

1999 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 2, 1999 DAY OF THE DIET

More diets begin on the second day of January than all the other days of the year combined! Everyone wants to “pig out” during Christmas but they know the dreaded “day of the diet” is coming.

All of the exercise equipment and exercise videos they purchased for Christmas must now be put to use. With fire in their eyes and determination on their lips they begin to shed those unwanted pounds. The good news is that some people will remain steadfast for as much as a week!

If it wasn't for people's tendency not to admit defeat, you could pick up used exercise equipment for a song in February. And I could probably clothe a third world nation with all the clothes people have in their closet that are just a little snug. They steadfastly refuse to discard them because they are going to be able to wear them one day. They eventually come in handy dusting the house or changing car oil.

Let me give you some common sense advice that will help you with your diet, as well as with your spiritual life. The Bible states that it is “The little foxes that spoil the vine” (Song 2:15). Most people's pounds come from their snacks between meals and not from the meals. Go for a week without eating anything between meals and see what a difference it will make. Remember, losing an ounce a day means you lose two pounds a month; which translates into twenty four pounds a year! And that is the goal of most people.

In the same way, you can deal with those little sins that keep you depressed and discouraged. After all, most people are not tempted to rob banks, they are tempted to talk about their neighbor or allow anger to control them or some other “little” sin. Learn to guard against these “little sins” in your life and you will find that the big ones seem to take care of themselves.

You can lose those pounds; and you can be a victorious Christian. Simply do it a step at a time. The change in life style will lower the size of your pants and increase the size of your testimony. And isn't that what you really want?

February 27, 1999 MAKING FAITH WORK

I have been preaching for nearly 37 years and I still get confused sometimes about the way people react to God's offer of pardon and forgiveness. Some people accept it readily and immediately begin to serve God with all of their heart and soul. Others hear the good news and make a sincere effort to do everything that is asked of them but for some vague reason it never seems to “click” with them. They struggle and struggle and never seem to find the peace and assurance they crave.

Recently, I came across a simple statement by the apostle Paul that just exploded with meaning in my mind- (Gal 5:6) *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love*. That is the difference! The energizing force in Faith is Love. When I try to educate the mind of these people who struggle with Faith I am dealing with the wrong need. It is not that they can't understand just as well as anyone else; the problem stems from a hindrance or blockage in their love relationship with God.

Sometimes a person is abandoned or abused by their parents, a close friend, or a mate. Many times these people find it difficult to have the right kind of faith because they have been “burned” before by someone they trusted. Their mind will say they trust God but their heart is afraid to make that leap of trust which is the very basis of faith.

Faith comes by education (Rom 10:17) but its motivating force is love. The hindrance to Faith is fear; fear of total commitment, fear of lack of ability, or fear of giving control to someone else. The answer to this fear is to understand fully the love of God for *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear*: (I John 4:18).

I hope you will see God's love today. And I pray that will cause your faith to work successfully and completely.

January 5, 1999 ASSEMBLING 1999

My father in law's television was broken so all his children decided to go together for Christmas and purchase him a new one. Unable, and unwilling, to purchase a very expensive floor model after considering how little my father in law watched TV we decided to purchase him a nice portable TV.

This presented an additional problem, where were we going to put the new portable TV? That "forced" my wife to go shopping where she found a nice table stand that would exactly fit in the corner of his living room and be just what he needed.

When we opened the box containing all the parts for his new table it was very confusing, and somewhat scary, to try to figure out where everything went. But we looked at the instructions, used a little common sense, and soon all those scattered pieces were assembled into a nice table for his TV.

God, in His great mercy and goodness, has granted us a new year. As we stand at the beginning of this year and look into the future it appears a little confusing, and somewhat scary. We want this year to be filled with joy, peace, and prosperity but we don't know exactly what to do in order for that to be accomplished.

Just like with that TV table, there are guidelines we must follow if we would look back on 1999 and see it "assembled" into something useful and pretty. First we must have a desire to make this year the best year of our life (We would not have purchased and put that TV table together unless there was a need).

Then we must assemble all the pieces of this year into their proper place. That means following God's instructions, using the common sense He has given us, and expecting God to use our efforts to make something useful and beautiful. Do that and 1999 will end up being just what you need and want.

January 6, 1999 THE BEST YEAR YET

Do you want things to go well in your life in 1999? "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Prov 16:7). What a Promise! Life will be so good until even your enemies will stop attacking you. Sounds good to me!

So pleasing God should be your goal for 1999. Here are several principles that will help you get a handle on what it means to live so as to please the Lord.

Guard your heart- (1 Sam 16:7) "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." God is concerned about your attitude and your motivations. It pleases God when we watch what we watch so our mind and vocabulary are kept clean. It pleases God when we seek to love our neighbor as our self instead of harboring grudges and prejudices.

Take time to build a relationship with God. My mother said over and over this Christmas that her greatest present was having her family with her. Take time to talk to God each day in prayer. Meet with God's people each week in a house of Worship. Study God's diary (the Bible) so you can learn, and follow, God's plans and principles.

Honor God's Son. Like any parent, God is pleased when you treat His only begotten son with honor and respect. Accept Christ as your personal Savior and model your life after Christ, that is sure to please God.

Make Pleasing God your goal and 1999 will be the best year you have ever had.

January 12, 1999 DECAFE OR REGULAR

One of the local service stations has a policy that if you buy one of their mugs you can then get coffee for ten cent a cup by getting it in that mug. For a confirmed coffee drinker like me that is a deal too good to pass up.

Recently, when I stopped by for a cup of coffee I found an interesting situation. The coffee pots in use at this station have a top and a bottom part. When I went to get my coffee I found that the top part of one pot was labeled regular and the bottom part was labeled decaffe. The other pot had the top part labeled decaffe and the bottom part labeled regular. I still don't know which kind of coffee I got that day!

The Bible states that "if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Cor 14:8). Like these coffee pots, I am afraid a lot of Churches have dual labels and, as a result, are really confusing people about what they are getting.

Take, for instance, the recent issue about immorality and forgiveness. The message given out by some churches is that because immorality is so prevalent among certain people then it should simply be forgiven and allowed to continue. In fact, however, the Bible states- "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom 6:1-2).

Like the mixed up coffee pots, the message that comes across from many people is that sin is to be winked at instead of repented of - and we wonder why society continues to become more and more corrupt.

Thank God for the mercy and forgiveness that God graciously gives us through Christ. But this forgiveness comes after a repentant heart and is followed by a changed life style. To teach otherwise is to mix up coffee pots and greatly confuse men about what is really the truth.

January 13, 1999 GRACE GOALS

He who aims at nothing has no problem hitting it! When you don't know where you are going any road will get you there! And if you don't have something to guide your life then you will end up with a life that has no purpose, no peace, and no progress.

Everyone needs goals in their life. A GOAL is defined as something to aim for- something to give direction to your work and effort. Here are a few of the goals that I have set for each Member of Grace Church in 1999.

1) BE INVOLVED -I would like for each member of the Church to be actively involved in the Church and its ministry every week. Precept must be upon precept if consistent growth is to happen. Remember, there are only 52 Sundays in a year, each one you miss cut out spiritual food you need to grow as a Christian.

2) BE A WITNESS - Determine to share what God is doing in your Life, and what He wants to do in their life, with at least one person each week. This is the greatest good you can do.

3) BE HOLY- Live like a Child of God in all of life's circumstances. Don't allow the conduct of the crowd to shape you- Be Holy because God is Holy. Make a Stand for right.

4) BE JOYFUL - Rejoice in the fact that God has provided forgiveness for your sins, provision for your life, and a promise of Heaven. Don't ignore life's problems, just trust God to give you victory over anything so you can rejoice in everything!

January 20, 1999

THE PREACHER DIDN'T KNOW

Several times in my ministry I have had people greet me at the door of the Church at the conclusion of a message with a statement like this, "Who called you and told you about my problem?" I always shake my head and point up.

It is wonderful when you are preparing a sermon and God reveals something that needed to be expounded. Many times, however, this revelation is about the principle that needs to be given and not about the problem that needs to be addressed.

At those times you feel like Elisha the prophet when he spoke to his servant about a woman who had caught him by the feet and would not let go- And Elisha said, "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." (II Kings 4:27). In cases like this the preacher has to preach BY Faith as well as About Faith.

Sometimes, it is not just the intent of the preaching that is unknown to the Preacher. Sometimes, and this is most dangerous, the Preacher does not realize if He has God's Power on his work-Moses did not know that his face shined from his meeting with God (Ex 34:29). And, horribly, Samson did not know that God's power had left him (Judges 16:20).

Sometimes the Preacher does not know, but God always knows; and God always cares. When he exposes you in a sermon it is not to embarrass you, it is to convert you. Remember that

January 26, 1999

WAKE UP WARNING

The wife said that it hovered over her husband's head like a cloud. She described it as intensely black with wing like projections protruding from the back. Suddenly, a light, like a flash of fire, projected from this "thing" and lit up the face of her husband.

She had been sound asleep when this presence awakened her and she was about to convince herself that it was just a very bad dream when her daughter, who had been sleeping on a pallet on the floor beside the bed, popped up and said, "Did you see it, Mom? It was so black and ugly and it hovered over Dad's face. And, Mom, I can still feel the heat on my face."

The mother reached over, felt the warmth of her child's face, and knew something very strange had happened that night. She did not know what she had witnessed but she did know that her husband lay in bed as if he were stunned; and everyone in that bedroom was intensely affected by something.

Two days later the husband visited me in my office. He told me that this "wake up warning" had convinced him that something needed to change in his life. As he described the empty feeling in his heart and the overwhelming desire he had for peace and security, I knew that I simply had to introduce him to the Christ that I worship and adore. Soon we were kneeling together in prayer and tears of joy were flowing down his cheeks as pardon and peace came into his life through a relationship with Christ.

It is extremely unusual for someone to get this kind of "wake up call" from God (I personally believe it resulted from the fact that several people were intensely praying for this young man). Most of the time when God calls it is in the form of a whisper instead of a shout. But, whatever method God uses to get your attention, I hope you will realize He is calling you to a loving relationship. A relationship that can change your nightmares into a wonderful life.

January 27, 1999

INTEGRITY

There has been a lot of talk in recent days about Integrity. Some people are apparently real foggy about what Integrity means. The Dictionary defines Integrity as "a steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code" or "maintaining a high standard of conduct in daily living".

While most of us can not readily give a dictionary definition of Integrity; we sure do recognize it when we see it. We know that a person has Integrity when they are honest, can be trusted, and will do right in all circumstances.

The Bible mentions many men who failed to live lives of integrity; and then shows the horrible consequences of their failures. But it also tells of several who did the right thing, all of the time, even in the midst of temptation and accusation.

Joseph lived a life of moral purity and exemplified Integrity even under extreme temptation. Daniel "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself". This stand enabled him to live a life of such high integrity in the midst of powerful political corruption until secret searches could find nothing wrong with his character.

Someone has wisely stated that we reach our greatest height by staying on the level. Every day you make choices about right and wrong. Integrity bases these choices on the standards given by God. And, in the end, those are the only standards that will matter.

February 2, 1999 STANDARDS

A man and his girlfriend decided to have a picnic. They stopped at a local fast food chicken location and purchased a box of chicken and fixings to carry with them. When they arrived at the park and opened their box of chicken they found a box full of money instead of chicken! The manager of the store had put his daily deposits in the box to take to the bank and one of the clerks had given it to this man by mistake.

The man told his girlfriend that he had to take the money back and so they drove back to the chicken store. When the manager saw the money and realized that this man had acted with such honesty he was overwhelmed. He told the man that he had never seen anything like this in his life and he wanted everyone to see this shining example of Integrity so he was going to call the local TV station and ask them to send out a news crew.

The man who had returned the money quickly exclaimed, "Please don't do that. You see, that is my girlfriend with me and my wife might see the broadcast!"

Isn't it amazing how some men will be extremely honest about some things while seeing nothing wrong with fooling around in other areas? It all depends on the man's "standards" of morality.

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

Maybe the reason the Church is losing the battle over morals in society today is because we fail to preach, and live, Biblical standards. Someone must raise a flag of righteousness to which we all can rally. Someone must exemplify Integrity so boldly until everyone will want to use their conduct as a standard in the community. And someone must declare that if society is not going to slip into the bottomless abyss of moral anarchy then certain standards of conduct and civility must be observed.

Someone must; maybe, just maybe, that someone is you.

February 3, 1999 HATRED HARM

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

Hatred is a hard master. It affects the way you live ("Walketh in darkness") and the motivation of your life ("Knoweth not whither he goeth"). And by doing so, it effects your health, your attitude, and your joy.

But hatred does something even worst- it brings you to blindness ("because that darkness hath blinded his eyes").

In a cave in the Smoky Mountains are some blind trout. When people began using the cave they thought it would be good to stock it with trout. To their great horror, they found that trout who live in the darkness of a cave all the time actually lose their sight.

In this cave there are also some bats. Again they have lived in the dark so long until they have lost the ability to see.

When a person allows hatred to live in his heart he is in danger of becoming like these trout and bats. Hugging that hatred to your heart may seem a great comfort at first but how horrible it becomes as you increasingly find yourself walking in darkness. And how utterly horrible it will be to one day find that you have allowed hatred to blind your eyes for so long until you no longer CAN see.

February 9, 1999

PRACTICAL PIETY

While eating lunch with a minister friend recently another minister came up and began talking to my friend. In the course of their conversation this minister asked my friend if he remembered a time they had prayed together in the parking lot of a local hospital. My friend said he remembered it well.

Then this minister looked over and said, "I'll never forget it either. Many things were going on in my life at that time. I'll never forget that this man not only took the time to listen to my problems but he laid his hand on my shoulder and lifted those burdens to God in prayer".

While visiting with a businessman last week several sets of circumstances allowed me to discover a wonderful secret. This man's secretary has been through a great many physical problems in her family and you would have thought that her main concern would have been for herself and her situation. Instead this woman has begun a program of sending cards to others in trouble. When the businessman found out about it he wanted to be part of something so worthwhile. Now anonymous cards arrive at people homes in times of need with a greatly appreciated gift certificate for food or clothing enclosed.

Recently I suffered from the flu that is sweeping our area. Aches, pains, and fever all combined to make life extremely miserable. And to make it even worst, it came on so suddenly until I didn't have time to get any groceries. Several people called and said they were praying for me but one man called and asked my wife specifically if we had any juice and soup. Twenty minutes after talking with my wife he was at our door with a bag full of juice and soup.

It is not hard to make an impact for God. Just make your piety practical by really loving people; instead of just talking about it.

February 10, 1999

WHY DIDN'T YOU CALL?

I worked long and hard on a project once. I spent almost all day struggling and struggling to accomplish the work and still lacked a little work to complete it when a member of the church dropped by.

He looked at what I was doing and then he said, "Preacher, why didn't you call me? I have the tool you need and you could have completed this job in no time".

After I got over my desire to choke him (!) I thought about how this same principle works in my spiritual life. Time after time I struggle with problems that God would gladly solve if I would simply call on Him. Read these verses and think of that this week.

(Jer 29:11-13) *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

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

(Psa 91:14-16) *Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.*

February 16, 1999 THE COMMUTER CHURCH

Our Church is a Commuter Church rather than a Community Church- Instead of being built around a family or local community most of the people who attend our Church drive over 10 miles, past 10 to 15 other Churches, in order to attend our services. When they arrive at our church each week there are four areas that we try to accent.

1) Evangelization- We attempt to clearly present the Gospel of Jesus Christ each week because we believe that (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.” We believe the most important thing that can happen in the life of an individual is for them to repent of their sins, believe that Jesus Christ died for them, and become a new creature through the power of the Holy Spirit.

2) Inspiration- People need Hope, Encouragement, and Motivation. Our music, our methods of worship, and our Ministry are all geared toward causing people to leave each week with hope in their heart, joy on their lips, and the ability to face, and overcome, life’s problems.

3) Information- Since most of our people seldom see each other except during Church services, we attempt to provide abundant and clear information about what is going on in the Church so everyone will know where we are and what we are attempting to accomplish.

4) Participation- The Church is a body with many members. Each person who attends is shown that they have a vital part in the overall ministry of the Church. Church is not a spectator sport! Everyone is given the opportunity to use their talents for the Lord with the realization that their work has eternal value.

Many people believe this type Church is worth commuting to each week. We hope you will believe the same thing.

February 17, 1999 MILLENNIUM MADNESS

The new millennium madness has begun. All sorts of prophecies and predictions are being made about what will transpire in religious circles with the advent of the year 2000. The truth about these future events is that no one knows all the answers; and most people don’t even know the questions!

Some things, however, are crystal clear and, because of their importance, need to be examined with a clear eye and a calm spirit.

First of all, Jesus Christ did promise that He would return for His followers one day- (John 14:3) *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.* But He also clearly stated that the date of His return was a secret- (Mat 24:36) *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

The job of the Church as we await His coming is to use the talents He has given us wisely, to testify of His Love and forgiveness, and to “occupy” until He comes. And, as Sin and wickedness become increasingly active, we are to live lives of moral purity that will build our Testimony and increase our stability as we await His return- (1 John 2:28) *And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming*

February 23, 1999 A DAY WORTH LIVING

A friend recently sent this to me. I have no idea where it originated but I felt it was worth sharing with you. Have a GREAT day.

I woke up early today, excited over all I get to do before the clock strikes midnight. I have responsibilities to fulfill today. I am important. My job is to choose what kind of day I am going to have.

Today I can complain because the weather is rainy or I can be thankful that the grass is getting watered for free. Today I can feel sad that I don't have more money or I can be glad that my finances encourage me to plan my purchases wisely and guide me away from waste. Today I can grumble about my health or I can rejoice that I am alive. Today I can lament over all that my parents didn't give me when I was growing up or I can feel grateful that they allowed me to be born.

Today I can cry because roses have thorns or I can celebrate that thorns have roses. Today I can mourn my lack of friends or I can excitedly embark upon a quest to discover new relationships. Today I can whine because I have to go to work or I can shout for joy because I have a job to do. Today I can complain because I have to go to school or eagerly open my mind and fill it with rich new tidbits of knowledge. Today I can murmur dejectedly because I have to do housework or I can feel honored because the Lord has provided shelter for my mind, body and soul.

Today stretches ahead of me, waiting to be shaped. And here I am, the sculptor who gets to do the shaping. What today will be like is up to me. I get to choose what kind of day I will have. So have a Great Day...Unless you have other plans?

February 24, 1999 HOW TO LIVE RIGHT

In the book of First John, John lists 3 criteria we need to follow in order to live righteous lives:

1> **Define Sin-** (1 John 3:4-5) *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. {5} And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.* Righteous living means we do what is right and avoid what is wrong. That can only happen when we define what sin is- Whatsoever is not of Faith is sin (Rom 14:2). The thought of foolishness is sin (Prov 24:9). To him that knows to do good and does it not it is sin (Jam 4:17). All Unrighteousness is sin (1 Jn 5:17). John states that Sin is Defilement (1 Jn 1:7-9) Defiance (1 Jn 3:8), and Lawlessness (1 Jn 3:4).

2> **Decline Sin-** (1 John 3:6) *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.* "Sinneth Not" here means to abide in sin as a habit of life. We fail but our Failures do not bring joy; they bring frustration, fear, chastisement; and should lead to repentance. That is why we say "No" to sin; again and again.

3> **Desire Righteousness-** (1 John 3:7-8) *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. {8} He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* If you have no desire to live a righteous life then you need to check your "heart". Remember, if you clean out your house and don't replace what you threw out then something worst will come in. Long for the Right or you will be left with the wrong.

March 2, 1999 MARRIAGE MEMOS

Someone recently shared a number of short sayings about marriage with me and I thought they would be helpful to others who are married, or who are contemplating getting married. Hope you have a happy marriage.

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

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

A marriage is like a long trip in a tiny rowboat: if one passenger starts to rock the boat, the other has to steady it; otherwise they will go to the bottom together- David Reuben

An ideal wife is any woman who has an ideal husband

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

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

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

Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards

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

Life is full of troubles; most of them are man-maid

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

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

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

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

MARCH 3, 1999 ACTIVE LOVE

One of the most haunting passages in scripture is First Corinthians 13:3 "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." This "flies in the face" of most people's concept of love. The scriptures here state that even extreme sacrifice doesn't measure up if it is not motivated by genuine love.

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

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

The perfect example of this kind of involvement is shown in God's Love. When man sinned, he incurred the penalty of death. God's didn't just "pay man's bill"; He actually BECAME a man in order to pay mankind's sin debt by His death on the cross. And He didn't just tell man how to live a holy life; He came to earth and demonstrated His love in real life situations.

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

March 9, 1999 MAKING FAITH WORK

I have been preaching for nearly 37 years and I still get confused sometimes about the way people react to God's offer of pardon and forgiveness. Some people accept it readily and immediately begin to serve God with all of their heart and soul. Others hear the good news and make a sincere effort to do everything that is asked of them but for some vague reason it never seems to "click" with them. They struggle and struggle and never seem to find the peace and assurance they crave.

Recently, I came across a simple statement by the apostle Paul that just exploded with meaning in my mind- (Gal 5:6) *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love*. That is the difference! The energizing force in Faith is Love. When I try to educate the mind of these people who struggle with Faith I am dealing with the wrong need. It is not that they can't understand just as well as anyone else; the problem stems from a hindrance or blockage in their love relationship with God.

Sometimes a person is abandoned or abused by their parents, a close friend, or a mate. Many times these people find it difficult to have the right kind of faith because they have been "burned" before by someone they trusted. Their mind will say they trust God but their heart is afraid to make that leap of trust which is the very basis of faith.

Faith comes by education (Rom 10:17) but its motivating force is love. The hindrance to Faith is fear; fear of total commitment, fear of lack of ability, or fear of giving control to someone else. The answer to this fear is to understand fully the love of God for *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:* (I John 4:18).

I hope you will see God's love today. And I pray that will cause your faith to work successfully and completely.

MARCH 10, 1999 PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

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

1) DON'T WORSHIP YOUR WORK. Many people seem to get all their self worth from their work. They don't want to retire or relax because that would mean their job could get along without them- something they just can't conceive of!

If you are able, you should work, and you should enjoy your work, but don't turn your work into the only driving force in your life. Don't serve your work, make work your servant. Work should allow you to be creative and make enough money to support your family but it should be a part of life; not all of life.

2) DON'T FORGET YOUR FAMILY. The scriptures state that (1 Tim 3:5) *if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?* God recognized early, and stated often, the importance of family relationships. Yet, many people treat their family like dirt while treating the people at work (that they hardly know) with respect and dignity.

3) DON'T BE WEARY IN WELL DOING. It is alright to get tired IN the way but you should never get tired OF the way. Don't allow discouragement and disappointment to make you quit. Use every opportunity to do good; You will never regret it.

March 16, 1999 DATE DETAILS

Dates are very important to me this week. Today (March 16th) is My lovely wife's birthday- a date I had better not forget! Then this coming Friday is my Spiritual Birthday. I was born again on March 19, 1962- That is a date I don't ever want to forget! And, of course, I have numerous meetings and activities this week that each have their own date.

I heard about someone recently who heard a speaker use some good material and decided that he wanted to use that same material in a speech he was supposed to give. When he went to look up the date to verify when he had to give his speech he found it was the past Saturday! He didn't get his date details right so a lot of confusion resulted.

Most of us live under the pressure of time and date obligations. If you go to school on Saturday instead of Monday you might feel very lonesome; and your teacher may not appreciate your absence on Monday! If you are supposed to be at work at 8 o'clock in the morning and you show up at 8 o'clock that night then you probably aren't long for that job.

Let me give you several things about dates that you need to remember. First, This is the day that the Lord has made, rejoice in that fact (Ps 118:24). It may be a "good" day or a "bad" day but it is a day from the Lord. Use it for all it's worth, believing God has given it to you for a purpose.

Finally, remember that today is the day of Salvation (2 Cor 6:2). I can't understand why anyone would want to delay accepting Christ as Savior but if someone is that foolish then they need to remember that delay can be deadly. Get that detail straight on this date; and then you, like me, can rejoice each year during this week that your sins are forgiven and Heaven is in your future.

MARCH 17, 1999 NIGHT I GOT SAVED

I'll never forget it. It happened on Monday night, March 19, 1962. All weekend long I had wrestled with my sin and the wickedness of my heart. I longed for peace and forgiveness but I had no real concept of how to go about getting what I needed.

The one week revival at New Prospect FWB Church had stretched into two weeks and my neighbor invited me to attend. No one else in my family wanted to go but I felt strangely drawn to this meeting and so that Monday night found me sitting about half way back on a wall isle seat.

The singing was pretty and the preaching was hot and heavy. Finally the time came for the altar call. The preacher asked for everyone who knew they were lost to come to the altar and get right with God. I didn't know much about Church but I knew I was lost and I sure did want to get right with God. I got up to go to the altar and my best friend, who was sitting beside me, got so excited until he grabbed me by my coat. I thought he was trying to stop me so I left my coat with him!

The altar was almost full but I found a place to kneel and tried to figure out what to do. Finally, the deacon who had brought me leaned over and told me to "Trust Jesus". And that is just what I did. And just that simply, and that quickly, Jesus forgave my sins and brought peace to my heart.

It was wonderful then, and it's wonderful now. The night I got saved, I'll never forget it.

March 23, 1999 WHY ARE YOU HERE??

Years ago in Russia, a czar came upon a lonely sentry standing at attention in a secluded corner of the palace garden. "What are you guarding?" asked the czar. "I don't know. The Captain ordered me to guard this post," the sentry replied.

The czar called the captain. His answer to the czar's question, "Written regulations specify a guard is to be assigned to that area." The czar ordered a search to find out why. The archives finally revealed the reason. Years before, Catherine the Great had planted a rose bush in that corner and ordered a sentry to stand guard over it that night. One hundred years later, the rose had long died, and sentries were still guarding what was now a barren area.

Sometimes patterns in our lives begin for a very good reason but over time they harden into habits that entrap us in situations which force us to use all our time and energy guarding barren ground. Instead of using our time to enjoy life and be productive we find ourselves trapped by old hatred of people who have either died or are no longer part of our life. Or we still stand guard over bitterness about a situation that has long changed. Or we find ourselves trapped in a vicious cycle of doubt and despair as we guard a barren spot entitled "What could have been".

God does not call us to stand guard over emptiness and barrenness. He wants our life to have meaning and victories. So He has sent changes to your orders. Leave your guard duty over that barren spot in your life and accept God's forgiveness and pardon so you can live a life full of the goodness and the grace of God. Once you do, you will find that even the midnight watches can be enjoyable when you guard the bountiful blessings of the Lord instead of a spot of barren ground.

March 24, 1999 6 MORE DROPS

The story is told about a bartender who thought of himself as a "macho man". He had a standing bet of \$1000 to anyone who could squeeze as much as a drop more liquid from a lemon he had squeezed. Many men were tempted by his bet and tried with all their might to squeeze just one more drop from that lemon. But all of them failed.

One day a short man of small stature came into the bar and told the bartender that he wanted to accept his challenge about the lemon. The bartender and all the patrons broke out into laughter and ridicule at this man's request.

He insisted, however, and finally the bartender grabbed a lemon and squeezed with all his might. Then he handed the flattened lemon to this small man who took it in his hand and squeezed out 6 more drops!

The Bartender gawked in amazement and finally asked this small man, "Who are you? I have had weight lifters, strong men, and professionals in here and all of them failed. What do you do?"

With a smile on his face, the small man replied, "I work for the IRS"

Its tax time again. Some of us may feel as flat broke as that flattened lemon and wonder how the IRS can get 6 more drops from us. Just remember this. God's word commands us to pay taxes and God has promised to meet our needs. Trust Him to provide for you; even if you need 6 more drops!

March 30, 1999 COPIER CONFIDENCE

Due to the wonderful generosity of several businesses in our Church we were recently able to purchase a very nice copier to use in our Outreach Ministry. We hope this will make our newsletter and Bible Study materials much easier to read while allowing us more opportunities to use pictures and other materials that we were unable to use in the past.

The new copier is located in the Church office while my office is in the front room of the parsonage. The wonder of electronics allows me to do my writing in my office and simply tell the computer that I want to make copies and the copier at the church will go to work accomplishing that task. But I will tell you this, it is still “scary” to push a button in my office and believe that a machine in another building is copying the material I have sent it. It is mighty hard not to get up each time and walk to the church to make sure everything is copied before I erase it from my computer.

God’s wonderful son, Jesus, came to earth one day. He lived a pure life and died on Calvary’s cross as a payment for our sin debt. They buried Him in a tomb but three days later He was resurrected and now is in Heaven interceding in the behalf of those who believe on Him. The problem is that we live on earth and He is in Heaven so sometimes this lack of sight causes our faith to falter.

Day after day I push the button in my office and copies come out at the church. I can’t see it working until I get to the church but, so far, copies have been made every time I wanted them. And you can be sure of this, God is a lot more trustworthy and dependable than any copier will ever be. So, by Faith, I can hardly wait to get to Heaven and see the Christ I have been trying to “copy” all these years.

March 31, 1999 THE REAL VALUE OF \$30

For the last 15 years I have been using a Mimeograph Machine to do much of the work of our Outreach Ministry. I call it our “million dollar machine”. It was the prototype for a new design that A B Dick Company was going to make before they decided to close their Lake City plant. I was told that over a million dollars’ worth of research and tooling went into this machine to make sure that everything worked as it should when they began running off other machines from this model.

When A B Dick closed, one of the men in our Church bid Thirty Dollars for the machine thinking he was bidding on a part that lay on top of the machine. When his bid was accepted he found that he had purchased not just a part but the entire Mimeograph Machine, 3 brand new drums (valued at \$300 each), and several other items.

This Mimeograph Machine has proved invaluable over the past 15 years in reaching people for Christ (We estimate we have printed well in excess of 7 million copies during that time). And all because a man bid \$30.

I think about that \$30 when I remember that Judas sold our Lord for 30 pieces of Silver. Judas thought Jesus was just a “pile of junk on a pallet” but the world has since learned of the tremendous value of Christ. Be careful that YOU don’t make the same mistake Judas made.

April 6, 1999 SPIRITUAL TEMPERATURE???

If you went to the “Doctor” and he checked your “spiritual temperature” what would he find? Would he find a vibrant thriving Christian who was Working for God, Walking in the Spirit, and Waiting on Christ? Or would he find a sick Saint with dirt in their mind and sin in their heart?

The doctor almost always begins by checking your temperature. That helps him determine if anything is going on in your body that is a problem. So let’s see which temperature describes you-

A) COLD- (Mat 24:12) “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” This person has gotten so caught up in the sin that abounds in society until their heart is hardly beating and their body is about to go into shock as their temperature plunges. The doctor sees immediate danger and recommends the warmth of fellowship with other believers and a quick dose of the word of God that burns as a flaming fire.

B) LUKEWARM- (Rev 3:16) “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” In the natural body, this would be a good situation but the doctor knows that apathy in the spiritual life is an extremely dangerous situation. He knows that this lukewarm temperature causes the person to believe all is well when in fact they give God a queasy stomach.

C) BURNING- (Luke 24:32) “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” Ah, a healthy Christian at last. The heart is hot as they reflect on their walk with Christ and their hearing of the word of God. And, like every well Christian, they can’t wait to go tell someone that they have been with the Master.

How are you doing today? Let me go get my thermometer.

April 7, 1999 RESOURCES ENTRUSTED TO YOU

WHAT TO DO WITH THE RESOURCES ENTRUSTED TO YOU BY GOD. We are all blessed with various amounts of resources. God has entrusted them to us to use in fulfilling His plan for our life. One day He will come back and ask us how we have used these resources (Matt 25:13-29). Here are two guidelines that will help you to use your resources correctly.

1) Use what God has bless you with to help others; don’t let it go to your head or capture your heart- (1 Tim 6:17-19) *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

2) Don’t wait until you have everything to do something. Use what you have and trust God to Bless it- (Mat 10:41-42) *He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*

April 13, 1999 SERMON SUBSTANCE

A young preacher once asked me what it took to make a good sermon. I told him a good sermon was a good man with a good message about the good Lord. The messenger needs to be called of God and filled with the Spirit. The message needs to be delivered with all the abilities and effort that this God called man can deliver. And the heart of the message must be about man's sin, Christ's sacrifice, and God's pardon.

A good sermon, like a good cake, needs several ingredients mixed together in the proper proportion, with just a touch of the personality of the "cook", that is then put into the fire of public scrutiny; where it should "cook" for just the right time- too little time and it is not done, too much time and it became hard and tough instead of chewy and delicious.

The first ingredient that a good sermon needs is Communication. A "link" must be established between those who are listening and the one who is speaking. Also, the speaker must deliver his message in words and methods that will allow the listener to understand what is being said.

The second ingredient you need is Illustration. This greatly helps the Communication as it allows the listener to visualize what is being preached. Like yeast in flour, Illustration causes what is communicated to expand and develop as it should.

The third needed ingredient is Inspiration. The message must speak to the "heart" of the people in the congregation if it is to change their character and destination. This is the "sugar" that transforms a bland message into a life changing sermon.

The final ingredient needed in a good sermon is Application. Why cook a cake if you are not going to eat it? And the best cake is when it is hot out of the oven.

I hope you will hear a good hot sermon this Sunday; and I hope it will be just what you need to fill that empty place in your heart.

April 14, 1999 MINISTER'S MINISTRY

I recently had the wonderful privilege of preaching the ordination message for a young man for whom I had been pastor for many years. In that message I tried to share the most important principles that he needed to follow if he was to be successful as a Pastor. I hope these principles will be a part of your life also.

1) Make Christ the Center of your Message- Men want to hear about many things but they MUST hear about Christ. He is the only source of salvation and it is only in a relationship with Him that men can find the peace and direction they seek. Expose sin, encourage people, but always preach Christ.

2) Make Service the Center of your Ministry- The greatest of all shall be servant of all. Ask not what the church can do for you but rather what you can do for others. God does not call pastors to be lords over the flock; He calls them to be leaders by service and example.

3) Make the Bible the Center of your Methods. Learn the Bible. Live the Bible. Preach the Bible. Fads and opinions will come at you faster than raindrops in a summer storm; and will be about as lasting. Build your convictions and principles on what God states in the Bible. You might not always be popular with men but, remember, men are not your boss; and men will not be your "paymaster" on judgment day.

Have you prayed for your pastor this week?

April 20, 1999 BETTER BELIEFS

I have noticed in the Bible, and in life, that it is better to pick the Best instead of the ordinary. I like my apples firm and crisp so I pick out the best instead of just throwing some into a bag. And who would think of going into a car lot and asking the dealer for just an ordinary plain car that cost as much as the best car he has?

Yes, the best is better. That is a truth you need to follow in your physical life. And it is a truth you need to observe in your relationship with God. Here are a few areas in which you need to chose the best.

It is BETTER TO OBEY GOD THAN TO SIMPLY GIVE TO GOD-(1 Sam 15:22) And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

It is BETTER TO BE POOR AND RIGHT THAN RICH AND WRONG- (Psa 37:16) A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked

It is BETTER TO HAVE A GOOD MARRIAGE THAN A BIG BANK ACCOUNT- (Prov 15:17) Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith

It is BETTER NOT TO MAKE A COMMITMENT THAN TO BREAK YOUR WORD- (Eccl 5:5) Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay

It is BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO GET- (Acts 20:35) remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

And remember this- It is BETTER TO NEVER BE SAVED THAN TO TURN BACK FROM GOD- (2 Pet 2:21) For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

Remember, Chose the BEST today. You will be glad you did.

April 21, 1999 4 QUESTIONS

Sometimes questions can be life changing- Will you marry me? How long have you had that lump on your chest? Would you like to go to work at my business, we have great benefits?

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter nineteen, we find 4 incidents that ask some very important questions. Let's see how YOU respond to them today.

1) **How Satisfied are You?** Zaccheus was a rich man who had all the comforts of a rich man's life but he found his life was missing the key ingredient- peace. He became so dissatisfied with the way things were going until he abandoned his pride, climbed a tree, and finally found the peace he longed for when he met with Christ. How about you? Are you Satisfied, or do you still seek?

2) **How Productive is your Life?** Jesus then told a parable that showed that productivity in life is tied to either fear or faith. Fear causes you to bury your talents and live in misery. Faith allows you to accomplish get deeds. What are you doing with Your life?

3) **Who Honors You?** Then as Jesus entered Jerusalem he was honored by the people who really matter, the people who believed in Him. Do you spend your life seeking honor from the world or does your family think you are the greatest?

4) **How clean is Your Conduct?** Finally, Jesus cleaned out the temple of money grabbing merchants. If He came to your house today would He eat at your table or turn it over?

April 27, 1999 COVETING CASH

Americans gamble more money each year than they spend on groceries. Over \$600 billion is wagered legally in the U.S. annually. More money is spent on gambling in Mississippi than on all retail sales combined. Over 31,000 video poker machines are spread over S.C. (That is one per each hundred people in the state- one per square mile of the state). Everyone seems to want to find an easy way to get rich NOW.

But this is not just a modern problem. The Apostle Paul did not have a problem with lusting after ladies like has happened to so many famous preachers. Paul said that the problem that revealed his sin was the seldom preached on sin of Coveting- (Rom 7:7) “Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”

God realized the power and danger of coveting so He put it in His list of top ten “Thou shalt nots”. Throughout the Bible God tells how he hates coveting and how His people must avoid the quicksand that surrounds an unwise desire for things that others have.

Of, if men could only see the damage done by coveting quick cash and abandoning God’s guidelines for wealth. Nearly 1 in 5 homeless people say gambling contributed to their poverty, and 75% of pathological gamblers admit they have committed at least one felony to support their habit. Nevada ranks first in suicide (One in 25 visitors who die in Las Vegas die by Suicide) and first in divorce.

The best advice I can give you when the cancer of coveting after cash begins to control your life is to remember that coveting displeases God, destroys families, and drains your joy. (Luke 12:15) “And Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

April 28, 1999 HOLY HABITS

The Bible states that Jesus went to Church each week “as his custom was” (Luke 4:16). Jesus had a habit of going to Church.

Webster defines a Habit as “A recurrent, often unconscious pattern of behavior that is acquired through frequent repetition. Or An established disposition of the mind or character. Or a Customary manner or practice.” Or, in plain English, something you do regularly.

Habits don’t start off as habits. They begin by doing something once. Then twice. Then it becomes a pattern. Finally, that pattern becomes a habit.

Sometimes these habits you pick up are not good. They control you and enslave you and cause you to feel bad, as well as do bad.

Some habits, however, are a needful part of your life. A daily devotional time with the Lord that includes prayer and Bible Study is one of the most beneficial habits you can begin. And regular church attendance is a Habit that is so important until even Jesus allowed it into His life.

Some other habits that will help you are- Make it a habit to look for the good in people instead of trying to find fault. Habitually, look for ways that you can be of service to others instead of seeking for someone to serve you. And make it a habit to put your mind into gear before you put your mouth into action.

May 4, 1999 REGARDING TIME

The new clock in the Post Office is running backwards! I could really make some comments about that but I like the people at the Post Office so I will just let it pass!

The reason the clock is running backwards is because it is counting down to the year 2000AD and the beginning of the new Millennium. Many people say the new Millennium will begin at midnight on December 31st of this year but it is a known fact that the person who began our present dating system started with the number One instead of Zero. This means the new Millennium will not begin until 2001AD. I don't know that this will make any difference in anything but it is useful to know.

When I commented on this new clock in the Post Office recently it was interesting to note the different reactions from the two clerks. One talked about how it made him very aware of how fast time was passing. The other said he didn't pay it any attention. That pretty well describes time for most people—some really regard the passage of time and others are content just to exist.

The Bible has a lot to say about time. We are told to “redeem the time” (The phrase means to buy up the opportunities that come your way). We are told that the cycle of time means that everything has a “season”. And we are told that there will come a time with time will “be no more” (Clocks and calendars will cease to have meaning).

But of all the things we know about time the most important is to know that there is an “acceptable time” to ask God for forgiveness and mercy (today). Just like this clock in the Post Office, God's clock is counting down to an important date, the time when God's Grace will turn to wrath. And while we know how long the Millennium clock has to run, we don't know when God's clock will strike “midnight”. Take time to think about that today.

May 5, 1999 MOTHER'S MATTER

I went to a revival service last night and people asked me many questions. The one I remember the most was that someone asked about my mother.

I visited in the hospital yesterday where a lady from our Church was sitting with her critically ill mother. I asked her how long she was going to stay. Her reply, “I am staying with my mother until we both go home or one of us goes to Heaven”.

When I arrived home from revival last night a lady called to tell me about a wonderful answer to prayer about her mother. Her mother has a prolonged illness and the last few years have been tremendously stressful both emotionally and financially. Finding good affordable help to stay with her mother has been challenging.

She now has a good lady sitting with her mother but this lady was called to jury duty. Now what was she going to do? And to top it off, she had some work that needed to be done on her teeth; another expense. While she was at the dentist office someone asked her about her mother and she shared her need. The receptionist said she just happened to know a very good and trustworthy lady who happened to be between jobs right now and would be glad to sit with her mother!

Mother's matter. With the help of God, they give us life and then spend their time and energy trying to sustain that life. Remember that this week as you prepare to honor your mother.

May 11, 1999 FIRE QUENCHERS

(Jer 20:9) *Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay (remain silent).*

Sometimes Christians get discouraged and want to quit. They face problems and persecutions that almost overwhelm them and they wonder how they can keep going forward. But, like Jeremiah, they find that the Fire of God burns in their soul and they just feel compelled to keep on in their work for the Lord.

Others, however, quit. They stop preaching the Gospel. They no longer teach their Sunday School Class. They no longer come to choir practice and they let someone else play the piano. They turn from faithful servants into pew warmers or missing members.

What happened to these people? Why is there no motivating flame burning deep in their soul? What quenched the fire that heated the steam that ran the engine that drove them to keep on keeping on for the Lord?

Maybe it was the allurements of sin. Maybe a sin of some kind came into their life and grieved the Spirit of God to the place that God's fire within could no longer burn. I do know this, when you deprive a fire of air (The word for Spirit is "air") then it begins to slowly smother.

Or it might have been that you removed the fuel from the fire. Instead of yielding yourself as a living sacrifice to God you decided to live your life in the way you wanted. This self-guided life found no time for fellowship with God, or the people of God, and slowly the flame starved for lack of fuel.

Is your heart cold and empty today? Or does the heat from the fire of God motivate you to remain faithful to the task assigned to you by God? Your answer may determine whether God says, "Well done, good and faithful servant." or "Depart from me, you who work iniquity!"

May 12, 1999 THE FIRE OF GOD

The "Theme Song" of our Church in recent months has been for God to "Set my Soul Afire". We are longing for God to do a special and unique work among His people that will stir us to greater efforts and effectiveness.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we want God to give us a "holy heartburn" as we commune with Him- *"Did not our heart burn within us, while Jesus talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?"* (Luke 24:32).

Like Moses in the desert, we want to stand barefooted before God as we see the bush that will not stop burning. And, like Moses, we want this fire of God to call us away from the desert of despair as He commissions us to go and set His people free.

Like Elijah we pray for God's fire to fall on the sacrifice we offer to Him so the people all around us will acknowledge that "The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God" (1 Kings 18:39).

The cry of every heart in the Church should be for God to set our souls on fire as He fills us with His power and purity. Oh, the fellowship we will share with God, and with each other, when this divine flame burns the chaff from our life and makes us holy vessels of honor unto our God.

May our goal as Christians be that *we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.* (Heb 12:28-29)

May 18, 1999 ABOVE MEASURE

(Luke 6:38) *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

I learned early in my Christian life that God wanted me to render my service to Him, and to others, with a cheerful heart and a willing attitude- (2 Cor 9:7) *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

Let me assure you, having been on the receiving end of charity many times, it is much better to receive something with a cheerful attitude than to have someone grudgingly give me what I need. The attitude of the giver makes all the difference in the world.

Recently, my doctor recommended very strongly that I take a few day off. That sounded great except for the fact that Doctor bills, hospital bills, car insurance, and taxes had all decided to come to roost at my home during the same month. My wife and I wanted the time off but we were financially challenged!

Let me show you how the Lord worked it out. One of the members of my church came to me one day and said he had a place at the Beach he could not use right now and he wanted my wife and I to use it for a week. And then he gave the “good measure, shaken together, and pressed down”, he also gave us an envelope that contained enough money for my wife and I to go to supper and enjoy our stay. What can a fellow say but, “Glory!”

Our Scripture verse says that it will be given to you according to the way you gave to others. Remember that when your chance comes along to help someone this week.

May 19, 1999 EXTRA MILES

(Mat 5:41) *And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*

One of the most difficult parts of Christianity is practicing it!! It preaches wonderful but it is often hard to actually put into practice in daily life. And one of the most difficult principles to put into practice is the one at the beginning of this article. It is just hard sometimes to go the “extra mile”.

But what a blessing it can be when you put the “extra mile” principle into practice. It changes a burdensome bother into a bountiful blessing. It changes a dreadful duty into a delightful demonstration of Christ living in your heart. And it changes a tiresome task into a tremendous triumph of mercy and love.

Let me give you a quick illustration. Someone called me on a Sunday afternoon recently needing some help. It had been a very busy Sunday and I had just returned from a Funeral when this person called.

The copier at their Church was broken and they needed a large number of bulletins printed for a conference they were hosting. I had a choice. I could gripe and complain and hate helping these people, or I could go the “extra mile”. I wanted to be a blessing as well as share a blessing so I offered to copy their bulletins on colored paper and even fold the bulletins for them. Their joy made the “extra mile” worth the extra effort. Try it today.

May 25, 1999 FLEA FOLLY

Unbeknown to my wife and I, a cat who roams the woods behind the parsonage decided to take up residence in our heating system during the winter. We found out about this cat when we were suddenly invaded by fleas and we began a prolonged battle to rid our house of these pesky critters.

Recently I have had numerous people come to me seeking counsel about their marriage. Solving the flea problem and solving marital problems have a lot in common.

When we found out we had fleas my wife and I could have screamed in disgust and decided to burn our house down in order to solve the problem. But that seemed a rather drastic step; besides, we didn't think the church would approve of us burning their parsonage!

Do you get the point? "Burning" your marriage will kill the flea problem you have but it will also destroy your home. And the marriage vows you gave were not just made to each other, they were vows to God. Be careful how you tear apart what God has joined together.

Here is how we worked on our flea problem. We located the hole the cat was using to get under our house and we boarded it up. Remember that about marriage problems. Then we began applying poisons specifically designed to kill fleas. We didn't try to kill everyone, or everything, in the house; we just wanted to deal with the flea problem (Get it?).

Want to know something? A flea free house is much better to live in than one in which my wife is constantly complaining about being bitten. And dealing with the "flea" problem in your marriage using biblical principles and practices is much better than burning your home down.

May 26, 1999 GOD'S NICKEL

See if you can relate to this story that someone recently emailed to me.

Back in the days when you could still buy an ice cream cone for a nickel, there was a little boy who lived in a small town with his grandmother. Every Sunday the grandmother took the boy to church and afterwards they would go downtown for a special treat--an ice cream cone.

One Sunday grandmother was not feeling well, and she told the boy that he would have to go to church by himself. Before he left she gave him two nickels--one for the offering plate and one for an ice cream after church.

Now it happened that the boy needed to cross an old wooden bridge in order to get to church. As he was crossing the old bridge, he began jumping up and down, as boys will do, making the bridge shake and sway. His sharp ears picked up a small thunk, and he looked down just in time to see one of the nickels his grandmother had given him roll into a small crack on the bridge.

The little boy fell down on all fours and put his eye to the crack. He watched helplessly as the nickel fell into the river below. Standing up and dusting off his knees, he said to no one in particular, "Oh well. There goes God's nickel."

Does God own your "First fruit" nickel? Or your left overs?

June 1, 1999 FOUNDATION PRINCIPLES

(Luke 6:47-48) Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: {48} He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

Rock solid foundations are very important. Society has abandoned many of the foundations principles that provided stability and security to our nation. Now we sit and grimly watch the tragic results on the nightly news. Here are four foundation principles for a good life; apply them and notice the difference in your life.

1) Your relationship to God Through Christ is the most important aspect of life. Make all your plans accordingly. This principle applies now, and for eternity. Don't let anyone, or anything, separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

2) Character is more important than Cash- What you are is more important than what you have. Set your goals accordingly. (Character is what you are when no one see what you are.)

3) To Lose FAITH is to Lose Life. Guard your heart accordingly. Loss of Faith kills your relationship to God, to others, and to loved ones. Remember, the most miserable man in the world is not the man who has no possessions or who has lots of troubles. The most miserable man in the world is one who loses faith in the transforming, Resurrecting power of God (1 Cor 15:19) *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

4) Abundant Life is becoming what God has put into your Heart; not what others have put into your mind. Live your life accordingly. The only way to real peace and joy in life is finding where God wants you to be and then joining God at work there.

Storms will come. Homes build on sand fall. Those built on the Rock will stand. What are you building on?

June 8, 1999 WHOSE RIGHTS ARE RIGHT?

In the aftermath of the recent tragic deaths at our public schools, one comment seemed to stand out like an island in the river of rhetoric that came pouring out of radio and TV. It expressed a sentiment that many people have wondered about for quite awhile.

“If these kids were walking around that school in black trench coats, saying Heil Hitler, why didn't somebody pay attention? I guarantee you if little Cassie Bernall, the little girl who was asked 'do you believe in God' and she said yes and then was blown away, if she and her friends had been walking through that school carrying Bibles and saying 'Hail the Prince of Peace, King of Kings,' they would have been hauled into the principal's office.” Bill Bennett on NBC's Meet the Press.

Statements like this have been a growing concern of many for years. Why has the law suddenly decided it is wrong to be right and right to be wrong? Why are the rights of those who spew hatred, destruction, and mayhem more important than the rights of those who seek to share love, kindness, and proper order?

Something has happened in the past half century that has turned moral standards and common sense values upside down. At first many seemed to think it was “cool” to flaunt the wrong and rebuke the right. Now, this crazy world we live in, is learning the painful lesson that God's “Woe” on turning right into wrong is more than just a saying- (Isa 5:20) Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Let me assure you that proclaiming darkness is light will not enable you to see. It will only cause you to stumble over furniture and bump into other people who are attempting to find their way in the dark. God is still light; and God is still right, regardless of what Society says.

June 9, 1999 INTERESTING FACTS

There are a lot of interesting “facts” for a person to learn. Here are a few that someone recently shared with me:

**In Shakespeare's time, mattresses were secured on bed frames by ropes. When you pulled on the ropes the mattress tightened, making the bed firmer to sleep on. That's where the phrase, “goodnight, sleep tight” came from.

**The sentence “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” uses every letter in the alphabet. (Developed by Western Union to test telex communications)

**When opossums are playing 'possum, they are not “playing”. They actually pass out from sheer terror.

**The term “the whole 9 yards” came from W.W.II fighter pilots in the Pacific. When arming their airplanes on the ground, the .50 caliber machine gun ammo belts measured exactly 27 feet, before being loaded into the fuselage. If the pilots fired all their ammo at a target, it got “the whole 9 yards.”

**The phrase “rule of thumb” is derived from an old English law which stated that you couldn't beat your wife with anything wider than your thumb.

Life is full of interesting things to know. But here is the most important information you will ever learn- (Rom 6:23) *The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

June 15, 1999 PUBLIC SHOWER

It had been a hot and sultry afternoon. The man came home from work and immediately began cutting his grass. As he cut he could see the storm clouds growing darker and more ominous on the horizon. Finally, the last part of the yard was cut and the mower was parked just as the first huge drops of rain began to splatter on his driveway.

Thankful to be through before the rain, the man went inside to shower and clean up. The cooling water felt so refreshing as it washed away the grim and sweat. Suddenly, he heard a sound that roared above the sound of the shower and this man watched in amazement as his home began to come apart right before his eyes.

Later, as people began to emerge from their destroyed or damaged homes someone saw him standing in a nearby field. Several people rushed to his aid but it soon became evident that he was okay except for the fact that he was dazed, disoriented, and, except for some soap suds, completely nude! The tornado had literally jerked him out of his shower as it destroyed his home and then deposited him in a nearby field before continuing its reign of destruction.

How embarrassing to be suddenly cast nude into a field surrounded by all your neighbors. I think this must be the way some people will feel on the day they face God. The scriptures declare that there is nothing hid that will not be revealed (Matt 10:26). Jesus said we would give account for every idle word we speak (Matt 12:36). And the Apostle Paul warned that there would come a day when the secrets of men would be judged by Christ (Rom 2:16).

My advice to you. Live so an unexpected exposure will reveal only a life being cleansed by the Power of the Blood of Christ. After all, you never know when YOU might take a public shower!

June 16, 1999 MODESTY DIET

Men have a problem with nudity. Sometimes it is a problem for women also but most often it is a male dilemma. God created men so that they are aroused by visual stimulation (Women are normally aroused by sound instead of sight. That is why they want men to talk to them and that is why a man on a date instinctively knows that whispering “sweet nothings” in the ear of his girlfriend is the best approach.).

When men see girls with plunging necklines and raised hem lines immediately they begin to draw certain conclusions. These conclusions are not always correct but it is hard for the man not to jump to them.

Many women will exclaim that they can't see why what they wear should be a problem. They then declare that it is just the dirty minds of some that try to limit their freedom of clothing choices.

The best way to answer that criticism is to use the following illustration. Suppose you went on a diet today and determined to lose 20 pounds. That shouldn't be hard; all it takes is will power!

Now suppose your boyfriend knew you were on this diet but insisted on bringing you a chocolate milkshake or a box of candy every day. And when you protested that you were on a diet he would say that he couldn't understand why his putting these temptations before you was a problem. Get the point?

June 22, 1999 PANE PROTECTION

Whenever possible, I like to go to a local fast food restaurant on Saturday morning. I can get sausage gravy and biscuit and a cup of coffee for about a dollar and a half; and, as early as I go, I get enough privacy to allow me to go over my Sunday School lesson and sermon notes one more time before I put them into their final form.

One cold Saturday Morning I was deep in thought about my sermon when suddenly the world right beside me seemed to explode. One of the employees of this restaurant was washing the windows and he began his work by spraying water on the large pane right beside where I was sitting. I'm just glad my coffee cup was almost empty!

After my heart finally started beating again, I looked at the water splashing against the pane only inches from where I sat and thought about how thankful I was that the cold water he was spraying was not getting to me. Just then it seemed the Lord spoke to me and told me He was my "pane protection" against many troubles in life.

I thought about the hedge of protection that God said is around His children. I thought about how Jesus said time after time that no one could harm Him until the right time. And I thought about the innumerable times that God has diverted troubles or trials from me when it seemed they would wash right over me.

Satan's roar is sometimes very frightening. Troubles may seem so close until you think you could reach out and touch them. But if you are under God's "pane protection" then you can smile at the cold water Satan sends your way as you relax with God in the warmth of His love.

June 23, 1999 DO YOU THINK?

Do you think your car is a "gas guzzler"? The cruise liner, Queen Elizabeth II, moves only six inches for each gallon of diesel that it burns! Remember to count your Blessings instead of complain about your troubles. There is always someone who needs your prayers more than they need to hear your problems.

Do you think only the big difficulties are a hindrance? The world's termites outweigh the world's humans 10 to 1. Most people don't stumble over mountains, they slip on stones. Remember, it is the "little foxes that spoil the vines" (Sol 2:15) so don't ignore the little things that are eating away at the foundation of your life.

Do you think your part in the work of God does not matter? McDonald Corporation paid someone to find out there are an average of 178 sesame seeds on a McDonald's Big Mac bun! I have no idea why that is important but I do know that McDonald sells more hamburgers than anyone. Remember that the next time you are asked to be secretary of a primary Sunday School class.

Do you think it will take a bomb or a major tragedy before you die? On average, 100 people choke to death on ball-point pens every year! Remember, it is appointed unto man once to die, and your date with death may be a lot closer than you think- Only one person in two billion will live to be 116 or older. Think about that!

June 29, 1999 **MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER**

Everywhere I look right now it seems as if people are depressed and despondent. Not only are they singing “nobody loves me, everybody hates me, I think I will eat worms” but they act as if their life has lost much of its meaning. If that is the way you feel today, let me suggest five actions that will give your life meaning and motivation.

First, **DO THE RIGHT THING**. Nothing brings joy and meaning to life like positive actions. You will never go wrong when you do right, so find something God wants you to do and do it.

Second, **BE IN THE RIGHT PLACE**. God has a place and a position that only **YOU** can fill. Work turns from drudgery to delight when you walk the path God has picked especially for you.

Third, **SUBMIT TO SERVE- BE AVAILABLE**. Remember those times you were really happy. It was not when you thought only of yourself and your needs. Joy came when you helped someone else.

Fourth, **ACCOMPLISH THE EXTRAORDINARY**. Don’t be satisfied just filling a space. Hook up with God’s power, get in God’s plan, and do something that only God could do. Feed 5000 with your lunch, kill a giant with a stone, get out of the boat and walk on the waves... You and God can do it.

Finally, **MULTIPLY YOUR MINISTRY**. Teach someone else your wisdom. Don’t die with the greatest biscuit recipe in the world locked in your mind. Don’t allow kids to believe that killing people in video games is as exciting as turning a piece of wood into something beautiful and useful.

Stop looking at the mud at your feet. Start glorying in the beautiful rainbow that stretches over the horizon. God is not dead, and He still loves you. Now, go out and live like a child of God!

June 30, 1999 **HELPFUL HABITS**

The Bible states that Jesus went to Church each week “as his custom was” (Luke 4:16). Jesus had a habit of going to Church.

Webster defines a Habit as “A recurrent, often unconscious pattern of behavior that is acquired through frequent repetition; An established disposition of the mind or character, or a customary manner or practice.” In plain English, a Habit is something you do so regularly until it becomes part of your life.

Habits don’t start off as habits. They begin by doing something once. Then twice. Then it becomes a pattern. Finally, that pattern become a habit.

Sometimes the habits you pick up are not good. They control or enslave you and cause you to do bad things, which causes you to feel bad; especially when the habit is repeated.

Some habits, however, are a needful part of your life. A daily devotional time with the Lord that includes prayer and Bible Study is one of the most beneficial habits you can begin. And regular church attendance is a Habit that is so important until even Jesus allowed it into His life.

Here are a few other helpful habits that you may want to acquire- Make it a habit to look for the good in people instead of trying to find fault. Make it a Habit to look for ways that you can be of service to others. And make it a habit to check every decision you make with God. That will keep you on the right road.

July 6, 1999 I WILL IF YOU WILL

One of the basic laws of science is that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. To some degree, that natural law applies in our spiritual relationship with God. Over and over God tells us that He will do certain things if we will do certain things. In other words, God responds to our actions with an appropriate reaction. Here are a few examples.

Doing Good for others prompts God to do good for you- (Eph 6:8) “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord.”

In the same vain, The way you share with others is an indication of the way God will share with you- (Luke 6:38) “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” and (2 Cor 9:6) “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”

The respect you give God is the basis of His respect for you- (1 Sam 2:30) “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

And one final thought. God said that if you would really look for Him that He would reveal Himself to you- (Deu 4:29) “if thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”

God will if you will. Will You?

July 7, 1999 SECRET SERVICE SAINTS

One Easter morning a pastor saw a man who had not attended church since Christmas. Wanting to convict this man about his lack of faithfulness the pastor said to him, “It seems to me that people in the army of the Lord should report for duty more often than at Christmas and Easter”.

The man looked back at the pastor and said, “I am part of the army of the Lord, Pastor. It is just that I belong to the secret service!”

A lot of strange birds claim the “tree” of Christianity as their roosting place. Like the parable of the tares and the wheat, it will take divine judgment at the end of time to distinguish which will bear fruit and which will face the fire. But here are 3 qualifications that should apply to every person who claims to be a Christian.

First, a Christian is someone who has FACED HIS SINS. God only saves sinners. You will never be saved until you acknowledge that you are lost.

Second, a Christian is someone who has been FORGIVEN of his sin debt by FAITH IN CHRIST’S PAYMENT for his sins.

Finally, a Christian is a person who FOLLOWS the PRACTICES and PRINCIPLES of Christ. A faith that does not produce change in a person is simply an acknowledgment about Christ instead of an acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior.

July 13, 1999

LAST WEEK LESSONS

Jesus Christ was the son of God. He always did those things that pleased the Father. Yet the last week of His life on earth contained tragedy and betrayal. Christ found that:

1) Fame is Fleeting- On Sunday the crowds proclaimed Him as King. By Friday they were calling for Him to be crucified. Being right does not always mean you will be popular.

2) Friends are fickle- Judas, who was willing to die with Jesus when He came back to raise Lazarus; and who was so trusted by everyone in the group until he was the group treasurer, ended up betraying Christ for the price of a slave. Peter, who was the most vocal of the disciples, and who had faith to walk on water at the command of Christ; was intimidated by a slave girl to the point that he denied that he even knew Christ. Sometimes people you trust will fail you.

3) Justice is not always just- Pilate declared Jesus innocent 3 different times. Herod could find no fault in Him. But a strong “religious” group (the Pharisees) prevailed and Jesus received the death sentence. Sometimes the right are not treated right.

No one wants the troubles that come our way. Even Jesus prayed for relief, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” (Matt 26:39). Yet, the rejections and rigors of the cross had to come before the glory of the empty tomb could be accomplished.

Maybe thunderstorms have come into your life in spite of the fact that you have been serving the Lord and doing the right things. Don’t let Satan discourage you. God is still on the throne even when the crowd forsakes you, your friends betray you, and justice is denied you. Stay in God’s will, the results will be “out of this world”.

July 14, 1999

WISDOM OR WEAPONS

(Eccl 9:18) *Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.*

The writer of Ecclesiastes had learned an amazing truth. It is better to be smart than to simply depend on owning a weapon; but sometimes a dumb man with a gun can do tremendous harm until you become smart enough to neutralize him. Your wisdom is better than his weapon but his weapon can destroy more in a minute than your wisdom can build in a year.

Wisdom is a long term investment. Weapons are a “no brainer” that immediately puts unreasonable power in an uneducated hand to do inestimable damage. Wisdom involves sacrifice and involvement. Weapons are a short term solution that can have permanent consequences.

It takes work to work things out. Sometimes it seems so easy to just use brute force so people will be forced to see things your way. Sadly, you learn much too late that force can force someone to do something but it does not persuade them to accept your point of view.

Life is full of situations at work, at home, and in school. You can use wisdom to handle them and turn bad circumstances into good results. Or you can pick up a weapon and “destroy much good”. Just remember that the wrong choice has “grave” consequences.

July 20, 1999 DEADLY PRAYER

It seemed innocent enough. Someone at work came by her office and, in the process of talking about several things, asked her to pray for his part time business to pick up. He said things were really going slow right now and he was really beginning to hurt financially.

Not wanting to fail in her obligation, she had a special prayer for his business to pick up as soon as he left the office. The next day she noticed he was absent so she asked about him. That was when someone told her he worked at a funeral home on the side and he was out because someone had died the night before! Now she knew that, in reality, when she was praying for this man's work to pick up it was done so at the grief of someone else!

As a young Christian I had a tremendous desire to see my friends and family come to know Christ as Savior and Lord (Still do, by the way). I'll never forget one time in particular when I prayed for the Lord to save a friend of mine "no matter what it takes". Within a week this person was in an accident that seriously threatened their life and confined them to the hospital for over 50 days. I greatly rejoiced in the fact that they became a Christian while in the hospital but I will have to admit I did not anticipate the pain and anguish it would take to bring them to that decision.

The thing to remember about praying is that God answers prayers! So when you pray you need to be prepared for the consequences of your prayers as well as joy of receiving the results you wanted. God will never do wrong but He does sometimes use extraordinary means to accomplish what we have requested. That means prayer should never be taken lightly. It is communication with the God of the universe. Never forget the power that comes with prayer.

July 21, 1999 THE GIFT OF GOD

Everyone likes a present. So let's look at some of the Gifts that God has given you and see if you are really enjoying them.

1) **The Ability to Enjoy Life**- (Eccl 5:19) *Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.*

2) The **Purpose to life** that comes from knowing you are part of God's plans- (1 Cor 7:7) *For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.*

(Realize also that God has given special gifts to certain people in order for them to fulfill God's Program- (2 Tim 1:6) *Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands).*

3) **Pardon** from the penalty and punishment of Sin as a result of the sacrifice of Christ- (Rom 6:23) *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

This gift is so wonderful because it is based on God's grace instead of our works- (Eph 2:8) *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

What wonderful gifts God has given us- Abundant Life, a Purpose to live for, and Promise of eternal life with Him. No wonder the people of God think God's gifts are great.

July 27, 1999 HOW TO DEFEAT SATAN

HOW TO DEFEAT SATAN WHEN YOU ARE AT YOUR LOWEST AND HE IS AT HIS HEIGHT

There is a story in the Bible that most of us will recognize instantly that tells how we can defeat Satan when he comes at us during our weak times. The Midianites had invaded Israel and were like a swarm of grasshoppers compared to the few men of Israel. Yet God did a wonderful work and “Gideon’s group” led in defeating this enemy and driving them from the land. They followed four principles to gain the victory. Four principles that will help YOU defeat Satan when he is at his worst and you are at your weakest.

First, Get a Word from God. God told Gideon to sneak up on the Midianite camp at night. When he did so, he heard about a dream one of the soldiers had that showed God was going to defeat the enemy. When Christ was tempted He always used the word of God as His weapon. Get a word from God and hold on to it.

Second, Gideon organized his resources. He only had 300 men but he divided them into 3 groups so he could surround the enemy. Look at what God has entrusted you with and then find ways to use it to the best advantage. Don’t allow Satan to make you major on how small you are, trust in how big God is.

Third, Focus on Ministry instead of Misery. Gideon’s army won the victory simply by letting their light shine (Daily living) and blowing their trumpets (testimony). Do what you are supposed to do and God will protect and keep you. Satan attacks you when you stop doing your job.

Finally, Remain steadfast until Satan begins to run- (Judg 7:21) And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. Satan barks a big bark but he runs in fear from a person willing to stand in faith.

At his weakest, a Christian still has more power available to him than Satan can muster. Rest in that.

July 28, 1999 WEAK ENDING WORDS

Did you ever stop to think that Christ began His ministry by fasting in the desert for 40 days. At the time He was at his lowest ebb physically and emotionally Satan tempted Him in a way unparalleled anywhere else in His ministry. Do you feel that way sometimes? Just when you are so weak until all you want to do is survive; that is the time Satan seems to come in his full fury.

Let me share with you some “Weak ending words” that will help you continue to keep on keeping on even when you feel so weak in body, soul, and spirit.

Take the Long view- (2 Chr 15:7) *Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.* Jesus told Satan that God had a plan and He was more interested in pleasing God than in satisfying His own hungry.

Remember the Source of your Strength- (1 Cor 1:27) *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;* Even Jesus did not rely on His own abilities- He simply stated the powerful word of God.

Rejoice that God is at work in your weakness- (2 Cor 12:10) *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.* I can’t but God can; and the fact that He does proves I am one of His children!

August 3, 1999 LOOKING FOR NOTHING TO DO

Anxiously he moved from place to place in the restaurant. He would walk to one area, look hastily around, and then scurry to another area. Other waiters were busy taking orders and delivering food but he always seemed to arrive just after another waiter began take the order or cleaning the table.

After several minutes of observation it dawned on me that this waiter was busy looking for nothing to do! His goal was to look busy but actually to be doing nothing. He wanted to be part of the staff so he could draw a check but he did not want to be part of the operation of the restaurant.

I know some church members like that. They want to give everyone the impression that they are busy in the Lord's work but actually they are busier looking for nothing to do than they are looking for ways to serve the Lord and the Church. They scurry around crumbs on the floor until someone else begins to sweep them up. Or they always raise their hand a little late in class so someone else will volunteer to read or participate.

I know preachers like that also. Every time you see them they give the impression that they have been studying, or praying, or visiting. The lie about their living, however, is exposed on Sunday Morning when the sermon has no meat that comes from study, when the delivery has no power that comes from prayer, and when the congregation has no growth that comes from visiting.

Jesus told us to pray for God to send **LABORERS** into the field; not people who are looking for nothing to do. Which are You? A looker or a laborer?

August 10, 1999 PITIFUL PEDAL POWER

When I drove up to the gas pumps I noticed a bicycle leaning against the gas island. When I looked around I found the owner of the bike talking to someone who was getting gas. As I was getting my gas the bike rider started to leave and I asked him if he used regular or Hi-test in his bike!

We both laughed but it started me to thinking about the way some people operate in acquiring God's power to help in their life. They "pedal their bikes" to church, go inside to the "gas pump" services, where they are shown how to have access to the mighty power of God; but, instead of filling up, they go back to their "bikes" and struggle through another week of problems powered only by their own pitiful pedal power.

God calls them to leave their self-effort and allow Him to supply the power to make their life peaceful and productive but they insist on pedaling their bike instead of riding in God's car. It takes faith to get in the car with God and believe that He will supply gas every time you need it. In our warped human reasoning we feel more secure trusting in our own pitiful pedal power than we do trusting in the supernaturally supplied power of God. Because of this, we pedal through life defeated, discouraged, and exhausted.

Take my advice. Park your bike outside the Church this week, climb into God's car by faith, and begin to really enjoy the wonders of a God powered abundant life. It sure beats pedaling through life using your own strength.

August 11, 1999 OUR MIGHTY GOD

Sometimes our explanations of scriptures take away from how eloquent they really are. Isaiah told his people to "Behold your God" and then described Him in terms that can only be referred to as awe inspiring. Read these verses, and see why only the Lord God is worthy of our worship and service.

(Isa 40:12-17) Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? {13} Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? {14} With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? {15} Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. {16} And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. {17} All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. (Isa 40:25-26) To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. {26} Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

August 17, 1999 SHIRLEY'S STORY

While we were out visiting various people recently, my assistant pastor and I remembered that one of our widows would be celebrating her birthday the next day. The Spirit of God kept nudging me that it would be nice to carry this widow a flower in remembrance of her special day so we circled by our local florist to pick up something special. That is when God's wonders became evident as we saw the wheels within the wheels of God's plan began to unfold.

As we walked in, Mrs. Shirley greeted us with her usual bright smile. We talked for a few minutes and then Mrs. Shirley began to share her story. Several months before she had been very sick- sinus infection, a spot on her lungs that made breathing difficult, and other ailments. She had visited doctors but was not any better; and it looked as if she was in for a long difficult road.

One morning God spoke to her about really trusting Him so she asked the church to pray over her and anoint her that day. She felt better after the prayer but nothing spectacular had happened. As she sat thinking about her prayer, one of the ladies in the Church came by, said she would continue to pray for her, and laid her hand on her.

That is when it happened. Mrs. Shirley said it felt like sticking your finger in an electric socket as the healing power swept over her. She said she tingled for over 12 hours as her sickness just left her. Now she is rejoicing in God's goodness and telling everyone about His wonder working power.

Mrs. Shirley gave us a flower that day to take to that widow. The widow was excited, Mrs Shirley was excited, we were excited, and God was glorified. Isn't it wonderful to see God at work? God cares about the flowers of the field and the people of His flock. Why don't you look for Him to do something special for YOU today?

August 18, 1999 SMELL TESTIMONY

I was walking from our motel room to the ice machine when suddenly it hit me. A rank, raw, putrid smell that almost made me gag. It was so overwhelming until it made me stop in my tracks.

As I was looking around for the source of the smell I heard a noise at the top of the hill. As I glanced toward the noise I saw the local garbage truck turning onto the highway. That explained the unpleasant aroma that still permeated the air.

I often visit businesses and homes in our community. I wander in, conduct my business or visit with the people in the home, and then "breeze" out. Behind me I leave an aroma of influence.

If my character, my conduct, and my Christian example is what it should be then I leave people with a smile on their face and joy in their heart. If my business dealings have been quarrelsome or my home visit has been negative then I leave a garbage truck aroma behind.

I pray this week that you will be aware of the testimony of your "smell". Your "smell" is not something you notice but those around you will be very conscious of it! Conduct yourself in such a way that your "smell" will be pleasing to God and man- (Phil 4:18) *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.*

August 24, 1999 CHRIST'S CLAIMS

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. I have committed my fortune, my family, and my future to this belief. This belief is not build on local customs or emotional experiences; it is based on what Jesus said about Himself in the word of God as He claimed to be God in the flesh. Four such claims make it clear that Christ is God.

1) Christ claimed to have the Power to Forgive sins; and “Who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7). Jesus would forgive the sins of a person then heal that person as a physical evidence of a spiritual cleansing. If Christ could forgive sins then He was God; if He could not then He was a liar and a hypocrite.

2) Christ taught with the authority of God. He did not simply interpret as a teacher, He proclaimed as the voice of God- (Mat 7:29) “For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” In other words, Jesus taught as if His words were God’s words- (John 6:63) “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”

3) Christ said he was the source of Life and He had the power to bestow life; something only God can do- (John 11:25-26) “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

4) Christ said that He would Judge the world at His return; again, something reserved for God- (John 5:22) “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son”

Christ claimed to be the Son of God. If He is, and He is, then you had better build your hopes of eternity accordingly.

August 25, 1999 HOW TO SEEK GOD

If you are concerned about your sinfulness, your situation, or your future then you need to seek the Lord. He not only has the answer but He IS the answer. Here are three attitudes you should exemplify when you begin to seek God.

A) **Seek God Humbly**- (Mat 11:25) *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.* Man’s wisdom is foolishness before God. Man’s works are as nothing before the awesome power of God. You can’t come demanding that God help you, you must seek God as an unworthy supplicant.

B) **Seek God Diligently**- “Man is as lazy as he dares to be” (Emerson). God desires to be found, but only by those who seek Him- (Jer 29:13) *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.* God throws a “rope” to you- not as a lasso that captures you but as a line that you must grab.

D) **Seek God Obediently**- We do not seek God because we know that seeking God will cause a change in our life. We want the benefits and the blessings without being obedient.

Remember this, The Gospel is not an invitation to do something; it is a declaration of what God has done for us through Christ that invites a response; which is found in seeking God.

August 31, 1999 IS YOUR RELIGION REAL?

Paul prayed for the Philippian Christians that they might “be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;” (Phil 1:10). The word “Sincere” here in the Greek means “without wax”. It shows that Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to have a pure relationship with God; not one that had hidden cracks they had tried to cover over by putting wax on them.

How about YOUR relationship with God? Jesus lived in such a way that God testified of His righteousness, His enemies said, “Surely, this was the son of God”, and the people He lived with exalted Him as the pure, sinless Son of God. Can your religion stand being tested by God and man? Think carefully before you answer because the test of your religion is not:

- Your Enthusiasm- The fact that you put a lot of zeal and energy into your worship does not mean you are acceptable to God.

- Your Experience- The fact that “something special” happened in your life at one time or another does not guarantee that everything is right between you and God.

- Your Enlistment- Joining the Church does not make you a child of God.

- Your Enlightenment- Education about Christianity does not make you a Christian. It might make you a Scholar but it does not make you a Christian.

- Your Ennoblement- The fact that you live a better moral life than your friends or neighbors does not mean you have a proper relationship with God: A life that keeps you out of jail does not guarantee you will get into heaven.

Is your Religion Real? Is it something you live for and can die with? The only way to answer correctly is to base your relationship with God on a personal Faith in Jesus Christ for the pardon and forgiveness of your sins. That will make sure your sins are not covered over with “wax”; but, instead, are covered by the blood.

September 1, 1999 WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING

As I drove up to the intersection I had to stop because the light was just changing from green to yellow. As I stopped I noticed a truck in the lane across the intersection. He saw the light turn yellow but he decided to go through anyway. The light turned red as he entered the intersection but the truck was so big until everyone decided to let him have the right of way.

The problem came with the car behind the truck. The lady driving that car was following so close behind the truck until she could not see the traffic light; so, unbeknown to her, she was going through a light that had been red for a significant amount of time.

Everyone on the cross streets were busy watching the truck so they could go as soon as it got through. They didn't know about the car that was trailing close behind the truck. No one crashed, but it was close, very close.

The lady in the car made two classic mistakes. She was following someone she didn't know, that was doing the wrong thing. And she got so close to the truck until she could not see the light so she did not know how much danger she was in.

Can you see the spiritual principles here? If you are going to follow someone then you better be able to trust their leadership. And never get so close to someone until they block your view of the “light”! Life is dangerous when you violate these principles.

September 7, 1999 FEELING BAD ABOUT BEING BAD

I think every Christian has times when he feels bad about how bad he is. We want to do good but, in spite of our best intentions, we still “goof up”. Well, if it makes you feel any better, even the Apostle Paul had these same feelings. Listen to his lament in Rom 7:15 “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.”

Paul was basically saying, “The Bad that I hate I end up doing but the Good that I like I end up not doing.” He was living the opposite of what he wanted to live! No wonder he cried at the end of this chapter- “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24) (The word “wretched” here means someone exhausted in battle and shows what a struggle Paul was undergoing.)

Now, before you throw up your hands in despair, let me assure you that there is help and hope for you. Immediately after Paul cried out as a “wretched man” and asked who would give him help he was able to exclaim, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 7:25). Paul realized it was not his reacting to the Law in a different way that would free him; deliverance from his “badness” would only happen through a proper relationship with Christ!

This relationship with Christ (and the Holy Spirit) gives us the victory we crave- (Rom 8:2) “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” It is no longer a “wretched man” struggling in his own energy to do better. Now it is God in our life giving us all the help we need- (Phil 2:13) “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

So if you feel bad about your badness; allow it to bring you closer to Christ. That will change your outlook as well as your outcome.

September 8, 1999 WHAT ARE YOU INVESTING?

Have you LOST YOUR JOY in your service for the Lord? Maybe it is because you have stopped investing anything in the Lord’s work. Let me tell you about the “Golden Ball Theory”. A Pastor spends all week working on his “golden ball” sermon. On Sunday morning he takes his shining ball and brings it out for the people to admire. But, instead of admiring the sermon “ball”, many of them just sit there and look bored.

These people have forgotten the basic premise of the “Golden Ball Theory”- only those who help shine the “Golden Ball” gain great satisfaction from its glow. If people don’t have a part in polishing the ball then they will simply observe it or ignore it, instead of JOYING in how the ball shines.

This leads to the following principle- If you do not invest much in a project then your commitment will be lukewarm and your emotional enjoyment about the success of the project will be minimal; defeats will not be devastating and victories will not be invigorating. Good news or bad news will all be boring to you.

You can come each Sunday to simply see the “ball” that is presented; or you can become part of the “shining crew”. Know this, however, simply looking at the “ball” will never satisfy the craving of your heart. And it certainly will never obey the command of God for total commitment.

September 14, 1999 PROVIDENTIAL PATTERNS

A Pattern is something to follow that enables us to do things right. Maybe the reason so many people are failing to live joyfully and to act righteously is because they have followed the wrong patterns for their life- developing your patterns for life from morally depraved musicians, money hungry TV personalities, and misery expounding horoscope readers will not give you a life worth living; nor will it ease your fear of dying!

When God gives us a pattern you can be sure it has been well thought out. Take the pattern of a Person. The Bible states that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14). This means that while each of us is a different and unique person; yet, all of us are build from the same “pattern”.

Let me give you a few illustrations. No matter how a person looks, or how old they are, the distance from the top of their thumb to the top of their first finger is also the length of their nose. Here is another, the length of everyone’s foot is the distance from their wrist to the inside of their elbow (I know you don’t believe that but put your shoe on your arm and be amazed).

Look at all the faces you see each day. Everyone is different, yet everyone is formed based on the same pattern. Everyone’s face is exactly 3 noses high and, since there is exactly one eye distance between your eyes, everyone’s face is 3 eyes wide.

Don’t allow Satan to try to shape you according to his corrupt patterns. You were make by God, for God, and he has a wonderful plan for your life-(Eph 2:10) “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Next week we will look at proper patterns you can follow that will build you into the kind of person that God intended for you to be.

September 15, 1999 PARTING WITH THE PAST

Do you know why some people are so miserable in their Christian life? They can’t part with their past. They remind me of the man who came home one day and found his cat was dead. He went out behind his house, dug a hole, and buried his cat; but he left the cat’s tail sticking out of the ground. When someone asked him why he had done such a thing he replied, “I just go back from time to time and pull that cat out of the ground to make sure he is dead. And, you know what, he stinks worst each time!”

Don’t allow Satan to make you dig up your “cat” each time he reminds you of your past sins. Jesus Christ paid the FULL price for your sins on the Cross; and they just stink worst every time you try to bring them back up! So when Satan brings up your past just remind him what happens to forgiven sins:

Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hast God removed our transgressions from us. Isaiah 38:17 for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. Isaiah 44:22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me: for I have redeemed thee. Micah 7:19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us: he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

September 21, 1999 PROVIDENTIAL PATTERNS (II)

Last week we looked at how important it was for a person to follow the right pattern in their life. We then showed how God uses the same “pattern” to create different people with a common goal; glorifying Him. Today, I want us to see three patterns that God wants us to follow in order for our life to develop the way God intended.

1) Our Pattern in Salvation- (1 Tim 1:16) “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” Paul’s conversion shows how Mighty God’s Salvation is, how Merciful God’s Salvation is, and how Magnificent God’s Salvation is.

2) The Pattern in Worship- (Heb 8:5) “Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.” God’s Pattern in worship meant that first you brought a blood sacrifice to deal with your sin, then you go by the laver of water where you deal with your daily sins on your way to the Holy Place where you find the light of revelation, the bread of life, and the daily prayers of incense. All of this leads, of course, to the Holy of Holies, where God meets with His people through the word (10 commandments in the ark) and the Spirit.

3) Our Pattern in Growth- (Titus 2:7) “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity,” The Pattern for Christian Growth shows the need of development in our Character, our Conduct, and the Christian faith. It also bears witness to the fact that we should never be content to be “lukewarm” in our lives; growth should be a normal part of our relationship with God.

What patterns are you following to develop your life?

September 22, 1999 TOTALING THE TRUCK

He was only three and his brother was only six when they totaled the family truck! The six year old brother was standing in the seat pretending to drive. The younger brother was playing in the floor board with the pedals. This was in the days when the starter for the truck was located beside the gas pedal.

It was fairly easy to understand what happened. After playing with the gas pedal for a while the younger brother decided to push the other pedals and suddenly the truck was running. When the six year old yelled at the three year old to mash the brake the three year old mashed the gas instead.

The six year old said he did a good job; he hit the tree directly in the middle of the hood! Wondrously, while it totaled the truck, both boys escaped unharmed- as least, until their dad got to them!

All of us have made mistakes in our life. Some have ended up totaling trucks while others have ended up totaling lives. Sometimes our mistakes were helped along by a friend while other times we got into all the trouble we need right by ourselves!

Thankfully, we can now laugh about the totaled truck as a humorous incident of by gone years. And isn’t it marvelous to know that the grace and mercy of God makes it possible for us to also laugh at the tragedy of our sins. By the blood of Christ our sins are forgiven and by the Spirit of God we are given a new life; even if we have totaled the truck!

September 28, 1999 REASONS FOR REVELATION

We are presently studying the book of Revelation during our Sunday School. Sometimes people wonder why we should study such a controversial book. I think there are at least Five Reasons a study of the book of Revelation is vital.

1) Revelation is part of the Bible. Enough said.

2) Revelation reveals the “rest of the story”. Without it’s exposure of God’s completed dealings with Israel and His judgment upon sinful men it would appear that God started many programs in motion and then went off and left them. Revelation reveals the end of the Church age, the establishment of God’s promised kingdom with Israel, the consequences of failing to repent and turn to God, the final defeat of Satan, and the glorious future of God’s children.

3) A special Blessing is promised to those who read Revelation- (Rev 1:3) Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy,...

4) Studying Revelation will purify your life. It will make you more aware than ever of how important it is to live a clean and pure life as you await the coming of the Lord- (1 John 3:2-3) ...we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

5) Seeing the agony and torment coming to the unsaved revealed in Revelation should make every Christian a consistent soul winner. Noone would want anyone they loved to go thru the tribulation that is to come-(Jude 1:23) And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

That is why you should study Revelation. So join us this Sunday at 10am and study it with us.

September 29, 1999 KNOW THE FUTURE

We are presently in a study of Revelation in our Sunday School. Many people say they have enough problems now so they see no need in studying about future events. Let me tell you why it is important to know about the future as revealed by God.

1) It keeps us from error- (2 Tim 2:17-18) *And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.*

2) It keeps us expectant about His return- (Titus 2:11-13) *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

3) It eases our mind about present events and future happenings- (2 Th 2:1-3) *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;*

October 5, 1999 ASHAMED

Jeremiah, the prophet, wrote of a day when men were not ashamed of their sin and wrong doing- “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush:” (Jer 8:12). We live in that same kind of time today. People boldly do badly and then don’t even have the decency to blush!

Let me give you three Bible reasons to be ashamed; and hope they will cause you to re-examine your reactions to anything wrong in your life.

SIN IN OUR LIFE SHOULD MAKE US ASHAMED- *And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.* -- Ezra 9:6 When we do wrong it is not cute or cool; it is contemptible and wrong- to be repented of, not rejoiced in.

LACK OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS SHOULD MAKE US ASHAMED- *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* -- Mark 8:38. When we fail to make a positive stand for the right it hurts God’s work and breaks God’s heart.

REBELLIOUS CHRISTIAN LIVING SHOULD MAKE US ASHAMED- *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.* -- 2 Th 3:14. When Christians fight and argue, or allow sin and self to control their life, it brings shame to the cause of Christ.

The only right cure for shame is salvation- *For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.* -- Rom 10:11. Get a good “dose” today.

October 6, 1999 PREDETERMINED PLANS

Why do people waste their life? They spend all their time and energy on things that really don’t matter. Then they sit before a stupid TV night after night and allow their minds to be warped into weird beliefs that would never even enter their mind if they took any time to really think about situations.

Maybe it is because they don’t know how valuable they really are. Some way we must get them to realize that they are not an Accident of nature; they are a design of God- (Job 33:4) *The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.*

They must learn that even before they were born God knew what He wanted to do with them- (Jer 1:4-5) *Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*

Oh, if we could just grasp the fact that we are special people designed by God for a prepared purpose- (2 Tim 1:9) *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,*

God made you, just the way you are, for a special reason. Don’t waste all the work that God has put into you.

October 12, 1999

SENIOR WISHES

We have some wonderful Seniors at our Church. As I pray for them, and attempt to work with them, I often find myself wondering what I can do to make their life the success God intended for it to be. This has caused me to come up with a four-fold prayer for my Seniors. I pray they will have:

- The **HEALTH** of Moses- He lived until he died! "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." (Deu 34:7). His death was "sudden" and he was able to be productive until the end. His burial was inexpensive and was attended by God! And his memory was cherished.

- The **HAPPINESS** of Jacob- He was able to live with those he loved and enjoy the fruit of his labors on this earth- "And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:" (Gen 45:10)

- The **HARMONY** of the Psalmist- Unity and Peace marked his dwelling. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa 133:1). Family was also friends and reunions were times of joy and sharing to be looked forward to; not dreaded.

- The **HEAVENLY** vision of John- He enjoyed his life and anticipated the wonders of Heaven at his death "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter." (Rev 4:1). He realized this world was not his home and, because of his faith in Christ, he looked forward to a wonderful eternity.

October 13, 1999

CLOCK CHRISTIANS

I have noticed that most Christians are a lot like clocks. See if you agree?

Some Christians are like old time **WIND UP CLOCKS**- As long as someone keeps them wound up with an exciting activity or some great entertainment they work great but they run down very quickly if neglected.

Other Christians are like **BATTERY CLOCKS**- They run longer than the wind up clocks but they still must have that yearly "boast" of a new battery in the form of appreciation, rededication, or supplication (begging them to teach that class for just one more year!). Also, if someone ever forgets to change their "battery" one year they suddenly turn up missing from their duties and place in Church. (And, for some reason, their battery always seems to run down at the most inconvenient time).

Finally, there are those wonderful **ELECTRIC CLOCKS**-They are connected to a constant power source and they just keep going and going. They are durable, dependable, and reliable. Oh, I know a major problem (like a hurricane) can come along once and awhile and knock out the power but as soon as power is restored these clocks "rededicate" (set their time back correctly) and go right back to work.

Are you a Christian? If so, what kind of clock are You?

October 19, 1999

WHO DO YOU TRUST?

For decades, anyone living within five or six miles of the hat factory in Denver, Pennsylvania, set their clocks by the sirens the factory set off five days a week. At 5:30 a.m., the wake-up siren would begin the day followed by the starting, lunchtime, and quitting sirens at the designated times.

When the siren system was eventually disbanded, someone was reminiscing with the timekeeper about his job. "What did you use to determine the exact time?" With a twinkle in his eye, the man reached in his pocket and pulled out a child's Mickey Mouse watch.

Some people trust in Magic, I trust in a Mighty God who is greater than circumstance or condition that may come my way. Some people trust in Picking a winner, I trust in a Provision Meeting God who meets my needs based on His love and not on the fickleness of luck. Some people trust in Wishing things will get better, I trust in Working Hard so God can bless my efforts- (Prov 14:23) "In all labor there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury."

Some people trust in hoping they will do enough good works to make them eligible for Heaven. I am reminded of how shocked some people were when an ancient Church building burned down. Everyone thought the Church was beyond harm since the cross on top of the steeple contained the ashes of several saints of by gone days. They learned that, no matter how good dead saints were, they can't save you from the fire!

As for me, I trust in the blood stained cross of Christ who died for my sins, who was raised for my justification, and who will come again soon to gather His children to live with Him in glory forever. I pray you are trusting in this mighty savior also. Anything else is just Mickey Mouse!

October 20, 1999

SPIDER WEB SECURITY

In days gone by, a daredevil attempted to climb one of the tallest buildings in New York using only his hands and feet for grips. From crack to crack he climbed as he worked his way ever higher. A large crowd gathered below to watch as he laboriously made his ascent. Suddenly, everyone heard a blood curling scream as this man plunged to his death.

When police were examining his body they noticed his hand was tightly clinched. Upon prying it open, they found he was clutching a handful of spider webs. Time and dust had made the spider web look like part of the building. When the climber grabbed it he made a life ending mistake.

Life is tough. Sometimes it feels as if you, like this man, are having to climb a great building with very limited resources. Marriage is not like the movies, your kids turned from happy bubbly babies into heart attack producing teens, and your money keeps making itself wings and flying away.

Day by day you struggle on this upward trek; and sometimes it feels as if your energy and enthusiasm are about gone. During these tough times it becomes all too easy to grab something without testing it first- Maybe I'll be lucky gambling today, maybe this one hit of drugs will provide the energy I need without hooking me, maybe an affair is what I need, ...

Sadly, as this climber found out, this can lead to disastrous results. Be careful of those spider webs you grab.

October 26, 1999

SONS OF GOD

Sometimes when you read a verse of Scripture it just makes you want to shout for joy. Take for instance First John chapter three, verse one -“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:” Wow! What an honor to be called the “son of God”.

How, I asked myself, could a poor person like me, with little abilities and influence, come to be called a “son of God”? That is when I found another of those shouting verses- (John 1:12) “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:”. Now I understood. The Love of God mentioned in the first verse motivated God to allow His son Jesus to die as a payment for my sin debt. Now all I have to do is receive Him as my savior by faith and this will give me the power (authority) to become a son of God. That shout is wanting to bubble up again!

But how can I live with this new responsibility of being a “son of God”? I know me. I am weak. I fail. Just forgiving my past won’t help me not to blow it in the future. That is when I found one more wonderful verse- (Rom 8:14) “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”. What joy! What a promise! It is not just me anymore. When I receive Christ as my Savior then the Holy Spirit comes into my life, makes me a new creation, and enables me to live as a “son of God”. Excuse me, but I believe I am just going to have to stop and shout!

You know what? You can be a “son of God” also. If I can do it anyone can. Receive Christ today and turn your complaining into shouting and your sorrow into joy.

October 27, 1999

LOCKED IN A HEARSE

The funeral director was proud of his new hearse. Everything was new and shiny and, despite the cargo that it carried, he thought his new hearse would make a good impression on everyone who saw it. It made an impression, alright, but not the kind he anticipated!

Everything went fine at the church. After the memorial service, the casket was loaded into the hearse for the journey to the cemetery. Wanting to be extra safe, the funeral director locked the back door of the hearse. It was only when he drove up at the cemetery and tried to unlock that back door that he found his mistake. The ignition key did not unlock the back door of the hearse and he did not have another key!

They tried everything they could think of but finally the preacher had to conclude the memorial service with the casket still in the hearse!

I thought of that hearse the other day when a dear Christian lady died. Once her soul had been locked in “Satan’s Hearse” where sin and death destroyed and doomed. People tried every way they could think of to open the “hearse” and get her out but no one had the key. That is when, praise the Lord, a man called Jesus stepped forward with the keys of hell and death and set her free. Now the hearse has been exchanged for Heaven as sin has lost its sting and death has lost its victory. Thanks be to God!

November 2, 1999 FAMILY QUOTES

People keep giving me quotes about family. Some of them are very thought provoking; and some are just cute. Thought you might enjoy a few.

If Motherhood was going to be easy it would never had started with something called labor!

Raising a teenager is like nailing Jell-O to a tree!

Parents are defined as people who bare infants, bore teens, and board newlyweds.

Any child can tell you that the sole purpose of a middle name is so he can tell when he is really in trouble.

There are only 2 things a child will share willingly- communicable diseases and his mother's age.

A Teen is someone who has stopped asking all those questions because they know all the answers.

Kids really brighten a household; they never turn off any lights.

I just wish I could be half as wonderful as my child thought I was when he was small; and half as stupid as my teenagers now thinks I am!

One final thought- Why is it that our children cannot read a Bible in school, but they can in prison?

November 3, 1999 PRECIOUS TO GOD

While studying in Revelation recently I discovered that the prayers we pray to God are so precious until He preserves them as the perfume of Heaven (Rev 5:8). Wow! Shouldn't that change the way you pray!

Then I thought, If my prayers are precious to God, I wonder what else God considers of great value (The meaning of Precious).

I found that the temptations and attacks of Satan on my life were precious to God. I thought of them as problems but God thought of them as precious! (1 Pet 1:7) *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*

I also found that the salvation of a lost soul is precious to God- (Psa 49:8) *For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:* That is because the sin debt for our souls was paid by the greatest gift Heaven had to offer- (1 Pet 1:19) *with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:*

Finally, I learned that the time of greatest sadness in our life is also a time of great value to God- (Psa 116:15) *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.* He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of Death and then welcomes us Home to be with Him. What a precious promise!

November 9, 1999 CASTAWAY CHRISTIANS

It is one of those verses you sort of wish were not in the Bible. It talks about self-discipline; and the awful consequences that come when we allow our life to get out of control- (1 Cor 9:27) “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

What an awful thought, to become a “castaway Christian”. Webster defines a castaway as “A rejected or discarded person or thing.” This means that a “castaway Christian” is someone who has been rejected or discarded from their service or position for the Lord. Once they sang heavenly anthems in the choir, or instilled Bible knowledge in Junior boys and girls during Sunday School, or preached life changing, marriage saving, hell forsaking messages from behind a sacred pulpit. Now, at the best, they warm a pew or, at the worst, they warm a bar stool.

How could this happen? What could cause a useful vessel to be tossed onto the scrapheap of mankind? What would move a person from committed to complacent to castaway?

The answer, according to this verse, is that they failed to keep their body under “subjection”. When you subject something you bring it under control or authority. So this person became a “castaway Christian” through failure to keep their body under control or subject to proper authority. Somewhere along the line their body became their boss; and a bossy body is a terrible taskmaster! A bossy body destroys our health, ruins our ambitions, steals our energy, and conquers our commitment.

Jesus said, (Mat 16:24) “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Denying self is still a key to victorious living. Remember that the next time your body tries to be boss as it leads you down a castaway course.

November 10, 1999 WHEN JESUS LOOKS

Sickness and circumstances placed me in charge of several young people recently. Just as Church was beginning they began doing things they shouldn't be doing in church. So I gave them the “Look”. You know the one I'm talking about. The “look” that said, “If you don't straighten up and do right then as soon as Church is over I will put the board of education on the seat of learning and it will not be a pleasant Sunday afternoon!”

Later that day I began thinking about that “look” and wondered if Jesus ever had to look at me in that way. That is when I began to remember all the times in scripture in which Jesus looked on people; and the difference it made.

The Look of Compassion- Over and over the scriptures tell how Jesus would look on a person with compassion. This means He looked at them through eyes of Love and saw their need instead of their failure.

The Look of Converts- The disciples stopped in Samaria and looked for a meal. Jesus looked on the fields white unto harvest and won a wicked woman for the kingdom. We miss so much because we are looking for crumbs instead of converts.

The Look of Conviction- His best friend had just cursed and denied he knew him. A rooster crowed, Jesus looked, and Peter was never the same again. How those eyes must have pierced him!

Jesus is looking for you today. Which look will He use?.

November 16, 1999 THE CHRISTIAN CHANGE

Can you imagine anyone so crazy that they would want to spend forever in the eternal agony of the outer darkness of the lake of fire instead of enjoying the eternal pleasures of Heaven with God? Why then do men reject the pardon and peace offered by God through faith in His son Jesus Christ and continue to live in the confusion and chaos of sin? The answer, I believe, is the simple word, Change (Repentance).

People just “instinctively” know that becoming a Christian involves Change. As soon as the Holy Spirit convicts them of their sinful state they realize they can't come to God and remain the same. They know that Christianity changes your character as well as your future destination and, as much as they want to go to Heaven, they are unwilling to implement the changes they know are a necessary part of becoming a child of God.

This Christian change involves at least three areas. First, there is Vocal Change- (Rom 10:10) “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Many people allow fear of others to prevent them from openly professing their faith in Christ.

Second is a Visible Change- (2 Cor 5:17) “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” It is faith that saves you but it is works that show this change to those around you. You will not be perfect but you will be different.

Finally, there is a Victorious Change- Becoming a Christian means we have passed from death unto life. Our future destination is different so we live as pilgrims and strangers on this earth. These changes have made a difference in my life; and I pray they will in yours.

November 17, 1999 SIN'S SAD STORY

The Fact of Sin- ALL have sinned and come short of the glory (ideal standard) of God. Sin is a problem for people regardless of their race, their riches, or their social standing. The common trouble in EVERY life is sin's actions and consequences.

The Fault of Sin- Sin is not the result of society's pressures, missed educational opportunities, or parental neglect. The heart of the problem is the problem of the Heart. That means we don't become sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. In fact, the Bible declares that our heart is desperately wicked from our birth and our very nature is corrupt.

The Folly of Sin- Sin takes us further that we want to go and keeps us longer than we want to stay. Once we arrive at sin's house, we find Despair, Disasters, and Disappointment instead of the joy, excitement, and fun that sin promised.

The Filth of Sin- What an awful problem sin becomes. It dirties your mind, your morals, and your manners. It causes people to do things they would never have thought they were capable of doing; and then corrupts everyone they touch with its filth.

The Fruit of Sin- It produces chaos and confusion in this life and condemnation in the next. It is always a rotten “apple”

The Finish of Sin- Jesus Christ, by his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead conquered sin. He offers forgiveness and life changing strength to all who come to Him by faith.

November 23, 1999 HALLELUJAH HELPS

The word “Hallelujah” is not found in the English Bible but its translation “Praise the Lord” is found a tremendous number of times. God is so wonderful, His works are so magnificent, and His grace is so marvelous until the people of God find themselves continually looking for new and better ways to praise and glorify Him.

Here are a few “Hallelujah Helps” to assist you in your praise and worship of our great God. Put them into practice today.

HOW should we Praise the Lord? With our mouth (Ps 145:21), With joyful lips (Ps 63:5), with a shout (Ex 3:11), with the trumpet and the sound of cornet (Ps 98:6), and with stringed instruments and flutes (Ps 150:4). With our mouths and our music let us praise the Lord.

WHERE should we Praise the Lord? In the gates of the camp of the Lord (II Chron 31:2), In the midst of the congregation (Ps 22:22), Among many people (Ps 35:18), and among the Nations (Ps 57:9). In our business, in our Church, in our daily living, and in all the world, let everything that has breath praise the Lord (Ps 150:6).

WHEN should we Praise the Lord? All day long (Ps 35:28), At all times (Ps 34:1), Seven times a day (Ps 119:164), Continually (Ps 71:6). Now is the time to praise the Lord for “The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord” (Ps 115:17-18).

WHAT should we Praise God for? His mighty acts (Ps 150:2), His power (Ps 21:13), His excellent greatness (Ps 150:2), His word (Ps 56:4), His name (Ps 54:6), His wonders (Ps 89:5), and His faithfulness (Ps 89:5). You’ve got a reason to praise God. Just make sure you take advantage of it!

November 24, 1999 COURTYARD CHRISTIANS

God had always been worshiped where ever people stopped in their nomadic wanderings. Now he wanted to change Israel from a wandering tribe into a great nation. He began this process by putting a Tabernacle of witness and worship in the very center of the people. This Tabernacle became the guide for the people (They only moved when the Tabernacle moved) and the center of their work and activities.

The design of this Tabernacle has intrigued Bible students for generations. As you entered the only door you were confronted with a brazen altar where sacrifices were made for sins. Just past this altar was a bronze laver full of water for washing that showed our need of daily cleansing even after the sacrifice for sin.

In the center of the Tabernacle was a tent called the Holy Place and in the end of this tent was the Holy of Holies containing the ark of the covenant. Surrounding this tent was a vast courtyard area where people milled and priest worked.

When Christ died on the cross the curtain to the Holy of Holies was rent apart by the hand of God signifying that everyone now had access into a personal relationship with God. Sadly, many Christians still spend their lives milling around in the courtyard doing “work and activities” instead of going into the Holy Place and building a relationship with God. No wonder their Christian life is a burden instead of a blessing.

November 30, 1999 HOW TO ENJOY LIFE

There are a lot of “formulas” for happiness in the world today, Yet it seems more and more people are enjoying life less and less. Here are 5 Bible principles for enjoying life that will work for you if you will work them.

1) Put a seal on your lips- (1 Pet 3:10) “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.” It is amazing how much more you enjoy life when you don’t let your tongue get ahead of your brain.

2) Practice Holy living- (Heb 1:9) “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” You never regret doing right. You are never ashamed of being righteous.

3) Participate in life now instead of always looking for later- (Eccl 5:19-20) “Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. {20} For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.” Take time to smell the roses: even God walked in the garden each day in the cool of the evening.

4) Pray like you mean it; and God will surprise you with the answer- (John 16:24) “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” God delights in giving “present” to His children. But He wants you to ask.

5) Place yourself near to God- (Psa 16:11) “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Know God, Know Joy. No God, No Joy.

December 1, 1999 BLANK FILM

It all began as a gesture of kindness. I am supposed to assume the duty of state promotional director for South Carolina Free Will Baptist in January of 2000. I had stopped by the office to talk with the present promotional director and in the course of our conversation I mentioned I needed to get some film developed so he asked me to carry a roll for him also.

My wife and I dropped off the film at a local one hour processing store, went to lunch, and returned at the end of the hour to pick up our prints. The look on the clerk’s face when I walked up started alarm bells ringing. Quickly, she explained that in the process of winding the film it had been exposed and now was completely blank.

Please, I begged, let it be my roll and not the current promotional director’s roll. No such luck!! All the pictures of special events he had taken as he crossed the state were now gone. I was unhappy. He was VERY unhappy!!

Most of you have special plans for a wonderful holiday season. If you build them around family and festivities and leave out Christ you will come to the end of this year as disappointed as I was at that film counter. Anticipation will turn to anguish as you find life unrolling into a blank instead of a blessing. The reason for the season is really what makes this a special time of year. Remember everything just turns out a blank when you leave out Christ.

December 7, 1999 WHAT CHRIST GAVE

In the hustle and bustle of Christmas giving it's easy to overlook what Christ gave up in order to be born in that Bethlehem Stable. And when we forget that, we lose the real meaning of Christmas.

Probably the best description of what Christ gave us when He came to earth is found in Philippians 2:5-11 "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This passage describes Four Things Christ Gave up in order to come and redeem mankind.

1. **HIS ROYALTY**- He left the splendors of Heaven for the squalor of a stable so that you and I could have eternal life. The King became a Babe so you and I could become sons of God.
2. **HIS REPUTATION**- He became of no reputation so that we who have a bad reputation might be restored to God.
3. **HIS RIGHTS**- The Son became a Servant. He gave up His rights that I might have the right to call on God as Father.
4. **HIS LIFE**- He who was life came to die in order for those who were dead in sin to have life.

Christ has given the greatest Christmas present possible. Accept it today.

December 8, 1999 CHRISTMAS JOY

This is the time of year when everyone should be singing Christmas songs, anticipating Christmas joy, and smiling about the decorations that fill our land. Instead, people are pushing and shoving at the mall, irritated and grouchy at home, and longing for Christmas to finally be over.

Christmas shopping has turned into a dreaded job instead of an anticipated joy because we have to spend money we don't have, to buy presents we don't like, to give to people who don't need them anyway! Kids don't care about the Love in your gift anymore; they just want to know it is the same thing all the other kids have!

These problems stem from the fact that we have forgotten what happened on that first Christmas. Christmas is not about God receiving a Gift, it is about God GIVING the Gift of His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (The Wise men probably did not bring their gifts to Christ until almost 2 years after his birth).

It's easy to put joy back into Christmas; simply put Jesus back into it! Let the example and love of Christ be the center of all you do and you will be amazed at the difference.

You can make this a wonderful Christmas or a stressful season full of bills, battles, and burdens. The difference will depend on what you do with Christ; and that choice is up to you.

December 14, 1999 SHEPHERD SYMPHONY

The cold wind whipping relentlessly around the fire only added to the anger and frustration of the Shepherd as he sat huddled under his blanket. Below twinkled the bright lights of Bethlehem thronging with the hustle and bustle of the throng of new people who had descended on the town to comply with the latest government census. Behind him, the only sound that disturbed his despair was the bleating of sheep and the snoring of fellow shepherds.

Trapped in his pity and complaint at being forced to miss all the excitement of this once in a lifetime gathering of people he thought at first that the brightness that suddenly appeared before his eyes was simply the wind flaring up the fire. Slowly he lifted his head and realized that the brightness emanated from above. Self-pity suddenly turned to tremendous fear as he saw an angelic being hovering above where he sat. He sensed more than saw his fellow shepherds stirring also but he was too fearful of what was happening to take his eyes off the wonderful being above him who radiated light and glory.

The voice, it was so strong and yet so soothing. The word were too wonderful to fully grasp at first, "I come to bring you good news of great joy that shall be unto all people, for unto you is born this day in Bethlehem a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Suddenly, the entire sky was filled with angelic being singing the most beautiful song human ears have ever heard. The melody simply washed over his soul and left him filled with hope, purpose, and love. And the words, how they thrilled the very core of his being, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men".

Then it was over. They were gone. But the shepherd knew he had heard the greatest symphony in human history and he, like his friends, could not wait to go into Bethlehem and see the wonderful child that the angels sang about.

This Christmas take your eyes off the throng and the bright lights and you might just hear a supernatural symphony. And above all, take time to visit with the Christ child. After all, Christmas is all about Him.

December 15, 1999 GIVING LIKE GOD

Maybe the answer is simpler than you imagined. You have lost the joy and excitement of the Christmas season and you think the reason for that is because the world has become so complicated and stressful. What if there were something YOU could control that would bring back the wonder and joy. Well, there is a solution; its found in learning to give at Christmas the way God gave on that first Christmas!

One of the most familiar Bible verses in the world describes how God gave- (John 3:16) *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

The SOURCE of His giving- "For God so loved". A gift from the heart pulls you into the heart of the receiver. That is when you learn it is more blessed to give than to receive.

The SCOPE of His giving- "the world". Reaching out to others will some way reflect their joy back to you.

The SACRIFICE of His giving- "He gave His only begotten Son." A gift that comes from the pocketbook only touches the hand. A meaningful gift from you includes you in the gift.

The SPLENDOR of His giving- "That whosoever believed in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God gave to help people's need, not their greed. His gift had eternal impact, even after the wrapping was gone

December 21, 1999 NO ROOM

You could almost read his mind. “Why did the maid take this week to get sick? Doesn't she know this is the biggest crowd we've had at the Bethlehem Inn since we opened? Now I'll have to tend to the rooms as well as tend to the guests and it's more than I can do.”

It was about this time that he heard another knock on the front door. Tired and pressed for time he went to the door and saw another stranger looking for a room. He already had his “No Vacancy” speech down pat but this one looked especially pathetic; tired, hungry, and with a wife expecting a baby any time. He felt sorry for the man but he didn't look like he'd be able to pay the rates he was charging this week, so he sent him away into the night.

Later that week he heard some wild stories about this couple spread by some ignorant shepherds but he was too busy counting his money to pay any attention to rumors. In fact, He had made so much money until he decided to give a larger than normal offering at the temple this Sabbath so the Priest would know he was doing everything he could to prepare the way for the Messiah.

What about YOU? Are you so busy with the Christmas celebration until you wouldn't have time for the Lord even if He came knocking at your door? The scriptures say that we must not be forgetful to entertain strangers because we sometimes entertain angels unawares (Heb 13:2). Wouldn't it be awful if we got so busy celebrating the birth of Christ until we would not even have time to visit with Him if He came to our door!

December 22, 1999 REST TO REJOICE

Ever noticed how cranky a little baby gets when it needs a nap? I see that a lot in grown up lately! The season to be jolly has left a lot of people jaded and grouchy. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

One reason we don't rejoice at this time of year as we should is because we do not get the REST our bodies require. Exhaustion and stress end up making us grumpy, irritable, and hard to live with! Let me share a few principles with you that will help you get through this season with some joy still left in your soul.

1) MAKE time in your busy schedule to find a place for rest, reflection, and renewal- (Psa 55:6) *And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.*

2) Realize that rest is just as important as the other activities in your schedule- (Isa 30:15) *For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.*

3) Keep the reason for the season at the forefront of all you do. A good relationship with Christ will provide the rest you need so you will not lose your joy in the swamp of shopping or the pressures of parties - (Mat 11:28) *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

So get some rest and have a MERRY CHRISTMAS!

December 28, 1999 FIVE LIFE PRINCIPLES

As we approach a new year, and a new millennium, let me share with you five foundational principles that the date on the calendar never change. These are life principles to be recognized and followed by every generation.

First, The Most important PRIORITY in your life is your Relationship with God through Christ- That means Repenting of sin, being Born Again by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, and then Living your life as a child of God.

Second, The greatest PRACTICE of daily living is learning to serve others- (Mat 23:11) *But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.* This does not make you a Slave or a doormat- If you think meek is weak try being meek for a week! It simply allows the real love of God to flow through you to others- (John 13:35) *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Third, The greatest PEACE in your life comes from finding your place in God's plan and functioning in that position- Find out where God is at work in your life and join Him at His work.

Fourth, The greatest PROFIT from your resources is to invest them in Heavenly work. Don't allow money to become your master, let it be your servant as you invest in the Heavenly bank.

Finally, The greatest PROSPECT that you anticipate is your Heavenly Home coming- (Heb 11:13) *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* This world is not our home. Don't allow it to Catch you or Control you.

Practice these principles and have a HAPPY NEW YEAR.

December 29, 1999 NEW CENTURY CHRISTIANS

A new century looms ahead of us. New inventions, new threats to our families and our society, and new challenges to commonly held beliefs and practices all mingle together to cause us to approach this new millennium with anxiety as well as anticipation. How are Christians to react to all these changes and challenges?

First of all we recognize that times may change but God does not- (Mal 3:6) *For I am the LORD, I change not;* (Heb 13:8) *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.* We are stable and secure as we depend on God.

Secondly, we rest in the fact that the Church is protected by God and nothing shall be able to destroy it- (Mat 16:18) *...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* The "gates of hell" here refer to the counsel and commands of society as it tries to mold the church into an organization espousing man made principles instead of an organism trusting in the living word of God. God's true church will not only survive, but she will succeed until she is snatched away from the horrors to come to meet the Lord in the Rapture.

Finally, we rejoice to know that the darker the night the brighter shines our light. Christians don't see the obstacles of an uncertain future; we see the opportunity of a clear witness as we stand "rock" solid in the midst of life's storms.