest a moment.

While we were sitting on the porch of the Church talking about how hot it was we both started sniffing. Our neighbor was grilling and the wonderful flavor of his cooking was carried by the wind to where we sat. Both of us looked at each other and said, "All of a sudden I'm hungry!"

That is the way I want my life to be for the Lord. I want my life and testimony to be so appealing until people who just sit around in the neighborhood will suddenly begin to get hungry to have the same joy and peace I possess. I know some of you think that is a wild example but I'm saved today because my neighbor lived such a wonderful life for the Lord until I became hungry to have the same thing in my life.

How about YOU? What kind of smell do you produce in your neighborhood? Is it the wonderful aroma of a life dedicated to God or is it the stench of sin?

June 12, 1996 ANTS IN THE AC

It was going to be a great Sunday Service. I already knew that someone wanted to join the Church, School was about out so all the young people were in a good mood, and it was a beautiful day. Hot and muggy, but still a beautiful day.

Then the services began and, as the congregation began to fill the auditorium, we all noticed that it was warmer than usual. We put it down at first to the size of the congregation and the humidity in the air. It was not long, however, until people started to look for something in the song books to fan with and men started removing their coats.

One of the men checked the thermostat but everything there was normal. In spite of that it was soon apparent that the Air Conditioner unit was not working properly and I had to watch in agony as the great Sunday Service turned into a sweat bath of endurance instead of a wondrous time of worship.

The next day, when the repair man came to check out the unit, he found that fire ants had worked their way into the unit and had built a mound by the compressor. In the process of their exploration they had ended up in a relay and shorted it out. Once they were removed the Air Conditioner worked great again.

If you lose your cool maybe you need to check and see if you have “ants” in your unit. Satan loves to send little things into your life such as a loose tongue or a bitter spirit to destroy your effectiveness. Don't let them build a nest in your life or you will find yourself in hot water also.

June 13, 1996 PHONEY PAGER

While talking to a salesman recently about a pager I asked if I could see his. Embarrassed, he said he had lost his pager and the one he had on his belt was only a shell. This was not a state of affairs that inspired you to immediately go out and buy a pager from this salesman, was it??

The implication for Christians is obvious; we aren't going to be successful at drawing people to Christ if all we have is an empty shell instead of the real thing. Yet, that is exactly what many Christians seem to have.

When someone needs them and tries to “beep” them they find the Christians are too busy with their own problems to help a wounded Samaritan beside the road of life. When someone asks to see what they are sharing they only get generalizations and clichés that sound amazingly like a commercial instead of a commitment.

Jesus said Empty Shell Christians were like a grave; pretty on the outside but full of dead mens bones on the inside. And that kind of life does not generate respect in this life or rewards in the next.

If your shell is empty, go back to where you lost your “beeper”. You will find Christ is anxiously waiting to restore you to a position of useful service again.

June 18, 1996 RESTORING AMERICA

If America is to be restored to her former Spiritual greatness (Which is the only way to keep America strong and stable), then the Christians of America must return to living lives of consistent Christianity. That means we must be people who are constantly growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In order to get some sort of indication about how you are growing ask yourself the following questions:

1) Do you have a daily time of prayer and Bible study in which you talk to God and He is given the opportunity to talk to you?

2) Do your prayers have more power today than they did 5 years ago?

3) Can you name 3 Bible Principles that you apply consistently in your daily living?

4) Have you personally told someone about your faith in Christ in the past month? Did you attempt to get them to trust Christ as Savior?

5) Are you able to hear God's voice with greater clarity today than you could a year ago? Are you obeying God's voice in life's situations more today than you did in the past?

Finally, Which answer describes your Christian walk--Do you personally think you are-- (a) Getting Weaker, (b) Remaining Static, (3) Growing Stronger- as a Christian?

America will only grow strong as Christians grow stronger. Are you doing your part??

June 26, 1996 SUMMER GUIDELINES

I recently gave my congregation the opportunity to establish some guidelines for young people who were at home for the Summer. I thought you might be interested in the results.

These were given by the under 18 age group- 1) Do Chores before anything else. 2) Try to get a job. 3) Help Pay Bills. 4) No work, No Play. 5) Come to Church on Time.

These are from the 19-40 year old group- 1) No TV until Chores are done. 2) No Play until Chores are done. 3) No friends of opposite sex while at home alone. 4) No Cooking. 5) Limits put on Phone use.

And these came from the over 40 group- 1) No TV until chores are done/Every child should have specific chores. 2) Must get a summer job. 3) Let Parents know where you are. 4) Dress like Christians. 5) Attend Church every week. 6) Read Bible every day. 7) Spend time with Family. 8) Limit Telephone use. 9) Never let outside activities interfere with Church Activities.

The Scripture we used to stimulate all this discussion (and it was lively as the guidelines were read) was Proverbs 13:1 "A Wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke." Do YOU have guidelines for your children to follow this Summer? If not, how can you expect them to do right?

July 3, 1996 FREEDOM'S LIMITS

The freedom you have to swing your hand ends at my nose! That is one of Freedom's Limits when it comes to Personal accountability. Not only can you not attack me, you cannot slander me, defraud me, or enslave me.

There are also limits to Social Freedom. You do not have the freedom to kill me, steal from me, endanger me with your actions (such as speeding on the highway), or engage in conduct that is considered so far outside the social norm until it causes problems (such as offensive language or nudity. Although the door on this offense is opening wider and wider with each passing year!).

I can complain about the Government and talk bad about politicians but I don't have the freedom to refuse to pay my taxes, serve in the military when drafted, or not show up for jury duty. That is because there are also limits to the freedom I have with the Government.

Realizing all this, why then do you think you have the freedom to treat God like dirt? Why do you think you can daily walk over the shed blood of His son Jesus as if it were meaningless? And what makes you think you can get by with ignoring the Bible, abandoning the Church, and living as if there will never be a judgment?

Don't let the freedom of Freedom make you forget the limits of Freedom. And don't let the power of freedom cause you to forget that death and judgment are still ahead.

July 10, 1996 BEDROOM FASHIONS

We recently took a group of people from our church to Atlanta for a Braves game and a day at Six Flags. It was an interesting trip and seemed to be enjoyed by all. Two incidents stand out in my mind, however; and both involve "Bedroom Fashions".

The first incident was our Evening meal before the Braves game. We decided to chose a restaurant known for being a "family atmosphere" so we could be sure of quality food and service. Wrong on both counts! This particular restaurant was dirty, the food was bad, and the waiters were men who thought they ought to be woman!

While God still calls Homosexuality a sin deserving of His wrath, I realize I cannot dictate to other people how they should live. I can, however expect them not to flaunt their bedroom behavior in public where my kids can see their sin. The other incident was immediately obvious when we arrived at Six Flags. Many of the girls were wearing nothing but their bras for a top covering! How can wearing underwear in public be reconciled with (1 Tim 2:9) In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety;

Bedroom fashions are not meant for public display. They are a shame to you and an offense to God.

July 17, 1996 TEAM SPORTS

Our Church recently took a trip with our young people and I had the privilege of staying in the same room with a number of Teen boys. After we arrived back from our activity I went to the other rooms to make sure everyone was settled in for the night. When I returned to my room I found the boys were “channel surfing”, trying to find something on TV they wanted to watch.

They skipped right through the movies (They knew I was not going to allow them to watch those) and the news channels but the thing that amazed me was the fact that they also skipped through several ball games. Finally, they stopped on the “X Games” broadcast and became totally engrossed in watching men do amazing tricks on bicycles and in line skates.

I let them watch for awhile as I got ready for bed. And the entire time I was thinking, “My, how things have changed.” Teen boys used to know baseball standings and batting averages. Today they want games in which the individual competes against other individuals. The team concept has disappeared.

The Bible says that in the last days men will be lovers of their own selves. That day seems to have arrived. People no longer want to work together; it is every man for himself. And when every man is king, the kingdom will be chaos.

July 24, 1996 CONFUSING CARDS

A Preacher friend of mine is also a chaplain for the sheriff's department in his county. Recently, one of his members asked him to visit someone in the community whom he had just met. When he arrived he found no one at home so he decided to leave a note to show that he had come by and then try to make contact again later.

Because of his dual job he often carries 2 different calling cards. On this particular day the only card he had was his card from the Sheriff's department. He wrote a brief note and went back to the church to do some work.

Shortly after arriving back at the Church he received a call from the people he had just tried to visit asking what was wrong. A little confused, the preacher said nothing was wrong, he had just come by to meet them.

After talking for a while the preacher finally figured out that the people he had visited had not recognized that he was a Chaplain. They thought he was the Sheriff and that they were in trouble! This preacher said he thought he would start leaving his Sheriff's card all the time because people never called back when he left his church card!

When the preacher comes calling you need to recognize he comes as a representative of the King of kings as well as the Prince of Peace. The state of your heart will determine which type calling card he needs to extend.

July 31, 1996 STEAM STANDARDS

A Steam engine will not run on hot water! As long as the water is only 211 degrees then the engine will sit helplessly on the track. But raise the temperature one degree to 212 degrees so that the hot water can become steam and suddenly that useless piece of metal can become a powerful locomotive that will move products and people across the most difficult terrain.

For years I wondered why God said Luke warm Christians made Him sick (Rev 3:16). It seemed to me that it would be better to be a lukewarm Christian than a cold hard sinner; and then I learned about the "Steam Standard".

The problem Luke Warm Christians have is that they think keeping the water warm in the engine is all that is needed. They don't seem to understand that God wants the engine to work; not just look pretty! At least a Cold hard sinner has no false allusions about what is going on.

What will it take to raise your temperature the one degree that will change the hot water into productive steam?? What will God have to do in order to get you to move that one inch, or take that one step? What will it take to change you from a person satisfied with keeping the water warm into a productive Christian who allows the steam of the Sprit to work in their life??

August 14, 1996 FOLLOW THE LEADER

Recently I had some problems with the phones at the Parsonage. The telephone repair man came out and isolated the problem to a phone line that we had added when we moved my office to the Parsonage from the Church.

The only help for the problem was to replace the wire. I dreaded that, because it meant I would have to crawl under the house amidst the mud and the bugs and the snakes. I thought about it for a while and then decided to try something. Knowing how lazy we are, I thought that maybe when the wire was run no one bothered to nail it to anything under the house.

I tried pulling it and, sure enough, it felt free. I attached a new wire to it and pulled the old wire through the hole in the office and the new wire soon appeared. Boy, was I a happy camper!!

I have been serving the Lord for nearly 35 years now. Someday my work will be over and the Lord will promote me to my Heavenly home. When that happens I pray I will have left such a clear testimony until those who follow behind me can simply hook on to my old "wire" and go right to work without having to crawl through the mud and the snakes. After all, We serve a wonderful Lord and I want to leave a clear path on how to Know Him and how to Serve Him.

August 21, 1996 ROTTEN CORE

It was a Monday morning and I was looking forward to eating my cereal, reading my Bible Chapters, and getting started with my week. The first thing I noticed was that we were out of milk so I had to go to the store and get some. I always like to eat a banana with my cereal but I saw we had one so I just picked up a bottle of milk.

When I got back home and started to cut the banana into my cereal I found that it looked great on the outside but the inner core was rotten. What a “rotten” way to start a week!

I have observed a number of people recently who have made professions of faith in Christ. Everyone rejoiced in their decision and looked forward to the new life they would be living now that they had become Christians.

How sad it has been to see that the great profession on the outside has not been followed up on and the inside is still full of corruption. Instead of bearing witness for the Lord their attitudes and actions make people wonder if anything really happened in their life after all.

Like the man in the Bible who cast the demons out of his life, these people have failed to replace the control the demons had with a relationship with the Lord and they have ended up in worst shape than at the beginning. And if they think rotten bananas make for a bad beginning to a week wait until they see what having a rotten core does when death comes to visit.

August 27, 1996 PART OF THE BODY

The Assistant Pastor of our Church, Rev John Keen, recently preached a message about how Christians are to function as part of the Body of Christ. In the message he listed five truths that all of us need to recognize so we can operate effectively as a Church. They were taken from I Corinthians 12:14-25.

1) We are all uniquely different. Some are ears and some are eyes. The differences are supposed to be there! That is the way God wants it.

2) Our inabilities do not render us useless. Because an ear cannot see does not make the ear of no value. I am not to major on the things I cannot do; but instead, seek to do the things for which God has created me.

3) We are given our abilities by God according to HIS Plan. My abilities are nothing to boast about because they were divinely endued. My obligation is to find where I fit in God's puzzle; it is not to attempt to hammer my piece of the puzzle into the wrong place.

4) All members are equally important. The foot cannot say it does not need the eye and the eye cannot say it does not need the nose. Each part is equally important if the body is to be complete and do the job God intended.

5) The Body is designed to function together. It is only when we find our place and function together that the Body is enabled to work without pain and with power. And that is what God wants for every church.

August 28, 1996 PERCEPTION

You even see them in the Sunday Comics now; those 3 dimensional puzzles that look like a group of chicken scratching until you focus on it a certain way. Then it turns into a person or an object. Perception puzzles like this are a constant source of joy to people as they get to find the hidden object and then laugh at others until they too learn the secret.

The Gospel, like these puzzles that make you look at things in a different way, will cause you to look at life and living from a different perspective. And that perspective will not always be correct if viewed by your normal vision.

Most People would think that Paul would have thought himself a great worker for the Lord with all the Churches he established and all the Missionary journeys he took. Instead, Paul said that as far as sinners were concerned he thought of himself as the “Chief of Sinners”. And as far as Saints were concerned he thought of himself as the “Less of the least”!! The exact opposite of what everyone else thought about him.

The next time you feel discouraged or depressed about what you are accomplishing for the Lord take time to step back and look at it from a different perspective. If you find there is a real problem then repent of it and ask God for Wisdom to live correctly in the future. But it may surprise you to see that what looks like chicken scratching on the surface is actually a clear picture of great progress when viewed from God's perspective.

September 3, 1996

A TALE OF TAILS

One of Aesop's fables is about a Fox who lost its tail- It happened that a Fox caught its tail in a trap, and in struggling to release himself lost all of it but the stump. At first he was ashamed to show himself among his fellow foxes. But at last he determined to put a bolder face upon his misfortune, and summoned all the foxes to a general meeting to consider a proposal which he had to place before them. When they had assembled together the Fox proposed that they should all do away with their tails. He pointed out how inconvenient a tail was when they were pursued by their enemies, the dogs; how much it was in the way when they desired to sit down and hold a friendly conversation with one another. He failed to see any advantage in carrying about such a useless encumbrance. "That is all very well," said one of the older foxes; "but I do not think you would have recommended us to dispense with our chief ornament if you had not happened to lose it yourself."

The Moral- Distrust interested advice.

I have recently noted several situations similar to this fable. I have noticed that the most outspoken advocates of "Free Speech" on the Internet are the people who want to sell pornography over the Internet. I have also noticed that the people who dislike plain Bible preaching about sin are the ones who want to continue in their sins.

Before you buy into the good sounding arguments of people you would do well to consider if their real goal is to empty your wallet or justify their own sin; and then respond accordingly.

September 4, 1996 PROFESSING CHRIST

I gave this test to our Teen Bible Study to help them see how important it is to be a confident, committed Christian. Thought it might be good for you to take also.

(Titus 1: 16) They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

1) WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN? (See Tit 2:10-15)

2) DO YOU PROFESS TO BEING A CHRISTIAN?

3) DO YOUR ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES SUPPORT YOUR MOUTH? (I John 1:6) If we say that we have fellow- ship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: Would your Friends immediately identify you as being a Christian? Do you have a DAILY time of Bible reading and Prayer? Do you feel you are growing as a Christian? What has changed in your life since you became a Christian?

4) DO YOU FEEL LIKE GOD IS PLEASED WITH THE AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF THE WORK YOU ARE DOING FOR HIM?

September 10, 1996 TRAIN GUARDS

I was standing outside the newspaper office recently when the quiet of a splendid afternoon was broken by the clanging of bells. When I looked toward the sound I could see that lights were flashing and the cross bars were beginning to come down in front of cars signaling the approach of a train. I could not see or hear a train but I knew one was coming because of the advance preparation that was being made to warn people not to cross the railroad tracks.

I commented to someone standing nearby that I wished life would treat us the same way the Train Guards worked. I wish lights and bells would go off when danger was approaching so we would know to be extra careful about where we went. And I especially wish road blocks would swing down over the road when deadly danger was headed our way so we would know to stop and wait for it to pass.

But then I thought, God does warn us about coming dangers. Through conscience, or circumstances, or the counsel of His Word, He continually tells us to be aware of dangers headed our way. Many times that danger can't be seen or heard but God lets us know it is coming. All we have to do is listen to the warning so we won't get caught in the middle of the track!

September 11, 1996 BAND-AIDS AND ASPIRINS

I went by an office recently to visit one of my members who had missed several services. While I was talking with her I noticed a basket on a counter in the office. When I looked inside the basket I found it was full of Band-Aids and packets of Aspirins.

I asked them if I could take the basket to Church Sunday because that was all the average person was looking for on Sunday Morning- Band-Aids for the little scratches that daily living gave them and Aspirins for the troubles that constantly brought them headaches.

Most people fail to realize that Church is not a Band-Aid and Aspirin center to get you through the day. It is a Surgery Center where God wants to do major surgery on you by giving you a complete heart transplant! God is not interested in simply patching you up and sending you back out into the fight. He wants to make you a new person that will live a victorious abundant life.

Don't struggle through life seeking only a basket of Band-Aids and Aspirins. Allow God to completely transform you by trusting Christ as your Lord and Savior today.

September 17, 1996 RING THE BELL

I was at the Post Office recently to mail some books and a long line began to form. It was the first of the month and many people were getting money orders. I could see the expressions of anxiety and impatience beginning to form but I didn't get concerned.

I have already paid over twelve hundred dollars (\$1200) in postage to the Post Office this year so I am familiar with their routine. I knew it would not be long until the clerk rang his buzzer and called for more help (A system that would be greatly appreciated in Department and Grocery stores!!). Sure enough, it was not long until the line was no more and I was on my way to do other tasks.

A popular Gospel song right now tells us that "burdens change shoulders when we stop to pray". Our problem is that we stand in line and get all bent out of shape because our problems aren't being dealt with as fast as we think they should be instead of ringing the buzzer and calling in the extra help that is needed.

Jesus promised that the Blessed Holy Spirit would be with, and in, the Christian. He's there to help you with your problems. All you have to do is push the buzzer and watch Him work.

September 18, 1996 FAILED WARNING

It was beginning to get hot sitting in the car. We were waiting with a number of other vehicles for a train to pass; and it didn't. We waited and waited while the lights flashed, the bells clanged, and the cross bars prohibited our crossing the track but no train showed up. Suddenly a truck at the head of the line swerved around the bars and went across the tracks.

Others were about to follow until they saw the blue light start flashing. There was a lot of sympathy for the driver as he stood talking to the policeman. That is, until the work train came whizzing by and we realized that if we had followed the truckers lead then someone would probably have been on the track when the train came through.

I warn people about many sins. Almost always someone will come along that they know and blatantly commit that sin and seem to get by with it. Then they wonder if they can get by also. That is when I have to remind them about the truck driver and the train.

You might get by without being hit by the train but there is still a blue light down the road waiting for you. And your example may lead many more directly into the train path.

September 24, 1996 PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION

I was visiting in the hospital in Florence when I met a lady who told me she had learned about me and our book ministry through some very unusual circumstances. Her mother had an extended illness and she was staying with her much of the time.

One day as she rushed to her car in a pouring rain she noticed something lying under her car. She quickly grabbed it and got in the car. When she had time to look at it closely she found it was one of the books the Outreach Ministry of our Church publishes. She told me she had enjoyed reading it and marveled at how God had brought it to her.

I have no idea how that book got in the parking lot of the hospital. Nor do I know how it got pushed under her car. I do know that if it would not have gotten there then the rain would have soaked it and made it unreadable. God didn't stop the rain but He did provide protection for the message He wanted to get to this lady; and that is often the way He works.

You don't have wait for a rain storm to get your copy of the books we publish. We have available 5 volumes of books containing newspaper devotions (like this) and a number of Bible study books. They are free for the asking. Just let me know where to send them.

September 25, 1996 GRACE GOALS

It has often been truly said that "He who aims at nothing normally hits it". That makes it important for people to have and maintain reasonable and attainable goals. Although I have many desires and ambitions for the Church I pastor, I think most of them can be condensed into my Four Goals for Grace FWB Church.

Goal 1: That EVERY Person who attends Grace Church will repent of sin, turn in faith to Jesus Christ for Salvation, and live a life honoring to God.

Goal 2: That EVERY Member of Grace FWB Church will find and fulfill their place in this Body of Believers so that no area of God ordained work will fail to function properly.

Goal 3: That Grace Church will grow and expand in God's Way, in God's Time, in God's Place, and with God's Provision.

Goal 4: That the Purpose of God for Grace Church- The Sharing of the Gospel, the Building up of the Saints, and the Serving of God's People through Example and Outreach- will be the guiding force in our Worship, our Preaching and Teaching, and our Activities.

We want to be the BEST and we know that the greatest of all shall be servant of all. So our working goal must ever be to serve God and others in all we do.

October 1, 1996 READING YOUR MIND

It never ceases to amaze me at how naive some people are. They call up a Physic Network “just for fun” and then are amazed at the information that they receive. In just a short time they are convinced that this Physic must be for real because of all the information they can tell them about themselves.

Let me give you a couple of clues that will help dispel some of your amazement. If you call by phone the Physic can have a caller ID program that immediately tells them who you are and where you live. With the programs available today they can almost immediately find out where you work, if you own or rent your home, marital status, etc. And, if you are crazy enough to give them your credit card number, they can almost immediately run a complete credit check on you to determine if you are having financial problems, medical problems, or any other expenses that you may be paying for (College, car, hobbies...).

By the way, if you talk to the Physic in person, you will be amazed at what your body language, manner of dress, and the fluttering of our eye lids will disclose.

Let me remind you that there is really someone who sees what is in your mind. He knows about your sins and your slackness; your debts and your diseases and your disasters. But you don't need a credit card to get through on His toll free number. And He is REALLY able to Help. Call on Jesus today.

October 2, 1996 REST STOP CHURCH

While traveling recently my wife and I decided to stop at a North Carolina Rest Area in order to get a new North Carolina map. When we pulled off the road we were amazed. It appeared that the road was leading us directly into the front door of a Church!

Just before we arrived at the Church we saw that the road looped around and the rest area was situated directly in front of the Church. I told my wife that you could not get much more symbolic than that because a church and a rest area have many things in common.

One reason many people stop at a rest area is (without trying to be crude) to get rid of unwanted waste. That's what happens at a Church also; you find forgiveness for sins and relief from burdens.

Another reason people stop at rest areas is to stretch their legs and rest their bodies. Jesus said we were to come to Him and find rest for our souls. That spiritual renewal is ours when we take time to worship and wait upon the Lord.

And some people stop at rest areas (as my wife and I did) to find a map so they will know the right roads to travel. What better way is there to find your way in life than in the study of the Word of God at Church?

October 8, 1996 SIGNS OF THE SAVED

Being "Born Again" is one of the most common descriptions we hear today. All Politicians want to claim it in order to get elected. Entertainers claim it by wearing a cross around their neck while at the same time they sing about cheating hearts or loose living. It seems that just about everyone wants to claim the title of being "Born Again".

The thing we need to remember is that even the devils believe and tremble before God. It is time we see the Bible guidelines that show us whether or not a person is "Born Again". They are all found in the book of First John. A Born Again Person:

1) DOES RIGHT- (1 John 2:29) If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

2) DOES NOT CONTINUALLY DO WRONG- (1 John 3:9) Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

3) LOVES GOD AND OTHERS- (1 John 4:7) Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

4) BELIEVES THAT THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN IS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST- (1 John 5:1) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

5) OVERCOMES THE WORLD- (1 John 5:4) For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

October 9, 1996 LOVE'S CHARACTER

(1 John 4:7) Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

Love is a Characteristic of a Christian as well as a command from God. It is not an optional part of our life that we can have if we really want to be pious. Love is the trademark of God; and of His children.

But what does Love really mean? So many people talk about Love but they really mean lust. Or their concept of Love is so vague until it simply becomes a license to do whatever feels good to them. We need to get some clear characteristics of Love so we will know the genuine from the false.

Love loves without first being loved (Just like God commended His love toward us while we were still sinners)

Love gives of itself (as God gave us His Son to die for us).

Love is Practical- It is not just in words but also in deeds. It is not just the way you talk but what you do.

Love grows as we learn more about the object loved. That is why God wants us to read the Bible and attend Church. The more we know of Him the more we will love Him; and that is His goal for us and the vital need of our life- (1 John 4:8) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

October 15, 1996 BAD BOOMERANGS

What do you call a Boomerang that won't do its job? When you throw it and it doesn't return to you, what do you call it- a stick! A Boomerang that won't boomerang is no better than a worthless stick you pick up beside the road.

What do you call a Church Member that doesn't do what they are supposed to do? They won't attend Church. They don't tithe. They never witness to anyone about their faith in Christ. If they were a Boomerang I believe you would call them a stick.

What do you call a Christian who lives like the world, talks like the world, acts like the world, and prefers to fellowship with people of the world instead of the children of God? I think if that was my Boomerang then I would call it a stick.

How about you? Are you a Boomerang or a stick? When God talks about you to the angels of Heaven, does He talk about the fine job you are doing or does He say your Boomerang is busted?

(Mat 7:16-20) Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? {17} Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. {18} A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. {19} Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. {20} Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

October 16, 1996 GUN SHY DOGS

While visiting with a friend in Mississippi he began telling me about a great bird dog he had acquired. He waxed eloquent about the blood line of this dog. He told about how pretty his colors were and how his skin was so smooth until it felt like silk. He said he was everything he could want in a dog except for one thing, he was scared to death of a gun!

I told my friend that I didn't hunt any more but I could just imagine that a gun shy dog would be a little bit of a problem. He laughed and said it had discouraged him a little to know how much he had paid for this dog and then to find out he went running off like he was on fire when someone shot a gun.

Thinking about that dog make me think of some Christians I know. They have been bought at a tremendous price (the death of God's very Son, Jesus) and they have access to the very best Bible study material and worship facilities. They should be tremendous workers for the Lord. They should be able to accomplish great things for the cause of Christ.

The problem is that they are gun shy. They are afraid to witness for God. They are unwilling to accept any post of responsibility in the Church. They look like perfect "bird dogs" but all Satan has to do is say "Boo" and they run for cover.

They are bird dogs in name but they never catch any birds.

October 22, 1996 DIFFERENT VEHICLES

I came to the stop sign and looked both ways. All was clear on my left and all I could see on my right was a garbage truck driving away from me. Just as I started to pull out onto the road I glanced back at the garbage truck and saw an ambulance coming toward me at a high rate of speed.

The garbage truck had hidden the ambulance when I first looked and I almost pulled out directly into its path. After I got over the scare, the thought came to my mind that these vehicles were good symbols for the road of life we travel.

Going in one direction we have the garbage truck. Surprisingly enough, it has a big following considering the fact that it is full of thrown away and worthless items. And it also stinks! Why do so many people want to go the way of the garbage truck? Why do they spend their life on things that have no value and then eventually end their life at the garbage dump?

Compared to the garbage truck there are not many people following in the path of the ambulance. Why can't they see that the ambulance represents care and compassion; as well as healing from the awful injuries that life inflicts on you. Plus, if you follow the ambulance, you will end up at a place where the doctors can deal with your problems and bring you to rest and comfort.

Don't let the garbage trucks of life hide the ambulance from you. Satan would have you believe there is nothing on the road of life but that garbage truck. I'm glad to tell you that there is an ambulance coming your way. Get in line behind it.

October 23, 1996 RIGHT RELIGION

This Scripture so impressed me in my devotion recently until I felt I must share it with you. If you will read it every day this week you will be amazed at God's work in your life. (James 1:19-27) My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, {20} for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. {21} Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. {22} Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. {23} Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror {24} and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. {25} But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. {26} If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. {27} Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

October 29, 1996 AFTER DEATH VOICES

Did you know it is possible for a dead man to speak? I can think of 2 ways that men are able to speak from the grave.

1) A Man can speak from the grave by HIS WILL. The instructions about the disposition of his property and assets only become effective after the death of the individual. And this "after death" voice carries the weight of the law behind it so that it is a very powerful and permanent voice. Many people today own, or don't own, property or assets because of this voice from the grave.

2) A Man can speak from the grave by HIS TESTIMONY- (Heb 11:4) By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

The way a person lives, or dies, can have a profound effect on those who remain here on earth. Multitudes of people have received inspiration from a person who has died. And this example has caused them to determine to change their life or goals.

But there is one way a man cannot speak from the grave that many of them wish they could- (Luke 16:22-23,27-28) The rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send Lazarus to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

If the multitudes in Hell could speak from the grave they would be the most powerful evangelist the world has ever seen. But their chance to speak, and for pardon, are past.

October 30, 1996 ALWAYS AND ALL WAYS

One of the statements I like to include in my prayer time talks with God is that I want to be His servant Always and in All Ways. I hate failing God (I hate it, I really hate it!). I want my life to be completely dedicated to God all of the time. And I want all of my actions to be pleasing to God and honoring to His work.

This kind of prayer demands Total Commitment. It is not a "now I lay me down to sleep" form prayer. This is telling God that you want Him to be in complete control of every area of your life. It means that in all times in your life, and in all situations of your life, you want God's will to be done.

Because of the total commitment of this prayer it also demands Total Confidence in the fact that God's plan is always right and always best. Always means that God is not a limited partner in your life. He is not a Sunday God or a part time Deity. Your timetable is to do things on His timetable.

This Total Confidence also means you trust that ALL things do indeed work together for the good to them that love the Lord and are called according to His purpose. All ways means you are determined to serve God in Sickness as well as Success; remaining confident the entire time that all God's ways are always right. You can trust Him always and all ways

November 5, 1996 OUR COUNTRY'S CHAOS

One of the principles I constantly must remember during this time of year is that "The Powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom 13:11). That is why I can try to calmly accept the fact that, despite the fact that his political and moral views are totally alien to most of the people in our area, my representative must be of a certain race in order to fight racism!

This is also the only thing that keeps me from giving up in total despair over the fact that America will probably re-elect one of the most immoral of men to lead our country. It seems most people in America are much more interested in feeling good about the economy than they are in dealing with the drug problem or stopping the murder of innocent unborn.

It appears that God's plan for the destruction of America (I do not believe America is a player in the end time drama as described in the Bible) is for America to destroy herself from the inside with the cancer of corruption. This corruption is of our own choosing and will continue America on its downward spiral until the dissolution of the moral and ethical fiber of our country is so horrible that we will literally tear ourselves apart.

With all that doom and gloom it is tremendously important for me to know as a Christians that God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you". That is stability in the midst of chaos.

November 6, 1996 PICTURE OR PAIN

I was sharing with some people recently the big picture about Israel. I was showing them that the horror of the holocaust had actually been the catalyst to allow the Jews to desire, and be granted, a home land in Israel.

That is when one of my men spoke up and said, "But Preacher, those 6 million Jews are still dead!" I was looking at the Big Picture of prophecy; he was looking at the Pain it took to bring that picture into being.

This principle is the determining factor in whether life will beat you down or build you up. If all you see is the pain of the moment you will constantly be in despair and anger. But if you can see the big picture you will maintain hope and stability no matter how dark things appear.

I am certainly not suggesting you ignore your pain or problems or pretend they don't exist. I am simply encouraging you to look beyond the pain of the moment to the Plan that God has at work.

The pain may be intense and the situation may be beyond our control but God is still on the throne and all things still work together for the good to them that love the Lord and who are the called according to His purpose. Don't let the little pain of the moment rob you of confidence in God's Big Picture.

November 12, 1996

CHARGING CAPPUCCINO

I had picked up some supplies for our Outreach Ministry at Wal-Mart and was about to leave when I decided to get a cup of cappuccino to carry back to the office with me. I knew the clerk had given me a dollar in change when I got my supplies and the cappuccino was about half that so I knew I had the money.

Imagine my surprise when I poured my cappuccino and came to the cash register and found that I had lost that dollar somewhere between the check-out counter and the snack bar! Suddenly, I'm in a bind. The cappuccino is already poured and I don't have the money to pay.

The wonderful clerk (Bless her heart) saw my dilemma and said, "Preacher, I know you are good for it. Just pay me the next time you come in." To her that was a simple act of consideration. To me it was a gracious example of kindness and trust.

I thought of her courtesy and trust the other day when I returned from another trip to Wal-Mart. This time when I started to record the check I had written for supplies I noticed that the scanner had failed to pick up some coat hooks I had purchased. Now it was time for the trust this lady had put in me to be put to the test. It involved a trip back to Wal-Mart and standing in line at the return counter but it meant I wouldn't have to face the Lord with stolen merchandise on my conscience.

Trust is a wonderful thing when it is earned; and when it is given. Just make sure your life is one that will continually inspire that trust.

November 13, 1996

KINGDOM CITIZENS

When a person accepts Christ as their Savior they become a citizen of God's Kingdom. Today I want to look at 3 aspects of what it means to be a Citizen of Heaven.

1) To be a Citizen of God's Kingdom is WORTH ANY SACRIFICE. Jesus said we had to forsake all and follow Him. He said we had to love Him above father, mother, and family. And He said He had to have First place in our heart. But it is worth any of these sacrifices in order to be a citizen of Heaven.

2) To be a Citizen of God's Kingdom REQUIRES A STEADFAST COMMITMENT. Jesus said if we put our hands to the plough and looked back we were not fit for the Kingdom. He told us to remember what happened to Lot's wife when she started for God and then looked back with longing for the things she had left behind. Serving God is not a hit or miss proposition; it means you burn your bridges and set your face with determination toward that celestial city.

3) To be a Citizen of God's Kingdom means YOU MUST LIVE BY FAITH. The most emphasized principle in the Bible is "The Just shall live by Faith". Chapter 11 of Hebrews is God's Hall of Fame of those who lived by faith for the kingdom by God. They knew that it is not what you can see with your eyes but what You are willing to trust God for that matters.

If you are not a citizen of Heaven then let me encourage you to trust Christ today. It will be the best day of your life.

November 19,1996

COOL WHIP COVER UP

I was sitting at my desk trying to do some work while I ate a piece of cake and drank some coffee. My wife came in, noticed that I had put a glob of cool whip on the cake, and asked me why I was eating more cool whip than cake. I told her the cake was so old until it had dried out and I was trying to make it eatable!

I know some Christians like that cake. They once had a thriving triumphant life of joy and victory. Now they are so dry and dusty until people would find it almost impossible to be around them if it were not for the "cool whip" of kindness you put on them because of love and consideration for their past actions.

It is not the fact that age has robbed them of energy and ability. That is normal and expected. Instead, their dryness comes from a bitter spirit, a complaining mouth, or a difficult to be around personality. Instead of growing more and more like Christ as they grow older their life begins to dry out as they abandon Church duties and daily devotionals. The water of the Word no longer keeps them fresh and joyful so their dryness takes away your appetite.

If you need a "cool whip" cover up in order for people to be around you, maybe it's time you came back to the living waters and asked Christ to refresh your spirit and renew your life. You will be amazed at how God can use you when the dryness disappears.

November 20, 1996

WHEN GOD SAYS NO

God can't can't but He will won't! Or to put it in normal talk, nothing is impossible with God but some things are not in the will of God.

This divine will of God is one of the most difficult things for humans to accept. We know that God can do anything; yet, there are numerous times that prayers and petitions get either no answer or a "No" answer. Many of those prayers are earnest prayers for very real needs and we know God could change the situation; but He doesn't.

That's why the most often repeated theme in the Bible is "The Just shall live by Faith". Faith is trusting in God's love even when you can't see His face. Faith is believing in God's Plans even when you can't see His purpose. Faith is accepting God's "No" even when you desperately want a "Yes".

In the middle of work, worry, and lack of wealth, you must recognize that God is still on the throne and His power is just as strong as ever. Our prayer should not be to "make" God do what we want; it should be to mold us into wanting what God wants.

Remember, God's "No" shows just as much love as His "Yes". Accept it with the same joy.

November 27, 1996

INSPECTOR CONDUCT

When you have the responsibility of preaching 5 radio programs, writing 3 newspaper articles, preaching 2 sermons, and developing a Sunday School lesson each week you look for inspiration and ideas everywhere you can. You also learn to “redeem the time” and make use of each opportunity to spend time writing down any of these ideas that come your way.

Recently one of my members was undergoing some test in a local hospital and I went with them to encourage and calm them. While they were involved in the tests I was leaning against a wall trying to collect my thoughts and write some articles. Several people came up to me while I was writing and asked if they could be of assistance to me.

Only after I talked with one of them later did I find out why they were so thoughtful. They were expecting an inspector from their parent company and they assumed that since I was taking notes that I must be that inspector!

They were extremely diligent in their work and friendly in their demeanor when they thought I was an inspector. Once they found out I was just a plain old preacher they basically ignored me.

Does YOUR conduct change when you think someone is watching? Just remember, God is always watching; and even taking notes about your idle words (Matt 12:36).

December 3, 1996 FLOWER PERSUASION

As I was conducting some business recently someone brought the secretary to whom I was talking a bunch of beautiful flowers. Naturally curious, I asked her if it was her birthday or anniversary. A little reluctantly she said neither; some people were after her husband to take a position with them and they thought sending flowers to her might help the situation. And they did seem to put a twinkle in her eye!

Many people tend to forget that the Church is the Bride of Christ. God loved the Church enough to send His son to die for it. Jesus loved the Church enough to leave Heaven and be crucified in order to buy the Church off the slave market of sin. The Church is a valuable and very loved possession for God and for His Son.

With that in mind, it might do you good to consider how you treat the Church. I tell people when they bring flowers for the Church service that it must bless God's heart just like sending flowers to a wife would impress a husband. And when you neglect, disregard, or insult the Church it must make God feel like a husband would feel if you did those same things to his wife.

Hope to see you in Church this week. And I hope you will come with a song in your heart and praise on your lips. You may be surprised about what a "husband" will do when you treat his wife special.

December 4, 1996 ROUND ABOUT ROUTE

As a result of a death in our church recently the ladies of the Church were serving a meal for the family of the deceased. The home was located in the country and several of the ladies asked for directions to the home. When it was time to serve the meal one of our most faithful ladies had not arrived. Finally, as the meal was coming to a conclusion this lady appeared.

Her tale of woe went like this. There was a branch off the road that came to the home. Instead of continuing straight down the road this lady took the branch, traveled all over the country, and finally arrived at the home a half hour late and with many extra miles on her car.

There is a story in the Bible like that. The Children of Israel left Egypt for the Promised Land but a short journey turned into a 40 year run around because they took the branch road of unbelief. They finally arrived at their destination but it was many years and many miles later.

I know church members in the same dilemma. They began traveling the road with God but disbelief, disputes, or distractions caused them to branch off on the wrong road. The best advice I can give is to go back to where you branched off and start back the right way. That roundabout route is a killer so get back on the straight and narrow.

December 10, 1996

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

(Eccl 7:10) "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this."

We all hear it, "Christmas is just not like it used to be" or "When I was a kid you would get an orange and an apple for Christmas and be very thankful while kids today get hundreds of dollars' worth of gifts and seem not to be thankful at all."

Solomon had noticed this same type phenomenon. People were always talking about how good things used to be in the "good old days" and how bad they were now. Solomon's observation was that it was not wisdom to think like this.

Sure things have changed; and not always for the best (although a lot of good has come from the changes). The truth we need to recognize, however, is that the reason the kids get the huge amount of toys compared to the apple and orange is because the people who used to get the apple and orange now buy these presents for them!

The problem is not in the progress. The problem is that people have allowed the progress to replace human contact and relationships. Love has been replaced by activities and things so that people become more interested in what they get than in the love that prompted the gift. And that is the real tragedy that comes from progress.

December 11, 1996

OUT THE IN

I had taken several people to a local eating establishment for some food and fellowship. When we started to leave it was easier for me to go out the entrance lane than to leave by the exit lane. The people with me immediately jumped on me and said that if that was them then I would write an article about them so they expected me to write one about me! So here it is.

The scriptures say, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber (John 10:1). So, just like it is wrong to go out the in door, it is wrong to attempt to come to Christ by any means other than the way He has provided.

Many people today are trying to come to God on their own terms instead of following God's directions. It seems easier their way or it makes better sense to them their way or they see lots of other people trying to go out the in-door and think it must be all right because so many others are going that way.

One of the duties of Christians today is to show people that if they try to come to God by any means other than through the sinless sacrifice of Christ then they will be exposed and evicted. Jesus is the only door; and if you don't go in through Him then you will be left out.

December 17, 1996 GOLD OR BREAD

Suddenly her whole world changed. A normal girl in a back woods hick town in a small country in the Middle East was going about her normal duties one day. She was anticipating her soon coming marriage to the town carpenter and looked forward to a quiet life filled with neighbors, kids, and the joys of marriage.

But as she went about her duties that day, suddenly an angel appeared to her, told her she had been specially picked by God, and she would become the mother of the Son of God. This was the crisis time of her life. Would she chose to believe God and commit to His will in her life or would she rebel and refuse in unbelief. Her answer, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word."

The Jews tell a fable about a man on the road to Jericho who is stopped by God. God looks over the man's poor condition and then tells him that if the man will only believe that He will turn his cart load of wheat into gold. The Man thought for a moment and said, "But Lord, My wife can't cook gold!"

I believe that God calls each of His children to a place of definite commitment. This commitment is normally life changing. When we come to this crisis of belief we can bow in faith and dedication like Mary. Or we, like the Jew going to Jericho, can think only of our immediate needs. The difference will determine whether our life produces Gold for God or Husk for burning.

December 18, 1996 MEANING OR MONEY?

Like many people, she had determined that she would not get wrapped up in the money and madness of Christmas. And, like many people, she had begun to fail in her goal. More and more the press of presents and the rush of time caused her to dread Christmas instead of rejoice in the birth of God's Son.

One day she went to a store to return some items and rush out to find others to replace the ones she was returning. But when she got to the next store and looked for her money she found she had been rushing so hard until she had dropped the money she got from the returned items and now didn't have enough to pay for what she was purchasing.

That is when the Spirit of God brought her up short and told her that it had taken this drastic event to get her attention so she could refocus on what was really important. When she told the story to me she said the lost money was now simply a symbol to her of what she was really losing by pushing Christ out of Christmas.

I hope you don't lose your money this Christmas. I also pray you don't lose your perspective on the real meaning of Christmas. But if you have to lose anything then I hope it's the money you lose and not the meaning of this wonderful time.

December 25, 1996

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

There are mainly two types of Christmas tree decorators. One group kind of throw the lights and decorations on the tree and accept the results. The other group, which includes my wife, must carefully wrap the lights on the tree in a particular pattern and then make sure the decorations are spaced just right so everything will look neat and symmetrical.

My wife spent 5 hours putting the lights on our tree this year and as she began to put on the last string of lights I heard her give a big exclamation of dismay. She had just realized that she was putting the lights on backward so that the receptacle end was ending up at the plug instead of the plug end! The lights were spaced just right on the tree but there was no way to get power to them. All that work would have to be discarded and done all over again.

Fortunately, when we began examining the problem we found that only the last sting was on backward so the problem was not nearly as serious as it first appeared.

We have finally reached the end of this Christmas season. Some people have thrown things together while others have worked long and diligently to make sure everything is in place. My question is this, did you come to Christmas day with your light shining for Christ or did you do everything backwards?

December 31, 1996

DANGEROUS TIES

Just as I turned into the Post Office parking lot the whole scene opened up before me. A man had noticed that his shoes were untied so he bent down to tie them. As he bent down he forgot he was standing in the middle of the road leading to the parking area.

Suddenly the car directly behind him began backing out of its parking space. Because the man was bent down he could not be seen by the person backing the car. Instantly I started blowing my horn to warn the driver of a problem. He finally stopped his car just as it bumped into the man bend down tying his shoes.

Thankfully, there was no harm done except for the fright of the driver and the shamefacedness of the man who stopped to tie his shoes in the middle of a road.

As we begin a new year it is easy for us to get so distracted with daily living until we forget the dangers all around us. We can get so preoccupied dealing with the little things until we miss the danger signals coming from a lonesome wife or a confused child. And, if we aren't careful, the first time we recognize something is wrong is when we realize we are about to get run over!

Don't get so tied down this year until you can't take time for your family and for God. Just make sure you don't take that time in the middle of the road!