

A Great While Before Day

VOLUME X

PART ONE

January 1–June 30

A New Devotional from
DON & PEARL ANDERSON

Bible Teaching Resources

Tools for Teaching the Word

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A GREAT WHILE BEFORE DAY

Volume X (January – June)

Daily Devotional

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Bible Teaching Resources

by Don Anderson Ministries

What Do We Do?

Formed in 1972 as a nonprofit organization, the Ministries is dedicated to excellence in the communication of the Scripture, camping, and counseling. Our ministry verse is Colossians 3:11b: “*Christ is all and in all.*” This, perhaps more than any other verse, sums up the Ministries’ philosophy.

Communicating God’s Word accurately and clearly is our primary focus. Bible classes are held annually in more than 20 cities in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. These classes – conducted in homes, businesses, banks, cafeterias, and public auditoriums – open and free of charge to anyone who is interested in learning more about the Scripture and its relevance to daily life. By design, class environments are warm, friendly, and non-threatening.

Believing that biblical principles can be effectively communicated in informal settings, the Ministries conducts fun-filled conferences and retreats throughout the year. Each event is intended to be an oasis of fun, fellowship, relaxation, and renewal – as well as a time of solid Christian growth.

Because our goal is to convey the Good News of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible, the Ministries’ media division produces biblically-based messages on cassette and CD. Marriage video and CD series are also available. The Ministries’ team also distributes Don’s many books. These widely circulated resources for teaching, study, and spiritual enrichment are listed in our media catalog and are available at nominal cost from our office. A quarterly magazine, *The Grapevine*, is sent without cost to anyone requesting to be on our mailing list. Hundreds of copies of Don’s series, *How to Become a Christian*, have been given out in classes, camps, and conferences, or mailed from the office through the years. There is never a charge for this timely series and our constant prayer is that it will be used to bring others into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

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A GREAT WHILE BEFORE DAY

Ghe gospel writer Mark records that Jesus “rising up a great while before day... went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” (1:35 KJV). Whenever and wherever you spend your time with the Father each day, we hope that these devotional verses and thoughts will be encouraging. Unless otherwise noted, New Testament verses are taken from the New American Standard Bible and Old Testament verses are taken from the New International Version.

January 1

“So teach us to consider our mortality, so that we might live wisely” (Ps. 90:12 NET).

It May Be Later Than You Think

Jean awakened from a deep sleep and realized it was time to meet with her first love, the Lord Jesus. She turned toward Charles, her husband of forty-four years and whispered: “Good morning, sweetheart!”

Later in her quiet time she read, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:13–15).

Jean could have endlessly mused about her sixty-seven years. How good God had been! After leaving Decatur, Texas, she had met Charles at Wheaton College in Illinois. His contagious enthusiasm ignited her life with joy. He meant everything to her.

His tireless energy propelled them as a couple through his training in dental school, five years of medical missionary service in the Belgium Congo, and into his professorship of Dental Radiology at a major university.

As a supportive wife, Jean, also a registered nurse, conscientiously balanced her career with mothering their four daughters. Remembering the death of one infant daughter often brought tears, but Jean remained steadfast in faith throughout life’s trials.

As a bold intercessor, Jean often prayed for the lost and dying, especially in India. She prayed for the hill-country pastors whom she and Charles had met four months earlier while visiting the Hindustan Bible Institute.

The morning passed quickly as Charles called Jean to breakfast. They prayed together, ate quickly, and hastily prepared for an engagement to complete the paperwork for their Social Security benefits.

Heavy freeway traffic almost detained them, but they arrived just in time for their 9:00 A.M. appointment on April 19, 1995, at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

“Welcome home my children.

Your condo and table are ready!” (*Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

“Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways’” (Hag. 1:5 NIV).

How about a couple of verses of **“Praise the Saviour”**: *“Praise the Saviour, ye who know Him! Who can tell how much we owe Him? Gladly let us render to Him All we are and have. Jesus is the name that charms us; He for conflict fits and arms us; Nothing moves and nothing harms us While we trust in Him.”*

January 2

“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Thess. 5:24 NASB).

“The best way to heal from what you didn’t get for Christmas is to give to someone else what you wish you had gotten yourself.” (Bill Kirkpatrick)

The month of January is named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings. He was symbolized as a man with two faces, one looking back and the other looking ahead. (*Our Daily Bread*, Jan. 13, 2004)

Verses for the New Year

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. ... to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise” (Isa. 43:18-21 NIV).

“Do you not know, have you not heard? The Lord, the everlasting God creator of the wide world, grows neither weary nor faint, no man can fathom his understanding. He gives vigor to the weary, new strength to the exhausted. young men may grow weary and faint, even in their prime they may stumble and fall but those who look to the Lord will win new strength, they will grow wings like eagles; they will run and not be weary, they will march on and never grow faint” (Isa. 40:28-31 NEB).

The *New English Bible* translation of Isaiah 40:28-31 renews our spirits and encourages us to press on with new determination in this new year 2011.

Our creator God knows our limits and will add His vigor and strength. He has an unlimited supply of everything we will need as we move into the uncharted future of 2011.

Have a need? Give heed to the still small voice of direction, “This is the way walk ye in it.”

Prayer: Father, I am grateful that we can trust You to go before and prepare a way for us this new year. We lift up our hearts and voices in praise for your grace and care. Our trust is in the name of Jesus.

January 3

“There is only one being who can satisfy the last aching abyss of the human heart, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Oswald Chambers)

Seeing is Believing

Christianity is the only religion with a living founder. That excites me, because I now have the potential for a relationship. I also am looking for Him because He promised to return.

The resurrection was a little tough for Thomas, one of the original twelve disciples, to accept.

Thomas’s commitment to the Lord was genuine. He’d made the commitment to follow Jesus, to death if necessary. I think he knew he should have accompanied Jesus to the cross. But he didn’t do what he knew he ought to. He went along with the others. He saved his own skin.

With another “Peace be with you,” the Lord appeared in the midst of the men who a week later had once again gathered behind closed doors.

See my hands.

Reach with your finger and touch them.

Put your hand into my side.

Believe.

I suspect that Thomas never extended his hand. I think tears must have begun to roll down his cheeks, and probably down the faces of the ten other men as they watched a skeptic come to faith. It was a tender, beautiful scene. “My Lord and my God!” Thomas gasped. He leaped from initial unbelief to total commitment. The intensity of the moment overwhelmed him. The evidence is inescapable. You can touch it. You can handle it. You can see it. God is alive.

For us, the events are invisible, historical, past tense, but that in no way nullifies their reality. Having watched hundreds over my years of ministry come to Jesus in faith, I know that my redeemer lives and that he is still saving and changing lives. Thomas knew it too.

“You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever” (Ps. 16:11 NLT).

How about a couple of verses of **“He Lives”**: *“I serve a risen Savior, He’s in the world today; I know that He is living, what ever men may say; I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer, And just the time I need Him, He’s always near. Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift up your voice and sing Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King! The Hope of all who seek Him, the Help of all who find, None other is so loving, so good and kind. He lives,*

He lives, Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart."

January 4

"The work of God is held back not by bad men and women, but by good ones who have stopped growing." (M.P. Horban)

"They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do" (Ps. 1:3 NLT).

Plowing & Planting

"If you want a harvest in your life, you must plow, plant, and water. When people treat you like dirt, when the trials of life go right through your life like a plow, get ready for the harvest. God has a harvest of blessing for you today, so remember to plant the right seed." (*Prayer, Praise & Promises* by Warren W. Wiersbe)

We are all intimately involved in plowing, preparation, and planting in anticipation of a rich harvest.

2 Timothy 2:6 says: "The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops." There is much in the Scripture on sowing and reaping.

I would like to center our thoughts on Six P's:

1. **Plowing**—Plowing is rugged work but it must be done if there is going to be a harvest.
2. **Preparation**—Now that the plowing is done the hard working farmer is involved in preparing the soil to receive the seed.
3. **Planting**—"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:6-8 NASB).
4. **Patience**—A process must take place before the harvest can be enjoyed. Another "P" that would fit well in regard to this process is the "P" of **Perseverance**. Patience looks at the passive acceptance of the process whereas perseverance is actively involved in overcoming the obstacles of weeds, weather and wooly-buggers that would eat the plants before they can become fruitful.
5. **Provision**—The heavenly Father will make provision of whatever is necessary to bring about the harvest.
6. **Potential**—In Matthew 13:8 Jesus says, "And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty" (NASB).

The longing of our hearts is that we will experience an abundant harvest.

Remember it was Jesus who said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:37, 38 NASB).

"Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest" (Ps. 126:5-6 NLT).

How about a couple of verses of that old hymn "**Bringing in the Sheaves**": *"Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness, Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve; Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping, We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves. Going forth with weeping, sowing for the Master, Tho' the loss sustained our spirit often grieves; When our weeping's over, He will bid us welcome, We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves. Bringing in the shaves, bringing in the sheaves, We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves."*

January 5

"Read it through; pray it in, live it out; pass it on." (George Gritter)

"Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them. For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things" (Ps. 107:8-9 NLT).

The WASP Principle

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humble with your God" (Micah 6:8 NIV).

Wanting to finish my ministry marathon with the Lord's blessing upon it, I did several things. One of which was I made a commitment to the WASP principles for the rest of my days on earth:

W = Worship

A = Accountability

S = Servanthood

P = Priorities

Daily I try to be faithful confronting these issues. Perhaps herein lies the key to the Lord's blessing on the work of our hands.

Worship for me involves starting the day with the Lord. I use several devotional tools such as *Our Daily Bread* from the Radio Bible Class. A systematic approach to Bible reading is vitally important, too. Exploring a few chapters per

day works well for me. Memorizing and reviewing scripture is also an integral part of my worship. Last but certainly not least, a time of prayer is essential. God wants to hear from us.

Many recommend keeping prayer and study journals. Although I haven't gotten into journaling on a daily basis, I know I need to because it has been a constant pattern of those the Lord has greatly used.

Accountability involves meeting on a regular basis with someone who can hold your feet to the fire.

Servanthood necessitates asking, "What can I do for someone today that will bring joy and be a blessing?" Then it means following through, with Jesus Christ the supreme example (Mark 10:45).

Priority-setting demands honest answers to such questions as these: How am I spending my time? Are my priorities His priorities?

"The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand" (Ps. 37:23-24 NLT).

Perhaps if you will give serious consideration to the WASP principles, the phrase will be true of you as you seek maximum spiritual fulfillment in the remaining days that the Lord has given to you.

"Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you" (Ps. 37:5 NLT).

How about a couple verses of "**Higher Ground**": *"I'm pressing on the upward way, New heights I'm gaining ev'ry day; Still praying as I onward bound, 'Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.' My heart has no desire to stay Where doubts arise and fears dismay; Tho' some may dwell where these abound, My prayer, my aim, is higher ground. Lord, lift me up and let me stand, By faith, on heaven's tableland, A higher plane than I have found; Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."*

January 6

"A magnificent marriage begins not with knowing one another but with knowing God." (Gary and Betsy Ricucci)

"The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving" (Ps. 28:7 NLT).

One Desire of Marriage—Love

An unmarried man penned some extraordinary words which can be applied to the marriage relationship (see Phil. 2:1-5, NASB). The apostle Paul wanted the Philippians to seek the "consolation of love" (2:1). There is tremendous comfort in knowing someone else cares deeply. This knowledge is important in any relationship, but it is vital in a marriage.

Maybe that seems obvious. Of course husbands and wives love each other! Why else would they have gotten married? But people need to be reminded that they are loved. Sorry to say, women are usually better at doing this than men.

The romance in marriage should continue long after the wedding day. Men, how long has it been since you told your wife that you adored her? Was "I love you" just a declaration that you made long ago, as a 22-year-old kid in a rented tuxedo? Do you only verbalize affection in the bedroom? Are squeezes of the hand, tender kisses, and gentle touches simply precursors to sex or are they regular parts of your time with your wife?

And what about birthdays and anniversaries? (I have found that most men remember Christmas on their own.) What was the last present you gave your wife? How romantic was it? How personal? A thoughtful present doesn't have to be jewelry, flowers, or perfume (although these generally work well).

Remember the special occasions tell her you are thinking of her. The little things don't have to cost a lot in terms of money—but they do take some time, effort, and thought—and they say, "I love you."

"But you, O Lord, are a shield around me; you are my glory, the one who holds my head high" (Ps. 3:3 NLT).

How about a couple verses of "**More Love to Thee**": *"More love to Thee, O Christ, More love to Thee! Hear Thou the prayer I make On bended knee; This is my earnest plea: More love, O Christ, to Thee, More love to Thee, More love to Thee! Once earthly joy I craved, Sought peace and rest; Now Thee alone I seek, Give what is best; This all my prayer shall be: More love, O Christ, to Thee, More love to Thee, More love to Thee!"*

January 7

"Life is my university, and I hope to graduate from it with some distinction." (Louisa May Alcott)

"Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you" (Ps. 25:4-5 NLT).

A High Five at the Finish Line

What Makes a Good Finisher? Psalm 25:1-22

Towards the end of our life, two realities become glaringly evident: 1) things are going to go on without us someday; and, 2) we feel a sense of urgency to get it right. The passion burning in our hearts is that of giving it our best shot, of sucking it up and going for it. The athlete would describe this as crunch time.

Join me as we explore Psalm 25 and view David's seven-point game plan for making a strong finish.

1) **Turn Your Thoughts Toward Hope**—verses 1-3

David uses the phrase “put to shame” three times in the preceding verses. In other words, Father, I’m lifting up my soul to you and trusting in you to do two things: do not let me be put to shame, and do not let my enemies triumph over me.

2) **Keep a Teachable Spirit**—verses 4-5

As we age, it is tough to maintain a sweet, submissive, teachable spirit.

3) **Take Inventory**—verses 6-7

It is good for us to take time to remember what God has done for us, that we might fully appreciate grace.

4) **Trust in the Lord**—verses 8-11

David is saying that one of the keys to being a faithful finisher is to never lose our trust and confidence in the Lord. Once again he acknowledges his need for forgiveness.

5) **Focus on Fearing the Lord**—verses 12-14

David acknowledges the fact that the Lord’s purpose will prevail, and so he focuses on fearing the Lord. The person who fears the Lord is the one who honors Him, respects Him, and is submissive and sensitive to His direction.

6) **Face Reality**—verses 15-20

David sees the Lord as the only answer to all the difficulties outlined in these verses. Yes, he is facing reality! Difficulties? David alludes to at least 10 in verses 15-20.

7) **Rest in a Final Wish**—verses 21-22

As David ends Psalm 25:21-22, he cries, “My integrity and uprightness protect me because my hope is in you. Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!” (NIV).

The finish is ahead. The best is yet to be. May we receive high-fives as we cross the line, good and faithful servants to the end of the race.

“The Lord is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray. He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way” (Ps. 25:8-9 NLT).

How about a couple of verses of **“Find Us Faithful”**: *“We’re pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road. And those who’ve gone before us line the way. Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary. Their lives a stirring testament To God’s sustaining grace. Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses Let us run the race not only for the prize. But as those who’ve gone before us Let us leave to those behind us A heritage of faithfulness passed on through Godly light. O May all who come behind us, find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe. And the lives we live inspire them to obey. O May all who come behind us, find us faithful.”*

January 8

“Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken” (Ps. 62:5-6 NLT).

Expectations

Expectations. In *How to Discipline Your Children*, Walter Henrichsen calls them “the fizz in the soda pop of life” (62). Soda pop is flat without the fizz. Life can be drab and burdensome if we don’t have high hopes for ourselves and others. In our day-to-day dealings, we expect that our Christian brothers and sisters, our family members, our co-workers and even our unsaved friends and acquaintances will be honest, unselfish, kind and thoughtful. Sadly, sometimes these expectations are ground into the dirt. Reality dishes up the reverse.

We also fill our minds and hearts with expectations as to how God is going to do things in our lives. Truth finally forces us to recognize that our presumptions are far from what we thought He was planning to do in a set of circumstances.

Our expectations are on solid ground when they are placed in three unchangeables:

1. God’s **PERSON**
2. God’s **PURPOSE**
3. God’s **PROMISE**

First, all these scriptures assure us, we can have complete confidence in God’s **PERSON**: Psalm 39:7, Psalm 71:5, and Psalm 38:15. “O Lord, you alone are my hope. I’ve trusted you, O Lord, from childhood” (Ps. 71:5 NLT).

The Bible also shows us we can hope in God’s **PURPOSE**: Romans 8:28 and 2 Timothy 1:12. “The humble will see their God at work and be glad. Let all who seek God’s help be encouraged” (Ps. 69:32 NLT).

Finally, we can trust in God’s **PROMISE**: Zechariah 9:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:24. “Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory” (Ps. 50:15 NLT). Our expectations rest securely when they are based on God’s person, purpose and promise. We can “stretch our heads” in confidence that He is trustworthy to complete His work in us. He allows circumstances. He operates with His ultimate and perfect plan in view. He loves us too much to do otherwise. Let’s make all our high hopes, His hopes.

“For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better” (Phil. 1:20-21 NLT).

How about a couple verses of **“I Know Who Holds Tomorrow”**: *“I don’t know about tomorrow; I just live from day to day. I don’t borrow from its sunshine, For its skies may turn to gray. I don’t worry o’er the future, For I know what Jesus said; And today I’ll walk beside Him, For He knows what is ahead. I don’t know about tomorrow—It may bring me poverty; But the One who feeds the sparrow Is the One who stands by me. And the path that is my portion May be through the flame or flood; But His presence goes before me, And I’m covered with His blood. Many things about tomorrow I don’t seem to understand; But I know who holds tomorrow, And I know who holds my hand.”*

January 9

“And Jesus answered saying to them, ‘Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you”” (Mark 11:22-24 NASB).

Understanding Faith

“You will never learn faith in comfortable surroundings.” (A.B. Simpson)

“Faith does not wait until it understands; in that case it would not be faith.” (Vance Havner)

“Faith is saying ‘Amen’ to God.” (Merv Rosell)

“The only way to learn strong faith is to endure strong trials.” (George Mueller)

“All work that is worth anything is done in faith.” (Albert Schweitzer)

“Faith is not belief with proof but trust without reservation.” (Elton Trueblood)

“Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the one who is leading.” (Oswald Chambers)

“Faith is the conviction of realities I cannot see or feel.” (Pamela Reeve)

(Above quotes taken from *Simple Living for the Worn Out Woman*, 94-95)

“... ‘Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.’ ...” (Matt. 9:22 NASB)

“Our asking must always be based on a desire to please God.” (Pearl Anderson)

Prayer: I love you Father with my whole heart. What a privilege to be your child—along with this great company of believers. By your power and grace may we leave a legacy behind to help future generations. Please bless our families Father. Keep them in Your care and protection.

January 10

“Holiness is not a series of do’s and don’ts, but a conformity to God’s character in the very depths of our being. This conformity is possible only as we are united with Christ.” (Jerry Bridges)

“Now godliness combined with contentment brings great profit. For we have brought nothing into this world and so we cannot take a single thing out either. But if we have food and shelter, we will be satisfied with that” (1 Tim. 6:6-8 NET).

Contentment & Consistency

Ray Stedman, many years ago, reduced the Christian life to one word: “perseverance.” I have often thought about this concept and the closer I get to the goal, the more I can affirm the accuracy of his summary.

Perseverance involves two other critical factors: contentment and consistency. In the words of Jeremiah Burroughs, “I offer the following description: Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.”

The dictionary defines contentment this way: euphoria, well-being, sufficiency, full measure, all that could be desired; a feeling of calm satisfaction, a feature or characteristic of something that gives rise to satisfaction.

Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have. Four ingredients form a biblical recipe for contentment. We must acquire a clear view of each of the following:

1. God’s sovereignty.
2. God’s unconditional love.
3. God’s plan and purpose.
4. Complete surrender to the three things mentioned.

Not only is contentment of importance in the Christian life, but consistency is equally vital.

Consistency is a heart issue. The pursuit of God must be the top priority in life. In the words of Bishop Wilson: “He knows little of himself who is not much in prayer and he knows little of God who is not much in praise.”

Just as there is a scriptural recipe for contentment, so is there one for consistency.

1. Passion.
2. Priorities.
3. A personal walk with God.
4. Pleasure of heaven.

Are you ready to get serious? My challenge to you is *Just Do It!* and do it daily. Committing yourself to contentment and consistency in your Christian life is a choice you will never regret.

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance. I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing" (Phil. 4:11-12 NET).

How about a couple verses of "**A Child of the King**": *"My Father is rich in houses and lands; He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands! Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold, His coffers are full—He has riches untold! My Father's own Son, the Savior of men, Once wandered o'er earth as the poorest of them! But now He is reigning for ever on high, And will give me a home in heav'n by and by. I'm a child of the King! A child of the King! With Jesus, my Savior, I'm a child of the King!"*

January 11

"O Lord, teach me how you want me to live! Then I will obey your commands. Make me wholeheartedly committed to you! O sovereign Master, my God, I will give you thanks with my whole heart! I will honor your name continually!" (Ps. 86:11-12 NLT).

Servant Leadership

What is a leader? What does it take to exercise leadership?

When one turns to the scripture, there is no question about what is involved in leadership. Real leadership is not the exercise of power and authority but the sacrificial act of a servant. This mind-set runs totally counter to our culture's mentality, as it did in biblical times.

After the power play of James and John to get seats on the right and on the left in the Kingdom, Jesus said in Matthew 20:25-27: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (NASB).

Mark 10:45 describes the heart of the ultimate servant leader, Jesus: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus is the first of our flesh-and-blood examples clustered in Philippians 2 of those who followed the principle of servant leadership. There we read that the Lord "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant" and "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (2:7-8). This same Jesus, hours before meeting human death, washed His men's dirty feet (John 13:4-5).

The second example is the apostle Paul, who writes in Philippians 2:17 that he is "being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith."

Paul commands young Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:3: "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Men, the lesson for us is clear. It is time for us to pick up the sword, the towel, the tools of our servanthood and begin to function the way God has intended—as servant leaders.

Real leadership in your home is a matter of what you are willing to give, no matter the cost.

"O Lord, I am your servant; yes, I am your servant, born into your household; you have freed me from my chains" (Ps. 116:16 NLT).

How about joining me singing this prayer chorus, "**Make Me a Servant**": *"Make me a servant, humble and meek; Lord, let me lift up those who are weak. And may the prayer of my heart always be: Make me a servant, make me a servant, Make me a servant today."*

January 12

"So take this seriously. The Lord has chosen you to build a Temple as his sanctuary. Be strong, and do the work" (1 Chr. 28:10 NLT).

Is Your House a Sanctuary

Solomon had a great task to accomplish. He was to build a temple in which God would dwell. Each of us also has a house to build. Our own personal house of life. "What know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." This house of ours is to glorify God. It is to be a place that is His sanctuary. A place set apart for Him. In another sense we are to build a home for our family that is a sanctuary (dwelling place) for God as well as for them.

Is your house a sanctuary? Does your family come home and feel they have come to a cease from the battle of the day. They are safe. They can rest. Here is peace,

a place to relax. Or is it another battle ground? We know how important it is to put God in the center and to build around Him in our Church life. It is equally important to have God as the center and core of our family life. "If I be lifted up (glorified) I will draw all men unto me."

Think of the problems this kind of living would solve.

Walk Within Thy House with a Perfect Heart

Lord, How I long to serve Thee upon some great mission field

And have the world see, How much I love Thee

By this my sacrifice.

"Nay," came his voice so gentle, yet so firm.

"Walk within thy house," With a perfect heart

And do not for other things yearn."

Then Lord make within these walls,

A perfect sacrifice of Thy grace.

A place where all who enter

May see Thy face

And rest and be renewed.

May those who dwell here Lord,

Find always warm welcome,

Peace and happy words.

That when they go,

Their own hearth to build,

They will have a perfect pattern,

And Thy perfect will fulfill. (Pearl Anderson)

"I'm asking God for one thing, only one thing: To live with him in his house my whole life long. I'll contemplate his beauty; I'll study at his feet" (Ps. 27:4 MSG).

Sing with me the chorus **"Let the Beauty of Jesus Be Seen in Me"**: *"Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me—All His wonderful passion and purity! O Thou Spirit divine, All my nature refine Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me."*

January 13

"Marriage is a promise that is shared by only two—a vow to love and dream and plan together all life through."
(Author Unknown)

"The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will answer my prayer" (Ps. 6:9 NLT).

Praying Together: Try It, You'll Like It (We Do)!

Louis Evans, former pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, made an amazing statement recorded in *Our Daily Bread*, February 14, 1993. Incredibly, Evans said he never knew a couple who proceeded with a divorce after first praying together on their knees every day for a week.

When I returned to school in the late '80s to pursue a doctorate in marriage and family counseling, I recognized one of the greatest areas of neglect in my marriage to Pearl was our shared prayer life. Throughout thirty-plus years of marriage, we had not consistently taken time to pray together!

And we were not alone.

Why pray with your spouse? Pearl and I have experienced at least ten benefits from making the commitment to come regularly before the Lord together.

1. **Improved communication:** Because we pray together, we walk transparently with each other about our needs, fears, and desires.
2. **Greater intimacy:** Closeness comes when you are united in the Lord's presence.
3. **The dissipation of anger:** Prayer is a great dissolver of bitterness and resentment.
4. **The increase of forgiveness:** Forgiving each other is much easier when you have prayed with each other.
5. **Conflict resolution:** When the issue is my way or your way, prayer can reveal God's way.
6. **Blessing:** It just feels right to pray. It feels right to give sacrificially.
7. **Seeing the Lord's provision:** When the Lord answers, what a thrill it is to pause in His presence!
8. **Family benefits:** We pray daily for each of our children and grandchildren by name. It is a joy to stop and pray for them specifically.
9. **Trust:** Trust in God and in each other deepens as mates pray together.
10. **Accountability:** Prayer together automatically demands a degree of accountability to each other in the personal spiritual disciplines of a godly life.

Is shared prayer worth the effort? Frankly, I don't see how you can let another day go by without taking your precious mate in your arms and spending quality time in prayer. Try it, men, you'll like it. It won't make you weak;

it'll make you strong in His strength. Invite your mate to join you with the words of Psalm 34:3: "Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together" (NIV).

"Come, let us tell of the Lord's greatness; let us exalt his name together. I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces" (Ps. 34:3-5 NLT).

How about let's sing a couple of verses of **"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"**: *"Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love; Hearts unfold like flow'rs before Thee, Opening to the sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; Drive the dark of doubt away. Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day! Thou art giving and forgiving, Ever blessing, ever blest, Well-spring of the joy of living, Ocean depth of happy rest! Thou our Father, Christ our Brother—All who live in love are Thine. Teach us how to love each other; Lift us to the joy divine!"*

January 14

"And my people, my God-defined people, respond by humbling themselves, praying, seeking my presence, and turning their backs on their wicked lives, I'll be there ready for you: I'll listen from heaven, forgive their sins, and restore their land to health" (2 Chr. 7:14 MSG).

One Nation Under God

Father, what joy and delight fill our hearts as we celebrate the birthday of America. Lord, we are 235 years old. Your fingerprints have been all over these years. We exist today because of your loving care and concern.

George Washington gratefully acknowledged your Sovereign hand on numerous occasions in our nation's birth and early history.

Lord, Moses warned the children of Israel prior to entering the Promised Land: "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today" (Deut. 8:17-18 NIV).

Lord, I feel ashamed in coming to You acknowledging our sin.

Daniel's prayer is my prayer this morning: "We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame" (Dan. 9:5-7 NIV).

Lord, how much longer can your holiness put up with our waywardness and wickedness:

1. Judges denying Your right to rule.
2. Corporations filled with corruption and fraud.
3. Moral deviations that are destroying purity, marriage, and the family.
4. Citizens living arrogant, selfish lives doubting that You even exist.

Daniel's prayer returns to my lips: "O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name" (Dan. 9:19 NIV).

Lord, what a debt we owe to you and to the dead and the living who are serving under your leadership. Abraham Lincoln's words fill my mind: "The sense of obligation to continue is present in all of us. A duty to strive is the duty of us all. I felt a call to that duty."

Lord, is it still possible that another miracle can take place in this great land of ours: "That from the honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Please, dear Lord, let the refreshing rains of revival fall all across this great land bringing repentance and a return to the way of living You intended.

In the name of our wonderful Lord and soon coming King of kings and Lord of lords, Amen.

"What joy for the nation whose God is the Lord, whose people he has chosen as his inheritance" (Ps. 33:12 NLT).

Join me in a couple of verses of **"Rise Up, O Men of God!"**: *"Rise up, O men of God! Have done with lesser things; Give heart and soul and mind and strength To serve the King of kings. Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where His feet have trod: As brothers of the Son of Man Rise up, O men of God!"*

January 15

"Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat" (Ps. 32:2-4 NLT).

Illusions

Illusions: The word means: "A false impression or belief, a delusion; false perception or conception of some object of sense; a perception of a thing which misrepresents it, or gives it qualities not present in reality; something that deceives by producing a false impression."

The thirsty man is convinced that he spies an oasis of water just ahead in the desert. Running and falling on his face in what he thought was water produces only a mouth full of sand.

There are those who order their lives as though there truly is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The more they pursue materialism and money the greater the frustrations. The illusion is like eating cotton candy. You bite into it and it disappears.

Satan is the master at using illusion to destroy lives. "The grass is always greener. . ." "Everybody else is so much happier than me. . ." "God is a God of love and He wouldn't judge anybody. . ." "If I do my best and give my money and sacrifice a lot, surely God is going to say come on in when I get to those pearly gates. . ."

Reality says: "Depart from me, I never knew you. . ."

Ann Keimel Anderson in her excellent little book called *I Gave God Time* records a letter she received from Elisabeth Elliott commenting on Psalm 27:1. "Stand strong, Ann. Love Will. Be respectful, obedient, gentle. . . And as soon as any single thought occurs to you that is not obedient to Christ, bring it into 'captivity' before it becomes a stronghold. A thought turns into a consideration, which becomes an attitude, then action, then habit, then stronghold! Let God be the stronghold of your life. . ."

"These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve" (2 Cor. 11:13-15 NLT).

Join me in a couple of verses of "**A Mighty Fortress is Our God**": "*A mighty Fortress is our God, A Bulwark never failing; Our Helper, He, a mind the flood Of mortal ills prevailing: For still our ancient foe Doth seek to work us woe; His craft and power are great, And armed with cruel hate, On earth is not His equal. And tho this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us: The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, For lo, his doom is sure; One little word shall fell him.*"

January 16

A Slow Goodbye to Sin

Walk by means of the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

"Sometimes God has to stuff blessings in our hip pocket as we run away from Him. What blessings we miss by not turning around and facing Him. Studying, memorizing and meditating on God's Word can ensure our discernment between good and evil." (Dennis Fisher, *Our Daily Bread*)

When you do it right, God is in it and there is peace and continuity. "Yet the Lord, the God of Israel, has chosen me from among all my father's family to be king over Israel forever. For he has chosen the tribe of Judah to rule, and from among the families of Judah he chose my father's family. And from among my father's sons the Lord was pleased to make me king over all Israel. And from among my sons—for the Lord has given me many—he chose Solomon to succeed me on the throne of Israel and to rule over the Lord's kingdom. . . . They feasted and drank in the Lord's presence with great joy that day. And again they crowned David's son Solomon as their new king. They anointed him before the Lord as their leader, and they anointed Zadok as priest. So Solomon took the throne of the Lord in place of his father, David, and he succeeded in everything, and all Israel obeyed him. All the officials, the warriors, and the sons of King David pledged their loyalty to King Solomon. And the Lord exalted Solomon in the sight of all Israel, and he gave Solomon greater royal splendor than any king in Israel before him" (1 Chr. 28:4-5, 29:22-25 NLT).

We honor God our Father when we live like His children.

Do you use the name Jesus Christ when you make a bad golf swing or any irritation happens? Bad habits are to be broken. Good habits are to be kept.

At any age make sure your mouth is not the only thing that works.

"Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it" (Ja. 4:17 NLT).

Prayer: Today, Father, may Your WORD be alive to convict, comfort, give peace and teach us what we need to know to live a life that will bring honor and glorify You in every contact we have today.

January 17

"I rise early, before the sun is up; I cry out for help and put my hope in your words" (Ps. 119:147 NLT).

Doing the Dailies

Many years ago Pearl had a little sign near the door of her office. "A man who fails to pray limits himself to his own resources."

One of the things that we emphasize is "Doing the Dailies."

1. **Bible study**
2. **Prayer**
3. **Memory work**
4. **Witness**
5. **Journaling**

I look back on my earlier life and ministry with embarrassment because I, too, was one of those who was too busy teaching the Bible, working with youth and preaching sermons to take time, on a daily basis, with the Lord. I am so glad to say to you today that the turning point in my life came when I realized how important it is to deepen one's relationship with the Lord Jesus. It has gotten to the place now that I don't have to meet with the Lord on a daily basis, I get to!

May I take a moment to suggest the four "C's" with regard to your daily communion with our Lord:

1. **Consistency**—Consistency does not mean that it has to be at the same time every day. Flexibility is another key ingredient to consistency. Emergencies and crises will come our way. The best way to handle this is to get to the Lord just as soon as possible when you recognize that your regular routine is being disrupted.
2. **Closeness**—James 4:8: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Oh the sweetness of His presence when you meet Him in that daily time.
3. **Christ-likeness**—2 Kings 22:19: "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord . . ." The key to change and growth in our lives is to spend time in the presence of the Lord, allowing Him to change our priorities, to help us solve our problems, to seek His face and direction and guidance. And above all, to allow Him the privilege of changing us more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. **Capacity for Service**—This comes from our daily time with the Lord. We gaze at Him in His Word and we grow in Christ-likeness but we walk away glowing in the radiance of the Savior so that others might see Him in us. The daily time energizes us for the service assignments the Savior has for us that day.

My question to you is this: Can you afford to waste another day without spending quality time with our Lord before you meet Him face to face?

"The possibilities of prayer run parallel with the promises of God." There are more than 7,000 promises of God in the Word. (*Daily Walk Bible*)

"Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions" (Ps. 119:18 NLT).

Join me in a couple of verses of "**Open My Eyes, That I May See**": *"Open my eyes, that I may see Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me; Place in my hands the wonderful key That shall unclasp and set me free. Open my ears, that I may hear Voices of truth Thou sendest clear; And while the wave-notes fall on my ear, Ev'rything false will disappear. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see. Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine."*

January 18

God supplies the strength to do the tasks He calls us to do.

A God-Given Risk

Looking at the Scriptures, you find Abraham putting up a "For Sale" sign in front of his home and heading off to destination unknown. You see him later climbing the mountain to sacrifice his promised son. As he walks up, the sacrificial provision is scaling the other side of the mountain.

Jacob takes the risk of leaving Uncle Laban. Joshua takes a risk at Kadesh-Barnea and at the Jordan River. Caleb joins Joshua at Kadesh-Barnea; neither is afraid of the giants in the land.

David takes a risk with his sling and five smooth stones as he comes on the playing field to meet Goliath.

Esther, Ruth, and Rahab are my favorite steel magnolias of the Old Testament. Each of them risks everything.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego risk the fiery furnace; Daniel, the lion's den; Nehemiah, the opposition; Peter the waves; Jesus, the cross.

As my good friend Dr. Dick Knarr said, "It is one thing to sit in the stands and shout Ole! Ole! and quite another to get into the ring with the bull." The late Helen Keller said: "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than exposure."

Looking at RISK from the biblical point of view suggests four principles:

R = Resources—"Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3:20 NASB). God provides the resources when we risk it all for Him, in His will.

I = Insight—"The Lord delights in the way of the man whose steps he has made firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand" (Psa. 37:23-24 NIV). "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit" (Psa. 147:5 NIV). The Lord directs our steps as he leads us into areas of risk for Him.

S = Strength—"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13 NASB). God supplies the strength to do the tasks He calls us to do.

K = Kindness—"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32 NASB). The Lord's kindness is certain and unshakeable even in scary times.

Jeremiah says it for me: "No one is like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power" (Jer. 10:6 NIV). Amen!

"It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward" (Heb. 11:24-26 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of "**So Send I You**": *"So send I you to labor unrewarded, To serve unpaid, unloved, unsought, unknown, To bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing; So send I you to toil for me alone. So send I you to leave your life's ambition, To die to dear desire, self-will resign, To labor long and love where men revile you; So send I you to lose your life in Mine."*

January 19

"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it. If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned" (Song of Sol. 8:6-7 NLT).

Making Marriage Work

My sweetheart Pearl and I are 57 years and going strong! What a special treasure our relationship is to us. Pearl and I are both committed to spending as much time together as possible in our remaining years on this earth. She is my lover and best friend. I hate to be away from her.

Our marriage was not always like this. At times we have had to work hard to keep everything from falling apart. What we are enjoying now is the fruit of faithful labor—partners working together in a joint venture to build something very special.

A turning point in our marriage occurred several years ago when a doctoral project forced us to spend forty hours nose-to-nose evaluating our relationship. No problem, I thought. Our marriage had bumpy spots, sure, but was pretty good overall. I figured to be in for a weekend of smooth sailing. Pearl saw typhoons ahead. The forty hours was a difficult yet tremendously worthwhile time of learning all about us.

Men, the bottom line lesson from that experience is that in many ways, we hold the key to making a marriage work. If your marriage is to flourish, guys, I urge you to fulfill these four roles:

1. **Be a soldier.** "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3 NASB). A soldier defends the cause, provides protection, and lays down his life if necessary.

2. **Be a student.** "You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way" (1 Pet. 3:7a NASB). This involves studying their desires, pleasures and delights. It means making their joy and happiness our goal.

3. **Be a statesman.** "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8 NIV). A statesman wears the hats of honesty, accountability, and transparency.

4. **Be a servant.** "[Jesus] rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet" (Jn. 13:4-5 NASB).

During courtship it is easy to be a servant. What happens during the walk down the aisle and the life together that follows is the mystery. So many of the little things are neglected.

Men, in marriage the challenge before us is to make it work by becoming soldiers, students, statesmen, servants. As Eugene Peterson paraphrases Psalm 37: "Bridle your anger, trash your wrath, cool your pipes, it only makes things worse." Amen.

"Oh, how beautiful you are! How pleasing, my love, how full of delights!" (Song of Sol. 7:6 NLT).

Join me and your spouse in singing that little prayer chorus "**Spirit of the Living God**": *"Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me."*

January 20

"You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally. I don't know

about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself" (1 Cor. 9:24-27 MSG).

Till the River Runs Dry

The world system says to those of us approaching retirement age, "You have earned it. Go ahead and live it up in selfish pursuit. Travel to faraway places in your RV. Give it your all on the golf course. Beat everybody at the bridge table." This mind-set trivializes seniors and denies their significance. Truth is, our greatest productivity should come in the last laps of the race of life. Certainly we shouldn't shut down.

When the two minute warning sounds we soldiers of the cross ought to increase our intensity. Speed up the pace. Suck it up. Give it our best shot. Really go for it. We need to lay it on not lay it down. It is time for the adrenalin to kick in.

Jesus warns against poor finishes in His address to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:11: "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown" (NASB). The apostle Paul asks the Galatians: "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Gal. 5:7 NASB).

I do not know about you, but the older I get, the more excited I become about what God is doing. The potential for finishing strong lights my fire.

To finish strong, I recommend pursuing the following four-point pattern:

1. **Plan**
2. **Persevere**
3. **Play through the pain**
4. **Put the pedal to the metal for the final lap**

The Garth Brooks song, "The River" speaks of a man's determination to keep going—to sail his vessel till the river flat runs dry. This guy refuses to sit upon the shoreline and be satisfied. Instead he'll "choose to chance the rapids" and "dare to dance the tide."

That's the challenge for us all, no matter how old we are. But, if you're like me and approaching the age when most folks slip into neutral, I beg you to reconsider the rest of your life. God has big plans for you and you have the time to do 'em up right.

My challenge to you is to persevere, press on, and pour it all out. The closer you get to the tape, the harder you go.

"Life is a lot like tennis—the goal is to learn to serve best." (*Daily Walk Bible*)

"I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us" (Phil. 3:14-15 MSG).

Join me in a couple verses of "**God Leads Us Along**": *"In shady green pastures, so rich and so sweet, God leads His dear children along; Where the water's cool flow bathes the weary one's feet, God leads His dear children along. Tho' sorrows befall us, and Satan oppose, God leads His dear children along; Through grace we can conquer, defeat all our foes, God leads His dear children along. Some thro' the waters, some thro' the flood. Some thro' the fire, but all thro' the blood; Some thro' great sorrow, but God gives a song; In the night season and all the day long."*

January 21

"Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly" (Ps. 5:3 NLT).

"Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray" (Mark 1:35 NLT).

Just Do It! - Disciplining Your Spiritual Life

The story is told of a husband who, arriving at home after an unusually tough day at the office, asked his wife how hers had been. She responded, "Which do you want first? The good news or the bad news?" Pausing a moment, he answered, "I have had a terrible day, so give me the good news first."

She replied, "The good news is, the air bag works."

When it comes to having an effective walk with the Lord, we find some very good news and some "bad" news, too. The good news is the relationship is free. Completely free. The bad news is that in order for the relationship to grow significantly, it's going to cost you. It will cost **T-I-M-E**: the single commodity no one seems able to spare. But in order to have an ever-deepening relationship with the Lord, I have found that you just cannot miss a day in His presence. But how to do it? There are no magic formulas. Here is what works for me.

Try starting with music. I often begin by playing a few worship tapes.

Read a daily devotion. *Our Daily Bread* is one of my favorites.

Read a chapter from scripture. Use different Bible translations from year to year. When reading, take time to think and ask questions. What does the text say? What does the writer really mean? Whom is he addressing? How does it apply to me?

Review verses you've memorized.

Read a few pages from a Christian classic like Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening*, Evan's *Daily with the King*, Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*.

Pray. Commit the day to the Lord. Praise Him for His faithfulness in the past. Petition Him regarding the challenges of the twenty-four hours ahead.

So how much T-I-M-E does all this take? And do you have it? Why not ask yourself instead: Can I afford NOT to be alone with God today? Some years ago, I made a commitment to the Lord that I would not live another day without spending vital time with Him.

May I challenge you to not allow another day to go by without making a similar commitment? Meeting regularly with the Lord is essential to finding fulfillment, bearing fruit, and finishing well. Find what works for you and Him, but don't delay. Nothing says it better than the Nike slogan: "Just do it."

"The person who will not command his or her thoughts will soon lose command of his or her actions." (*Daily Walk Bible*)

"When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God of Heaven's Armies" (Jer. 15:16 NLT).

Join me a couple of verses of "**Take Time to Be Holy**": *"Take time to be holy; Speak oft with thy Lord; Abide in Him always, And feed on His Word. Make friends with God's children; Help those who are weak, Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek. Take time to be holy; The world rushes on; Spend much time in secret With Jesus alone. By looking to Jesus, Like Him thou shalt be; Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see."*

January 22

"And yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand" (Isa. 64:8 NLT).

"Who in the world do you think you are to second-guess God? Do you for one moment suppose any of us knows enough to call God into question? Clay doesn't talk back to the fingers that mold it, saying, 'Why did you shape me like this?' Isn't it obvious that a potter has a perfect right to shape one lump of clay into a vase for holding flowers and another into a pot for cooking beans?" (Rom. 9:20-21 MSG).

Take Me to the Potter's House

Pearl and I have become great fans of Steve and Annie Chapman. One of their albums is titled *The Potter's House*. The lead song begins: "I am a vessel broken by sin needing to be mended made useful again. Take me to the potter's house, put me on that wheel. His mighty hands on me is what I need to feel. Let Him turn my life around, make something of this clay. Take me to the potter's house today."

It was early Saturday morning and I was doing my daily walk upon the beach. Cars were lining up for this rare occasion when they could drive on the beach. It was sand castle Saturday.

One pickup pulling a trailer caught my attention. Its occupants piled out and began unloading construction forms: plastic buckets, shovels, etc.

Later in the day Pearl and I were amazed at the work of sand art that greeted us. It was called "Can-On-Beach." This enterprising group had built a sand outhouse with a quarter moon door partly-ajar, a still, and a dilapidated old truck. They topped off their work of art with sand animals lying around and a couple of hillbillies cradling their jugs.

I wasn't prepared for the next morning's walk. All that was left of "Can-On-Beach" were a couple lumps of sand. The tides coupled with rain and some night-time vandals had pretty well destroyed the work of art.

On the way back to the cabin that morning, I realized I had seen a small glimpse of my life as a believer and the lives of countless others, I'm sure. The Lord Jesus starts out making us works of art, so we may bear brightly His image. Then the tides of sin, the rains of temptation, and the destructiveness of Satan's vandals go to work and there we are, a lump.

You know the sand artists never came back to repair the damage to their masterpiece. Even the lumps are gone now. Oh how precious Jeremiah 18:4 became to me that morning: "But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to Him." Yeah!

"The ability to make good decisions demands a heart devoted to God!" (*Our Daily Bread*)

"The Lord said to Jeremiah: 'Go down at once to the potter's house. I will speak to you further there.' So I went down to the potter's house and found him working at his wheel. Now and then there would be something wrong with the pot he was molding from the clay with his hands. Then he would rework the clay into another pot as he saw fit. Then the Lord said to me, 'I, the Lord, say, "O nation of Israel, can I not deal with you as this potter deals with the clay? In my hands, you, O nation of Israel, are just like the clay in this potter's hand"' (Jer. 18:1-6 NET).

Join me in a couple of verses of **“Have Thine Own Way, Lord”**: *“Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mould me and make me After Thy will, While I am waiting, Yielded and still. Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Search me and try me, Master, today! Whiter than snow, Lord, Wash me just now, As in Thy presence Humbly I bow.”*

January 23

“A friend loves at all times, and a relative is born to help in adversity” (Prov. 17:17 NET).

“A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need” (Prov. 17:17 NLT).

“Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble” (Prov. 17:17 MSG).

“... And I can live my life on earth

Contented to the end,

If but a few shall know my worth

And proudly call me friend.” (Edgar A. Guest)

How to be a Friend

What kind of perspective do you bring to unpleasant situations? Do you add to the gloom or introduce joy? Do you join in the grumbling or find something to laugh about? Do you follow our Lord’s example and lift the spirits of “those bent beneath their loads”? (Barbara Johnson)

“The Lord lifts the fallen and those bent beneath their loads” (Ps. 145:14 TLB).

Never be careless with your relationships.

Never let loyalty and kindness get away from you.

“I command you to love each other” (Jn. 15:17).

“If you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like and it will be granted!” (Jn. 15:7 NLT).

Prayer: By Your power I pray that we will be blessed today and know you as our God. Please touch every heart and life, that burdens will be lifted and spiritual eyes opened to see You as our Savior and Lord.

January 24

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne” (Heb. 12:1-2 NLT).

I found this piece several years ago and would like to share it with you.

No Lack Whatever

by Arno C. Gaebelien

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”

And just what shall we not want?

Rest: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”

Forgiveness: “He restoreth my soul.”

Guidance: “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.”

Companionship: “For Thou art with me.”

Safety: “I will fear no evil.”

Comfort: “Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

Food: “Thou preparest a table before me.”

Victory: “In the presence of mine enemies.”

The Holy Spirit: “Thou anointest my head with oil.”

Perpetual joy: “My cup runneth over.”

Anything in time: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

Anything in all eternity: “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Hallelujah! What a Savior!

“When the battle is the Lord’s, the outcome is already certain.” (Unknown)

“Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don’t get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things” (2 Tim. 2:3-7 NLT).

Join me in a couple of verses of **“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”**: *“O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? There’s light for a look at the Savior, And life more abundant and free! His word shall not fail*

you He promised; Believe Him and all will be well: Then go to a world that is dying, His perfect salvation to tell! Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face; And the things of earth will grow strangely dim In the light of His glory and grace."

January 25

"Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged" (Col. 3:20-21 NLT).

"A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting, and when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are important. ... The fate of humanity is in his hands." (Abraham Lincoln)

Thanks for the Memories: Family Tips Which Work

Pearl and I became parents only thirteen months after marriage. We had contemplated foreign mission service, but before we knew it, we had our own home mission field to tend.

Much of our personal time went by the boards when the first baby arrived. We fell prey to neglect and really missed so much. Be sure you take care of each other because soon it will be the two of you and the Lord.

As I reflect on our life as parents with a full nest, a number of things come to mind which made a real difference in our relationship with our five children. I would like to share just a few of these.

The first is **TRUST**. Pearl and I made a common commitment to trust our children until they did something to make us change our minds. Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Second comes **EXPANDING RESPONSIBILITY**. Children need to know that as they are faithful in smaller things, they will be given the freedom to tackle greater things. Our kids' boundaries enlarged as they proved to be faithful stewards of the responsibilities they had been given. Our kids did so great in this area.

Number three, **FORGIVENESS** is essential. Both parents and children must tender and taste of it often. Parents do not always realize how a negative comment, unfair decision, or hasty judgment may be remembered for years to come. The words "I'm sorry" cover a multitude of mistakes.

Number four is **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**. Children should not feel they have to earn or work to keep their parents' love.

Fifth, we endeavored to be **POSITIVE** and excited about the things that were happening in their lives as well as in our life as a family. At times this was not easy.

Sixth, it is a good practice to point to the **FUTURE** in times of failure. We are big believers in forgetting those things which are behind and pressing toward those things which are in front. Mop up the spilled milk and forget it. There's more at the grocery store.

Seventh, we focused as a family on the **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**. Our children gained great respect for the word of God as it was taught to them, and they learned to pray.

Number eight—a situation for which we're eternally grateful—is that our children were exposed at young ages to many great Christian **ROLE MODELS**. Because we worked in Christian camping and the cream of the crop served on our staffs, our kids had the privilege of being around some of the finest examples of Christian young people a person could find.

Parenting involves tears, trials, trouble, and triumphs. When your nest is empty—and this will happen sooner than you think—you will know it was worth it all. Becky is in heaven and we really miss her love and laughter.

"As hard as it is to die well, it is harder to live well." (Richard Alleine)

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58 NASB).

Please join me in a couple of verses of "**Pass It On**": *"It only takes a spark to get a fire going, And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing; That's how it is with God's love; Once you've experienced it, You spread His love to ev'ryone; You want to pass it on. I wish for you, my friends, this happiness that I've found, You can depend on Him, It matters not where you're bound; I'll shout it from the mountaintop, I want my world to know; The Lord of love has come to me, I want to pass it on."*

January 26

"The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure" (1 Cor. 10:13 NLT).

"Choices are the hinges of destiny." (Edwin Markham)

Choices, Choices, Choices!

Choices. Paper or plastic? SUV or Lexus? PC or Mac? Stocks or CDs? Married or single? Children or no children? Public school, private school, or home school? Choices determine destiny. The choices you made determine the choices you have.

Looking back over our lives, we probably all realize we've been guilty of some pretty dumb choices. We would look to reverse the VCR of life and rerecord sections where we blew it. I tell the Lord that very thing and he says, "Forget it. I have. Now, get on with what's left." Who can argue with the pure logic of that response?

Scripture includes numerous biographies recording some pretty bad choices and also presents many biblical characters who made some really good choices. Joshua 24:15: "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Daniel did too! "But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. ... But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God" (Dan. 1:8; 6:10 NLT).

We really have only three choices: we can ignore God, we can fight God, or we can submit to God. Making no choice is also a choice.

May God cause us to be sensitive about choices we are making daily. May we seek and be sensitive to the Spirit's direction. May each step we take be one in which we walk by means of the Spirit.

"How very important it is to obey the Lord, *step by step*! We cannot know how much may hinge on one single step. The whole course of a life might be changed by just a step." (Isobel Kuhn, *In the Arena*)

"But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:11-12 NLT).

Join me in singing Stuart Hamblen's little chorus "**Is He Satisfied**": *"Do you ever search your heart as you watch the day depart? Is there something 'way down deep you try to hide? If this day should be the end and eternity begin, when the book is opened wide, would the Lord be satisfied? Is He satisfied, is He satisfied? Is He satisfied with me? Have I done my best, have I stood the test? Is He satisfied with me? When my Lord shall come again, when He walks and talks with men, what if ev'ry friend He had were just like me? Would He feel welcome here or would He go away in tears? Am I all that I should be? Is He satisfied with me?"*

January 27

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne" (Heb. 12:1-2 NLT).

Run to Win!

We are living in a "do-nothing" or "do as little as you can get by with" generation. We are content to be getting by with a minimum performance. Many would say, "Don't bug me with responsibility. I want to eat, drink, and make merry, for tomorrow they are going to repossess my Jaguar."

The problem in the US is we are going in the wrong direction. we are hunting for something better and we already have it. Like the Prodigal Son, we need to be heading home. We need to be heading where we've been. We need to return to the fact that great men and women are men and women of conviction, character, courage, and Christianity. We've raised a crop of kids in our generation that think life is made up of drinking, smoking, and having a good time. We've given our kids everything they want and forgotten to tell them how to live. We've taken away their opportunity to bloom where they are planted by blossoming all their potential for them.

The time is now to do something-either to lead, follow, or get out of the way.

Someone wisely said: "Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail." It's time to begin setting our sights high, shooting for big goals, and go where others have only dared to travel.

"Regardless of what came before or of what has yet to come, what matters most right now is how I choose to respond to the challenge before me. Will I lie down or will I fight? The choice is mine and I choose to finish strong." (Dan Green, *Finish Strong*)

"We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work" (Jn. 9:4 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of "**Work, for the Night Is Coming**": *"Work, for the night is coming, Work, through the morning hours; Work while the dew is sparkling, Work 'mid springing flowers; Work while the day grows brighter, Under the glowing sun; Work, for the night is coming, When man's work is done. Work, for the night is coming,*

*Under the sunset skies; While their bright tints are glowing, Work, for daylight flies; Work, till the last beam fadeth
Fadeth to shine no more; Work, while night is dark 'ning, When man's work is o'er."*

January 28

Conformed to His Image

Second Corinthians 3:18 "And we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being changed into the same likeness from one degree of glory to another as from the Spirit of the Lord."

God immediately upon salvation begins a most exciting and dramatic work in our lives conforming us to the image of His Son. This transformation process takes place inwardly in the renewing of our minds.

It is transformation by contemplation as we behold Him, the Living Water in the written Word, our lives are indelibly marked and changed.

Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

That which we see becomes a very part of our life and character. It is by spending time in the Word of God, contemplating the Savior that this work is done in our lives. It is cultivated by communion.

The inward change that takes place is manifested in our outward appearance. It is the longing of the spirit of God that He might manifest Christ through us.

Christ lives in me to dwell and to possess to the full, in order to shine out, to live out, to flow out. This is the normal experience from the Christian when he is right with God and living in the power of the Spirit.

As we gaze upon Him in the Word, growth is manifested in our lives and we begin to glow. It is GAZING, GROWING, AND GLOWING that is the experience of each one who is following the normal pattern for spiritual development. May God find this to be true of us.

"Some people are so proud that they are sitting around waiting for a vacancy in the Trinity." (Mark Twain)

"Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure" (1 Jn. 3:2-3 NLT).

Join me a couple verses of "**All That Thrills My Soul**": "*Who can cheer the heart like Jesus, By His presence all divine? True and tender, pure and precious, Oh how blest to call Him mine! Ev'ry need His hand supplying, Ev'ry good in Him I see; On His strength divine relying, He is All in All to me. All that thrills my soul is Jesus; He is more than life to me; (to me;) And the fairest of ten thousand, In my blessed Lord I see.*"

January 29

"Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you" (Ps. 25:4-5 NLT).

Weighed in the Balances

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? That there is none like him on the earth; a man of integrity and uprightness, who reveres God and turns away from evil. He still holds fast to his integrity, though you did incite me against him to consume him without any cause." ... Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Bid God farewell and die" (Job 2:3, 9).

The dictionary defines integrity as "unimpaired moral principles, honesty, soundness, the quality of being whole or undivided."

Integrity is that quality of character that is developed over time. It reveals the tenor of the life, the direction determined by decisions that are upright and moral.

A person of integrity is characterized as making the right decisions under pressure. There are three outstanding illustrations of integrity in the scriptures that I would call to your attention.

1. **Joseph**: When Mrs. Potiphar endeavored to solicit Joseph for sexual favors, his response was, "'How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?' And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her."

2. **Jehoshaphat** is the next illustration of integrity: When surrounded by the enemy and when all eyes are on him to act, he does the right thing and turns to the Lord.

3. **Jesus** in Matthew 4: He is tempted by Satan on three occasions, and each time He is pressured to act independent of the Father, and each time He counters with a message from the scriptures.

In all three of these illustrations you have individuals who are pressured to act but who resist that pressure and do the right thing.

I believe the real crisis of integrity comes when we forget that we are servants and we begin thinking selfish thoughts. I would go so far as to say that self-interest destroys integrity.

How about you? Is your life pointed in the direction of integrity because of your self-sacrificial servanthood? Job's response to that would be: "Then let him weigh in a just balance and God will know my integrity." (Job 31:6)

"The Lord is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray. He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way" (Ps. 25:8-9 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **"Victory in Jesus"**: *"I heard an old, old story, How a Saviour came from glory, How He gave His life on Calvary To save a wretch like me; I heard about His groaning, Of His precious blood's atoning, Then I repented of my sins and won the victory. I heard about a mansion He has built for me in glory, And I heard about the streets of gold Beyond the crystal sea; About the angels singing, And the old redemption story, And some sweet day I'll sing up there The song of victory. O victory in Jesus, My Saviour, forever, He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood; He loved me ere I knew Him and all my love is due Him, He plunged me to victory, Beneath the cleansing flood."*

January 30

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 NKJV).

"Along the way the cares and burdens of the journey can rob us of our hope and joy. We become distressed travelers in desperate need of encouragement and refreshment." (Bill Crowder, *Our Daily Bread*)

"Your own soul is nourished when you are kind. But you destroy yourself when you are cruel" (Prov. 11:17 NLT).

During the South African Boer War (1899-1902) a man was convicted of an unusual crime: being a discourager. The South African of Ladysmith was under siege. This man, a traitor, moved up and down the line of soldiers, who were defending the city and did everything he could to discourage them. Fortunately, his efforts were unsuccessful. (Unknown)

It seems in a church, office, family and circle of friends, there are encouragers and discouragers. Let's make sure we stay on the positive side with our comments and opinions.

Encouragement is oxygen to the soul.

Prayer: Our Father, please bring to our minds those relationships that need a call, letter or special prayer. Give us spiritual insight into how to relate, encourage and connect with the people we meet today.

January 31

"Then he said to the crowd, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me'" (Lk. 9:23 NLT).

The Number One Priority

I had the joy of teaching Romans chapter 1 some time ago. Romans 1:5 hit me in the heart: "through whom we received grace and apostleship with a view to [promoting] obedience which springs from faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake" (DAV). Our number one priority, our major concern ought to be to express to the Lord an obedient heart. How important is obedience in your life? What would be the level of your obedience if it were tested at this time?

In Christ Himself we have the perfect prototype of obedience. In the words of Hebrews 5:8: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (NASB).

For us, obedience to God starts simple. It begins with an attitude.

Obedience continues with a look at the instructions. As Max Lucado, in his book *In the Eye of the Storm: A Day in the Life of Jesus*, puts it:

Every day I have the honor of sitting down with a book that contains the words of the One who created me.

Every day I have the opportunity to let him give me a thought or two on how to live.

If I don't do what he says, He doesn't burn the book or cancel my subscription. If I disagree with what he says, lightning doesn't split my swivel chair or an angel doesn't mark my name off the holy list. If I don't understand what he says, he doesn't call me a dummy.

In fact, he calls me "Son," and on a different page explains what I don't understand. (Lucado, 1991, 69)

Accountability, transparency, honesty and uprightness are all spin-offs of the obedient heart. How much of a priority is obedience in your life?

"But Samuel replied, 'What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams'" (1 Sam. 15:22 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **"Trust and Obey"**: *"When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, What a glory He sheds on our way! While we do His good will He abides with us still, And with all who will trust and obey. But we never can prove the delights of His love Until all on the altar we lay; For the favor He shows and the joy he bestows Are for them who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey."*

February 1

HOSPITALITY

"The Love of a Stranger"

Home is where it happens.
 Opportunity for edification and evangelism.
 Spiritually, sensitive servants.
 Prayer, preparations and perseverance.
 Invitations that issue in involvement.
 Time and talents it takes to touch lives.
 Active adventure and acceptance.
 Love that longs to let you look.
 Ideas initiating impact.
 Table talk that tells my testimony.
 You and your yearning to yield.

"Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you" (Rev. 3:20 MSG).

"An Open Heart Precedes an Open House."

The Love of a Stranger

Maybe you've visited someone's home before and felt like all the little things that might have distracted from your time were taken care of.

This year, you'll probably play host to friends and family. You, too, will want to make sure every detail is cared for so that their visit goes smoothly. But why not do more? Why not look outside your familiar circle? How about having people you don't know too well in your home this year for the purpose of sharing the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Greek word translated in the New Testament as hospitality is actually a combination of two words. The first part of the word means "love" and the last part of the word is "stranger." It would be accurate to translate the New Testament word hospitality as the "love of the stranger." This word occurs in the list of requirements for elders and deacons. The apostle Paul urges: "Be hospitable to one another without complaint" (1 Pet. 4:9 NASB).

In *The Measure of a Man*, Gene Getz maintains that hospitality is not a new idea, much less unique to Christianity; it is considered a sacred responsibility in Oriental culture. I believe that hospitality was designed by God to build bridges for personal ministry. Practicing hospitality opens opportunities for both edification and evangelism.

My challenge to you this year is first of all to recognize that if you have never received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, He is waiting for you to express hospitality to Him by inviting Him into your life. Revelation 3:20 says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (NASB).

If you have already opened the door to Jesus, may I challenge you to reach out to others this holiday season. Open your heart, open your hand, and open your home!

"The best way to face life's changes is to look to the unchanging God." (*Daily Walk Bible*)

"Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay" (1 Pet. 4:9 NLT).

How about a couple of verses of "**Let Us Break Bread Together**": "*Let us break bread together on our knees; Let us break bread together on our knees. Let us praise God together on our knees; Let us praise God together on our knees. When I fall on my knees; With my face to the rising sun, O Lord have mercy on me.*"

February 2

"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:24-27 NLT).

Incentive to Holiness

What does it take to light your fire, to turn you on, to get you moving? For some of us it's to make the million-dollar round table. To others, it's to become president of a corporation. To still others, it's to be able to shoot golf in the 70s, to water ski bare-footed, to finish a marathon, to get a degree, to write a best-seller, to win a gold medal, to play on a dream team. For the apostle Paul, it was to finish and to finish well.

Paul gives us a little peek at what he thought about and what pushed him out of bed in the morning in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. I encourage each of you to read this passage.

In these verses I see four incentives to holiness:

1. **Run to Win** (9:24)—“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!”

2. **Discipline Produces Reward** (9:25)—“All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.”

3. **Find the Goal and Hit the Mark** (9:26)—“So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.”

4. **Extra Effort Produces Excellence** (9:27)—“I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.”

How are you doing in your race? What are your incentives to holiness? Are you running to win? Are you exercising the discipline that produces reward? Have you found the goal of God’s will for your life and are you hitting the mark? Have you gotten weary in the race? Are the cramps and fatigue combining to make you ask the question: “Is it worth it?” Are you tempted to stop short of the goal? Remember, extra effort produces excellence.

The most important thought in 10 words or less: “I want to be a man that God can use.”

“I glorified you on earth By completing down to the last detail What you assigned me to do” (Jn. 17:4 MSG).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Holy, Holy, Holy”**: *“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee: Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty! God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity! Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore Thee, Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea; Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee, Who wert, and art, and evermore shall be.”*

February 3

“Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man.” (Benjamin Franklin)

Sovereignty Sets the Schedule

A friend sometime back, said he wanted to give me something to solve all my problems. I told him I had already found everything I needed in God the Father’s gift, the Lord Jesus. He persisted and handed me a round wooden coin, that had the words ‘round tuit’ printed on the surface. Since I am often guilty of saying about opportunities, “I want to do this when I get a ‘round tuit,’” he felt he had taken away all my excuses.

Aren’t you glad that God the Father did not wait to send His only Son until He got a “round tuit”?

God operates on a schedule. “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die” (Ecc. 3:1, 2 NIV). “My times are in Your hands” (Ps. 31:15 NIV). When questioned by the disciples about the kingdom, the resurrected Savior responded: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7 NASB). Speaking about the appearing of the Lord Jesus, Paul tells Timothy: “which He will bring about at the proper time” (1 Tim. 6:15 NASB).

With a new day before us and the awareness that we are one year closer to our scheduled appointment, what should we do? Three questions arise.

1. What do you want to accomplish with the rest of your life? What is your passion?
2. How are you going to do this? Make your plan.
3. What are your priorities? List them.

Consider the following five areas:

1. **Personal**—your relationship with the Lord.
2. **Partner**—your marriage needs.
3. **Parenting**—your family needs.
4. **Professional**—your job goals.
5. **Pleasure**—your hobbies, etc.

If you haven’t gotten a “round tuit” yet. Get it now!

“No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:37-39 NLT).

Join me in a few verses of **“My Saviour”**: *“I am not skilled to understand What God hath willed, what God hath planned; I only know at His right hand Is One who is my Saviour! I take Him at His word indeed: ‘Christ died for sinners,’ this I read; For in my heart I find a need Of Him to be my Saviour! That He shall leave His place on high. And come for sinful man to die. You count it strange? so once did I, Before I knew my Saviour!”*

February 4

“But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives’” (Gen. 50:19-20).

God Meant It For Good

Why me? Why this? Why now? Are often the questions that plague us when some new trial blows up in our faces. If you can sit there with the stem and the torn pieces of the balloon that are left and say: "Thanks, I needed that!" you have come a long way toward growing up in Jesus.

"And we know that God causes all things to work TOGETHER ..." The secret to acceptance of what God allows is seen in the word "together." Trauma, trials, and terrible happenings seen in isolation can make us bitter.

I love homemade chocolate ice cream. A friend gave me a recipe that is out of sight. When you behold the ingredients in isolation it just doesn't sound that great, but put them together and you have something Tummy Tinglin' good, I'll tell you! Almost as good as yogurt.

Peter caught this truth when he challenged the suffering saints with these words: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation" (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

The Father is just panning for gold, so just let Him have at it because soon we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

The story is told of a wagon train going west that saw a prairie fire coming toward them. The wagon master frightened the people by ordering them to set the dry grass ablaze near the wagons. They did as he told them and when the burned area cooled, he told them to quickly get the wagons to the charred ground.

This is a beautiful illustration of John 1:17 "For Moses gave us only the law with its rigid demands and merciless justice, while Jesus Christ brought us loving forgiveness as well."

Our safety lies in the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. God's vengeance fell on Him and we are safe with Christ where the wrath of God has already fallen. Our Savior has truly brought us loving forgiveness.

"But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield" (Ps. 5:11-12 NIV).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**And Can It Be That I Should Gain?**": *"And can it be that I should gain An int'rest in the Saviour's blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? He left His Father's throne above, So free, so infinite His grace! Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race? Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"*

February 5

"But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that" (1 Cor. 5:10 NLT).

Commended by the Law

For many years my spring tour included Greenville, Texas. We have many precious friends through that ministry.

One night two state troopers, Barry Morris and Steve Carlson, came into the class in full uniform. Their young wives accompanied them.

On this particular night I was teaching from Romans 13 and I came to verse 3: "For the rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior but for evil. Now are you desiring to be having no fear of the authority? Keep on doing the good and you will receive commendation from the same."

I mentioned, off the cuff, that I have never in my years of travel been commended by the law for my good driving. However, I have certainly experienced the wrath of the law at times when my speed was suspect.

A month later, Pearl and I were driving down Highway 69 from Sherman to Greenville on the last week of tour. Just about four miles out of Greenville we came upon a highway patrol car. As we passed him, the officer immediately began flashing the gumball lights on the patrol car's roof, letting me know that I was in trouble. My instant response was, "Now what have I done?" I had set the speedometer on cruise control and felt like I was being a law-abiding citizen!

When I got out of the car to meet my accuser, who but Barry was there to greet me with a big smile? And a ticket! The citation was not for speeding but for being the safest-driving Bible teacher in the Southwest. As you can imagine, Pearl and I have had a lot of fun over the episode.

My experience of being "commended" by the law reminded me once again of the judgment seat of Christ. With our freedom in the Lord Jesus, there is also accountability. As Paul's words in Romans 14:12 testify, "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God."

I pray that your heart is so directed, and that your internal motivation is to be living your Christian life in such a way that you will hear at the judgment seat or bema, "Well done thou good and faithful servant ... enter into the joys I have prepared for you" (Matt. 5:21).

“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19-20 NASB).

Join me in a couple verses of **“I Know Whom I Have Believed”**: *“I know not why God’s wondrous grace To me He hath made known, Nor why unworthy—Christ in love Redeemed me for His own. I know not how this saving faith To me He did impart, Nor how believing in His Word Wrought peace within my heart. But ‘I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to Keep that which I’ve committed Unto Him against that day.’”*

February 6

Car Maintenance—Marriage Maintenance

Car maintenance is important. It makes the car operate trouble-free for a longer time.

Our son was sure he had found the first car he would own. We suggested he take it to a mechanic and get it checked out before he put any money down.

He came home without the car. The mechanic said it looked as if the former owner had never changed the oil. There was gunk and sludge in the engine, which was ruined.

The importance of marriage maintenance cannot be overstated. If a healthy, happy marriage is to last a lifetime it is necessary to work on maintenance every day.

When two people drive their marital car on the bumpy road of life and put in no fuel, no motor oil, no new tires or alignment, sooner or later they will end up stalled by the side of the road.

How can we keep our marital car running on all cylinders and on the right road to marital bliss?

1. **Maintain Connection:** share, talk, plan, express.
2. **Maintain Faithfulness:** One man—One woman. God first, marriage second, others third.
3. **Maintain relationship with God:** His infinite sovereign power will keep the relationship safe. This is vital!

4. **Maintain relationship:** by nurturing each other and by being totally committed to the care and happiness of your friend, lover and partner for life.

“Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord” (Prov. 16:20 NIV).

“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord” (Prov. 18:22 NIV).

“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11 NIV).

Prayer: Lord, give us wisdom and understanding on how to relate to our spouses and in all our relationships. The past seems to dominate at times. The sins and mistakes committed are not reconciled and forgiven. Your power and grace are sufficient in all things. Lead us Lord Jesus and renew a right spirit within us. Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. Give us Your victory Father God.

February 7

“If racing against mere men makes you tired, how will you race against horses? If you stumble and fall on open ground, what will you do in the thickets near the Jordan?” (Jer. 12:5 NLT).

God Delights in Finishers

Revelation 3:2 says: “Be becoming wide awake (wake up) and strengthen the things that are remaining, which were about to die; for I have found no deeds of yours that have been brought to completeness in the sight of My God.”

There are two commands given in this verse:

Command #1: “Be becoming wide awake (wake up).”

Command #2: “Strengthen the things that are remaining, which were about to die.”

In the latter part of the verse he gives the reason for the two previous commands: “For I have found no deeds of yours that have been brought to completeness in the sight of My God.”

This church at Sardis had been fantastic in starting things with enthusiasm but had failed to bring to completion any deed or task that they had started.

The Corinthians had promised to give to the relief of the saints fund, but they had not done anything about it. A year had passed, and so the admonishment is given.

In the life of the Old Testament judge Gideon, we see him in the battle with the Midianites and characterized as weary, and yet pursuing.

In the Galatian epistle Paul says in Galatians 5:7, “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?”

There is no follow-through here in the church at Sardis. No finishers. They have stopped short somewhere along the way. They have been distracted by the world, the flesh or the devil and have become casualties in the race of life.

Maybe you feel like your life is filled with piles of broken promises, charcoaled commitments that once flamed with fire and fervor, forgotten faggots at a fireside.

Since the Lord delights in finishers, maybe you need to “stir up the gift that is in you” and ask the Lord to fill you with the fire and fervency of the Spirit so that you might “work the works of Him that sent you while it is day.” May God in these exciting days give us a huge army of those who are committed to finishing strong, no matter what happens.

“I remind myself of my commitment to finish strong and to focus on my true priorities in life. Because as the quote says: ‘To the world you may be just one person ... but to one person you may be the world.’” (Dan Green, *Finish Strong*)

“As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:6-8 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Lead On, O King Eternal”**: *“Lead on, O King Eternal, The day of march has come; Henceforth in fields of conquest Thy tents shall be our home. Thro’ days of preparation Thy grace has made us strong, And now, O King Eternal, We lift our battle song. Lead on, O King Eternal, We follow not with fears; For gladness breaks like morning Where’er Thy face appears; Thy cross is lifted o’er us; We journey in its light: The crown awaits the conquest; Lead on, O God of might.”*

February 8

“Friends, when life gets really difficult, don’t jump to the conclusion that God isn’t on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner” (1 Pet. 4:12-13 MSG).

Turn Up the Heat!

Pearl and I once found ourselves in Lake Jackson, Texas, participating in a wedding of friends. We drove the short distance to the Gulf of Mexico. The huge oil refineries concentrated in the area impressed us.

Later I looked up the word refinery in the dictionary and found the meaning to be “a place and apparatus for refining sugar, metals, or oils.” To refine means to make fine or pure, to free from impurities.

All Christians are born again by God’s Spirit and undergo a sort of spiritual relocation as they are taken out of Adam and placed in Jesus Christ. In our new relationship with Christ, many holdovers—habits, behaviors, choices—from our old lives may be offensive to our heavenly Father. We are rather like crude oil in need of refinement to be useful to Him. The process through which the Father refines the Christian may prove painful and is often misunderstood.

It also helps to understand the results of the refining process.

1. Sin is dealt with and cut out of our lives. We will never be rid of all sin. We can expect to be refined all the way to the heavenly home (see Phil. 1:6).

2. Strength is gained through the refining process as we learn to depend upon God. (2 Cor. 12:9, Phil. 4:13).

3. Sweetness develops. A fragrance flows from brokenness (2 Cor. 2:15, Ps. 34:18).

4. Steadfastness grows (1 Cor. 15:58).

Understanding the refining process helps us keep on keeping on. If you find yourself in the Father’s furnace, tell Him to turn up the heat. Adversity is a sign He is getting ready to use you. Get excited! A rare privilege may soon be yours.

“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing” (Jam. 1:2-4 NLT).

“With promises like this to pull us on, dear friends, let’s make a clean break with everything that defiles or distracts us, both within and without. Let’s make our entire lives fit and holy temples for the worship of God” (2 Cor. 7:1 MSG).

Join me in a couple verses of **“He Giveth More Grace”**: *“He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater; He sendeth more strength when the labors increase. To added affliction He addeth His mercy; To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace. When we have exhausted our store of endurance, When our strength has failed ere the day is half done, When we reach the end of our hoarded resources, Our Father’s full giving is only begun. His love has no limit; His grace has no measure; His pow’r has no boundary known unto men. For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!”*

February 9

“Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world” (1 Pet. 4:12-13 NLT).

Stability in a Storm

While teaching 2 Corinthians I came across this passage in chapter 2:12-13: “Now having come to Troas for the gospel of Christ and a door having been opened for me in the Lord, I have had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but having bidden them farewell, I went on to Macedonia.”

Paul had left Ephesus and had planned to rendezvous with Titus in Troas so that he could get a fresh report of what was going on in Corinth. When he arrived at Troas he found two situations: first, an open door for ministry; second, no Titus.

Under unexpected conditions like these, our mind sometimes plays tricks on us. We always believe the worst. I am sure Paul, as he waited at Troas until the last passenger got off the boat and saw no Titus, believed the worst.

In view of the unexpected, Paul must make a decision. He has two options. Should he stay in Troas and capitalize on the open door of ministry available to him? Or should he book passage and head toward Macedonia in search of Titus? Paul rolls up the scroll, packs his bag and buys a ticket for Macedonia.

From a human perspective, we may think that Paul should have stayed to minister in Troas and trusted the Lord with Titus and his circumstances, but scripture contains no condemnation of the apostle’s action. Instead we stand amazed at his calm, his presence of mind, his refusal to panic, his willingness to accept the unexpected and seek Titus elsewhere.

When Paul gets to Macedonia he finds his friend, and after receiving a good report, exclaims in 2 Corinthians 2:14: “But thanks be to God who is always leading us in His triumph in Christ and is making known through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”

How can you and I be just as stable in a storm of unexpected circumstances? I have three suggestions:

1. **Remember God’s Sovereign Purpose Will Prevail:** Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28. “The Lord of Heaven’s Armies has sworn this oath: ‘It will all happen as I have planned. It will be as I have decided’” (Isa. 14:24 NLT).
2. **Stand On His Promises in the Midst of the Storm:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-17. “So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said” (Acts 27:25 NLT).
3. **Remain Steadfast in Service:** 2 Corinthians 15:58, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7, and Psalm 27:14. “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up’” (Dan. 3:16-18 NLT).

“Though you may ask God to do something for you, He generally wants to do something in you.” (*Daily Walk Bible*)

“So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you” (1 Pet. 4:19 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Day by Day”**: “*Day by day and with each passing moment, Strength I find to meet my trials here; Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment, I’ve no cause for worry or for fear, He whose heart is kind beyond all measure Gives unto each day what He deems best. Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure, Mingling toil with peace and rest. Help me then in ev’ry tribulation So to trust Thy promises, O Lord, That I lose not faith’s sweet consolation Offered me within Thy holy Word. Help, me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting, E’er to take, as from a father’s hand, One by one, the days, the moments fleeting, Till I reach the promised land.*”

February 10

“These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world” (1 Pet. 1:7 NLT).

“It is the fire of suffering which will bring forth the gold of godliness.” (Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*)

The Mystery of Godliness

“And most certainly, great is the mystery of godliness: He, who was made visible in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

We ask ourselves the question, “Why does Paul make reference to the mystery of godliness?” It is a mystery because it is not the way we thought. We are going to learn that godliness is not wrapped up in a performance but in a person, even Jesus Christ.

The mystery refers to that which is hidden or concealed and is now revealed. The mystery of godliness equals Christ.

Godliness is Christ manifest in our conduct and conversation. It is the result of a genuine work of God in an individual's life. The focus of godliness is Jesus Christ. In Him we have the essence of godliness.

The rest of this verse is made up of six verbs. There are three opposites that make up these six verbs.

1. Manifest in the flesh—vindicate in the Spirit
2. Seen of angels—preached unto the Gentiles
3. Believed on in the world—received into glory

In our first step, God came down and in the sixth step, God went up. He was manifest in the flesh and received up into glory.

Yes, the mystery of godliness centers in a person. That person is Jesus Christ. The mystery of Godliness involves the six things we now consider:

1. The mission **ATTEMPTED**—He was made visible in the flesh.
2. The mission **ACCOMPLISHED**—He was vindicated in the Spirit.
3. The mission **AFFIRMED**—He was beheld by angels.
4. The mission **ANNOUNCED**—He was proclaimed among the nations.
5. The mission **APPLIED**—He was believed on in the world.
6. The mission **ASCENDED**—He was taken up in glory.

Godliness is what we are because of who He is. Godliness is the result of a relationship—the deeper the relationship, the more godly.

The more God is allowed to work in our lives, the greater the godliness. Yes, godliness centers in a personal relationship to a living person.

“The question is not, ‘Is what you have sufficient?’ but ‘Are you sufficient for what you have?’” (Robert Fulghum)

“There are many ways to lose your life. Death is only one of them.” (Robert Fulghum)

“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Phil. 1:6 NLT).

Join me in a verse of **“More Like the Master”**: *“More like the Master I would ever be, More of His meekness, more humility; More zeal to labor, more courage to be true, More consecration for work He bids me do. Take Thou my heart, I would be Thine alone; Take Thou my heart and make it all Thine own; Purge me from sin, O Lord, I now implore, Wash me and keep me Thine forever more.”*

February 11

“All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize” (1 Cor. 9:25 NLT).

Divine Disqualification

Being an old marathoner who has hung up the shoes forever, I get excited when Paul likes our Christian life to a race. For instance, he says in Galatians 5:7: “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (NASB). And among his final comments to Timothy are these words, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7 NASB).

Keeping the faith. Even when they blast homeruns, baseball players must touch all the bags when rounding the bases. Slalom skiers must make all the gates on a run or they are penalized. A marathoner may cross the finish line, but it only counts if he runs the entire 26.2 miles. No one can run it for him. No one can give him a lift. He cannot swerve from the route. Shortcuts and sloppy performance disqualify him.

So it can be in the Christian life. If we have trusted Christ, we cannot lose our salvation. “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me” (Jn. 10:28 NLT). But we still can blow it in the stretch in terms of eternal rewards. Sloppy morals, lackadaisical commitment, self-centeredness—otherwise known as just plain sin—may cause us to stumble enroute and limp across the finish line. Our race of life ends, but neither memorably nor well. And while we find ourselves in heaven because we have trusted Christ, we also find ourselves in the presence of One who gave His all and probably hoped for more from us.

What is your mind-set, as you are engaged in the race that is the Christian life? May I suggest three things that will keep us on track and keep us from embarrassment at the bema—the “judgment seat”?

1. **A teachable spirit**
2. **A sense of accountability**
3. **A commitment to obedience**

I look forward to seeing you at the finish line!

“Even a long dangerous journey can be faced confidently when God is leading the expedition.” (*Daily Walk Bible*)

“Then Jesus explained: ‘My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, “Four months between planting and harvest.” But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest’” (Jn. 4:34-35 NLT).

"We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work" (Jn. 9:4 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of "**O to Be Like Thee**": *"O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer, This is my constant longing and prayer; Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures, Jesus Thy perfect likeness to wear. O to be like Thee! Full of compassion, Loving, forgiving, tender and kind; Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting, Seeking the wand'ring sinner to find. O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee, Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art! Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness; Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart."*

February 12

"So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong" (Heb. 12:12-13 NLT).

Living in View of Accountability

Accountability. Many run from it. Few seek it.

Webster describes accountability as: "The state of being accountable, answerable, liable or responsible." The word conveys the idea of caring for a trust. Christians should be particularly aware of their accountability before God.

The Bible makes it clear that we are going to be answerable to God for how we spend our Christian lives. As the apostle Paul puts it: "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12 NASB). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10 NASB).

Jesus refers to the importance of accountability in several of His parables. In Matthew 25 He tells of three men entrusted with talents. The message is plain: With the privilege of serving comes responsibility.

One of the most effective ways to remember our accountability before God is to develop a sense of accountability to godly men and women.

Believers who take solid steps toward developing accountability are men and women of integrity. Trustworthy, transparent, they lack hidden agendas. They are motivated by the desire to become Christlike. They long to practice Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (NASB).

Would you like to become more accountable as a believer right now? Focus on these three areas:

Purity—Long to become increasingly holy as God is holy. "But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16 NLT).

Projects—Healthy goals and desires are often achieved after we share them. "Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith" (2 Cor. 13:5 NLT).

Private Disciplines—Meeting regularly with a fellow believer to discuss spiritual matters encourages us to read the Scriptures daily, memorize the Word, pray, give, and share our faith. "Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15 NLT).

"He does not say, 'As many as I love I commend'; but, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' It is more necessary for us that we should make a discovery of our faults than of our virtues. (C. H. Spurgeon)

May what we do as believers in the here-and-now cause us to stand unashamed in the here-after. In the words of an unknown poet:

*When I turn my face to the setting sun,
When the race is ended and the course is run,
When the trials are past and the triumphs begun,
May I hear in heaven my Master's, "Well done."*

"Be careful that you don't become a hypocrite by spending all your time trying to get others right with God before you worship Him yourself." (Oswald Chambers)

"Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love" (1 Cor. 16:13-14 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Cleanse Me**": *"Search me, O God and know my heart today; Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray: See if there be some wicked way in me: Cleanse me from ev'ry sin, and set me free. Lord, take my life, and make it wholly Thine: Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine; Take all my will, my passion, self and pride; I now surrender: Lord, in me abide."*

February 13

No Account or Zealous?

“Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people” (Col. 3:23 NLT).

While vacationing in Astoria, Oregon, my husband I went to the Lewis and Clark Museum. In one of the display cases was Lewis’ journal. On the page being displayed was a list of the men who were on the expedition. By each man’s name he had written their strengths. One man had by his name “excels at tracking.” Some men had several of their contributions to the team listed. About three quarters of the way down the list there was a man with “OF NO ACCOUNT” written by his name. What a sad commentary on this man’s life, and lack of contribution to the team.

In the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, chapter three has a list of names. Nehemiah lists the names of his team that are helping him rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. Thirty-eight times the words “repaired” or “made repairs” appears next to a name. There is **ONE** exception, his name appears in Nehemiah 3:20. BARUCH the son of Zabbai. Written by Baruch’s name is the phrase “He ZEALOUSLY repaired ...” Baruch stood out—while everyone else made repairs or repaired their section of the wall, Baruch ZEALOUSLY repaired his section. I just love it. I can’t wait to meet Baruch the Builder when I get to heaven.

Application: Think of the many teams of which you are a part. Home. Work. Church. Volunteer Organization. What best describes you on this team? “Of no account” or “Zealously”? It is never too late to change.

Prayer: Father, we pray You will bless the work of our hands this day. Also, may every thought, word and deed be filtered through the control of the Holy Spirit who abides in us. May we honor Your holy name and in every work and word be an able and zealous team member.

(Guest contributor, Donna Anderson Skorheim)

February 14

Love ever gives—
 Forgives—outlives—
 And ever stands
 With open hands.
 And while it lives,
 It gives.
 For this is Love’s prerogative—
 To give—and give—and give— (John Oxenham)

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance” (1 Cor. 13:4-7 NLT).

S.H.A.P.E.

by Donna Anderson Skorheim

I want to share with you something our daughter Donna wrote. Donna serves with her husband Mark at Faith Community Church here in Tyler. Donna is a corporate chaplain, serving on staff of Chaplains USA.

I found a card that spoke to me (in fact I have sent it to some of you!). The card has a quote from Rick Warren (*Purpose Driven Life*) on the top. “God deliberately shaped and formed you to serve Him in a way that makes you unique.”

The card then has the following acrostic:

Spiritual Gifts
 Heart
 Abilities
 Personality
 Experiences

The card also has a new translation of my chosen life verse that I chose while in College. “We’re the clay and You’re the Potter: All of us are what You made us” (Isa. 64:8 MSG).

The ironic thing is God has shaped each of us to be a blessing to others in ways that are unique to us. Today is Valentine’s Day. Let me give you a challenge. Look around at work and see if there is someone who is alone for the first time on Valentine’s Day or someone who is going through a difficult time. Ask the Lord if there is a way that you could minister to this co-worker or friend. Maybe you will feel led to do something anonymous and just put on the card “wanted to remind you this Valentine’s Day that God loves you.” I do not know how He might lead you, but I encourage you to do this act of kindness as a Valentine’s gift of love to Our Heavenly Father.

God has SHAPed you, uniquely and wants to use you to show His love and kindness to someone for Him. Happy Valentine’s Day! (Taken from Donna Skorheim’s Devotional #74)

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (Jn. 13:34-35 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **“O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go”**: *“O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee; I give Thee back the life I owe, That in Thine ocean depths its flow May richer, fuller be. O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to Thee; I trace the rainbow through the rain, And feel the promise is not vain That morn shall tearless be.”*

February 15

“For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.’ As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn’t discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all” (Heb. 12:6-8 NLT).

From 85 to 5

Several years ago during winter tour the weather was unusually warm—this is no longer an unusual occurrence. On the fourth week, driving back from Sherman to Dallas on Wednesday afternoon, the temperature reached 85. By the time I was heading home on Friday morning it was 5 degrees in Tulsa. How is that for going from the sublime to the ridiculous!

How often we must face that very experience in our lives.

James says in James 4:13-17: “Look here, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.’ How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. What you ought to say is, ‘If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.’ Otherwise you are boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil. Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it” (NLT).

There is the precious confidence in the midst of the unexpected, that God is in the process of working all these things together for good. I am so glad it is in the present tense because it tells me He is continuously and daily, yea, even moment by moment, involved in my life. His sovereign purpose is being accomplished in all things.

Margaret Clarkson, in her book *Grace Grows Best in Winter*, says: “The sovereignty of God is the one impregnable rock to which the suffering human heart must cling. The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident: they may be the work of evil, but that evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God.”

Author Max Lucado writes vividly of the abandonment of the Son on the cross as he bore our sin:

“Here is the cup, my Son. Drink it alone.”

God must have wept as he performed his task. Every lie, every lure, every act done in shadows was in that cup. Slowly, hideously they were absorbed in the body of the Son. The final act of incarnation. The spotless Lamb was blemished.

The King turns away from his Prince. The undiluted wrath of a sin-hating Father falls upon his sin-filled Son. The fire envelops him. The shadows hide him. The Son looks for his Father, but the Father cannot be seen.

“My God, my God ... why?”

It was the most gut-wrenching cry of loneliness in history, and it came not from a prisoner or a widow or a patient. It came from a hill, from a cross, from a Messiah.

“My God, my God,” he screamed, “why did you abandon me!”

Never have words carried such hurt. Never has one being been so lonely. The despair is darker than the sky. The two who have been one are now two. (Max Lucado, *The Cross*, 33-34)

“Sin is so big that it takes a Christ with a cross to measure it.” (*Daily Walk Bible*)

“Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. Don’t get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil” (Prov. 4:25-27 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **“Wounded for Me”**: *“Wounded for me, wounded for me, There on the cross He was wounded for me; Gone my transgressions, and now I am free, All because Jesus was wounded for me. Dying for me, dying for me, There on the cross He was dying for me; Now in His death my redemption I see, All because Jesus was dying for me.”*

February 16

“There are two things I’ve learned: There is no Cinderella. And, I’m not her Prince.” (Unknown)

An unmarried man penned some extraordinary words which can be applied to the marriage relationship (see Phil. 2:1-5, NASB). The apostle Paul begged his fellow Christians at Philippi to spread encouragement, love, fellowship, and understanding among themselves. And men and women marry in hopes of receiving those very things. Yet as husbands and wives, shouldn’t we be more concerned with being encouraging rather than encouraged? Loving

rather than loved? Understanding rather than understood? In other words, shouldn't we focus on fulfilling the needs of our mate in these areas?!

One Desire of Marriage (Fellowship)

Paul exhorted the Philippians to remember the importance of "fellowship" (Phil. 2:1) with other Christians. This wonderful bond that believers can have with like-minded others involves heart-to-heart communication, essential in any good marriage as well.

Guys, your wife wants a companion who will share of himself. She wants to know what happened at work, what problems cropped up, what successes were achieved. She wants a prayer partner who is truly a spiritual leader in the home. And she wants a good listener who is interested in what she has to say. Women, your husband wants someone who is on his team, who supports him, and who listens without continually criticizing.

Most men realize that their fellowship with their wife is much like their fellowship with God. God wants us to speak with Him, to consult Him, to listen to Him. And as we communicate with Him, we'll become better able to communicate with our spouse. Many men have told me that the key to their becoming open and vulnerable with their wives is that they first began to be that way with the Lord.

"Give of your hands to serve and your hearts to love." (Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

For any marriage, it's vital to remember that what seems like the end can often be a new beginning. Loss of passion does not equal loss of love. Loss of love does not equal loss of hope. Loss of hope does not mean a relationship should be abandoned.

When troubles first begin, hope is resilient, but it gradually becomes fragile and seems to break. But even when hope seems lost, a tiny strand lingers. We pray you will find that golden strand and hold on tightly, for its powerful allure can help you find the way to become one again. (Dr. Steve Stephens and Alice Gray, *The Walk Out Woman*, (20)

You are the other part of me

I am the other part of you.

We'll work together

With never a thought of walking out. (Ruth Harms Calkin, *Love Is So Much More*, Lord)

"Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth" (Prov. 5:18 NLT).

Prayer of Eugene Peterson: "Lord, protect me from being distracted by the sensational, from being diverted by the extraordinary. Keep me faithful in the daily round, attending to the common details of mercy and holiness. Amen."

Join me in singing "**The Servant Song**" with a few changes: "[*Sweetheart*], let me be your servant Let me be as Christ to you Pray that I may have the grace To let you be my servant, too. We are pilgrims on a journey We are partners on the road We are here to help each other Walk the mile and bear the load. I will weep when you are weeping When you laugh I'll laugh with you I will share your joy and sorrow Till we've seen this journey through. When we sing to God in heaven We shall find such harmony Born of all we've known together Of Christ's love and agony. [*Sweetheart*], let me be your servant Let me be as Christ to you Pray that I may have the grace To let you be my servant, too."

February 17

"Would that I had served my God the way I have watched my waistline!" (Cardinal Wolsey)

"Prepare your shields, and advance into battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor" (Jer. 46:3-4 NLT).

The War Begins

Moonlight touched the bedroom walls of a sixty-year-old French schoolmistress. As Madame Angele Levrault opened her eyes, flashes of red and white lights reflected in a mirror across from her bed. The low drone of planes, muffled explosions in the distance, plus the staccato of flak batteries sent Madame Levrault bounding to the window. Far up the coast from her small village, brilliant clusters of flares gave the clouds an eerie, red glow. The schoolmistress assumed that Cherbourg, twenty-seven miles away, was being bombed again, but she thought her home was safe. Quickly donning shoes and a robe, she headed through the house and out the back door toward the outhouse.

The garden was peaceful. A combination of moonbeams and flares lit the sky, accentuating long shadows. Within seconds the sound of planes grew louder; they were flying fast and low. A sudden, deafening burst of antiaircraft fire sent Madame Levrault cowering behind a large tree. She was still trembling when the firing stopped abruptly.

As she stepped forward, the silence was broken by a strange fluttering sound. Looking up, Madame Levrault saw a parachute floating toward her garden. Hanging below the chute, silhouetted against the moon, was Private Robert M. Murphy of the 82nd Airborne's 505th Regiment. He hit the ground with a thud and tumbled about twenty yards away. Madame Levrault froze as she watched the eighteen-year-old whip out a knife and cut himself loose from the chute. The tall, slender soldier stood up, laden with weapons and equipment. He spotted the teacher. They gazed at

each other for what seemed like an eternity. While the terrified lady watched, he put his finger to his lips, discouraging any sound. Then he swiftly disappeared.

Madame Levrault grabbed her skirts and dashed into her house. She had just witnessed one of the first Americans to land in Normandy at 12:15 a.m., Tuesday, June 6, 1944. D-Day had begun!

Before becoming a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we are unaware of unseen conflict. However, as strange as it may seem, when we step through the door of salvation into God's Kingdom, our personal war begins. We are the objects of enemy attack. Satan's Gestapo tactics include: erecting roadblocks to hinder our fellowship with God, hurling false ideas into our minds, and plotting to steal our peace and joy. How can we fight? What can we do?

Paul answers our questions. Since the apostle encountered many Roman soldiers during his imprisonments, he became familiar with their gear. It seems only natural that he would draw an analogy between the soldier's armor and a Christian's armor. Because spiritual warfare is a reality, Paul wants to make sure we understand all that is involved. He writes: "A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm" (Eph. 6:10-13 NLT).

God's strength is our resource during spiritual warfare. He is alive, available, and adequate. That is why Paul calls us to be strong in the Lord and to put on God's full armor because it is necessary in battling against the devil's tricks and devices. Satan plots to defeat and discourage us in our Christian walk, but his strategies are successful only if we go to war unprepared. Now let's get dressed for battle.

"Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up. You're not the only one plunged into these hard times. It's the same with Christians all over the world" (1 Pet. 5:8-9 MSG).

Join me in a couple verses of **"Onward Christian Soldiers"**: *"Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before! Christ, the royal Master, Leads against the foe; Forward into battle, See His banner go! At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee; On, then, Christian soldiers, On to victory! Hell's foundations quiver At the shout of praise; Brothers, lift your voices, Loud your anthems raise! Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before!"*

February 18

"Prepare your shields, and advance into battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor" (Jer. 46:3-4 NLT).

The Belt of Truth

The military girdle is central to the body. Located in the lower abdomen and hips, the loins are regarded as the region of strength. The belt encircles the body. When the soldier girds up his loins, he is ready for action.

In Scripture, truth is manifested in several ways, but it is central to any trusting relationship. God's Word is truth, and God places a high priority on truthfulness. Ananias and Sapphira found this out the hard way in Acts 5. They both lied about a real estate deal and became instant fatalities. Jesus was particularly tough on the scribes and Pharisees for their lack of truthfulness. He called them hypocrites because they tried to appear outwardly clean while their hearts were wicked.

Unlike the Pharisees, truth is displayed in our lives when we stand with personal integrity. "Hold firmly to the truth in love ..." (Eph. 4:15 Phillips). "The appropriation of the truth is not intellectual only but moral, expressed through our whole being, in character and action."

An attitude of total truthfulness is consistent with a genuine commitment to Christ. That is why Paul says, "I do my utmost to live my whole life with a clear conscience before God and man" (Acts 24:16 Phillips).

Warren Wiersbe reminds us, "God wants you to be open and honest with Him. Never flatter Him with dishonesty, insincerity, or deception. One way to be honest in your relationship with God is to keep your heart clean. Confess your sins instead of trying to cover them. He knows your heart, so be truthful in your praying."

Jesus Christ, the Living Word, is also truth. Jesus tells his followers, "I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (Jn. 14:6). When we go into battle without the belt of truth, our pants fall down. When we are not honest and transparent in our walk with God, our mates, our family, and our accountability brothers and sisters, we have hit the shoulder of the road and are heading toward the ditch. We are opening ourselves up for a real shot from hell.

Living in the realm of the fake and the falsehood will quickly drain and deplete our spiritual resources. We are fighting a losing battle. David writes: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I

acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:3-5 NIV).

David then says: "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts, you teach me wisdom in the inmost place" (Ps. 51:6 NIV).

When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit creates pressure points in our lives that focus on areas that need purifying. Our pride naturally resists this pressure and will try to find solace in denial. When we succumb to this overpowering force in our lives, we find ourselves trafficking in untruthfulness. Satan, the father of lies, is clapping his hands with glee. Another soldier out of commission. Taking the initiative to confess and forsake this lifestyle and come out into the light is the way to deal with this situation (See Ps. 139:23-24; 26:2-3 NIV). "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Prov. 28:13 NIV).

Pearl and I have been doing numerous marriage retreats recently. A young couple in attendance had some unresolved secrets between them that had stifled their relationship for seven years. In a flood of emotion and tears these matters were confronted and instantly their sorrow was turned to joy and their mourning into dancing. The love, joy, and peace of their wedding day seventeen years earlier now returned.

What secrets are you holding on to that need resolution? Why risk another day going out without your belt on? You might lose a whole lot more than just your pants!

"The reason salvation is so easy to obtain is that it cost God so much." (Oswald Chambers)

"Nicodemus asked, 'What do you mean by this? How does this happen?' Jesus said, 'You're a respected teacher of Israel and you don't know these basics? Listen carefully. I'm speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions'" (Jn. 3:9-11 MSG).

Join me in singing all four verses of "**Am I a Soldier of the Cross?**": *"Am I a soldier of the cross, A follow'r of the Lamb? And shall I fear to own His cause, Or blush to speak His name? Must I be carried to the skies On flow'ry beds of ease, While others fought to win the prize, And sailed thro' bloody seas? Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend to grace, To help me on to God? Sure I must fight, if I would reign; Increase my courage, Lord; I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, Supported by Thy word."*

February 19

"Prepare your shields, and advance into battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor" (Jer. 46:3-4 NLT).

Breastplate of Righteousness

The second piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. This is like a bulletproof vest which protects the heart, lungs, and other vital organs. While wearing this breastplate, Satan's fiery darts and accusations will come flying toward us, but we can stand firm. Our heart is protected.

Another way to think of righteousness is—our right standing with God. When we receive Christ as Savior and Lord by faith, we are declared righteous in God's sight.

In contrast, Scripture also speaks of self-righteousness which is the product of our own performance. Isaiah says, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6 NIV). This reminds us once again that our human efforts to become right with God always fail. Our only shelter from Satan comes from the righteousness of Christ which we appropriate by faith.

Scripture also speaks of practical righteousness, the changed life we live when Christ indwells us. Paul speaks to the Philippians about, "having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11). This righteousness flows from a life obedient to God's Word. In this case, the quality of our changed lives deflects the devil's bullets of doubt.

The daily experiential knowledge of Christ causes us to be sure of our position in Him. As we strap on the breastplate of righteousness we can say with assurance, "I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:8: "But we who are of the day, let us be self-controlled, having clothed ourselves with a breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation." That breastplate protects us from a culture that wants our hearts—a world that wants to squeeze us into its mold.

So many young Christian girls give their hearts to young men who have no desire to serve the Lord and soon they are living in the realm of chaos, compromise and confusion. The same scenario is played out time after time by young men who take their first drag on a marijuana joint. Going out into the world without our vest on can lead us to make some very poor choices.

On the other hand, the breastplate preserves us. Daniel had his breastplate on when he faced a choice about diet: "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way" (Dan. 1:8 NIV). His request was granted.

When we're not wearing our breastplate we become chameleons. We're constantly taking our color from the last environment we crawled across. We become thermometers instead of thermostats. Thermometers only register the temperature, thermostats determine it. Peter drew near to warm himself at the fire of the enemy and soon found himself denying his Lord. "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, 'The righteous by faith will live'" (Rom. 1:16-17 NET).

How about singing a couple verses of **"The Solid Rock"**: *"My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name. When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found; Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand, All other ground is sinking sand."*

February 20

"Encourage Mint"

One of the things I like to do is send little notes with a mint and write "note of encourage mint." It is a fun way to encourage others with a kind word or a verse of Scripture.

We are commanded in Scripture to be encouragers. "So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing" (1 Thess. 5:11 NLT). "You must warn each other every day, while it is still 'today,' so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God" (Heb. 3:13 NLT). "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near" (Heb. 10:25).

One of my favorite New Testament characters is Barnabas. Barnabas is an encourager. Following are five passages about Barnabas and in every passage he is encouraging.

Acts 4:36: In this passage we discover that Barnabas is really a nickname not his given name. The disciples changed his name from Joseph to Barnabas. The nickname Barnabas means "Son of Encouragement." Barnabas is an encourager, so much so that his friends and fellow workers gave him the name Encourager. What a great nickname!

Application: If our friends, family or fellow workers were to give us a nickname, would Encourager be one they would choose for us?

Acts 4:35 and 37: Barnabas in this passage is encouraging by giving generously for the care of those in need.

Application: There is such discouragement when we are in need, whether a financial, emotional, or physical need. Who around you is in need? How could you encourage them this day?

Acts 9:26-27: Barnabas encouraged by standing with the Apostle Paul and giving credence to his testimony, salvation and call of God on his life. The early Christians would not trust Saul/Paul the former persecutor of the church and Christians. They would not believe that Paul was a devoted Christian servant even after his road to Damascus conversion. They were afraid he was just spying on them! Look at the result of Barnabas' encouragement of Paul by reading verse 28!

Application: What gospel work has been furthered because of your encouragement? Who is speaking out boldly the name of the Lord that you could support and encourage?

Acts 11:20-25: Barnabas encouraged by accepting God's work in a different racial and cultural group.

Application: Support and encourage missionaries and those ministering in different cultures.

Acts 13:2-3, 13: Something significant happens in this passage. The Bible accounts have been Barnabas and Paul with Barnabas—the mentor-teacher's name first. It changes in this passage to Paul and Barnabas.

Prayer: Lord, may we be humble like Barnabas to protect, counsel, and mentor then let go and rejoice. As we watch the fledgling try his wings, may we clap our hands, smile our encouragement, and wait to be asked for any more help or advice. It is a privilege to serve You and be faithful.

(Guest contributor, Donna Anderson Skorheim)

February 21

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid" (Jn. 14:27 NLT).

"Prepare your shields, and advance into battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor" (Jer. 46:3-4 NLT).

Feet Shod with the Gospel of Peace

A good soldier knows the importance of proper footwear. Well-fitting, heavy leather boots with a steel reinforced toe will take us many miles and many hours into battle. On the other hand—blisters, cuts, or twisted ankles put us out of commission before the battle is won—hence, the agony of de-feet.

Without the gospel of peace, we will suffer spiritually. So what are our spiritual shoes? How can we assume a steady march with a resolved frame of heart?

We might think about the soles as being the foundational peace we have with God once we have received Christ. “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

The foam-fitted lining which soothes and protects as we fight on life’s daily battlefronts is described in Isaiah. “The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever” (Isa. 32:17 NIV).

The outer leather gives protection and surefooted stability. “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (Ps. 119:165 NIV). This outward peace becomes a guard against the rains, mud, and other realities of trudging in the trenches. “Now may the Lord of peace personally give you his peace at all times and in all ways” (2 Thess. 3:16 Phillips).

The assurance of peace will give us strong support in the midst of adversity. When our feet are shod with the gospel of peace, we are less likely to be tripped up by Satan’s schemes. Trekking the trail in shoes of settled issues gives us great stability and footing from which to wage war. The foundational truths of the gospel provide this for us. Like Martin Luther we can stand saying: “Here I stand, God help me!”

Few have gotten as much flak for their faith as Charles Colson. The press was vicious, Christian brothers and sisters were suspicious, but Chuck knew what had happened in his life.

In his book, *Life Sentence*, he quotes D. L. Moody: “When I was converted, I made this mistake: I thought the battle was already mine, the victory already won, the crown already in my grasp. I thought the old things had passed away, that all things had become new, and that my old, corrupt nature, the old life, was gone. I found out, after serving Christ for a few months, that conversion was only like enlisting in the army—that there was a battle on hand.”

When the battle is the hottest and it seems like all hell has broken loose, we can join Isaiah in saying: “Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame” (Isa. 50:7 NIV).

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation. The Lord be with you all” (2 Thess. 3:16 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of “**Wonderful Peace**”: *“Far away in the depths of my spirit tonight Rolls a melody sweeter than psalm; In celestial-like strains it unceasingly falls O’er my soul like an infinite calm. What a treasure I have in this wonderful peace, Buried deep in the heart of my soul, So secure that no power can mine it away While the years of eternity roll! Peace! peace! wonderful peace, Coming down from the Father above! Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray, In fathomless billows of love.”*

February 22

“Prepare your shields, and advance into battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor” (Jer. 46:3-4 NLT).

The Shield of Faith

The shield in the Roman soldier’s attire was about two-and-one-half feet wide and four feet long. It was made of wood and overlaid with linen and leather to absorb fiery arrows.

Paul tells us to take up our shield of faith that we “will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16). Here we must not underestimate the power of the enemy. Satan’s quiver is loaded with a number of fiery arrows. Here are a few and their descriptions.

ARROWS IN SATAN’S QUIVER:

DOUBT—Satan wants us to doubt God’s goodness in the midst of difficult circumstances.

DECEIT—Satan wants to fool us and fake us into following his plan.

DEFENSIVENESS—He delights in seeing us defend ourselves and rationalizing our behavior that is contrary to the desires of the Heavenly Father.

DISCOURAGEMENT—Satan knows if he can get us discouraged, our next step is to throw in the towel and quit trying.

DISTRACTION—He loves to scramble our priorities and get us to invest our time on temporal things rather than eternal matters.

DIVISION—Satan wishes to divide and conquer marriages, families, and churches. Warring factions lose their witness and their joy.

DESTRUCTION—With sovereign permission Satan destroyed Job’s business, possessions, and wiped out all ten of his children. He can wreak havoc when he is turned loose. The casualties of war mount with his every effort.

DISOBEDIENCE—Satan has used this one ever since the Garden of Eden to cause the downfall of many believers.

DOCTRINAL ERROR—He tries to inflict false doctrine by using counterfeit ministers and false teachers to pervert the pure teaching of Scripture.

DELAY—Paul tells the Thessalonians that he has been hindered by Satan in coming to see them.

DENIAL—If we fail to face reality, Satan has free reign, and he loves to be in that position.

After examining Satan's arsenal it is easy to understand why we need a shield of faith. But what is it and how can we use it? Christian faith has three tenses: past, present, and future. The past tense speaks of salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). An eternal transaction took place when we were born by the Holy Spirit into God's family.

Faith's present tense is revealed in many places in Scripture. The patriarch, Abraham, "did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God" regarding God's promises (Rom. 4:20). Paul instructs the Corinthians to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). He also tells the Galatians "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

James tells us to be joyful when we encounter various trials because the testing of our faith produces endurance (Jam. 1:2-3). Peter also tells us that when we are distressed by trials, the proof of our faith, even though tested by fire, will result in praise and honor to Christ (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Although our circumstances will be varied, we can be sure that difficulties will come into our lives, and when they do, they become opportunities for us to exercise faith and to triumph in our trust.

The future is in view when Paul charges Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called" (1 Tim. 6:12). Later in his second letter to Timothy he says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

The shield of faith stands between us and this arsenal from hell. It is there to protect us from getting wounded. It is our patriot missile to intercept incoming shots that are designed to do damage and destroy.

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song" (Ps. 28:7 NIV). "But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thess. 3:3).

When a U.S. spacecraft enters earth's atmosphere, the function of the heat shield is of major concern. It protects the astronauts and their vehicle from burning up on the way back to earth. The Psalmist says: "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless" (Ps. 84:11 NIV). Let's allow Him to protect us as we keep our shield of faith in place.

"The spirit of God is grieved by sin and quenched by resistance. Please Father, purify my heart and accept my total yieldedness to Your will." (Don Anderson)

"And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him" (Heb. 11:6 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **"Faith Is the Victory"**: *"Encamped along the hills of light, Ye Christian soldiers, rise, And press the battle ere the night Shall veil the glowing skies. Against the foe in vales below Let all our strength be hurried; Faith is the victory, we know, That overcomes the world. His banner over us is love, Our sword the Word of God; We tread the road the saints above With shouts of triumph and trod. By faith they, like a whirlwind's breath, Swept on o'er ev'ry field; The faith by which they conquered death Is still our shining shield."*

February 23

"Prepare your shields, and advance into battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor" (Jer. 46:3-4 NLT).

Helmet of Salvation

The helmet is a life-preserving piece of equipment. The football player, the polo player, the motorcycle rider, and the soldier will all tell you the same thing. "We need a helmet." Loggers, construction workers, and power-company employees see the helmet as an important part of their equipment. It is designed for protection of vital functions in the head, namely the brain.

If the thought processes are secure from injury, the battle can be waged as planned. The citadel of function is the mind. Have you ever watched a football player get his bell rung? He doesn't know where he is and what he is doing. Satan knows that, so his frontal attack is aimed at storming the fortress. When he has control of the nerve center of operation, it is only a matter of time until conduct will follow. Jesus says: "For it is from inside, from men's hearts and minds, that evil thoughts arise—lust, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly! All these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean!" (Mk. 7:21-23, Phillips).

So how can we resist these temptations? Salvation serves as our security and our hope. "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1 NIV).

The present tense of our salvation in Christ is the daily growth toward Christlikeness. Another name for this process is called sanctification. Paul told the Philippians to work out their own salvation with a reverential fear and trembling. He reminded them that God is the one who was working in them.

God's purpose is for us to be progressively freed from the power of sin. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). One of the steps necessary in this process is to think God's thoughts (Scripture) and to bring our minds under Christ's control.

Without the helmet of salvation, the soldier becomes easy prey for satanic attack. He moves in immediately to entice us to entertain his thoughts, actions, feelings. If we recognize his tactics, we can be on guard and make certain our helmet is in place. Remember, let's not leave home without our hard hats on!

"A faith that falters before the finish was faulty from the first." (*Daily Walk Bible*)

"When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" (Unknown)

"Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!" (Ps. 126:3 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **"When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder"**: *"When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more, And the morning breaks eternal, bright and fair; When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore, And the roll is called up yonder I'll be there! Let us labor for the Master from the dawn till setting sun, Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care; Then when all of life is over and our work on earth is done, And the roll is called up yonder I'll be there! When the roll is called up yonder, When the roll is called up yonder, When the roll is called up yonder, When the roll is called up yonder I'll be there."*

February 24

"Prepare your shields, and advance into battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor" (Jer. 46:3-4 NLT).

Sword of the Spirit

So far, the soldier is outfitted in armor designed to protect and defend. At last he is given one offensive weapon—a sword.

In the valley of Elah, David tried on Saul's armor and sword and decided they wouldn't cut it (pun intended). So he took his sling and stones and hit Goliath right between the running lights. He did, however, use Goliath's sword to finish the job. "David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword" (1 Sam. 17:51 NIV). You can get a lot done with a good sword.

Just as the soldier trains hours on the target range while preparing for battle, so the Christian works to master the Word of God. Jesus gave us an example of how to use Scripture against Satan in Matthew 4 when, after fasting for forty days and nights in the wilderness, Satan tempts Jesus to turn the stones into bread. Jesus answered with a Scripture from the Old Testament (Deut. 8:3)—"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4).

But Satan did not stop with just one temptation, he took Jesus into the holy city and stood Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God throw Yourself down." Furthermore, Satan cleverly quoted Scripture from Psalms to indicate the angels would save Jesus (Ps. 91:11-12 NIV). But Jesus countered with the verse, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Matt. 4:7; Deut. 6:16).

Did the devil give up? No! A third time he took Jesus to a high mountain and told Him He could have all the kingdoms of the world if He would fall down and worship Satan. Did Jesus give in? No!

Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (Matt. 4:10). Then the devil left Jesus alone, and angels ministered to Him.

Often it seems during the times of greatest stress and even during times when we seem to be growing spiritually, Satan tries to tempt us and get us to neglect God's truth. He may offer a half-truth or try to disguise something as good when it is not.

He delights in cluttering our lives with so many demands that we fail to have any time in the Word. Satan knows we may have a great defense, but we will never score without an offense. If he can keep the sword out of our hand, it's a piece of cake to whip us!

I remember in my early ministry how I used to rationalize my study time in the Word for teaching others as adequate for my own soul as well. After getting nailed real good a couple of times, the Lord got my attention. Now my own funeral will be all that breaks my earthly appointment with my heavenly Father. And really that's no big deal since I will have already entered His presence for eternity. I am committed to spending personal quality time in the Word first thing every day. Reading, meditating, and memorizing passages that will make me fruitful as the day unfolds.

Dressed for Victory

When do we get dressed for these battles? Every day. One woman I know prays the Ephesians passage for her son each morning before he heads out to school. She mentally dresses him out in his armor and sends him out the door while singing “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

Does the Ephesians passage remind us of science fiction or some far-out fairy tale? That’s what Satan would like us to believe. He doesn’t want us to know the truth. Now that we do, we’ll be ready for him and he won’t like it—that’s for sure.

Satan’s desire is to mentally tie us up and trap us in some kind of bondage. But Satan is no match for our Commander-in-Chief. Jesus has come to set us free. He is greater than Satan.

“For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires” (Heb. 4:12 NLT).

Join me in a couple of verses of “**Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus**”: *“Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross; Lift high His royal banner, It must not suffer loss: From vict’ry unto vict’ry His army shall He lead, Till ev’ry foe is vanquished, And Christ is Lord indeed. Stand up, stand up for Jesus, The strife will not be long; This day the noise of battle, The next, the victor’s song: To Him that overcometh, A crown of life shall be: He with the King of glory Shall reign eternally. Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross; Lift high is royal banner, It must not, It must not suffer loss.”*

February 25

“The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children who follow them” (Prov. 20:7 NLT).

Never Walk Away

The role of fatherhood has been muddled and messed up by a culture gone bonkers over feminism, homosexuality, and abortion. Too often, biblical values of honesty, respect, responsibility, and morality have been lost in this shift.

Crawford W. Loritts, Jr., has written an excellent book, *Never Walk Away: Lessons on Integrity From a Father Who Lived It*. He explains the title thus, “Some old sayings have been passed down from one generation to the next among the Loritts. One of them is ‘You never walk away from home’ . . . Another is ‘You take care of your family first.’”

The apostle Paul, writing to the Thessalonian church, likens his relationship with that body to that of a father to his children: “You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers. And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:10-12 NLT).

Paul’s words suggest four qualities characteristic of the life of an effective father:

1. **An effective father is an example.** Paul mentions his upright and blameless behavior toward the Thessalonians. Sound conduct and character are essential if a father is to do what God wants done. The principle is do as I do not just as I say.

2. **The effective father exhorts.** Just as Paul exhorts the Thessalonians, a dad should be his kids’ best fan. I know you can do it! Give it your best shot! You are going to win!

3. **The effective father encourages.** This means imparting words of affirmation and assurance that everything is going to work out. Encouragement also includes words of cheer and comfort when things are tough.

4. **The effective father implores.** A father bears witness of his faith with his life and his lips. There is no greater joy on earth than having the privilege of leading a child to Christ.

I am confident that many times as a dad you feel like you are in an impossible, no-win situation. May I exhort, encourage, and bear witness to you that it’s worth it? Keep hanging in there. Perseverance is really the foundation of anything that takes place in life.

“Many people believe in law and order as long as they can lay down the law and give the orders.” (Unknown)

“Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged” (Col. 3:21 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of “**I Have Decided to Follow Jesus**”: *“I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, No turning back, no turning back. The world behind me, the cross before me; The world behind me, the cross before me; The world behind me, the cross before me, No turning back, no turning back.”*

February 26

“But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (Jn. 1:12 NLT).

Created for a Relationship, Not a Performance

We thrive on performance in our society. We expect our kids to behave, our dog to do tricks and not to bite the neighbors, our employees to complete their assignments accurately and on time. We withhold or dish out pats on the back, privileges, raises, incentives, and approval, based on how others perform. How natural it is, therefore, that

even when an individual recognizes that belief in Christ is the only way to please God and receive eternal life in his presence, performance often still proves to be a problem. Many a Christian becomes right with God through faith, and then turns around and performs all the more—spinning his wheels in every semi-spiritual direction. The thinking goes something like this: Attend the church board meeting ... donate big bucks for the new playground ... serve on the missions committee ... volunteer to be president of the women's association ... lead a Bible study ... recruit twelve new members a year ... worry about everybody you know ... do, do, do, and you're guaranteed to become a spiritual giant. You'll accomplish big things for God! The fact is, you'll probably die serving and, although you will be in heaven because of your faith, at your funeral a few of us may be wondering if you've done with your life what the Lord really wanted. We'll wonder if God was really pleased by all your busyness, or if, as the mourners file quietly past the casket, he too silently grieves over what might have been ... what should have been.

We in the Christian community are often to blame for the emphasis on performance. Our churches are structured to suit the do-do-do mentality. We take new believers and involve them on committees, corral them into the choir, train them to teach Sunday school, elect them to leadership, and constantly commend them for fine performances. Sometimes the externals become so important that we don't even realize when one of the players has missed the whole reason for the part!

The Bible reveals that from the very beginning we members of the human race were created for the express purpose of having that brand new existence in relationship with the Lord. God desired this fellowship, and he breathed life into Adam, Eve, and their descendants not because of what they could do for him, but because of what they could be to him (Gen. 2:18-24; 3:8-9).

The original relationship between God and man was altered because of the disobedience of the pair in the garden. God responded to the sin of humankind by offering Jesus Christ as the means by which individuals can still enter into a relationship with him. And today the Lord remains more concerned with what we are to him than with what we do for him. His message to us is simply this, "Stop! Be still and know that I am God. Take the time to learn of me. Let me take over. I'll do the doing."

If relationship with him is the Father's primary objective for us, then it ought to be yours and mine, also. First we must get to know him as savior. Next we must commit ourselves to deepening the relationship. That means being careful never to let anything, no matter how good it is, stand in the way of our getting to know him better every day and, as a result, becoming more like him. It means we must, like Martha's sister, Mary, choose the good part and find our place sitting at his feet, learning from him the principles of his word, communicating to him the anxieties of our heart (Lk. 10:38-42; 1 Pet. 5:7). It means finding our total adequacy in Him. (*God Wants a Relationship, Not a Performance* by Don Anderson)

"Lord, you have not redeemed me to make my life happy, healthy or free of trouble. You've redeemed me to become more like Christ, and this is why I'm destined for trials. Give me wisdom, strength, and grace to go through them giving honor to your name." (Joni Eareckson Tada)

"The real test of a saint is not one's willingness to preach the gospel, but one's willingness to do something like washing the disciples' feet—that is, being willing to do those things that seem unimportant in human estimation but count as everything to God. It was Paul's delight to spend his life for God's interests in other people, and he did not care what it cost. But before we will serve to ponder our personal and financial concerns—"What if God wants me to go over there? And what about my salary? What is the climate like there? Who will take care of me? A person must consider all these things? All that is an indication that we have reservations about serving God. But the apostle Paul had no conditions or reservations. Paul focused his life on Jesus Christ's idea of a New Testament saint; that is, not one who merely proclaims the gospel, but one who becomes broken bread and poured-out wine in the hands of Jesus Christ for the sake of others." (Oswald Chambers)

"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of "**We Rest on Thee**": *"We rest on Thee, Our Shield and Our Defender! We go not forth alone against the foe, Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go. Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go! We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling, and needing more each day Thy grace to know; Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing; We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go. Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing; We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go!"*

February 27

Fruit of the Spirit—Kindness

We have all been filled with sadness at the disaster in Louisiana, Mississippi, Haiti and Africa. As we have watched the news our hearts have been grieved for the sorrow and agony of our fellow man. While listening to stories I have

thought of the similarity to the Bible character Job. In a short span of time so much and so many were taken from Job.

While preparing for a women's retreat on care and comfort for the hurting, I found a verse that spoke powerfully to me. I committed it to memory and try to practice this truth from God's Word. It comes from the book of Job. "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; Lest he forsake the fear of the Almighty" (Job 6:14).

There are many around us in despair. What does Job, a man who just lost dear family members and possessions, in a very short time, say he needed? He desired KINDNESS. We can do that!

What is kindness? Webster defines "kind" as "sympathetic, gentle, generous."

Application: Are we kind? Do these words describe us?

The Bible tells us that if we know Christ as our Savior and His Spirit indwells us, that kindness will be a characteristic of our lives.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, KINDNESS, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ..." (Gal. 5:22-23).

Job 6:14 gives us a real motivation for kindness. It is easy in despair to forsake God. We can help prevent this additional tragedy of forsaking God. We can show kindness. We can show the love of God. We can give a cup of cold water, cook a meal, invite a stranger in, speak a kind word. What a powerful motivation—we could possibly help keep someone from forsaking the Almighty!

There is so much need surrounding us right now. Instead of becoming overwhelmed with so many opportunities, let us each pray about who, what and where God wants us to show His kindness. There is a freedom when we pray. Our focus is on what God wants us to do and not on things we can not do. Stay close to God and seek His direction.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we do seek Your will and direction. We want to provide help in Your name so that You will receive praise. May Your Spirit lead us to your beloved people whose faith would be renewed by an answer to their prayers. May Your kindness and love flow through us.

(Guest contributor, Donna Anderson Skorheim)

February 28

"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity" (Rom. 12:2-3 Phillips).

The Grand, The Grind, The Groan ... And the Growth

Many marriages (including my own) undergo a series of phases. I call these the grand, the grind, the groan, and the growth. Under normal circumstances, everything is wonderful in the beginning, after the wedding bells first chime. The typical newlyweds sweep each other off their feet with a display of love and affection which can only be classified as grand. Flowers, candy, cards, calls, and candlelight dinners are common. For most couples, the romantic fires of love will probably burn with flaming ardor during the first year or so of wedded bliss. The ecstasy is sheer and sure!

Gradually the bonfire may dim, though not without sending up an occasional flare as it wanes. Then the cold shower of reality hits as kids arrive, bills mount, mortgages accrue, promotions occur, committee work increases, church obligations expand, and life generally becomes hectic and complex. Almost inevitably, the grand begins to seem more like a grind.

Along the way, many husbands and wives become disenchanted with their mates, weary of their commitments, sick of their responsibilities. The grind becomes a groan in the hearts of two one-time lovers, a long, drawn-out wall of disappointment and shattered dreams. Alarming, the dirty word divorce enters the conversation; the discouraged pair sees splitting up as a viable alternative to what has proved to be a bum deal. Indeed, with the pressures on modern marriages, it is a wonder any couple manages to remain happily wedded. Too often even Christians merely stay together out of a sense of obligation, not because they are truly content with each other. The flavor, fervor, and fire are gone from the relationship.

It doesn't have to be that way. There is another option which I hope you will consider as you read this book. God did not design marriage as a lifelong punishment, a venture into mutual agony. He planned it as a state in which a man and a woman could find complete fulfillment. He intends it as a catalyst for growth—and it is with that goal in view that we must proceed.

It is a law of life, whether physical or spiritual, that growth comes through change. Spiritually, growth takes place as the Spirit of God conforms us more and more to the image of Christ. The apostle Paul speaks of this process of change in Romans 12:2-3: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity" (Phillips). In our marriage, the challenge to each of us is to make a common commitment to change, allowing God to help us communicate more honestly with our partner and to care

more deeply for his or her welfare than for our own. As we do bloom; it will flourish. As husbands and wives, we'll grow together, and as an added bonus, we'll find ourselves becoming more like Christ in the process. (*Song of Solomon* by Don Anderson)

"A wise person will desire no more than he or she may get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly." (*Daily Walk Bible*)

"So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Eph. 5:33 NLT).

Join me in singing that little chorus **"In His Time"**: *"In His time, in His time; He makes all things beautiful in His time. Lord, please show me ev'ry day As You're teaching me Your way, That You do just what You say In Your time. In Your time, in Your time; You make all things beautiful in Your time. Lord, my life to You I bring; May each song I have to sing Be to You a lovely thing In Your time."*

"The object of love is not getting something you want but doing something for the well-being of the one you love. It is a fact, however, that when you/we receive affirming words we are far more likely to be motivated to reciprocate." (Gary Chapman)

February 29

"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow" (Jam. 1:2-3 NLT).

The Joy Directive

How do you respond in the gut-check times of life? When the hurt is so real and so heavy that you can't stand it? When the walls close in? James started his letter by telling us how to respond. His words are tough medicine, hard to swallow. They run contrary to what we think we really want.

A trial or test is an experience allowed by a sovereign God to enter our lives to measure our progress toward Christlikeness, or to hasten the development of Christlike character in us. If we are not believers, trials often come to nudge us toward belief. If we are believers, they come to grow us up. Remember the principle: We grow taller through testing.

One evening while driving home I jokingly said to my wife, "Honey, guess what? We are working on a manuscript on James." Her sigh and statement nearly made me drive off the road: "Lord help us all! You know whenever you preach on James, we always get to practice it. When will you ever learn?" It's true. Opportunities to practice what we preach do increase as the Lord works his message in our lives before we proclaim it to others. Pearl and I are no strangers to the gut-check times.

What does God want from us when things get tough? James says we are to consider it "pure joy ... whenever [we] fall into various kinds of trials" (1:2). Note the word whenever. Not if, but whenever. Trouble is inevitable. It will happen to us, although we belong to Christ. Remember, James was writing to Christians. Tough times are unavoidable, even though the modern trend in the church is to present the abundant life in Jesus as a fun-packed adventure, guaranteeing health, wealth, and prosperity. This is what J. I. Packer called "hot tub religion":

The hot tub experience is sensuous, relaxing, floppy, laidback: not in any way demanding, whether intellectually or otherwise, but very, very nice, even to the point of being great fun ... Many today want Christianity to be like that, and labor to make it so. The ultimate step, of course, would be to clear church auditoriums of seats and install hot tubs in their place; then there would never be any attendance problems (Packer, 69).

God never promises that the Christian life is flop, laidback and undemanding. His directive is that in the midst of trouble we consider each heartache and trial to be pure joy. (*James* by Don Anderson)

"Lord, crush me, break me, and melt me in the furnace of affliction so that I become soft and pliable clay in Your hands." (Don Anderson)

"Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!" (Ps. 126:3 NLT).

How about singing with me a couple of verses of **"All the Way My Saviour Leads Me"**: *"All the way my Saviour leads me; What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy Who through life has been my Guide? Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in Him to dwell! For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well. All the way my Saviour leads me; Cheers each winding path I tread, Give me grace for ev'ry trial, Feeds me with the living bread. Though my weary steps may falter, And my soul athirst may be, Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! a spring of joy I see."*

March 1

"But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere" (Ecc. 2:11 NLT).

Eggs in the Wrong Basket

I recall an article published several years ago in the Dallas Insider, a seminary newspaper. It was shortly after President Carter had announced the United States boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics that were held in Moscow. Two American athletes, Jeff Wells and John Lodwick, were interviewed.

Jeff and John were good friends. Both Christians, they had attended Dallas Theological Seminary together and had gone to the Northwest following graduation. Olympic hopefuls, they'd been in training for years in anticipation of being able to compete for the gold in the marathon. When Carter announced the boycott, their Olympic aspirations were immediately crushed.

But they weren't bitter. In fact, Jeff and John were among the few athletes to officially support the President's decision. Sure, they were disappointed as their years of commitment and training suddenly appeared to have been for nothing. I'm sure they had questions about the fairness of it all. Yet they didn't complain. In fact, John commented during the interview that Jeff and he had recognized the futility of putting all of their "eggs" in a basket that could not last.

If we go through a severe, shattering, mid-life crisis, it may be because we have done just that. We have put all of our eggs in a basket that is doomed to deteriorate. Our overcommitted lifestyle, misplace values, neglect of God, and lack of knowledge about His ways finally catch up with us, as we are tested for unworthy goals. As Dobson write in *Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives*: Stated succinctly, a mid-life crisis is more likely to be severe for those whose values reflect the temporal perspective of this world. A man does not mourn the loss of his youth, for example, if he honestly believes that his life is merely a preparation for a better one to follow. And God does not become the enemy of a man who has walked and talked with Him in daily communion and love. And the relationship between a man and his wife is less strained in the mid-life years if they have protected and maintained their friendship since they were newlyweds. In short, a mid-life crisis represents a day of reckoning for a lifetime of wrong values, unworthy goals, and ungodly attitudes (Dobson 1980, 181).

It was Fred Allen who said, "We sow our wild oats, and then we pray for a crop failure." How true that is! The apostle Paul cautions in Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." As we search for significance, we may well sow some seeds which harvested will spell trouble for us and for those we love. We may do permanent damage to relationships which are already tender. That's why I believe that in the book of Ecclesiastes God provides is with a biblical example of a man in the throes of a crisis at mid-life. Through the practical application of His Word, it is possible to avoid making those mistakes which destroy lives.

Friends, the chickens will come home to roost, whether we like it or not. It's time now to examine ourselves, to test ourselves for errant values and wrong goals. We'll observe as Solomon does just that in Ecclesiastes. And let's remember that despite our mistakes, God is faithful to freely forgive and to help us forge ahead in His will. It is never too late. (Don Anderson, *Ecclesiastes: The Mid-Life Crisis*)

"Lord, I want to be a sweating servant straining in Your service until the whistle blows." (Don Anderson)

"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be" (Matt. 6:19-21 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **"I'd Rather Have Jesus"**: *"I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold; I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands. I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand. I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause; I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause; I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame. I'd rather be true to His holy name. Than to be the king of a vast domain And be held in sin's dread sway. I'd rather have Jesus than anything This world affords today."*

March 2

Growing Old Has Turned to Gold

"The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride" (Ecc. 7:8 NIV).

"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you" (Is. 46:4a NIV).

"Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised. Reward her for all she has done. Let her deeds publicly declare her praise" (Prov. 31:30-31 NLT).

On this, our fifty-seventh wedding anniversary I want to honor my precious Pearl. Fifty-six years have come and gone. We have walked with God through it all together. We have reared our children and now it's just the three of us: you, me, and our Lord.

As we stand at this milestone of marriage I am filled with gratitude for your faithfulness, friendship, and the fruitful life you continue to live. Your personal passion to pursue with perseverance the pleasure of our Lord blesses me. You are such a joy and so much fun. Christ-likeness shows up in your peace, contentment, kindness, gentleness, prayer life, and your daily walk with God.

Thank you for the wisdom of your words, the energy I receive from your encouragement.

You are my fellow-soldier, fellow-servant, and comrade in the conflict.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Ulysses)

"If you allow physical selfishness, mental carelessness, moral insensitivity, or spiritual weakness, everyone in contact with you will suffer." (Oswald Chambers)

"Forgiveness is an expression of love. 'I love you. I care about you, and I choose to forgive you. Even though my feelings of hurt may linger, I will not allow what has happened to come between us. I hope that we can learn from this experience. You are not a failure because you have failed. You are my spouse, and together we will go from here.' Those are the words of affirmation expressed in the dialect of kind words." (Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*, 47)

"In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Still Sweeter Every Day**": "*To Jesus ev'ry day I find my heart is closer drawn, He's fairer than the glory of the gold and purple dawn; He's all my fancy pictures in its fairest dreams, and more, Each day He grows still sweeter than He was the day before. My heart is sometimes heavy but He comes with sweet relief, He folds me to His bosom when I droop with blighting grief; I love the Christ who all my burdens in His body bore, Each day He grows still sweeter than He was the day before. The half cannot be fancied this side the golden shore; O there He'll be still sweeter than He ever was before.*"

March 3

What human heroes do you especially admire?

Do their sacrifices even begin to equal that of Jesus Christ?

The Bridge of Life

Jesus is the bridge connecting us to the Father. He's interceding for us right now. Even as you're reading this, he is pleading your case. Under the Levitical system of atonement, the priests' work was never done. There were no chairs in the tabernacle or the temple. Now there is no longer a need for smoking altars, dying lambs, and human priestly intercessors. Jesus Christ, God's Son, put an end to all of that. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5 NASB). The writer of the book of Hebrews put it this way:

Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered Himself (Heb. 7:25-27; see also Heb. 4:14-16; 10:12, 19-22).

Jesus Christ waits today to meet your needs. The greatest of these needs is that of salvation. If you think you're okay because you're a relatively moral person, you're wrong. Scripturally, none of us is righteous. God's standards for entry into heaven and fellowship with him are too high. None of us can attain them. If we've thought even one bad thought, we've failed. The stopwatch has stopped before the race has started.

The answer is Calvary. Atonement has been provided at the cross. The high priestly sacrifice has been made there, once for all time. It will never be exhausted. As Alexander Whyte wrote, "After that fountain filled with blood has drowned in the depths of the sea all the accusations that my sinful life has raised against me, that same blood will still flow for you and will do the same service for you. And the blood of Christ is the same blood yesterday, today, and for ever."

The blood of Christ. Yesterday, today, and forever. With William Cowper, raise your voice in praise and thanksgiving that:

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.*

Thank God we can be whiter than snow. (Don Anderson, *Joy Comes in the Morning*)

“The thing that really testifies for God and for the people of God in the long run is steady perseverance, even when the work cannot be seen by others. And the only way to live in an undefeated life is to live looking to God. Ask God to keep the eyes of your spirit open to the risen Christ, and it will be impossible for drudgery to discourage you. Never allow yourself to think that some tasks are beneath your dignity or too insignificant for you to do, and remind yourself of the example of Christ in John 13:1-17.” (Oswald Chambers)

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“There Is a Fountain”**: *“There is a fountain filled with blood Drawn from Immanuel’s veins; And sinners, plunged beneath that flood, Lose all their guilty stains: Lose all their guilty stains, Lose all their guilty stains; And sinners, plunged beneath that flood, Lose all their guilty stains. The dying thief rejoiced to see That fountain in his day; And there may I, though vile as he, Wash all my sins away: Wash all my sins away, Wash all my sins away; And there may I, though vile as he, Wash all my sins away.”*

March 4

Paul, in Romans 4:20-22, says of Abraham: “With respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able to perform. Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

He Won’t Go the Limit

God’s tests let us know that He’s not finished with us, that He’s still working to make us more like Christ. Yet whatever He does, He never goes the limit when He tests us. Remember that. He never gives us more than what we can endure; He never asks us to sacrifice more than we are able. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.”

The Lord pushed Abraham to the edge, but not over the brink. He’ll do the same for us. Maybe you feel God has pushed you to the limit.

There have been times in my own life when I have wondered, really wondered, about God’s purpose in allowing certain trials to enter the lives of people. I wondered when my secretary’s husband was killed after they had been married only ten months. I wondered when my best friend’s fifteen-year-old son took his own life. I wondered when my daughter Becky died from diabetes. One morning, in fact the morning after I had a tire blowout on the freeway, I awoke with a prayer on my lips. “Lord,” I said, “there is a purpose, and sometimes we can’t see it for awhile. We just have to trust You, right?” The reassurance was instantaneous. It was as if the Lord were saying, “Precious child, leave all that in my hands. We’ll talk about it when you get home.” (Don Anderson, *Abraham*)

“If you are truly recognizing your Lord, you have no business being concerned about how and where He engineers your circumstances. The things surrounding you are real, but when you look at them you are immediately overwhelmed, and even unable to recognize Jesus. Then comes His rebuke, ‘ . . . why did you doubt?’ (14:31). Let your actual circumstances be what they may, but keep recognizing Jesus, maintaining complete reliance upon Him.” (Oswald Chambers)

“Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, ‘Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?’ He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do” (Jn. 6:5-6 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Does Jesus Care?”**: *“Does Jesus care when my heart is pained Too deeply for mirth and song; As the burdens press and the cares distress, And the way grows weary and long? Does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed To resist some temptation strong; When for my deep grief I find no relief, Though my tears flow all the night long? O Yes, He cares; I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief; When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.”*

March 5

“How happy is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of arrogant fools! Instead he finds pleasure in obeying the Lord’s commands; he intently studies his commands day and night. He is like a tree planted by flowing streams; it yields its fruit at the proper time, and its leaves never fall off. He succeeds in everything he attempts” (Ps. 1:1-3 NET).

Study God’s Word

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Paul writes to Timothy telling him to make every effort to be a student of God’s Word. This involves sweat and study. It involves asking questions such as:

1. What do I see? (**Observation**)

2. What does it mean? (**Interpretation**)
3. What does it mean to me? (**Application**)

Or we can simply ask who? What? When? Where? How? Keeping a notebook and pen handy is important for jotting insights, words, or key phrases. A Bible dictionary, concordance, and other reference tools will help when digging deeper into a verse or passage.

I will always remember how rich and timely my first word study in the Greek text was to me personally. My assignment was to dig into the full meaning of the word “depart” in Philippians 1:23. I never realized one word could be so interesting.

After looking up the word, I discovered Paul is saying to the saints in this verse: “I am being held in custody between the two (life and death), having the desire to depart and to be with Christ for that is very much better.” The phrase to depart has some great pictures in its meaning: A ship untying and loosing its moorings to set sail; A camper pulling up the tent stakes and going to his permanent dwelling.

The latter reminded me of Paul’s words about death for the Christian. “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1).

As I worked on this assignment, I was mourning the loss of one of my classmates who had been killed in a holiday car accident. He had just departed into eternity! What joy and peace flooded my heart as I became aware of how temporary everything is down here. This study, plus a godly professor who comforted us with these words: “Saints are immortal until their work on earth is done!” got me through my first real experience with physical death.

Prolonged exposure to Scripture changes our lives. What riches await us! God has provided all we need for right living through His Word. Our part is to mine the nuggets of truth that lie beneath the surface.

Many fine programs already exist for helping us examine Scripture. Churches often sponsor Bible studies. Some non-denominational organizations offering study helps are: Bible Study Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ, Intervarsity, Navigators, Precept Ministries, and others. Our own Bible study materials include over fifty different book, character, and topical studies on CD and some on video and DVD. We are presently in the process of training teachers in the Inductive Bible Study Method and supplying materials to teach the Word. (Don Anderson, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36 NASB).

Join me in singing a couple verses of “**How Firm a Foundation**”: “*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said, To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled? When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply: The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*”

March 6

Faith in the Father

“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence” (1 Jn. 3:18-19 NIV).

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16-17).

“The distinguishing marks of a Christian is his confidence in the love of Christ, and the yielding of his affections to Christ in return. It was a passion with them (early Christians) of such vehement and all-consuming energy that it was visible in all their actions, common talk, and looked out of their eyes.” (C. H. Spurgeon)

“Wherever this abiding love of truth can be discovered, we are bound to exercise our love.” (C. H. Spurgeon)

“As Christ’s love grows in us, His love flows from us.” (*Our Daily Bread*, April 17, 2010)

“Love always desires to bless the object of its affection.” (Jim Cymbala, *Break Through Prayer*, 13).

Prayer: Father, thank You for the powerful love the saints of the past had for You. They were fervent and courageous. They were not afraid to suffer for their faith. Thank you for Your sustaining grace for them and for us. We love You Father God and want to be faithful in the hard times of growth and the good times of basking in Your presence.

March 7

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12 NIV).

The Potential

It is critical to remember that God has a plan and purpose for our final years, as He does for every other stage of life. Just as in our earlier years we grappled to discover the Lord's will for our lives so that we could be in the place of maximum fulfillment, effectiveness, security, and fruitfulness, so now we must consider what He wants for the last half.

Whatever your age, don't buy into the lie that your useful years are behind you. Leaving the work force does not hail the end of significant productivity in your life.

I recently counseled a friend whose life is coming unraveled. I gave him an assignment I hoped would help. He promised to set at least one goal in each of five crucial areas of his life for the next year. These goals are to be realistic and manageable and ones he will be committed to. We are not talking about resolutions. Those can be broken in a minute. We are talking goals.

Would you consider taking the same challenge? Right now, write out one goal in each of the following areas of your life:

1. **Spiritual**
2. **Physical**
3. **Family**
4. **Marriage (if applicable)**
5. **Money**
6. **Vocational and / or avocational**

Keep reading to discover some unique goals God has for the rest of your life as revealed in the ultimate strategy manual: the New Testament book of Philippians.

My closing wish for you as you plan is found in Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in your faith, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope" (Phillips). (Don Anderson, *Keep the Fire*)

"Not what I want, but what you want, O God. Guard me from all temptations to use you to satisfy my appetites. What I want mostly is to acquire new appetites, a hunger for righteousness, that will be satisfied by your word. Amen." (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Year With Jesus*, 27)

"Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest" (Ps. 126:5-6 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of "**When We All Get to Heaven**": *"Let us then be true and faithful, Trusting, serving ev'ry day; Just one glimpse of Him in glory Will the toils of life repay. Onward to the prize before us, Soon His beauty we'll behold; Soon the pearly gates will open, We shall tread the streets of gold. When we all get to heaven, What a day of rejoicing that will be! When we all see Jesus, We'll sing and shout the victory."*

March 8

The Other Side

"But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!'" And he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.' Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his thorns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son" (Gen. 22:11-13).

When we climb the mount of sacrifice, we must be sure not to limit God with human expectations. His provision comes up the other side of that mountain. No matter how difficult the test, God doesn't ask us to go the limit. He asked that of Someone only once, and His Son died on a cross. Abraham's knife-wielding arm never had to make its downward stab. Instead—suddenly, wonderfully—"the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!'" Abraham's arm froze in mid-air. We'd better believe he answered quickly, too. "Here I am," he said (22:11). The angel continued, "Do not stretch out you hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (22:12). Abraham had gone all the way, and God in His mercy had stopped him on the brink of the precipice.

The Lord does not ask us to go the limit. Even so, some of us never see God's provision because we never respond properly to the trials He sends. Instead of trusting, submitting, and obeying, we become bitter, resentful, angry, rebellious. In the face of our resistance, God calmly says, "Be still and know that I am God. Wait and watch Me work." And He does work all things out in His time.

After Abraham's hand had been stayed from its awful task, he lifted his eyes and saw a living, breathing, bleating miracle. Behind him a ram was caught by its horns in a thicket. Genesis 22:13 says that "Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up a burnt offering in the place of his son." God's provision scaled the other side of that mount of sacrifice. (Don Anderson, *Abraham: Delay Is Not Denial*)

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Be Still, My Soul”**: *“Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side; Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain. Leave to thy God to order and provide; In ev’ry change He faithful will remain. Be still my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend Thro’ thorny ways leads to a joyful end. Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake To guide the future as He has the past. Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake; All now mysterious shall be bright at last. Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.”*

March 9

“Temptation discovers what we are.” (Thomas à Kempis)

How the Snare Works

Just how are we tempted?

James 1:14-15 puts it well: “But each one of is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (NASB). Something appeals to our senses. Usually it is the eye-gate that opens wide to let in a flood of desire. That’s what happened to Achan following the battle of Jericho. “I saw ... I coveted ... I took,” he confessed concerning the forbidden gold, silver, and clothing that he plundered from the burning city (Josh. 7:21). Years later, had David kept his eyes from straying, he might never have committed adultery with Bathsheba.

We don’t expect temptation; it strikes us unaware. We may be minding our own business, then it hits us. The key is to determine not to succumb before the temptation ever hits, then pray like crazy and hit the ground running when the bait of the snare dangles in front of us! (Don Anderson, *Joseph*)

“The true expression of Christian character is not in good-doing, but in God-likeness. If the Spirit of God has transformed you within, you will exhibit divine characteristics in your life, not just good human characteristics. God’s life in us expresses itself as God’s life, not as human life trying to be godly. The secret of a Christian’s life is that the supernatural becomes natural in him as a result of the grace of God, and the experience of this becomes evident in the practical, everyday details of life, not in times of intimate fellowship with God. And when we come in contact with things that create confusion and a flurry of activity, we find to our own amazement that we have the power to stay wonderfully poised even in the center of it all.” (Oswald Chambers)

“And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself” (Acts 20:32 NLT).

“‘No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me,’ declares the Lord” (Isa. 54:17 NIV).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“He Is Able to Deliver Thee”**: *“‘Tis the grandest theme thro’ the ages rung; ‘Tis the grandest theme for a mortal tongue; ‘Tis the grandest theme that the world e’er sung, ‘Our God is able to deliver thee.’ ‘Tis the grandest theme, let the tidings roll, To the guilty heart, to the sinful soul; Look to God in faith, He will make thee whole, ‘Our God is able to deliver thee.’ He is able to deliver thee, He is able to deliver thee; Tho’ by sin opprest, Go to Him for rest: ‘Our God is able to deliver thee.’”*

March 10

“It cannot be emphasized too clearly and too often that this nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ.” (Patrick Henry)

Just recall the battles

That were fought for you and me,

The valiant men who fought and died

To keep our country free;

The line would circle ‘round the globe

If they were on parade

A debt so overwhelming,

It ne’er can be repaid. (Unknown)

Men of Christianity

Our founders were not only men of conviction, character, and courage, they were also, by and large, men of Christianity. David T. Moore maintains that fifty-two of fifty-five signers of the Declaration of Independence were orthodox believers in Jesus Christ.

The words of George Washington establishing Thanksgiving as a national holiday reveal his faith and the faith of the statesmen who served with him:

WHEREAS, It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor;

WHEREAS, Both houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me “to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God. ...”

Now, therefore, I do recommend next, to be devoted by the people of the states to the service of that great and glorious being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country.

Ben Franklin—statesman, philosopher, intellectual—also humbly acknowledged the supremacy of One mightier than man. The following counsel offered by eighty-one year old Franklin at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 illustrates his belief in the scripture he often quoted, “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Ps. 127:1):

Gentlemen, I have lived a long time and am convinced that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, it is probable that an empire can rise without His aid? I move that prayer imploring the assistance of Heaven be held every morning before we proceed to business.

A century later, Abraham Lincoln would echo Franklin’s sentiments as he encouraged his audience to “recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.”

It has been a long time since U.S. national policy was dictated by what God might think or desire. Have we lost the distinction of being a truly good land? Others think so. Os Guinness reports that a member of the English Parliament described America in these terms even before the end of Ronald Reagan’s first term: “Huge and powerful still, but purposeless and ineffectual, the United States lies wallowing, like some dismasted man-of-war, in the trough of world events.”

“You cannot put straight in others what is warped in yourself.” (Anthonasius of Alexandria, Patriarch of Alexandria and Church Father, c. 293-373)

“They are a nation of ninnies, they don’t know enough to come in out of the rain. If they had any sense at all, they’d know this; they would see what’s coming down the road” (Deut. 32:28-29 MSG).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“The Battle Hymn of the Republic”**: *“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword; His truth is marching on. In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea, With the glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me; As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free, While God is marching on. Glory! Glory, hallelujah! Glory! Glory, hallelujah! Glory! Glory, hallelujah! Our God is marching on!”*

March 11

“If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it” (Matt. 10:38-39 NLT).

Wanted: Life Losers

Howard Guinness asks the piercing question, “Where are the young men and women of this generation who will hold their lives cheap and be faithful even unto death. Where are those who will lose their lives for Christ’s sake?” Where, we might add, are those who will recklessly give themselves for His service? Where are those who love Him above all else and serve Him at all costs and care for His people without thought of self? As Guinness further asks, where are the visionaries? The adventurers? The explorers? The men and women willing to pay the price of an enduring vision for Him?

Sometimes I think we don’t really expect that a commitment to Christ will involve brains, desire, drive, determination, and discipline, to produce a godly destiny. Why not? Why don’t we focus on the fact that today’s fear, fatigue, failure, and frustration, make fertile soil for tomorrow’s fruit? This reality must be grasped if you are to understand the climb before you.

In the twenty-first century church we dillydally with dedication. Ours is a comfortable conformity, a convenient commitment. J. I. Packer calls what we seem to prefer, “hot tub” religion.

Where are the soldiers of the cross who through fire, tears, and blood are willing to lay down their lives for the Christ they serve?

Where are the life-losers who surrender self for the sake of the Savior, the life-bringer?

“If you are going through a time of discouragement, there is a time of great personal growth ahead.” (Oswald Chambers)

“The secret of the servant’s life is that he stays in tune with God all the time.” (Oswald Chambers)

Dark times are allowed and come to us through the sovereignty of God. Are we prepared to let God do what He wants with us? Are we prepared to be separated from the outward, evident blessings of God? Until Jesus Christ is

truly our Lord, we each have goals of our own which we serve. Our faith is real, but it is not yet permanent. And God is never in a hurry. If we are willing to wait, we will see God pointing out that we have been interested only in His blessings, instead of in God Himself. The sense of God's blessings is fundamental. "... be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (16:33). Unyielding spiritual fortitude is what we need. (Oswald Chambers)

"What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (Job 3:25-26 NIV).

"So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you" (1 Pet. 4:19 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **"So Send I You"**: *"So send I you to labor unrewarded, To serve unpaid, unloved, unsought, unknown, To bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing; So send I you to toil for me alone. So send I you to leave your life's ambition, To die to dear desire, self-will resign, To labor long and love where men revile you; So send I you to lose your life in Mine."*

March 12

"Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (Col. 3:13b NLT).

Check the Instructions

If you think it can be hard to forgive, you're right. The folks in the Bible could identify with you.

In the New Testament, the word translated "forgiveness" has several literal meanings. It can mean to let the pot drop. To leave, let go. To send forth. To send away.

The apostle Peter had more than a few things to learn about forgiveness. Matthew 18 suggests there may have been interpersonal relationship problems between Peter and some of the other Twelve. At least Peter had trouble forgiving somebody for something.

Peter comes to Jesus with the billion dollar question, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (18:21 NASB). Notice, Peter raises two questions: How often shall I forgive him? Shall I forgive him as many as seven times?

Remember, this is Peter the "perfect," or maybe we should call him Peter the puffed up and proud. Notice he never asks, "How many times shall I ask for forgiveness, Lord?" People who think they're perfect never need it.

Peter very generously suggests the number seven. The going rate for forgiveness in those days was twice. Two times--that's all you had to forgive anyone. If someone wronged you a third time, you were under no obligation to forgive. What Peter did was multiply the going rate by three and add one to make seven. I am sure that he expected to hear the same thing from the lips of Jesus as earlier in Matthew 16:17, where the Lord exclaimed, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (KJV).

Instead Peter is shocked to hear Jesus answer, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Mt. 8:22 NASB).

Seven is Peter's budget of forgiveness. Seventy times seven is the Lord's. And really, no limit is implied. Jesus is calling for forgiveness without computation.

Do you want to have a clear conscience before God and man? (Acts 24:16, Ps. 119:165). Forgive! As George Bernard Shaw said, "A conscience is an expensive thing to keep."

"Jesus is remaking you into a person who actually loves people and who begins to consider their best interests. Our opinions and impulses no longer reign. What he has begun, he will complete." (David Powlison)

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **"Jesus Paid It All"**: *"Lord, now indeed I find Thy pow'r, and Thine alone, Can change the leper's spots, And melt the heart of stone. For nothing good have I Whereby Thy grace to claim, I'll wash my garments white In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb. Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."*

March 13

Anxious

"For this reason I say to you, do not be **anxious** about your life, as to what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being **anxious** can add a single hour to his life? ... for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,

and all these things will be added to you. So do not be **anxious** about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt. 6:25-27; 32b-34 NIV).

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who **asks** receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son **asks** for a loaf, will give him a stone? ... If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who **ask** Him?" (Matt. 7:8-9, 11 NIV).

Webster's definition of the word "anxious" is uneasy in mind. The antidote for anxiety is knock, ask, and receive.

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand" (Phil. 4:6, 7a NLT).

Why does God allow the circumstances that make us anxious?

Isobel Kuhn in her book *In the Arena* states: "The circumstance will pass in time, but the revelation you will receive of Himself, His love, and His power will enrich you forever." (25)

Prayer: Father God, we need Your power today. Hinder, remove, bring to non-effect any other power except Yours. Keep us focused on You! It's all about Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. Lord, please keep our families on Your blessing list! May Your name be lifted up, praised, worshiped and honored in what we say and even think. We love You. In faith believing we ask that You grant us peace of mind.

March 14

"The secret to success is consistency of purpose." (Benjamin Disraeli)

"Oh, that my steps might be steady, keeping to the course you set" (Ps. 119:5 MSG).

You Were Made For This

Pearl and I were intrigued by the crabs that make their way back and forth across the road on Little Cayman. They are the funniest little creatures. They live inside a great big shell, and whenever they sense motion they withdraw immediately and the shell lies on the road like a rock.

One day I just couldn't pass up the opportunity to play kid again while Pearl and I were riding our bicycles to the store. I gave one of the crabs a kick in the shell, and he must have rolled up the road about thirty or forty feet. When I rode up beside him, I noticed that he had already begun to resume his journey to wherever crabs go to when they cross the road. He was walking a little crooked, but after all, crabs walk sideways and people walk straight. I could just hear him singing inside his shell, "Hey, hey, hey. I was made for this."

When it comes to PERSEVERANCE, that's a tune all Christians could be singing. Perhaps Paul's words to the Corinthian Christians in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 in the Phillips translation will inspire us: "We are hard-pressed on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but are never deserted: we may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out!"

I think it would be altogether fitting as we conclude our meditation with Edgar Guest and a poetic piece called, "It Couldn't Be Done":

Somebody said that it couldn't be done,
But he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.
Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
At least no one ever has done it";
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.
There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
There are thousands to prophesy failure;
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,
The dangers that wait to assail you.

But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.

"Seek to cultivate a buoyant, joyous sense of the crowded kindnesses of God in your daily life." (Alexander Maclaren)

"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus" (Rom. 15:5 NASB).

"But you need to stick it out, staying with God's plan so you'll be there for the promised completion" (Heb. 10:36 MSG).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Beneath the Cross of Jesus**": *"Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand, The shadow of a mighty Rock Within a weary land; A home within the wilderness, A rest upon the way, From the burning of the noontide heat, And the burden of the day. I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place; I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face; Content to let the world go by, To know no gain nor loss, My sinful self my only shame, My glory all the cross."*

March 15

"I would rather attempt to do something great for God and fail, than to do nothing and succeed." (Unknown)

Goal Setting and God's Will

Almost every modern book on success in business and life focuses on setting goals. For some reason Christians often resist this kind of thinking. Why? Are we dismissing the concept of setting life goals as presumption upon God? If so, we're dead wrong!

Setting goals is not a way of telling God what He can and cannot do in our lives. Goals don't tell Him to take a back seat while we drive the wagon. Setting goals means taking aim, moving toward things He values, and recognizing it is His prerogative to shift directions on us. We flex when He does.

People who aim at nothing generally hit it. God doesn't want our lives to be a bunch of misfires, mistakes, and miscues.

Goal-setting and God's will are not opposites. Goal-setting is a method of taking temporal control of our lives, realizing God is ultimately in charge. Goal-setting also involves determining the direction of our lives, realizing God always has the last word there, too. We take nothing out of His hands when we set goals. We can take nothing out of His hands! Is there anything in your life He cannot touch in some way if He desires? No.

The primary goal of the believer climbing the mountain of commitment is Christlikeness. True Christlikeness only comes when we are at last in His presence and have shed the mortal for immortality. Until then, may we keep climbing . . . progressively becoming doers of His word, not just hearers. We express our obedience by setting goals to develop Christlike qualities and to accomplish things we have learned from our time in His word, in prayer, and in sensitivity to His Spirit.

"Be careful that you don't become a hypocrite by spending all your time trying to get others right with God before you worship Him yourself." (Oswald Chambers)

The Red Sea Rules

Rule 1: Realize that God means for you to be where you are.

Rule 2: Be more concerned for God's glory than for your relief.

Rule 3: Acknowledge your enemy, but keep your eyes on the Lord.

Rule 4: Pray!

Rule 5: Stay calm and confident, and give God time to work.

Rule 6: When unsure, just take the next logical step by faith.

Rule 7: Envision God's enveloping presence.

Rule 8: Trust God to deliver in His own unique way.

Rule 9: View your current crisis as a faith builder for the future.

Rule 10: Don't forget to praise Him. (Robert Morgan, *The Red Sea Rules*)

"I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself" (1 Cor. 9:26-27 MSG).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Draw Me Nearer**": *"I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice, And it told Thy love to me; But I long to rise in the arms of faith, And be closer drawn to Thee. There are depths of love that I cannot know Till I cross the narrow sea; There are heights of joy that I may not reach Till I rest in peace with Thee. Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, To the cross where Thou hast died; Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, To Thy precious, bleeding side."*

March 16

“Onward and Upward

The story is told of a sweet little old lady who was asked the secret of her longevity, “And why do you think God has permitted you to reach the age of 92?” Without hesitation she replied, “To test the patience of my relatives.” Growing older isn’t easy on anybody. I’ve spent years collecting comments on getting up there, and here are a few of my favorites:

Aging is when ...

- ... the gleam in your eye is from the sun hitting your bifocals.
- ... your little black book contains only names ending in M.D.
- ... your favorite part of the newspaper is “25 Years Ago Today.”
- ... your knees buckle and your belt won’t.
- ... you’re growing old alone because your wife has quit having birthdays.
- ... you burn the midnight oil till 9:30 p.m.
- ... you have too much room in the house and not enough room in the medicine cabinet.
- ... you get your exercise acting as pall bearer for your friend who exercised.

Actually, the picture isn’t all that gloomy. The following little piece included by Patsy Clairmont in a message called, “Under His Wings, Close to His Heart” is a classic:

What’s Happened to Grandmothers

In the dim and distant past,
When life’s tempo wasn’t fast,
Grandma used to rock and knit,
Crochet tats and babysit.
When the kids were in a jam
You could always count on Gram,
And in an age of gracious living,
Grandma was the gal for giving.
Grandma now is at the gym
Exercising to keep slim.
She’s off touring with a bunch
Taking clients out to lunch.
Driving North to ski a curl
All her days are in a whirl.
Nothing seems to stop or block her,
Now that Grandma’s off her rocker.

Way to go, Gram! Nothing thrills me more than seeing seniors stay active and literally give life their best shot in the final laps. My book, *Keep the Fire!* was written for the purpose of encouraging seasoned citizens to do just that. In many ways, the last years of life can be the best, the most focused, the most spiritually productive. Seniors well along the climb of commitment often look more like Jesus day by day.

“Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me” (Ps. 71:18 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Until Then”**: *“My heart can sing when I pause to remember, A heartache here is but a stepping stone Along a trail that’s winding always upwards, This troubled world is not my final home. This weary world with all its toil and struggle May take its toll of misery and strife The soul of man is like a waiting falcon, When it’s released it’s destined for the skies, But until then my heart will go on singing, until then with joy I’ll carry on, Until the day my eyes behold the city, Until the day God calls me home.”*

March 17

Following is Fun

Do you realize that following is fun? This lesson was brought home to Pearl and me at South Padre island along the Texas Gulf coast.

The brown pelican population has made a remarkable comeback in South Texas in recent years. The birds look rather cumbersome in flight, but are genuine fishing machines. We watched them demonstrate their technique as they would fly twenty to thirty feet above the waves, then abruptly dive straight down like kamikazes into the water. There would be a splash, then up they would pop with the catch of the day in the hopper.

On other occasions we noticed the pelicans flying in a formation of five very close to the water. We wondered if this was another fishing strategy. The birds flew so near the surface of the water that we would lose them visually in the trough of the waves. We thought they were hunting for a school of fish, but after watching the antics for a few days,

it became apparent that the maneuver was not utilitarian at all. The pelicans were playing a game! The leader would fly inches above the waves. If he went higher, his followers went higher. He would dip down between the waves, and they would follow. Just as the water broke, he would rise. The goal of the followers seemed to be to fly nimbly enough to keep from getting wet. It looked like great fun, and they'd have missed out entirely if they hadn't been willing to stay behind the leader.

I wonder how much joy we miss when we get out of formation and forget who's in charge?

I am still in your presence, but you've taken my hand. You wisely and tenderly lead me, and then you bless me. You're all I want in heaven! You're all I want on earth! (Ps. 73:23-24 MSG).

Yes! He does lead safely home.

Dark times are allowed and come to us through the sovereignty of God. Are we prepared to let God do what He wants with us? Are we prepared to be separated from the outward, evident blessings of God? Until Jesus Christ is truly our Lord, we each have goals of our own which we serve. Our faith is real, but it is not yet permanent. And God is never in a hurry. If we are willing to wait, we will see God pointing out that we have been interested only in His blessings, instead of in God Himself. The sense of God's blessings is fundamental.

"... be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (16:33). Unyielding spiritual fortitude is what we need. (Oswald Chambers)

"I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet!" (Phil. 3:12-15 MSG).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"**: *"Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, Pilgrim thro' this barren land; I am weak, but Thou art mighty, Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand; Bread of Heaven, Feed me till I want no more; Bread of Heaven, Feed me till I want no more. Open now the crystal fountain Whence the healing waters flow; Let the fiery, cloudy pillar Lead me all my journey thro'; Strong Deliverer, Be Thou still my Strength and Shield; Strong Deliverer, Be Thou still my Strength and Shield."*

March 18

"But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5 NIV).

Putting It All Together

During the Christmas season, our Ministries office receives more requests for sermons and messages focusing on tracing the seed of Jesus Christ through Scripture than any other subject. What seems to me to be a dry recitation of Bible verses stirs the hearts and minds of hundreds of believers each year. They thrill at the sacred thread that holds it all together. There are several reasons why this is true.

First of all, God's Word is alive and powerful, and it communicates like nothing else. The Lord invented communication, after all, and if we are receptive, then His teachings can come alive for us with the timeless truths of which they are made. They are the very voice of God!

Additionally, the tragic reality is that so many people, even Christians, do not realize that God's Word is bound together by the unifying cord of Jesus Christ. News of His coming is found throughout the Old Testament, and it is thrilling to view the specific fulfillment in Christ of centuries-old prophecies. We are comforted, as we realize that our God is dependable, faithful to work as He says He will. In the words of Joshua 21:45, "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" (NIV).

God has certainly worked as He said He would in sending Jesus, "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1 KJV) to earth. Born of a virgin, born in a small village, born to die for us, He was rightly called Immanuel, "God with us" (see Matt. 1:25).

It is vital that this Jesus, this Immanuel, this greatest seed of Abraham and David, reigns in our hearts.

The Surrendered Life

"I have been crucified with Christ . . ." (Gal. 2:20)

To become one with Jesus Christ, a person must be willing not only to give up sin, but also to surrender his whole way of looking at things. Being born again by the Spirit of God means that we must first be willing to let go before we can grasp something else. The first thing we must surrender is all of our pretense or deceit. What our Lord wants us to present to Him is not our goodness, honesty, or our efforts to do better, but real solid sin. Actually, that is all He can take from us. And what He gives us in exchange for our sin is real solid righteousness. But we must surrender all pretense that we are anything, and give up all our claims of even being worthy of God's consideration.

Once we have done that, the Spirit of God will show us what we need to surrender next. Along each step of this process, we will have to give up our claims to our rights to ourselves. Are we willing to surrender our grasp on all that we possess, our desires, and everything else in our lives? Are we ready to be identified with the death of Jesus Christ?

We will suffer a sharp painful disillusionment before we fully surrender. When people really see themselves as the Lord sees them, it is not the terribly offensive sins of the flesh that shock them, but the awful nature of the pride of their own hearts opposing Jesus Christ. When they see themselves in the light of the Lord, the shame, horror, and desperate conviction hit home for them.

If you are faced with the question of whether or not to surrender, make a determination to go on through the crisis, surrendering all that you have all that you are to Him. And God will then equip you to do all that He requires of you. (Oswald Chambers)

“For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies will make this happen!” (Isa. 9:6-7 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Open My Eyes That I May See”**: *“Open my eyes that I may see Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me; Place in my hands the wonderful key That shall unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see; Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine! Open my mind that I may read More of Thy love in word and deed. What shall I fear while yet Thou dost lead? Only for light from Thee I plead. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see; Open my mind, illumine me, Spirit divine!”*

March 19

“All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all” (Isa. 53:6 NLT).

Born to Die

Psalms 16 and 22 are among the many songs written by King David, who, besides being a military mastermind, was also a gifted writer, poet, lyricist, and musician. Portions of these two psalms are prophetic in nature, as we shall see. In Psalm 16:10, we read, “For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol: Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay” (NASB). Just as God would not eternally sentence David’s soul to Sheol, the place of the dead, neither would He condemn the coming Holy One of the Lord to endure decay. The prophetic language is a prediction of the resurrection of this Holy One, this promised seed, this Christ who was born to die for us ... and who would not suffer everlasting death (see Acts 2:21, 13:35). He it is who has risen from the dead, and who eventually will rule eternally, fulfilling the “forevers” in the promise of God to David in 2 Samuel 7.

Turning a few pages in our Bibles, we find the drama of Psalm 22. With agonized voice, David laments of his own sufferings in verse 1, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning” (NASB). His words transport us to the foot of Calvary, where Jesus Christ, hanging upon the cross, also loudly cries, in anguish, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” or “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46 NASB). The prophetic parallel is unmistakable ... David’s words foreshadow the heart-and-soul-wrenching message of our Savior.

And yet that is not all, for further along in Psalm 22, as David continues to write of his suffering, we are also given a searing and painful picture of the horrors of crucifixion. It is amazing to realize that these words were penned seven hundred years before Christ met His death upon the cross. David and his countrymen did not practice crucifixion as a form of punishment, and were not likely to have been intimately acquainted with the rigors of this method of execution. But through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David was able to describe with remarkable and terrifying accuracy the agony experienced by our Lord at Calvary.

While surely David underwent trial and persecution, he was never crucified. Consider briefly how his words mirror what would actually happen to his greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, seven hundred years later. “I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint ...” The trauma of crucifixion included the horrid fact that one’s body weight gradually pulled joint from joint, tearing the muscle sinew in unimaginable agony.

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws ...” No one can doubt that Jesus’ strength was drained by the brutal beatings He received at the hands of His captors, the demanding journey to the brow of Golgotha, the hours upon the cross. As the moment of His death approached, Christ requested something to drink. John 19:28 tells us that a sponge soaked in wine vinegar was lifted to His lips. When He received this drink, He proclaimed, “It is finished” ... bowed his head and give up his spirit” (Jn. 19:30 NIV).

“A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet ... They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” The words of Mark 15:24 eloquently testify to the fulfillment of this prophetic utterance, speaking of the Roman soldiers who nailed Christ to the cross: “And they

crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take” (NASB).

This Jesus, this “greater son” of David, was a man born to die, and in so dying He fulfilled the over three hundred specific Old Testament predictions. (Don Anderson, *A Gift Too Wonderful for Words*)

“They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, ‘Hail! King of the Jews!’” (Matt. 27:29 NLT).

Join me in singing “**The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power**”: “*The blood that Jesus shed for me, Way back on Calvary; The blood that gives me strength from day to day, It will never lose its pow’r. It soothes my doubts and calms my fears, And it dries all my fears; The blood that gives me strength from day to day, It will never lose its pow’r. It reaches to the highest mountain, It flows to the lowest valley. The blood that gives me strength from day to day, It will never lose its pow’r.*”

March 20

Careful Words

Temper—proud of it? Choose to give it to Jesus in obedience. Feed and nurture your soul—the only eternal part of your being.

“Our opinions must never replace the truth of God’s Word.” (*Our Daily Bread*, April 17, 2010).

“A wise person is hungry for truth, while the fool feeds on trash” (Prov. 15:14).

Contentment comes when we want God’s will more than we want our own way.

Sometimes our prayer is, “Listen, Lord, Your servant is speaking.” Not “Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening.” (Adrian Rogers)

The only time you hear from some people is when they have critical words or opinions. If you do not pray, encourage and affirm others on a regular basis then you have no right to criticize.

Cat birds sitting in a tree looking down at every one chattering, chattering about every thing they see and hear. Never helping—just observing, watching—waiting for something to happen so they will have something to chatter about.

I must be utterly ruthless to cast off and cut out everything in my life that is a stench and offense to the holiness of God.

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;

Try me, O Saviour, know my thoughts, I pray;

See if there be some wicked way in me:

Cleanse me from ev’ry sin, and set me free. (J. Edwin Orr, *Cleanse Me*)

“The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results” (Jam. 5:16b).

“When we focus on God and are quiet before Him our chatter will cease. All else is irrelevant in the presence of the Holy God.” (A.W. Tozer)

“God is in heaven, and men below: Be short our tunes; our words be few: a solemn reverence checks our songs, and praise sits silent on our tongues.” (Isaac Watts, *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse*, 1)

Prayer: Thank You Lord Jesus for the object lesson of the way You love people. Please cleanse our minds and hearts that we might think and by our actions and words, always to encourage and affirm others. Deliver us from the desire to give our opinion on any and all subjects that are none of our business. After all, Father, we do want to have a few friends left.

March 21

“Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom” (Ps. 90:12 NLT).

“Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is” (Ps. 39:4 NLT)

A Time For All - Ecclesiastes 3:2-8

a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

In verse 2-8, Solomon muses, mentioning twenty-eight experiences which encompass nearly the whole of life. In so doing, he proves that there is a time for everything in God's plan. But as we discuss his reflections, we need to remember also that Solomon's viewpoint is that of a man in mid-life; some of what he speaks he says with a sense of frustration, an awareness that he bumps into the Lord's sovereign cycle no matter where he turns.

First, Solomon says, there is a "time to be born and a time to die" (3:2). How does that relate to the mid-life crisis? In middle age, we're sitting down at halftime reflecting on how we've lived, and we realize that our death-day is now closer than our birthday. Each day we live marches us twenty-four hours nearer the moment of our demise. We may get a little shaky inside as it becomes all too clear that our time truly is in somebody else's hands.

Only Jesus Christ has known with certainty the moment of His death. Not until after He triumphantly entered Jerusalem for the last time, did He tell the disciples that the hour was near for Him to be glorified (see Jn. 12:27). Within a week He would be hanging on a cross, suffering an agonizing death just so He might pay the penalty for the sins of all who believe (See Rom. 5:8).

Jesus knew His death date beforehand, but we never do. Even terminally-ill patients are not able to mark specifically the hour of their passing. We all know that death will come, but we're never really prepared for it, are we? Our time is truly in God's hands. That's what Solomon is trying to say in Ecclesiastes 3:2.

"We have a faith that does not shrink from death. The fundamental concern of our faith is born to reveal with fearsome accuracy the nature of death, and to draw the sting from it by the victory of the resurrected Christ. We, of all people, need to deny nothing true, the bad and the good. Of all people, we are most able to confess the grand proportions of death: so terrible as to defeat us all!—but defeated, rather, in Jesus." (Walter Wangerin, Jr.)

In the second half of verse 2, he continues his observations, mentioning that there is "a time to plant and a time to uproot." We plant gardens in the spring and then we tear them up in the fall—except for me. I plant my garden each spring; the sun burns it up in June, so I pull it up then! There's also a time to settle down, to "plant" roots in our lives. People change careers; they move and "uproot" too. To do some of this uprooting frequently becomes the desire of many men in mid-life. Job changes are common then. Moves are often made. (Don Anderson, *Ecclesiastes: The Mid-Life Crisis*)

"O that I would take time daily in His presence to drink in His love." (Andrew Murray)

"Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me" (Ps. 23:4 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Reach Out to Jesus**": *"Is your burden heavy as you bear it all alone? Does the road you travel harbor danger yet unknown? Are you growing weary in the struggle of it all? Jesus will help you when on His name you call. Is the life you're living filled with sorrow and despair? Does the future press you with its worry and its care? Are you tired and friendless, have you almost lost your way? Jesus will help you just come to Him today. He is always there hearing ev'ry prayer faithful and true. Walking by our side in His love we hide all the day through. When you get discouraged just remember what to do, Reach out to Jesus, He's reaching out to you."*

March 22

"Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, 'I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life'" (Jn. 8:12 NLT).

"And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants" (Jn. 3:19-21 NLT).

Examining the Arena

Serious competitors, regardless of the event, examine their territory before the real action begins. Ice skaters glide on the ice, skiers race the downhill course, basketball players dribble the gym and shoot baskets. Besides the benefits of physical conditioning, on-site preparation sharpens mental alertness. Knowing the eccentricities of the playing field may mean the difference between the athlete's victory or defeat.

In a similar way, Christians benefit from examining the culture in which we live. Christians have always lived in societies which were generally antagonistic to biblical beliefs. However, in modern America the trend toward outright hostility is increasing.

Jim Black, in his book *When Nations Die*, makes ten observations about the United States today which portray social, cultural, and spiritual symptoms of danger ahead:

1. General increase in lawlessness throughout the culture

2. The loss of economic discipline and self-restraint
3. A decline in the quality and relevance of education
4. Rising bureaucracy, government regulation, and taxes
5. A weakening of the foundational principles that contributed to the greatness of the nation
6. A loss of respect for established religions
7. Increase in materialism
8. A rise in immorality
9. The lure of alien gods
10. A decline in the value of human life. (Dr. Jim Black, *When Nations Die*)

Some practical ways these trends are revealed can be noted in our daily newspapers. Stories about:

- Militant radical feminists
- Gay-rights advocates who justify their sin
- People who are outraged that a mother drowns her two sons, but who support another woman's rights to kill her unborn child
- A justice system that too often rules in favor of the criminal and forgets the victims and their families
- Policemen who go to war when they leave for work
- High school graduates needing remedial reading classes
- TV channels filled with violence, murder, sex, drugs, profanity, nudity, and dysfunctional families

Another tragedy of America is that many have replaced God-given initiative with selfish entitlement. "In God We Trust" may still be inscribed on our coins but "Me First" is engraved upon our hearts. We crave our rights, and selfishness consumes us like a cancer.

As a nation, the further we slip away from God and His Word, the more everyone does what is right in his own eyes. However, the recent emphasis upon biblical family values and other trends reveal that America still has heart. Hopefully this new conservatism will prove to be more than a promising blip on the nation's otherwise flat moral EKG.

How is a Christian to live in this kind of world? How can we impact our society in a positive way? What can we do or say to make a difference for Christ? Leading the way walking in the Light. (Don Anderson, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

"Whenever I come in prayer, the Lord instructs me to pause long enough to remember who He is." (Andrew Murray)

"The Bible: *Know* it in your head, *stow* it in your heart, *show* it in your life, *sow* it in the world." (Charlie Riggs)

"The teaching of your word gives light, so even the simple can understand" (Ps. 119:130 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Stepping in the Light**": "*Trying to walk in the steps of the Savior, Trying to follow our Savior and King, Shaping our lives by His blessed example, Happy, how happy, the songs that we bring. Trying to walk in the steps of the Savior, Upward, still upward we'll follow our Guide; When we shall see Him, the King in His beauty, Happy, how happy, our place at His side. How beautiful to walk in the steps of the Savior, Stepping in the light, Stepping in the light; How beautiful to walk in the steps of the Savior, Led in paths of light.*"

March 23

Let's begin our devotion today singing "**My Desire**": "*My desire, To be like Jesus, My desire, To be like Him. His Spirit fill me, His love o'erwhelm me; In deed and word To be like Him.*"

The Spirit in the Relationship (Romans 8:1-11)

Office machines were created for frustration and the fracturing of confidence, I've decided. Recently I saw the following cartoon tacked above an office computer, depicting a man with goggles in place, a fiendish smile on his face, and a mallet raised above his head. "Strike any key when ready," the caption read!

A friend ran across this sign posted above the office copier one day. Whoever wrote it knew worlds about the exasperations of photocopying.

WARNING! This machine is subject to breakdowns during periods of critical need. A special circuit in the machine called a "critical detector" senses the operator's emotional state in terms of how desperate he or she is to use the machine. The "critical detector" then creates a malfunction proportional to the desperation of the operator. Threatening the machine with violence only aggravates the situation. Likewise, attempts to use another machine may cause it to also malfunction. They belong to the same union. Keep cool and say nice things to the machine. Nothing else seems to work. Never let anything mechanical know you're in a hurry.

Our old nature operates very much like that "critical detector." Whenever we are desperate to do the right thing and we attempt on our own to perform the requirements of the law, the old nature reacts to create a malfunction in our spiritual life. Romans 7 is a portrait of the apostle Paul frantically trying to become righteous by adhering to the law, and finding that his "critical detector" sets off a chain reaction of misbehavior every time he turns around. "I am not

practicing that which I am desiring to do, but I am doing that which I am hating,” he admits in Romans 7:15 (DAV). He is a Christian, without doubt, but he is always doing the wrong things. Finally Paul comes to a great moment of futility and exhaustion, where he cries in desperation, “Wretched man that I am! Who shall set me free from out of the body of this death?” (7:24 DAV). Who, indeed? The answer is the Spirit of God, and the method is given in Romans 8. (Don Anderson, *God Wants a Relationship Not a Performance*)

“But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you” (Jn. 14:26 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of “**Near to the Heart of God**”: *“There is a place of quiet rest, Near to the heart of God, A place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God. There is a place of full release, Near to the heart of God, A place where all is joy and peace, Near to the heart of God. O Jesus, blest Redeemer, Sent from the heart of God, Hold us, who wait before Thee, Near to the heart of God.”*

March 24

It's not an easy road.

Marks of Maturity (James 1:1-5:20)

I believe that the book of James shares with us twelve points for progress, or marks of maturity, characteristic of the Christian life. These dozen guidelines for growth form a framework about which his letter is organized. Here is a preview of the rich wisdom that James, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded for us.

Twelve Points for Progress

1. The Christian grows taller through testing. God uses the tough times in our lives to produce growth (Jam. 1:1-12).
2. Spiritual growth is stunted by sin. Tests may promote growth, but yielding to temptation paralyzes progress (1:13-18).
3. Growth is produced by reading God's word. The consistent intake and application of scripture causes us to grow spiritually (1:19-27).
4. Our maturity is shown by whether or not we have learned to love the unlovely. Part of godliness is the capability to care for others without prejudice or partiality (2:1-13).
5. Our faith is dead without deeds. Salvation does not result from works, but if we have the real thing, our faith should be showing itself in our lives (2:14-26).
6. We are to be striving for tongue control. The maturing Christian is one who is increasingly able to tame his or her tongue (3:1-12).
7. The progressing believer should also be growing in good judgment. A person who is manifesting the wisdom from above is growing up in Jesus Christ (3:13-18).
8. Part of the process is lifelong—it is an ongoing war against the big three: the world, the flesh, and the devil. We can count on participating in the fight if we desire to grow up in Christ (4:1-12).
9. Our maturity is reflected in our daily dependence on the Designer. Our lives should give evidence of an increasing reliance on the Lord, a gradual yielding of our independent spirits to him (4:13-17).
10. Another indicator of growth is our ability to be discerning about wealth. Although it is not sinful to be rich, it is sinful for a Christian to have much yet not use it properly, for God's glory. We will eventually be accountable for our bank balances, stock portfolios, and giving (5:1-6).
11. Part of growing in Christ is to have an increasing awareness of his prophetic timetable. The Lord's reappearing is right on schedule, and should be an event we eagerly anticipate as we come to know more of him (5:7-12).
12. A growing Christian is a praying Christian. James exhorts us, as a mark of maturity, to pursue the power of prayer (5:7-12).

There you have them. Twelve points for progress. Twelve marks of maturity. (Don Anderson, *James: Running Uphill Into the Wind*)

It is not that you have gotten God, but that He has gotten you. God is at work bending, breaking, molding, and doing exactly as He chooses. And why is He doing it? He is doing it for only one purpose—that He may be able to say, “This is My man, and this is My woman.” (Oswald Chambers)

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18 NASB).

Join me in singing a couple verses of “**It's Not An Easy Road**”: *“It's not an easy road we are trav'ling to Heaven, For many are the thorns on the way; It's not an easy road but the Saviour is with us, His presence gives us joy ev'ry day. Though I am often footsore and weary from travel, Though I am often bowed down with care; A better day is coming when Home in the glory, We'll rest in perfect peace over there. No, no, it's not an easy road, No, no it's not an easy road; But Jesus walks beside me and brightens the journey, And lightens ev'ry heavy load.”*

“Lord, I want to be a sweating servant straining in Your service until the whistle blows.” (Don Anderson)

March 25

When the Pieces Don't Fit

Joseph's life speaks eloquently to us today as we are pounded by the crashing waves of trial and tribulation. As our businesses fail, and our kids rebel, our parents age ungracefully, our friends betray us, we need to remember one simple yet powerful truth: God is at work in the midst of adversity. As he was with Joseph—everywhere, in every situation—so God is at work in our bodies, souls, and spirits even when it seems that the pieces of our lives are cut crooked and the jagged edges don't connect.

The truth is that sometimes our lives look like pictures composed of ill-fitting pieces. I suppose the reality of hard times is difficult to swallow for a generation raised on the pabulum of television. Problems on the small screen are designed to disappear; they are magically presented and resolved within spaces of twenty-three minutes. On TV father always knows best.

But not always does secular television offer up ample portions of instant solutions to life's dilemmas, Christian television also promises a host of trouble-free good times to the believer who trusts in Jesus Christ. I do not mean to condemn Christian TV as a whole, but the truth is that some of the “joy boys” of the Christian media, sporting 1,000 dollar suits, Gucci loafers, and Rolex watches, preaching at us from the stages of multi-million dollar sets, often promise us the “abundant life” in exchange for a belief in Christ. To their way of thinking, the abundant life consists of health, wealth, and prosperity. If we would only place our faith in Jesus, these would be ours. Fortunately, it doesn't work that way.

In the foreword to Paul Powell's book on Job, *When Hurt Won't Go Away*, Pastor John R. Bisagno puts it this way:

In spite of the current deluge of “health-and-wealth theology,” the fact of the matter is that Jesus promised His followers only three things in this life: they would always be in trouble, never alone, ever at peace. The Christian faith was never intended to be merely an absence of human suffering; it is, rather, comfort in the midst of the storm, God's working out His purposes, revealing His grace, blessing with His presence. We get sick, we get divorces, we lose our jobs, our kids go bad like everybody else's. But we don't have to blow our brains out or jump off tall buildings! We have a Savior who has answers, help, a purpose, and a presence to reveal through it all (Powell 11).

God is not an all-powerful Santa Claus who showers us with microwaves, DVRs, yachts, swimming pools, summer homes, happy marriages, and healthy bodies whenever we ask. Instead, he permits us to face the tough times so that he can shape us and mold us into the types of people he wants us to be. He uses the trials to conform us to the image of his son, Jesus Christ (Jam. 1:2-4; Phil. 1:6; 2 Cor. 3:18). (Don Anderson, *Joseph: Fruitful in Affliction*)

The Discipline of Spiritual Perseverance

“Be still, and know that I am God . . .” (Ps. 46:10).

Perseverance is more than endurance. It is endurance combined with absolute assurance and certainty that what we are looking for is going to happen. Perseverance means more than just hanging on, which may be only exposing our fear of letting go and falling. Perseverance is our supreme effort of refusing to believe that our hero is going to be conquered. Our greatest fear is not that we will be damned, but that somehow Jesus Christ will be defeated. Also, our fear is that the very things our Lord stood for—love, justice, forgiveness, and kindness among men—will not win out in the end and will represent an unattainable goal for us. Then there is the call to spiritual perseverance. A call not to hang on and do nothing, but to work deliberately, knowing with certainty that God will never be defeated. If our hope seems to be experiencing disappointment right now, it simply means that they are being purified. Every hope or dream of the human mind will be fulfilled if it is noble and of God. But one of the greatest stresses in life is the stress of waiting for God. He brings fulfillment, “because you have kept My command to persevere . . .” (Revelation 3:10).

Continue to persevere spiritually. (Oswald Chambers)

“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!” (Job 19:25-27 NLT).

Join me in singing a couple verses of “**Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting**”: “*Jesus, I am resting, resting In the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness Of Thy loving heart. Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, And Thy beauty fills my soul, For by Thy transforming power, Thou has made me whole. Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, I behold Thee as Thou art, And Thy love, so pure, so changeless, Satisfies my heart; Satisfies its deepest longings, Meets, supplies its every need, Compasseth me round with blessings: Thine is love indeed!*”

March 26

“Our love's gone dry and so has the cow.” (Cowboy song)

Taking the Plunge

"I now pronounce you husband and wife," the minister proclaims in a voice loud enough for Great-grandma Smith to catch, without turning up the volume on her hearing aid. Then, with a faint, knowing smile, the man of God gently nods to the groom and quietly says, "You may now kiss your bride."

The flower girl stops fidgeting and stares up expectantly. Camera shutters click as the nervous twenty-four-year-old husband, clad in a rented tuxedo for the first time since his senior prom, lifts the lace blucher of his new wife's veil. He grasps her left hand and touches his lips to hers. Grinning broadly, they turn to face their guests. The bride's pink-gowned maid of honor hands back the bouquet and stoops to straighten the train of the expensive wedding gown. Then to the strains of the recessional, the pair marches back down the aisle and into the reality of life together. They are officially one—on paper, at least.

Yet as a minister who has performed nearly five hundred weddings ... and counseled hundreds of couples who have become disenchanted with their marriages, I can tell you that much more is involved in becoming one than making it through the wedding ceremony, as complicated as even that may be in our age of lavish receptions and high-priced photographers. One-becoming can be very unbecoming, at times.

I tell each couple that I marry after I have pronounced them husband and wife: "You came in here with a four letter word, L-O-V-E, and you are leaving with a four letter word, W-O-R-K." I then give them Daddy Don's final words. Every successful marriage has 5 ingredients:

1. A **COMMITMENT**—This is forever—You have entered into an unconditional covenant. It is permanent. It is sacrificial.
2. It is A **COMPANIONSHIP**—You are complete now.
3. It's A **CHALLENGE**—To change into what you are to become. The product of change is oneness and a greater closeness.
4. **COMMUNICATION**—Effective communication involves nourishing and cherishing. For the wife it affects her need for security and self-image. For the husband it affects his need for affirmation and acceptance.
5. It's A **CHRIST**—Life is like a triangle: the closer you get to God, the closer you get to each other. Remember Psalm 89:33-34: "Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

As soon as our spit-polished young pair exits the church, they enter a lifelong process of adjustment and adaptation. It begins quickly, possibly as soon as the receiving line forms at the reception.

I remember a story told by two of my good friends, a young couple on the executive board of our ministry. It seems that at the dinner following their wedding, their fathers were standing together, chatting. "How does Sally handle money?" asked the groom's dad.

"She still has the first nickel she ever earned," replied the father of the bride. "What about John?"

"Spends every dime he can lay his hands on," chuckled the new husband's father. And if it wasn't apparent before, both men knew then that the wedding was simply the beginning of some difficult steps toward oneness for their children.

Thankfully, the young man and woman have bridged much of their economic gap, but their story illustrates that marriage is the product of the joining of two unique personalities, two distinct individuals. Husband and wife must somehow learn to understand each other, to change when necessary, to accept freely, and to forgive generously.

Always remember: "Life is too short for drama and petty things, so kiss slowly, laugh insanely, love truly and FORGIVE quickly." (Don Anderson, *Song of Solomon*)

"Set me like a cylinder seal over your heart, like a signet on your arm. For love is as strong as death, passion is as unrelenting as Sheol. Its flames burst forth, it is a blazing flame. Surging waters cannot quench love; floodwaters cannot overflow it. If someone were to offer all his possessions to buy love, they would be utterly despised" (Song of Sol. 8:6-7 NET).

God designed marriage as a laboratory to teach and prepare us for living only for Jesus throughout eternity.

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**My Jesus, I Love Thee**": "*My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine; For Thee all the follies of sin I resign; My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou; If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now. I love Thee, because Thou hast first loved me, And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree; I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow; If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*"

March 27

The Joy of His Presence

"But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7 NASB).

"But those who obey God's word really do love him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did" (1 Jn. 2:5-6 NASB).

“‘See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the Lord Almighty. ... Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. ‘They will be mine,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not’” (Mal. 3:1, 16-18 NIV).

When we are living in the joy of God’s presence we are living in the light. God states we will be His special treasure as a father spares an obedient and dutiful child. There will be a difference between those who serve God and those who do not.

In His presence a scroll of remembrance was written of those who feared and loved to think about Him.

Even though this was written four hundred years before the birth of Christ, we are safe in His care and love.

Prayer: Lord, help us to follow faithfully and trust You completely for the future. We yield to Your plan and purpose for our life. We know Your grace is sufficient. We want to be clean and pure in our motives so that You can do a mighty work through us by the power of the Spirit. Praise God Who is worthy. Our greatest blessing is Your presence with us.

March 28

Over the Hill and On a Roll

“Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for the Lord” (Rom. 12:11 Phillips).

Eli, the temple priest was not a great man like Moses or Aaron, but his ambition drove him to assume the roles of both. Results? Eli failed both as a priest and as a parent. His carelessness, carnality, and complacency finally led to the collapse of his family and his ministry. We might say Eli was a religious leader suffering from burnout.

As a result, he abdicated his responsibilities as a parent. He abandoned and failed to lead his family. His sons are described as “wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:12 NIV).

In addition, Eli quit taking care of his own physical needs as he continually sat. Maybe he was the first couch potato! As the late coach Vince Lombardi said, “Fatigue makes cowards of us all.”

In the end, weariness left Eli without drive or incentive. With no motivation to keep going, he became careless and sloppy. He just sat, ate, and finally fell over backward out of his chair, breaking his neck on impact. He died a fat, frustrated, frumpy failure.

Scripture paints vivid portraits of others who failed to finish well. Other men occupying the Hall of Shame are Lot, Gideon, Samson, Nadab, Abihu, Gehazi, Asa, Saul, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Judas, just to name a few!

Today our culture plays well into the scenario by focusing on retirement, telling us that significant activity and productivity cease in our sixties and seventies. Not true. Life should intensify and become fuller as we anticipate seeing the One who would rather die than live without us, the One we have lived for and longed for throughout our Christian experience.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course; I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7 DAV). (Don Anderson, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

“If you are passionate about hearing: ‘Well Done!’ . . . ‘You are making every effort to present yourself to God, approved, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, guiding the word of truth along a straight path’ (2 Tim. 2:15 DAV).

I feel like singing with the Promise Keepers **“Let It Be Said of Us”**. Care to join me?: *“Let it be said of us, that the Lord was our passion. That with gladness we bore every cross we were given. That we fought the good fight, that we finished the course Knowing within us the pow’r of the risen Lord. Let the cross be our glory, And the Lord be our song. By mercy made holy, By the Spirit made strong. Let the cross be our glory, And the Lord be our song. Til the likeness of Jesus, Be through us made known. Let the cross be our glory, And the Lord be our song. Let it be said of us, We were marked by forgiveness. We were known by our love, And delighted in meekness. We were ruled by His peace, Heeding unity’s call. Joined as one body, that Christ would be seen by all.”*

March 29

Is The Grass Always Greener on the Other Side?

When driving down Texas highways I often see a cow poking its head through a barbed-wire fence and munching grass on the other side. Why do cows do that? Is it curiosity or a lack of contentment with provisions in the pasture? I don’t know. I sure do know a lot of people who are living like that.

Many fail to understand that God’s fences are for our benefit. Just as obedience to God’s principles yields the fruit of peace and blessing, disobedience yields bitter consequences. Since the beginning of time, man has challenged the

moral laws of God and tried to jump the fence. Instead of feeding on God's Word and obeying His precepts, some have gazed at the world's pasture and found it appealing. Yet many biblical examples demonstrate the devastating results of wrong choices.

David got his eyes on the lady next door and put his head through the fence. When Abraham gave Lot a homestead choice, he put the binoculars on the well-watered plains of Jordan. King Saul became impatient, took matters into his own hands, and offered a sacrifice instead of waiting for the priest according to the law. Gehazi, the servant, chased the chariot of Naaman. When Naaman stopped and addressed his need, he requested gifts for the sons of the prophets. He took the gifts, but instead of giving them away, he hid the gifts in his house and lied about it. Jesus challenged the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and give them to the poor because Jesus knew that while the young man tried to keep the Old Testament laws, he had made an idol of his possessions.

I have a beautiful picture of a large rainbow trout poised to strike a fly that has just fallen in front of him with a line attached. You can tell the fish is focused, enticed, hungry, and ready. He has already made his choice. In a similar way, Satan dangled the fruit before Eve and she took it. The Devil's been enticing us for years and with total disregard for the Father's restraints. Before we know it—wham! He's allured another one. You can almost hear him saying: "Gotcha!"

Confronted with the crisis of continuing to choose correctly, we can give in, give out, give up, or go on. For those of us who feel both beat up and bedraggled, Scripture holds a promise,

"But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:31 NLT).

(Don Anderson, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

"And do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness" (Rom. 6:13 NET)

C. S. Lewis wrote: "The moment you wake up each morning ... [all] your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job of each morning consists in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in" [As quoted in Timothy Jones, *The Art of Prayer* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 133].

Here is how the psalmist began his day: "Every morning, I tell you what I need, and I wait for your answer" (Psalm 5:3).

Which leads to the second idea:

GIVE GOD YOUR WAITING THOUGHTS. Spend time with him in silence. The mature married couple has learned the treasure of shared silence; they don't need to fill the air with constant chatter. Just being together is sufficient. Try being silent with God. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10 NIV). Awareness of God is a fruit of stillness before God.

Join me in a couple verses of "**'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus**": "'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at his Word; Just to rest upon His promise; Just to know, 'Thus saith the Lord.' Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, Just from sin and self to cease; Just from Jesus simply taking Life and rest, and joy and peace. Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him! How I've proved Him o'er and o'er! Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more!"

March 30

Fencing Out the Roaming Beasts

It is easy to underestimate the power of the adversary in the Christian walk. Quite often the greatest enemy lies within. Before a new Christian can make progress, he needs to identify several hindrances. Here are a few temptations we all face:

The Past

Someone has said—When the past quarrels with the present there can be no future. The Bible teaches us to lay aside our regrets and guilt and get on with the business of serving God.

When we become Christians each of us carries into our new family of God a private past, some of which we may feel ashamed about and some over which we had no control. Perhaps we deeply regret the awful insensitivity with which we have responded to others. I know how that feels.

Yes, when we become Christians we are new creations and the old things are passed away. The power of sin is broken and Satan is a defeated foe. But he can still use unresolved areas in our lives to establish a base of operations to wreak havoc within. When we come to Christ, most of us do come with a load of emotional baggage. We need to deal with it. Forgiving ourselves and others is a vital part of leaving the past behind.

Disobedience

Moses warned the Israelites, "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws, and his decrees that I am giving you this day" (Deut. 8:11 NIV).

Knowing God is in the business of blessing the obedient heart, Moses again cautions the people, “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach ... No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” (Deut. 30:11, 14 NIV).

The children of Israel go into the land under Joshua’s leadership and make all these wonderful statements of committed obedience at the end of his life and when we open the Book of Judges, the most oft repeated phrase is: “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (Jdg. 13:1 NIV).

Pride

We are often tempted to become proud in times of prosperity. Moses mentions five signs of material abundance.

1. The Israelites will eat and be satisfied.
2. They will build good houses and live in them.
3. Their herds and flocks will multiply.
4. Their silver and gold will multiply.
5. All they have will multiply.

Prosperity is dangerous when we fail to realize its source and when we place more faith in the wealth than in the One who provided our needs.

Ungratefulness

When difficulties arise we sometimes forget what God has done for us in the past.

Forgetfulness isn’t a unique temptation.

Gratitude is an attitude! Patriotism is a form of gratitude. I am reminded of what it cost in shed blood for me to live in a free country. If those who died were on parade, the line would circle the globe.

Gratitude is also the oil in the machinery of interpersonal relationships.

Independence

Another roaming beast we want to fence out is a spirit of independence. If we do not learn dependence upon God, we may end up with a hip out of joint like Jacob. We will be making the rest of the trip leaning on the top of a staff. We can be so stubborn at times. God then must take us through the breaking process. (Don Anderson, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

Devil’s Beatitudes:

Whew...talk about the hot seat! This one will make you stop and shudder!

If the devil were to write his beatitudes, they would probably go something like this:

1. Blessed are those who are too tired, too busy, too distracted to spend an hour once a week with their fellow Christians—they are my best workers.
2. Blessed are those Christians who wait to be asked and expected to be thanked—I can use them.
3. Blessed are the touchy who stop going to church—they are my missionaries.
4. Blessed are the trouble makers—they shall be called my children.
5. Blessed are the complainers—I’m all ears to them.
6. Blessed are those who are bored with the minister’s mannerisms and mistakes—for they get nothing out of his sermons.
7. Blessed is the church member who expected to be invited to his own church—for he is a part of the problem instead of the solution.
8. Blessed are those who gossip—for they shall cause strife and divisions that please me.
9. Blessed are those who are easily offended—for they will soon get angry and quit.
10. Blessed are those who do not give their offering to carry on God’s work—for they are my helpers.
11. Blessed is he who professes to love God but hates his brother and sister—for he shall be with me forever.
12. Blessed are you who, when you read this think it is about other people and not yourself—I’ve got you too!

“Be humble then before God. But resist the devil and you’ll find he’ll run away from you. Come close to God and he will come close to you. You are sinners: get your hands clean again. Your loyalty is divided: get your hearts made true once more. You should be deeply sorry, you should be grieved, you should even be in tears. Your laughter will have to become mourning, your high spirits will have to become dejection. You must humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord before he will lift you up” (Jam. 4:7-10 Phillips).

Join me in three verses of **“O for a Thousand Tongues”**: *“O for a thousand tongues to sing My great Redeemer’s praise The glories of my God and King, The triumphs of His grace. He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free; His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me. My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim, To spread thro’ all the earth abound, The honors of Thy name. Amen.”*

March 31

Eat, Drink & Get Ready

Years ago an issue of the *Ladies Home Journal* (not my normal reading) featured an article on one of my favorite entertainers. This well-known comedian has it all: a hit television show, a loving real-life family, millions of dollars in commercial endorsements. I'm referring to Bill Cosby. Let me quote from the article:

But he [Cosby] doesn't despair at growing older. "It isn't sad, it's funny," he insists. "I think growing older is wonderful." Nevertheless, he now keeps a close watch on his health. When a recent physical showed that his cholesterol level was high, he cut back on butter and milk. "I rectified that because I don't want to die," he says. "Sure, I'm scared of dying."

Cosby will probably need to live to a ripe old age just to accomplish all his goals. He's planning to write a third book, on love and marriage, and he'd like to make more films. He has said he will quit his series after two more seasons so that he can concentrate on other projects.

No matter what he does, though, you can count on Bill Cosby to break more records. Is he already thinking legacy? "I don't have time," he says. "I've lived a good life—and I don't think there's an afterlife" (Collins 141).

The article concludes with the observation that Cosby doesn't need an afterlife; he's found his heaven on earth. It left me cold, but this is what much of the world thinks. Let's eat, drink, be merry, love, work, and play, for tomorrow we die. This is all there is. It never occurs to some of us that we might just be wrong.

There is an afterlife—in the presence of God, or eternally suffering apart from him, tormented in a lake of fire. We don't like to talk about hell, but Jesus talked about it. He talked about hell as fervently as he talked about heaven. It's a place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth"—and that's the good stuff, you might say (Matt. 25:30 NASB). Hell is a horror of flame where a mere drop of cool water will be an unattainable treasure (see Lk. 16:24). I don't know about you, but I have better plans for eternity.

God is a God of the living. Jesus Christ said it with these words, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10b NASB). He is also a God of judgment and justice. The apostle Paul confronted the philosophers on Mars Hill with a sobering message of their accountability before the Lord: "He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man who He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:22-34 NASB).

The options for us? We can eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Or we can eat, drink, and get ready, for tomorrow we may be ushered into his presence. Jim Elliot, a missionary martyred by the Auca Indians in 1956, put it like this: "When it comes time to die, make sure that all you have to do is die."

And if we are Christians, and ready to die, let's never forget that most of the people we meet each day are probably not. Most are lost. That clerk in the grocery store, that bus driver, the mailman, the neighbor across the street—most will never come to know Jesus Christ. They'll step across to the other side expecting the billowy clouds, pearly gates, and waiting angel wings they've been promised in the movies. It happened in *It's a Wonderful Life*, for goodness sakes. It may have been a wonderful life, but it won't be a wonderful death for them. (Don Anderson, *Joy Comes in the Morning*)

"You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world" (Jn. 11:25-27 MSG).

"You know, Lord, how faithless and nervous I am in the presence of illness and death: even though I know you are the great Physician; even though I know you are the resurrection and the life. Teach me to live in hope, responsive every moment to your glory. Amen." (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Year With Jesus*)

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Blessed Assurance**": "*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood. Perfect submission, perfect delight, Visions of rapture now burst on my sight; Angels descending, bring from above Echoes of mercy, whispers of love. This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long; This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.*"

April 1

Keys to the City

A fellow I know recently attended a business conference held at one of the newest luxury hotels in Houston, Texas. He took his wife and infant son with him. When they checked in, instead of a room key they were given a credit card sized piece of laminated plastic that had been computer-designed to slide into a slot above the doorknob and unlock the door to their suite. Into the hotel's computer-controlled elevator my friends piled. The bellboy accompanying them escorted them to room 427.

Taking the plastic card, he lightly pressed it into the slot on the door, smiled, reached for and twisted the doorknob. Surprise! The door wouldn't open. Frowning, he tried the card in the slot again—no luck—the door remained locked. Apologizing to the couple (whose four-month-old baby had by then awakened and begun to cry loudly), the bellboy scampered back to the nearby elevator. Several minutes later he emerged with another card, placed it in the slot, and easily opened the door. Even with the marvels of a microchip, we still need the right “key”!

To enter the kingdom of heaven, we need the right key, too, and the key is Jesus Christ. What words say it better than those written years ago by Fanny J. Crosby in the lyrics to her immortal hymn, “To God Be the Glory”? The “amens” resound in our hearts when this one is sung:

To God be the glory, great things he hath done,
So Loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the Life-gate that all may go in.

(Don Anderson, *Abraham: Delay is Not Denial*)

We are accountable to God not only for our disobedience, but for our unbelief in Christ and his redemptive work. As unbelievers we “were dead in the trespasses and sins” in which we walked (Ephesians 2:1, ESV). God's standard is perfection: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48, ESV). But how can we, who still sin, be perfect? Paul and John both recognize Christians can and do sin (see Galatians 5:17; 1 John 1:8). On God's moral examination, we don't know whether some would score 1 percent, some 10, some 20, but we know for certain no one scores 100 percent. When perfect is the standard, 99 percent on the final exam is a failing score: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10; see also Galatians 3:10).

So how do we gain the moral perfection God requires of us? Only by trusting Jesus to give us what we cannot attain ourselves. The God who requires moral perfection is the God who supplies it in Jesus. (Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good*)

“Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14 NET).

Join me in a singing a couple verses of “**To God Be the Glory**”: “*To God be the glory, great things He hath done, So loved He the world that He gave us His Son, Who yielded His life an atonement for sin, And opened the Life-gate that all may go in. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood! To ev'ry believer the promise of God; The vilest offender who truly believes, That moment from Jesus a pardon receives. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the earth hear His voice! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the people rejoice! O come to the Father thro' Jesus the Son, And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.*”

April 2

“Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set out for him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and *has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne* of God” (Heb. 12:2 NET).

Look Out ... And Up!

I am certain that some of us can identify to an extent with the difficulties described by Solomon in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes. Maybe the foundation for a mid-life crisis has already been laid in our lives. Possibly we are racing out of control, desperately looking for an exit ramp as life becomes increasingly futile. Wherever we are, there is an answer to the problem.

What is it? The hymnist, Clara Scott, put it so well when she wrote:

*Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!*

We must open our eyes to Christ, and get them off ourselves. With Peter, we're going to sink in the waves the minutes we start looking only at our circumstances. (See Matt. 14:22-32.) Instead, let's concentrate on the Lord, letting His Spirit renew and refresh us. The key to getting through the trouble spots is found by “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Heb. 12:2 NASB). At mid-life—as always—the only favorable option is to run with patience and prayer the course that is set before us, keeping our focus on Christ, drawing every ounce of our strength from Him whose grace and power are totally adequate. (Don Anderson, *Ecclesiastes*)

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13 NASB).

Join me in singing that little chorus **“Open Our Eyes Lord”**: *“Open our eyes, Lord; We want to see Jesus, To reach out and touch Him, and say that we love Him. Open our ears, Lord, And help us to listen. Open our eyes, Lord; We want to see Jesus.”*

“That he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight” (Eph. 1:18 NET).

April 3

“The Lord’s servants must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone. They must be able to teach effectively and be patient with difficult people. They should gently teach those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will believe the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

David Branon, a writer for *Our Daily Bread*, tells of missionaries in a downtown German city who were serving refreshments as a way to start conversations about Christ. Two guys wearing skull and crossbones bandanas approached intending to give them trouble. They were greeted with such warmth and friendly discussion they forgot their original intention. They stayed around long enough to hear the gospel and accepted Christ as their Savior.

We need to put into action God’s saving work in our lives, obeying God with deep reverence and respect. For God is working in us, giving us the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases him. (paraphrase Phil. 2:12b, 13 NLT).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. It always teaches us. We are rich because our soul has found Jesus and is at rest. The longing of our heart is satisfied and at peace. God’s greatest gift. We are truly blessed. Indeed. May we reach out to others and share this “indescribable” gift.

April 4

The Watching World

Something we need to remember during the weeks, months, and even years of black or gray circumstances is that others will be watching. Joseph isn’t the only one to observe that God is blessing him in the midst of slavery. Potiphar also takes note, according to Genesis 39:3-4: When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

The prison warden also takes note: “the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did” (Gen. 39:21-23 NIV).

Isn’t that terrific? What a tremendous testimony to the Lord’s power that a pagan onlooker notices the success of a slave. What a joy it is to have someone outside (or inside) the body of Christ say, “Hey, you’ve got it all together. You’re happy. You’re satisfied.” When it’s obvious that the Lord is blessing us, believe me, it will be noticed by the watching world. (Don Anderson, *Joseph: Fruitful in Affliction*)

“Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people” (Phil. 2:14-15 NLT).

How about singing a couple verses of **“It Is No Secret”** with me: *“The chimes of time ring out the news, another day is through, Someone slipped and fell, Was that someone you? You may have longed for added strength, Your courage to renew, Do not be disheartened, For I bring hope to you. There is no night, for in His light you’ll never walk alone, Always feel at home wherever you may roam. There is no power can conquer you, While God is on your side, Just take Him at His promise, Don’t run away and hide. It is no secret what God can do, What He’s done for others, He’ll do for you. With arms wide open, He’ll pardon you, it is no secret, What God can do.”*

“Dear Jesus, you have showed me how to love you; you have commanded me to love; you are in and with me to love. Develop in me a deep, consistent and mature love for others. Amen.” (Eugene H. Peterson)

April 5

Tiger Fish in the Tank

I remember when our son Andy was a young teenager, our house was cluttered with his gerbil cages and glass containers of snakes. Why shouldn’t he have a few fish, too, we thought. The rest of the house was pet-packed. So we bought an aquarium at a garage sale and stocked it with goldfish and tropicals. Then one day at the pet store, a sale sign in front of a tank filled with tiny little fish—pretty ones with black and white stripes and a streak of fluorescence underneath—caught my eye.

“Can we put those fish in the aquarium with our others?” I asked the sales clerk. His reply should have made me suspicious.

“Well, probably ... how big are your goldfish?” he asked. I indicated the length with my thumb and forefinger. “Oh sure, they’ll be okay,” the expert assured us.

So we bought the fish. They were tiger fish, and did they live up to their name. As soon as Andy and I dumped the fish into their new accommodations, they began zipping around the tank, nibbling at the fins of the goldfish and angelfish. If we’d left them in there we’d have had finless fish, and maybe even a few fish fatalities! It’s the nature of tiger fish to eat the fins of other fish. When you put them in the tank, they’ll behave as their nature dictates. It’s unavoidable.

When we introduce the law into our Christian life, it’s the same as throwing tiger fish into the tank. Our old nature will respond to the law. The evil one delights in removing us from dependence on God’s Spirit and reliance on our new nature. He knows our old nature erupts when confronted with the law, and he knows that we’ll constantly fail. Jesus came to take care of all of that. He lived the law perfectly and died to free us from the pressure to perform in our new relationship. That’s what Romans 7:6 says.

“But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were being bound, so that we are serving in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter,” concludes Paul in the passage (DAV). Let me give you two passages to go along with that. 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 states: “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (NASB).

And 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 tells us: “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (NASB).

Progressive change comes with relationship. Christlikeness comes with time. “For I am confident of this very thing,” says the apostle in Philippians 1:6, “that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (NASB). (Don Anderson, *God Wants a Relationship, Not a Performance*)

“No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13 NET).

“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that could defile the body and the spirit, and thus accomplish holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor. 7:1 NET).

How about joining me in singing a couple verses of **“I Traveled Down a Lonely Road”**: *“I traveled down a lonely road And no one seemed to care; The burden on my weary back Had bowed me to despair. I oft complained to Jesus How folks were treating me. And then I heard Him say so tenderly: ‘My feet were also weary, Upon the Calv’ry road; The Cross became so heavy I fell beneath the load. Be faithful, weary pilgrim. The morning I can see; Just lift your cross and follow close to Me.’ ‘I work so hard for Jesus,’ I often boast and say; ‘I’ve sacrificed a lot of things to walk the narrow way. I gave up fame and fortune; I’m worth a lot to Thee.’ And then I hear Him gently say to me: ‘I left the throne of glory and counted it but loss; My hands were nailed in anger Upon a cruel Cross. But now we’ll make the journey With your hand safe in Mine; So lift your cross and follow close to Me.’”*

April 6

Pressing on the Upward Way

“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14 NASB).

Once we’re convinced that God longs for a deepening relationship with us, not some kind of power performance from us, what’s next? How do we transfer that knowledge onto the treadmill of human life? How can it make a difference in us and to us?

I think that we must first look honestly at ourselves and evaluate exactly where we stand with the Father. Do we know Christ as savior, or are we somehow trying to work our way into heaven? If God thought for a moment that we could do it ourselves, he would not have bothered to send Jesus.

If we are sure of our salvation, however, then we’d better look closely at the things we are doing, and more importantly, at the motivation behind them. How are we spending our time? Are we doing things with God, instead of just for him? Are we often on our knees, talking with him? How rich is our fellowship with him in his word? Does our life focus on getting to know him better and better, or has our schedule become so jam-packed with Christian activities that we’ve just about forgotten Christ? Are we burying ourselves in busyness because we feel guilty about the dryness of our relationship with the Lord? Are we striving to stick to the subsections of the law instead of basking in the freedom of his grace? Is our obedience forced or willing, grudging or grateful, engendered by obligation or enkindled by love?

Everyone must peer into his own heart and answer these questions for himself. Only you and God truly know your motives, practices, and the depth of your shared relationship. "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve" (Jer. 17:10 NIV). (Don Anderson, *God Wants a Relationship, Not a Performance*)

"Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness" (1 Pet. 2:2-3 NLT).

"Thoughts about myself hinder my usefulness to God. God's purpose is not to perfect me to make me a trophy in His showcase; He is getting me to the place where He can use me. Let Him do what He wants." (Oswald Chambers)

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**My Wonderful Lord**": *"I have found a deep peace that I never had known And a joy this world could not afford Since I yielded control of my body and soul To my wonderful, wonderful Lord. Thou are fairer to me than the fairest of earth, Thou omnipotent, life-giving Word. O Thou Ancient of Days, Thou art worthy all praise, My wonderful, wonderful Lord. My wonderful Lord, my wonderful Lord, By angels and seraphs in heaven adored! I bow at Thy shrine, my Saviour divine, My wonderful, wonderful Lord."*

April 7

Three Obstacles to Confession

Confessing our sins to God and, where reasonable or possible, to those we have humanly offended, is essential for spiritual growth. If we are unwilling to confess, it may mean that some things are getting in the way.

Why do we sometimes find it so difficult to own up to what we have done? The first reason is pride; we never want to admit that we are vulnerable or wrong; we equate confession with weakness. A second reason is fear; fear comes along and mocks us; fear suggests that our confession will be greeted with boos, hisses, and I-told-you-so's. Finally, dishonesty also gets in the way; we just won't admit to ourselves or anyone else that we have failed. Pride, fear, and dishonesty, singly or in any combination, are enemies to keep us from following the prescription of confession and praying for one another. (Don Anderson, *James: Running Uphill Into the Wind*)

In my reading of spiritual masters, I have noticed that persons we now view as saintly have a finely calibrated sense of sin. Aware of God's ideal, aspiring to holiness, free of the vanity and defensiveness that blind most people, they live in full awareness of falling short.

True saints do not get discouraged over their faults, for they recognize that a person who feels no guilt can never find healing. Paradoxically, neither can a person who wallows in guilt. The sense of guilt only serves its designed purpose if it presses us toward a God who promises forgiveness and restoration. ("Back Page" column, *Christianity Today*, Nov. 18, 2002, 112)

"But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 Jn. 1:9 NLT).

If we are serious about getting right with God whether it's for salvation or fellowship we must journey to the cross.

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Room at the Cross for You**": *"The cross upon which Jesus died Is a shelter in which we can hide; And its grace so free is sufficient for me, And deep is its fountain as wide as the sea. Tho' millions have found Him a friend And have turned from the sins they have sinned, The Savior still waits to open the gates And welcome a sinner before it's too late. There's room at the cross for you, There's room at the cross for you; Tho' millions have come, There's still room for one, Yes, there's room at the cross for you."*

April 8

Benefits of Staying in Touch

When the world seems to be falling apart, the best thing we can do is to stay in touch with God. Some see disappointment as God's appointment, as one poet has said. I can think of at least three benefits of staying in touch in the thorny thick of things:

1. Staying in touch prevents loneliness. It is a comfort to realize that no matter what, God is there. We have a constant, caring friend in him.
2. Staying in touch reminds us that God is in control. We cannot come and talk to him without thinking about his sovereignty and power over even the toughest situation.
3. Staying in touch enables us to see things from God's point of view. It is through fellowship with him that we begin to see what He is trying to do in our lives. His thoughts are not our thoughts, his ways not our ways, as scripture teaches (see Isaiah 55:8-9). Too often we have relegated prayer to the act of petition. We ask for things, petitioning for our needs and thanking him for answers. Prayer is more than that. Prayer is communication. Prayer is constant communion growing out of relationship. Prayer sensitizes us to God. Slowly his thoughts begin to become our thoughts. We understand some of the why behind the what.

“How you respond to the challenge in the second half will determine what you become after the game, whether you are a winner or loser.” (Lou Holtz)

“Truly serving others requires putting ourselves and our desires aside while looking for ways and opportunities to do what is best for others.” (Tony Dungy, *The Mentor Leader*, 39)

“But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy” (Phil. 2:17 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of **“Channels Only”**: *“How I praise Thee, precious Saviour, That Thy love laid hold of me; Thou hast saved and cleansed and filled me That I might Thy channel be. Emptied that Thou shouldest fill me, A clean vessel in Thy hand; With no pow’r but as Thou givest Graciously with each command. Channels only, blessed Master, But with all Thy wondrous pow’r Flowing thro’ us, Thou canst use us Ev’ry day and ev’ry hour.”*

April 9

Watch Your Words—James 3:1-12

When I was in seminary, Pearl’s sister Ardith Black typed out my papers on an old IBM manual typewriter. Commentaries, projects, thesis—I never would have made it without her long hours of loving labor. What a difference it makes today, as I complete doctoral studies at Talbot Seminary, to have some hyper-speed word-processing software and computer equipment in our offices. Pages need no longer be painstakingly typed and retyped, nor mistakes globbed over with Liquid Paper. Little errors disappear with the press of a button; entire paragraphs are moved or wiped out in milliseconds. A laser printer spits out the revisions as fast as they are entered. It is nearly impossible to misuse words with this high-tech equipment.

Too bad we can’t say the same thing about the other type of word processing we do. You know what I mean: the words we process with our mouths and minds.

Statistics tell us that we spend at least one-fifth of our lives talking. That is approximately thirteen years of mouth motion. Psychologists estimate that each day the average adult utters between 12,000 and 25,000 words.

What should come through loud and clear is that every single day we shove our mouths in gear and release the clutch on thousands of statements. Regrettably, our brains are not always engaged in that process. We often do a whole lot of talking before we do very much thinking about what we are saying and its consequences. Suffering from chronic foot-in-mouth disease, we ignore the effect our verbal word processing has on others. Our insensitivity is captured in Paul Simon’s lyrics to “Sounds of Silence”:

*And in the naked night I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more,
People talking without speaking,
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices
Never shared. No one dared
Disturb the sounds of silence.*

My friend Dave Simmons tells this story. I got to know Dave as I helped a little in the development of King’s Arrow Ranch, and I have heard him relate this incident several times in group situations. Dave played for the Dallas Cowboys. His father, Amos, was a man you could never really please. When Dave called his dad after the NFL draft with the news that he had been taken second behind Joe Namath, Amos’s only words were, “How does it feel to be drafted second?”

Years passed, and eventually Dave’s own son began playing football. Dave, his wife Sandy, and their daughter all went to the son’s first game. It was a fiasco on the field, and on the way home Dave found himself locked into a critical mode, picking apart every play. Arriving home, the boy burst into tears and ran into the house. Sandy and their daughter followed silently. Dave sadly drove the car into the garage and made his way toward the house. Sandy met him at the door. One word got the job done: “Amos.”

Tongue Taming

The tongue uncontrolled can slice up someone’s self-image, destroy a dream, shatter a relationship. The ability to curb one’s tongue is a mark of Christian maturity. That was James’s main point in the first twelve verses of chapter 3. He already showed us several signs of spiritual growth. Now he turned to the potential monster within us all and deals with the devastation this tiny member can cause. As usual, he minced no words.

James prepared us for his message with two previous statements. In 1:19 he said, “You know this, my beloved brethren, now let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” In 1:26 we read, “If any man is thinking himself to be religious, not holding in check his tongue, but is deceiving his own heart, his religion is worthless.”

Tongue control is vital to the growing Christian. Loose lips sink ships and also shipwreck lives. They end friendships, destroy marriages, and ruin relationships with children and between siblings. Too much idle talk tears

down our ability to be good witnesses for Christ. It destroys our credibility and discredits the Savior. We show spiritual growth when we think before speaking. James exhorted us to do just that in 3:1-12.

Being of a temperament similar to the apostle Peter's, I confess I say a lot of things before I have really thought them through. I am getting better, but it's an uphill struggle (as my wife and kids can tell you). In this passage, James hit me pretty hard and pointed out my weaknesses. (Don Anderson, *James: Running Uphill Into the Wind*)

Father in heaven, I make many naïve promises and brave-sounding resolves. Much of it is sounding brass and clashing cymbals. I start out expecting your congratulations and end up needing your compassion. Receive me in mercy and forgive me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen. (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Year With Jesus: Daily Readings and Meditations*)

Three out of seven things on the Lord's hate list involve the tongue. Proverbs 6:16-19

1. A lying tongue.
2. A false witness who pours out lies.
3. A man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **"Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated"**: *"Take my hands and let them move At the impulse of Thy love. Take my feet and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee, Swift and beautiful for Thee. Take my voice and let me sing Always, only, for my King. Take my lips and let them be Filled with messages from Thee, Filled with messages from Thee."* Then I added this verse: *"Take my mind and let it think Thoughts that please and honor You. Let the mind of Christ my Savior Show itself in all my ways, Show itself in all my ways."*

April 10

Prayer

When it was time for our children to get up and get dressed for school I would stand in the hall outside their bedrooms and belt out a song "Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory ..." Eyes would roll, groans could be heard and covers would come up over heads.

That was how I taught them to pray. They prayed fervently that I would go away!

How do we attract the attention of God when we pray? Perhaps like David's uninhibited way of praying: "O God, you know how foolish I am; my sins cannot be hidden from you. Don't let those who trust in you stumble because of me, O Sovereign Lord Almighty. Don't let me cause them to be humiliated, O God of Israel" (Ps. 69:5-6 NLT).

How did Jabez attract the attention of God? We do know "Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers" (1 Chron. 4:9 NKJV).

It was his crying out in prayer saying "Oh, that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory, that your hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain" (1 Chron. 4:10 NKJV).

The common thread in both prayers seems to be love and respect for God. In deep humility they did not want to be the cause for pain or stumbling to others.

Prayer: Your faithfulness is such a blessing to us Lord Jesus. When we pray in faith believing You answer in such astounding ways. Oh, Father interpose Yourself between us and the forces of evil in this world. May the name of Jesus be lifted up as the way, the truth and the life. Lead on O King eternal!

April 11

"Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet shed on the heel that has crushed it." (Mark Twain)

Recognizing the Red Lights

"Your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of the populous city," says Solomon next (Song of Solomon 7:5). His gaze moves upward and he looks directly into her eyes. He finds them refreshing, clear and serene as cool pools of water on the outskirts of a bustling, steamy city. Rather than showing fear or alarm, her eyes reflect the peacefulness she has found in him and the easy contentment they share.

Men, if you want to take a reading on the quality of your relationship with your wife, look into her eyes when the two of you are alone together. Much like the lights on the dashboard of a car which flash red when a fan belt breaks, the oil runs low, or the radiator overheats, your wife's eyes can give you clues about the state of your marriage. If she finds it difficult to return your direct gaze, if she glances downward or away from you or seems uncomfortable, it is as if the red lights have come on. She may well feel misunderstood, unimportant, unloved—a sense of grief and hurt replacing the confidence and joy which should be there. There may be emotional wounds desperately in need of healing.

If you, speaking with quiet love as Solomon does, can peer into the eyes of your lover and find that she meets your gaze with a look of calm trust, then the red lights are off. The relationship is on stable ground. Your woman feels significant to you, secure in your affection, safe in your arms. (Don Anderson, *Song of Solomon*)

What are husband and wives not telling each other? "I need you to be my partner, not my parent. I feel suffocated and frustrated when you treat me like a child and boss me around. We can never truly love one another the way we need to until you are willing to treat me like an adult." (Steve and Annie Chapman, *What Husbands and Wives Aren't Telling Each Other*, 42)

You are the other part of me

I am the other part of you.

We'll work together

With never a thought of walking out. (Ruth Harms Calkin)

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary**": *"Days are filled with sorrow and care, Hearts are lonely and drear; Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near. Troubled soul, the Saviour can see Ev'ry heartache and tear; Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near. Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Calvary, Calvary; Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near."*

April 12

Matchless Joy

There is joy beyond human comprehension at the fulfillment of God's promises to us. Sarah and Abraham overflowed with ecstasy at the birth of Isaac, their joy bubbling up from a well of human hopelessness.

How appropriate even today are Jeremiah's words from Lamentations 3:25-26: "The Lord is wonderfully good to those who wait for him, to those who seek for him. It is good both to hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (TLB).

I have experienced that kind of heaven-sent joy at times. I remember when Pearl and I first started in this ministry. The first month we drew a salary from the work, our hearts rejoiced like never before.

The Lord has said in His Word that He would meet our material needs, and there we were, the direct recipients of His provision. What joy—it was a tiny foretaste of heaven. To be truthful, sometimes our joy is tempered by the nagging question, "How long is it going to last?" Yet that first month was absolutely terrific. And now 38 years later we are still singing Great Is Thy Faithfulness. (Don Anderson, *Abraham: Delay Is Not Denial*)

"The way to do a great deal, is to keep on doing a little. The way to do nothing at all, is to be continually resolving that you will do everything." (C. H. Spurgeon)

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne" (Heb. 12:1-2 NLT).

Join me in a couple verses of "**Like a River Glorious**": *"Like a river glorious, Is God's perfect peace, Over all victorious In its bright increase; Perfect, yet it floweth Fuller ev'ry day, Perfect, yet it growth Deeper all the way. Ev'ry joy or trial Falleth from above, Traced upon our dial By the Sun of Love. We may trust Him fully All for us to do; They who trust Him wholly Find Him wholly true. Stayed upon Jehovah, Hearts are fully blest; Finding, as He promised, Perfect peace and rest."*

April 13

Three To Grow On

It is good for the man recovering from crisis to remember three very important principles. Here they are:

Number one: Life's greatest challenge involves what we're going to do with the time that is left.

"My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die" (Phil. 1:20 NET).

"My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10 NET).

"So teach us to consider our mortality, so that we might live wisely" (Ps. 90:12 NET).

"And I will say to myself, 'You have plenty of goods stored up for many years; relax, eat, drink, celebrate!'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded back from you, but who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Lk. 12:19-20 NET).

Number two: We can ruin the rest of our lives by refusing to let go of the past.

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14 NET).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set out for us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer

and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set out for him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2 NET).

Number three: God is the master potter who is famous for transforming cracked vessels into beautiful ones which bring glory and honor to Him.

"Yet, Lord, you are our father. We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the product of your labor" (Isa. 64:8 NET).

"The Lord said to Jeremiah: 'Go down at once to the potter's house. I will speak to you further there.' So I went down to the potter's house and found him working at his wheel. Now and then there would be something wrong with the pot he was molding from the clay with his hands. Then he would rework the clay into another pot as he saw fit" (Jer. 18:1-4 NET).

(Don Anderson, *Ecclesiastes*)

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NET)

1. **Run to Win** (v. 24) Do you not know that all the runners in a stadium compete, but only one receives the prize? So run to win.

2. **Discipline Produces Reward** (v. 25) Each competitor must exercise self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.

3. **Find the Goal and Hit the Mark** (v. 26) So I do not run uncertainly or box like one who hits only air.

4. **Extra Effort Produces Excellence** (v. 27) Instead I subdue my body and make it my slave, so that after preaching to others I myself will not be disqualified.

Join me in singing **"Something Beautiful"**: *"Something beautiful, something good All my confusion He understood All I had to offer Him was brokenness and stife, But he made something beautiful of my life. If there ever were dreams That were lofty and noble They were my dreams at the start And hope for life's best were the hopes That I harbor down deep in my heart But my dreams turned to ashes And my castles all crumbled, my fortune turned to loss So I wrapped it all in the rags of life And laid it at the cross."*

April 14

Flies in the Ointment

"As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is" (Ecc. 10:1-3).

A smattering of evil may have devastating effects. So may a small bit of foolishness. Solomon observes in Ecclesiastes 10:1: "As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor." Not only may a crisis at midsentence crop up because of unchecked sin, but even a little bit of carelessness in one's life can be dangerous.

After all, how did the dead flies of which Solomon speaks manage to drop into the perfume bottle in the first place? Surely nobody intentionally placed them there—into a pot of foul-smelling oil. The answer is that somebody got careless. Someone forgot to cap the jar, and a splendid scent became an unbearable stench.

As we are to beware of overt sin, so are we to be on the lookout for signs of carelessness in our lives. I am reminded of what Solomon says to his bride, Shulamith, in chapter 2, verse 15 of the Song of Solomon. His words are these: "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom." The "little foxes" to which he refers represent all of the minor irritants, trivial in and of themselves, which can combine to threaten a relationship. Solomon feared that a number of "little things" would escalate into big things and spoil the vine of love that was blossoming before them. That could only happen if the couple became inattentive, taking each other for granted, forgetting to protect and nurture their love.

Solomon recognized the dangers of carelessness as a young man, but it is apparently a lesson he forgot as he grew older and found it necessary to search for significance by pursuing other women (see Ecclesiastes 2). In midsentence, he finds his marriage unsatisfying. In truth, he had probably been letting the "little foxes" run roughshod over his relationship with Shulamith for years. The flies had long since buzzed their way into the perfume pot.

Many times mid-life marital problems have their roots in exactly this type of lack of caution. I remember, as I was preparing this series on Ecclesiastes, walking into Pearl's office and seeing paper on her desk entitled, "Pearl's Ecclesiastes." I thought, oh no, she's having a mid-life crisis! Then I picked up the page, which had not been left there merely by chance. I read the message Pearl wanted me to see. It began with a sentence: "Home isn't the way is used to be." Listed underneath that statement were three phrases: "Running, racquetball, hundreds of activities." I got the point.

Home was not what it used to be because I was allowing little things to become big things, permitting unimportant pastimes to become primary pursuits. I was living in denial. The dead flies were causing a tremendous stink.

The big thing I was neglecting was my personal time with the Lord. I was leaving Pearl out of my life activities. I almost lost everything before I realized how selfish I had become. I thank God every day for grace and forgiveness. I haven't missed a day with the Lord since then either. Every Friday is date night too! No wonder I'm such a happy camper now! (Don Anderson, *Ecclesiastes*)

"Love is not about how many people we have used, but about how much we have cherished one person." (Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Barbarian Way: Soul Cravings*)

Join me in singing all four verses of "**O Worship the King**": "*O worship the King, all glorious above, O gratefully sing His pow'r and His love; Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days, Pavillioned in splendor and girded with praise. O tell of His might, O sing of His grace, Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space. His chariots of wrath the deep thunder clouds form, and Dark is His path on the wings of the storm. Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite? It breathes in the air, it shines in the light; It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain, And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain. Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail, In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail; Thy mercies how tender! How firm to the end! Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend. Amen.*"

April 15

"Enemies That Lie Within"

by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13).

As we have said before, your life is the sum total of your responses to God. Choices, choices, choices. ... We are constantly confronted with the responsibility of choosing correctly. We can give in, give out, give up or go on according to God's plan. If we fail, we do not lose our eternal life. Our correction or rewards for our life of choices and responses will come at the Judgment Seat.

In our lives, we battle against Satan. His goal is for the Believer to fail: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8). Often, an equal hindrance to your life as a Believer is the enemy within. Before you can mature, you must identify and deal with these issues.

THE PAST: The Scripture teaches us to lay aside our regrets and guilt and get on with the business of serving God—"Forget what lies behind and reach forward ..." (Phil. 3:13). When we become Christians, each of us carries into our new life baggage from the past. Satan can use these memories to wreak havoc in our lives. Deal with the past—ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Forgiving yourself and others is a vital part of the process.

DISOBEDIENCE: To love God is to obey God. There is no middle ground. "Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.'" (John 14:23). You will never come to maturity in your Spiritual life if you have your own agenda and refuse to obey. God is in the business of blessing the obedient—there is no other option!

PRIDE: We are often proud in times of prosperity. I think that is why we have difficult times ordained by God. We learn more when we're down (at 1 or 2 on a scale of 1-10) than we do in the good times (9 or 10 out of 10). You cannot mature if you do not deal with pride. No one can do it for you!

UNGRATEFULNESS: Gratitude is an attitude. It is a choice. God deserves our gratefulness. An ungrateful heart is a breeding ground for discontent and disaster. If you have trouble in this area, try the book of Psalm, especially Chapters 104-106.

INDEPENDENCE: We must be dependent on God. If we are stubborn, God will not move ahead with us. King David said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17).

(This devotional was compiled by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld using Don Anderson's book, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

"Perhaps our greatest weariness is weariness of ourselves. The one person that troubles me most is the one from whom I cannot get away as long as I am here." (C. H. Spurgeon, *Exploring the Mind & Heart of the Prince of Preachers*)

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it'" (Gen. 4:6-7 NIV).

Join me in a couple verses of "**Farther Along**": "*Tempted and tried we're oft made to wonder Why it should be thus all the day long, While there are others living about us, Never molested tho' in the wrong. Faithful till death said our loving Master, A few more days to labor and wait; Toils of the road will then seem as nothing, As we sweep thru the beautiful gate. Father along we'll know all about it, Farther along we'll understand why; Cheer up my brother, live in the sunshine, We'll understand it all by and by.*"

April 16

“Staying Stable”

by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld

“Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you” (Hosea 10:12).

As Believer’s, the storms of life will test your stability—your place of refuge. Where do you find your security? In your career? Your salary? Your position? Your material possessions? Some people will turn to other things to dull the pain: drugs, alcohol, or illicit sex.

A better option is to allow God to teach us, refine us and purify us. As Max Lucado writes, “A season of suffering is a small price to pay for a clear view of God.” The safest place to be is close to the Savior. How can we stay stable in a storm of unexpected circumstances?

1. Remember that God’s sovereign purpose will prevail.

Often we cannot see God’s purpose as He works out His purpose in our lives. Remember the story of Joseph? He suffered, but God’s purpose for him prevailed. Joseph told his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20).

Even under the direst circumstances, God is there whether you sense Him or not. He is orchestrating your circumstances behind the scene on your behalf—for your ultimate good. God is sovereign! God is love! To believe this truth is not blind faith. Trust God—He will always come through. He is the ultimate comfort.

2. Stand on His promises in the midst of the storm.

God does not audibly speak to us. His promises are in His Word. What a great reason to study Scripture! Then when trouble hits, you can remain stabilized in His promises. The old hymn says: “Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail; By the Living Word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.” When you’re in the midst of a storm, turn to Romans 8:38-39. God will care for you—no exceptions.

3. Remain Steadfast in Service.

The Apostle Peter tells us, “Casting all your anxieties upon Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7). Believers are not exempt from heartaches and trials. Don’t be disappointed, disillusioned and let circumstances thwart your service. See the unexpected as an opportunity to stand firm. A choice to do so honors God.

(This devotional was compiled by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld using Don Anderson’s book, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

“Being Lost is living by a set of values that systematically dismantles your life.” (Unknown)

“When you are in the furnace, your Father keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat.” (Warren Wiersbe)

“Friends, when life gets really difficult, don’t jump to the conclusion that God isn’t on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner” (1 Pet. 4:12-13 MSG).

Join me in a couple verses of “**Habored in Jesus**”: “*Once I was drifting, lost and in sin, Once I was dying, darkness within. Now I am living the way He planned. Harbored in Jesus, Kept by His hand. Storms may surround me, tempests may roar, Doubts may assail me, knock at my door. Nothing shall move me from Jesus’ side. Harbored in Jesus, Wonderful Guide. Harbored in Jesus, safe and secure. Harbored in Jesus, safe evermore.*”

April 17

You Are Worthy, O Lord

Music has always been a much appreciated and important part of my life. It is fun to remember certain songs that had special memories in the stages of my life.

My father loved to sing. He sang with a quartet at community song fests. I remember the Stamps Song Books with the shaped notes. A song will come on the radio and Don or I will comment “that is one of the songs dad used to sing.”

One of my cousins played the guitar. His favorite song was “Cool Clear Water.” We sang it together. He was killed in Europe during World War II. Whenever I hear that song a sadness comes over me.

“Sunny Side of the Street” was constantly played on a juke box where I worked at a hamburger place for awhile. We had every word memorized and sang along when there were no customers.

When I moved to Salem, Oregon I joined the First Baptist Church. One Sunday. Dr. L. T. Anderson taught from Jeremiah 8:20, 22:

“the harvest is finished and the summer is gone,” the people cry, “Yet we are not saved!” . . . Is there no medicine (balm) in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people?

He explained that “balm” was the resin of the storax tree that was used medicinally. Gilead, east of the Jordan River, was famous for its healing balm.

Dr. Anderson stated the balm that is needed is the healing power of Jesus for our deep wound of sin.

The choir ended the service with a song I had never heard before.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;

There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

If you cannot preach like Peter, If you cannot pray like Paul,

You can tell the love of Jesus And say, “He died for all”. (Afro-American Spiritual)

During my years there, I learned to study the Bible and how to walk with the Lord.

God led me from Salem, Oregon to Northwestern College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I majored in Christian education.

Dr. Harry Stam often led the chapel services. He was a retired missionary. My heart was touched and regularly examined by a song, “Go Ye into All the World.”

Far, far away, in heathen darkness dwelling,

Millions of souls forever may be lost;

Who, who will go, salvation’s story telling,

“I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O most high” (Ps. 9:1-2 NIV).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we have such an abundance of beautiful Christian music. We have the Bible in many translations. We have the writings of those whom You have blessed. We are so grateful for all You have provided. May we take advantage of these opportunities. May Your power and presence be especially strong for those who do not have this great blessing and privilege. We want to sing our praises to You every day from clean, pure hearts.

April 18

“How Do We Allow God to Abide in Our Lives?”

by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The secret of bearing fruit (maturing spiritually) is abiding in Christ. The secret of abiding in Christ is obedience. You must surrender your will, your heart and your mind to God (your Creator who knows you better than you know yourself). There is no risk in this—only benefit! Does that mean that you stop thinking? Of course not! The paradigm shift, though, is to concentrate on discerning God’s will in your daily life—not your own. Jesus spoke of the fact that He is the vine and we are the branches. Branches do not have life in themselves; the branches’ life is in the vine. Even though we don’t understand how it is possible, Jesus literally indwells every Believer through the Holy Spirit. In that way we are connected to the source of nourishment.

How can we abide? We must obey and be available. Here are some specifics to apply:

1. **Acknowledge:** God, you are God. You know exactly what you are doing with me. It is for my best. All is well!
2. **Accept:** Trust and accept His management of your life. Therein lies peace and rest. You do not resist or resent His work in your life. You do not agonize with anxiety with regard to circumstances of life or the length of your life.
- TRUST.**
3. **Approve:** Approve of Christ’s arrangement of your affairs of life. He wants you to be fruitful. This is nothing more than allowing God to work (unobstructed by you) in your life.

Pray the prayer of David:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).

(This devotional was compiled by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld using Don Anderson’s book, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

“Our one aim is to save sinners, and this we are not to talk about, but to do in the power of God.” (C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*)

“Acquaint yourself with prayer, make Christ your Captain and your Armour; make conscience of sinning when no eye seeth you.” (Ellen S. Lister, *The Loveliness Of Christ: Extracts from the Letters of Samuel Rutherford*)

Join me in singing a couple verses of “**He Hideth My Soul**”: “A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, A wonderful Savior to me; He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, Where rivers of pleasure I see. A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, He taketh my burden away; He holdeth me up, and I shall not be moved, He giveth me strength as my day. He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock. That shadows a dry, thirsty land; He hideth my life in the depths of His love And covers me there with His hand, And covers me there with His hand.”

"I offer you my adoration and my obedience, Lord Jesus. By your life I discover redemption; in your words I find direction; through your resurrection I enjoy eternal life. All praise to your great name! Amen. (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Year With Jesus*)

"Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for God" (Rom. 12:11 Phillips).

April 19

"How to Assess Abiding in the Lord and Fruit Bearing"

by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12:25).

Three things characterize the abiding life:

1. We are **drawing** upon all that He is.
2. We are **depending** upon all that He can do.
3. We are **developing** into His image.

It is our responsibility to draw and depend. God will not do it for us. When this happens, though, He will abide in us and we will develop into His image. Can't God do this by His power? Certainly, He is able, but He chose at the time of Creation to give us a free will. He doesn't want worshippers without free choice. He wants man (who does have a choice) to choose to fellowship with Him, trust Him and to live confident in His ability to provide for us. You see, God wants us to choose His way—life according to His plan. This is an eternal perspective. You cannot love this life and be concerned with the temporal and have the proper perspective on the eternal: He who loves his life will lose it ... he who hates his life on earth (in comparison) will keep it eternally.

Don Anderson has some great points to remember about abiding:

1. The branch (us) has one purpose and that is to bear fruit.
2. The Father is glorified when we are bearing much fruit.
3. Love, joy and obedience are evidences of the abiding life.
4. Using Christ as an example, our joy should be independent of external circumstances.
5. Abiding in Christ means to turn everything over to Him and trust Him.

What about assessing fruit in your life?

A life full of fruit has these characteristics and results:

1. **Christ-like character**—Being like Christ as a goal because of what He did for you
2. **Confession of Praise**—This person is joyful and expresses praise and thanks to God.
3. **Contributions**—This person is generous. His generosity towards God's work is a manifestation of what God has done in His life.
4. **Conduct**—This person is different. The Holy Spirit is in control; therefore people can see God in him.
5. **Conversions**—People see something fresh and different about this person and desire to know the Lord as a result.

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (Jim Elliot)

(This devotional was compiled by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld using Don Anderson's book, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

"Save me, Lord Jesus Christ; expose my sin and lead me to the place of forgiveness. Heal my faithlessness and make me healthy with love; convert my rebellion and train me in persevering discipleship. Amen." (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Year With Jesus*)

"You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you" (Jn. 15:16 MSG).

Join me in a couple verses of "**Moment by Moment**": "*Dying with Jesus, by death reckoned mine; Living with Jesus a new life divine; Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine, Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine. Never a trial that He is not there, Never a burden that He doth not bear; Never a sorrow that He doth not share, Moment by moment, I'm under His care. Moment by moment I'm kept in His love; Moment by moment I've life from above; Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine; Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.*"

April 20

"Convictions & Unity"

by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld

"Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved" (Phil. 1:1).

As Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison, we see his ability to live a joyful life above his circumstances. There are nine concepts he sets forth to help us maintain joy in daily living. We will finish this set of devos by examining these principles and learning to apply them, daily.

Convictions: We are called to stand firm—not double-minded. Our foundation is Jesus Christ and the instruction book is the BIBLE. God gives us the ability to do it. We are promised that we will never, ever encounter a situation that we cannot handle. Therefore, be known by your convictions. Be a man or woman of your word.

There are **three P's** that can challenge our stand:

1. **Problems:** Don't be a quitter. God values perseverance in His children. Don't throw in the towel.
2. **Pressures:** The world's way is 180 degree out of phase with God's ways. Don't be tempted to cave in under the pressure to compromise for any reason. If the issue is an absolute, don't compromise.
3. **Persecution:** Don't make decisions with the agenda to avoid persecution. If something is right, don't back down. Remember that God promises to protect you and provide for you. "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Heb. 13:6).

It will cost something to be what God wants us to be. We are called to stand firm and not let problems, pressures or the threat of persecution deter us from doing what is right.

Unity: Brothers and sisters in the Lord are called to be unified. Problems among Believers occur often because the ultimate goal is forgotten: to serve, to obey, and to worship God. Don't let anything else get in the way. If you've been offended, be quick to forgive. Satan is the enemy, not your brothers and sisters. We need to get our minds off ourselves and seek Jesus and His plan first.

(This devotional was compiled by Dr. Ken Kummerfeld using Don Anderson's book, *Drawing Closer, Growing Stronger*)

"Servant Christ, you show me how to serve; you command me to serve; you bless me as I serve. I praise you for the servant way, its joy and its glory. Amen." (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Year With Jesus*, 317)

Join me in singing a couple verses of **"Leaning on the Everlasting Arms"**: *"O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim-way, Leaning on the everlasting arms; O, how bright the path grows from day to day, Leaning on the everlasting arms. What have I to dread, what have I to fear, Leaning on the everlasting arms? I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, Leaning on the everlasting arms. Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarms; Leaning, leaning, Leaning on the everlasting arms."*

April 21

The Early Bird Gets the Word

Why rise early in the morning? What possible good can come from getting up at the crack of dawn? In the still quiet of a house, before the crush of the day begins and the clamor of kids, pets, or carpools erupts, early morning moments can give us solitude to spend time with the Lord. Early morning may well be the only time during the entire day when we are by ourselves.

No law says we must spend quality time in scripture and in prayer at the start of each new day, but it helps. Often, if we wait till later, we never get around to opening the Bible or bowing before God. We get busy. People make demands on us. Errands, phone calls, and crises at work interrupt us. Night falls, and we're so tired that all we want to do is collapse in bed. Twenty-four hours are gone, and we have never gotten around to opening up God's word.

One of the hardest things in my life has been to discipline myself to rise early enough to exercise and to meet with the Lord on a daily basis. What a difference it makes. The biographies of persons greatly used by God bear this out. C.T. Studd, a turn-of-the-century English missionary statesman who arose at 4:30 each morning to spend time with the Lord, said, "If you don't desire to meet the Devil during the day, meet Jesus before dawn" (Cosgrove 82).

Mornings are good times to set aside for spending time with God. But what is most vital is that we meet daily with the Lord, no matter when and where it is. We must consistently commune with him in prayer. And, if we are ever going to grow up in him, we must consistently study his word. (Don Anderson, *James: Running Uphill Into the Wind*)

"How happy is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of arrogant fools! Instead he finds pleasure in obeying the Lord's commands; he intently studies his commands day and night. He is like a tree planted by flowing streams; it yields its fruit at the proper time, and its leaves never fall off. He succeeds in everything he attempts. Not so with the wicked! Instead they are like wind-driven chaff. For this reason the wicked cannot withstand judgment, nor can sinners join the assembly of the godly. Certainly the Lord rewards the behavior of the godly, but the behavior of the wicked is self-destructive" (Psa. 1:1-6 NET).

"Father, I keep thinking I have to rush out and do something; you keep calling me back to be someone. Use this life that you have created and redeemed to preserve and enhance those among whom I live today. Amen." (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Year With Jesus*)

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“Living for Jesus”**: *“Living for Jesus wherever I am, Doing each duty in His holy name; Willing to suffer affliction and loss, Deeming each trial a part of my cross. Living for Jesus through earth’s little while, My dearest treasure, the light of His smile; Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem, Bringing the weary to find rest in Him. O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee, For Thou, in Thy atonement, Didst give Thyself for me; I own no other Master, My heart shall be Thy throne; My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.”*

April 22

The Ultimate Workout

A word workout is what James recommended in the passage we are about to consider. What is a word workout? It means taking a passage of scripture and focusing on it for all it will reveal to you. Meditating on it. Uncovering the context. Finding out what God really means. Seeking to understand how the teachings can be applied to your own life. You can pore over commentaries and Bible handbooks if you like, but don’t neglect the primary source. Have you ever bought weights, exercycles, rowing machines, or aerobic videos and never used them? Unused exercise equipment does nothing to get us in shape. Study Bibles, modern translations, commentaries, and handbooks that lie untouched on dusty shelves are not going to help us shape up spiritually, either. To have a successful word workout, we have to use the tools.

James 1:19-25 (DAV)

v.19 You know this, my beloved brethren. Now let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

v.20 For a man’s wrath does not bring about the righteousness of God.

v.21 Wherefore having laid aside all moral uncleanness and wickedness, which is abounding, in meekness receive the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.

v.22 But keep on becoming doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

v.23 Because if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, this one is like a man looking at the face of his birth in a mirror.

v.24 For he looked at himself and he has gone off and immediately forgot what sort of person he was.

v.25 But he who has looked into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and has continued in it, not having been a hearer who forgets, but a doer who works, this man shall be blessed in what he does. (Don Anderson, *James: Running UpHill Into the Wind*)

Marks of the Spiritual Man

True spirituality manifests itself in certain dominant desires. These are ever-present, deep-settled wants sufficiently powerful to motivate and control the life. For convenience let me number them, though I make no effort to decide the order of their importance.

1. First is the desire to be holy rather than happy.
2. A man may be considered spiritual when he wants to see the honor of God advanced through his life even if it means that he himself must suffer temporary dishonor or loss.
3. The spiritual man wants to carry his cross. Many Christians accept adversity or tribulation with a sigh and call it their cross, forgetting that such things come alike to saint and sinner.
4. Again, a Christian is spiritual when he sees everything from God’s viewpoint.
5. Another desire of the spiritual man is to die right rather than to live wrong.
6. The desire to see others advance at his expense is another mark of the spiritual man.
7. The spiritual man habitually makes eternity—judgments instead of time—judgments.

(A. W. Tozer, *The Best of A.W. Tozer*)

“Personally, when I have been in trouble, I have read the Bible until a text has seemed to stand out of the Book, and salute me, saying, ‘I was written specially for you.’” (C. H. Spurgeon, *Exploring the Mind and Heart of the Prince of Preachers*)

“I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back. So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you’ll see it yet! Now that we’re on the right track, let’s stay on it” (Phil. 3:12-16 MSG).

Join me in a couple verses of **“Where He Leads I’ll Follow”**: *“Sweet are the promises, Kind in the word; Dearer far than any message man ever heard; Pure was the mind of Christ, Sinless, I see; He the great example is, and pattern for me. List to His loving words, ‘Come unto me!’ Weary, heavy-laden, there is sweet rest for thee; Trust in His promises, Faithful and sure; Lean upon the Savior and thy soul is secure. Where He leads I’ll follow, Follow all the way.”*

April 23

The Primary Tool: The Word

The Bible is our primary word-workout tool. It is more than a piece of equipment; it is a weapon. “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12 NASB).

Written over a period of 1,600 years before forty-four human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit, scripture tells one story from Genesis to Revelation: the story of God’s plan for humanity through the working of Jesus Christ. With perfect unity and consistency, the Bible instructs us in godly living. Used properly, Holy Scripture is the ultimate weapon in the hearts and hands of believers. Knowing and applying God’s word is the basic equipment of any spiritual shape-up program. In the words of the psalmist: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:9-11 NIV; see also Jer. 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:2).

Those to whom James originally wrote his letter did not have the advantage we do of possessing the entire canon of scripture. They did have God’s principles and prophecies as recorded in the Old Testament. Some had access to the early New Testament letters too. All had news of the life, works, and words of Jesus Christ, who perfectly embodied every principle of scripture, and who showed us the mind and heart of God in the only way we could understand—by becoming one of us.

James did not know at the time, but the Holy Spirit prompting him to write knew, that his letter to the displaced Jewish Christians would one day be included in what we call the New Testament. God knew that millions of believers would eventually read the words of the epistle, as well as the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, and others. The fact that we possess the entire revealed written word of God should excite us. It should make the last part of James 1 even more real and relevant to us.

We experience growth when we are victorious over temptation and we are submitting to the test. But how? How do we do it? In what practical ways can we handle tests and temptation?

Let us never forget the powerful weapon God has given us for the battle: his holy word. Letting scripture sink into our hearts is a key to winning victory in the Christian life. James wrote just that in the last part of chapter 1 of his letter. (Don Anderson, *James: Running UpHill Into the Wind*)

When you shall come before him, he shall say, “Did you read my Bible?” “No” “I wrote you a letter of mercy; did you read it?” “No.” “Rebel! I have sent thee a letter inviting thee to me: didst thou ever read it?” “Lord I never broke the seal; I kept it shut up.” “Wretch!” says God, “then thou deservest hell, if I sent thee a loving epistle and thou wouldst not even break the seal: what shall I do unto thee?” (C. H. Spurgeon)

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15 NASB).

Join me in singing **“Fill My Cup, Lord”**: *“Like the woman at the well I am seeking For things that could not satisfy; And then I heard my Savior speaking ‘Draw from My well that never shall run dry.’ There are millions in this world who are craving The pleasure earthly things afford; But none can match the wondrous treasure That I find in Jesus Christ my Lord. So, my brother, if the things this world gave you Leave hungers that won’t pass away, My blessed Lord will come and save you, If you kneel to Him and humbly pray: Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord! Come and quench this thirsting of my soul; Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more, Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole!”*

April 24

“Be careful to walk in obedience with the Lord Jesus and you will be successful wherever you go. Perhaps not by the world’s standards but more importantly: “The Lord will do what is good in his sight” (1 Chron. 19:13b).

Julie Ackerman Link, contributor to *Our Daily Bread* writes:

Job didn’t understand the reason for his suffering, yet he affirmed his steadfast belief in a God who had the right to allow trouble in our lives as well as good. In times of suffering, it’s important to consider what God would have us teach, as well as what He would have us learn. (January 19, 2006)

People learn more from watching our trust and faith toward God when there is suffering or hardship than at any other time. When we are faithful and “walk the walk” during hurtful times they will respect us when we “talk the talk.”

Prayer: Oh God, deliver us from evil that we might walk lock-step with You. May the eyes of millions be opened to faith and belief in Jesus as Savior. Protect us with Your great power. Nurture and keep us in Your hands as a caring Father. Show yourself strong in behalf of all Your children. You promised “ask and ye shall receive.” We are asking in the name of Jesus.

April 25

The Picture and the Problem

"A tumor with a main section the size of a small grapefruit is lodged against your rib cage," said the physician. "It isn't a completely solid mass, either. Its edges are ragged and touch most of the major internal organs. For lack of a better word, 'fingers' from the tumor have stretched out to attach themselves to your heart, lungs, kidney, liver, and spleen. We cannot hope to remove the entire mass through an operation, and unfortunately a biopsy has shown it to be cancerous. The most we can do is treat the area with radiation, and of course you can pray." Ominous news, isn't it? Surprisingly, the patient described above won't die from his cancer for years and years to come. He will, however, live with the malignancy the rest of his life.

The picture of that cancer patient is a picture and every Christian. We too live with a cancer within—a spiritual malignancy. It's called, as we've discussed earlier, the old nature. It will never go away completely. We'll live with the old nature and the new nature coexisting within us for the rest of our life. Someday we will probably suffer a physical disease and physical death, the result of living in a fallen world. Until then we are victims of an inoperable, aggressive spiritual tumor. The sin nature may go into remission periodically, but it'll never be eradicated until we reach glory, and thus much of the Christian life is learning to live with a cancer that won't quit. (Don Anderson, *God Wants a Relationship, Not a Performance*)

"Have the dogged determination to follow through to achieve your goal: Regardless of circumstances or whatever other people say, think or do." (Paul J. Meyer)

"My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day. Why don't you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence?" (Gal. 5:16-18 MSG).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Face to Face**": *"Only faintly now I see Him, With the dark'ning veil between, But a blessed day is coming, When His glory shall be seen. What rejoicing in His presence, When are banished grief and pain; When the crooked ways are straightened, And the dark things shall be plain. Face to face I shall behold Him, Far beyond the starry sky; Face to face in all His glory, I shall see Him by and by!"*

April 26

"To me, Calvinism means the placing of the eternal God at the head of all things." (C. H. Spurgeon)

Accidents

For years each spring our ministry held couples' conferences in the piney woods of east Texas. We frequently stayed at Kaleo Lodge, a retreat center operated by the Christian Concern Foundation, the ministry founded by the late Creath Davis. Kaleo, nestled between a shimmering blue, well-stocked lake and a forest of tall pines whose topmost needles brush the sky, was the perfect setting in which to relax, reflect, and renew relationships.

We only had trouble at Kaleo once in all the years we used its lovely facilities. Our couples' conference that particular year was unusually promising. We had a full house—many special friends had signed up for the weekend. The program we'd worked so hard to develop promised great fun, fellowship, and opportunity for growth. For months the staff prayed earnestly that God might use us to touch the lives of the husbands and wives who would attend. We were eager for the weekend to begin.

Friday night went off without a hitch, as did Saturday morning. Then disaster literally slapped us flush in the face. Saturday afternoon the pump that operates the conference ground's water system broke down. That meant no running water, no flushing toilets—and no way could we stay. The group packed up and we all left early, conference unfinished, program partly unrepresented, and, I felt, lives largely untouched.

I am rarely quiet under stress. Driving the thirty-odd miles back to our home in Tyler, I fumed, fussed, and fired off a mostly meaningless monologue of my frustrations. As usual in these occasions when I am letting off steam, Pearl kept quiet. In silence she allowed me to voice my disappointment for forty-five uninterrupted minutes. Then, as we turned into our driveway, she looked over at me and simply said, "Don, I think the God who runs the universe could have kept a little old pump going one more day if he wanted to."

That knocked the wind out of my sails, as you can imagine! How right she was. There are no accidents in the will of God—only preplanned incidents. The ups, downs, and in-betweens of our lives are programmed in advance by a loving heavenly Father who seeks proper responses from us. Everything that happens does so because he permits it—even right down to broken water pumps and prematurely-ended conferences. (Don Anderson, *Joseph: Fruitful in Affliction*)

"I remind myself of my commitment to finish strong and to focus on my true priorities in life. Because as the quote says: 'To the world you may be just one person ... but to one person you may be the world.'" (Dan Green, *Finish Strong*)

“The Lord of Heaven’s Armies has sworn this oath: ‘It will all happen as I have planned. It will be as I have decided. I have a plan for the whole earth, a hand of judgment upon all the nations. The Lord of Heaven’s Armies has spoken—who can change his plans? When his hand is raised, who can stop him?’” (Isa. 14:24, 26, 27 NLT). Join me in singing a couple verses of **“His Eye Is on the Sparrow”**: *“Why should I feel discouraged, Why should the shadows come, Why should my heart be lonely And long for Heav’n and home When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He: His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He watches me; His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He watches me. Whenever I am tempted, Whenever clouds arise, When songs give place to sighing, When hope within me dies, I draw the closer to Him, From care He sets me free; His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He cares for me; His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He cares for me. I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free, For His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He watches me.”*

April 27

The Happy Man

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers” (Ps. 1:1 NIV).

We could translate the word “blessed” as “how completely happy is the man.”

The happy man in Psalm 1:1 has three things that he does not do. The three verbs in this verse stand out as warning signals along life’s ways: (1) walk; (2) stand; and (3) sit.

For our meditation this morning, let’s look at these three phrases a little more closely: (1) “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.” We could translate this “he does not walk after the advice of the wicked.” His manner of life is not one of following the advice of those who do not know the Lord. Men are what they are because of the counsel that they follow. A good rule: Listen to no man who fails to listen to God.

We have learned thus far that the happy man “does not walk in the counsel of the wicked” and (2) “[he does not] stand in the way of sinners.” He is not loitering in that which is sinful. He does not stand in the path of sinners. It is when we are tentative in temptation that we become dead meat for the devil.

Paul told young Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:11: “But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness” (NASB).

You can tell how vulnerable you are when you are channel surfing and you hesitate on the remote. Your thumb goes numb at a torrid love scene.

“Blessed is the man who does not”: (1) “walk in the counsel of the wicked”; (2) “stand in the way of sinners”; or (3) “sit in the seat of mockers.”

He does not laugh and make fun of the things of God. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7 NASB).

Just described are the steps to wickedness or unhappiness. It starts out with an occasional contact, then hanging around, then an adopted philosophy of life. Sin is so subtle and James describes the same three steps in James 1:14-15: “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (NASB).

The language of the fisherman is evident here. The fish is swimming along and he is attracted by the shiny little lure and finally takes it only to find it has a deadly hook in it.

A man without God in his life is like a fish out of water. The fish may wiggle and flop on the shore for a time but the ultimate reality is this, the fish is doomed unless he gets into the water. Man, too, is the same in his relationship to God. He is doomed unless, in God, he lives and moves and has His being.

Spurgeon says: “Ah! the further I can get from the scorner’s seat the better, and there let him sit alone! Away! away! away! for behold the day cometh when like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the profane shall go down alive into the pit. Happy is the man who shall escape that horror, by keeping far, far away. These are some of the things the truly ‘blessed man’ avoids, and the more he avoids them, the more blessed he is.”

Augustine has said: “Thou hast made us for thy self, O God, and restless are our hearts until they rest in Thee.”

Fenelon says: “It is easier to keep our hearts in a state of repentance and burning desire for God than to bring it back to Him once it has gone down the slope of pleasure and laxity.”

Please join me in singing a couple of verses of **“Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul”**: *“O what a wonderful wonderful day, Day I will never forget; After I’d wandered in darkness away, Jesus my Savior I met. O what a tender, compassionate Friend He met the need of my heart; Shadows dispelling, With joy I am telling, He made all the darkness depart! Born of the Spirit with life from above Into God’s fam’ly divine, Justified fully thru Calvary’s love, O what a standing is mine! And the transaction so quickly was made When as a sinner I came, Took of the offer Of grace He did proffer He saved me, O praise His dear name! Heaven came down and glory filled my soul, When at the cross the Savior made me whole; sins were washed away And my night was turned to day—Heaven came down and glory filled my soul!”*

April 28

The Happy Man—Part 2

Richard Halverson in his book *Man to Man* says: “The fact also that man was made for God and his restlessness increases in ratio to his rebellion against the rule of God in his life until rebellion leads to total impasse and man finds himself arriving at the ultimate in frustration and futility. As man takes God seriously and gives himself to God, he grows, matures, expands, into progressively greater freedom, efficiency, productivity, fulfillment. As man resists God, life becomes increasingly confining.”

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2 NIV).

In verse 1 we looked at the three things that the happy man does not and now, by contrast, in verse 2 we are going to be looking at the two things that the happy man does. We had the negative in verse 1 and now the positive in verse 2. Whereas there are three things that the righteous man does not do in verse 1, there are two things that he does do in verse 2.

The two things that the happy man does is: (1) “his delight is in the law of the Lord” and (2) “on his law he meditates day and night.” He is abiding in the Word and assimilating the Word. He is living by the book.

The happy man’s attitude is that of Samuel: “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4 NIV). The word “delight” means to stoop down and to look into as the disciples did into the empty tomb after the resurrection. To “delight” is to be eager, excited and enthused about the opportunity.

The first thing the happy man does is “his delight is in the law of the Lord.”

“If you wish to know God you must know his word; if you wish to perceive his power you must see how he worketh by his word; if you wish to know his purpose before it is actually brought to pass you can only discover it by his word.” (C. H. Spurgeon)

The second thing the happy man does is “on his law he meditates day and night.” He keeps pondering the principles and precepts of the scripture. The word “meditates” has in this thought a well of thought within you that brings forth your word and deed.

Psalms 19:14: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (NIV). Acts 17:11: “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so” (NASB). Jeremiah 15:16: “Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your words were to me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts” (TAB).

To meditate is to “chew the cud.” C. S. Lewis says: “A man can’t be always defending the truth; there must be a time to feed on it.” It is learning to allow the Word to shape our lives.

Fenelon says: “Those who know the Lord well cannot resist turning to Him in every available moment.” Oswald Chambers says: “When we are born from above, the Son of God is formed in us; it is not the passing of the years that matures His life in us, but our obedience.”

“I have tasted Thee,” Augustine said, “and now I hunger for Thee.”

George MacDonald says: “The words of the Lord are seeds sown in our hearts by the sower. They have to fall into our hearts to grow. Meditation and prayer must water them and obedience keep them in the light. Thus they will bear fruit for the Lord’s gathering.”

May I suggest to you three things with regard to your personal walk with God: (1) conviction—I must; (2) consistency—there’s no excuse; and (3) Christlikeness—the only way.

Join me please in singing all five verses of “**Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee**”: “*Jesus, the very thought of Thee With sweetness fills my breast. But sweeter far Thy face to see, And in Thy presence rest. No voice can sing, no heart can frame, Nor can the mem’ry find A sweeter sound than Thy blest name, O Savior of mankind! O Hope of ev’ry contrite heart, O Joy of all the meek, To those who fall, how kind Thou art! How good to those who seek! But what to those who find? Ah, this Nor tongue nor pen can show. The love of Jesus, what it is—None but His loved ones know. Jesus, our only joy be Thou, As Thou our prize wilt be. Jesus, be Thou our glory now And thro’ eternity.*”

April 29

The Happy Man is Like a Tree

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Ps. 1:3 NIV).

The happy man we have been studying in verses 1 and 2 is “like a tree.”

“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (Ps. 92:12-14 NIV).

There are four things that are said about this “tree”: (1) “[it is] planted by streams of water”; (2) “[it] yields its fruit in season”; (3) “[its] leaf does not wither”; and (4) “Whatever [it] does prospers.”

“Having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude” (Col. 2:7 NASB).

Let’s meditate this morning now for a few moments on the four phrases that characterize the tree that’s representing the happy man:

(1) “[he is] planted by streams of water.” It is the longing of the Father’s heart that we be planted in a place of His choosing which will provide all that is necessary for maximum productivity. He knows best, he knows where. We are therefore to be blooming where we are planted.

Spurgeon, commenting on this phrase, says: “*By the rivers of water;*” so that even if one river should fail, he hath another. The rivers of pardon and the rivers of grace, the rivers of the promise and the rivers of the communion with Christ, are never-failing sources of supply.

(2) “which yields its fruit in season.” The question we need to ask ourselves in this meditation is: Is my life bearing fruit? John 15:8: “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (NASB). John 15:16: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you” (NASB).

(3) “whose leaf does not wither.” The happy man is a perpetual evergreen, if you please.

(4) “Whatever he does prospers.” Jeremiah 17:7-8: “[Most] blessed is the man who believes in, trusts in, and relies on the Lord, and whose hope and confidence the Lord is. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters that spreads out its roots by the river; and it shall not see and fear when heat comes, but its leaf shall be green. It shall not be anxious and full of care in the year of drought, nor shall it cease yielding fruit” (NIV).

Psalms 65:11: “You crown the year with a bountiful harvest; even the hard pathways overflow with abundance” (NIV). Malachi 3:10: “... ‘Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it’” (NIV).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of “**Surely Goodness and Mercy**”: “*A pilgrim was I, and awand’ring, In the cold night of sin I did roam, When Jesus the kind Shepherd found me, And now I am on my way home. He restoreth my soul when I’m weary, He giveth me strength day by day; He leads me beside the still waters, He guards me each step of the way. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days, all the days of my life; Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days, all the days of my life.*”

April 30

The Unhappy Man by Choice

“Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” (Ps. 1:4-5 NIV).

The contrast is incredible here because you have the contrast between the righteous man who is “like a tree” and the wicked man who “like chaff ... the wind [is blowing] away.” We can say of the wicked, they are literally blown away. They’re here today and gone tomorrow.

“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” (Ps. 1:5 NIV).

Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases this verse: “Without defense in court, unfit company for innocent people.”

Luke 13:26-29: “Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets’; and He will say, ‘I tell you. I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves being cast out. And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at table in the kingdom of God” (NASB).

Matthew 22:11-13: “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen” (NASB).

John 3:19-21: “This is the crisis we’re in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won’t come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is” (MSG).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of “**A Shelter in the Time of Storm**”: “*The Lord’s our Rock, in Him we hide, A Shelter in the time of storm; Secure whatever ill betide, A shelter in the time of storm. The raging storms may round us beat, A shelter in the time of storm; We’ll never leave our safe retreat, A Shelter in the time of storm. O,*

Jesus is a Rock in a weary land, A weary land, a weary land; O, Jesus is a Rock in a weary land, A Shelter in the time of storm."

May 1

Home Where I Belong—Ps. 126:1-3

"When I meet God in prayer, His presence is my strength for service." (Andrew Murray)

This psalm is a psalm of freedom. It is the psalm of the exiles who are coming back 50,000 strong from Babylon to the land under Zerubbabel's leadership.

I found myself singing that song of B.J. Thomas, "Home Where I Belong": *"They say that heaven's pretty And living here is too But if they said that I would have to choose between the two I'd go home, going home, where I belong. And sometimes when I'm dreaming It comes as no surprise That if you look and see The homesick feeling in my eyes I'm going home, going home, where I belong."*

When the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt early in their history and they crossed the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: "The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. (Ps. 118:14 NIV). In Your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In Your strength You will guide them to Your holy dwelling.

Psalm 126 is the song of the pilgrims going back to the land after being 70 years away in captivity in the land of Babylon.

I almost feel like singing too: *"His eye is on the sparrow ... I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free. For His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me."*

Psalms 120 to 134 are the psalms that the pilgrims sang as they went up to Jerusalem. This particular psalm is the seventh in that series. Jesus sang these psalms on the way to Jerusalem with His parents for the Passover.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s gravestone has the following words: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!"

Lutzer says: "Freedom comes by filling your mind with God's thoughts."

John 8:32: "and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (NASB).

Verse 1: "When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed" (NIV).

Peterson paraphrases that verse: "It seemed like a dream, too good to be true, when GOD returned Zion's exiles."

Notice that it says "When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion." This is something He did. The Lord brought them out of Egypt. The Lord brought them into the land. Now He brought them back to the land.

Ecclesiastes 3:11: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. ..." (NIV).

There is a glorious future day soon coming when he's going to bring us out.

There are going to be three things that are said in these first couple of verses about the returnees: (1) they were men who were dreaming; (2) "[their] mouths were filled with laughter"; and (3) "[their] tongues with songs of joy."

Isaiah 25:1: "O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago" (NIV).

There is joy and laughter at the time of the new birth. There's joy and laughter when we're going home. Can you imagine the glorious joy and laughter that will be ours when we step onto that eternal shore to be forever with the Lord?

C. S. Lewis said: "The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last."

Verse 2: "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them'" (NIV).

Back in verse 1 (1) "[they] were like men who dreamed." Now in verse 2: (2) "[their] mouths were filled with laughter"; and (3) "[their] tongues with songs of joy."

The Lord has done great things for them. Their laughter and songs and joy produced a witness to honor the God of the universe.

Verse 3: "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy" (NIV).

Peterson paraphrases that: "GOD was wonderful to us; we are one happy people."

Verse 3 is the record of their testimony: (1) "The Lord has done" and (2) "we are filled." It's what "The Lord has done" and how we have responded that becomes our testimony. "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." The Lord has done great things in the past, and in the present "we are filled with joy."

Psalm 116:5: "How kind the Lord is! How good he is! So merciful, this God of ours!" (NLT).

Brennan Manning said: "God is God. The Holy One isn't to be commanded, controlled, manipulated, or exploited." (*The Wisdom of Tenderness*, 155)

Join me please in singing a couple of verses of that great old hymn **“When We See Christ”**: *“Oft-times the day seems longer, our trials hard to bear, We’re tempted to complain, to murder and despair; But Christ will soon appear to catch His Bride away, All tears forever over in God’s eternal day. Life’s day will soon be o’er all storms forever past, We’ll cross the great divide to glory, safe at last; We’ll share the joys of heav’n a harp, a home, a crown, The tempter will be banished, we’ll lay our burden down. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, Life’s trials will seem so small when we see Christ; One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase, So bravely run he race till we see Christ.”*

May 2

The Choice is Ours

Hebrews 11:25: “choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (NASB).

“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (Ps. 1:6 NIV).

The reason the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous is now given here in verse 6. The verse begins with the word “For.” Life is the fruitage of obedience and righteousness. Death is the fruitage of disobedience and unrighteousness. Let’s take a little time this morning to meditate on these two phrases: (1) “the way of the righteous” and (2) “the way of the wicked.”

Our text tells us first of all that “the Lord watches over the way of the righteous.”

“The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore” (Ps. 121:7-8 NIV).

Proverbs 4:18: “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day” (NIV). Yes “the Lord watches over the way of the righteous” but in contrast “the way of the wicked will perish.”

Proverbs 14:12: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (NIV).

Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it” (NIV).

Those who do not plan for the future will have to live through it anyway. Robert Foster says: “Don’t fade coming down the home stretch of life ... be like a tree!”

Join me in singing a number of verses of that great old invitation hymn, **“Just As I Am”**: *“Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come! Just as I am, and waiting not To rid my soul of one dark blot, To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come! I come! Just as I am, tho’ tossed about With many a conflict, many a doubt, Fightings within and fears without, O Lamb of God, I come! I come! Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind, Yea, all I need in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come! I come! Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve, Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come! I come! Just as I am, Thy love unknown Hath broken ev’ry barrier down; Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!”*

May 3

How Great Thou Art

Psalms 8:1-2: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger” (NIV).

One writer titles Psalm 8: “The Praise of the Creator’s Glory Sung by the Starry Heavens to Puny Man.” Still another titled it: “God’s Glory Revealed in Man’s Dignity.”

The psalmist begins and ends with an accolade of praise to the Lord.

Hebrews 13:15: “Through Him, therefore, let us constantly and at all times offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that thankfully acknowledge and confess and glorify His name” (AMP).

Wiersbe expressing it this way: “O Lord [the promise-making God], our Lord [the Sovereign, who has the power to keep His promises], how excellent is your name in all the earth.”

Lancelot Andrewes records this prayer of praise: “It is right and good that we, for all things, at all times, and in all places, give thanks and praise to you, O God. We worship you, we confess to you, we praise you, we bless you, we sing to you, and we give thanks to you: Maker, Nourisher, Guardian, Healer, Lord, and Father of all.”

The Lord’s name and His glory are the two elements of praise as the psalmist opens Psalm 8.

Spurgeon says: “He who delights in the songs of angels is pleased to honour himself in the eyes of his enemies by the praises of little children. What a contrast between the glory above the heavens, and the mouths of babes and sucklings! yet by both the name of God is made excellent.”

Join me in singing a couple verses of **“How Great Thou Art!”**: *“O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made, I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy pow’r throughout the universe displayed! And when I think that God, His Son not sparing, Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in. That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin! Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee; How great Thou art, how great Thou art! Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee; How great Thou art, how great Thou art!”*

May 4

This Is My Father’s World

Psalm 8:3-9: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (NIV).

Beginning with verse 3 there are four things the psalmist is considering: “your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars.” All of these are truly God’s finger-work.

“What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps. 8:4 NIV). The psalmist now raises a question in view of the greatness of creation. How can the Creator be mindful of man and that He would care for him?

Isaiah 57:15: “For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’” (NIV).

Psalm 104:24: “O Lord, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures” (NLT).

“You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5 NIV).

One of the writers translates the first phrase: “You made him a little less than divine.” Oswald Chambers says: “The point to remember is that all our circumstances are in the hand of God.”

“You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet” (Ps. 8:6 NIV).

“All flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field” (Ps. 8:7 NIV).

“The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas” (Ps. 8:8 NIV).

Here the psalmist puts definition to the statements that were made in verse 6: “You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.” Here is a listing of six things that have been placed under man’s authority: “all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas” (Ps. 8:7-8 NIV).

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Ps. 8:9 NIV).

I find myself worshiping the Lord as the Creator God. The words in Colossians 1:16-17 are my meditation: “Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together” (NLT).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“This Is My Father’s World”**: *“This is my Father’s world, And to my list’ning ears, All nature sings, and round me rings The music of the spheres. This is my Father’s world, I rest me in the thought Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas His hand the wonders wrought. This is my Father’s world, The birds their carols raise, The morning light, the lily white, Declare their Maker’s praise. This is my Father’s world, He shines in all that’s fair; In the rustling grass I hear Him pass, He speaks to me ev’rywhere.”*

May 5

Psalm 13

Leupold titles this psalm: “Yearning for Help from God.”

Ironside says: “In Psalm 13 we have the tried believer crying to God for deliverance and yet trusting in His overruling providence in spite of all the difficult circumstances of the way. Four times in the first two verses we get the cry, ‘How long?’”

Allen titles this psalm: “When God Seems Far Away.” He then says: “Probably our greatest question respecting praise is how to manage when life is rough and God seems far away. How do we praise Him then?”

Steve and Annie Chapman have a line in one of their songs: “Our God reigns even when it’s raining.”

This psalm was probably written late in Saul’s pursuit of David. He is weary in waiting and restless in running. We are going to be looking at the psalm in three parts. We are going to look at verses 1 and 2 this morning. Tomorrow morning verses 3 and 4. The next morning we will look at verses 5 and 6.

Psalm 13:1: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" Verse 2: "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

Our psalm opens with three questions in verse 1. There will be two more questions in verse 2.

Question #1: "How long, O Lord?"

Question #2: "Will you forget me forever?"

Question #3: "How long will you hide your face from me?"

Question #1: "How long, O Lord?" This is the same question asked by those who were martyred in the tribulation period. "And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" (Rev. 6:10 NASB).

Question #2: "Will you forget me forever?" "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill]" (Ps. 137:5 NIV).

"But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me'" (Isa. 49:14-16 NIV).

Question #3: "How long will you hide your face from me?" "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26 NIV).

Leupold says: "The fourfold 'how long' indicates the extremity of this poor man's misery. His strength is well-nigh spent, his patience can hold out no longer."

Fenelon says: "When he plunges us into the night of pure faith, let us still press on through agonizing darkness."

"How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?" (Ps. 13:2 NIV).

Whereas we had three questions in verse 1, we now have two questions in verse 2.

Question #4: "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"

Question #5: "How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

When I think of this wrestling going on in the psalmist's thought-life, I am reminded of Gethsemane. A very good friend of mine who suffered the loss of his three-year-old daughter finally came to this conclusion: "I understand that I don't understand."

Question #5: "How long will my enemy triumph over me?" I'm sure David was tired of losing and wondering if he was ever going to win one again.

You can just hear David say, "Lord, I'm tired of having my tail whipped every time I turn around."

Allen says: "All the while, like slow, circling vultures, his enemies hover above, waiting for his fall—and their meal!"

Margaret Clarkson says: "Pain is pain and sorrow is sorrow. It hurts. It limits. It impoverishes. It isolates. It restrains. It works devastation deep within the personality. It circumscribes in a thousand different ways. There is nothing good about it. But the gifts God can give with it are the richest the human spirit can know."

I guess the real secret is trust God and take it as it comes.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **"Through It All"**: *"I've had many tears and sorrows, I've had questions for tomorrow, There've been times I didn't know right from wrong. But in ev'ry situation, God gave blessed consolation that my trials come to only make me strong. I've been to lots of places And I've seen a lot of faces, There've been times I felt so all alone. But in my lonely hours, yes, those precious lonely hours Jesus let me know that I was His own. Through it all, Through it all, Oh, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God. Through it all, Through it all, I've learned to depend upon His Word."*

May 6

Prayer is Going to Change His Perspective—Ps. 13:3-4

Psalm 13:3-4: "Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes will rejoice when I fall" (NIV).

In the first two verses we have the repeated question "How long?" as the psalmist David was in deep sorrow. We now are turning in verses 3 and 4 to his supplication. Prayer is going to change his perspective. He's going to see the unfolding of God's plan.

Daniel 9:19: "O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name" (NIV).

"Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death" (Ps. 13:3 NIV). Time is running out. We have the two-minute-warning. The red flag "Expired" is about to pop up on the parking meter. The show is over. The CD has played its last number.

Fenelon says: "He leads you to sacrifice more and more, and you go from one troublesome situation to another! He trains you to fulfill His noble plans amidst the petty annoyances and aggravations of life. And He doesn't allow you much more than a moment's rest! Hardly will one annoying person have gone before God sends another to you." "My enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes will rejoice when I fall" (Ps. 13:4). David could surely relate.

Craig Barnes says: "We do not live by faith in God's intervention. We live by faith in God's grace when there is no intervention." (*When God Interrupts*, 100)

"As I pray, it is the Crucified Christ who comes to walk with me and in whose power I live. ... Through consistent daily prayer, my whole life becomes devoted to my King and to the service of His kingdom. ... Sometimes prayer changes me more than the circumstances." (Andrew Murray, *199 Treasures of Wisdom*)

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Sweet Hour of Prayer**": "*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, That calls me from a world of care, And bids me at my Father's throne Make all my wants and wishes known. In seasons of distress and grief, My soul has often found relief, And oft escaped the tempter's snare, By thy return, sweet hour of prayer. Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, Thy wings shall my petition bear, To Him whose truth and faithfulness Engage the waiting soul to bless; And since He bids me seek His face, Believe His word and trust His grace, I'll cast on Him my ev'ry care, And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer.*"

May 7

Sorrow and Supplication Leads to a Song—Ps. 13:5-6

David's been doing everything he could to survive in this situation. It reminds me of a sign on a wagon out west: "Pickin' up bones to keep from starvin'. Pickin' up chips to keep from freezin'. Pickin' up courage to keep from leavin'. Way out West in No-Man's land." (Ken Alstad, *Savvy Sayin's*, 78)

Psalm 13:5-6: "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me" (NIV).

We come now to the third and final part of our psalm. We've considered together: (1) Sorrow—verses 1 and 2; (2) Supplication—verses 3 and 4; and now we come to (3) Song—verses 5 and 6. The word "But" forms the contrast to everything that we have been considering in the previous four verses.

Peterson paraphrases verse 1: "I've thrown myself headlong into your arms—I'm celebrating your rescue."

Gene Guyon says: "Always receive everything from Him with a thankful heart, no matter what it is He chooses to bestow. ... It is the *fire* of suffering which will bring forth the *gold* of godliness." (*Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, 42).

Verse 6: "I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me." The expression of this trust and joy is going to be break forth in singing from the psalmist.

Acts 16:24-25: "and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (NASB).

"I will sing to the Lord" and the reason given is: "for he has been good to me."

Please join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Count Your Blessings**": "*When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed, When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost, Count your many blessings, name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done. Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings, ev'ry doubt will fly, And you will be singing as the days go by. Count your blessings, Name them one by one; Count your blessings, See what God hath done; Count your blessings, Name them one by one; Count your many blessings, See what God hath done.*"

May 8

Sowing Tears, Harvest of Joy—Ps. 126:4-6

"If our spiritual life is healthy, under the power of the Holy Spirit, praying at all times will be natural." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 4: "Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev" (NIV).

Here in verse 4 we turn from these great statements of praise to petition: "Restore our fortunes, O Lord." The psalmist gives an illustration: "like streams in the Negev."

Hosea 10:12: "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you" (NIV).

Bishop Lancelot Andrewes prayed: "... instruct me to do what things are pleasing in thy sight, for Thou art my God: let thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness."

Verse 5: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy" (NIV).

Psalm 30:5: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (NIV).

2 Chronicles 15:7: "But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded" (NIV).

Donal McGavran: "The Lord has more winnable people than ever before. Let us not experience the tragedy of coming out of a ripe field empty handed."

Verse 6: "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" (NIV).

The focus of verse 6 is on the four verbs: (1) "He ... goes out"; (2) "carrying"; (3) "return"; and (4) "carrying."

Jeremiah 31:25: "I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint" (NIV).

Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-reserved body. But rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out and proudly proclaim: "Wow! What a ride!"

Join me in singing the two verses of "**Take My Hand, Precious Lord**": "*Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, help me stand; I am tired, I am weak, I am worn; Thru the storm, thru the night, Lead me on to the light; Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home. When my ways grows drear, Precious Lord, linger near; When my life is almost gone; Hear my cry, hear my call, Hold my hand lest I fall; Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home.*"

May 9

God's Guest List—Ps. 15:1-5

It is believed by many that Psalm 15 and 24 were both written on the occasion of the bringing up of the Ark to Jerusalem to dwell in the tent that David had prepared for it.

This psalm will explain to us who is worthy to be a guest of the Lord. This psalm will make us tremble if we have not made reservations by accepting God's provision for qualification. We cannot come to God on our terms.

Verse 1: "Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?" (NIV). David opens with two critical questions: (1) "Who may dwell in your sanctuary?" and (2) "Who may live on your holy hill?"

If we were asking these questions we would say: Who is going to heaven? Who is going to participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb?

The people who will spend eternity with the Lord will be characterized now in verses 2-5. There are eleven characteristics and I will just summarize those. These characteristics make us acceptable guests in the Father's house.

1. **Character**—"he whose walk is blameless."
2. **Conduct**—"[he] who does what is righteous."
3. **Convictions**—"[he] who speaks the truth from his heart."
4. **Criticism**—"[he who] has no slander on his tongue."
5. **Compassion**—"[he] who does his neighbor no wrong."
6. **Circumspect**—"he who ... casts no slur on his fellowman."
7. **Courage**—"[he] who despises a vile man."
8. **Commitment**—"[he] who honors those who fear the Lord."
9. **Consistency**—"[he] who keeps his oath even when it hurts."
10. **Charitable**—"[he] who lends his money without usury."
11. **Cautious**—"[he who] does not accept a bribe against the innocent."

Peter Marshall says: "Give to us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for—because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything."

Abraham Lincoln said: "I have simply tried to do what seemed best each day, as each day came."

Flowing out of my life will be evidences that I am His child. We learn here that we are to keep it positive and to have an attitude of gratitude.

The last phrase in our psalm in verse 5 is: "He who does these things will never be shaken."

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**We Have an Anchor**": "*Will your anchor hold in the storms of life, When the clouds unfold their wings of strife? When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain, Will your anchor drift, or firm remain? It will firmly hold in the straits of fear, When the breakers have to the reef is near; Tho' the tempest rage and the wild winds blow, Not an angry wave shall our bark o'erflow. We have an anchor that keeps the soul Steadfast and sure while the billows roll, Fastened to the Rock which cannot move, Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*"

May 10

Creation Proclaims the Glory of God—Ps. 19:1-6

Verse 1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (NIV). The psalmist begins this prayer with praising God the Creator. We would do well to ask ourselves the question: How do "the heavens declare the glory of God?"

There are three things that stand out: His greatness, His goodness, and His glory in the light of the sun. He is exalting the Creator by magnifying creation.

Creation proclaims the glory of God!

Isaiah 66:2: "'Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' declares the Lord. 'This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word'" (NIV).

Verse 2: "Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge" (NIV). The heavens are like an ever-gushing stream pouring forth witness.

Verse 3: "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (NIV). The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says: "The message from nature about the glory of God reaches all nations, and is equally intelligible to them all . . ." (807).

Verse 4: "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun" (NIV).

C. S. Lewis said: "A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word 'darkness' on the walls of his cell."

The focus of verses 5 and 6 will be upon the sun. Verse 5: "which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course" (NIV). The sun is "like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course."

The old cowboy said: "Go after life as if it's something that's got to be roped in a hurry before it gets away." (Texas Bix Bender, *Don't Squat With Yer Spurs On!*, 80)

Verse 6: "It rises at one end of the heavens and makes it circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat" (NIV). The "circuit" of the sun reminds us of God's faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (NIV).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**The Wonder of It All**": *"There's the wonder of sunset at evening, The wonder as sunrise I see; But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul Is the wonder that God loves me. There's the wonder of springtime and harvest, The sky, the stars, the sun; But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul Is a wonder that's only begun. O the wonder of it all, the wonder of it all—Just to think that God loves me! O the wonder of it all, the wonder of it all—Just to think that God loves me!"*

May 11

Standing on the Promises—Ps. 7-10

"The Bible is a Book of precious promises; all the way we have to travel, they seem to be like a series of stepping-stones across the stream of time, and we may march from one promise to another, and never wet our feet all the way from earth to heaven, if we do but know how to keep our eyes open, and to find the right promise to step upon." (C. H. Spurgeon)

Psalms 19:7: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (NIV).

Bacon says: "The heavens declare the glory of God but not His will." His will is expressed in His Word.

In verses 7, 8 and 9 we have three series of six's:

1. **Six titles** by which the scripture is called.
2. **Six things** that the scripture does.
3. **Six words** that tell us what the scripture is.

What are the six words that serve as titles for the Word of God? (1) "The law"; (2) "The statutes"; (3) "The precepts"; (4) "The commands"; (5) "The fear"; and (6) "The ordinances."

What are the six words that describe what the Word of God does? (1) "reviving the soul"; (2) "making wise the simple"; (3) "giving joy to the heart"; (4) "giving light to the eyes"; (5) "enduring forever"; and (6) "altogether righteous."

Finally, what are the six words that describe the Word of God for us? (1) "perfect"; (2) "trustworthy"; (3) "right"; (4) "radiant"; (5) "pure"; and (6) "sure."

1 Thessalonians 2:13: "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (NASB).

"The law of the Lord is perfect" and what it does, it is "reviving the soul." It lifts our spirits. It renews our strength. It refreshes our perspective. It provides the wisdom necessary to provide a framework for obedience.

Paul's last epistle, 2 Timothy, focuses on the Word:

1. 2 Timothy 3:15: "and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (NASB).

2. 2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (NASB).

3. 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (NASB).

Verse 8: "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes" (NIV).

"The precepts of the Lord" would refer to the orders from the Lord. The word is right, it is exactly what needs to be done. It gives "joy to the heart." "Joy" is the fruit of obedience.

"The commands of the Lord are radiant." It gives you a glow. "Giving light to the eyes"—it provides nourishment.

We could say the Word of God contains the orders from headquarters.

Verse 9: "The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous" (NIV).

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says: "**Fear** is here a synonym for the Law, for its purpose was to put fear into human hearts." (808)

It is "enduring forever." "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35 NASB).

"The ordinances of the Lord are sure." The "ordinances" are an anchor of the soul in the midst of a storm.

Verse 10: "They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb" (NIV). The Bible is more precious than your bottom line.

Jeremiah 15:16: "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty" (NIV).

Here the psalmist tells us that the Word of God is "precious" and it is sweet.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Standing on the Promises**": "*Standing on the promises of Christ my King, Thro' eternal ages let His praises ring; Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing, Standing on the promises of God. Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, By the living Word of God I shall prevail, Standing on the promises of God. Standing, standing, Standing on the promises of God my Savior; Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.*"

May 12

The Manual for Living—Ps. 19:11-14

"Precious Book! I would say of thee what David said of Goliath's sword, 'There is none like that; give it me.' Thou art marrow and fatness, honey, wines on the lees well refined; yea, manna of angels, and water from the Rock Christ Jesus. Of all soul-medicines thou art the most potent; of all mental dainties thou art the sweetest; and of all spiritual food thou art the most sustaining." (C. H. Spurgeon)

Verse 11: "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (NIV). The key words in verse 11 are "warned" and "great reward." The function of the Word of God is to warn us. The obedience to the warning brings a "great reward."

Our attitude as we approach the Word of God should be one expressed in the following phrase: "What wouldst Thou have me to do!"

Verse 12: "Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults" (NIV). First we have a question in verse 12: "Who can discern his errors?" None of us can do that. When it comes to seeing our own errors, we are in desperate need of outside help. The reason this is so is because of denial and rationalizations and blind spots in our lives.

Following the question "Who can discern his errors?" David's request is: "Forgive my hidden faults." The *Family Circus* has it right: "Conscience is email your head gets from heaven."

The Word of God is like a mirror giving us a true picture of ourselves. It is our responsibility to be submissive and obedient in our response to what we see.

Psalms 119:9, 11: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ... I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (NIV).

Verse 13: "Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression" (NIV).

Back in verse 12 his petition was "Forgive my hidden faults." Now in verse 13 his petition is "Keep your servant also from willful sins." He then continues in prayer: "may they not rule over me."

Romans 6:14: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace" (NASB). David gives us the result with the key word "Then." There are two things that will be true: (1) "Then will I be blameless" and (2) "innocent of great transgression."

Verse 14: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer" (NIV).

Here the psalmist makes reference to speech and motivations. Speech in: "the words of my mouth." Motivations in: "the meditation of my heart."

Psalm 104:34: "May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the Lord" (NIV).

The psalmist concludes his prayer by referring to the Lord in two ways: (1) "O Lord, my Rock" and (2) "and my Redeemer."

The Lord indeed is our "Rock" to stand upon. He ensures us of stability. Yes, He is "my Redeemer," the One who came and willingly paid the price for our salvation.

"[Lord,] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight" (NIV). And Lord thank You that You are "my Rock and my Redeemer."

Join me in singing a couple of verses of that great old hymn, "**Hiding In Thee**": "*O safe to the Rock that is higher than I, My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly; So sinful, so weary, Thine, Thine would I be; Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in Thee. How oft in the conflict, when pressed by the foe, I have fled to my Refuge and breathed out my woe; How often, when trials like sea billows roll, Have I hidden in Thee, O Thou Rock of my soul. Hiding in Thee, Hiding in Thee, Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in Thee.*"

May 13

Hallelujah! What a Savior!—Ps. 22:1-6

Psalm 22 is a Messianic psalm and is one of the most remarkable of all in its detail sitting forth of the sufferings of the cross. No experience of David is recorded here. It is all a prophecy of Christ. Psalm 22 was written a thousand years before Christ's birth. There are thirty-three prophecies fulfilled in these verses.

This psalm is divided into two parts: (1) The Sob (22:1-21) and (2) The Song (22:22-31).

It is going to be our purpose for these devotionals to divide this psalm up into seven parts, taking the Seven Sayings of Christ from the Cross and seeing them interspersed through the outline of the text.

The study for today would be titled "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—verses 1-6.

Verse 1: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?" (NIV).

This psalm opens with three questions: (1) "Why have you forsaken me?" (2) "Why are you so far from saving me?" and (3) Why are you ... so far from the words of my groaning?"

This is the central saying from the cross—probably spoken in the darkness about ten minutes to three. This is a time when Christ became sin for us.

These opening words are the agonizing cry that thrills every heart and arrests every attention. Christ cried: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' (Matt. 27:46 NIV).

Why are you so far from helping me? The answer is: The victory may be altogether thine own."

Question #3: "Why are you ... so far from the words of my groaning?" Which we are taught to reply: "That thou mayest learn obedience by the things which thou hast suffered."

Verse 2: "O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent" (NIV).

Verse 3: "Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel" (NIV).

Perhaps some of these answers lie in the fact that God is holy and therefore cannot look upon sin.

Verse 4: "In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them" (NIV).

Verse 5: "They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed" (NIV).

Verse 6: "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people" (NIV).

The word "worm" in verse 6 is an indication of the degradation and helplessness with the secondary idea of contempt.

Join me as an act of worship in singing all five verses of that great hymn "**Hallelujah! What a Savior!**": "*Man of Sorrows' what a name For the Son of God, who came Ruined sinners to proclaim. Hallelujah! what a Savior! Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood Sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah! what a Savior! Guilty, vile, and helpless we; Spotless Lamb of God was He. 'Full atonement' can it be? Hallelujah! what a Savior! Lifted up was He to die; 'It is finished,' was His cry. Now in heav'n exalted high Hallelujah! what a Savior! When He comes, our glorious King, All His ransomed home to bring, Then anew this song we'll sing, 'Hallelujah! what a Savior!'"*

May 14

Father, Forgive Them for They are Not Knowing What They Are Doing—Ps. 22:7-8

Whereas "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" was the fourth and central saying of the cross, we have considered it here in the first part of this psalm. The very first statement from the cross is the one that now comes

under consideration. It's a prayer I believe that is uttered from the lips of the Savior as the spikes are being driving in His hands and the cross is being lifted up and dropped into the hole prepared for it.

Luke 23:34: "But Jesus kept on saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'"

Verse 7: "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads" (NIV).

Verse 8: "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him" (NIV).

Matthew 27:39-44: "And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. He trusts in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, "I am the Son of God."' And the robbers also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him."

Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (NIV).

Forgiveness involves letting the pot drop. It's hitting the delete button and running the shredder.

John MacArthur says: "*Forgiveness* was the predominant theme of His thoughts throughout the whole ordeal of His crucifixion. For example, at the height of His agony, at the very moment when most victims of crucifixion might scream out in fury with a curse, He prayed for forgiveness for His tormentors: 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34)." (*The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 38)

Join me in singing a couple of verses of that great old hymn "**Near the Cross**": "*Jesus, keep me near the cross, There a precious fountain Free to all, a healing stream, Flows from Calv'ry's mountain. Near the cross! O Lamb of God, Bring its scenes before me; Help me walk from day to day With its shadows o'er me. In the cross, in the cross Be my glory ever; Till my raptured soul shall find Rest beyond the river.*"

May 15

Woman, See Your Son. See Your Mother—Ps. 22:9-11

As Jesus surveys the angry mob, those who are mocking, laughing, and creating an increase of pain by their treatment, Jesus finds in the crowd the face of His mother and the disciple whom He loved, the apostle John.

John 19:26-27: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household" (NASB).

In these verses that we will be looking at from Psalm 22:9-11, we are going to be considering the third statement that was made of the seven sayings from the cross. We've considered the first and the fourth. Now in this study we are considering the third.

Verse 9: "Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast" (NIV).

Verse 10: "From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God" (NIV).

Verse 11: "Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help" (NIV).

His disciples may desert Him, His friends may forsake Him, His nation may despise Him, but His mother stands. One is reminded of Song of Solomon 8:7: "Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away" (NIV).

Beside the cross in tears the woeful mother stood.

Bent beneath the weight of years and viewed his flowing blood.

Her mind with grief was torn, her strength was ebbing fast

And through her heart forlorn the sword of anguish passed. (unknown)

Twice he mentions His mother. Throughout the Old Testament there is never any mention made of a human father or begetter to the Messiah. But always only of His mother or her who bore Him.

Faith and hope begin to reassert themselves. At the same time the poor sufferer does exactly what his opponents had just recommended to him to do—to commit all issues to God. He recounts what God has meant to him in the past and what He has done for him from earliest infancy. It is as though he had said "During every moment of my life till now, You have been my God and have sustained me."

Now as He looks over the crowd, He sees not only eyes of hate and antagonism, but He sees eyes of love. He sees His mother with John down there. There stood by the cross of Jesus His mother. "Woman, behold thy son." Yonder at the wedding at Cana in Galilee she had asked Him to do something to show that He was the Messiah, that she was right when she said He was virgin-born. She wanted Him to reveal Himself at this wedding. His answer to her at that time was, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." But there hanging on the cross, "Woman, behold thy son, whose hour has come." The reason for His coming into the world is now accomplished. This is the most important hour in the history of the world.

For John it is a faithful stewardship. Out of love the Savior says to Him: "Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household" (Jn. 19:26-27 NASB).

Who can measure the peace and satisfaction of knowing that in obedience you are fulfilling the will of your very special friend—the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God—in taking care of His mother at this point.

We would do well to ask ourselves a couple of questions this morning:

Am I faithful in accomplishing the stewardship You have for me?

And am I walking with You in obedience and truth?

Join with me if you will in singing a couple of verses of **"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"**: *"When I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of Glory died, My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride. See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"*

May 16

I Am Thirsty—Ps. 22:12-18

This is the fifth statement of the Lord from the cross and it comes at a time very close to the end. We've considered the fourth, first, and the third sayings. Now we are considering together the fifth saying from the cross.

If you look at the sequence of the sayings on the cross, all that remains is "Tetelestai! It is finished!" and "Father, into Your hands I am committing My spirit."

Being near the end, we read in John 19:28: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I am thirsty'" (NIV).

He has been on the cross now for about six hours. Think of the loss of blood and the fever created by the wounds. The weakness and weariness from the all-night vigil. Thirst was one of the severest agonies of crucifixion.

Psalm 69:21: "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst" (NIV).

This is the only cry of physical suffering from the cross.

Verse 12: "Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me" (NIV). Verse 13: "Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me" (NIV).

We can see Satan's forces in the wild animals that are described in these two verses.

Wiersbe says: "Today's passages talk about the Devil's entire zoo. 'Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me' (v. 12). Our Lord was on the cross, and people were acting like animals. That's what is wrong with the world. When we leave God out of our lives, we descend to the level of animals."

Conceive of the Lord Jesus as a helpless, unarmed, naked man, cast in the midst of a herd of infuriated, wild bulls.

Verse 14: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me" (NIV).

Verse 15: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death" (NIV).

Verse 16: "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet" (NIV).

Verse 17: "I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me" (NIV).

Verse 18: "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing" (NIV).

There are ten phrases in these five verses that graphically describe what is going on while Christ hangs upon the cross. The language of suffering here should bring tears to every loving eye. 2 Corinthians 13:4, from the NET Bible we read just the first part of the verse: "For indeed He was crucified by reason of weakness."

Focus for a moment on verse 16 and the final phrase "they have pierced my hands and my feet." This is written by David 1000 B.C. In 700 B.C. Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 53:5: "But he was pierced for our transgressions" (NIV). In 500 B.C. Zechariah prophesied: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced" (12:10 NIV).

Join me if you will please in singing as we stand at the foot of the cross, a couple of verses of **"The Old Rugged Cross"**: *"O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, Has a wondrous attraction for me; For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above To bear it to dark Calvary. In the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, A wondrous beauty I see; For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died To pardon and sanctify me. So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, Till my trophies at last I lay down; I will cling to the old rugged cross, And exchange it some day for a crown."*

May 17

Father, Into Your Hands I'm Committing My Spirit—Ps. 22:19-21

In Luke 23:46 we read the following: "And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.' And having said this, He breathed His last" (NASB).

Psalm 22:19: "But you, O Lord, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me" (NIV).

Verse 20: "Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs" (NIV).

Verse 21: "Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen" (NIV).

This is the fifth of seven studies we are pursuing in Psalm 22 with regard to the sayings of Christ from the cross. We looked at number four, one, three, and five. Now we are considering number seven.

This becomes so painful to realize that the heavens are silent. The angels didn't come and the sacrifice must be consumed upon the altar.

Delitzsch says: "In ver. 19 the description of affliction has reached its climax, for the parting of, and casting lots for, the garments assumes the certain death of the sufferer in the mind of the enemies."

Peterson paraphrases verse 19: "You, GOD—don't put off my rescue! Hurry and help me!"

Our suffering Savior refers to the Father as His source of strength: "O my Strength, come quickly to help me."

In verse 20 he says: "Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs." He is making very short and emotional urgent petitions to His Father.

Verse 21: "Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen" (NIV).

Peterson makes it very graphic in the way he paraphrases these final two verses in this meditation: "Don't let them cut my throat; don't let those mongrels devour me. If you don't show up soon, I'm done for—gored by the bulls, meat for the lions."

My heart is drawn to Hebrews 5:7-8: "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (NASB).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **"Ten Thousand Angels"**: *"When they nailed Him to the Cross, His mother stood nearby; He said, 'Woman, behold thy son!' He cried, 'I thirst for water' but they gave Him none to drink. Then the sinful work of man was done. To the howling mob He yielded; He did not for mercy cry. The Cross of shame He took alone. And when He cried, 'It's finished,' He gave himself to die; Salvation's wondrous plan was done. He could have called ten thousand angels To destroy the world and set Him free. He could have called ten thousand angels, But He died alone for you and me."*

May 18

Truly to You I am Saying, Today You Shall Be With Me in The Paradise—Ps. 22:22-30

This is the second saying of Christ from the cross. We've looked at the fourth, the first, the third, the fifth and the seventh. Now we have the second here in verses 22-30

The radical change between verse 21 and verse 22 causes us to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again the third day. These remaining verses speak of the resurrected Christ. We are attaching this second saying from the cross, the statement of the Lord Jesus to the thief who asked the Lord Jesus to remember him. This is the only saying from the cross that points to the future and the life after death.

The record is recorded in Luke 23:39-43: "And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise'" (NASB).

The word "today" is emphasized in the Greek text. It's not tomorrow or next week or later, but it's today. The thief had just prayed for remembrance but once again we see how gracious the Lord is in answering our prayers. He always gives the exceeding abundance above all that we could ask or think. Because He loves us His divine grace always exceeds our human expectations.

Verse 22: "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you" (NIV). This is the testimony of the thief from the cross.

Watchman Nee said: "O that we might learn the undefeatedness of God."

I can just hear the thief singing Charles Wesley's great old hymn "And Can It Be That I Should Gain".

Verse 23: "You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!" (NIV).

Here in verse 23 we have three key phrases: (1) "praise him"; (2) "honor him"; and (3) "Revere him."

Verse 24: "For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help" (NIV).

The reason we are to praise Him, honor Him, and revere Him is now stated here in verse 24: "For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one." The Father has accepted the sacrifice of the Son.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the evidence that He was “not despised or disdained” but that He fully qualified as the Redeemer of fallen mankind by His death upon the cross. Therefore the Father put His seal of approval upon this redemption by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

Because of the reception of the Father with the work of the Son, He now is free to provide salvation for a lost and dying world. Here this thief on the cross hears the words: “Today, with me you shall be in the Paradise.” This thief couldn’t do a thing but receive and accept what the Lord had promised.

Verse 25: “From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows” (NIV). Christ is saying “I will pay my vows. Now you shall be with Me in paradise.”

Verse 26: “The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever!” (NIV).

John 10:27-29: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (NASB).

Verse 27: “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him” (NIV).

This reminds me of Jesus’ last words. Acts 1:8: “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (NASB).

Verse 28: “for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations” (NIV).

I feel like singing “All Hail the pow’r of Jesus’ name! Let angels prostrate fall; Bring forth the royal diadem, And crown Him Lord of all.”

Verse 29: “All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive” (NIV).

Verse 30: “Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord” (NIV).

Join with me in singing a couple of verses of “**All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name**”: “*All Hail the pow’r of Jesus’ name! Let angels prostrate fall; Bring forth the royal diadem, And crown Him Lord of all; Bring forth the royal diadem, And crown Him Lord of all! O that with yonder sacred throng We at His feet may fall! We’ll join the everlasting song, And crown Him Lord of all; We’ll join the everlasting song, And crown Him Lord of all!*”

May 19

It Is Finished!—Ps. 22:31

John 19:28-30 record the following: “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop, and brought it up to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit” (NASB).

“Tetelestai!” is the victor’s shout. It is the cry of the man who has completed the task, who has won through the struggle. It is the cry of a man who comes out of the dark into the light to grasp the awaiting crown.

It is the shout of the man who has just broken the tape and finished the course. This is statement six from the cross.

We have looked together at the other six statements: number four, number one, number three, number five, number seven, number two, and now number six.

Verse. 31: “They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it” (NIV).

They will witness to a righteousness which makes them acceptable in the presence of God. The reason: “for he has done it.”

It is finished, yes indeed,
Finished every jot.
Sinner, this is all you need,
Tell me, is it not?” (Unknown)

What is it that is finished, since the word “IT” is the subject? We could say there are a number of things. The completion of His physical sufferings, the long lists of types and prophecies that are fulfilled in Him, the ceremony of the Jewish Law was finished, the perfect obedience to the demands of the Law was accomplished, and the triumph over Satan’s sin and death is finished.

It is finished by the Son upon the cross, the Father in the resurrection of the Son, and the Spirit through His work in the believer when soon we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

The price of salvation has been fully paid in the death of the Lord Jesus upon the cross.

Our psalm begins with a cry of agony: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And it closes with a triumphant shout of our glorious Lord: “It is finished!”

Your redemption is a completed package and He presents it to you wrapped up with everything in it. He does not want you to bring your do-it-yourself kit along. It does not need batteries to make it work. He does not need that. When He died on the cross He provided a righteousness that would satisfy a holy God. All He asks of you is to receive this package, this gift of God, which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Wesley said: "We will not injure the cause of Christ by admitting our sins but we are sure to do so by denying them."

Join me in singing a couple verses of Fanny Crosby's great hymn "**Redeemed**": *"Redeemed how I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; Redeemed thro' His infinite mercy, His child, and forever, I am. Redeemed and so happy in Jesus, No language my rapture can tell; I know that the light of His presence With me doth continually dwell. Redeemed, redeemed, Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; Redeemed, redeemed, His child, and forever, I am."*

May 20

The Lord is My Shepherd—Ps. 23:1

As we begin the study of this wonderful psalm, let's hear the Puritan prayer: "O ever watchful Shepherd, lead, guide, tend me this day; Without thy restraining rod I err and stray; Hedge up my path lest I wander into unwholesome pleasure, and drink its poisonous streams; Direct my feet that I be not entangled in Satan's secret snares, nor fall into his hidden traps. Defend me from assailing foes, from evil circumstances, from myself." (Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 117)

I think David is writing this psalm late in life, probably at the two-minute warning. In this psalm the sheep is doing the talking. To get an overview of the psalm, we could say the following: Because the Lord is my Shepherd there are three things that are true: (1) I do not want because He makes me lie down in green pastures, he gently leads me beside quiet (restful) waters, he (refreshes) restores my soul, and he regulates me in righteous tracks." (2) I do not fear because you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me, you [arrange] prepare a table before me, and you anointed the head of me. (3) I am content because my cup (is fullness) overflows, good fortune and grace shall pursue me, and I will dwell in the house of (Yahweh) the Lord."

As we meditate on this great psalm, let's begin our thoughts with Hebrews 13:20-21: "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (NASB).

Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want" (NIV).

Since "the Lord is my shepherd" that means that I am a sheep. There are two things about sheep that we need to know: (1) sheep are dumb and (2) sheep are dependent.

David does not say "The Lord was my shepherd" or "The Lord shall be my shepherd." But rather, "The Lord is my shepherd"—it is a present experience.

F. B. Meyer says: "There is nothing you really need for which you may not count on Him."

Bob Foster says: "THE LORD! Place any other name in this statement and it would never work."

The Lord is, He has been, He will be, but best of all He is right now. This very minute He is my shepherd, this hour, today.

Psalm 84:11: "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless" (NIV).

Psalm 34:9-10: "Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (NIV).

Philippians 4:19: "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (NIV).

1 Timothy 6:6-8: "But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content" (NASB).

Join me in singing a couple verses of "**Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us**": *"Saviour, like a shepherd lead us, Much we need Thy tender care; In Thy pleasant pastures feed us, For our use Thy folds prepare: Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Thou hast bought us, Thine we are; Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Thou hast bought us, Thine we are. We are Thine; Do thou befriend us, Be the Guardian of our way; Keep Thy flock, from sin defend us, Seek us when we go astray: Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Hear Thy children when they pray; Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Hear Thy children when they pray."*

May 21

He Makes Me Lie Down In Green Pastures—Ps. 23:2

The Lord is my Shepherd and because He is my Shepherd I do not want. The reason I do not want is (you will notice in the verb) “He makes” and “he leads.”

I do not want because “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” I do not want because “he [gently] leads me beside [restful] quiet waters.”

Let’s move in a little closer for a look at these two phrases in verse 2: (1) “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light” (NASB).

“Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord’s word, seated at His feet. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.’ But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one: for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her’” (Lk. 10:38-42).

Ron Mehl in his book *The Ten(der) Commandments* says: “He *makes* me lie down! If you don’t lie down and rest, if you don’t seek those quiet pastures and still waters with your Shepherd, it’s not beyond Him to make you. You say, ‘Well, I don’t believe God would do that.’ Then you don’t know God! You don’t understand His Father love! If you’re not going to slow down and rest, then look around at the circumstances of your life and find out why you’re in the condition you’re in. Maybe He loves you more than you think. (105-6)

I do not want because “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” But secondly, “he [gently] leads me by restful waters.” We focus on the word “makes” in the first phrase and now we focus on “leads” here in the second phrase.

John 10:27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (NASB). These “quiet waters” could be translated “waters of rest.” The Good Shepherd with tender care imparts sweet repose to His weary sheep.

Join me in singing that little chorus written by Orien Johnson, **“His Sheep Am I”**: *“In God’s green pastures feeding, by His cool waters lie, Soft in the evening walk my Lord and I. All the sheep of His pasture fare so wondrously fine. His sheep am I. Waters cool, pastures green, In the evening walk my Lord and I; Dark the night, rough the way, Step by step my Lord and I.”*

May 22

He Restores My Soul—Ps. 23:3

“He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Ps. 23:3 NIV).

“The Lord is my Shepherd” and because He is my Shepherd, “I do not want.” And the reason “I do not want” is four-fold. You will notice the verbs in verses 2 and 3: “he makes ... he leads ... he restores ... and he guides.”

“I do not want” because “he makes me lie down in green pastures” and secondly “he [gently] leads me by restful waters.” We looked at those in verse 2. Now we look at the next two in verse 3: (1) He refreshes my soul and (2) He regulates me in righteous tracks.

Psalm 23:3: “he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

“I do not want” because “he makes me lie down in green pastures” and “he [gently] leads me by restful waters.” We come now to number three: “he refreshes my soul.” The phrase that we will be considering in verse 3 is the first phrase in that verse: “he restores [refreshes] my soul.”

Summarizing the activity of the shepherd in these two verses, we have been considering the four verbs: “he makes ... he leads ... he restores my soul.”

Ezekiel 34:15-16 says: “... I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, ...” (NIV).

David had this very experience after having been confronted with his sin in 2 Samuel 12:13: “Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die’” (NIV).

Psalm 51:12: “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (NIV).

“I do not want” because “he makes me lie down in green pastures , he [gently] leads me beside restful waters, he [refreshes] restores my soul.” Finally, he regulates me in righteous tracks.” The fourth and final phrase occurs in the last phrase in verse 3: “He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

We have focused on the activity of the shepherd in supplying all of our needs by looking at those verbs: “he makes ... he leads ... he restores ... and he guides.” We can say that “he guides me” and the meaning of that, from God’s point of view, is control for a purpose. Divine guidance is essential.

Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (NIV).

He’ll let you have your own way but you will have to walk right by His open arms to do it.

Notice that verse 3 concludes with a reason. Why does he make me lie down in green pastures? Why does he lead me beside quiet waters? Why does he restore my soul? Why does he guide me in paths of righteousness? It's all "for his name's sake."

Leupold says: "He does all this because he has a reputation among His saints for faithful dealings with them, a reputation which must be cautiously upheld."

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **"He Leadeth Me"**: *"He leadeth me, O blessed thought! O words with heav'nly comfort fraught! Whate'er I do, where'er I be, Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me. And when my task on earth is done, When by Thy grace the vict'ry's won, E'en death's cold wave I will not flee, Since God through Jordan leadeth me. He leadeth me, He leadeth me! By His own hand He leadeth me! His faithful foll'wer I would be, For by His hand He leadeth me."*

May 23

I Will Fear No Evil—Ps. 23:4

Because the "Lord is my shepherd": (1) "I do not want" and now (2) I do not fear. There are four reasons that I do not fear: (1) "you are with me"; (2) "your rod and your staff, they comfort me"; (3) "You arrange a table before me"; and (4) "You anointed the head of me."

Verse 4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (NIV).

David now comes to grips with the inevitable at this point in dealing with the subject of death. He has probably had to think a great deal about this in the last number of days since leaving Jerusalem behind in the hands of his son Absalom.

He knows full well that if Absalom or any of his forces find him he will be the target of their wrath. In other words, he is the primary target of this military operation.

Philippians 1:20-23: "according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better" (NASB).

2 Corinthians 5:8-9: "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him" (NASB).

Proverbs 4:18: "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (NASB).

What's being said here is that there's more to life than a ride in a Hearse.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (NIV). 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love" (NASB).

Zig Ziglar says: "FEAR is nothing more than False Evidence Appearing Real."

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (NIV).

Now we have a statement of the reason why there is no fear of evil. There are actually four reasons for no fear of evil in these next phrases that occur here in verse 4 and verse 5. "I do not fear": (1) "for you are with me."

Exodus 33:14: "The Lord replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest'" (NIV).

Deuteronomy 31:8: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (NIV).

Phillips says: "He is no longer talking *about* the Shepherd. He is talking *to* the Shepherd: ..."

"I do not fear" because: (1) "for you are with me" and (2) "your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (NIV).

J. Vernon McGee says: "A rod was for defense, and a staff was for direction. F. B. Meyer says: "[The] Club to defend; crook to chasten and guide."

Let's meditate for just a moment on the words of this Puritan Prayer: "May I speak each word as if my last word, and walk each step as my final one. If my life should end today, let this be my best day." (Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 119)

Join me in singing several verses of that great old hymn **"Amazing Grace"**: *"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed! Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace*

will lead me home. When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we first begun."

May 24

I'm Drinking From My Saucer—Ps. 23:5

Verse 5: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows" (NIV).

"I do not fear" because: (1) "you are with me"; (2) "your rod and your staff, they comfort me"; and now (3) "You arrange a table before me."

This is the third of four reasons why the psalmist could say "I do not fear." "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."

David is in the wilderness near Mahanaim and many of his friends have come and brought supplies and food-stuffs to take care of David during this time of banishment from his kingdom.

Psalm 31:19: "How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you" (NIV).

Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (NIV).

Wiersbe says: "At the end of the dark valley, He has a special blessing for you: you drink of the refreshing water of life, and you receive the Spirit's anointing. The Shepherd is there to care for every hurt and heal every bruise."

"I do not fear" because: (1) "you are with me"; (2) "your rod and your staff, they comfort me"; (3) "You arrange a table before me"; and now (4) "You anoint the head of me."

Once again we can focus on the two verbs: (1) you prepare a table and (2) you anoint my head. He also gets his kingdom back. Not only the table prepared for dining, but the well-accepted guest is anointed with oil before the dinner begins.

We come now in our study of Psalm 23 to our final division: I am content. There are three reasons for this contentment. The first is seen here in verse 5: "my cup overflows" or my cup is fullness."

Ephesians 3:20: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (NASB).

1 Peter 2:25: "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (NASB).

Join me in singing along with Jimmy Dean in his famous song **"I'm Drinking From My Saucer 'Cause My Cup Is Overflowed"**: *"I've never made a fortune, And it's probably too late now, But I don't worry about that much—I'm happy anyhow. As I go along life's journey I'm reaping better than I sowed, And I'm drinkin' from my saucer, 'Cause my cup is overflowed. Don't have a lot of riches, And sometimes the going's tough. But I've got some kids who love me, And that makes me rich enough. Aw, I remember times when things went wrong, And my faith got a little bit thin, But then all at once the dark clouds broke, And that old sun peeked through again. So, Lord, help me not to gripe About the tough rows that I've hoed—I'm drinkin' from my saucer, 'Cause my cup is overflowed. And if God gives me strength and courage When the way seems steep and rough, I'll not ask for other blessings—I'm already blessed enough. And may I never be too busy To help another bear his load. Then I'll keep drinkin' from my saucer, 'Cause my cup is overflowed."*

May 25

Surely Goodness and Love Will Follow Me—Ps. 23:6

Verse 6: "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (NIV).

I am content because my cup is fullness. I am content because good fortune and grace shall pursue me. I am content because I will dwell in the house of Yahweh [the Lord]. "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." This is God's secret service making provision, protecting along life's pathway.

Scroggie says: "My Host calls two of His alert servants and bids them continually wait upon me. Their names are Goodness and Kindness, and they follow me ..."

I am content because my cup is fullness. I am content because good fortune and grace shall pursue me. I am content, I shall dwell in the house of Yahweh.

We come to the end of our journey through Psalm 23. What a blessing. Because "the Lord is my shepherd" there are three things that are true: (1) "I do not want" because "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores [refreshes] my soul and he regulates me in righteous paths. (2) "I do not fear" because "you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare [arrange] a table before me" and "You anoint

my head with oil.” (3) I am content because “my cup overflows.” Good fortune and grace will pursue me and “I will dwell in the house of the Lord [Yahweh] forever.”

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“God Will Take Care of You”**: *“Be not dismayed whate’er betide, God will take care of you; Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you. Through days of toil when heart doth fail, God will take care of you; When dangers fierce your path assail, God will take care of you. God will take care of you, Through ev’ry day, o’er all the way; He will take care of you, God will take care of you.”*

May 26

The Lord is My Light and My Salvation—Ps. 27:1

We will begin this morning a meditation and study of Psalm 27. This psalm divides itself into two contrasting parts: (1) praise in the time of blessing—verses 1-6 and (2) prayer in the time of testing—verses 7-14.

It is believed by many that this psalm was written during the time that David fled from Absalom, being banished and exiled from his kingdom. He has crossed the Jordan River and fled north to Mahanaim. It is probably during this time that he wrote this psalm.

H. Beecher Hicks said: “How did I get to where I am which is so far from where I am supposed to be?”

Verse 1: “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (NIV).

This psalm begins in a similar fashion to Psalm 23. Psalm 23 is “The Lord is my shepherd.” Here it is “The Lord is my light.” David could truly sing “You light up my life.”

David, in this first verse, says: “The Lord is” three things to him: (1) “my light”; (2) “my salvation”; and (3) “The ... stronghold of my life.” Can you believe that a king in exile would write words like this?

J. Vernon McGee says: “‘He is my light.’ He is a holy God. He is the one who directs and guides me by the light of His Word. Later the psalmist will say, ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path’” (Ps. 119:105).

I am reminded of John 13:30: “As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out and it was night.” Outer darkness never see the light of day.

He’s my light for the dark days. He’s my light in the valley of the shadow of death. He is my light when I pass through that dark valley. But guess what? Revelation 22:5: “And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever” (NASB).

Spurgeon says: “he is light within, light around, light reflected from us, and light to be revealed to us.”

David begins the verse by saying: “The Lord is my light.” He lights up my dark night. He then moves on to say: “The Lord is ... my salvation.” He is the one who brings victory. He then raises the question: “whom shall I fear?”

Romans 8:31: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?” (NASB).

The Lord is alive and the Lord is my light and my salvation. That’s my offensive weapon. Martin Luther said: “One with God is a majority.”

Question #1: “whom shall I fear?” Not Absalom. Not the armies. The reason being, the Lord is not only alive, He’s adequate. “The Lord is the stronghold of my life.” A place to go in the time of peril.

Question #2: “of whom shall I be afraid?” Not Absalom. Not the armies. I am reminded of Paul’s words to the Philippians “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13 NASB). F. B. Meyer says: “Whatever our difficulties, whatever our weakness and infirmity, we shall be kept steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Gaining by our losses, succeeding by our failures, triumphing in our defeats, and evermore than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

John Stott says: “The Lord is my light, to guide me; my salvation, to deliver me; and the stronghold of my life, in whom I take refuge.”

What a testimony David gives at this critical point in his life. He is so positive and confident when, by human nature, he could be saying the words of Elijah as he was fleeing from Jezebel in the wilderness: “Take my life, my work is done. I am finished.” Instead he looks afresh at the Lord and His adequacy and here calls Him, “his light,” “salvation,” and his “stronghold” in the midst of these very difficult circumstances. What freedom! So he can truthfully say, “whom shall I fear ... or whom shall I be afraid?”

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus”**: *“I would love to tell you what I think of Jesus Since I found in Him a friend so strong and true; I would tell you how He changed my life completely, He did something that no other friend could do. Ev’ry day He comes to me with new assurance, More and more I understand His words of love; But I’ll never know just why He came to save me, Till some day I see His blessed face above. No one ever cared for me like Jesus, There’s no other friend so kind as He; No one else could take the sin and darkness from me, O how much He cared for me.”*

May 27

Sound the Battle Cry—Ps. 27:2-3

Verse 2: “When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall” (NIV).

David finds himself in very precarious circumstances with Absalom. Absalom is organizing this group of men to come up against David and his forces in conflict to usurp the kingship. And yet, David can say: (1) “when evil men advance against me to devour my flesh” and (2) “when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.”

He is making reference to a three-fold opposition: (1) “evil men”; (2) “enemies”; and (3) “foes.” It is inevitable. The conflict is coming.

Isaiah 54:17: “no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me,” declares the Lord” (NIV).

Ephesians 6:12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (NASB).

1 Corinthians 16:13: “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (NASB).

1 Corinthians 15:57: “but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (NASB).

Plumer says: “An assault on a God-protected man is fatal to the assailant.”

Ephesians 6:16: “in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one” (NASB).

I think it would be good for us to remind ourselves of the words of Hezekiah who in very difficult circumstances said to the people in 2 Chronicles 32:7-8: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles” (NIV).

Verse 3: “Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident” (NIV).

The two phrases in verse 2 began with “When” and now David does not know how difficult these future circumstances are going to be. So as he continues to praise the Lord in confidence, he uses two phrases that begin with “though”: (1) “Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear” and (2) “though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.”

In the midst of this conflict, however, he makes two great statements. One of which he had already made back in verse 1: (1) “[I] will not fear” and (2) “[I will] be confident.”

How is it that David can be so confident in these difficult circumstances? Remember Elisha’s servant is so concerned about the king of Aram and that they had surrounded them in the night with their forces. 2 Kings 6:17: “And Elisha prayed: ‘O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (NIV).

The Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when they came to arrest Him told the disciples that there were 72,000 angels on alert status just waiting for Him to say “Sic ‘em!”

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“Sound the Battle Cry”**: *“Sound the battle cry! See, the foe is nigh; Raise the standard high For the Lord; Gird your armor on, Stand firm, ev’ry one; Rest your cause upon His holy word. O! Thou God of all, Hear us when we call, Help us one and all By Thy grace; When the battle’s done, And the vict’ry’s won, May we wear the crown Before Thy face. Rouse, then, soldiers, rally round the banner, Ready, steady, pass the word along; Onward, forward, shout aloud Hosanna! Christ is Captain of the mighty throng.”*

May 28

Focused on the One Thing—Ps. 27:4

Philippians 3:13: “No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead” (NLT).

Verse 4: “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (NIV).

David says: “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek.” “One thing I ask.” “One thing ... I seek.” Looking at the three verbs helps us to understand this request: (1) “[to] dwell”; (2) “to gaze”; and (3) “to seek.”

David, like Paul, is focused on “one thing.” I really believe that the older we get the more focused we should become on the one thing that the Lord wants us to do so that we might ensure maximum fruitfulness.

Luke 10:41-42: “But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one: for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her’” (NIV).

What is this “one thing” that David is asking and seeking of the Lord? Really it is summarized in the three words “dwell,” “gaze,” and “seek.” First of all, “that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” The

longing of David's heart is to have access into the house of the Lord—the place of fellowship and communion. It's the cry of Enoch in his desire to walk with the Lord.

The second phrase is “to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.”

2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (NASB).

Lord, You are beautiful. You are the fairest of 10,000. You're the Lily of the Valley. You're the Rose of Sharon. You're the Bright and Morning Star.

The third and final phrase is “to seek him in his temple.”

Andrew Murray says: “Gaze on the vision until your heart says: ‘It must be true. It is true. There is a life promised I have never yet known.’”

Jerry Bridges says: “I've also learned that progress in personal holiness must be built upon an ever-deepening awareness of God's holiness.”

Fenelon says: “We think there are a thousand things we should be concerned with, but there is actually only one.”

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“In Times Like These”**: *“In times like these you need a Savior, In times like these you need an anchor; Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock! In times like these you need the Bible, In times like these O be not idle; Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock! This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One; This Rock is Jesus, The only One! Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!”*

May 29

The Day of Trouble—Ps. 27:5-6

Verse 5: “For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock” (NIV).

The reason for the one thing that he is asking the Lord is now given here in verse 5. The reason for that request, as you will notice, is not a question “IF” there is going to be a “day of trouble” but it is a given that he is going to have “the day of trouble.”

Each of us must expect the fact that there are going to be times of trouble in our lives no matter what. This trouble comes, first of all, through trials. Secondly this trouble can also come in time of testing. Thirdly, it can come in time of temptations.

Job 5:7: “Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” (NIV).

What is he going to do for me “in the day of trouble”? There are three things stated here in verse 5: (1) “he will keep me safe”; (2) “he will hide me”; and (3) “[he will] set me high upon a rock.”

David is probably singing that old spiritual: *“Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.”* Or perhaps you can hear him saying “There's trouble in River City!”

Because the Lord is involved in this situation with David, He is going to do these three things: (1) “he will keep me safe”; (2) “he will hide me”; and (3) “[he will] set me high upon a rock” where no one can reach me.

I find myself singing *“Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.”*

Verse 6: “Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord” (NIV).

David is convinced that the Lord is going to give victory. “Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me.” When all of this happens, I'm going to do two things “at his tabernacle”: (1) “I [will] sacrifice with shouts of joy” and (2) “I will sing and make music to the Lord.”

David is still reflecting that same confidence in the Lord that he had as a young man ready to go and face Goliath on the field of battle. 1 Samuel 17:37: “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (NIV).

He told Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:47: “All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands” (NIV).

Join me in singing a couple of verses **“No One Understands Like Jesus”**: *“No one understands like Jesus, He's a friend beyond compare; Meet Him at the throne of mercy, He is waiting for you there. No one understands like Jesus, When the foes of life assail; You should never be discouraged, Jesus cares and will not fail. No one understands like Jesus. When the days are dark and grim; No one is so near, so dear as Jesus Cast your ev'ry care on Him.”*

May 30

If My People Who Are Called By My Name Will Humble Themselves and Pray—Ps. 27:7-9

Verse 7: “Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me” (NIV).

It's at this point that things change so dramatically in our psalm. Perhaps he has heard some fresh reports from developments in Jerusalem under Absalom's administration and the impending conflict that is coming. We really do not know but David has three concise requests at this point as he turns to pray: (1) "Hear my voice when I call"; (2) "be merciful to me"; and (3) "answer me."

Isaiah 65:24: "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (NIV).

Verse 8: "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek" (NIV).

David is listening to his heart. His heart is saying "Seek his face!" David has learned to listen and respond for he says: "Your face, Lord, I will seek."

Verse 9: "Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior" (NIV).

There are three negative requests here in verse 9: (1) "Do not hide your face from me." David knew this by personal experience as a result of his sin with Bathsheba. Not only "Do not hide your face from me" but (2) "do not turn your servant away in anger"; and (3) "Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior."

Andrew Murray says: "As I pray, let me be willing to accept my place with Him, crucified to the world, to sin, and to self." He also says: "God asks that I carefully stay in close fellowship with Him every day I order that my prayers may be answered."

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**I Need Thee Every Hour**": "*I need Thee ev'ry hour, Stay Thou near by; Temptations lose their pow'r When Thou art nigh. I need Thee ev'ry hour, In joy or pain; Come quickly and abide, Or life is vain. I need Thee, O, I need Thee; Ev'ry hour I need Thee! O bless me now, my Saviour, I come to Thee.*"

May 31

No Matter What You'll Still Be There—Ps. 27:10-12

Verse 10: "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me" (NIV).

Leupold, in interpreting and paraphrasing the verse, says: "When all earthly props give way, the Lord can still be depended upon, and on Him I rest."

Verse 11: "Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors" (NIV).

Lord, I don't want to make another mistake. I've made enough already. The request is two-fold here in verse 11: (1) "Teach me" and (2) "lead me."

J. Vernon McGee says: "Lord, ... help me not to embarrass You by what I do."

Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (NIV).

Verse 12: "Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence" (NIV).

There are four negative requests in these verses in Psalm 27, as far as his prayers are concerned. Back in verse 9 we had three of them: (1) "Do not hide your face from me"; (2) "do not turn your servant away in anger"; and (3) "Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior."

Now we have: "Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes." The reason for this is "for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence." The Father certainly chose to do this very thing for His own Son because he allowed the Savior to be turned over to His foes, to the false witnesses who were "breathing out violence" by saying "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Ahithophel, one of David's counselors, forsook David and endeavored to give advice to Absalom.

A fitting benediction to this prayer of David would be Numbers 6:24-26: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (NIV).

Andrew Murray says: "In the quietness of prayer, let me believe that a simple and determined surrender of my will to Him will bring the heart cleansing I need."

1 John 5:14-15: "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (NASB).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Close to Thee**": "*Thou, my everlasting portion, More than friend or life to me; All along my pilgrim journey, Saviour, let me walk with Thee. Lead me through the vale of shadows, Bear me o'er life's fitful sea; Then the gate of life eternal May I enter, Lord, with Thee. Close to Thee, close to Thee, Close to Thee, close to Thee.*"

June 1

The Goodness of the Lord—Ps. 27:13-14

Verse 13: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (NIV).

What a statement! Here is David forsaken, his enemies are attacking him, his circumstances are unbearable, and yet once again David has been strengthened in the Lord to express confidence and a positive attitude about “the goodness of the Lord” that he is expectantly going to see in the days that are before him.

It reminds me of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. In the midst of all the persecution and holocaust of a sinful nation, Jeremiah would write, “Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.”

Philippians 1:6: “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (NASB).

“I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” David could have added: “I know I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the dead.”

Phillips says: “How good is the God we adore, Our faithful, unchangeable Friend; Whose love is as great as His power And knows neither measure nor end.”

Fenelon says: “The most perfect preparation for this future, whatever it is, is to die to all will of our own, in order to yield ourselves wholly to that of God.”

Verse 14: “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord” (NIV).

David is talking to himself here and he is basically saying: “You’re going to see the goodness of the Lord, but you’re going to need to wait.” “Wait for the Lord” and while you’re doing it “be strong and take heart” in your waiting.

Joshua 1:6: “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (NIV).

He repeats basically the same thing in Joshua 1:7, 9 and 18.

Divine guidance always involves the obedience of waiting.

Saul lost his kingdom because he forced himself to offer a sacrifice that Samuel was coming to make for the army before they went into battle. David, throughout his life and experience, did seek the Lord in many circumstances and was sensitive to the Lord’s leading. In his victories over the Philistines, in his confrontation with Nabal, in his victory in delivering the city of Keilah.

The sad consequences of not consulting the Lord is seen in Joshua’s military campaigns as he fails to seek the Lord’s mind with regard to the Gibeonites and enters into a covenant with them without seeking the Lord.

Isaiah 30:21: “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (NIV).

Yes, David you are going to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. But you know as do all your children know, that there is a time of waiting for that to come.

Hosea 10:12: “Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you” (NIV).

Isaiah 40:31: “but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (NIV).

What should we be doing in the process? Four things: waiting, warring, walking, and working.

“In prayer we begin to realize God’s thoughts and will. Whenever I come in prayer, the Lord instructs me to pause long enough to remember who He is.” (Andrew Murray)

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”**: *“‘Great is Thy faithfulness,’ O God my Father, There is no shadow of turning with Thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not; As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide; Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! ‘Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!’ Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed Thy hand hath provided, ‘Great is Thy faithfulness,’ Lord, unto me!”*

June 2

Forgiven—Ps. 32:1-2

Isaiah 43:25: “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (NIV).

I believe at the bottom of many of the church interpersonal problems is guilt. Because of guilt you have: hypocrisy, the critical spirit, bitterness, and people who are never willing to get close and be open and transparent. The guilty person dreads to let others find out about his sin. He protects his ego in the process. A failure to admit one’s weaknesses and to accept one’s feelings of guilt will ultimately lead to neurosis. There is a secret in his breast that will not let him rest.

The guilty person goes through life trying to prove he is all right when he knows he isn’t.

Isaiah 57:20-21: "But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked'" (NIV).

Guilt is a feeling of dread for past actions. It is a conviction that a wrong action has been committed in the past and that there is no undoing of that deed.

It is going to be our joy on this occasion to spend some quality time in Psalm 32. David was unwilling to confess his sin with Bathsheba so he carried the guilt of the sin for nearly a year. The child had been born and David is supposing falsely that he has gotten away with these terrible acts. It is at this time that God uses Nathan the prophet to reveal to him that his sin is known.

David's guilt is painful because he's used his position, his power, and his privilege to attain sinful desires that have not been pleasing to God.

Proverbs 28:13: "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (NIV).

Psalm 32 is a song of joy. It starts with "Blessed is he" and finishes with "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad."

In the psalm we have the joy of restoration. "Kill the fatted calf. This my son was dead and is alive again!" In John 8, the woman caught in the act of adultery hears from the lips of the Lord those words of forgiveness: "Neither do I condemn you." Those words of freedom: "Go." John 8:32: "and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (NASB). And you've got a future: "No longer be sinning."

Verse 1: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (NIV).

We go back to Psalm 1 to find the word "Blessed." "O the inward happiness. O the blessednesses." This is also the word that the Lord Jesus used when He opened His public ministry. Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (NASB).

There is a four-fold blessing that is spelled out in these first two verses by the psalmist.

Blessing #1: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven." The word "transgressions" has the idea of breaking a covenant or to fall away or to tear away. It also has the idea of rebellion in it. It is a deliberate turning away from God. It is seeing the "No Trespassing" sign and disregarding it. It is open defiance.

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered."

The first blessing is "he whose transgressions are forgiven." The word "forgiven" means to be lifted up, a heavy weight taken away, let the pot drop, hit the delete button and run the shredder.

When we're walking around in guilt we are putting limitations on the adequacy of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Blessing #2: "whose sins are covered." It was the blood of the sacrificial lamb in the Old Testament that merely covered the blood. It is the precious blood of our Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, that our sins are washed away. Would you be free from your burden of sin, there's power in the blood.

Verse 2: "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."

The third part of this four part blessing is seen here in verse 2.

Blessing #3: "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him." There is nothing on the ledger. All the past entries have been shredded when You went to the Cross.

On the negative side, he "does not count [them] against him." On the positive side, He inputs the righteousness of Jesus Christ which qualifies us for eternal residence with Him. Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before His throne.

Blessing #4: "in whose spirit is no deceit." Guilt and hypocrisy go together. In order for the guilty person to cover his sin, he must use deception.

Take with you the four-fold blessing of these first two verses: (1) "[his] transgressions are forgiven"; (2) "[his] sins are covered"; (3) "[his] sin the Lord does not count against him"; and (4) "in whose spirit [there] is no deceit [or deception]."

Isaiah 41:16: "... And the joy of the LORD will fill you to overflowing. You will glory in the Holy One of Israel."

Join me in singing a few verses of that great old hymn "**At Calvary**": "*Years I spent in vanity and pride, Caring not my Lord was crucified, Knowing not it was for me He died On Calvary. By God's Word at last my sin I learned, Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned, Till my guilty soul imploring turned To Calvary. O, the love that drew salvation's plan! O, the grace that brought it down to man! O, the mighty gulf that God did span At Calvary! Mercy there was great, and grace was free; Pardon there was multiplied to me; There my burdened soul found liberty, At Calvary.*"

June 3

Silence—Ps. 32:3-4

"God is always waiting to hear my voice." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 3: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" (NIV).

We know at the time of Nathan's confrontation with David, the child had already been born. So the period of time for being silent about these matters must have been at least a year.

Psalm 38:3-4: "Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear" (NIV).

Psalm 6:2-3: "Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?" (NIV).

Psalm 102:3: "For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers" (NIV).

There are three things that David shares from his experience as a result of trying to hide his sin that are recorded in verses 3 and 4.

Because of his unwillingness to confess his sin, here are the three things that are taking place: (1) "my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." David was being affected physically by the burden of his guilt. The statute of limitation never runs out with God. The issues will be addressed. Your appearance is already scheduled and your case will be heard.

David Roper says: "We are thrown into this world like a baseball with a spin on it; in time we break and the curve is always down and away."

I love the prayer of Howard Hendricks: "*From the cowardice that dares not face new truth, from the laziness that is contented with half-truth, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, Good Lord, deliver me. Amen.*"

The key to it all is: settle all the claims against you ahead of time.

Verse 4: "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah" (NIV).

Verse 4 now tells us the reason why his "bones wasted away through [his] groaning all day long."

We are pursuing together the three things that result from David's unwillingness to confess his sin. In verse 3: (1) "my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." And now here in verse 4 we consider: (2) "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me."

David is feeling God's displeasure over his sin. He feels cut off from God because of his sinfulness. He is feeling the chastening hand of God.

Psalm 38:2: "For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me" (NIV).

Why ruin another day? Why prolong the agony? Settle the issue.

When David kept silent: (3) "my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." He is literally smoking in his tennis shoes. He is spending all of his emotional energy acting.

Let's join David in praying Psalm 139:23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (NIV).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Nothing But the Blood**": "*What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus; What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus; For my pardon this I see, Nothing but the blood of Jesus; For my cleansing this my plea, Nothing but the blood of Jesus; Oh! precious is the flow That makes me white as snow; No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*"

June 4

Tonight I Climbed the Wall—Ps. 32:5

"Prayer opens the way for God to do His work in and through me." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 5: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah" (NIV).

With the word "Then" we have the turn around. Here's the key that unlocks the door to the blessings we have been studying up in verses 1 and 2 and also the blessings that will follow in the remaining verses of our psalm.

There are four things that we want to notice in verse 5. David says: (1) "I acknowledged my sin to you"; (2) "[I] did not [hide] cover up my iniquity"; (3) "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'"; and the result (4) "you forgave the guilt of my sin."

First, he acknowledged his sin, he accepts reality, he comes clean, he addresses the issues. Secondly, "[I] did not cover up my iniquity." I did away with my excuses and my defense.

(1) "I acknowledged my sin to you"; (2) "[I] did not cover up my iniquity"; (3) "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; and (4) "you forgave the guilt of my sin."

Join me in singing a couple of verses of that marvelous hymn "**Grace Greater Than Our Sin**": "*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt, Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured, There where the blood of the Lamb was split. Dark is the stain that we cannot hide, What can avail to wash it away? Look, there is flowing a crimson tide; Whiter than snow you may be today. Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within; Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin.*"

June 5

A Call to Prayer—Ps. 32:6-7

“Though everything may appear cold, dark, and strained—may I be faithful in talking with my heavenly Father.” (Andrew Murray)

“To reach the place where the Word and prayer each have its undivided right over me, I must be wholly transformed.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 6: “Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him” (NIV).

David thus far in the psalm has given us: the blessing of forgiveness, the picture of silence in his guilt, and then the key that unlocked the door was in verse 5: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you.”

Now in verse 6 we have the word “Therefore.” David recognizes that the door of grace and mercy will not always be open and so there is an urgency here to be praying and seeking Him while He may be found.

2 Corinthians 6:2: “for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, And on the day of salvation I helped you;’ behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’” (NASB).

Jeremiah 29:13: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (NIV).

Isaiah 55:6: “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near” (NIV).

The certainty of God’s judgment is overshadowed in the next statement in verse 6: “surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.”

I think the psalmist has the thoughts of the flood in mind at this point. Psalm 42:7: “Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me” (NIV).

The word is not falling apart, it’s all falling into place.

Psalm 18:16: “He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters” (NIV).

Isaiah 43:2: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (NIV).

Verse 7: “You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah” (NIV).

When these mighty waters of judgment rise, they will not reach him. The reason is three-fold. Because: (1) “You [Lord] are my hiding place”; (2) “you [Lord] will protect me from trouble”; and (3) “[You Lord will] surround me with songs of deliverance.” What a beautiful verse!

F. B. Meyer says: “So the Lord Jesus will take the broken pieces of any life that will come to Him. And with His skillful and tender touch, will make it into useful and beautiful in His service.”

Please join me in singing that little song that asks the question **“Do You Know?”**: *“Do you know that you’ve been born again? Do you know that you’ve been born again? Does the Spirit dwell within, Bearing witness that you’ve been Cleansed from ev’ry sin and stain? Are you ready if the Lord should come, Or today your soul should claim? Can you face eternal years Free from doubt and dread and fears? Do you know, know, know that you’ve been born again?”*

June 6

We Interrupt This Broadcast—Ps. 32:8-9

“Prayer time can become for me a wonder of God’s goodness and a fountain of great joy.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 8: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you” (NIV).

The Lord breaks in here and gives some definite statements that will protect the psalmist from getting into the same mess that he had just gotten out of.

It’s kind of like we hear sometimes important bulletins: “We interrupt this broadcast for some very important information.”

The four verbs really describe the Lord’s action toward the psalmist: (1) “instruct”; (2) “teach”; (3) “counsel”; and (4) “watch over.”

Psalm 143:10: “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground” (NIV).

Ron Mehl confesses: “The greatest challenge I face every day of my life is probably the very one that you face every day ... maintaining a close, personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ. It is keeping Him first.” (*The Ten[der] Commandments*, 41)

In maintaining the relationship with the Lord, what a tremendous statement he gives: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.”

Tony Evans says: "There's a great truth here I want you to see. God's guidance is such that if you follow what you do know, He will show you what you don't know until you get where you are supposed to go." (*Time to Get Serious*, 336)

Verse 9: "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you."

It is much better to live in verse 8 than it is to live in verse 9. "Do not be like the horse or the mule" which have to be managed by force and the severity of discipline.

We are naturally born wild and needing to be broken and to be trained. I am reminded of Paul's words to Agrippa in Acts 24:16: "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads'" (NASB).

The secret in verse 9 to staying on track is to be governed by God. I learned several years ago, working with horses, that they have what they call the round pen. The cowboy with his bridle and his bucket of oats lets the horse run 'round and 'round until finally he gets the message and accepts the oats and ultimately the bridle.

For many of us, we run a long time in circles before we learn to be broken and to trust the Lord to fully accomplish His purpose in our lives.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Trusting Jesus**": *"Simply trusting ev'ry day, Trusting thru a stormy way; Even when my faith is small, Trusting Jesus, that is all. Brightly doth His Spirit shine Into this poor heart of mine; While He leads I cannot fall; Trusting Jesus, that is all. Trusting as the moments fly, Trusting as the days go by; Trusting Him whate'er be fall, Trusting Jesus, that is all."*

June 7

The Lord's Unfailing Love—Ps. 32:10-11

"There can be no communion with a Holy God, no fellowship between heaven and earth, unless I set apart time for it." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 10: "Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him" (NIV).

The word "Many" gets our attention immediately. "Many are the woes of the wicked."

There will be no end of disrespect and discord in this crowd. They live like a hive of wasps, constantly harassing and attacking them.

I will never forget lifting a railroad tie in our backyard and finding myself dive-bombed all the way to safety, practically running through the closed back door to our house.

What a contrast to the "Lord's unfailing love [Who] surrounds the man who trusts in him."

The contrast is that the bees are surrounding them and making honey for the man of God.

Whereas the key in verse 9 is to be governed, the key in verse 10 is to be guarded by the Lord.

Fenelon says: "All I ask is that you rest in faith with a teachable spirit. Do not listen to yourself. Give in to the will of God with a humble heart. God will work everything out for you. The things that look the largest and most impossible will be accomplished without your even knowing how."

Verse 11: "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"

The key in verse 9 was governed. The key in verse 10 was guarded. Now the key in verse 11 is gladdened. There are three commands here: (1) "Rejoice in the Lord"; (2) "be glad, you righteous"; and (3) "sing, all you who are upright in heart!" The "Lords unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him." Here all these blessings are for the one who is "upright in heart." God has all the bases covered. He's got every situation taken care of.

The pardoned should be noted by their praise.

Zephaniah 3:17: "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing" (NIV).

It was Dag Hammarskjöld who said: "For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes."

Join me please in singing a couple of verses of that great hymn "**He Keeps Me Singing**": *"All my life was wrecked by sin and strife, Discord filled my heart with pain, Jesus swept across the broken strings, Stirred the slumbering cords again. Though sometimes He leads through waters deep, Trials fall across the way, Though sometimes the path seems rough and steep, See His footprints all the way: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Sweetest name I know, Fills my ev'ry longing, Keeps me singing as I go."*

June 8

My Testimony—Ps. 34:1-3

"I want my spirit to be a listening spirit waiting to hear what God says." (Andrew Murray)

Just preceding the writing of this psalm, we find David is so fearful that Saul would kill him that he fled to Gath and sought the protection of the enemy.

You are never safe out of the will of God and David had to lie to escape. This psalm is David's personal testimony of what God did for him.

One of the big lessons we can learn from this is "Don't make major decisions when you're tired or sick."

Many believe that David wrote this psalm after he successfully fled from Gath to the cave of Adullam. The first ten verses of the psalm is a hymn of praise and worship. Verses 11-22 is the sermon or the message.

You could say, verses 1-10: "Let me tell you what God has done." And verses 11-22: "Let me tell you what I have learned."

We are going to consider in these first three verses of this meditation: Praise of Jehovah—verses 1-3.

Verse 1: "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips" (NIV).

We open the psalm with the priority of praise. In these first three verses we have five words that describe what David is doing here: (1) verse 1—"extol"; (2) verse 1—"praise"; (3) verse 2—"boast"; (4) verse 3—"Glorify"; and (5) verse 3—"exalt."

Psalm 5:11-12: "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield" (NIV).

In verse 1 I think it would be good for us to focus for just a moment on the words "all times" and "always."

"I will extol the Lord at **all times**; his praise will **always** be on my lips."

Nothing could happen in David's life that would stop him from continually praising the Lord. Boy that's a challenge! I blow hot and cold and I really want to be consistent in this regard.

This is the reason the apostle Paul, when he writes the Philippian epistle from prison, can say: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4 NASB).

This is also the reason you can find them singing at midnight in the Philippian jail in Acts 16.

Just hours before the Savior would be hanging upon the cross, we read in Mark 14:26: "And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (NASB).

John 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (NASB).

Here is David still praising the Lord, running for His life, hiding in the cave of Adullam. No matter what, my mind and mouth are filled with His praises.

Verse 2: "My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice" (NIV).

"My soul will boast in the Lord." Look what the Lord has done for me!

"Let the afflicted hear and rejoice." Offer words of encouragement and comfort to others. We so oftentimes say "I'm tired." And we get the response "I'm tired too." We have a pity party, raining on everybody else's parade. God teach us how to trust You, fully and completely, and to realize that even in the midst of the storm, You are there, ready to work on those circumstances for Your glory and honor.

Verse 3: "Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together" (NIV).

We've seen the words "extol," "praise," and "boast." Now there are two more words of worship and praise: "Glorify" and "exalt."

The Lord is going to be mentioned 32 times in these verses. The psalmist is mentioned 16 times. Psalm 69:30: "I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving" (NIV). Psalm 13:5-6: "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me" (NIV).

It is also hard to feel alone in an atmosphere of praise.

J. Vernon McGee says: "The first three verses are sheer praise to God; they are the Hallelujah Chorus."

Please join me in singing the "**Doxology**": "*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host; Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.*"

June 9

I Prayed and the Lord Answered—Ps. 34:4-5

"Only prayer gives my work its worth and success." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 4: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."

We now have the reasons why he and others should praise. Our three key words in verse 4 are: (1) "sought"; (2) "answered"; and (3) "delivered."

You can summarize it by saying: "He praised and God worked."

"At a critical time of his life, D. L. Moody made his confession concerning the proposition of fear. He stated that he had learned to take his stand upon the Rock, and rejoiced in the fact that in spite of storm, temptation or darkness, he was still standing firm. He quoted the remark of an Irishman who said: 'I tremble sometimes, but the Rock never does.'" (Quoted by Robert Foster in *A Challenge to Men from Psalms*, 7)

Psalm 56:3-4: "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (NIV).

Phillips Brooks said: "Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but taking hold of God's willingness."

Fenelon said: "Prayer is so necessary and the source of so many blessings, that they who have discovered the treasure cannot be prevented from having recourse to it whenever they have an opportunity."

Verse 5: "Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame" (NIV).

There are two key words here in verse 5: "look" and "radiant."

Delitzsch says: "It never comes to pass that their countenances must be covered with shame on account of disappointed hope: this shall not and cannot be, ..."

Spurgeon says: "He who trusts in God has no need to be ashamed of his confidence, time and eternity will both justify his reliance."

Perowne says about the word "radiant": "[they] ... were bright with gladness because He heard them, reflecting as it were the Light of His countenance."

Knight says: "The joy of faith and awareness of God's presence will make *your faces radiant*."

Job 29:24: "When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it; the light of my face was precious to them" (NIV).

Exodus 34:29: "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord" (NIV).

Psalm 19:8: "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes" (NIV).

Isaiah 60:5: "Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy ..." (NIV).

2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (NASB).

Please join me in singing a couple of verses of **"Praise Him! Praise Him!"**: *"Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer! Sing, O Earth, His wonderful love proclaim! Hail Him! Hail Him! Highest archangels in glory; Strength and honor give to His holy name! Like a shepherd Jesus will guard His children, In His arms He carries them all day long: Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer! For our sins He suffered, and bled and died; He our Rock, our hope of eternal salvation, Hail Him! Hail Him! Jesus the crucified. Sound His praises! Jesus who bore our sorrows; Love unbounded, wonderful, deep and strong: Praise Him! Praise Him! tell of His excellent greatness; Praise Him! Praise Him! ever in joyful song!"*

June 10

Love Lifted Me—Ps. 34:6-8

"God waits for me to ask for His grace and power." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 6: "This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles" (NIV).

Our three key words in verse 6: (1) "called"; (2) "heard"; and (3) "saved."

Back in verse 4 we read: "he delivered me from all my fears." Now here in verse 6 we read: "he saved him out of all his troubles."

David refers to himself as a "poor man" and he certainly was because he was a fugitive being chased by the king of the land. He had to beg for bread and he borrowed a sword. He had nothing and did not know if he would make it out alive.

Verse 7: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them" (NIV).

There are two key phrases in verse 7: (1) "encamps around" and (2) "delivers them."

This "angel of the Lord" is the angel of deliverance. He is the pre-incarnate Christ. The word "encamps" indicates the fact that the Lord is certainly not alone on this occasion.

Genesis 28:16: "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it'" (NIV).

Jesus spoke of twelve legions of angels (72,000 angels) that are on alert status waiting for the call from the Savior from the Garden of Gethsemane.

We see the angel's presence depicted in the word "encamps" and the angel's power depicted in the word "delivers."

Verse 8: "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him" (NIV).

Basically what he is saying here is "put God to the test in any similar situation."

1 Peter 2:3: "if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord" (NASB).

David in essence is saying "Try Him, you'll like Him!"

"The Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."

Wiersbe says: "Sometimes the cup that is handed to us is not one of sweetness but of bitterness. Our Lord had to drink a bitter cup. Do you know what makes the bitter cup satisfying and sweet? It's 'tasting' the Lord in it. When you taste the Lord in the experiences of life, they become sweet in Him."

“Taste” is used here in the sense of “find out by experience.”

Jeremiah 15:16: “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty” (NIV).

Join me in singing that great old hymn **“Love Lifted Me”**: *“I was sinking deep in sin, Far from the peaceful shore, Very deeply stained within, Sinking to rise no more; But the Master of the sea Heard my despairing cry, From the waters lifted me, Now safe am I. Souls in danger, look above, Jesus completely saves; He will lift you by His love Out of the angry waves. He’s the Master of the sea, Billows His will obey; He your Saviour wants to be, Be saved today. Love lifted me! Love lifted me! When nothing else could help, Love lifted me.”*

June 11

Jehovah Jireh, The Lord Will Provide—Ps. 34:9-11

“As I pray, my attitude should be one of silent expectation.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 9: “Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing” (NIV).

We have mentioned early in our exposition that the “Fear of the Lord” is introduced into the psalm at verse 7. We see it mentioned here twice in verse 9 and then also again in verse 11.

Here we are commanded to “Fear the Lord, you his saints.” The reason given for that is “for those who fear him lack nothing.”

Psalm 31:19: “How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you” (NIV).

The command is “Fear the Lord, you his saints.” We are to have profound awe and veneration. Take your shoes off, you are standing on holy ground.

Adrian Rogers says: “We cannot pray effectively with dirty hands, defiled hearts, and double minds.” (*The Power of His Presence*, 138)

Verse 10: “The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (NIV).

Back in verse 9 it was “those who fear him lack nothing.” Now in verse 10: “those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.”

Verse 11: “Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (NIV).

Proverbs 1:8: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (NIV).

Scroggie says: “To *fear* the LORD does not mean to be *afraid* of Him, but signifies that attitude of devout reverence towards Him which becomes us all, and the conduct which it demands.”

Philippians 4:6-7: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (NLT).

Philippians 4:19: “And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus” (NLT).

Join me if you will in singing a couple of verses of **“Jesus Is All the World to Me”**: *“Jesus is all the world to me, My Life, my Joy, my All; He is my Strength from day to day, Without Him I would fall: When I am sad, to Him I go, No other one can cheer me so; When I am sad, He makes me glad, He’s my Friend. Jesus is all the world to me, My friend in trials sore; I go to Him for blessings, and He gives them o’er and o’er: He sends the sunshine and the rain, He sends the harvest’s golden grain; Sunshine and rain, harvest and grain, He’s my Friend.”*

June 12

More About Jesus Would I Learn—Ps. 34:12-14

“If I seek fellowship with the Father, I will find Him in His word.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 12: “Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days” (NIV).

Now as he begins to instruct, he describes to whom he is talking. There are two characteristics he is talking to “Whoever”: (1) “loves life” and (2) desires to see many good days.”

I am reminded of my customary greeting on many mornings: “Have a good day!”

M. Craig Barnes says: “We are a nation of wanna-bes. We want to be successful and respected. We want to be loved and cared for and maybe even happy. We know that we only get one shot at life, and we are determined to get it right because we’ll be dead for a long time.” (*Hustling God*, 13).

Verse 13: “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.”

The psalmist is now becoming a professor. He is going to teach the fear of the Lord. This is for “Whoever ... loves life and desires to see many good days.” There are six things that he is going to outline in verses 13 and 14. First of all he’s going to talk about words: “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.” Then he’s going to talk about your walk: “Turn from evil and do good.” Then he’s going to talk about your works: “seek peace and pursue it.”

1. "Keep your tongue from evil."

A cowboy's wisdom is relevant. "Be sure to taste your words before you spit 'em out. ... Given a choice between show and tell, silence is golden." (Gladiola Montana, *Never Ask A Man the Size of His Spread*, 21, 129)

2. "Keep ... your lips from speaking lies."

Colossians 3:9: "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds" (NLT).

Verse 14: "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (NIV).

3. "Turn from evil"—Make the right choice.

4. "Do good."

James 1:22: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (KJV).

5. "Seek peace."

Isaiah 32:17: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (KJV).

Isaiah 26:3: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (NIV).

6. "Pursue it."

Paul says in Philippians 3:13: "I am focusing all my energies on this one thing." Then in verse 14: "I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God through Christ Jesus is calling us up to heaven."

Pursue the past pattern with great intensity so you can lay hold of the past for a completion.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**More About Jesus**": "*More about Jesus would I know, More of His grace to others show; More of His saving fullness see, More of His love who died for me. More about Jesus let me learn, More of His holy will discern; Spirit of God, my Teacher be, Showing the things of Christ to me. More, more about Jesus, More, more about Jesus; More of His saving fullness see, More of His love who died for me.*"

June 13

The Lord is Seeing and Listening—Ps. 34:15-18

"When I take the time and the trouble to spend time with God, my reward will be great." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 15: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry" (NIV).

Jeremiah 16:17: "My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes" (NIV).

2 Chronicles 16:9: "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. ..." (NIV).

Psalms 32:8: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (NIV).

Job 34:21: "His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step" (NIV).

With His eyes He sees what you do and with His ears He hears what you say.

C. K. Chesterton was once asked by a reporter what he would say if Jesus were standing behind him. "He is," Chesterton replied with calm assurance. (David Roper, *In Quietness and Confidence*, 86)

Verse 16: "the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth" (NIV).

We talked about the eyes and the ears of the Lord in verse 15. Now we are going to talk about the "face of the Lord" here in verse 16.

Nobody is going to feel sorry for "those who do evil" when they leave.

Verse 17: "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles" (NIV).

The psalmist told us back in verse 4: "The Lord delivered me from all my fears." Then in verse 7: "he delivers them." Now in verse 17: "he delivers them from all their troubles."

F. B. Meyer says: "Not kept from it, but delivered out of it ..."

Verse 18: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (NIV).

We will focus on two words: (1) "close" and (2) "saves."

"[He] is close to the brokenhearted" and "[He] saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Lange says: "The greatest calamity of our times is, that there are so few broken hearts and contrite spirits."

We are to draw near to Him in humility and to surrender it all to Him.

Isaiah 66:2: "... This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (NIV).

Isaiah 57:15: "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (NIV).

Psalms 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (NIV).

“As long as the least bit of self-love remains in the secret parts of our heart,” Fenelon said, “God will hunt it down, and by some merciful blow, force our selfishness and jealousy out of hiding.” (David Roper, *In Quietness and Confidence*, 37)

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“Just a Closer Walk With Thee”**: *“I am weak but Thou art strong; Jesus, keep me from all wrong; I’ll be satisfied as long As I walk, let me walk close to Thee. Thro’ this world of toil and snares, If I falter, Lord, who cares? Who with me my burden shares? None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee. Just a closer walk with Thee—Grant it, Jesus, is my plea. Daily walking close to Thee—Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.”*

June 14

Nobody But the Lord Knows the Troubles I’ve Seen—Ps. 34:19-22

“Isn’t it worth the trouble to deny myself daily in order to meet God?” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 19: “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all” (NIV).

Back in verse 17 it was “he delivers them from all their troubles.” Now here in verse 19: “the Lord delivers him from them all”—referring to the troubles.

Wiersbe says: *“Perhaps God’s greatest use of affliction is as a tool for helping you grow into a mature Christian. The good news is that you must trust Him to deliver you from your afflictions. The next time you face affliction, trust the Lord for your deliverance.”*

In the words of an old Audrey Meier song, *“God washed Job’s eyes with tears so he could see.”*

Verse 20: “he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken” (NIV).

Exodus 12:46: “It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones” (NIV).

John 19:36: “For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of Him shall be broken’” (NASB).

Verse 21: “Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned” (NIV).

It was Robert Louis Stevenson who said, “Everybody, sooner or later, sits down to a banquet of consequences.”

Verse 22: “The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him” (NIV).

Spurgeon says: “Believer, thou shalt never be deserted, forsaken, given up to ruin. God, even thy God is thy guardian and friend, and bliss is thine.”

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“My Redeemer”**: *“I will sing of my Redeemer And His wondrous love to me; On the cruel cross He suffered, From the curse to set me free. I will praise my dear Redeemer, His triumphant pow’r I’ll tell, How the victory He giveth Over sin, and death, and hell. Sing, oh, sing of my Redeemer, With His blood He purchased me On the cross He sealed my pardon, Paid the debt and made me free.”*

June 15

Leave It All in God’s Hands—Ps. 37:1-2

David has witnessed so many things in fleeing from Saul and from the seeming injustice of how he has been treated in these circumstances. To get us ready for Psalm 37, let’s just take a moment to look at 1 Samuel 25:39: “When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, ‘Praise be to the Lord, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.’ Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife” (NIV).

Let’s meditate on a few words from Psalm 73:1-7: “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits” (NIV).

Psalm 90:12: “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (NIV).

Verse 1: “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong” (NIV).

We are going to see this negative command “Do not fret” occur 3 times in these first eight verses. Here in verse 1, down in verse 7, and again in verse 8. “Do not fret” and the reason for this negative command: (1) “because of evil men” and (2) “be envious of those who do wrong.”

We could translate this “Don’t get hotted up.” It means hot. In other words, “be cool.” Don’t get all worked up.

“Don’t fret. Didn’t you turn this over to Me? I’ll take charge of you and will deal with them.”

Verse 2: “for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away” (NIV).

Here in verse 2 we now have the reason for the negative command in verse 1, “Do not fret.” And then there are two illustrations from nature to bring this point home: (1) “like the grass they will soon wither” and (2) “like green plants they will soon die away.”

In other words, you are observing a temporary cycle. The market goes up and the market goes down. Basically he's saying, "Don't get upset over temporary things."

1 John 2:17: "And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever" (NASB).

Ten days after David turned aside from slaying Nabal, that miserable man died.

Whenever folks complain to me about the weather I always tell them that my experience with the Lord is that when I complain about the weather He says to me, "Stick to sales. I'm in management." I think that is a very astute observation with regard to this passage of scripture.

The Lord is in control of all the circumstances in our lives. He also is aware of what's going on. Because of that, we must trust Him even when we do not fully understand or comprehend His purpose in the midst of all of it.

Please join me in singing a couple of verses of **"Only Trust Him"**: *"Come, ev'ry soul by sin oppressed, There's mercy with the Lord, And He will surely give you rest By trusting in His Word. Yes, Jesus is the truth, the way, That leads you into rest; Believe in Him without delay, And you are fully blest. Only trust Him, only trust Him, only trust Him now; He will save you, He will save you, He will save you now."*

June 16

Leave It There—Ps. 37:3-7

"To experience real prayer I must sacrifice my selfish desires." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 3: "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture" (NIV).

We begin the psalm with a negative command "Do not fret." Now there is a series of commands in verses 3-8 that are stated from a positive perspective.

The opposite of "fret" would be to "Trust in the Lord." There are things that you leave in the hands of the Lord.

There are a series of four commands here in verse 3: (1) "Trust in the Lord"—focusing on God's power; (2) "do good"—understanding God's purpose; (3) "dwell in the land"—God's plan; and (4) "enjoy safe pasture"—God's provision.

"Do good" instead of worrying about people doing evil. "Dwell in the land"—in other words, stay where you are and then feed on His faithfulness.

The Puritan Burroughs says: "I offer the following description: *Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.*"

As we conclude verse 3, let us return to the four P's that we began with, focusing on God's:

Power—"Trust in the Lord."

Purpose—"do good."

Plan—"dwell in the land."

Provision—"enjoy safe pasture."

Verse 4: "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (NIV).

In verse 3 we are to "Trust in the Lord," now in verse 4 we are to "Delight [ourselves] in the Lord."

Fenelon says: "Live with God in the present moment. Live your daily life out in the presence of God. He will give you all that you need."

Verse 5: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this" (NIV).

Thus far in verse 3: "Trust in the Lord." Verse 4: "Delight yourself in the Lord." Now here in verse 5: "Commit your way to the Lord."

To "commit" means to roll over. Spurgeon says: "Roll the whole burden of life upon the Lord."

1 Peter 5:7: "casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (NASB).

Let Him look after you completely. Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (NIV).

Verse 6: "He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun" (NIV).

Proverbs 4:18: "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (NIV).

Verse 7: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes" (NIV).

We've had the following commands so far: "Trust in the Lord"—verse 3, "Delight yourself in the Lord"—verse 4, "Commit your way to the Lord"—verse 5, and now "Be still before the Lord"—verse 7. "Wait patiently"—that is with calm resignation that God indeed is at work and will continue to work to the full accomplishment of His purpose.

Rest and rejoice, wait and see. *"Jesus, I am resting, resting In the joy of what Thou art."*

Join me in singing a couple of verses of the hymn **“Leave It There”**: *“If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold, And you have to get along with meager fare, Just remember, in His Word, how He feeds the little bird; Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. When your enemies assail and your heart begins to fail, Don’t forget that God in Heaven answers prayer; He will make a way for you and will lead you safely through. Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. When your youthful days are gone and old age is stealing on, And your body bends beneath the weight of care; He will never leave you then, He’ll go with you to the end. Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. Leave it there, leave it there, Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. If you trust and never doubt, He will surely bring you out. Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.”*

June 17

Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Your Anger—Ps. 37:8-11

Verse 8: “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil” (NIV).

This is command #5 of these positive commands here in these early verses of the psalm.

1. “Trust in the Lord.”
2. “Delight yourself in the Lord.”
3. “Commit your way to the Lord.”
4. “Be still before the Lord.”
5. “Refrain from anger.”

This is the third and final time we have this phrase “do not fret.” It was in verse 1, verse 7, and now here in verse 8. Proverbs 15:1: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (NIV).

Ephesians 4:26-27: “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity” (NASB).

James 1:19-20: “This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (NASB).

Verse 9: “For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land” (NIV).

Now the psalmist states the reason for the previous commands that have been given. Boice says: “It is hard for most of us to take the long view, because we are consumed by the present.”

Verse 10: “A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found” (NIV).

Psalm 1:6: “For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (NIV).

Verse 11: “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace” (NIV).

One writer has said: “God gives His very best to those who leave the choice with Him.”

Jesus mentions the meek in His Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (KJV).

They are not only going to “inherit the earth,” they are going to “enjoy great peace.”

Isaiah 32:17: “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever” (KJV).

Join me please in singing a couple of verses of **“Breathe on Me, Breath of God”**: *“Breathe on me, breath of God; Fill me with life anew, That I may love what Thou dost love, And do what Thou wouldst do. Breathe on me, breath of God, Till I am wholly Thine, Until this earthly part of me Glows with Thy fire divine.”*

June 18

Here I Stand, God Help Me—Ps. 37:12-15

“Am I spending time in His presence? Everything depends on this.” (Andrew Murray)

Isaiah predicted that we would have opposition when we make the decision to walk with the Lord.

Isaiah 54:17: “‘no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me,’ declares the Lord” (NIV).

Jesus said that this would be part and parcel of the curriculum for those who would walk in faithfulness. As He began His Sermon on the Mount, He said in Matthew 5:11-12: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (NKJV).

Paul told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4: “so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know” (NASB).

He told young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12: “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (NASB).

Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 2:20-21: “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor

with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (NASB).

1 Peter 4:19: “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (NASB).

Verse 12: “The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them” (NIV).

This reminds me of the response of the Sanhedrin to Stephen’s message in Acts 7:54: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him” (NASB).

F. B. Meyer says: “Let us not fear the threatenings of our foes. ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’ (Rom. 8:31).”

Jesus said in Matthew 10:22: “And you will be hated by all on account of My name ...” (NASB).

Matthew 10:28: “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (NASB).

In John 15:18-19 Jesus said to His disciples: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (NASB).

Verse 13: “but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming” (NIV).

It seems kind of awkward to see the Lord in laughter in circumstances like this. This pattern is also described in Psalm 2:4: “The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them” (NIV).

The reason for this laughter is: “he knows their day is coming.”

Boice says: “If God can laugh at the wicked, shouldn’t we be able at least to refrain from being agitated by them?”

Verse 14: “The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright” (NIV).

One of the saddest experiences in the life of King Saul is when he accused Ahimelech of being pro-David and that he ordered Doeg the Edomite to strike down the priests. “So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep” (1 Sam. 22:18-19 NIV).

Verse 15: “But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken” (NIV).

I am reminded of God’s intervention with the Egyptians who were pursuing the Israelites even into the Red Sea. We read in Exodus 14:24-25: “During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, ‘Let’s get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt’” (NIV).

The scripture is filled with God’s sovereign intervention against the wicked.

The wicked Haman in the time of Esther built a gallows 75 feet high for the purpose of hanging Mordecai. With a turn of events: “The king said: ‘Hang him [Haman] on it!’ So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided” (Esther 7:9-10 NIV).

Jeremiah 32:17-19: “Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers’ sins into the laps of their children after them. O great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve” (NIV).

Join me please in singing a couple of verses of “**Blessed Be the Name**”: “*All praise to Him who reigns above In majesty supreme, Who gave His Son for man to die, That he might man redeem! His name shall be the Counselor, The mighty Prince of Peace, Of all earth’s kingdoms Conqueror, Whose reign shall never cease. Blessed be the name, blessed be the name, Blessed be the name of the Lord! Blessed be the name, blessed be the name, Blessed be the name of the Lord!*”

June 19

Little Becomes Abundance in the Hands of God—Ps. 37:16-22

“As I walk in fellowship with Him, I am given strength to be like Him.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 16: “Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked” (NIV).

Ironside says: “... God can take a very little that His dear people have and make it an abundance for them.”

Philippians 4:11-13: “Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (NASB).

Verse 17: “for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous” (NIV).

Now here you have a statement of the reason that “Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked.”

Wiersbe says: “He knows how great a burden we can bear, how fierce a battle we can fight. When God puts us in the furnace, He always keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat.”

Verse 18: “The days of the blameless are known to the Lord, and their inheritance will endure forever” (NIV).

Ironside says: “Poor unsaved men have nothing but judgment ahead of them; but the children of the Lord have nothing but glory.”

John 14:2-3: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (NASB).

1 Peter 1:4-5: “to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (NASB).

1 Corinthians 2:9: “but just as it is written, ‘Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him’” (NASB).

Psalms 90:10, 12: “The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. ... Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (NIV).

Verse 19: “In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty” (NIV).

Jeremiah 17:7-8: “But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit” (NIV).

Psalms 1:3: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (NIV).

Verse 20: “But the wicked will perish: The Lord’s enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish—vanish like smoke” (NIV).

This verse reminds me of James 4:13-17: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin” (NASB).

Verse 21: “The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously” (NIV).

Calvin Coolidge said: “There is no dignity quite so impressive, and no independence quite so important, as living within your means.”

Verse 22: “those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off” (NIV).

This takes us back to Psalm 1:6: “For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (NIV).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of my mom’s favorite hymn, **“Mansion Over the Hilltop”**: *“Tho’ often tempted, tormented and tested And like the prophet my pillow a stone; And tho’ I find here no permanent dwelling, I know He’ll give me a mansion my own. Don’t think me poor or deserted or lonely, I’m not discouraged, I’m heaven bound; I’m just a pilgrim in search of a city, I want a mansion, a harp and a crown. I’ve got a mansion just over the hilltop, In that bright land where we’ll never grow old; And some day yonder we will never more wander But walk the streets that are purest gold.”*

June 20

There Shall Be Showers of Blessing—Ps. 37:23-28

“Through prayer I can have the Father’s presence every moment of the day for my happiness and strength.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 23: “If the Lord delights in a man’s way, he makes his steps firm” (NIV).

Back in verse 4 it was “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Now here in verse 23 it is: “If the Lord delights in a man’s way, he makes his steps firm.”

Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (NIV). He will keep you on the freeway.

Isaiah 42:16: “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them” (NIV).

Verse 24: “though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand” (NIV).

The reason “he will not fall” is because “the Lord upholds him with his hand.”

The Douay version reads “The Lord putteth his hand under him.”

Gary Oliver expresses the twelve steps that are necessary in the process of guidance:

1. **Acknowledge** God’s presence.
2. **Adopt** an attitude of praise.
3. **Ask** God for His guidance.
4. **Align** your perspectives to His.
5. **Acknowledge** the anatomy of failure.
6. **Admit** you made a mistake.
7. **Accept** responsibility for it.
8. **Analyze** what happened.
9. **Assess** what you could do differently next time.
10. **Accept** God’s forgiveness.
11. **Activate** your plan.
12. **Announce** what God has taught you. (*Made Perfect in Weakness*, 83-84)

Verse 25: “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread” (NIV).

Isaiah 46:4: “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (NIV).

Psalm 71:17-18: “Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come” (NIV).

2 Corinthians 4:16-17: “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (NASB).

The man whose problems are all behind him is probably a school bus driver.

Verse 26: “They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed” (NIV).

2 Corinthians 8:9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (NASB).

Verse 27: “Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever” (NIV).

Verse 28: “For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off” (NIV).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“There Shall Be Showers of Blessing”**: *“There shall be showers of blessing:’ This is the promise of love; There shall be seasons refreshing, Sent from the Saviour above. ‘There shall be showers of blessing:’ Send them upon us, O Lord; Grant to us now a refreshing, Come, and now honor Thy Word. Showers of blessing, Showers of blessing we need Mercy drops round us are falling, But for the showers we plead.”*

June 21

The Lord Takes Care of His Own—Ps. 37:29-34

“I put on Christ by spending time alone in His presence.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 29: “the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever” (NIV).

Joshua 23:14: “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed” (NIV).

Verse 30: “The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just” (NIV).

The psalmist now focuses upon the righteous man’s tongue and his words here in verse 30.

We will note in verses 30 and 31 the psalmist will talk about the righteous man’s mouth, his tongue, his heart, and his feet.

Lange says: “A silent tongue in many cases not only shows a wise head, but a holy heart.”

Verse 31: “The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip” (NIV).

The law within is the guiding principle which directs his steps.

Psalm 119:11: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (NIV).

Psalm 119:165: “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (NIV).

Verse 32: “The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, seeking their very lives” (NIV).

Acts 9:23-25 records Saul of Tarsus and his departure from Damascus: “And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates

day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket" (NASB).

Verse 33: "but the Lord will not leave them in their power or let them be condemned when brought to trial" (NIV).

Paul, late in his life, tells young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:16-17: "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth" (NASB).

Verse 34: "Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it" (NIV).

This takes us back to verse 7: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes" (NIV).

I think it would be good for us to meditate for a moment on these five commands in our psalm that speak of our relationship to the Lord: (1) "Trust in the Lord"—verse 3; (2) "Delight yourself in the Lord"—verse 4; (3) "Commit your way to the Lord"—verse 5; (4) "Be still before the Lord"—verse 7; and (5) "Wait for the Lord"—verse 34.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **"Under His Wings"**: *"Under His wings I am safely abiding, Tho the night deepens and tempests are wild; Still I can trust Him, I know He will keep me, He has redeemed me and I am His child. Under His wings, O what precious enjoyment! There will I hide till life's trials are o'er; Sheltered, protected, no evil can harm me, Resting in Jesus I'm safe evermore. Under His wings, under His wings, Who from His love can sever? Under His wings my soul shall abide, Safely abide forever."*

June 22

You Get to Choose—Ps. 37:35-40

"Prayer is an emptying of myself and my own lusts and desires." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 35: "I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil" (NIV).

The word "ruthless" here could be translated "full of violence" or "inspiring terror."

Verse 36: "but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found" (NIV).

Verse 37: "Consider the blameless, observe the upright; there is a future for the man of peace" (NIV).

The recommendation of the psalmist is to keep the focus on: (1) "the blameless"; (2) "the upright"; and (3) "the man of peace." This is the description of the "righteous man" back in verse 29: "the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever."

Verse 38: "But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off" (NIV). The focus of this verse is on the words "destroyed" and "cut off."

It is really sobering to look at verse 36 and verse 38 together: "but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found" (verse 36) and "But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off" (verse 38).

My mind goes to Luke 16 and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The reality of hell as the rich man is there and Lazarus is at peace and comforted in the bosom of Abraham. This story told by Jesus makes us realize there really is a hell and that there is eternal judgment to come in the future.

Verse 39: "The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble" (NIV).

Verse 40: "The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him" (NIV).

The key words here in verse 40 are: "helps," "delivers," and "saves."

Walking back through the psalm I counted thirteen things the Lord does. "The Lord":

1. "laughs"—verse 13.
2. "knows"—verse 13.
3. "upholds"—verse 17.
4. "blesses"—verse 22.
5. "curses"—verse 22.
6. "delights"—verse 23.
7. "upholds"—verse 24.
8. "loves"—verse 28.
9. "will not forsake"—verse 28.
10. "will not leave"—verse 33.
11. "will exalt you"—verse 34.
12. "helps them"—verse 40.
13. "delivers them"—verse 40.

D. H. Walters says: "The Father thought it. The Son bought it. The Holy Spirit wrought it, and by grace I sought it." (Albert M. Wells, Jr. *Inspiring Quotations*, 174)

Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (NASB).

It's our choice.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of that hymn "**He the Pearly Gates Will Open**": *"Love Divine, so great and wondrous, Deep and mighty, pure, sublime! Coming from the heart of Jesus, Just the same thro' tests of time. Love Divine, so great and wondrous, All my sins He then forgave! I will sing His praise forever, For His blood, His pow'r to save. He the pearly gates will open, So that I may enter in; For He purchased my redemption And forgave me all my sin."*

June 23

I Prayed and He Heard Me—Ps. 40:1

"Even in the midst of my daily schedule I can call out to God." (Andrew Murray)

We are turning now to Psalm 40 for our meditations these next few mornings. This is a Messianic psalm similar to Psalm 22.

This psalm could fit into two circumstances in David's life. The first would be during the long and relentless pursuit of Saul to destroy David. And the second possibility could be during the time of the Absalom rebellion and his stealing the kingdom away from David.

Either one of these possibilities would fit with the words of this psalm.

Plumer says: "Unquestionably this Psalm contains a prophecy of the Messiah."

Verse 1: "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry" (NIV).

There are three times in David's life when he "waited patiently": (1) in granting David the kingdom; (2) the affair with Bathsheba; and (3) the rebellion from Absalom.

Psalm 130:5: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope" (NIV).

Psalm 27:14: "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (NIV).

Leupold says: "The Hebrew says, 'waiting did I wait for the Lord.'" I waited and waited and waited.

Phillips says: "It was David's unwavering conviction that sooner or later God always came through on behalf of His own."

I am not a very good waiter. You could translate my experiences, I wait impatiently.

Blaise Pascal says: "I have discovered that all human evil comes from this, man's being unable to sit still in a room." (David Roper, *In Quietness and Confidence*, 5).

Fenelon says: "Why do we rebel against the length of the way? Because we are so wrapped up in self, and God must destroy this infatuation. It is a constant hindrance to his work."

"He is waiting patiently" could have reference to Saul's pursuit of his life or Saul's mistake. When we are waiting, we are manifesting the spirit of submission and also the spirit of trust.

Because he "waited patiently for the Lord" the Lord "turned to me." Not only did he turn to me, He "heard my cry."

While "I waited patiently" I sensed that the Lord's presence was very real. "He turned to me" and not only that, but He listened to "my cry."

1 John 5:14-15: "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (NASB).

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**He Is So Precious to Me**": *"So precious is Jesus, my Saviour, my King, His praise all the day long with rapture I sing; To Him in my weakness for strength I can cling, For He is so precious to me. He stood at my heart's door 'mid sunshine and rain, And patiently waited an entrance to gain; What shame that so long He entreated in vain, For He is precious to me. For He is so precious to me, For He is so precious to me; 'Tis Heaven below My Redeemer to know, For He is so precious to me."*

June 24

God is at Work—Ps. 40:2

"Each day as I spend time in His presence, let this thought be with me: *Christ is all.*" (Andrew Murray)

Verse 2: "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand" (NIV).

We focused on two verbs in verse 1: "turned" and "heard." Now here in verse 2 we focus on the words "lifted," "set," and "gave."

Psalm 18:16: "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters" (NIV).

If David is going to get out of this mess, God is going to have to do something. There must be sovereign intervention.

Muddy times and slimy pits can be the lot of all of us on occasion. This is a graphic description of what sin is and what sin does.

"He set my feet on a rock." We could well sing *"On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand."* We could also reflect upon the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, that the wise man built his house upon the Rock (see Matt. 7:24).

Robert E. Lee said: "We failed, but in the good providence of God, apparent failure often proves a blessing."

"He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."

Thus far we have read in the psalm: (1) "I waited patiently for the Lord"; (2) "He turned to me and heard my cry"; (3) "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire"; (4) "he set my feet on a rock"; and (5) "[He] gave me a firm place to stand."

An anonymous writer wrote these words: "Sin will take you further than you ever intended to stray. Sin will keep you longer than you ever intended to stay. Sin will cost you more than you ever intended to pay."

For each of us that "firm place to stand" is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is alive. He is adequate. He is available. He is *all* and in *all*.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **"He Lifted Me"**: *"In loving kindness Jesus came, My soul in mercy to reclaim And from the depths of sin and shame Thro' grace He lifted me. Now on a higher plane I dwell, And with my soul I know 'tis well Yet how or why, I cannot tell, He should have lifted me. From sinking sand He lifted me, With tender hand He lifted me, From shades of night to planes of light, O praise His name, He lifted me!"*

June 25

I'm Singing a New Song—Ps. 40:3

"Through prayer God can give me strength for all I do and bring down His power to work through me in the lives of others." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 3: "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord" (NIV).

The result of the Lord's action in verse 2 brings about "a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God."

When David slew Goliath there was a hit song that topped the charts. When the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, Miriam got everybody singing.

Let's meditate for just a minute on the six things the Lord does here in verses 1 to 3: (1) "he turned to me"; (2) "[He] heard my cry"; (3) "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire"; (4) "he set my feet on a rock"; (5) "[he] gave me a firm place to stand"; and (6) "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God."

"Many will" do three things. They will: (1) "see"; (2) "fear"; and (3) "put their trust in the Lord." People are watching what is going on. "Wow! I want some of that action!" So they "put their trust in the Lord."

Wiersbe quotes the Lord as saying: "David, I'm going to take you out of the mire and put you in the choir."

Revelation 14:3: "And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth" (NASB).

Zephaniah 3:17: "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing" (NIV).

Please join me in singing a couple of verses of **"In My Heart There Rings a Melody"**: *"I have a song that Jesus gave me, It was sent from heav'n above; There never was a sweeter melody, 'Tis a melody of love. 'Twill be my endless theme in glory, With the angels I will sing; 'Twill be a song with glorious harmony, When the courts of heaven ring. In my heart there rings a melody, There rings a melody with heaven's harmony. In my heart there rings a melody; There rings a melody of love."*

June 26

A Happy Man on the Right Road—Ps. 40:4-5

"Without love, true holiness is impossible, so I pray that my love for others will grow." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 4: "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods" (NIV).

Once again we have run into the word "Blessed." It occurs in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Psalm 1:1: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." And in Psalm 32:1: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." And Psalm 32:2: "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."

“Blessed is the man” who does three things: (1) “who makes the Lord his trust”; (2) “who does not look to the proud”; and (3) “who does not look ... to those who turn aside to false gods.”

Those who “look to the proud” would be those who are self-sufficient or humanism.

To look to those “who turn aside to false gods” could be materialism and a lot of other things that distract humanity today.

Wiersbe says: “*Don’t trust yourself or your circumstances; trust the Lord. When you roll all your burdens onto Him, you gain a new perspective. You see life through His eyes, you appreciate His works, and you enjoy His Word. Is the Lord your Trust today?*”

Craig Barnes says: “The right path isn’t the road that we climb up, it is the road that God climbs down to bless us.” (*Hustling God*, 16)

Verse 5: “Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare” (NIV).

“Many, O Lord my God are”: (1) “the wonders you have done” and (2) “The things you planned for us.”

Isaiah 26:12: “Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us” (NIV).

Here in verse 5 it is “Many ... are the wonders.” In verse 12 it is “For troubles without number surround me.”

“Wonders” and “troubles without number” are a part of the normal Christian life.

“The things you planned for us no one can recount to you.”

“Were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.”

Someone put it: “Count your many blessings, name them by the score, and it will surprise you, there are millions more.”

Psalm 139:17-18: “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you” (NIV).

Join me in singing a song by George Beverly Shea called “**O, the Wonder of it All**”: “*There’s the wonder of sunset at evening, The wonder as sunrise I see; But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul Is the wonder that God loves me. O, the wonder of it all! The wonder of it all! Just to think that God loves me. O, the wonder of it all! The wonder of it all! Just to think that God loves me. There’s the wonder of springtime and harvest, The sky, the stars, the sun; But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul Is the wonder that’s only begun.*”

June 27

Lead Me to Calvary—Ps. 40:6-8

“If God is waiting to meet me, it is shortsighted to put other work in His place.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 6: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require” (NIV).

This is the Messianic part of Psalm 40. This is the Lord Jesus talking to the Father.

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire.”

Hebrews 10:4: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (NASB).

“But my ears you have pierced.” In Exodus 21 we read that a servant who wants to stay with his master, the master “shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life” (21:6 NIV).

Alexander says: “Pierced my ear, as a sign that I will hear thee and obey thee for ever.”

Obedience is the number one priority. Vance Havner says: “It is important *that* we hear. It is important *what* we hear. It is important *how* we hear what we hear.”

Revelation 2:7: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches ...” (NASB).

The hearing ear is the obedient heart.

Alexander says: “Thou hast not required ceremonial services, but obedience, and hast pierced my ear, as a sign that I will hear thee and obey thee forever.”

Verse 7: “Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll’” (NIV).

“Here I am” as an expression of the obedient servant, ready for the service of His Lord. And standing in this willingness before the Lord. Isaiah 6:8: “... ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

Verse 8: “I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (NIV).

John 17:4: “I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do” (NASB).

Ephesians 6:6: “not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (NIV).

Father, I am setting my face like a flint. “I desire to do your will” and I am motivated by the fact that “your law is within my heart.” Not my will, but yours be done.

Join me in singing a couple of verses of “**Lead Me to Calvary**”: “*King of my life, I crown Thee now, Thine shall the glory be; Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow, Lead me to Calvary. Show me the tomb where Thou wast laid,*

Tenderly mourned and wept; Angels in robes of light arrayed Guarded Thee whilst Thou slept. Lest I forget Gethsemane; Lest I forget Thine agony; Lest I forget Thy love for me, Lead me to Calvary."

June 28

Dressed in His Righteousness—Ps. 40:9-10

"My relationship with the Father can become one of continual prayer." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 9: "I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O Lord" (NIV).

"I proclaim righteousness" in verse 9. "I speak of your faithfulness and salvation" in verse 10.

Romans 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith'" (NASB).

Romans 3:21-22: "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction" (NASB).

1. "I proclaim righteousness."
2. "I speak of your faithfulness."
3. "I speak of your ... salvation."

Titus 3:5: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (NASB).

Jude 24, 25: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (NASB).

Verse 10: "I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly" (NIV).

There are two positive and three negatives in these two verses. The two positives are: (1) "I proclaim righteousness" and (2) "I speak of your faithfulness and salvation." The three negatives are: (1) "I do not seal my lips"; (2) "I do not hide your righteousness"; and (3) "I do not conceal your love and your truth."

The content of the witness here is: "righteousness ... faithfulness ... salvation ... love and ... truth."

Oswald Chambers said: "We carry our religion as if it were a headache. There is neither joy nor power nor inspiration in it, none of the grandeur of the unsearchable riches of Christ about it, none of the passion of hilarious confidence in God."

Warren Wiersbe says: "You are a Christian today because somebody cared. Now it's your turn."

William Barclay says: "The Church must never be in any sense a little huddle of pious people, shutting the doors against the world, lost in prayer and praise, connoisseurs of preaching and liturgy, busy mutually congratulating themselves on the excellence of their Christian experience." (*In the Hands of God*, 41)

Join me in singing a couple of verses of "**Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned**": "*Majestic sweetness sits enthroned Upon the Saviour's brow; His head with radiant glories crowned, His lips with grace o'erflow, His lips with grace o'erflow. He saw me plunged in deep distress And flew to my relief; For me He bore the shameful cross And carried all my grief, And carried all my grief.*"

June 29

Communing with the Father—Ps. 40:11-13

"To pray is to enter into God's presence, commit my need to Him, and leave it there." (Andrew Murray)

Verse 11: "Do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord; may your love and your truth always protect me" (NIV).

The change in the psalm is very dramatic between verses 10 and 11. From verse 11 on down to the end of the psalm, we're going to have David in prayer. There are going to be seven petitions in this prayer.

His prayer begins with the words "Do not withhold" in verse 11. His prayer ends with "Do not delay" in verse 17. In the middle of the prayer we have "Come quickly to help me" (verse 13).

Petition #1: "may your love and your truth always protect me."

Isaiah 43:1-2: "... Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" (NIV).

David actually begins this prayer with the words "Do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord." Then we have the first petition: "may your love and your truth always protect me."

In verse 12 we now have the reason for the first petition, "may your love and your truth always protect me."

Verse 12: "For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me" (NIV).

We must mention again, “wonders” and “troubles without number” are a part of the normal Christian life. There are three reasons given for these petitions: (1) “troubles without number”; (2) “sins have overtaken me”; and (3) “my heart fails within me.”

A phrase from Martin Luther’s great hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” says: “*Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing, Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God’s own choosing.*”

Joni Eareckson Tada says: “Suffering hurries the heart homeward.”

It’s good to remember this before you burden other people with your troubles. Half of them aren’t the least bit interested and the rest are delighted that you’re getting what they think is coming to you.

In summary of verse 12, the three reasons for these seven petitions in David’s prayer that we’re studying, concludes this psalm: (1) “troubles without number surround me”; (2) “sins have overtaken me”; and (3) “my heart fails within me.”

Verse 13: “Be pleased, O Lord, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me” (NIV).

This outcry of urgency is placed right here in the middle of this prayer. The two key words in verse 13 are: “save” and “help.”

“O Lord, ... save me” and “O Lord ... help me.” The urgency in David’s prayer reminds me of the prayer of Daniel in Daniel 9:19: “O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name” (NIV).

Fenelon says: “Open your heart. Humble your weak spirit. Give up your vain and presumptuous mind. Vessel of clay, he who has made you has a right to break you, and far from breaking you, see how he fears to have to. He warns you in his mercy.”

Join me in singing a couple of verses of “**I Must Tell Jesus**”: “*I must tell Jesus all of my trials; I cannot bear these burdens alone; In my distress He kindly will help me; He ever loves and cares for His own. I must tell Jesus all of my troubles; He is a kind, compassionate friend; If I but ask Him, He will deliver, Make of my troubles quickly an end. I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus! I cannot bear my burdens alone; I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus! Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.*”

June 30

What a Friend—Ps. 40:14-17

“The most important and profitable time of my whole day is the time I spend with God.” (Andrew Murray)

Verse 14: “May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace” (NIV).

We have petitions 2 and 3 here in verse 14.

Petition #2: “May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion.”

Petition #3: “may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.”

These petitions would certainly fit into the Absalom era when the kingdom was temporarily overthrown and Absalom and all of those with him were seeking David’s life. They were above all, desiring his ruin.

Verse 15: “May those who say to me, ‘Aha! Aha!’ be appalled at their own shame” (NIV).

We come now to the fourth petition of the seven petitions in these verses.

Petition #4: “May those who say to me, ‘Aha! Aha!’ be appalled at their own shame.”

Wiersbe says: “*God doesn’t waste your trials. He designs them for your good and His glory. Perhaps you are going through difficulties and trials today. Let God prepare you for what He has prepared for you. He might be planning to use you as an answer to prayer.*”

Verse 16: “But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, ‘The Lord be exalted!’” (NIV).

Petition #5: “may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.”

Petition #6: “may those who love your salvation always say, ‘The Lord be exalted!’”

Philippians 1:20: “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death” (NASB).

Verse 17: “Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay” (NIV).

We come now to the final petition.

Petition #7: “may the Lord think of me.”

Fenelon says: “Suffering is necessary for all of us. You will be purified by dying to your own desires and will. Let yourself die! You have excellent opportunities for this to happen—don’t waste them!”

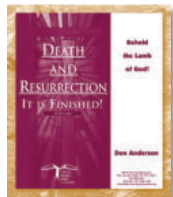
David concludes his psalm with this testimony: “You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.”

Join me in singing a couple of verses of **“What a Friend We Have in Jesus”**: *“What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Ev’rything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Ev’rything to God in prayer! Are we weak and heavy laden, Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer; In His arms He’ll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.”*

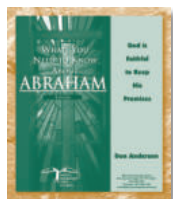
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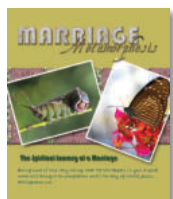
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PURE SCRIPTURE FOR THE SOUL

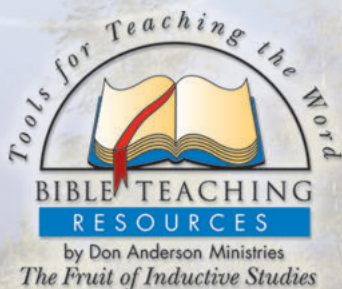
This devotional from Don and Pearl Anderson and Bible Teaching Resources provides pure Scripture for the soul to encourage you in your walk with Christ. Daily readings feature a Bible passage, prayer of response and a devotional thought written by Don and Pearl to help focus you on God's Word every day.

"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty."

Jeremiah 15:16



DON ANDERSON is a popular guest speaker at churches, para-church organizations, conferences, and retreats. His refreshing style and unique insights, captured on CD and DVD and published in his many books, effectively communicate timeless truths from Scripture and their application to everyday life. Don currently serves as the pastor of Hide-A-Way Lake Community Church in Hideaway, Texas.



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