

Walks with God

"You slept through **your** alarm, don't sleep through **Mine**," God told me one day. "A watchman can't fall asleep on the wall!"

Following His lead, I compiled these insights He has shared with me over the years. So it is appropriate that I dedicate this volume to Him Who has compelled me to write it. Thank You, Abba (Father)!

Preface

Walking the fairway of a golf course on the coast of Northern Ireland as a fog bank rolled in, a friend, who fancies himself a mystic, asked: "What is on the other side of the mist?"

I answered, "The wind."

Caught short, he coughed out a laugh and had no retort. He had asked that question a number of times before and no one had ever had an answer. But we know that beyond everything is God. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Creator of all we see — including the mist — and that which we don't see — including the wind. And in all His creation, He teaches us lessons. Yes, even the stones cry out His glory.

In my walks these last few years with my dogs, in the woods and along our country road, the Lord has shared numerous insights with me, far beyond what is on the other side of the mist. And if we need to ask such questions, Whom better to reveal the answers?

Please take these walks with me and feel the crisp Maine fall air and the cantankerous winter blast, watch the trees hibernate then turn vibrant, observe the fern peek out of the earth and then burst into fans. In all these things, and more, God reveals Himself, highlights His Word and confirms our faith. These lessons from God are sometimes quick bites, sometimes longer tastings, and I hope you will enjoy partaking in them before starting your walk in the world each day.

In John 2:10 Jesus (Jesus) is told at the wedding feast: "Everyone brings out the choice wine first ... but you have saved the best till now."

I have written many things for and about many people — mostly for "the world" and a handful for God. I have met, interviewed and written about rich men and women, famous men and women. But not one of them is fit, nor are any of us, to even tie the sandals of the One Who came to die for us.

Lord, I pray, let this book be "the choice wine" ...

... better than the previous wine from me and satisfying to those who drink of it.

... good for their stomachs and bringing joy to their souls.

... enriching their walks and encouraging them (giving them courage) along their way.

... "watering" dry places.

Call them "Short Cuts." These brief revelations are like cuts from a video, or small pieces from a fabric — God's fabric of life.

January 1 —

"How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" — Psalm 119:103

God's Word Is a Progression

The woods are barren and bitter this first day of the New Year in Maine. The trees are leafless — and if you did not know better, you might think lifeless — as the "real" Maine winter begins to plow in from Canada. Oh, how I long for the autumn, its colorful beauty and crisp morning air! But God's plan is a sequence — spring, summer, fall, winter, spring, summer, fall, winter...

Similarly, when God wrote the Bible He had a reason for its sequence. His Word is a progression just as He progressively reveals it to us — when you look at it cover to cover, or within each book.

For instance, Mark 4's Parable of the Sower flows into the passage about not hiding your light under a bushel which flows into the growth of a seed. We are planted. We must not keep our light under a barrel, or our planting is for naught. Once planted, God makes the seed grow. Be willing to be planted. Be willing to be light. Then watch God work!

The Bible itself reveals the progression of the Word. God created the earth in Genesis and put man on it. He ends the world in Revelation and sweeps man into heaven ... a beginning and an end and a new beginning.

But man has so compartmentalized God's Word that, in many instances, we lose the full intent of God. For instance, by subdividing it into chapter and verse, we focus on the end of a verse as the end of that thought. Expand, rather than

contract, what you are studying and you will see the whole by the sum of its parts: the Old Testament from creation through God's call to the redemption of His Jewish people, prophesying the coming of Messiah as the perfect sacrificial lamb to wash away their sins and the sins of Gentiles (other peoples) as well; and the New Testament which points to the Second Coming of the Messiah to redeem all of mankind. From Genesis, the Bible points forward toward the cross. From Revelations, the Bible points back to the cross. Everything converges there.

A most important case in point to the argument for looking beyond one scripture is in Luke 11 where the disciples (talmadin) ask Jesus (Jesus) how to pray. He recites for them the Lord's Prayer, and that is where most teachings stop. It should be where they start, for Jesus proceeds to tell the disciples to continue and be persistent in prayer, to continue asking, seeking and knocking. "Which of you fathers, if your son continues asking for a fish, will give him a snake instead?" Jesus asks.

And His final point? "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The chapter goes on to talk about Jesus driving out demons and being accused of being in league with Beelzebub, so we know now that the Lord is finished with the question of praying. And how did that lesson progress? First, the Lord's prayer, then through persistence seeking Him and making your

requests known to Him, and, finally, asking for the Holy Spirit.

Is this not how we should begin each day?

And is this not revival? — personal revival?

Lord, I pray that this day, the first of the new year, you spark in me a desire for revival in my life. That you show me there is a sequence of events in my life, just as there is in the Bible, that should lead me to the ultimate conclusion: being swept up into Heaven with You. Amen.

January 2 —

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in the season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." — Psalm 1:1-3

Key to the Scriptures

This psalm is a key to the scriptures — and it is written by God, not Mary Baker Eddy.

King David's delights were in God's law and he **meditated** on that law day and night. David wrote many beautiful messages to God's people, but this was perhaps the most crucial and potent of all.

Rising early this morning, walking my three dogs along our country road, the winter sun rises over the horizon before us,

washing the sky in an ever-increasing splash of light yellow. God is like that sun in a way. Seek Him first when you awake in the morning and He will reveal His light in an ever-increasing way.

The Morning Search

I seek You in the morning.
I want to know Your will.
I want to feel Your tender touch
And so I sit here... still.

I fix my thoughts on Jesus —
His **enormous** love on the cross.
And deep tears well up within me —
Of regret and thankfulness.

I was a slave to Satan,
In darkness to the nth degree.
But Jesus has set me free
By His work on Calvary.

So I seek Him in the morning.
I want to know His will.
My first step He is planning,
When I see it I will **not** sit still.

Lord, I pray that each day when I awake, You remind me to say, "Good morning, Father!" with joy and with expectation that you are there watching and listening to me. Amen.

January 3 —

"...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God." — I
Thess. 1:4

The Chosen

We are blessed, beyond measure, that the Creator of the universe **chose** us to be His children.

To what do we owe this election? Nothing of us.

Thus, claiming no "right" to our salvation, we should daily — if not moment by moment — express our everlasting gratitude to Him.

Undeservedly So

We deserve to be cast out.

God took us in.

We deserve eternal damnation.

God gave us salvation.

We deserve disease and death.

God took that upon Himself and gave us health and life.

We deserve malaise and depression.

God gave us expectancy and joy.

We deserve utter abandonment.

God gave us total acceptance.

We deserve His hatred.

God gave us His love.

Thank you, Father God, for allowing me into your eternal family, delivering me from the fate I deserve. Your mercy and

*grace are proof that You are the one and great God of Love.
Amen.*

January 4 —

The Believer's Heritage

Roots. We hear the word and think "ancestry," or we hear "Jewish roots" and we think "Jewish heritage."

But think on this: What do roots do? Provide nourishment and support for the whole tree and its branches. Without them, the tree would not stand.

The patriarchs also are called the roots. In this case Jesus would be considered the **earth** which supplies life to the roots.

Without roots, you get sinkholes and earth with no structure. Without nourishment from the earth, anything planted there will surely die. Likewise, the better the nourishment, the stronger will be anything that is planted there. And, you know, go deep enough into the soil and eventually you tap into water. At 200, 400, 1,000 feet, that wellspring must feel like a life-quenching source.

I wander through these woods of ours and wonder why some trees have grown so much stronger and fuller and higher. Is it simply age? Probably so in many cases. But in others, it is because of the soil beneath, and the life-giving water even further below. In our search for God, the deeper we dig the fuller will be our understanding and the stronger our faith.

Deeper Roots, Fuller Fruits

The deeper your roots, the fuller your fruits.

So grow daily in His love,
Drink deeply of the water of His Word.

Lord, I thirst after You as a deer panteth after the water brook. Supply me the nourishment of Your Word, I pray. Help me to discern truth from error in the preaching I hear. Please remind me of my roots and be thankful for my spiritual ancestors, from the patriarchs to the prophets to the evangelists of the Jewish race. Amen.

January 5 —

"So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer."
— Deut. 10:16

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 'Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.' "

— Ezek. 36:25

Law and Grace/Flesh and Spirit

It is often preached that the Jews can't possibly keep the Law — there are too many and it is too difficult. Wrong! See Phil. 3:6: Paul kept the Law and was "blameless." Elizabeth and Zacharias were blameless as well. See Luke 1:6.

Jesus came and took keeping the Law to another level: being right with God in your heart. It became a spiritual rule

and thus a thing of deep roots that only God can see. We can fool the world with our actions, but we can't fool God; our hearts can't fool God; He knows our hearts better than **we** do.

Now, instead of the Law the New Testament spells out 1,050 "commandments" — things we can do to please the Lord. I like to think of The Beatitudes which Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 5 as the "be-attitudes" as described in this poem:

Be-Attitudes

Be of the attitude of love and joy, peace and patience,
kindness, gentleness and self-control.

Be of the attitude that Jesus showed you when He lived on the earth among you.

Be of the attitude of the fruits of the Spirit, loving your God and your neighbors as well.

Be of the attitude to be a vessel, showing God's love for the people around you.

Be of the attitude of speaking the Truth in love and patience, kindness and forgiveness and self-control.

Filled to the Full

Jesus said he came "to fulfill the law, not dispose of it."

"Fulfilled" means "filled to the full," not "get rid of it."

How often has that been wrongfully taught and the Jews brought into derision?

Dear Lord and Father, help me today to be in the correct attitude throughout my waking hours. That way, people will see You in me, and my day will truly be complete. Amen.

January 6 —

"Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers."

— Neh. 9:2

"Be careful that you do not forget the Lord, Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

— Deut. 6:12

Separation Anxiety

They say certain dogs have it, that it is unveiled when their owners leave them at home. They are anxious, upset, "beside" themselves. It is an overwhelming feeling.

Hell may be something like that — feeling a separation from God.

These dogs will "shadow" their owners, sticking as close-by as possible, not letting them out of their sight. One of our dogs is like this — **most** of the time. Inside the home, he is as close as a shadow. But outside, he can get focused on a squirrel or chipmunk and off he flies into the woods. Funny, I can get frustrated stepping over him in the house and worrying about not closing the door on him. But when we're outdoors and he gets an animal in his sights, I wish he were my shadow again.

What about us and the Lord? If we love our Lord we will want to shadow Him. We will be anxious about being apart.

And I'm sure He would prefer us shadowing Him rather than chasing shadows in the forest.

Central to shadowing God is separating ourselves — as the Israelites did in Neh. 9:2 — from the world.

Separation Anxiety between humans and God, this is a **good** thing.

I have this question to contemplate: If you do not fear having separation anxiety from God, do you love Him enough?

Father, I do not want to be separated from You. And since You are always accessible, it depends on me to stay close as a shadow to You, to cling to You, to not lose my focus on fleeting diversions of the world. Help me, Lord, to accomplish this in my life.

Also, Lord, the ultimate reunion I pray for is that reunion between You and Your Jewish people, a people separated from You since their rejection of their Messiah. Amen.

January 7 —

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, or where thieves break in and steal."

— Matt. 6:19

"A faithful man will be richly blessed; but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished."

— Prov. 28:20

Satan's Prosperity, Not God's

When Satan met Jesus (Jesus) in the wilderness after He had fasted and prayed for 40 days, Satan tried to get Him to focus on Himself. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (Matt. 4:3b) "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " (Matt. 4:6) "All of this [all the kingdoms of the world] I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me." (Matt. 4:9)

It was the prosperity message of that time! "You are the head and not the tail."

It was the Kingdom Now message of that time. "You are above and not beneath."

If you believe some of the prosperity and Kingdom Now preaching of today, you have to ask: Were Jesus and Paul and others ignorant of God's Word and His plan for His people?

Jesus was abused, flogged and even crucified. Did He not know the "above and not beneath" message?

Paul was flogged, imprisoned and shipwrecked. Did he not know the "head and tail" message?

(I ask this facetiously.)

But the truth is: We are to focus on the Kingdom of God, not the Kingdom of Now. How many things in this world are "wonderful, pure and of good report"? Because those are the things on which we are to focus.

Are we sojourners or "part of" the world? We are supposed to be pilgrims walking through it, but citizens of another place — a heavenly place.

God, thank You for the examples of Your Son and the disciples of the Scripture. Help me to be like them and to desire what they desired in this life: To serve You and You alone. Amen.

January 8 —

"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

— Matt. 23:12

I, I, Me, Me

Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done..."

He sent John to proclaim: "The kingdom of God has come. Repent and be saved."

Jesus came saying the same.

Note that John was wearing a prophet's clothes — camel hair and uncomfortable. He was not dressed to the hilt, wearing gold, silver and diamonds. Jesus walked everywhere. He did not ride the finest of chariots, or take a camel to the Mount of Olives. Neither did either one say we should "claim our inheritance," or "declare our rights," or "speak into existence our fortunes."

No, they were concerned with our eternal souls, not our temporary, and temporal, possessions on this earth.

So many of us believers go here and there to hear messages of "the wealth is laid up for us," to "name it and claim it as ours."

We are "I," "I," "I"-oriented. Yet Jesus did not say to Peter: "Be well-fed and well-dressed. And, by the way, there's a 33 High-winged Chariot GT you should have down at Ezekiel's Chariot Sales and Service on King David Street."

He said, "Feed My sheep."

He said, "Proclaim the Good News" of salvation.

Are our hearts crying out for loved ones, neighbors and strangers headed toward hell? Or are we hungering for more of this and much more of that?

Oh, my Lord and God, let Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done. I know You desire the salvation of all men. Please count my family among those who will accept that they are sinners and need salvation; whose hearts will break and accept Your Messiah; who will bow their knee and declare You Lord of their lives. Fertilize what seed has been planted in them, God, and bring forth a wonderful fruit! Amen.

January 9 —

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
— Gen. 1:1

"In Him [Jesus] and through faith in Him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence."
— Eph. 3:12

Him, Or You?

Just think!

Who is the center of the universe — you or God? Many of us live as though we are and we deserve His attention.

The Lord God, Creator of the Universe, listens to you, cares about you, wants to fill your needs. This is He Who put the stars in motion, Who had the absolutely massive ingenuity to create all the creatures, ecology, trees and flowers — and then man. The Creator, mind you, will listen to you, puny man.

Stand in awe of Him and in awe of His love! He is not One you can connive, manipulate, mouth rote words to in order to persuade. Worship Him Who is so great He will even come for the sparrow which is so little. Be grateful He listens, rather than demand that He does what you think is best for you...

Jesus, on the cross, was thinking of others, not Himself.

Remember, we can only go to God through His own humbleness.

Perhaps this is why the exact center of the Bible is Psalm 118:8, which says: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."

Interesting that that verse is exactly in the center, isn't it? As a reminder to us, maybe.

Not me, me, me...

But You, You, You, Lord

God Is Awesome!

Who has gathered up wind in the hollow of His hand?

Who has wrapped up the waters in His cloak?

Who has established all the ends of the earth?

What is His name, and the name of His Son?

Who has set in place the stars in the heavens?

Who has put in motion the universe?

Who has breathed life into the inert?
What is His name, and the name of His Son?

Whose thunder and lightning puts man's fireworks to shame?
Whose cloud bursts dwarf our fire brigades?
Whose earthquakes shake man's very foundations?
What is His name, and the name of His Son?

Who gave Himself that we might live,
Dying on the cross for our sins?
Who prepares a feast in His kingdom
For the day when His bride joins Him?

Dear Lord, You are indeed a magnificent God. You made me and You save me. All the universe centers on You and You alone. Forgive me, God, for thinking myself worthy of anything, let alone eternal life. But I know through my blessed Messiah, even that hope was a gift from You. Amen.

January 10 —

"Yet all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

— John 1:12

Who Is "The Bride"?

The Jews and the Christian church are encompassed together in the Lord's vision of His Holy City, Jerusalem. Together we are the wife and bride of His Holy One, the

Messiah Jesus. We have similar roots in His vision and we have the same finality as well.

Let me explain. Ezekiel 48 details the dimensions of Jerusalem in relation to the allotment of land for the Israelites (the wife).

Rev. 21:9 describes Jerusalem also in relation to the people who will inhabit it. Verse 12 tells of the 12 gates and 12 tribes (the wife) and verse 14 tells of the 12 foundational stones and the 12 apostles (the bride).

Rev. 21:9-10 describes Jerusalem as the **bride**, the **wife** of the Lamb — thus bringing the two together.

The bride is the city and the people, because the city is the people as well as the land it sits on. God allotted the land and the people together. Now, the question is, are we ready together to commit as one person to our Lord and Savior? This question ultimately rests with each individual one of us. I must act like the bride just as you must.

Oh God, my God, my Bridegroom and Savior Who died on the cross for me, part of His bride, arm me for the battle against my flesh, fortify me against temptations, deliver me from the enemy into Your arms. Help me to prepare to be the perfect bride for a perfect Bridegroom. Amen.

January 11 —

"The Lord your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul."

— Deut. 32:46

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father Who is in heaven."

— Matt. 7:21

To Commit or Not Commit

Do you take this person — to love, hold and cherish?
Do you promise to obey in this divine marriage?
Is it too much to grasp, too hard to ask
To stay loyal and true — you love Him, He loves you?

I wonder about The Body of Christ — myself especially...
The born-again hallelujah crowd, who praise so emotionally.
Is He first in our mind, first in our heart, first in our love?
Are our eyes set on the things of this world, or heaven above?

I fail, I flounder, I flop — then cry
Because there is not a splinter but a log in my eye.
And though I adamantly say, "I love You, Lord" the facts belie
The keeper of my eye and ear gates has failed — and he is I.

Lord, I know I **can** succeed — we **all** can do it.
If we only let our lives be led by Your Holy Spirit.
"Seek ye' first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness."
Help us to realize: If we accomplish this, life **and** death are bliss!

Strengthen me, Father, for the battle ahead,
Against principalities and powers — a dual in my head.

Losing this war is something I can ill afford.
"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord.

At the alter, when I wed, it was an easy choice to make.
Now, with eternity at stake, how much easier, for Heaven's sake?

How can I hesitate? What is the hold?
Should I care how politics, Wall Street and everyday work unfold?

What's primary, secondary and peripheral in my life?
Should not first, second and third be He Who gave me that life?

Should not I love back the One Who first loved me?
Who gave His life for mine that day on Calvary?
The One Who is without sin died for me who embody it.
I know that for the sacrifice He made, I am not fit.

Lord, You love us, care for us — You **died** for us.
I look around and observe: We're not worth the fuss.
All the more reason to love Him.
All the more reason to not sin.
All the more reason to honor and obey.
All the more reason to be the Potter's clay.
All the more reason to kneel at His throne.
More reason to tell Him, "This body **You** own."

O, Lord God, King of Kings, Holy of Holies, Creator...
I know I've made this analysis before.

But this time, for all time, let it stick.
Help me to walk the walk, 24, 7 — all of it.
Help me to be a beacon in the darkness,
To reach out to anyone whose life is a mess,
To share Your love, forgiveness, atonement — all You do,
So that they, too, might give their lives to You.

After all, when the end has come
And there is nothing left but judgment,
I want to present to You the good deeds I've done —
Not be forced into excuses: "Well, I **meant** ..."

So, strengthen my resolve, Lord.
Heighten my knowledge of the Word.
Create in me a renewed mind
So that, to my death I'll be inclined
To praise, worship, honor and adore
My Lord and Savior more and more
And say at the wedding feast: "I do promise to obey.
I do promise, in Your hands, to be clay."

January 12 —

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

— Prov. 3:5

"It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man."

— Ps. 118:8

Cut Loose the Lifeboat

When the Roman soldiers were transporting Paul aboard a ship to Rome for trial and the storm struck for two weeks and the ship was run aground, some of the soldiers were going to jump aboard the lifeboat and abandon the ship. But the Lord had shown Paul that all 276 people onboard would survive **if** they stuck together.

"Unless these men stay on the ship you cannot be saved," Paul told the centurion in charge. Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off." — Acts 27:31-32

That is what God wants us to do: cut the ropes to our lifeboat and trust in Him. What is your lifeboat? It is well worth it to consider, identify, and then act.

Is it finances? You want to hold tight to those that you have, right? After all, they are a safeguard in case some misfortune befalls; and besides you do not want to go hungry.

Is it your job? You certainly do not want to lose that, right? After all, it provides your professional and personal needs as well as puts food on the table; and besides, remember the old refrain: "Idle hands are the devil's plaything."

No, God says, "Let it go. Cut the rope. Trust in Me."

This is the same message He has been giving His people for thousands of years. Abraham believed God and followed His direction, leaving his home and friends and the land of Ur for an unknown future. The Jews left Egypt for an unknown future in a dangerous desert, with no assurance of what lay ahead. You are not the only one God has told to "cut loose the lifeboat and trust in Me."

Lord, You count every sparrow that falls from the sky, know every hair on my head, love me beyond my own comprehension. I trust in you. Increase my faith! And give me the courage to cut loose from those things of the world that hold me, those things in which I put false trust. Thank You, Father! Amen.

January 13 —

"In six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you."

— Job 5:19

"Surely He will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence."

— Ps 91:3

In the Midst of It All

Isn't it in the middle of winter when the January thaw comes?

Isn't it in the middle of the hurricane that the eye exists?

Although the tree looks lifeless in winter, isn't the sap running? Isn't life ready to burst into buds?

Doesn't Indian Summer come when all indications are that winter is here?

Doesn't God show that He rules no matter what we think are nature's rules?

The grass goes "dormant"; it does not die.

Do you **feel** dormant? Know **He's** alive — alive in you.

Above the clouds is the sun.

Beyond distresses is The Son.

In the Deep, Bitter Night

It's bitter cold outdoors
And the trees are as naked as they'll ever be.
Yet, He is here as before —
Potent and awesome is He.

The clouds are steel-gray from East to West,
No sun in thought or sight.
Yet, I will lift you from the blight
And carry you from darkness to Light.

Yes, it can be bitter, barren and dark;
It can be cold, dreary and full of dread.
But think on My warm and loving heart,
On forgiveness, salvation and deliverance instead.

When all seems lost, think "found."
When all looks defeated, think "victory."
When all appears dead, think "life abounds."
When depression is a weighty force, think on His Story.

For faith is being "sure of what we hope for
And certain of what we do not see."
Faith is not necessarily knowing who **you** are,
But being absolutely sure of Who is **He**.

*Dear Lord, the darkness so often seems to overwhelm me.
When it descends, I want to hide, to withdraw within myself.*

Remind me, Father, of Your great exploits, the greatest of which You accomplished in the midst of the darkest hours. When the dark veil of night sweeps down upon me, lift me up, Lord, life me up. Amen.

January 14 —

God Set the Pattern: To the Jew First

God chose the Jews, actually creating the Hebrew nation from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus told His disciples to go to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. When evangelizing from place to place, Paul always went first to the Jewish synagogue. What about us today?

Taking the Good News "to the Jews first" is no different from what the Lord did.

The Bible tells believers time and again "not to be like the Gentiles."

"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth ... remember that at that time you were separate from Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Messiah." (Eph. 2:11-13) And that is the Jewish Messiah!

Indeed, Luke records in Acts 10 and 11 the astonishment that was felt when Gentiles in the centurion Cornelius's household were saved. At that time the Jewish people thought Messiah had come only for them.

Gentiles wanting to coopt Jesus as theirs exclusively, should read the story of the apostle Peter going to share the Word at Cornelius's house. It was even against Jewish law to associate with a Gentile or visit him. Nevertheless, because of a vision from God, Peter went. And there, he shared.

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles."

Later, when criticized by Jews for his taking the Word to Gentiles, Peter related his vision in which the Lord had said: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

This referred to Gentiles. And this was the beginning of the revelation of the astounding "mystery" of Messiah, the church.

Later, in Eph. 4:17-19, Paul tells believers: "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."

The New Testament — the "new and better covenant" — is that God's people are "called out of both Jew and Gentile who with their heart believe and are justified and with their mouth confess and are saved." — Rom. 10:10

But we should never forget: The roots of our faith are Jewish, and it is to them and their Messiah that we owe the debt of our salvation.

A Common Heritage

Scattered by God's almighty hand,
Afflicted and forlorn,
Sad wanderers from their pleasant Land,
Do Judah's children mourn;
And e'en in Christian countries, few
Breathe thoughts of pity for the Jew.

Yet listen, Gentile, do you love
The Bible's precious page?
Then let your heart with kindness move
To Israel's heritage;
Who traced those lines of love for you?
Each sacred writer was a Jew.

And then as years and ages passed,
And nations rose and fell,
Though clouds and darkness oft were cast
O'er captive Israel
The oracles of God for you
Were kept in safety by the Jew

And when the great Redeemer came
For guilty man to bleed.
He did not take an angel's name,
No, born of Abraham's seed,
Jesus, Who gave His life for you —
the gentle Savior — was a Jew.

And though His own received Him not,
And turned in pride away,
Whence is the Gentile's happier lot?
Are you more just than they?
No! God in pity turned to you —
Have you no pity for the Jew?

Go, then, and bend your knee to pray
For Israel's ancient race;
Ask the dear Savior every day
To save them by His grace.
Go, for a debt of love is due
From Christian Gentiles to the Jew.
— *Author Unknown*

We pray, Lord, for the salvation of Your people — that they be protected from their enemies here on earth and free from them once they leave this earth — that they know peace here temporally as they will know shalom with You eternally — walking in the Spirit. Amen.

January 15 —

"Here am I! Send me." — Isaiah 6:8

The Jewish Journey in a Spiritual Light

When the Jews left Egypt, it was a spiritual as well as physical journey. They left "the world" and set out for God's

land filled with milk and honey." He prepared this land for them just as He is preparing heaven for us.

Look at the parallels between that ancient Jewish journey and the current journey of the believer:

Leaving Egypt = Being saved.

Parted Sea, Manna and Split rock = Miracles in our lives.

The Desert Trials = When we feel abandoned.

Forgetting God's Deliverance = Forgetting His deliverance.

Groaning and Complaining = Groaning and complaining.

Enter Into Canaan If You Believe = Enter God's service if you are faithful.

Ask yourself if this is true: Taking that last step into Canaan land is equivalent to Samuel saying, "Here am I! Send me."

Is God waiting for us to be like Joshua and Caleb, like Isaiah and Samuel, like Jeremiah, who believed in the Lord their God and accepted the challenges He placed before them? — to believe in Him and be prepared to enter into the land He prepared for us?

Dear Lord, our journey is roughly the same — Jew and Gentile. Thank you for deigning to save Gentiles as well as Your chosen people. Help us, Lord, to stand tall in that great salvation, increase our faith in the strength of Your right hand, grant us courage to say, "Yes" when You call us to a task You have prepared before us. Amen.

January 16 —

"... I never knew you ..."

Taking His Name in Vain

For people of the Jewish faith, taking a person's name in vain is a substantial wrongdoing. But what does that mean, exactly?

In a TV interview the body guard of Dodi Fayed, Princess Diana's boyfriend who died with her in the car crash, said something that clarified this phrase for me. He said Fayed took his father's name in vain by speaking by his father's authority when he did not have that authority or when he lied about his father's orders.

Taking the Lord's Name in vain, then, would not necessarily be when a person swears but when he says, "The Lord says this and so" when He does not, or when a person has no authority from God but says he does.

Joshua 4:10 relates that "the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan River until everything was finished that the Lord had commanded Joshua to speak to the people..."

If God had not ordered this action, it would have been done **in vain**. Same with using His name to accomplish other things He did **not** order.

Acts 4:12 declares, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

If you are not saved, you can not use His Name, period. So, first, you must be saved. Second, you can use His Name **if** He told you to do so.

We so casually toss out "in Jesus' Name," or "in Jesus's Name" in our prayers as if we naturally have the authority. Maybe we do; maybe we don't.

We can not pray "in Jesus's Name" unless we are cleansed. To have that authority, we must repent, be washed and be in His fellowship.

Remember — and contemplate — the fate of the sons of Skiba, who went out to cast out demons and received a beating from a demon because they were not walking in the authority of Jesus.

Lord, I do not want to be like the sons of Skiba. I want that close walk, knowing I can not get closer to You, nor You to me. I need that closeness to be able to pray effectively, to be able to affect a world that is so dark and lost. Help me, O Lord, help me! Amen.

January 17 —

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

— Heb. 10:26

Live the Lifestyle

Continue in Him, or continue in sin.

It's your choice to make.

Be blessed if you do,

Cursed if you don't

But if you don't, it's a deadly mistake.

King David prayed in Psalm 86:11: "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth."

God wants us to be "a vessel of honor, not of dishonor."

To do this, we must control our thoughts and our five senses. The importance of this is accentuated when you compare Ephesians 3:8 and Matthew 15:11:

Eph. 3:8

versus

Matt. 15:11

Preach the good news.

Not what goes into the mouth

the mouth.

defiles man but what comes

out of

Think on things that are lovely, Keep your mind from unclean
pure and good report. thoughts.

Hear the voice of the Good
Shepherd...

... not the voice of the
stranger.

Eat not defiled things

Lay hands on people
to heal them...

... not to harm them.

Rev. 18:15-17 tells of the final destruction of a city whose senses leaned toward the world's and not God's: "The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold,

precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" "

Dear Lord, the destruction of this great city in Revelation is due to a lifestyle — choices made, moment by moment, for a lifetime. Do not let that happen to me, Lord. Strengthen me in my resolve, in my faith. Give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to be molded by Your hand. Amen.

January 18 —

"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate."

— Prov. 8:13

Love Whom, Not What

Loving the person does not mean loving what they do. Likewise, hating what a person does, does not mean hating them. You must separate the person from his actions — then you can love **whom** you should love and hate **what** you should hate.

For the unsaved know not what they do. How often do people outside the faith listen to Christians or orthodox Jews and think they are nasty or full of hatred because of the way they speak out against abortion or homosexuality? Often, we tend to appear bitter and hateful; we spit out our words with venom. But, think, what can we expect from a person — even a president — who is an unabashed sinner? How can we expect them to act saved if they are not saved? It is like asking this little poplar tree before me to turn into a majestic elm, or

that nuthatch that is flitting about the bushes to soar into the heavens like an eagle. It can't be done.

Only by God can a sinner "change his stripes."

Mark 5:8 tells of Jesus approaching the demon-possessed man in the Gerasenes and commanding, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" "

Unclean spirits are everywhere, maneuvering men and women to break every commandment God laid down to Moses. Those men and women need to be set free, not demeaned. And that starts with love, even the love Jesus displayed when, on the cross, He asked of God, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Lord, help me to love and not hate, to pray for deliverance and not condemn those under oppression, to display Your attitude toward all men rather than my fleshly desire to "string up the naysayers." Thank you, Jesus, for being my example in this. Amen.

January 19 —

"You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions."

— Hebrews 10:34

Heritage

I really didn't have a grasp about what heritage meant until God showed me this:

Your heritage changes when you get saved.

You had a heritage of death, destruction and eternal damnation.

You had a heritage of bitterness, hate, unforgiveness, anxiety, impatience, unkindness, uncontrol, abrasiveness, envy, sadness and lust.

Once saved, your heritage is love, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, peace, self-control, patience and joy.

You inherit those traits when you are adopted into God's family. His inheritance is the fruits of the Spirit.

The fruits of the Spirit are equivalent spiritually to "the cattle on a thousand hills" that God owns physically.

You are rich in what matters. Share those riches just as you share your material riches.

Luke 3: 23-37 tells us that Jesus had an earthly heritage. But He never once mentioned Joseph (His earthly father). He knew His Father was Adonai, and His **heritage** was from God, His Father in Heaven.

Webster's Dictionary says heritage means "something that comes or belongs to a person by reason of birth; an inherited portion; something reserved for one: 'the heritage of the righteous.' Law: Any property, especially land, that devolves by right of inheritance."

Our "birth" that truly counts is our re-birth when we are "born again." That heritage is our "inherited portion" from God. And what does He own? All!

Our *nature* was changed from sinful to saintliness when we were born again.

As I Peter 1:23 says, "For you have been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living and enduring word of God."

If a person is not born again, they are corruptible. And they can't help that — yet.

Dear Lord, I pray for the salvation of those outside Your family. Deliver them, Father, from what binds them in sin. Open their eyes to that sin and set them free. And may You get the honor and glory in their new lives, Lord. Amen.

January 20 —

"You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me."

— Jonah 2:3

"... If you do not listen to Me and follow My law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth."

— Jer. 26:4-6

Get Intimate with God, Then Obey

God knows what is going on — past, present and future — in our lives, in intimate detail ... and yet, we have trouble "getting intimate" with Him?

He **is** involved with us, and yet we're too busy to get involved with Him?

We respond too matter-of-factly to the Scripture that He counts every hair on our head, as if we **deserve** the attention, as if we **earned** His sacrifice, as if our salvation would simply be justice. No, No and No!

Jonah serves us as an excellent example that getting intimate with God is not the end of the matter. After the intimacy, then you must obey. Otherwise, beware the consequences of Jonah, who was thrown overboard into the ocean (Jonah 2:3) and those of the Jews, who faced a curse from God for disobedience (Jer. 26:4-6).

God illustrated this to me, in terms that I could understand: a baseball coach and his players — God as the baseball coach and me as a player. He tells me to bunt or hit-and-run, or take the pitch, or steal the base. If I don't obey, it messes up His game plan. We may not lose, but it is not being played His way. I would not intentionally disregard my coach's signs in a baseball game. And life is so much more important than a ball game!

Forgive me, Lord, for the wrongs I have done You — not just the sins but the times I have not followed Your directions.

January 21 —

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

— Eph. 2:10

Let Him Write You

Workmanship here is the Greek word "poema," which translates "great epic poem."

Just imagine: We are God's great epic poem. He is taking the time to "write" us, so to speak, into something truly wonderful, a poem of beauty that can inspire and encourage those who "read" us.

Paul called believers "living epistles." How true — as long as we let the Lord "write" us! If so, we will be a reflection of Him and His character and integrity.

There are poems of tragedy and those of victory, poems of great distress and those of abounding joy, and there are poems that run the gamut, just as so many psalms that begin with anguish and turmoil but end with the expression of God's almighty deliverance.

God wants you to be a poem of honor. To do so, He needs a willing papyrus. Are you one?

Let Him write a chapter with you today. You are neither the writer nor the ink, but the poem. He is the Author and the Holy Spirit is the ink.

His Novel

In "self's" novel, you'd make Him the preface or prologue.

In "His" book, He's the entire plot, beginning to end.

In "self's" novel, there's no end to war.

In "His," you just stand — He defends.

In "self's" work, there's hell to pay.

In "His," at His right hand you will stay.

In "self's" book — short-term thrills, long-time destruction.

In "His," health, love, joy, perfection.

Dear God, I want to be a great epic poem, not a trashy novel; a work of Your hand, not of my own; a person others can read and see the love and compassion of God rather than the envy and sin of men. Write in me a masterpiece, Lord! Amen.

January 22 —

"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle?"

— Job 38:22

"But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all."

— Luke 17:29

When Trouble Comes from God

Once-mighty trees lay flat on the ground today. Ice has formed thick upon branches, overcoming them and crashing them to the ground. The tops of trees everywhere have snapped off. Power lines are down; electricity is off and promises to remain off for two weeks or more. Oh, what mighty power the Lord displays!

When tribulation begins and people die en masse, look for this to happen (just as it did after the great ice storm of 1999 with piles of dead trees everywhere): People will say, "Oh, what a disaster! But we will pull together, show everyone the overcoming character of man, love and help our neighbors," and they will cart off the dead and continue with life.

Most will not seriously consider judgment or God's wrath. Most will never link destruction of any sort — earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, or a person's death — as a hammer of justice laid down by the hand of God. But perhaps we should. Perhaps many of these events are meant to lead us to look anew at our own lives and at the direction our society is taking.

Father, I look inward today, inward to inspect my own heart to see what truly lies there. Please refrain from harsh judgment, Father, and cleanse me, giving me a new start. Amen.

January 23 —

"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

— Eccl. 12:14

Naked, to God's Eye

When you walk our road in the summertime, the trees are "fully dressed" in their fine greenery, and human eye can not see beyond perhaps 100 feet into the forest. But now, in the middle of winter, all but the evergreens are "naked" and a person can see deep into the woods.

This is symbolic of each one of us. Most seasons in our lives we put on airs, we cover up our inner selves, and no human eye can see to the depths of our being. Yet God can always see everything. He can see through our "foliage" just as if it were the middle of winter. Nothing we can adorn can

fool Him. And notice how often He makes us walk through a winter season for our souls — a season that exposes our innermost weaknesses, that leaves us open to wintry blasts from the enemy. This is ultimately for our good.

Yes, our Creator can always see beyond the coverings of this world, and ourselves. And since He knows what is in your heart, why not just willingly lay it out before Him and ask for healing, for wholeness, for whatever is needed to make you whole?

Dear Lord, I so often hide my heart from others and I guess I think I am also hiding it from You. But I know that cannot be. Please look deep within me, Father, and do a work to complete me, to perfect me for Your use. Amen.

January 24 —

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." — Ps. 90:2

Be Prepared for Short Days

In the dead of winter when the days are short, the hustle-bustle of life is condensed — squeezed into fewer hours. There is less light, so we get less melatonin. Because darkness falls early we have to complete the same number of jobs or chores in a shorter period of time. It can cause you to lose your peace, to be anxious, "short" with people.

God's answer: Don't give in to the pressures of time. Don't be anxious for anything. Don't let Satan steal your joy.

First of all, perhaps, is to be prepared and know that this phenomena is going to happen — like clockwork — as winter approaches each year. Be wise, therefore, and prepare yourself for it. Gird yourself up in your innermost parts. Remember, love your neighbor as yourself.

Father, You know I love the long days, those when the sun does not go down until 10 o'clock in the evening. These short days try to depress me. And the time, oh, it seems so short each and every day. Help me, Father, to not be anxious for anything, to know that with You time is irrelevant, and to rest in Your shalom. Amen.

January 25 —

"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.' " — Matt. 3:17

We should have the same characteristics toward others as God does toward us. If we possess, and act on, the qualities of Jesus, God will be well pleased with us as well. Is it easy? No. Is it possible? Yes. And though it may be nearly impossible, it is something after which we should strive.

To Be Well Pleasing

Oh Lord, I want to live
so that You will be
"well-pleased" with me
as with Him Who set me free.

Lord, You saved me from my iniquity.
I will always praise and honor thee.
Your righteousness is what I seek.
Your commands I will always keep.

Your joy lifts up and sustains me
(My joy should lift you up.)
Your patience makes me thankful.
(My patience would make You thankful.)
Your grace shines upon Your sheep.
(My grace should shine on others.)
Your love fills my prayers full.

Comfort me, O Spirit.
Counsel me, O Jesus.
Sustain me, O God,
So I can live my life like You.

You are the one and only truth.
You never leave nor forsake me.
You give me the strength of my youth.
It is to You alone I cleave.

Dear God, I fail in so many ways and then make excuses for myself. So often I lament my actions, yet return to them as soon as the opportunity arises. Then I look back and examine myself and see that I have not improved one stitch. Yet I can. With Your help and my determination, I can. Help me to do that, Lord. Thank You! Amen.

January 26 —

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." — I Cor. 13:1

The Greatest Love

Is not the greatest love of all the love of God for us? As it says in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life."

Likewise, our first and greatest commandment is: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, body, soul and mind.

With this in mind, it can be life-changing to read the entire chapter I Corinthians 13 and change "love" to "love for God" throughout.

So read the rest of that famous chapter with me in this way:

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love for God, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love for God, I gain nothing.

"Love for God is patient, love for God is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love for God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

"Love for God never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love for God. But the greatest of these is love for God."

The next sentence? "Pursue love for God."

Lord, what a great and glorious honor it is to have You as my Savior. How fortunate I am for my salvation. I love You for You first loved me, and to a far greater degree than I can ever possess. But I do love You, and will devote myself to increase that love more and more day by day. All the other gifts are wonderful, but that love for You is the finest of them all. Thank You! Amen.

January 27 —

"Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the day time, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual

*immorality, debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.
Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do
not think about gratifying the desires of the sinful nature."*
— Romans 13:10-14

Purge It!

Just as the Lord told the Jews to purge the enemy from their camp, so are we to purge sins from within us. They might look good, they might feel good, they might even deceive us into thinking they are good for us, but sins are an abomination to God. So they should be abominable to us.

And since we are to be "temples of the Holy Spirit," what business have we with sin in our temples? The answer is scary. The Holy Spirit can not co-habitate with sin. That marriage will not work. So He can not abide within us when we are living in a sin that we will not let go of. If that be the case it is time to:

Kick Sin Out

Whatever your darkness is, come out, come out.
Turn your life of sin inside out.
And flood yourself with Word round about,
So when you get to Heaven's gate, they'll let you in, not kick
you out.

*Dear Lord, by Your strength I can purge the sin from
within. Give me an abundance of that strength, that power,
and that will, O Lord. Wash me in the precious blood of Your*

Son, cleanse my from my iniquity, and make me as white as snow from Heaven. Amen.

January 28 —

"Love the Lord God with all your heart, soul and strength. That is the one great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

— Jesus HaMashiach (Jesus Christ)

Simple Faith

You want simple faith?

- Love God.
- Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Believe on Him Whom God has sent.

It is that simple. Not a complex matter at all — even if we and preachers and others try to complicate the matter. I have heard sermon upon sermon that went on and on — 45 minutes and hour and a half and longer. Sermon after sermon that could have been reduced to a simple paragraph. How many people have we driven away from the faith by making it sound complex?

The Essential

The rest is peripheral. This is central and essential:
Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.
Don't worry about those sins that you have left behind.
Push forward in your walk, loving all you meet.
This is holy aroma that the Lord calls sweet.

Love your wife and your neighbor and your sister and yourself.

Put God in your life and not on a shelf.

Hallelujah, Lord! You are glorious and glorious to behold. And You have simplified faith to a point I can understand it. Thank You for that simplicity and for the ability to share it easily and understandably. Amen.

January 29 —

"How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings..." — Matt. 23:37b

Though the Storm Rage

A blizzard, marked by howling winds and heavy snow that cause whiteouts, screams through the forest and across the front yard which is spotted with beach, birch, pine and fir trees. The squirrels and birds, beating the storm, have already scurried around for an extra cache of food to see them through this menace. Notice how the trees bear the brunt in their own peculiar ways. The flexible birch bend freely with the wind. The sturdy beach just shuns the snow from its branches. The needle-laden pine, with snow mounting heavy upon it, seems like Atlas holding the world on his shoulders.

And, for man? Well, if you have God then you have His own unique storm-bearing abilities, don't you?

Second Day of the Storm

Though the storm rage all about me,

Though wind howls and snow blusters and blows,
I sit here, dry, warm and secure in Thee,
Comfortable, at home — Your protection I know.

Though the drifts grow high and higher,
Though there seems no end in sight,
I read Your Word and feel the fire
Of Your incredible love and might.

Though whitest day turn to darkest dark,
Though Satan pushes fear in my face,
None of this worries me — not **this** Mark —
Because I'm fearlessly secure in Your grace.

Thank you, Father, for being my shelter, my high tower, my protector. Whether under clear skies or in the midst of a threatening storm, I know you are around and about me, buffering me from it all. Amen.

January 30 —

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."

— I Cor. 1:17

The Trees for the Forest

Sometimes you don't see the tree for the forest. I walked on and worked in our front yard daily for years and have not

noticed this one particular pine tree next to the house stands tall above all the others. How could I not notice?

If you just look at the whole, you can miss the important parts. It's similar to the old saw: "You don't see the forest for the trees."

In the case of God? The most important part is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

He came down as a man and died as a perfect sacrifice for our sins so that we might have eternal life. And it is the one single, all-important thing we should not lose sight of. It is the one tree in the forest that stands high above the others — the one event in the history of God's people that stands as the chief cornerstone of our faith.

Look at everything that happens in the Bible in light of the cross — pointing to the cross, either as the prophets foretold it in reverence or as we look back at it in awe and thanksgiving.

Similarly, look at the Before Christ (BC) and After Christ (AC) in your own life.

Col. 2:10 says, "... And you have been given fullness in Christ, Who is the head over every power and authority."

How did He do that? By going to the cross. That is where He destroyed Satan's work. He achieved His ultimate goal as the perfect man by dying on the cross. For the rest of us, the entire Bible points to that sacrifice. From the cross, death for one man brought eternal life for all men.

And what of us? We achieve the ultimate plan He has for us by "dying" ourselves. Putting aside our wants and dreams for

ourselves and taking on His wants and dreams for us. By putting Him first in our lives like He put us first in His life.

How often we must die to ourselves for a seed to be born in someone else. When you do this, your life for Messiah becomes like that tree in the lawn: the one that stands out.

Dear Lord, so often I look at the entire forest and don't see the one tree that matters most, and I lose sight of Your greatest gift. Help me, Father, to notice those aspects of Your Word and character and plan for mankind that stand tall above the rest. Amen.

January 31 —

"... but whoever does not believe, stands condemned already..."

— John 3:18

"Because of the Lord's great love we are consumed; for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." — Lamentations 3:22

'Unexpected' Can Mean 'Unready'

We experienced a ferocious wind storm recently, and in the middle of the winter like this you can see some distance in the woods. I noticed how many trees had been uprooted, how many branches broken and I thought how very sudden this had happened. One moment these trees were upright, alive. The next, they lay as kindle wood.

Is that not like our lives? Death can come so unexpectedly, catching us unaware. Are we ready? Perhaps. Are those who

do not know the Lord ready? No! Then how much the need to pray for their salvation before it is too late.

Since time is no obstacle to God, I believe (but have not scriptural basis for it) that in the moment when life leaves a person God can reveal Himself to them and lead them to salvation. I pray that is so, because otherwise I know a lot of people who are in a very hot, tormenting place at this very moment.

Too Late?

When they died
Did they have their eye on You?
Did they put You first and last,
Or hide from Your eyes?

Where was their destination
When life left their soul?
To the side of the God of creation,
Or was Sheoul their goal?

Did they believe in the one true God,
His Holy Spirit and Son?
Or had they bought into Satan's fraud,
Putting their heads to an eternal gun?

I pray, O God, for my ancestors past,
Waiting for the final judgment day.
Please, O God, extend Your compassion,
Pull them from the pit, I pray.

Thank You, Lord, for hearing this prayer, this heart's lament. We know that it is true: You are a God of love and forgiveness. Amen.

February 1 —

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. 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."

— Malachi 3:10

All-Sufficient, More than Enough

El Shaddai means God Who is all-sufficient, more than enough.

Moses had an army. So did Joshua. But God went ahead of both of them and brought victory. They were not sufficient in themselves. But El Shaddai was more than enough.

El Shaddai sent the consuming fire for Elijah when he confronted the 100 priests in a test of power, and the fire proved to be more than enough. El Shaddai provided the food for Jesus to feed the 4,000; and there was more than enough. He provided for the 5,000; and there was more than enough.

Phil. 4:19 says, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches and glory in Messiah Jesus."

The Lord wrote through Solomon in Prov. 10:22: "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and He adds no trouble to it."

And He used David to pen in Psalm 65:9: "You care for the land and water it; You enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so You have ordained it."

God illustrates throughout the Old Testament that He provides abundantly, even in the middle of the desert. Then, in the New Testament He reminds us by mentioning how He even provides for the birds of the air:

- "Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." — Luke 12:7

- "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" — Matt. 6:26

The bottom line is not one, but twofold. First, do not be afraid because El Shaddai will provide all our needs — and more.

Second, we will receive a greater blessing if we follow God's example and give more than enough. As Luke tells us in Luke 6:38: "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

El Shaddai, thank You for all Your provision. I know that in Your plan for me You provide more than enough. Forgive me, Lord, when I falter and fear that my needs will overcome me. Strengthen my faith that I will not doubt You. Amen.

February 2 —

"Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil."

— Proverbs 4:25-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize."

— I Cor. 9:24

Keep Your Focus

Clearing wind-downed branches that were blocking the old tote road in our woods, I stumbled over a tree root, fell to the ground, had one of the branches I was carrying bop me on the head and scratch my glasses. It could have been a scene out of the Keystone Cops or Laurel and Hardy, except that I was a one-man show. Only the squirrels were there to laugh at my bumbling.

Later (because I wasn't thinking too clearly at the time) it occurred to me that the whole accident happened simply because I was not watching where my feet were treading; I was distracted by the load of wood in my arms and my destination. The result was not pretty.

Distractions. Spiritually they can be even more harmful. They interfere with the important, keep us from concentrating on God, tie us to the world in which we are to be only sojourners, detour us from our calling, put us on a course to be earthly minded rather than heavenly minded...

Distractions. Esau was distracted. Jacob was not. It sure pays to keep your focus. King David was distracted in various ways — Bathsheeba being the most famous — and each time it led to a devastating event.

Do not be turned aside to the left or the right by the whims of the flesh or the fortunes of the world. If you stumble along the way, check first to see if your focus is on the Lord and His Word and the exact plan He has for you to perform.

Oh, God, I am distracted so easily it seems. My attention diverts this way and that. I want to return to certain recreations that lead me away from You, or at least not toward You. Help me to put on the mind of Messiah, that I might be strong-minded enough to retain my concentration on heavenly things.

February 3 —

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." — John 10:10

Beware the Temptor

Like God, Satan's larger concern is spiritual, not physical. So while he comes to steal your goods, he comes to rob you of your joy — and perhaps even your salvation; he comes to kill your body but also kill your spirit within; and he comes to destroy your life, your relationships, all that you hold dear, but also to destroy your faith, hope and love.

So guard your heart and mind.

Think only on things of good report — lovely and pure.
Let not your heart be troubled.
Be anxious for nothing.
Put on the mind of Christ.
Seek God first and His Kingdom.
Speak to the "mountains" in your life, that they may be removed.
Determine, each moment, to walk in the fruits of the Spirit.
Love not your things.
Do not be overcome evil with evil but overcome evil with good.
Have no idols.
Stand firm in your faith.
Know the Word and use It.
Know that the battle is the Lord's. ("Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord.)
Praise, worship and love God.
Ask Him to forgive your sins, to sanctify and justify you.

Father God, I pray that You would protect me and my family, that You would place Your angels around and about us, that You would be our High Tower, and that You would keep us from any harm Satan might bring against us. Thank You, Lord, for the power and might and protection of Your Word, and for increasing my faith to use it effectively. Amen.

February 4 —

"So Joshua said to the children of Israel, 'Come here and hear the words of the Lord your God.' " — Joshua 3:9

Listen, Then Do

God told His priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant to step into the Jordan, which is in flood stages that time of the year. A scary proposition. But they heeded His direction, and the moment they stepped into the water He stopped up the river so that all the Jews could cross over to the other side.

The Lord also promised to drive out their enemies before them: "As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I Myself will drive them out before the Israelites." (Joshua 13:6a) This, God also did.

When you arrive at a point in your life when you hear Him say, "Take that step into the Jordan. Do it in faith in Me," do so, knowing that He will deliver you to the other side, then drive out the enemies before you.

In Colossians 2:13a-15, Paul tells believers: "He [Messiah] forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

The statement asks a response from believers today, facing "territory" that is spiritual rather than physical. Take the step and claim that God will drive out before you the region of legalism, the land of lust, the realm of the law, etc., etc., whatever the enemy is using as a plague against you.

Thank You, God my Deliverer, for going before me as a Breaker, for being my Front and Rear Guard, for driving out my enemy before me. To You alone do I owe any victory in my life. Please impart to me the trust and determination to take that step into the Jordan, knowing that roiling waters can not overcome me when You are there before me. Amen.

February 5 —

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made."

— John 1:1-3

The Trinity

In one day we experienced water in three forms: It rained, that rain turned to snow, and as it warmed up again, banks of fog rolled in. Snow, rain and fog are all the same element. Then can you not comprehend water?

Man is body, soul and spirit. Then can not you comprehend man? The Godhead is God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh). Then can you not comprehend the Trinity?

It is a simple question to ask those who do not believe in the Trinity. Otherwise, there is plenty of scriptural evidence:

- "Who has seen Me has seen the father." — John 14:9
- "The Father is in me and I am in the Father." — John 14:10

- "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." — II Cor. 13:14

- "I and my Father are one." — John 10:30

- "And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'

"And of the angels He says: 'Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.'

"But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'" — Heb. 1:6-8

In Is. 42:8 God said, "I am the Lord and I will not give My glory to another." Well, He gives it to Jesus, so Jesus must be God.

- Matt. 28:19 — "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

He does not say in the "Name of the Father and Holy Spirit" or in the "Name of the Holy Spirit and Son," but rather all three. So the Father is **not** linked to Holy Spirit and separated from Jesus.

- "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." — John 14:26

If the Father is, together, the Holy Spirit, why would He send Him in Jesus' Name?

- "The grace of the Lord Jesus HaMashiach, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." — II Cor. 13:14

- To the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus HaMashiach." — I Peter 1:2
- "If you have seen Me, you have seen God. I and the Father are one."
- "Before the earth was, I am."
- Then, there is the "Us" factor. Who could "Us" be?
√ "Come, let Us go down and confound their language..." — Gen. 11:17
- √ "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air...' " — Gen. 1:26

Thank You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for all You have done and continue to do on this earth and in Your heaven — for salvation, deliverance and sanctification. Amen.

February 6 —

"Cleanse me with hissop' and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." — Psalm 51:7

What a Covering!

What a beautiful layer of snow covers the woods this morning. Snowfall always reminds me of God's love for us His children, His great sacrifice to wash us of our sins and make us "white as snow."

White as Snow

As the snow falls and covers all earth's flaws,

So You did for us when You went to the cross.
White and clean from hill to glen;
Our sins are covered, as if we had never committed them.

And as the earth did nothing to merit this covering
So, too, we deserved nothing but to die for our sin.
Thank You, Lord, for Your suffering
And the promise to us that it brings.

You made our sins as white as snow.
Your divine love this act truly shows.

*Lord, we live by Your grace, we die by Your grace, we
inhabit eternity with You by Your grace. Thank You for the
washing and cleansing, for the feeling of purity that can only
come through You. Amen.*

February 7 —

*"For where two or three come together in My name, there
am I with them." — Matt. 18:20*

*"I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my
right hand, I will not be shaken." — Ps. 16:8*

Our First Love

"My dear beloved..."

For most of us this is a term reserved for our husband, wife
or fiancée. But whom are we instructed to love first? "Love
the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5)

So it's appropriate to speak of our Lord in endearing terms; to speak to Him intimately, knowing He loves us beyond understanding; and to even write love songs to Him.

It has always been crucial to men's and women's spiritual lives to cling near to God, express our love for Him and hear His affection for us. But even more so if, indeed, these are the End Times.

Are you sold out, or a holdout? Surrender totally to Him — as you would your husband or wife — before you can expect to get an answer in prayer.

Notion of Devotion

Do you have a funny notion
Of the extent of your devotion
to the Lord?

Do you set aside the time
And take opportunity to climb
into His arms?

Is your love unconditional?
If not, is it functional,
or set off alarms?

Is the Bible just another book
Into whose pages you seldom look
except on Sunday?

Are His kingdom and His righteousness

Things you seek so you can get blessed,
or to obey?

Is me-me-me your favorite word,
Or is they-they-they ever heard
from your lips?

When the joke's on someone else
Do you comfort them, or laugh along —
just for kicks?

In His laws are you deeply set?
Do you give in order to get,
or to receive?

When a "bad guy" known for lies,
and, bound for hell, dies
do you grieve?

Do you often say, "I need to pray"
And get down on your knees *that* day
instead of tomorrow?

When you witness to an unsaved neighbor
And he turns his back, do you show anger,
or weep in sorrow?

I think you should beware —
If indeed you really care —

Not to center on yourself
But rather the needy "other,"
Putting your needs on the shelf
And lifting up your brother...
Caring to feed the widow and orphan,
To share salvation with another...
Telling old and young of God's plan
'Cause God doesn't care what you'd *rather*...
He wants your utter devotion.
That is not a difficult notion
for you to understand.

February 8 —

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Messiah, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God..."

— Heb. 6:1

Stick to It!

We walked down a woods path today and spotted something unusual: two trees (a very tall pine tree and a midsized poplar) side by side uprooted and blown down. Here was a pine tree that was perhaps 50 years old or older, but its roots were very shallow. Next to it a younger tree with similar shallow roots.

It served as a spiritual reminder: Your roots being in the ground does not mean strength. They must go deep to withstand the storms that may come.

How's your aching shoulder?

How's your thickening waist?

Like our body, our faith gets out of shape if we neglect it.

Absorbing the Word should be a lifelong lifestyle ... part of us integral to keeping us "in shape" spiritually.

Neglect workouts for your body and muscle turns to flab.

Neglect "workouts" for your Spirit and what happens?

Backsliding. Lack of faith. **Sin.**

Keep flying up or you are apt to dive down. A continuous upward spiral leads you to heaven's Gate.

Know where a downward spiral ends?

God works out His perfection in us daily. It is a continual process until we meet Him in the air.

It all starts with being "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3:17) so that you "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Messiah which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:18-19)

Do not be like the tree which can grow tall and old but whose roots are so shallow that any time a wind or storm can flash by it and take it down. Set your roots deep... in the Word, in your faith, in your life and lifestyle (over the long haul).

Take a lesson — and decide the right path (Jacob's, not Esau's) — from Obadiah verses 16-18: " 'Just as you drank on My holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been. But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance.

'The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on

fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau.' The Lord has spoken."

Father God, I pray You continue working out Your perfection in me until the day I come home to be with You! Amen.

February 9 —

"He who guards his mouth preserves his life. But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction." — Psalm 13:3

Mum's the Word

The thought for the day: Watch your mouth.

The squeaking field mouse, the chirping bird put their lives at risk in the wild. Circling in the air could be a hawk, or hunting on the ground could be a cat.

It amazes me to watch the hawks circle the field across from our home. At first, they are high up and flying in wide circles, eyeing the field far below for prey. Then their flight becomes lower, their circles tighter and — phewm! — they dive to the earth below to snatch their quarry.

Satan is to mankind as those hawks are to field mice. He is "a roaring lion looking for whom he might devour." And one way we put ourselves at risk is making a spectacle of ourselves by our mouths.

The Jews grumbled as they fled Egypt. The result? An entire generation was denied access to the Promised Land.

Paul warned against gossip for it is poison to the soul and tears apart the brethren. "And not only do they become idlers,

but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to." (I Tim. 5:13b)

The old saying of the submariner, "Loose lips sink ships," is just as true of the believer. We can truly be sunk by our lips, as Jesus warned: "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored upon him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken, For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matt. 12: 34b-37)

Lord, I am not always good at watching my tongue, at guarding what comes from my mouth. Jesus said that salt water and clear do not emanate from the same mouth. Let all my speech be encouraging, full of love and compassionate. Amen.

February 10 —

You want to be "good ground." — Matt. 13

Man, Not the Word, Was Planted

Why is this maple tree so tall and sturdy and the one beside it, planted in the same earth, shorter and more spindly? The soil, the rainfall, the sun and shade are exactly the same. Why, Lord why? Perhaps it depends in large degree on the tree itself, the substance of that little nut from which it sprang.

In Jesus' parable about the sower, what was being planted? The Word, you say, and the Word, everyone preaches when discussing this scripture. Wrong.

Jesus was talking about planting people, **not** the Word!

Listen to His own explanation to His disciples in Matthew 13:18-21: "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. What was sown on rocky places is **the man** who hears the Word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he quickly falls away. What was sown among the thorns is **the man** who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But what was sown on good soil is **the man** who hears the Word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

The Lord plants us. Our roots determine whether we survive. We must hear the Word and accept it, not letting the worries and desires of this life choke it out. Drink in the Word, eat its nourishment for your soul and spirit, push your roots ever deeper into the soil, grow and prosper. Do all that and we can produce a crop that will be pleasing to the Lord.

Thank You, God, for choosing me to plant, and then taking the time and care to water and feed me. I deserve none of this attention but am ever thankful for it. I pray, Lord, that you will

reap a plentiful harvest from me before I come home to be with You. Amen.

February 11 —

"Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.'"

— Matt. 15:32

Clothed in Him

Bundle up well, in the clothes the Lord provides, and you can withstand the cold. Clothed in His Word, wrapped in His Son, the bitter cannot prevail.

You hear tales of people stranded or lost out in the bitter winter, praying for food and shelter. My greatest fear would be to be lost in the frigid woods without God. Which, dear friend, is worse: physical death, or the spiritual death that accompanies it for people without the Lord in their lives?

Food and Strength

Your Word is food unto my spirit.
It gives me sustenance for eternity.
It builds my faith when Satan would crush it.
It turns defeat into victory.

Your Word gives me strength when I need it.
When bitterness is at my door, it brings joy.

It is food and drink, morning, noon and night.
It sends my family to victory, my enemy to flight.

Dear Lord, the longer I stay in Your company even without food, the greater the blessing will be in the end. Father, deliver Your food to my mouth that I shall not faint, Your drink that I shall be strong in the faith. Amen.

February 12 —

"Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar." — Prov. 30:6

Mice Beginnings

I removed a family of mice from our home one time and relocated them in a stone wall across the street nestled against the woods. Today I was walking by that spot and wondered how that family was doing, building a fantasy in my mind of them hunkered down under two feet of snow. It was all my conjecture, a daydream not founded on facts.

Beware expanding on the Word rather than expounding on it.

For instance, the widow's mite: saying she gave her last bit of money and in the same way we should give our last bit of life. Sounds good, but may not be true. Jesus never said **that**. Besides, He might have other plans for us.

So, expound — do **not** expand... unless Scripture corroborates you.

Do not add to nor subtract from the Word of God.

Do Not Add or Subtract

I won't take the shine from Your sword.
I won't add or subtract from Your Word.
I'll believe no gospel but Messiah's,
For You alone fill my spirit's desires.
You alone fill my spirit's desires.

Check me, Father, if I ever put in, or take out from Your Word or in any way obfuscate it. Thank You for correction! Amen.

February 13 —

"He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.' "

— Luke 16:15

All with a Kiss

You can laugh in a kiss.
You can cry in a kiss.
Your heart can rejoice or revile in a kiss.
The Lord God knows your heart.

He loves us when we're good — with a laugh.
He loves us when we're bad — with a tear.
He hates the sin but loves His creation.
The Lord God does this to all He is near.

You can laugh in a kiss.

You can cry in a kiss.
Your heart can rejoice or revile in a kiss.
The Lord God knows your heart.

He shares your joy when you're laughing.
He sheds a tear, too, when you cry.
He lives in you if you love Him.
If you don't, He's still nearby.

You can laugh in a kiss.
You can cry in a kiss.
Your heart can rejoice or revile in a kiss.
The Lord God knows your heart.

He's the One you can trust with your feelings.
You can't hide them with a kiss.
Make His way yours in all dealings
And for eternity you will be His.

Father, I know I can not hide my true feelings from You. In fact, I truly don't want to do so. Remind me to come to You with all my cares, fears — and sins — and be washed by Your love and Your Word. Amen.

February 14 —

"Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies."
— Eph. 5:28

"However, let each man of you [without exception] love his wife as [being in a sense] his very own self; and let the wife

see that she respects and reverences her husband [that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates, and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly]."

— Eph. 5:33 Amplified

Valentine's Day For Husbands

So, you've tried to show her that you love her — with flowers, chocolates, affection, compliments... But you see no progress?

Heart Service, not Lip Service is required.

Here's a note from someone who has done it wrong so often that I should be the poster boy for the "other side." (But I am learning):

Love your wife as yourself. Abide in that love constantly. Let affection — and the tone of it — not depart from your lips. Hold her in highest esteem — that is, respect her feelings and her attitude about things.

Comfort her always.

Show her your grace — that is, daily make it real to her.

Help her in her work — especially those chores that are "wearing" and need redoing every few days.

Be truthful. Don't withhold your feelings.

Be attentive.

And, ladies, this can all pertain to you as well!

We-We, Not Me-Me

You must be "we"-centered, not "me"-centered in your marriage today.

Is "we" too high a cost to pay?

Has me-me-me got you walking toward the grave,
Knee-knee-knee deep in trouble for how you behave?

Wisdom says, "You're one flesh, not two —

Whatever one does, the other does, too."

A me-me-me guy is but a fool.

Sooner or later he'll be alone, the devil's tool.

So be we-we-we in your heart and your mind,

And you'll find it's no grind — at any time.

Dear Father, thank you for my spouse. She has become flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone, so remind me every moment we are together to treat her as I would myself. Bless You, God, that "I" am really "we." Amen.

February 15 —

"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord." — Prov. 18:22

A Statement, a Prayer and a Blessing

Statement: When a man marries, he leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife. The two become one flesh. This is no easy thing. Two wills, two opinions, two personalities. It requires putting the other person first, comforting, sharing burdens,

giving in. But if they know the Lord, then they and He become like a three-stranded cord which can not be easily broken.

Prayer: That you would come to know Jesus, to have a personal relationship with Him as your Lord and Savior. All the blessings in God's storehouse flow from this relationship with Him.

Blessing: If you walk in God's statutes and keep His commandments and perform them, He will:

- give you rain in its season;
- fill your threshing floor;
- give you peace and freedom from fear;
- put your enemies to flight;
- make you fruitful and multiply; and
- walk with you and be your God.

May the Lord bless your getting up and your lying down, your going out and coming in, make you the head and not the tail, above and not beneath. May He bless your children and your children's children, providing all your needs according to His riches and glory. And may He help you to walk in love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness and self-control.

February 16 —

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." — I Peter 4:10

Snowshoeing the Drifts

The snow fell all night, all day and all night, dropping a foot to 18 inches, and the blizzard-condition winds piled up drifts

that are three and four feet high in some places. What a beautiful cover! But how deep! Taking my roof rake in hand, I circled the house pulling down the snow, sinking up to my hips in places. Once I got indoors I thought, "Oh, my snowshoes. Agh-h!" I could have made my job so much easier if I had donned my trusty old snowshoes.

It made me consider: we face all sorts of obstacles in our physical and spiritual lives. But God gave us the ingenuity and insight to overcome them. The North American Indians were reportedly the first people to make snowshoes. They saw a problem and solved it, better than anyone's invention until the snowmobile in the 1960s. Yet, the snowshoes, skis, the snowmobile — none of these will do us any good if we do not use them.

The same goes for God's Word and His gifts. No matter what He has endowed us with for gifts, no matter what rich Word He has given us, they will do us no good unless we use them.

Lord, remind me what You have provided, what others have written, what directions and aids lie at my fingertips. Then, with Your wisdom, please stand watch as I use them! Amen.

February 17 —

"But truly I am full of power, by the Spirit of the Lord, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." — Micah 3:8

Renewal and Refreshment Equal Revival

Sometimes when I take my walk with the dogs the sun is just beginning to rise over the horizon. And on rare occasions the sky brightens blood-red like a beautiful sunset. The feeling I get is, let a new day dawn in my life with "a fire shut up in my bones," like Jeremiah. Do you desire that new day, that fire that you may have lost? Do you need your own personal revival?

Pray for consecration and that your **very end desire** be revival.

What is revival but a radical change of heart that starts with conviction of sin in your life and a humble breaking?

Fan the flame of revival — like a billows on a fire! Then, like the Jews did when they traveled the wilderness from place to place, carry the hot coal with the pot to start another fire. Be the scensor or fire pot, carrying the fire of revival from dead heart to dead heart, dead church to dead church.

We all need that **zeal** for what is utmost in our Father's heart: that all men will be saved.

In God there is no slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female, black or white. But all are one race created by God. And God, in His love and grace, gave us the **greatest** gift. How can we **not** have zeal to share it?

We should do as the psalmist did who wrote: "Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your Name I will lift up my hands." (Psalm 63:3-4:)

Lord, thank You for that renewal and refreshment in my own life. And grant me the zeal to share it with others, that revival might take over their hearts as well. Amen.

February 18 —

"From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor... Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked."

— Neh. 4:16-17

Be on Guard

Nehemiah faced his own countrymen who opposed him in his quest to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and others in the territory "plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it."

But God told Nehemiah to set up guards day and night to meet this threat, and then to have his people work with one hand while carrying protection with the other. It is little different today: When we set out to do God's business, enemies rise up against the work. We are to continue our job with safeguarding. And how do we safeguard but with the Word. Use it as a weapon, as a heat-seeking missile strapped to your hip. When Satan tempted Jesus after His 40 days in the desert, Jesus used the Word to thwart the enemy:

- "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

- It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

- "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.' " (Matt. 4:4-10)

Study and memorize the Word, store it up in your heart and spirit and you can go about your work while being armed with the greatest weapon of all time: God's Word.

Dear Lord, help me to remain alert and on my guard for attacks from the enemy, and to take hold of Your Word for protection so that I can fend him off as Jesus did. Amen.

February 19 —

"In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.' " — Is. 25:9

Lord, Come Quickly

Oh, Lord, come quickly
To redeem the world You made.
It's crashing to destruction
Through mortal man's corruption.
Oh, Lord, don't tarry.

It was dark,
So very, very dark
Before You entered my heart.
And now I see,
I really believe

It was me who was keeping You out.

But now Your light shines brightly,
Now Your Spirit's alive.
All through — within and without me —
As bright as the morning sky.

I was darkness but now I'm alight,
Filled to overflowing with You.
Your love and Spirit shine so bright,
They fill me through and through.
I'm basking in the brightness of You, Lord,
Basking in the brightness of You.

*Dear Father God, I look around and see a world in sin,
anguishing in distress of all sorts, and I can only ask, "Come
quickly, Lord!" Come quickly to the hearts of all people, save
them out of the darkness and fill them with Your Spirit. Only
then will their darkness become light!*

February 20 —

"Yet will I praise Ye." — Hab. 3:17-19

The Go-To Page

When in need of encouragement or conviction, I have what I call my "Go-To Page" in my journal. It contains, in part, these scriptures:

- Psalm 68:7-10: "When You went out before Your people, O God, when You marched through the wasteland, the earth

shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. You gave abundant showers, O God; Your people settled in it, and from Your bounty, O God, You provided for the poor."

- Heb. 12:1-3: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him Who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

- Col. 3:2 — "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

- Matt. 6, especially verse 33: "Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness..."

- And verse 8: "... do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

- Acts 9:31b: Then the church "was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."

Thank You, Lord, for the wisdom and encouragement in Your Word, for standing beside us when we need courage, holding us in Your hand when we need support, and breathing Your life through us when we need unction. Bless You, Father, as You bless us. Amen.

February 21 —

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

— Acts 3:19

"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Messiah..." — Col. 2:11

A Place for Slaughter

In Lev. 4:24 the Lord explains that the priest is to "lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the Lord. It is a sin offering."

In the same way, you are to slaughter your sin, absolutely annihilate and destroy it!

Slaughter bitterness and unforgiveness.

Slaughter that obnoxious temptation that continues to lurk in the background and then flashes before your eyes in a way that tears at your senses and your will.

Remove it from your heart.

Any sin in your heart is like "the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong" (Mark 13:14) because the believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

And that Holy Spirit is the instrument by which we are saved, as it says in Titus 3:5-6: "...He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the

Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ (Jesus HaMashiach) our Savior..."

I praise Your Name, Father God, for hearing my cries of repentance, for blotting out my sins by the blood of the Lamb, for saving me from the sins that plague me, and for giving me a new heart, new life and new hope. Amen.

February 22 —

"And you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses." — Lev. 10:11

"They are to teach My people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean."

— Ezek. 44:23

Be Cleansed, Then Teach the Transgressors

Psalm 51 is a wonderful psalm with wonderful requests:

- Create in me a clean heart, O God; renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.
- **Then** I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.
- Oh, Lord, open my lips that my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

- The sacrifices of God are a broken Spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

David wrote this psalm after the prophet Nathan had come to him and pointed out his adultery with Bathsheba.

Notice that in the heart of this psalm is the statement: "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You."

Once God created the clean heart and restored the joy of his salvation, David was prepared to lead others to salvation. So, no matter how badly you have sinned, how poorly you have performed as a child of God, remember this: God can always use you to teach transgressors His ways.

Lord, I truly do not deserve a second chance, or is it 2 millionth chance? But You are a God who mends broken hearts and broken spirits, and You have mended mine. Thank You for that, Lord, and also thank You for using me to help others from falling off the path to righteousness. Amen.

February 23 —

"Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan.' " — Joshua 4:16

Step Up Out of the Jordan

There are two lessons to the Jews confronting the Jordan River in this passage: the stepping into the river and their stepping out.

That first step took courage because the Jordan was flowing at flood stage and the priests were carrying the most holy artifact on Earth. But there is also something special about what happens when stepping out ... of the Jordan, in particular.

In Matt. 3:16 Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended on Him ... in the Jordan. The anointing came stepping out of the Jordan.

And, remember that once the Israelites crossed over the river, they stepped into the Promised Land.

Just so with us: If we have the courage to step into the fray, whatever that may be and despite what treasures we may be shouldering, God will bless us, even anoint us, when we come out of that situation.

Thank You, Father, for holding back the waters that would overcome me, for helping me to keep my footing, for encouraging me to walk into danger no matter what it looks like, and for delivering me out of it. Amen.

February 24 —

"The Lord, the Lord Almighty, called on you that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth."

— Is. 22:12

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord..."

— Acts 3:19

Prepare the Way

It's so much fun cross-country skiing with the dogs. They run out in front, breaking the path for us, making it a lot easier to trek through the new-fallen snow. Is it time for the Body of Messiah to do the same?

John the Baptist (did and) did **not** prepare the way for the Lord. He **said**: "Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for Him." (Matt. 3:3b and Mark 1:3)

He was calling **the people** to prepare the way. First, we prepare the way for Him in us, in our own hearts.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near." (Matt. 3:2)
That is what John said — and it fulfilled the Scripture
"Prepare the way."

So that is how we prepare the way. Repent. Repent. Repent daily — even moment by moment.

Lord Jesus, forgive me for my sins. Wash me in the blood of the Lamb. Use me to prepare the way for your coming again — first in the hearts of men, then in Your own coming down to earth for the salvation and judgment of all mankind. Amen.

February 25 —

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves he corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights. Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding..."

— Prov. 3:11-13

Give Over the Remote Control

In a dream I had I kept seeing a remote control. Why? I asked God. He replied: "You want to have control of your life. Give it to Me."

How do I give over the remote control?

When you take the controls, God sees two things:

- Pride, saying you can do it best, and
- Absence of faith and trust in Him.

"Do I want control of the remote to **punish** you?" God asks. "No! Because I am a control freak? No! Rather because I want the best for you. Not just at the start of the day, but throughout it. I have insight to share all day long... unless you wrest back the remote."

"Do not be frightened or discouraged," God says, "about your work, your family, your finances... Give over the remote and do not take it back. Storm clouds may come but they will blow by; it is Satan testing, trying to scare you, to shake your faith.

"Do not forget: Seek Me first and My righteousness. Keep your eyes to the sky, from where your help cometh. Look to the mountaintop to Him Who knows the answers. The promises are plentiful — for My people."

Jesus, forgive me for holding onto all the controls, for being fearful and timid, for not trusting You. Increase my faith, O Lord. Increase my faith! Amen.

February 26 —

"Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation... And these signs will accompany those who believe:

In My Name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

— Mark 16:15-18

For Him, Not Me

President John F. Kennedy had it right. With a twist, I paraphrase:

Ask not what God can do for you;

Ask what you can do for God.

Is He the big genie in the sky?

There for us to command?

Or is He the Almighty El Shaddai

On Whom we know we can stand?

Is He the clothing store clerk

To whom the customer is always right?

Or is He the One Who spoke the Word

And the universe leaped into sight?

Does He exist simply for us to do things

In our own time and our own way?

Or was He here always and to stay?

And did He create Man one day...

Yes, ask not what God can do for you;

Ask what you can do for God.

*Lord, I so often put me first. Yet I am merely the creation.
Remind me, Father, to look up, not at my own navel, to focus*

on others and not myself, to stress doing Your work and not my own. Amen.

February 27 —

*"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching **in the wilderness** of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.' "*

— Matt. 3:1-2

In the Wilderness? Don't Think It Futile

Two things here:

- Jesus had arrived, was living among them, and the people were being drawn to John the Baptist. Jesus is soon arriving again and people will be drawn to those who proclaim Him.
- John drew crowds even though he was far from them. (The Jordan River is a good distance from Jerusalem, about a 40-minute drive even today.) It doesn't matter where you are today. Proclaim Him!

Are you walking in the woods, all alone except perhaps with your faithful dog? Proclaim Him! Practice preaching to the trees that exist solely because of His imagination.

Are you fishing in a boat in the middle of a lake? Proclaim Him! Tell the fishes and loons, the May flies and geese: They draw breathe because He is a mighty, creative God. Tell them that He has come and is coming again to deliver all the earth into salvation.

If people come to hear you, fine. If not, then you have still done your part.

Lord, sometimes I feel like I am in the Judean wilderness, with mammoth dunes sweeping high and wide into the distance and with no life in sight. Nevertheless, I want to proclaim Your Son to the world. Give me the boldness, and the words, to do so. Amen.

February 28 —

*"And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my **fellow laborers**." — Philemon 24*

"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."

— Matt. 9:37

Labor for God!

We look at Elijah and think he did all the work. But he had a worthy servant, Elisha, who was his aid along the way and who later took his mantle when Elijah was carried away to be with the Lord.

We look at Paul and easily pooh-pooh the idea that he had help. But Timothy, Silas, Barnabas and Mark all shared that work, and the struggles and beatings and, literally, shipwrecks that went with it.

Even if we are not the charismatic leader, the center of attention, the preacher/prophet/apostle, we have a work to do for the Lord — not to gain salvation, mind you, but just to fulfill our commitment to Him. Do not despise your gift, or your mission.

Remember Stephen, "a man full of God's grace and power"? (Acts 6:8) He waited on tables for the brethren, but he went down in history's most famous book as a great man of faith, and a martyr.

As Paul reminds us, the body needs all its parts in operation; the eyes need the hands just as the toes need the heart.

Father, forgive my pride that would keep me from Your work. Forgive my selfishness that would keep me doing "my own thing" instead of Yours. Put me in a place, Lord, to be a laborer in Your cause. Amen.

March 1 —

"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to His disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' "

— Mark 4:39-40

Against the Storm

The storm rages, the wind howls.
The rain and sleet pelt window and door.
But I am safe in my Lord's house —
Anxious for nothing, dry and secure.

There is this place, this holy shelter,
For all who seek asylum here.
The enemy would have your faith falter,

Slamming you with disease and fear.

He would faze you with confusion.
He would befuddle you with doubt.
But stand against his wicked intrusion.
Stand with God; kick the enemy out.

Stand on all the promises of Heaven.
Know you're safe in His mighty hand.
Stand calm, undaunted in this haven.
Stand on the Rock, not on sinking sand.

O Lord, I so often read about the disciples and wonder why they did not have more faith in certain instances, only to find myself in a similar situation, lacking faith in the same way! Help me to stand unafraid, even in the midst of the tempest, knowing You are a Rock in the midst of the waves. Amen.

March 2 —

"Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise and apply your heart to my knowledge." — Prov. 22:17

You Are What You Eat

How do you "grow" in the Word? By eating it.

Think of the Word as nutrition, as well as sustenance. You know how fish and animals taste like what they eat. That food has been transfixed into their bodies, part of them. The same with the Word. Eat it and it becomes part of you — your bone, your flesh, your spirit and soul. The more of it you eat, the

more of you is it. It is nutrition for a soul and a spirit that will starve without it.

Watching the chickadees and blue jays eat sunflower seed, they grab hold of it between their talons and crack through the shell with their beaks to the tasty meet within. They obviously savor that food and count on it to keep them full, their metabolism humming and therefore their bodies warm in this deep-freeze winter.

Your Word, O Lord, is meat to my spirit and leads me in ways of righteousness, keeping me alert to the enemy, alive to Your direction, and thankful for my salvation. Thank You, God, for such nourishment!. Amen.

March 3 —

"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.

"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."

— Psalm 32:2-5

Good Fruits, Bad Fruits

If the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness and self-control, then the fruits

of the evil one are hate, despair, antagonism, impatience, harshness, badness and uncontrollability.

When we look at ourselves to see the fruits of the Spirit, we should also check to ensure **absence** of those bad fruit. Have you despaired over a situation? — antagonized anyone? — been impatient? These are responses to stimuli and people that can easily come your way. Yet you will not see them so clearly if you are focused only on the fruits of the Spirit.

O God, my Savior, I would like to think that I produce only good fruit. But I have only to look to the last 24 hours, perhaps minutes, to discover a "bad fruit" hanging from my lips or my hands, or my thought life. Help me, Father, to pare down, and toss out, those fruits in my life whose source is not You but the enemy of all life. Thank You. Amen.

March 4 —

"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for Whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ... I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings..."

— Phil. 3:6-10

Seek God's Face, Not His Hand

All the birds, all the creatures that walk on four feet or crawl on their tummies are looking after their immediate needs:

shelter and food. In our front yard alone, I can spot the woodpecker pounding into the tree in search of bugs, squirrels scurrying along the ground to store up acorns, and birds flitting from branch to branch in search of straw for their nest. That is the Lord's plan.

But His plan for us — His prize creation — is not to concentrate on shelter and food but on Him, on founding a relationship with Him and then strengthening it day by day. I have heard too many sermons where the traveling evangelist talks about laying his hand on this red Cadillac or that piece of land to claim it for his own, or calling forth what is "rightfully" his as "a child of God."

Jesus Himself told us: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." (Matt. 6:33)

"All these things" are those necessities in life about which Satan would have us anxious, worried or concerned. And "all these things" are often not just needs but our desires. Yet "all these things" God will provide to us if we simply seek Him first, not second or third.

If you seek Him and desire Him and to know His presence and His Word, **then** the provision follows. If you seek the provision first, you are only "using" God.

For those who are worried about fulfilling a vision the Lord has given you, take this pearl:

When God gives you a vision
He gives you provision.

Praise You, God my Provider, for You are the first and last in all things. And I desire to make You first in last in my life — from the first to the last of each day. Amen.

March 5 —

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death."

— I John 3:14

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will."

— Rom 12:2

Act Like It

When I don't act like Jesus with people who know I'm a "Christian," I harm God's Name.

When I do so with other Christians I can cause them to stumble just by causing anger, unforgiveness or other such reactions in them. Forgive me, Lord!

Not a Straight but a Crooked Walk?

I have such a crooked walk
In what I do and the way I talk.
Renew my mind; show me the way
To make that crooked walk straight.
Oh, Lord, make that crooked walk straight.

Let the Lord do to you as He did with His people:

"See, I have refined you, though not as silver. I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake I do this. How can I let Myself be defamed I will not yield My glory to another." — Is. 48:10-11

Sometimes, Lord, I feel like one leg is shorter than the other and I walk in circles, spiritually, rather than climb higher toward the precipice of Your mountain. Help me to go beyond saying I'm a Christian to acting like it, and doing so all the time not just a portion of it. Thank You. Amen.

March 6 —

"Nations will come to Your light, and kings to the brightness of Your dawn." — Is. 60:3

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." — Is. 9:2

Out of the Dark

Have you ever been in the deep woods in the daytime when, suddenly, darkness fills the sky and deep foreboding squeezes your heart? Have you then looked around and, suddenly concerned, asked yourself which is the quickest way out of that forest? Those majestic oaks and fir trees that you so admired a minute before suddenly become impediments to your way home!

I find it interesting, with every person I'm praying for, the bottom line is to deliver them out of the darkness — be it utter

blackness or dusk — into a greater light; or somewhere in the middle.

And Who is the Light? Hallelujah!

Those we pray for, who are so often lost in a deep and dark place and can not see their way out of it, need to know the Word of God — the Light of God that will deliver them.

For those who are lost, Lord, show them Your great Light: Your love, Your forgiveness, Your salvation. For those who are saved, Lord, rekindle their fire, that they might burn hot and give light to those around them! Amen.

March 7 —

"Then Boaz said, 'On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.'

"At this, the kinsman redeemer said, 'Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.' "

— Ruth 4:5-6

Action and Consequences

When God performs His "selective cutting" in the woods, He does it just that way: selectively. His winds do not blow down every tree in the forest, but rather the branches that are weak and the individual trees that are frail or rotting. When man arrives to clearcut, he ought to take a lesson from his

Creator, for clear-cut lands leave wide-open spaces for erosion.

In God's case, He replants. If man does not follow that lead, he may cause devastation.

How does this relate to today's scripture? This way:

When you inform someone of their choices in a matter, make sure you tell them **all** the consequences of their decision. A person may realize what they would like may not be best for them or those around them.

Also, as this relates to your own decisions, the Word tells us to "count the cost" before momentous judgments or resolutions.

As an aside, if this choice regards yourself, believe on this "Find favor with God and you will find favor with man."

My Lord, I too often do something too quickly or say something too quickly, without first foreseeing the results of my actions. Remind me, Father, to slow down, to ask You for direction and discernment before jumping ahead in a matter. Amen.

March 8 —

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things."

— Phil. 4:8

Concentrate on What?

If a thing is **not** a good report, not true or noble, or lovely, or virtuous, or admirable, or praiseworthy, do not concentrate on it.

A debtor not paying you is not a "good report," so do not concentrate on that. It can too easily cause bitterness. A person lying is not admirable, and another being unfaithful is not virtuous, so do not concentrate on them, either. It can only cause judgment.

Yet, it seems those are the types of things that want to occupy our attention. Why do newspapers and newscasts concentrate on these type of headline stories for hour on end and day on end? Because people's fleshly nature craves it, as in an addiction. And it is unhealthy — both physically (causing high blood pressure and anxiety that you can not see) and spiritually (causing a falling away from the Lord which you may not see).

You might cry out: "Deliver me, God, from my own flesh!"

But that will not happen until you die. Until then, you will struggle as did Paul, who said, "My mind struggles against my spirit. It does what I do not want it to do..."

Yet, Paul holds out the glorious hope that, in the end, "[The Lord Jesus Christ] will transform our lowly bodies conformed to His heavenly glorious body." (Phil. 3:21)

Lord, I fight against my flesh, which wants to concentrate on the bad reports, on the rumors and gossip. Work out Your perfection in me, Father, and strengthen my resolve. Amen.

March 9 —

*"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear,
but you received the Spirit of adoption by Whom we cry out,
'Abba, Daddy.' "*

— Romans 8:15

One of my favorite memories of Eretz Israel is hearing the little children run up to their fathers and calling, "Abba. Abba!" Abba means Daddy. And that is the relationship we are to feel with our God. How personal that is. How intimate! And that is exactly how He feels about us. We are His kids and He feels close, ever so close, to us.

Childlike

Oh, to have a faith that is childlike, sublime,
A faith that always provides perfect peace of mind.
Like a child doubts not his Father's authority
No doubt, no question — a spiritual maturity.
"Come to Me like a little child," Jesus said.
Don't let Satan play games in your head.
Recall that glorious day He saved your soul,
Made you whole with a brand new goal.
You **were** "like a little child," do you recall?
So, why have you taken such a fall?

Step back a bit, contemplate the thoughts of a child
And relate them to God's lovingkindness, mercy mild.
You **know** what Daddy says is true.
You **know** He thinks the world of you.
You **know** a stone He would never give

And you **know** that as long as you live
He will watch over you, perform His Word.
The thought of lies and hate are utterly absurd.

So, again I say, "Be childlike" —
Once you begin, it's like riding a bike,
Your faith increasing, never faltering.
Always believing, always trusting,
Always knowing that He will do
What is best, where is best, when is best for you.
Anxious for nothing, this child keeps its eye
Looking heavenward, where its Father lives in the sky.

Abba, Daddy, I do believe You in everything You say. I do not doubt You have the best plan in mind for all Your children, including me. Thank You for Your glorious promises, Daddy!

March 10 —

"Humility and fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life."

— Prov. 22:4

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." — Acts 12:11

Humility and Passion

God wants both from us.

Humility: Look at King Uzziah, whose heart was after God but who later lacked humility and died. He was like the seed that was planted, flourished and then perished because it did

not take root. In Uzziah's case his downfall was because of pride. He did not remain humble before his Creator.

Passion: God first. God first! God First!! He must command our primary attention, deepest devotion, strongest love and everlasting trust. There must not be a chink in the armor of our faith.

You must be humble to repent. Have a passion at least for what He will do and can do in your own life.

As King David wrote in Psalm 34:1-3: "I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His Name together."

Despite his own victories, David boasted in the Lord and extolled his God, not himself.

Dear Lord and Savior, I too often walk in pride, even without realizing it. I do not want to end up like Uzziah. I want to be a saint of God until I join You in heaven. Be with me, Father, and witness my passion for you! Amen.

March 11 —

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives unto death."

— Rev. 12:11

What Is Our Testimony?

We repeat this phrase often in believers' circles today, claiming it for ourselves: "We overcome the enemy by the

blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony." But just what does "word of our testimony" mean?

In John 3:32-33, John the Baptist is speaking about Jesus and says: "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies, and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true."

Defining "testimony," Lexical Aids to the New Testament in the Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible states that in I John 5:9-10 John designates the eternal life possessed by believers as God's gift as they witness testifying of Him. And in John 3:11, 32-33 the testimony of Jesus is that which He declares with the authority of a witness, of one who knows.

I believe that is the importance of our testimony: believing in it strong enough to know without doubt that God is true.

Recall the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well. She went back to her village, ecstatic, saying: "He told me everything I ever did." (John 4:39)

Once the villagers had gone out and met this Man and listened to Him, they said, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Hold on to what the Lord has done for you. Store it in your heart, because it is your own personal testimony. And whenever doubts rise up in your mind, recall this testimony. It will increase your faith to the point of victory over the enemy.

Praise You, praise You, God, for You have done great and wonderful things in my life and I thank You for them. I will strive not to forget, but to carry the witness of my testimony

*with me forever, sharing it whenever and wherever I can.
Amen.*

March 12

" 'And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that My covenant with Levi may continue,' says the Lord Almighty."

— Mal. 2:4

Jesus, New and Improved

Society — and the church — have, to a degree, changed the perception of Jesus. They have metamorphosed Him and His values into their own personalities and values.

Jesus is love. They've changed that to: He is Santa Claus.

He is forgiveness. They have changed that to: Whatever you want to do is all right with Him.

He is our Mediator. They have changed that to: You can keep on sinning because He will put up the bail.

Why did He come? See John 3:16 and Isaiah 53. See any Christmas wish list there? No, because the spiritual and eternal are what is important.

In the above scripture from Malachi, the Lord illustrates that He will admonish His children in order to keep them in line with His Word and His law and in order that, like Levi, we may continue in our covenant relationship with Him. So, if you have tended to displace your own character and beliefs onto Jesus, stop this very second, re-evaluate Who He is and who you are, and start afresh as His pupil and child.

Lord, forgive me for even subconsciously placing my philosophy upon Your shoulders, for forging my own doctrine at the expense of Yours, for stating as facts anything that is not rooted in Your Book. Amen.

March 13 —

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

— Rom. 8:16-17

"Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Messiah." — Gal. 4:7

Co-heirs with Christ

Let us not lose this, Lord: We are co-heirs with Christ. Whatever He inherits, believers in Him inherit. Whatever He owns, we own.

Jesus said to His followers, "Ask whatever you want in My Name and it shall be given you."

The Bible says: "Greater is He Who is in you than he who is in the world."

God has given us authority over Satan and his demons "in the Name of the Lord." Remember what it means to "take His Name in vain": use His authority when you have no right to? Well, when you are walking in His truth, you **do** have a right, so use it!

Why is it that today we see few of the signs and wonders of the first century when the people who followed after Jesus

truly believed His words: "You will do greater things than these..."

Do we easily forget Mark 16:17-18 in which Jesus declared: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My Name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

When we wake up in the morning and look in the mirror and ask God to forgive the sins of the sinner staring back at us; when we then ask Him to wash us as white as snow in the blood of the Lamb; **then** we should stand straight, prepared to walk that day as a "co-heir of Christ," humble yet empowered to do even greater works than our Master the Great Co-Heir in God.

Thank You, Lord, for Your inheritance, for all Your answers are yes and amen, and all of Your gifts are good. Help me to use them to give glory and honor to You. Amen.

March 14 —

"I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

— Matt. 17:20b

Faith as a Child

We can have great measures of knowledge, but if we don't have faith, it is all for naught. God calls us to have "faith as a

child." A child who can believe in a healing, for instance, and see it come true because he **believes**. Faith as a child, who is not bound to the beliefs and reports of the world because he **believes** that his father tells him the truth no matter what others say.

Come as a child, Jesus said. Don't question God. Understand that He knows all and sees all. This is what God wants: Skip by the Terrible Twos when a child questions everything and remain the obedient child who longs to sit in his Father's lap, listening to His words of love and faith, and believing without trace of doubt every single syllable that comes from His mouth.

Lord and Father, I truly do want to believe like a child. So much of "the world" has crept into my life that I tend to run with its way of thinking. Yet I know those beliefs are so often wrong, devised by men in their own silly minds. Help me to discern truth from fiction. and to believe You with zero doubt in my own mind. Amen.

March 15 —

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship." — Rom. 12:1

His Reign in Us

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God..." the scripture tells us. What is a kingdom? A place where a king rules.

In the Kingdom of God, He rules. His commandments are the law of the land. Whatever is illegal in His Kingdom, heaven, is illegal here on this earth, which is His creation.

The Greek dictionary defines kingdom as "the actual reign or rule itself." It is the realm in which God's reign is experienced. Accept God's reign or rule here. Seeking it is seeking God's rule **in our lives**. Don't think of that reign, or that kingdom, as "out there" in outer space somewhere, but right where you are sitting, standing and walking this very day.

Why, the Bible asks, do you pay so much attention to signs saying "Don't do this," "Don't eat that," "Don't touch this" when the really important, and eternal, commands are those handed down by the Almighty?

As an aside to this, we are told to "cast out the illegal from among you." This is not "binding" the illegal or demons; it is tossing them out altogether.

This, dear God, is Your kingdom as well as is that in heaven. Help me to remember that I am walking on hallowed ground, earth that You created. Praise Your Name for a perfect set of commandments that, if we all follow them, will lead us to life eternal. Amen.

March 16 —

"Simon has described to us how God at first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear My Name, says the Lord, who does these things,' that have been known for ages."

— Acts 15:14-18

One Body

It is no mystery that the first believers in Jesus were Jews. The first disciples were Jews. With the exception of Luke, the entire Bible — Old Testament and New Testament — was written by Jews. In fact, when Simon Peter brought the Good News to the Roman Centurion Cornelius and his household, it startled his Jewish friends to find out that the Holy Spirit fell on this group of ... oh-my! ... Gentiles.

As Acts 10:44-46 relates: "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers [Jews] who had come were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues, and praising God."

Note their surprise: "even" on the Gentiles...

And in Romans 3:29-30 Paul asks: "Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles, too? Yes, of Gentiles, too, since there is only one God, Who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith."

Yet, today, Jew and Gentile — even Jewish and Gentile believers — are often so divided.

But regardless of attitudes, the truth is: saved Jews and Gentiles are part of the same house. Note the comparisons:

Israel and the Body of Messiah

Jews

- Chosen
- Delivered from Egypt
- Led to the Promised Land, the land

of

of milk and honey

- If they fully obey the Lord and follow all His commands, He will pour blessings upon them.
- Cursings on them who do wrongs

Gentiles

- Chosen
- Delivered from sin
- Led to the Kingdom

Heaven

• Ibid

• Ibid

Thank You, God of the Jews and Lord of the Gentiles, for reconciling the two, for making one new man, for healing breaches, for planting forgiveness in the hearts of Jews for all the wrongs suffered at the hands of Gentiles in Holocausts or elsewhere, and forgiveness in the hearts of any Gentile wronged by a Jew. I praise you, Adonai, for showing us all that we are part of the Body of Messiah. Let Jewish hand hold Gentile hand as we walk toward eternity with You — and with each other. Amen.

March 17 —

"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."

— Jer. 18:4

"Yet, O Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand." — Is. 64:8

Still Time for Perfection

Notice that when Jeremiah went to the potter's house, the potter took clay that was at first ill-formed and created a beautiful pot. It was not perfect the first time off the wheel. Why think that you are beyond the same reformation in the Master's hand?

An Instrument for the Maestro

You think you're beyond use,
An instrument too rusty or abused?
You feel you missed your chance
To serve the Lord, Who would not now give you a glance?

An old and oil-less musical instrument
Too long left toneless, no scales to play?
Ah, but the Maestro can transform any implement
Into a grand and wondrous harmonic display.

An old piano not tuned in many years?
A trumpet put aside in a closet?
No worry. God, with a tin can, can emit cheers;
With an old bottle, He can create a hit.
When the Maestro fingers the strings,
When He makes music sweet as honey,
It doesn't matter the instrument He brings;

It will fill the hall with a wondrous symphony.
So, give up, give in, and come to Him,
The Maestro Who can make **any** instrument sing.

Lord, I sometimes feel too old, too tired, too useless for You to use. For all of us in this situation, lift up our heads, comfort us and give us strength and a vision of a work for Your Kingdom. Help us to be willing instruments in Your hand! Amen.

March 18 —

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." —
Rom. 3:23

A Path to Salvation

I don't like to admit that there are creatures on this earth that I dislike, but if I did, crows would be near the top of the list. One day walking the woods, there were two of these jet-black birds perched atop a tree (which, I admit, beats munching on a dead carcass) and they were cawing and cawing. It annoyed me at first, and then it frightened me, because it seemed they were screaming at me, "You're in sin. You're in sin!" Perhaps it was God speaking to me through them, but it certainly was annoying! People in the world are often bathed in sin, but our message to them should not be a condemning cawing: "You're in sin, you're in sin!" But rather "Jesus can give you a better life. He absolves you and frees you!"

To lead a person to Messiah, here is a good progression of scripture:

1) Romans 3:23 — "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

2) Romans 6:23 — "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

3) John 1:12 — "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God."

4) I John 1:9 — "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

5) Rev. 3:20 — "Here I am. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me."

Lord, please remove from me any tendency to "caw" at sinners, to condemn them with a harsh tongue. They know they are sinners and because they do not believe in You and Your Son, nor possess the Holy Spirit, they are powerless to do anything about it. Give me the words to speak and soften their hearts that they might acknowledge their need for a Savior and bow their knee, and their hearts, to You. Amen.

March 19 —

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. but you

were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God."

— I Cor. 6:9-11

Not Perfect and That Is the Example

"I feel so not holy so much of the time..."

Often, in Bible studies and sermons, teachers/preachers refer to Old Testament people, especially Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as heads of "dysfunctional families," and even as fools themselves. As a lover of God's people, this upsets me. And yet I think their actions and part of their character — and God's response to them — are supposed to serve as an encouragement to us.

Whatever they did — Abraham inferring Sarah was his sister, Jacob "stealing" Esau's birthright, Solomon marrying pagan women — God did not forsake them, did not renege on His promises, but rather rewarded them with the Holy Land. His gifts and calling are irrevocable. So I see that although I am to live a Spirit-filled, not a flesh-driven life, God will not forsake me.

And those who feel that they have sinned so badly, or backslidden so much that they are beyond help, well, they are wrong. The examples are plentiful.

Besides Jesus, the person most written **about** in the Bible is David. Look at what he did that was evil and yet he was called "a man after God's own heart" — because he was repentant.

The person who **wrote** the most in the Bible was Paul. Look at what he, as Saul of Tarsus, did before his Damascus road

experience. Now look at your own life. Are you beyond repair? Is God unfaithful? No and no!

For look what God did for the Colossians who believed in Him. They were all sinners, yet after receiving Jesus as Lord (Col. 2:6), they were "complete in Him Who is the head of all principality and power." — (Col. 2:10)

Indeed, Col. 2:13 -14 told them: "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

Father God, I am far from perfect. But I come before you in contrition, in repentance for my sins and in thankfulness for Your salvation. You say I am a living epistle, Lord, so help me to write a love story to You with my life. Amen.

March 20 —

"Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and your children, and to all who are afar off as many as the Lord our God will save."

— Acts 2: 38-39

Believers Are All Jews

Christians are all Jews, accepted into the camp of followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and believers that the

Jewish Messiah has come — Jesus. There have been "foreigners" in the camp of the Jews almost since Abraham was called to leave Ur and trek westward toward what is now Eretz Israel (The Land of Israel). Even when the Jews left Egypt, some non-Jews left with them, having acknowledged Who the real God is.

Yet, because of the events of history, most every Christian today thinks of Jewish believers as men and women grafted in to the Christian (or non-Jewish) tree. Sorry, it is the other way around. Gentiles were first grafted into the Jewish family, then usurped the place of their "older brother." When we accept a Jew into the faith we are simply welcoming home a wayward brother or sister, like the prodigal son come home.

God's Love for His People

Do You love Your people, Lord? Do You love the Jews?

"Oh, My child, if you only knew."

Will You save them, Lord, from the sin of the world?

"I've done so on the cross. The mystery is unfurled.

From cloud and fire I led them along,

Yet even so visible, they wanted to return

To the things of this world — shelter, possessions —

To the manna of gold, silver, man's stony erections;

To the shelter of their own hands, which disappears into dust;

To wheat and barley, not My manna but their lusts."

They haven't listened, Lord. Will You try again?

"The cross was once for all — Jew and Gentile, past and future.

I shed My blood for both infant and mature,
For My Israelites whom I love
And all others in need.
For Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their seed,
For those still below and others here above.

"I died so perfection would be obtainable.
So we could commune, you and I.
My death was the only sacrifice sustainable,
A perfect gift for a spotless bride.

"Yes, I love My people the Jews.
And, yes, I'll save many from the fire.
Pray that in the last day there'll be no bad, just good news —
That all will receive Jesus Messiah.

"I'll soften stony hearts.
I'll prepare dessert souls.
I'll end the work I started.
I'll water, nurture and see that they grow.

"You? Always stay near.
Search Me out in the morning.
Seek My face at night.
Desire My heart every moment.
I'll **always** be here.
Don't stray from My Presence.
There's a deadly wolf about.
Pray always, without ceasing,

And I'll answer. I'll answer — no doubt."

Oh, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — God of Jew and Gentile — I pray that Your people, all of them, have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to receive You and Your Messiah. I pray that they have courage to take that step toward salvation and boldness to proclaim their new beliefs. Thank, You, Father, for accepting those who are not Jews into Your eternal family. Amen.

March 21 —

"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." — I Cor. 4:2

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them.... But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back..."

— Luke 6:32, 35

Walking the Dogs: Lesson One

Unconditional Love

Our three dogs are often a good object lesson. They are wonderful animals, living up to their billing as "man's best friend" — loyal, faithful and loving. Though the border collie is different from the part-border collie and both are different than our Scotch collie, they have one thing in common: They are full of devotion. It seems their love is boundless **and** unconditional.

There are endless numbers of stories about dogs saving people from flaming fires, from raging rivers, from earthquake rubble. My object lesson today is: If a dog can possess all of these attributes, why do I, who am made in the image and likeness of God, find it so difficult to possess and employ them?

Is it so difficult to be loyal and faithful? Why is it so difficult to love people unconditionally? If I can but look at others with the eyes that I know God looks at me — with abounding love and devotion — than I, too, can love them unconditionally. If I can look at a sinner as God looks at that sinner — as someone He loves and wants to save — then I, too, can love them unconditionally.

Now, Lord, it is time to do, not just think. Time to love others, all others, as you do — no matter what they have done to others or to me. Time to show the love of Messiah, Who gave His life for all men, believers and non-believers alike. I pray You help me to do this, Lord. Amen.

March 22 —

"I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking."
— Col. 1:21

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Two

Distractions, Distractions...

As much as I love our three dogs, they are not perfect. And when I notice their imperfections it usually points out similar

imperfections in me. This day, for instance, I learned that the closer you walk to the edge, the easier you get distracted — distracted by the "sniffs and smells" of the world. Delayed in time and waylaid in intentions. Distractions keep you from your purpose, destination and timing. Rather, walk down the middle of the road, away from those distractions, and you get to your destination straightway and with dispatch. If not, what will you miss along the way? God knows. Will you get to your destination? Guess.

My life lesson here is to keep away from the distractions and temptations of the world and keep your focus on walking a straight path "down the middle of the road."

Sometimes those distractions might even be a work in the Body of Messiah — a good work, mind you, but something for which you are not called. If asked to participate, you should reply, "God has another work for me, another path to take."

If you walk with God, do not be like your dogs are on their first walk with you — starting out brisk and focused, then deteriorating into smelling all the smells along the way, checking out this and that distraction, needing to be tugged and pulled along instead. No, travel at a steady same pace.

Lord, even in my prayer time it seems I get easily distracted. Thoughts apart from what I am praying about pop into my head and keep me from zeroing in on a target. The same happens at other points in my life when I should have my attention on You. Help me, Father, to remain in the middle of Your will. Amen.

March 23 —

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."

— I Cor. 12:12

"... so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." — Rom. 12:5

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Three **Walk in One Accord**

When walking the dogs along our country road I always have them on leashes. Three dogs, three leashes. Now, one dog walking along on one leash is a simple proposition. Adding a second dog complicates things a little, tangling up the leashes, that sort of thing. But add a third dog and a third leash and you had better pay attention. If one of the pooches decides to turn toward the woods, or into the road, or to jump ahead, it compounds an already "iffy" situation.

Have you heard the statement: "If Columbus had appointed a committee, he'd still be on the dock"? There is a lot of truth in the assertion that you can get a lot done with one person focused on the goal, but make it a committee and watch out! Yet, the Lord wants us to work together as different parts of the body work together.

My life lesson: When part of a group, remain aware of your function in that group, do not try to jump ahead or act on your own accord. If you do, both you and your walkmates will get

tangled, needing your Master to untangle you. It disturbs Him and you both.

God, I praise You for those believers I work with in Your service. Help me, Lord, to always be aware that we are a team and all of us must work in a coordinated fashion. Amen.

March 24 —

"So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

— Is. 41:10

If God Is For You...

Most people do not have a clue
Of the full meaning of the Scripture
"If God is for you, who can stand against you?"
They think of Satan as a deadly bombardier,
Raining down terror and destruction.
But his biggest weapons are fear and deception.

Pick up your spear and your bow.
They're made by God, don't you know?
Tempered and strong, to be wielded with faith;
Straight and true, just as God sayeth.

Be undoubting, unshrinking, knowing God is here.
Be fervent, not anxious, knowing He is near.
God is "for you" if you're a child of His.

And He wants you to live totally without fears.
For fear and unbelief menace those He holds dear.

Fear is from the enemy of your soul.
Kick it out by Him Who makes you whole.
Doubt would have you hide your light.
God would have you send Satan to flight.
Unbelief would have you never reach out.
But that is not what God is about.

God would have you touch others' lives,
Kings and paupers, in castles and dives.
Whether to heal or evangelize,
He would say to the dead, "Arise!"

"Yes, I am for you, so who can oppose?"
Says the Lord God of Heaven's hosts.
Was Daniel afraid in the lions' den?
Was imprisoned Paul fearful, or say, "Amen"?
Did David doubt when he faced Goliath?
Did Elijah falter when raising the boy from death?

*Dear God, I realize that You are a strong tower that no
bomb, no avalanche, the device of Satan, can prevail against.
Thank You for standing before me and mine, putting Your wall
of fire and protection around us. Amen.*

March 25 —

"This is why it says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts to men.'

"What does 'He ascended' mean except that He also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He Who descended is the very One Who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was He Who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers..."

— Eph. 4:8-11

God's Hope for Us

An apostle is one sent forth, a special messenger. One chosen and sent with a special commission as a fully authorized representative of the sender.

Prophets are inspired preachers and expounders.

Evangelists are preachers of the Gospel, traveling missionaries.

Pastors are shepherds of His flock.

Teachers teach the Word, and often pastor and teacher are considered the same office.

Which are you? Have you answered God's call?

As one might ask: Are you involved or irrelevant?

You're one of the other.

Not only help me to see my station, my ministry for Your Kingdom, Lord, but then give me the wisdom to carry it out. Amen.

March 26 —

"All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied." — Ecc. 6:7

The End (Omega)

Too many people see Jesus as a **means** to an end rather than The End.

Jesus, give me this.

Oh, Lord, I want that.

Gimme, gimme, gimme.

I claim this car as mine.

I declare I am not sick, in Jesus' Name.

Me, My and I

Most prayers are filled with "I's."

If more were filled with "God," or "Lord,"

There would be less compromise.

*Lord, I know there would be more setting apart the flesh, more putting off the self if I concentrated on what You want **for** me rather than what I want **from** You. Remind me, Father, to keep my eyes looking up to you rather than down on my navel; listening to what You want me to do for others rather than telling You what I want You to do for me; not desiring the world to be my oyster but wanting to be that oyster for someone else; expecting to be flogged and imprisoned for my faith rather than garnering the world's rewards. Amen.*

March 27 —

"Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." — Psalm 51:7

"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." — Is. 1:18

Washed White as Snow

More than a foot of snow piled down from the sky throughout the night, leaving our yard and the fields beyond looking like snow dunes. How beautiful. It makes the woods and fields seem almost elegant and, seemingly, cleansed.

The Bible tells us the Savior's blood washes us as white as snow, covering our sins. ("But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." — I John 1:7)

Yet, in the case of the land that now looks so pure around us, this came only after hours of raging snow storm that, for only the second time in my life, was accompanied by cracks of thunder and nearby lightning bolts. Similarly, in our lives, the purification often comes after a particularly stormy period that threatens even our lives.

This sort of period awaits the world in the End Times. As Rev. 7:14 relates: "I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' "

Dear Lord, as beautiful as the world looks around us, we know that dirt and sin lies beneath. Only Your blood can cleanse us. Only Your blood can wash us clean. Only Your blood can set us free. Thank You for that great gift!. Amen.

March 28 —

"Praise be to the Lord, Who has given rest to His people Israel just as He promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave through His servant Moses." — I Kings 8:56

"... being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised." — Rom. 4:21

Raised Back to Life

II Kings chapter 4 tells the story of the prophet Elisha and the well-to-do Shunammite woman who had a small room built for Elisha to stay in whenever he came through Shunem. She was a barren woman, but the Lord showed Elisha that she would bear a child as a reward for her help. She indeed got pregnant and bore a son. But later the child complained of head pains and died. Distressed, the Shunammite woman searched out Elisha, who rushed to find that the boy was indeed dead. But, when Elisha had stretched himself upon the boy, the child awoke and lived.

This was a miracle then, and it is an example today:

When God promises something (in this case a child; what is it in your case?) even if it "dies," He can raise it back to life (in this case a child; in your case?). Do not ever count something as dead if God gave it to you in the first place.

Lord, I know You do not renege on Your promises. Thank You for being a God upon all who believe can rely! Amen.

March 29 —

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

— Matt. 5:18

"All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

— II Tim. 3:16

Eat The Word, All of It

On the first Passover night in Egypt, the Jews had to eat **all** of the Passover lamb or they would not be protected from the angel of death that was to pass over the country before morning. Likewise, Jesus, as the Passover Lamb, must be eaten in His entirety, ("You must eat My flesh and drink My blood," He said.) or we will perish.

Jesus is the Word, and we must eat **all** the Word, not pick and choose what we want to believe.

A fellow once said to me, "I go to the Open Bible Baptist Church. We believe in all the Bible ... except tongues."

The leaders of that church had picked and chosen what they would and would not believe. And I am left to wonder how many of them may perish because they rejected a way to commune with, get closer to and hear from the Lord.

Do we want to use just a few, or all our spiritual weapons in our battle against the enemy? Know the entire Word, know all of Jesus, to defeat Satan when he comes at you with temptation, when he tries to bury you under trial upon trial. When destruction seems imminent — even at your door — you want to have eaten the entirety of the Passover Lamb.

All the Word, All the Time

Inhabit His Word.

Wear it like a cloak.

Use it as a sword,

Your enemy to smote.

Eat all His Word,

For it is meat of your bones,

A personal life cord,

A true cornerstone.

Be ever mindful in all you do

To seek the source of truth.

The Bible is the only school

You'll need to say you knew.

All the food on Your table is good nourishment, Lord. I want to devour it; to come back for seconds; to absorb it into my spirit! Amen.

March 30 —

"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' "

— Matthew 25:24-25

The Wrong Idea of God

In the Parable of the Talents, the master of the house is as the Lord. But did you ever notice that this fearful fellow who buried his one talent was dead wrong about Who God is? He had the wrong kind of fear. The Lord is not a "hard man" who reaps where he has not sown. He is not an ogre. He rewards those who use wisdom and invest in His Kingdom.

We would do ourselves well if we remind ourselves that "righteous and worshipful fear" of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This is not a dreadful fear as we might fear a barbarian who might lop off our heads as easily as smirk in our direction. It is an awe, a feeling of wonder at the might and power of the Creator.

We should beware to not be like the one-talent servant, but rather like the three- and five-talent servants. Their reward was great indeed.

Thank You, God, for being a rewarder of wisdom, not a marauder of foolishness; for caring that we act with discernment not with misunderstanding. Help Your people, Lord, to know the true and glorious You. Amen.

March 31 —

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready."

— Rev. 19:7

Both Servant and Bride

Jesus is Lord.

What does that mean for me — being His servant **and** His bride?

Do I bow down to Him...

Answer when He calls...

Do His will...

Serve Him...

Take questions of arbitration to Him...

Act as an ambassador for Him...

Watch over His "territory" — ("guard your heart with all diligence")...

Love Him...

Remain faithful to Him...

Look at no other...

Look for no other...

Desire no other?

Dear Lord, let my desire be to not only serve You and Your interests, but to prepare myself — and let Your Holy Spirit work Your perfection in me — so that I may be a spotless, and expectant, bride, fully prepared when You come to take Your people home. Amen.

April 1 —

"May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

— I Thess. 5:23

Convict and Consume

Convict and consume people, O Lord!

Convict them of their need for You.

Consume them with a fire for Your Word.

Consume Your servants with Your love for them.

Build a fire within them, Father.

Convict sinners of their sins and give them a desire to

Consume all they can learn about You and Your Kingdom.

Lord, so often when I have been feeling so good about myself, I find myself needing that conviction. I'm not as "good" as I like to think myself. Consume me with a desire for a closeness to You, Father! Amen.

April 2 —

"And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, 'This man [Jeremiah] deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.' "

— Jer. 26:11

Beware 'Bad-Mouthing'

In Jeremiah 26, the Bible tells the story of how the priests and prophets tried to have Jeremiah executed for speaking harshly about Israel, speaking for God when he said that if the Jewish nation would not heed His prophets "I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." (v. 6)

The priests and prophets responded furiously, calling for Jeremiah's death. Sound familiar? Like how the Pharisees responded to Jesus, calling for His death; like how the Pharisees responded to Stephen, stoning him to death; like how the Pharisees responded to Saul (Paul), asking Rome to imprison him.

We tend to read this account and get mightily upset at the Pharisees. But... Do we not sometimes do the same thing as the Jews? Offended, or ashamed, we respond the opposite of how we should. Rather than repent, we defend ourselves.

Instead, we could get close to God and hear the same message from Him as from His prophets. Instead of drawing closer, though, we do as the Jews did at the mountain, saying to Moses, "You go and talk to God for us." Too often, we do not have the energy. Too often, we're too concerned with things of the flesh. Whatever our excuses, we act as the Pharisees in Jeremiah's time, in Jesus's time — and in our own time.

I stand convicted, Lord, of not standing with your prophets who called for a closer walk with you and for me to run from the gods of this world. Give me the strength and faith to stand firm in Your Word. Amen.

April 3 —

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things."

— Phil. 4:8

Be Not the Antithesis of a Believer

Do we not do the antithesis of this scripture every time we talk badly about a person, or listen or contemplate the evils of, say, a government official or prominent person and his or her life?

Paul, in Ephesians chapter 4, says we should act "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love." (v. 2)

He says God wants us to be equipped so that we may edify the body of Messiah (v. 11), "speak the truth in love" (v. 15) and "let no corrupt word proceed from your mouth, but what is necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers," (v. 29) and "let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice." (v. 31)

Oh, Lord, forgive me for speaking words not in love and grace; for acting in bitterness; for thinking myself higher than another, which I know is pride. Help me to always be thinking on things that are virtuous and lovely. Amen.

April 4 —

"Then He said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it.'"

— Luke 9:23-24

"And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be My disciple." ... "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple."

— Luke 14: 27, 33

Followers Versus Disciples

My dogs can follow after me, and run hither and yon in the woods, sniffing after this and that fuzzy creature or deer print. But do they respond to me — come when called, heel when commanded, sit when told?

Have you asked yourself if you are a follower or a disciple of the Lord? Do you walk with Him only until a scent pulls you off-track? When off-track, do you come when He calls, listen to His command ... obey His command? We are called to a walk of obedience, just as we would love our dogs to be obedient.

Since we are NOT all obedient, this explains lack of unity in the Body of Messiah. It also should help us to not get upset and frustrated with others, if they are followers but not disciples.

Lord, I say I want to be a disciple, but so often only follow until something catches my fancy. Let me "fancy" be always You! Amen.

April 5 —

"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the duplicity of the treacherous destroys them." — Prov. 11:3

Do Not Be Affected BY the World, But Affect the World

Walking through the woods it is often easy to identify how the health of some trees is affected by their environment, or the trees surrounding them. There may be two trees of equal age and type, yet one overshadows the other. And once in the shade of another tree, a smaller one will fall further and further behind in height and girth because it needs the sun in order to flourish.

It is important for people to begin their journey with God at an early age, so that they will not be affected by others who will not help them to grow, but rather to wither. The stories are legend about the power of "peer pressure." But that message is normally a negative one: "Don't be affected by peer pressure!" "Watch out for peer pressure; it will pull you into sin!"

Why not view it the other way around? "Be the peer pressure." "Do not be overshadowed by sinners, but be the shade for them."

If we walk in the light, exuding life, vibrancy and love, then others around us will see that zest and want it for themselves. They will ask, "What is the source of your joy and integrity?" And you will stand tall with the answer that will give them life!

Jesus, You walked this earth as the Peer Pressure for those around you. Help me to firmly grounded so that I may do the same. Amen.

April 6 —

"Everyone who swears by Him shall glory; but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped." — Psalm 63:11b

Sobering Prophecy

Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 13 the destruction of Babylon because the Babylonians had 1) destroyed Jerusalem and 2) worshipped the god Marduk. "The Lord of Hosts musters the army for battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven — the Lord and His weapons of indignation, to destroy the whole land. Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty." (v.4b-6) And Isaiah adds: "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it." (v. 9)

As surely as every other prophecy in the Bible came true, this one did, also: God destroyed this capital city of the ancient Babylonian Empire.

As true then as it is today is this: In the face of evil comes destruction. But God has a better plan, too: In the face of destruction, salvation waits. **Revival** is kindled in the worse of times, or in the driest of times.

As David wrote in Psalm 63: "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water... So I

have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory." (v.1-2) And he adds: "My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me."

Dear great and powerful God, You are an awesome God and You rule from heaven above, with wisdom power and might; You are an awesome God. And I thank You for Your mercy on me and my loved ones, for rekindling our lives and plucking us from destruction. Amen.

April 7 —

"And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.'"

— Mark 14:36

Obedient, Without Question

Preachers tell us that Jesus perspired like blood because of the anguish over what was going to happen to Him. Are we to believe this? After all, He had been telling His disciples for quite some time that the Son of Man would be handed over to the authorities and be crucified. He well knew Isaiah 63 prophesied His death in great detail, and He knew that would come to pass exactly as foreseen.

So, what was He really praying and upset about? Recall that He left Peter, John and James behind in the garden to pray while He went on to be alone with His Father; but when He returned "He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter 'Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' " (Mark 14:37-38)

I believe that God did indeed show us that Jesus was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, but that the reason was that He foresaw that:

- 1) Judas was betraying His love;
- 2) Peter would deny Him;
- 3) His disciples would fall into temptation because of lack of steadfastness i prayer; and
- 4) The disciples would flee when the crowd came to arrest Him.

Paul writes that man fell because of one man's disobedience and was saved by Another's obedience. He does not say Jesus decided at Gethsemane to be obedient. Indeed, He was obedient from birth. And He intended all along to be obedient as the sacrificial perfect Lamb of God. His deep and troubling concern was that His disciples' flesh would be as willing as their spirit when it came to temptation.

Lord, help my flesh to be as strong as my spirit, to firmly stand with You at my side against all temptation — temptation to run, hide and deny You. Amen.

April 8 —

"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" — Esther 4:14b

Yielding the Will

A footnote in the *Living Bible* says: Esther and her cousin Mordecai had God's power working through them. Their wills were yielded to Him, their hearts were humble, their unity was remarkable, and their God was victorious.

Yielding the will... Shouldn't that be easy? If we trust Him, it should be easy. But what else is the rub? Concern for our lives? (Remember, Esther was risking her life by going in to see the king, uninvited.) Giving up our "things" if we yield to Him and He calls us away? (With death would come loss of all those things.)

When a terror arrives at the doorstep of another — Jew or Gentile — will we risk all and intercede? The risks may be great. But think of how great the reward!

Father, if and when I am placed in the position of Esther, give me the fortitude and strength of character, faith and trust to do as she did!. Amen.

April 9 —

"But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

" 'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered.

"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Messiah?' They all answered 'Crucify Him!'

'Why? What crime has He committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify Him!' "

— Matt. 27: 20-23

Crucified Again and Again?

When given the choice of who would live — the murderer Barabbas, or their Messiah Jesus — the Jews in Jerusalem adamantly chose Barabbas. We read the account of the story and rail on the Jews. How could they do this? How could they be manipulated like that? What were they thinking!?

But do we not do the equivalent when we choose hate over love, death over life, unforgiveness over forgiveness, bitterness over joy?

When we choose to act on a sin impulse rather than overcome the temptation, are we not answering to Pilate, "Crucify Him!"?

In recounting to the Jews how they had handed over Jesus to the cross, Peter in Acts 3:15 said: "You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead."

But while this stood as a condemnation, Peter said there was a cure. "Repent, then, and turn to God," he said (verse 19), "so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord..."

O Jesus, I repent, right now, for choosing Barabbas over you so often in my life. I did not realize, but I do now, and I promise to try never to make that choice again. Amen.

April 10 —

*"When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as **one who had authority**, and not as their teachers of the law."*

— Matt. 7:28-29

Whose Authority?

When you speak, remember, it is not your authority (as some teach), it is His. But we should pray to God as His child, not as a stranger; and speak for God as His child, not someone just reading the words of some or other book; and speak to Satan as one with authority, which you have as a co-heir of messiah; command demons as one with authority.

In any situation, societal or military, one with authority commands, they do not request. In the believer's case, they command demons to leave and sickness to flee.

And when you walk and act in that authority, you will see come to pass what Peter wrote in I Peter 2:12-14: "Having your conduct honorable among Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the days of visitation."

Thank You, Father, for giving me the authority of Your child. Thank You for the keys to Your kingdom. Amen.

April 11 —

"It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of the people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the see.

"He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."

A Second Trip Home

The Lord plans to bring His people home to Israel in the last days.

In Isaiah chapter 49, God repeats that He will return His people home (vv. 22-26), showing Himself as the Redeemer of Israel (vv. 7-22) and sending Messiah also as a "light to the Gentiles" (vv. 1-7).

Since that is God's own vision, should it not also be ours? God wants a people like Moses, who will turn aside to look at the burning bush and take up the challenge to save His people. He wants us to be instruments of His plan.

He also says in vv. 25-26 that He will contend with those who contend with Israel.

Called Out to Aliyah

I call out to My people;
I call them by name.
But they want not to hear,
Nor return to the land I claim.

They aliyah by thousands from the North
And have emptied from the lands of the South.
But to the East and to the West
They incline not their ear to My mouth.

I love them and hold them
And I gently enfold them

In My arms, showing favor
And yet so many labor
For things of this world.

Yet before I return for them,
I will accomplish what I yearn for them.
Regardless of their murmurs or moans
I will pull, prod and drive them home.

Dear Lord God, Your first call is to Your chosen people Israel, I know that. Impress on me how I may help in Your divine plan. Amen.

April 12 —

"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Messiah which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

— Eph. 3:19

Is It So Hard To Love?

One day, in prayer, Jesus asked me: "Is it so hard to love? Is it so hard to love them — **all** of them? Even those who dislike you or revile you?"

Then He added: "I died for them just as I died for those who love Me. Love them as I do."

I received a piece of that love that day. I want it all.

Jesus says in John 15:17: "These things I command, you, that you love one another."

Love others and **then** you will bear fruit.

Forgive others and **then** you will get what you pray for.

What is the ultimate you can do for someone to show your love?

Die for them. Then, the ultimate we can do for God is die — die to the flesh. That is the ultimate Jesus did for us: He died to the flesh. Are you ready for that?

I try to love all others. I do, Lord. How on earth did You accomplish that while on earth, and how do You do that now, seeing all the sin and sinful behavior and outright hate for You and Your Son? I struggle with that, but help me, Father, to love all mankind, just as You do. Amen.

April 13 —

"Now when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated."

— II Chronicles 20:22

Praise, Then Watch for the Results

Before calling for that prayer in II Chronicles 20:22, the Hebrew King Jehoshaphat told his people: "Believe in the Lord Your God, and you shall be established; believe His

prophets, and you shall prosper." (v. 20) After consulting the people, the first thing Jehoshaphat did was appoint those who should sing to the Lord and those who should praise the beauty of holiness as they went out BEFORE the army.

See also Joshua 6, the story of the destruction of Jericho; and Judges 7, the story of Gideon's army of 300 who simply blew trumpets, then watched as the Lord destroyed the Midianites.

Psalm 22:3-4 speaks to God: "But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them."

And II Kings 7:3-16, 19-35 tells the story of the Lord causing the Syrian army to hear the noise of horses, chariots and a great army so that they fled at twilight, leaving their camp intact, complete with tents, horses and donkeys.

God indeed does the miraculous when we praise Him. In church meetings and prayer groups, I have noticed the effects of prayer **after** we sing and compared to when we do not worship. The two experiences do not equate.

Lord, my tongue shall sing forth Your praises, just as David's did. May You find joy in that worship! Amen.

April 14 —

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply;

and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess."

— Deut. 30:15-16

You Are the First Prize

The first prize, when you give your life to the Lord, is **you!** The others who follow because of your obedience are above and beyond that first prize — a prize for the Kingdom and a prize for you yourself because of God's promises in Deuteronomy 30, because you have reclaimed your life for you and God, and because that life is eternal.

Yes, the fields are white for the harvest and, in your life, that harvest begins with you yourself.

*Hallelujah! Thank You, God, for my own salvation! Let me be the first of many on my particular "family tree of salvation" as You help me to lead others down this wonderful path.
Amen.*

April 15 —

"For our citizenship is in heaven..." Phil. 3:20a

Tax Day

Did Jesus speak against the Roman government, declare "No taxation without representation!" and get caught up in politics?

From heaven, where we hold our citizenship, Paul says in Phil. 3:20-21, "We eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (not our savior the government!) "who, by the power

that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body..."

This being the case, why do so many of us continue to be flustered, flabbergasted, disgusted and dismayed at the actions of a government so often run by the unsaved, for the unsaved? What actions do we expect them to take? Righteous ones? No, do not let those in Washington, D.C., or your state legislature, or your town council steal your joy. Be that "good soldier" that Paul talks about, caring only what his Commander and Chief speaks and directs.

Oh, Lord, I will give to Caesar what is Caesar's. And though I may feel it is theft and an abomination, I will subdue that feeling and look joyfully into the future eternal, where there are no governments — only a Benevolent Ruler — and no taxes. Amen.

April 16 —

"Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you."

— Prov. 4:25

The Big Picture

Looking at one of those big-screen, pre-digital TVs in a store, I noticed it was difficult to see the picture. It was very dark and hard to distinguish. The salesman told me, "Get directly in front and sit down." Sure enough, when I did so the

picture magically brightened and was clear. Yet, looking at it from anywhere else, it was far too dark.

It reminded me of our relationship with God and His Word. Kneel (sitting height) before Him, reverently, and you will see clearly. Sit at His feet like the disciples.

Also this: How can we expect people in "the world" — the unsaved — to understand God? He is unclear to their unbowed hearts and knees as the big-picture TV is to us. Our help for them should be as that salesman's was to me: Get before God, kneel to Him and see what wondrous things He will show you!

Thank You for clarity, Lord, when I come to You in prayer and supplication. You are Light, Your Word is light, and Your answer to prayer is Light in a dark place. Bless You, Father! Amen.

April 17 —

"For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone."

— Psalm 91: 11-12

Walking My Dogs — One

Strolling the road today my dogs and I came too close to an encounter that I care not repeat. It proved to me one thing: We're so intent on the world sometimes that we don't notice the killing machine rushing down the highway at us.

Around a bend at high speed came a truck — too fast and too close. I yanked the dogs with me down into the gully. In the same way, God pulls us out of danger.

I really do not believe any of the dogs realized I had saved their skins. Yet, so often, we don't ever realize or recognize that our protecting Father has done the same for us.

Lord, I know You encamp your angels around me to protect me. Thank You for the many times you saved my life, when I did not even realize it! Amen.

April 18 —

"For the Lord is the great God and the great King above all Gods."

— Psalm 95:3

Taking God for Granted

Respect God!

He is, after all:

- The One Who created you and the universe.
- Your Strong Tower and Protector, the Way out of darkness to eternal life.
- Your salvation embodied on earth and in heaven.
- Your Rock and Solid Foundation.
- Your Final Judge and Authority.

If you are to honor your father and mother to the promise of long life, how much greater call is it for you to honor your Father? What greater promise of life — eternal and glorious?

Do you come to Him in an attitude of respect, of honor?

Examine your heart in this.

Jesus is your best friend.

The Holy Spirit is your comforter.

God is God.

Keep Him in His place and you in yours.

Where do you suppose the "new gospel" so prevalent today came from? Man took God's place and rewrote what he didn't like!

We are to have a "righteous and worshipful fear of the Lord."

That is the right balance to all this "I-am-Jesus" blasphemy. That focus is on: "You're not a sinner."

The correct phrase is: "You are a sinner; repent daily for your sins."

Malachi 3:16-17 says: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to each other and the Lord listened and heard... 'They shall be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I make up My treasured possession. And I will spare them just as a man, in compassion, spares his own son who serves him.' "

Let my attitude always be one of awe that You would even listen to me, Lord. For You are truly to be loved, admired, honored and obeyed. I pray I will never, ever take You for granted. Amen.

April 19 —

"Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

— Luke 2:49

His Nature, Our Nature

We inherited a sinful nature. Jesus did not.

After Pesach (Passover), Mary and Joseph et al returned home — to the world. That was their nature.

Jesus did not. He went to His Father's house — by nature, saying to his parents who later searched and found him in the temple, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49)

His nature was serious. He did not play hide-and-seek and pick-up sticks with the other kids. He sat among the teachers in the temple court, listening, asking questions and giving answers.

Whose nature do we have now that we are saved? Should it not be His?

Where do we spend our time, and in what are we serious?

Is it God's nature active within us — or is it our old flesh nature?

Mary and Joseph returned to "the world." To where will we return?

Help me, Lord, to live in Your nature, not my old flesh, to attend to the matters of eternity, not the temporary, to be about Your business, not that of the world. Amen.

April 20 —

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

Spring a Time of Renewal

As ferns open up, as spring flowers blossom, as the woods takes on colors gone since last summer, it reminds us of new birth and "renewal."

We are told in scripture to renew our mind. ("Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what god's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will." — Rom. 12:2)

We are told to renew our spirit. ("Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." — Ps. 51:10)

We are told to renew our strength. ("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." — Is. 40:31)

We are even told to put on a new self. ("...and put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." — Col. 3:10)

God even says He will renew our hearts. ("I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with all their heart." — Jer. 24:7)

God can do a lot of this, but just how do we actively "renew our minds."

Peter tells us in Phil. 4:8 (Amplified): "Whatever is true, whatever is worthy of reverence and is honorable and seemly, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely and

lovable, whatever is kind and winsome and gracious, if there is any virtue and excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on and weigh and take account of these things [fix your minds on them]."

Where better to think on these things than in the Word. Read the Word, the Word, the Word — especially the gospels — to "renew your mind."

Flee from evil thoughts just as you would flee from the real thing.

Your Word, O Lord, renews me, whether it be spring, summer, fall or winter. Thank You for that renewal — of strength, spirit, mind and self! Amen.

April 21 —

"... For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."

— I Cor. 10:33b

Who's More Important?

We have two apple trees in our yard — a wild apple tree that is in the backyard and was here long before we moved in, and a dwarf Macintosh which I planted a few years ago. Funny how I pay more attention to "my" Mac than the tree out back. When I mix spray to protect "my" Mac from pests, I spray the other tree because I have the mix already prepared.

Watch out for pride and selfishness in your prayers, the Lord told me one day.

When you ask for this, that and the other thing for yourself, are you not saying you're more important than the dying man, the sick child, the single mother without work?

Remember: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."

Seek Him and you will get those things you would ask for. Why not spend your prime time in prayer asking for others?

Help me, Lord, to keep in mind the widow and the orphaned, the sick and the infirm, the unemployed and the unhappy — all those who need Your touch. Amen.

April 22 —

"So I told you, but you would not listen. You rebelled against the Lord's command and in your arrogance you marched up into the hill country."

— Dt. 1:43

Empty Lots in God's Forest

In our New England countryside men first marked the partitioning of the land ownership with low stone walls. We have one across the front of our property, and as you walk the land you run across them often, usually running along an open meadow.

In today's world surveyors use red flags on trees to demark property lines, especially when a builder cordons off lots for housing. I noticed several of these surveyed properties along

our road, but they have been there for years, no one building, no one apparently even considering it, and, perhaps, no one caring one way or the other.

Just like this, "people of God" have passed right along God's highway, not settling into the lots the Lord has prepared for them. We would rather move into an established home (ministry) than clear the land and build our own. OR, and this is a bigger OR, we would rather not do this at all. We would rather work for, build for, live for ourselves than God. That's why there are so many empty lots in God's forest.

Dear Lord, I do not want to be blind to any "building" plan You have in store. Point out those "red flags" to me, will You? Thank You! Amen.

April 23 —

"Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." — II Cor. 13:11

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Four

Getting Better Acquainted

After several months of walking, and learning my desires and demands (quirks, perhaps!), the dogs move off the road at my command. Even when they hear a car coming, they take note and are ready to move off the road themselves.

Is this what God meant by "He works out His perfection in us daily"? We learn His commandments. We study His life and His lessons. We get better acquainted with Him so that we can feel His touch, hear His "still small voice," and know what

He wants from us in situations even before those situations occur. When we do this, we are walking "closer to perfection," although that perfection will not happen until we are resurrected in our heavenly bodies.

Father, keep me on Your "lead line," not letting me stray. Thank You for Your directions and guidance, for letting Me know Your desires for my life. Amen.

April 24 —

"Whenever God slew them they would seek Him; they eagerly turned to Him again. They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer."

— Psalm 78:34-35

Confronting a Desert Place

Job gives us a good example of confronting a desert place. Imagine his tragedy: All his children die, all his flocks are stolen away, all his land is taken from him. Then, in Job 23 he says: "Look, I go forward but He is not there, and backward, but I can not perceive Him. When He works on the left hand I can not behold Him; when He turns to the right hand I can not see Him." (vv. 8-9)

Talk about a "desert place"! Job has no sense of God being in his life, and that life had disintegrated. All that was left was a wife who pressured him to forsake and curse God, and three friends who were not much better encouragement. Darkness and sickness were engulfing him. Yet, Job continues: "But He

knows the way that I take; when He has tested me I shall come forth as gold." (v. 10)

And he goes on to relate that he has kept God's commands: "My feet have closely followed His steps; I have kept to His way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread." (vv.-12)

Are you in a dark place? Does it seem God has not answered your prayers? Is He silent? Take heart from Job's experience. Because, despite the darkness, even utter doom, of the circumstances, He stands on the other side with the cooling waters to restore your soul, heal your pain and fashion you into a utensil fit for His kingdom.

Central to the circumstance is whether you will push through and keep your faith and trust in Him.

Remember that God will always deliver, at just the right time — that's His right time.

No matter the circumstances, Lord, I intend to trust in Your deliverance. Increase my faith that my intentions will become reality! Amen.

April 25 —

"For He will give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." — Ps. 91:11

Being "Kept"

Pray that God would "keep" His people in the full sense of the word.

The definitions of "keep"?

- Complete, finish, keep peace, stay healthy; repay, reward; peace prosperity, fellowship offerings; whole and perfect.
- Keep watch, preserve.
- To guard, protect, maintain, preserve; a watcher over.
- To hedge about, that is guard, protect, attend to. Save.
- To beware, to revere.
- The sense of watching over someone, guarding against intruders, hedging about as with thorns.

Yes, God is our Keeper, and as our High Tower, He protects us with a "hedge of health" and "wall of fire" as well as with His angels.

Thank You, Lord, for protecting Your people, hedging them about with peace and protection. Amen.

April 26 —

"Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart."

— Prov. 3:3

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Five

Love Each Other

No matter what our skin color or personalities, God loves us all. And no matter what our disposition or personalities, we can all pull together with the same objective. Case in point: Yancey and Scotia are quite opposite — in looks and personality (at least in their contact with the world outside our family). Scotia will cuddle with a stranger and lick and love

them. Yancey is very "stand-offish" until he realizes that stranger is a friend of his master or mistress. Yet both dogs love me, obey me and go in the same direction.

Members of the Body of Messiah can, and should, love each other as well, regardless of our personality conflicts ... just like our dogs. What is our excuse to do otherwise? Which, after all, has the higher IQ: people or dogs?

Help me, Lord, to love all the brethren as You love them. Help me to not be judgmental, and if I look at myself from an unbiased standpoint I am sure that will be fodder for this improvement in me. Thank You for the remembrance to "do unto others as I would have them do unto me." Amen.

April 27 —

"Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.' "

— II Kings 17:13

"But the Lord your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies." (v. 39)

Please God

Is not much of the Body of Christ like those in II Kings 17?

They worshipped the Lord **and** other gods.

Please God and, pleased with you, He will please you.

How do you please Him?

Put sin far from you and walk a close walk with Him, not straying from His side for even a moment or as far as a hair's breadth.

Care for Him — above all things.

Put Him first — at all times.

Pray for Him to be glorified primarily,

And your needs to be fulfilled secondarily.

Love His Word more than your own.

Treasure His wisdom, not man's technology.

Seek His face.

Practice His grace,

So you can one day take your place

By His side.

Toys and Joys

Men care more for their toys.

They strive for their little joys.

Their worship, too often, is just noise.

"Your righteousness," God says, "is like filthy rags —
heaven.

All the works in the world won't get you to heaven.

Your heart must be pure, clean, without guile

(Like that of a little child)."

May I have no other "gods" before You, Lord. And as easy as that may seem to be, I recognize "gods" can be other things in life that I put before you at certain times. I realize I have done that, Lord. Help me to never do it again. Amen.

April 28 —

"Christ in you the hope of glory." — Col. 1:27b

In Him

Jesus said, "Father, as I am in You and you in Me, let us live in them (believers)."

"Draw close to Me and I will draw close to you," He said.
"Reside in Me and I will reside in you."

"In" is as close as you can get. But that's what He wants. In your very skin!

Then he can be manifest **in** you. His compassion can become a touch through you, His mercy can endure in you, His caring become a hand of help through you, His patience take perfection in you, His grace abound through you, His never-ending ever-fulfilling, always-present, forever-grand, wider-than-the-earth, higher-than-the-heavens, warmer-than-the-sun, love can become real and palpable and life-changing — and eternal — **in** you.

I John 4:4 says: "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

And John 1 speaks of the possibilities of Jesus being **in** us:

"The Word was God." (v. 1) And the Word and God are in us.

"Through Him all things were made." (v. 3) Then He can still create, from within us.

"He was life and light to men." (v. 4) So can He be from within us.

Let us get this message **in** us!

...

Look even more closely at the context of Col. 1:27b and you will notice that it is not the inward-looking verse that we have been taught. In context it means for **others** to see "the hope of glory" in you — that is, salvation and **their** hope in it (salvation). And, even too, it is the believer's responsibility to make sure the hope of glory **does** shine through them.

*Thank You, Father, for coming and dwelling **in** me, for allowing me to be a temple **in** whom the Holy Spirit can reside. What a holy compliment and mission! Amen.*

April 29 —

"The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head."

— Ps. 7:16

Watch Out for the 'Unseens'

Blue sky was all about except a cloud over the sun during our walk this morning. There was a darkness about us, but up ahead the sun shone golden on the road. From the rains last night many worms had wandered out, along with a frog, and died in the road.

What can that possibly teach us? If you're on God's road, even if darkness comes, keep your eyes on the light up ahead. His paths lead you out of the dark and keep you in safety.

Those little creatures died on the road — why? Besides that, they are mindless and can't know God.

The **unseen** can kill you — not just the car racing down the street. In this case, the cold killed the worms; a car killed the frog.

The **unseen** destroys. Pride, hate, unforgiveness — they kill. Watch out for them and other "unseens" as well.

I always want to keep my eyes on You, God, living in the spirit as well as in this world. Give me the ability to see things before they happen, to discern the dark from the light. Amen.

April 30 —

"Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the Lord — for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all."

— Jer. 31:12

Good Food, Bad Food

Normally we stock our bird feeders with striped sunflower seeds. The birds come in droves — chickadees, bluejays, finches and many others. They can crack the shell and get to the meat inside. But yesterday I bought black-oil sunflower seeds and loaded up the feeders with that. Today, I watched as the birds flew to the feeders, took a quick look and darted away, not eating and not returning. Some stopped and looked at me through the window, as if they were asking, "Alright, Bud, what kind of trick are you playing on us?"

Thank God, He only gives us good food. When we eat of His Word, we are satisfied — body, soul and spirit. Unlike me, He knows what His children want and need and what they will eat. He knows if it were not good, we would not return for more. We should be like those birds: searching out the good food but not even daring a taste of that which is not good.

A Blessing

Be present at our table, Lord.
Be here and everywhere adored.
These morsels bless, and grant that we
May feast in Paradise with Thee.
Amen...

Thank You, Lord, for Your good and perfect — and very tasty — food! As long as You continue to provide it, I will come to Your feeder and partake; and I know Your supply will never run dry. Amen.

May 1 —

"For where two or three come together in My Name, there am I with them." — Matt. 18:20

Walking Out on God?

So many people, during a church service, just get up and wander off to the rest room, or somewhere else, who knows where. But if this is a meeting of God's people, God says He is in the midst of them. So, if you stand up and walk away while the congregation is gathered together, reading the word or

worshipping, you are being rude to God and showing Him a lack of respect.

Think on this the next time you consider wandering around the church during a service.

...

Think on this also:

Bored Sheep

We say to someone in the doldrums, "Oh, let's give you some excitement. Strap you into a helicopter seat and zoom you about the sky."

It's all external, experiential. And it has no lasting effect — only goose bumps for the moment.

Is that what the church is doing for the "bored sheep" today?

I beg Your forgiveness, Lord, for the times I have showed disrespect for You by ignoring Your presence. Amen.

May 2 —

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."
— Rom. 8:13

"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."
— John 8:24

Fallen but Fodder

By the winnowing power of God, trees are here and there scattered on the forest floor. You can guess at how long ago they fell by the degree to which they have decayed.

Eventually, the purpose of that deteriorating will be visible in the new, invigorated life of the vegetation around them. When a tree falls, it nourishes the next generation of trees.

When we die, what we leave behind should also nourish those still alive, shouldn't it? So, ask yourself: What have I done to nourish those who will be left behind?

That is my contemplation today, as it should be regularly.

When You died, Jesus, You provided the greatest nourishment of all time. I just want to accomplish a small portion. Help me to walk the walk of righteousness that will be a beacon for others who live on after my death. Amen.

May 3 —

"Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior and my hope is in You all day long."

— Ps. 25:5

Show Me, Lord

Show me humility, O Lord,
that I might walk in it.

Show me Your love, O Lord
that I might feel it for **all** men.

Show me Your joy, O Lord,
that I might revel in it.

Show me Your compassion, O Lord,
that I might show it to others.

Give me revelation, O Lord,

that I might reveal Your Word to others.
In all things, in all ways and at all times —
In everything I say, do, or think, Lord, may Your Holy Name
and Your glory be first and last.

*Humility, love, joy, compassion, revelation... grant me all
these things, Lord. Thank You! Amen.*

May 4 —

*"Silver and gold I do not have. But what I have I give you.
In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."*

— Acts 3:4

Do!

Peter and John were at the temple when the lame beggar asked for alms. They were ready to give a better gift. Philip was walking along the roadside when he noticed the rich foreigner reading the prophets, and he was ready to explain the Truth of the Messiah.

Be prepared to do this as you walk out in the world today!

It feels better to give than to receive. When you lay hands on someone and Jesus heals them, it is a greater joy than being healed yourself.

And when you DO, you can sing as King David did in Psalm 57:5: "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth."

Thank You, Father, for the simple ability to practice what I preach, to "do" instead of just saying. Help me to keep my

eyes wide open, and my "discerner" discerning as I walk out there in the world today. Amen.

May 5 —

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

— Heb. 13:8

One Constant

God is the only constant... and His creation mirrors that constancy. The sun rises every morning and sets every evening. Tides rush in and ebb out. The stars appear in the evening and make their rounds through the night.

Man and all the "living" creatures change. We respond to emotions and vary in those responses from moment to moment.

Thank the Lord we can depend on Him for consistency.

He is steadfast in His love, mercy and grace — and in everything else.

He will not be moved.

He is our Cornerstone, and the key to any cornerstone of any building is that it can not be moved. It is (and He is) unchanging.

With Expectations

Go to God with expectation,
By consecration set apart to hear.
No need to regale Him of your frustrations.
It's you, not your voice, He holds dear.

Let Him, not you, handle communication.
Let Him, not you, the vessel steer.

So often I walk away from my prayer closet
Exasperated that I'd heard no Word.
The obstacle, I wanted to know, what was it?
After all, the thought of hearing God is not absurd.
Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Paul, Isaac
And scores more His voice have heard.

The problem is me, not He.
I'm too quick to talk, too loud to listen.
Use of the heavenly pipeline is free,
But hearing my endless prattle must make Him bristle.
When I finally stop, it must give Him glee.
It's then, on my spiritual stature, He can chisel.

So here's the answer, I suppose.
If it's not right on, it's very close.
Prepare your ear gate, heart and soul.
Think: my spirit's not cold as ice, but hot as coal.
Then expect to hear God's grand voice,
Or sweet whisper, even chapter and verse.
Expect to feel His presence all around,
His loving, tender touch so profound.
Expect, yes, expect without a doubt.
And sit quiet to hear Him out!

*Thank You, Lord, for being Someone on whom I can rely,
Who does not change Your mind or commandments. Help me
to be as constant as You. Amen.*

May 6 —

*"For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts
the waves of the sea." — Psalm 107:25*

"Home" Improvement

Look at the weather: cold and breezy, the sky ominous. A rainstorm is coming later in the day and tonight. At some time warm weather will arrive; we're promised that because spring inevitably follows winter and summer follows spring. Along with the change will come hurricanes, twisters and tornadoes. Winds always swirl around the world.

The story is, God keeps the world on an even keel by causing turbulence here and there. It is the same in our lives. If He allowed them to remain unchanging and without challenges, how would we grow? God allows the storms to blow into our lives. They are a tool of betterment — kind of a "Home Improvement."

Thank You, Father, for the inevitable change in weather, the storms You blow into my life as well as the calm and pleasant times. I know You are using them to help me grow as a person of God. Amen.

May 7 —

"Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren."

— Deut. 4:9

Remember the Victories

When the boy David challenged the giant Goliath, he did not fear Goliath because he recalled the victories God brought him against the lion and the bear when protecting his flock of sheep.

David told Saul, "The Lord Who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the law of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (I Sam. 17:37a)

Scripture says that we overcome Satan "by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony." Remember the Lord's victories in your life to build your faith and walk through future challenges.

The Bible is voluminous in instances where God tells His people to remember. When the Jews crossed over the river He told them to stack a pile of stones in remembrance of the deliverance. When they found water in the desert, another pile of stones. He told them to remember His works through a series of feasts, such as Pesach (Passover). And they retained their peoples' history, so that when they looked back on it, they saw the deliverance.

Nehemiah records in Neh. 4:14: "And I looked and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them [Israel's adversaries]."

Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.' "

Time and again David speaks to the importance of remembrance in his psalms, such as Psalm 78, Psalm 74:12-17, and Psalm 77:11-12 where he writes: "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds."

And God said through His prophet Zechariah in Zech. 10:9: "I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; they shall live, together with their children, and they shall return."

And on His last night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples to partake of the Passover communion "in remembrance of Me."

Yes, we are to remember past victories **and** the reasons for them.

The major reason is that God loves you. He did, after all, give His only begotten Son so that anyone who believed would not perish but have eternal life."

Praise Your Name, O God, for the many victories You have brought in my life, for the many times you have saved me from debacles of all sorts, and for Your continuing protection. Help me to remember them all, and through that recollection, gain faith and trust in Who You are, and who I am in You. Amen.

May 8 —

"Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves [not Messiah]. Do you not yourselves realize and know [thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience] that Jesus HaMashiach is in you — unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected?"

— II Cor. 13:5

Prove Yourselves

Yes, it is scriptural!

I was once condemned as a false teacher for writing that, in the midst of a fast-and-prayer weekend, the Lord told me to "prove" myself. A person declared that I heard no such thing since "God would not say such a thing"; and so he could not read and believe anything I wrote. Months later I discovered this scripture. It was too late for any defense, but not too late to pray that that person would also discover that scripture. Also, in Psalm 26:2 King David prayed: "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my mind and my heart."

Beyond the admonition to "prove" yourself by examining and evaluating your actions, this personal story should serve another purpose: Do not condemn someone or their teaching until you prove to yourself that you are standing on firm ground, found in the Word of God.

Lord, I have failed so many tests. The "spot quizzes" seem to get me often! But I know that if I evaluate my walk throughout

each day, it will be a good "proving ground" for You. Remind me of that, will You? Amen.

May 9 —

*"And they [Zacharias and Elizabeth] were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord **blameless**."*

— Luke 1:6

You CAN Be Blameless!

How often do you hear the lament: "But God does not expect us to be sinless, blameless, pure!"?

If so, what about the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth? What about Job, who was "blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil"? (Job 1:1)

And there are others who walked similarly before the Almighty.

We **can** be blameless, too? How? Choices.

We **choose** to keep our eyes open — or to close them.

We **choose** to close our ears — or to open them.

We **choose** to stay or run from temptation — or submit to it or fight.

We choose, choose, choose, all day long every day.

We can be thankful for this: God will not tempt us beyond our capabilities of resisting.

*Please give me the strength and fortitude, Lord, to make the righteous choices all the day and all the night, every day. Remind me that, yes, it **can** be done! Amen.*

May 10 —

"Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "

— Acts 9:5

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Six **Keeping a Steady Pace**

I have a certain pace I like to keep up when walking my dogs — a steady and even pace, uninterrupted by starts and jerks and stops and wanderings. You get what I mean. I know where I'm going and I know when I want to get there.

To do this, I need the cooperation of my companions, three creatures that are very nice but sometimes have not a clue about my plans or timing.

Likewise, God keeps an even cadence, or beat in the dimension of time, and maintains a steady pace along the way. He knows what awaits us in the future and when it will occur, although we normally have no idea. If we walk at His pace, it's a smooth walk. If we strain against the leash, so to speak, it's hard on us and hard on Him.

Keep pace with God, not yourself.

Forgive me, Father, for kicking against the gourds, for trying to operate in my own timing instead of paying attention to Yours, of tugging and pushing against the will of the Holy Spirit in my life. Amen.

May 11 —

"Surely He will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart."

— Ps. 91:3-4

In Your Arms

In Your arms I want to stay,
Being held throughout the day.
Holy arms wrapped around me,
It's peace and love I feel.

Oh, Lord, don't turn away
From my sin and misery.
You gave Your only Son for me,
One whom only He could save.

The world has no clue
To the answers of life's mysteries,
But on my face I seek You,
Knowing wisdom's in Your stories.

Oh, Lord, please come quickly
To redeem the earth You made.
So many to the hills will flee,
But my trust will never fade.

Though struggles and strife may happen, Lord, I will seek Your arms to rest in and Your Word to take refuge in. Thank You! Amen.

May 12 —

"Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 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 good things to those who ask Him!"

— Matthew 7:9-11

A Parent's Love

The question this fine morning was: Would I rather have a novel I had written or a game my son had created, published? My son's game was my quick response.

"Then," the Lord said to my spirit, "think of My love for My children, which is so much greater than yours."

Most parents would pick their children's good over their own. It's one of those loves C.S. Lewis writes about. Yet God's version of that love blows mankind's away, blinds it, it is so strong. God, after all, gave His only begotten Son's life on the cross so that we, His billions of children, could have forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life for those who believe in Him.

Recall Isaiah 43:1-2: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you. When you pass through the waters, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you."

What greater gift! What greater love!! When you next think of the magnitude of your love for your children, contemplate the depth of your Father's love for you.

I do not deserve the kind of love You have for me, Father. But I am ever thankful that You do possess it. Help me to be ever-thankful and worthy of Your devotion. Amen.

May 13 —

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction."

— II Tim. 4:2

Preachers of Habit

The early robins are catching the breakfast of worms. The woodpeckers are mining their morning ration of bugs.

You know the expression "creature of habit." A certain bird is a creature of habit. Or the bear is a creature of habit. In certain ways, probably most of us humans are creatures of habit as well.

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines "habit" as "a usual manner of behavior" and "a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition."

Consider being a "preacher of habit," going about with the main focus of your life being to share the Word of God.

One of my favorite quotes is from Puritan pastor Richard Baxter: "I preach as never to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

Be prepared to preach the good news in season and out of season. This, of course, is something most of us know. But do we make it "a habit"?

Help me to be a preacher of habit, Lord, to declare Your Good News, to share Your love and Your glory. May I never fall out of that habit, Father. Amen.

May 14 —

"Even the priests, who approach the Lord, must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them."

— Exod. 19:22

Left and Forsaken? No!

When a mother gives birth, that life, that heartbeat which has been beating right next to her heart for months, is removed. Relate that feeling to Jesus on the cross when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

Jesus was God. He was in God and God was in Him even before Jesus came down to Earth in the flesh. And, on the cross, God had to depart before the sin could come on Him.

(It was not what some preach, that God could not "look on sin." Doesn't He look on sin all the time?)

The agony Jesus felt was God's distancing from His body. That Presence in our lives is in danger when we walk in sin; and I believe when a person goes to Hell, the lack of God's presence is the greatest agony they will feel. Is that not enough to keep us fearful of a sinful existence? Is it not enough to spur us on to "flee from sin"?

Oh, God, I fear the day when You are not with me! Give me the composure and the inner strength, when faced by the enemy, to spurn his every advance toward me. Amen.

May 15 —

"For both He Who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren."

— Heb. 2:11

His Family

Hebrews 2:11 tells us that Jesus is not ashamed to call believers ("those who are being sanctified") brothers.

Scriptures declare that we are heirs together with Messiah, and that He is "the firstborn among many brethren."

And Jesus said pointblank: "Those who do the will of My Father in heaven, they are my mother and brother and sister."

God has adopted us into this Glorious Family. Imagine the wedding celebration when He comes for His Bride!? Imagine the Pesach feasts together in heaven! Wow!

I am certainly not deserving, but thank You, Father God, for accepting me into Your great and glorious family! Hallelujah!

May 16 —

"And coming in that instant she [the prophetess Anna] gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

— Luke 2:38

Be Nearsighted, Not Farsighted

The prophetess Anna, widowed at an early age, had served God in the temple until her 84th year, and then she saw the blessed Messiah, Who had just been born.

Luke 2:38 — We can and should look ahead, but beware if we concentrate on that. Live today as long as it is called today.

The church as a whole — and yes, me, too — is too farsighted too much of the time.

That is, looking far ahead, interested in Revelations, etc.

Look at the attendance at talks on prophecy. Would that many come to a talk on piety?

As Scripture says, "Each day has trouble of its own."

Being nearsighted is to be "nearer my God to Thee," concentrating on today how to live, talk, witness, praise, worship, study, be perfect like Jesus, love the Lord and our neighbors — a whole host of things we neglect when concentrating on the future.

I DO thank You, Lord, for promising an eternity in Your house. But I DO also know that I must concentrate on this very day, on sharing the love of God to those who have ears to hear and who need someone to share their joys and their grieves. Help me to fulfill that need, Lord. Amen.

May 17 —

"Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase." — Prov. 3:9

"We will not neglect the house of our Lord." — Neh. 10:39b

Firstfruits

Nehemiah 10 spells out the dedication the Jewish people had for their God. With the rebuilding of Jerusalem well under way, the nobles and "the rest of the people — priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who were able to understand..." bound themselves to follow the law.

Further, they assumed responsibility for bringing to the house of the Lord each year their firstfruits in their covenant with God to forsake their sins:

- Wood to burn on the altar
- Crops
- Fruit trees
- Cattle, herds and flocks
- Grain and ground meal
- Wine and oil.
- Offerings

Even their firstborn sons.

What of your firstfruits are you delivering up to the Lord?

When I began my own business and could work out of the home, the Lord impressed on me to offer the firstfruits of my time and writing to Him. No longer would I just begin each day in prayer, but I would begin the "work" part of each day writing for Him. But look how many firstfruits there are in my life — in our lives!

Go back to the beginning. Why were we created? To commune with the Lord. Should we not have the same heart as David who wrote: "As the deer panteth for the water brook, so my soul seeketh after Thee"?

The ultimate desire and goal should be to honor the Lord with the firstfruits of yourself: your **self**.

I pray, dear God, that You show me what are the firstfruits in my life that I should be dedicating to You. Give me a heart to obey once I hear Your voice, and then to obey and obey each and every day. Amen.

May 18 —

"The Name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and are safe." — Proverbs 18:10

"As the deer panteth for the water brooks, so my soul panteth for You, O God." — Psalm 42:1

Flee from Evil, Run to God

Just as we are to **flee from** evil, we are to **run to** God, hungering for His eternal food, thirsting for His living water, grasping for His Word, living sinless and righteous before Him.

Mark 3:13 says, "Jesus went upon the mountainside and called to Him those He wanted and they came to Him."

It is like the song says: "I'm Yours, Lord, everything I am, everything I'm not, everything I've got, I'm completely Yours."

Beseeching God

Do we look for, do we beseech You?
Do we not know how to reach You?
Is it a fleeting fancy, a game we play
When, asking for direction, Your Name we say?

If, full-force, we really sought Your face
To discover the path we ought to take
Your Word says You won't allow disgrace.
You will show us the way, for Your own sake.

If we put aside selfishness, pride, self-control,
If we kill the fleshly side of our soul,
If we give the Spirit reign in our lives,
We need never fear the enemy's knives.

"If" is the biggest two-letter word.
It connotes a decision must be made.
Your eternal future lies in the balance.
Satan's hellish lies, or the Lord's two-edged sword.

Both are available for your selection.
The wrong choice brings hell's correction.
But seek the Father's face, His voice,
Make the right one and the angels rejoice.

That "if" — it's such a huge, huge word.
It tells of obstacles to overcome.
Choices, choices, choices. The greatest one
Is that your will or His be done.

Make no quick decision on your own. Rather,
Take time to pray and listen.
Remember you're a "living epistle."
The route your story takes depends on the author.

Dear Lord, I do thirst after You and Your Word. It is eternal life, while the world's will only bring death. Bring me daily to Your water brook, Father, that I may drink to the full. Amen.

May 19 —

"Moreover, as they go about from house to house, they learn to be idlers, and not only idlers, but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say and talking about things they should not mention."

— I Tim. 5:13

That's Their Story

Walking along our country road, the dogs and I passed a woods lot that was being clearcut. Few trees were left standing, and it created an ugly sight. It gauled me to think that these men had apparently not considered selective cutting. But God told me He had other things than clearcutting that should be occupying my mind.

Whether in the world or the Body of Messiah, do not waste your time complaining about what someone else has done, or is doing, or how poorly they are handling a certain situation.

"That's their story. Focus on your own," He said.

Likewise, avoid gossip. Do not be angry. What good can either the act or the emotion accomplish?

Only they and God know the circumstances — and their own heart even deceives them.

If the person who concerns you is not saved, pray for their salvation. If they are saved, pray in love for their eyes to be opened.

The Lord tells us to "think on things that are lovely, pure and of good report." (Phil. 4:8)

Father, I struggle with being judgmental. Sometimes I think it is in my genes; but I know that is just an excuse. I can choose my actions. I can choose the path of my thoughts. Please help me to think on the good and not the bad. Amen.

May 20 —

"So the king set out, with all the people following him."

— See II Samuel 15:17

Ready To Leave All?

Be prepared to leave what you have to follow the Lord.

Notice in II Samuel 15: 15-30 that when King David's son Absalom mounted his coup to overtake the government, all the people loyal to David left their homes to follow David into the wilderness. Even the "new convert" Ittai the Gittite (with all his family) went with him. David **did** tell Zadok and his priests to stay and to keep the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem. But the rest went with David. There is no mention

here of hesitation, murmuring or complaining, or even discussion of the positive and negative consequences

Think what they were leaving behind.

David said to Ittai: "You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you."

From the king's own mouth, Ittai had the blessing to return to a comfortable life, but responded: "As surely as the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be."

Now this does not mean you will not be sad ("all the people who were with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up" the Mount of Olives). But they went, nevertheless, knowing their love and duty was to their king.

And David was the earthly king. How much more devotion does our Heavenly King deserve?

Duty Versus Comfort

They left comfortable beds,
The roof over their heads
To follow King David instead
Of the easier route in life.

From their homes they were displaced;
The wilderness they faced;
They relied on God's grace.
They chose duty despite the strife.

Lord, would I wander the wilderness at Your call
And take no thought to leaving it all?
I truly would like to think so,
But only this I know:
I will need Your strength to hold my hand as I go.

Lord, I know the Scripture says, "I can do all things through Him Who strengtheneth me." That is exactly the strength I need: Yours! Thank You God for Your promise that no matter where I am, You will "never leave me nor forsake me." Amen.

May 21 —

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." — Ps. 51:12

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Seven **Excited about God**

Look how excited our dogs get when we've been away for a few days... when they're back in our presence!

Look how excited we get in the same way when we've been out of God's presence. Right? If not, then pray for regeneration because if you have been too harried and hurried to spend time with God, and you do not feel an empty hole inside, something is terribly wrong.

Step two is a warning: Do not get **so** excited when you return to His presence that you don't pay attention. In my "doggy" experience, the dogs got so excited and rambunctious that one of them almost ran in front of a moving car!

Remember, the enemy is still firing those deadly darts to destroy you.

I pray, God, that I will never be without Your presence. But if that does happen, please keep me alert, aware and cautious when I invite You back into my life. Amen.

May 22 —

"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."

— Is. 25:1

God Is Life

The woods today is loaded with songbirds and a woodpecker — all making a symphony — babbling and gagging (and in the woodpecker's case, rat-tat-tatting) in this short distance we walked up and down. Nothing today is colored; the sky is gray from stem to stern, and yet the "life" in the woods was as vibrantly colorful as could be imagined.

Now, just imagine God, Who created the university **and is omnipresent in it.**

This experience gave me a profound fullness of understanding of "God is life."

Given: The Creator is greater than His creation.

So then: Just listen to how full of life God's creation is, then try to fathom His own fullness of life. How grand and glorious and incomprehensible!

God, You are the Creator of all life. Thank You for letting us experience the wee corners of it that we come across in our own lives, and for the promise of the far grander experience when we join You in heaven!. Amen.

May 23 —

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." — Prov. 4:23

Prepare for the Dreaded Day

An ominous day awaits. The gray sky, the rising breeze... a storm lies ahead. Watch, Jesus warned. You do not know the day or hour. So, watch.

Guard your heart. That's the crucial thing in being prepared for that day and hour. Guard against temptation, against sin. If the hour comes when you have not kept guard, woe to you!

Jesus admonished the Pharisees for not being able to perceive the time (spiritually) although they **could** perceive the weather (physically). His inference was that they should be able to perceive both. So should we. Be forewarned in the Spirit, of the day to come.

Then be prepared by guarding your heart.

Father God, I know terrible tempests and swirling storms lie in my future — perhaps even today. Help me to guard my heart, mind and soul so that when they strike, I will yet stand, firmly, as an example of a Godly person, not a fallen one. Amen.

May 24 —

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus HaMashiach is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

— Phil. 2:9-11

Jesus Is God, Very God

Jesus does not need to be magnified physically; He already is. He sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He does not need to be magnified spiritually; He already is. He is the Mediator for all mankind, interceding to the Father for us.

But we do need to magnify him in our own hearts, make Him bigger in us, and a bigger part of us. "If you be in Me as I am in my Father," He said, "than you and I will be one, just as I and My Father are one."

Just think of what a great and wonderful "oneness" that can be — with the living Savior "in" you, working in you, rejoicing in you, preaching in you, sharing and loving in you. The One, Whose Name is above every name and to Whom every knee will bow, living in you! That is worth a full contemplation in each of our lives, something we should consider in all of its ramifications, something to scrutinize this very day.

O God, what a fantastic thing! Jesus, Who is God, very God, magnified in my heart! Thank You. Make me a worthy receptacle and use me, Father. Amen.

May 25 —

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

— I Cor. 3:16

We, Temples

Walking down this old tote road in the woods behind our home, you pass a little round opening in the forest canopy. Here you can still see the remnants of the "temple" our youngest son erected out of a tree trunk, branches and rope. There is a seat to sit upon, a cross of branches tied by a rope and hanging on a tree... and seclusion to be alone with God. Simple, yet effective.

It reminds me that believers should see ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit, which He says we are. If you are familiar with the temples of the Jews, think of yourself in these terms to make this scripture come alive in your life:

Your Body = the outer court.

Your Soul = the inner court.

Your Spirit = the holy of holies.

God is Spirit and that is the most holy — and untouchable — part of you.

When God gave the Jews directions on caring for the tabernacle in Leviticus 24:2-8, He specified that they use pure

oil; light to burn continuously; bread; a pure gold lampstand; and bread on a pure gold table.

Likewise, He wants us to be pure as He is pure. Continually burn the light, His light, as it is burned in the temple. Be a place of worship. Be a place where the Word is read and absorbed.

Body, soul and spirit, I want to be pure as You are, Lord. Help me to walk that walk, thinking as I go that I am a temple, and an example, of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

May 26 —

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

— I Peter 5:8-9

Put Away Your Pride

In Mark 5, the woman with the issue of blood was not even supposed to be in public. But she risked the consequences of the law and the possibility of humiliation and in order to touch the Savior and receive her healing.

In Samuel, the general and prince were told by the great prophet to bathe seven times in the river in order to be cleansed from leprosy. They put aside their pride and did what they knew looked foolish in the eyes of their troops.

How often has pride stood in the way of your doing what you heard the Lord tell you to do? Pride stinketh in the nostrils of God. And it should stinketh in our own nostrils.

Humility, on the other hand, is a sweet-smelling aroma to him, and it is something we ought to practice — a lot.

Dear Lord, please set me free from the pride that I often do not even recognize is there in my heart. Cast it far from me, Lord! Amen.

May 27 —

"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold."

— Prov. 22:1

Change Yourself First

The Wright brothers forever changed the world in terms of travel.

Edison changed it in terms of light and power.

Bell changed it in terms of communication.

Mere individuals, they changed the world.

Jesus changed it in the most important way: He changed **us**, inside, who and what we **are**. He redeemed us spiritually and every moment of every day He is delivering someone from sickness, disease, death, debilitating temptations... myriad things.

Yes, change the world... but change yourself first. Let the Lord work out His perfection in you.

Lord, I know I must be a me-changer before I can become a world-changer. Help me to improve my reputation, so that I can be a good representative for You and then become an instrument for change in the world around me. Amen.

May 28 —

"My son, give attention to My words; incline your ear to My sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."

— Prov. 4:20-23

God's Way Versus the World's Way

The world's way: You hear and it goes to your brain and you **reason** what is right and wrong, good and bad.

God's way: You hear and it goes to your heart, **then** to your head. Search your heart, your Spirit, and it will tell you what is right.

We struggle with the world's way versus the Lord's way, but we have to choose. As James writes in James 4:4-5:

"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'?"

And here is an entire sermon: "Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will, and] so shall

your plans be established and succeed." (Prov. 16:3
(Amplified)

Keep your heart with all diligence for "out of your heart are the issues of life."

Thank You, God, for showing me the right and good way, for letting me pass my cares over to You, for helping me to guard my heart against the enemy at the same time I am absorbing and living Your living Word. Amen.

May 29 —

"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him." — Ps. 34:8

I Want To Know You, Lord

I want to know You better, Lord,
I want to know Your face.
I want to know Your plan.
I want to know Your grace.
I want to know Your love.
I want to fathom Your allness.
I want to feel Your compassion.
I want to see Your beauty.
I want to learn Your every lesson.

I desire to do Your will, Lord.
Do with me what you will, Lord.
Carry me to heights of joy,
Where I can breathless stand at Your side.

Take me to depths of despair,
Where all my sin I must confide.
Do whatever You will with me, Lord,
For I know You'll always be there.
I know You'll always be there.

Show me the depth of Your love, Lord.
Show me the breadth of Your care.
Display the height of Your holiness.
Illumine the width of Your wisdom.
For You are love, You are care,
FROM You spring holiness and wisdom.
Your fullness is all these together
In such measure I could not fathom.

May 30 —

"For God uses the simple things of the world to confound the wise."

— I Cor. 1:27

The Simple Things

God does use the simple to confound the wise. This is not talking about "simple" people as I have heard so many say, inferring that the first disciples, being fishermen by and large, were stupid. No, the scripture, I believe, means that the Lord uses simple concepts to confound the wise.

How many have sought the Fountain of Youth, sailing the seas and facing danger for their quest, when eternal life was such a "simple" matter?

The heart of the Bible, John 3:16, is a simple concept of total sacrifice that answers this search for the Fountain of Youth: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Repent, believe in Him and make Him Lord of your life, and eternal life is a done deal. No complexity there. And that is what confounds so many.

I recall sharing John 3:16 with an unsaved friend. Salvation seemed too easy to him. He said, "But I would not deserve it!"

Correct. And none of us do...

Thank You, my Lord and Savior, for making the Fountain of Youth such an easy discovery, such a simple matter to discover, such a quick compliance to fulfill.

May 31 —

"Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us."

— Eph. 3:20

Incredibly Designed

The Holy Spirit was dealing with me through John 14:12-13: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the

works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My father. And whatever you ask in My Name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

As I lamented my lack of belief because I was not seeing these "greater works" in my life, He reminded me that reading the Gospels increases faith, reading testimonials increases faith, recalling the miracles in my own life increases faith. And then He showed me something I did not expect to increase my faith: the birds flitting about our yard.

Try as man might, we have not been able to create anything that can fly nearly as dexterous or easily as birds. Try as man might, he has not been able to build a jackhammer that does not jar the body; yet witness the woodpecker. Try as man might, he has not been able to come even near the radar system contained in the tiny brain of the bat. Look at the long-distance vision of the eagle or hawk, at the inconceivable hearing of the robin, who can tell precisely where the worm is beneath the earth, at the grasp of the nuthatch who can climb **down** a tree upside down.

If these are not enough to increase your faith that there is a Great Designer and that He has awesome, miracle-generating power, than I am left shaking my head.

So, look out the window at the birds of the air; look back into your past at the miracles God has wrought; and look forward to the "great things" God wants you to do!

Hallelujah, Lord! As little as we deserve, as minor as we have attained, You have in store great things for us to do.

Help me to increase my faith, Father, so I can be about that work. Amen.

June 1 —

"... wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong."

— Is. 1:16

"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

— II Cor. 7:1

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Eight Shed the Rags

Our border collie Yancey loves leaving the road and walking through tall, wet grass. It must feel good to him, that cool, wet swoosh in the face. Trouble is, he's off the road where I want him to be.

It's something like us, isn't it? We get off God's highway, then do what feels good. Ooo, that's different. Ooo, that's refreshing. Ooo, that feels so-o good.

Problem is, it makes us that much harder to dry off and clean up when we return home! Just like Yancey gets wet and sometimes muddy feet and a wet chest and belly and needs to be wiped off before we can allow him into the house, so the Lord needs to clean us up before allowing us into His house. His is a pure, undefiled home, after all. And like Joshua, we must shed our dirty rags before entering.

Lord, give me a gentle jerk back onto your pathway when I begin to wander. Thank You! Amen.

June 2 —

"The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife... Do not deprive each other..." — I Cor. 7:3

Fulfilling Husbandly Duties

We know that the Lord looks upon His people Israel and believers in Messiah as His bride. He said in Hos. 2:19: "I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion."

This is reinforced in other scriptures:

- "For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is His name..." Is. 54:5
- "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him [the Lord] glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready." — Rev. 19:7
- "As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you." — Is. 62:5

We also know by I Cor. 7:3 that Jesus HaMashiach (Jesus Christ) will fulfill his marital duties to His Bride, the Church. Messiah wants to be intimate with the Church.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," Gen. 2:24 says. Now that is intimacy: One flesh.

"Be in Me as I am in My Father," Jesus said.

"I and My Father are One," He said.

All He needs is a people WILLING to be intimate with Him. That does not take a lot of hard work. It simply takes being quiet and communing with Him.

My Messiah, my savior, my Husband, how glad I am that You chose me. I shall endeavor to always be intimate with You, sharing with You my deepest feelings and taking from You Your greatest thoughts and love. Amen.

June 3 —

"Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: 'O my son Absalom — my son, my son Absalom — if only I died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!'" "

— II Sam. 18:33

Lament for a Child

King David had just heard that his son Absalom, who had led a rebellion against him, had died in battle; and yet David would that he could have died in his son's place. What love a parent has for a child!

Many believers with children have at least one who is not saved, and if not saved, they are spiritually dead. And yet are we agonizing over them in tears and lamentation? Is it foremost in our heart to cry out to God for them?

When David said he would die in Absalom's place, the Savior had not yet come upon the Earth. Now He has and we need not cry out: "O that I could die in my child's place." But

we should be crying out: "Lord, Your Son died for my child. Save him!"

Salvation comes solely from You, Lord, by Your mercy and grace. Extend that to my child, Father, showing them the need to accept You as Lord and Savior in their live! Amen.

June 4 —

"Be on guard. Be alert." — Mark 13:33a

Walking the Dogs: Lesson Nine **Caution and Control**

Perils. Perils. Perils.

On our walk we passed by an unfamiliar man and Yancey had to be carefully watched, so that he wouldn't lunge at the fellow. Then we met a strange dog and Yancey and Scotia both had to be restrained.

What goes?

The Lord showed me, no matter what familiar territory we are walking, we need to be alert.

We need to be cautious.

We need to be in control.

Most of all, in order to discern what and who is danger, or not danger, we must be "prayed up."

Father, thank You for this message, for the world is a dangerous place for man and beast. Yet You are our Guardian and You give Your angels charge over us to watch us in all our ways, to hold us up in their hands so we do not strike our

feet against a stone. Thank you for always giving us the heads-up, Lord. Amen.

June 5 —

"And he made fifty clasps of gold, and coupled the curtains to one another with the clasps, that it might be one tabernacle."

— Ex. 36:13

"He overlaid the ceiling beams, door frames, walls and doors of the temple with gold and he carved cherubim on the walls."

— II Chron. 3:7

God's Temple, His Vessel

God was **so** precise in ordering how the temple was to be made, He dealt with every detail — every dimension, every ounce of gold, every color of fabric...

The reason: It was the vessel of the Holy Spirit. And that is just as **we**, His creations, are. Temples of the Holy Spirit, we are "wonderfully and fearfully made." And how would He adorn us in order that He would live within us? And how much greater than gold is He!

The next time you are feeling depressed, or down on yourself, think on this: I am wonderfully and fearfully made by the hand of Almighty God!

Oh, how great are You, my God and Creator! Thank You for being so very precise, so intimately involved in who I am made to be! Amen.

June 6 —

"But You remain the same and Your years will never end."
— Ps. 102:27

Forever the same

We bless Your Holy Name,
My Lord Jesus, forever the same.
On Calvary, You took upon Yourself the blame
For all our sins and iniquities.
Purity, on this earth, we can never claim.
But, hallelujah, we can always call on Your Name
To shield and cleanse us from any shame.
Washed by Your blood, we're innocent, not guilty.

Thank You and bless You, Lord.
We love You for Who You are and what You've done.
Thank You and bless You, Lord,
Despite our falls and our faults,
Your children You never shun.

Help us through this life, this day
To walk in perfection,
To heal, to help, to sing Your praise
With people in all directions.

Help us, O Lord, this very hour
To walk in Your power,
To show the world Your splendor and might

And prove to Satan he's in for a fight.

For those who magnify the Lord
Decrease as He increases
And when the Lord is for us
Who can be against us?

It's Your Name — no other, Lord,
We lift up in honor and praise.
It's to Your glory, no other, Lord,
We want to win men's souls.
It's for Your cause, no other, Lord,
We live out every day.
It's in Your Son, no other, Lord,
That mankind is made whole.

Cleanse us, wash us, strengthen us, we pray,
That we may be a people, called by Your Name.
A people pure as a new white snow
As gentle as a dove.
A people sure of the One they serve
Who are known for His love.

June 7 —

"Would God not have discovered it, since He knows the secrets of the heart?"

— Ps. 44:21

Outward Appearances: One

Bug-Free?

I have been noticing these two hairy woodpeckers for weeks, pecking away at a certain beech tree. Now this tree looks like the least likely candidate to serve up their daily treat of bugs. How could there be any bugs inside this healthy specimen? There are certainly less healthy-looking trees immediately around it. Yet, these woodpeckers are coming to this one and apparently getting their daily fill.

This is an object lesson. We may look free of spiritual "bugs." We may fool the world about how "healthy" we are. But if there is anything amiss inside us — any pest eating away at our soul — it will be found out. And when it is, the process of extricating it from within us is bound to be painful. Ouch!

God, help me to remove any dangerous "pests" within me before any outside force comes to do so. Purify me, O Lord. Purify me! Amen.

June 8 —

"You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence. " — Ps. 90:8

Outward Appearances: Two The Wood Within

Walking in the woods, I came upon a fairly large oak, fallen on the ground. It appeared perfectly well, strong and sturdy. Obviously not. On closer inspection, right at the break where its trunk was severed (by lightning or wind I know not), there

was a large area of rotten wood. The bark right next to that rot showed no ill signs at all, but the meat of the tree was in terrible condition.

And when the time came when lightning or wind flashed upon this poor tree, to the shock of its neighbors around it, phoom!, down it came.

In the last few years the Christian world has witnessed seemingly strong men of faith, pillars of our religion, brought down and their innermost sins exposed to the world. No matter the size or celebrity of their ministries. No matter the appearance of great spiritual strength. They were brought down by the disease within them.

Two things to contemplate: first, beware to not allow any sin to grow within ourselves; second, beware accepting outward appearances as being the truth. Do not support a minister or ministry because it looks to be doing good works and upholding the Name of the Lord. Pray for discernment, asking God to show you the "wood within the bark."

Lord, grant me discernment, both to look inward within myself and inward within others. Grant me courage to stand in the faith firmly against that which would destroy my soul, and to help deliver (not support) others who are being beset by the enemy. Amen.

June 9 —

"You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence. " — Ps. 90:8

Outward Appearances: Three Do Not Get Blinded

Don't get blinded by the glitz, or by the outward appearance of things.

The sun is **so** bright this morning that if you look eastward down the road it is too fuzzy to see — that is, unless you pull down the visor of your cap; then you can see clearly.

In the spiritual realm, the glitz of certain "revivals," for instance, can blind you from seeing reality... what is **really** down the road. A crowd of "hallelujahs" and "amens" does not mean the Holy Spirit is operating, although He could be.

The glitz of a great success, or of fame can blind you to where you're going. Success and fame can lead to pride, and pride is at the top of the list of The Top 10 Downfalls of Man. Beware, and investigate the spiritual element of things that you confront in your life.

Give me eyes to see, O Lord, that I will not be blinded by my flesh and my emotions. I know You are a God of spirit and I must be discerning in that realm even more so than the physical realm. Amen.

June 10 —

*"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." —
Gen. 1:27*

Part of the Picture

Interesting, isn't it, how we walk about and observe "God's creation" — as if we're aloof from it, not a part of it but a neutral party just "looking in." (Here are the dainty lady slippers. There are the fern that spread out like a peacock's feathers. And there is the rabbit hole, down which Jack and family are planning a night raid on my carrot patch.)

Well, we are part of God's creation — a special part, yes — but a part that should meld in with the rest and consider ourselves as "in the picture" rather than outside of it all, browsers at a photo gallery.

The **most** removed we should get is thinking that we were put here to be benevolent rulers — kind of like what Jesus is to us.

Oh, yes indeed, I too am a creation, Lord. Fashioned by Your hands to "rule over" this earth, but not to devastate it in any way. Thank You for making me the most integral part of this most beautiful world You have created! Amen.

June 11 —

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants die like flies. But My salvation will last forever, My righteousness will never fail."

— Is. 51:6

Blue Sky Beyond

The entire sky is gray except one small circle about 25 to 30 degrees high in the horizon directly above our path as we take our morning stroll. In that circle the blue sky beyond is clear.

Dear heart, know that no matter how bad the circumstances appear, how disheartening the signs, how distressing the actions of those around you; no matter the depression that wants to weigh heavily upon your heart, declaring that all is gray and lost. No matter all this: God **is** there. You merely have to look in the right place, not at the appearances of the world but at the Almighty, All-powerful Creator — He Who delivers from the darkness.

Keep your eyes looking Heavenward, on the Deliverer, not the depressor. And that Deliverer will be there to direct your walk and be a beacon shining out of the grayness in your life.

Oh, Father, I too often look only at the physical around me and let feel overwhelmed, not searching out where You sit, watching over me with compassion and a steady hand of deliverance. Thank You for being ever present. Amen.

June 12 —

"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."

— Is. 40:31

Soaring with the Lord

My spirit is lifted up and soars,
Carried along by the hand of the Lord,

When I worship my father, Adonai,
When His wondrous works I don't deny,
When we commune, He and I.

My spirit soars to join the Lord's
When we talk in one accord.
And I seek my daily infusion
Of His love that breaks confusion.
And destroys all life's illusion.

My spirit becomes one with His,
And not one beat of my heart's amiss,
When to His will I submit my own,
Putting job, cares and lusts below
The perfect plan that He'll let me know.

My spirit is lifted up and soars,
Carried along by the hand of the Lord.
We're inseparable, He and I.
I feel so free I could really fly
When I seek **His** will and deny mine.

*Thank You, Lord God, for giving each human being a spirit
that can soar with Your own!. Amen.*

June 13 —

*"Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known
among the nations what He has done."*

— I Chron. 16:8

Be Thankful, Not Mournful

Be thankful for what **is** rather than bemoaning what **might have been**.

Be thankful your errant child is alive and well rather than a POW in Bosnia, or a dead under a tree in a playground like a child found yesterday. Your child may be unsaved, lost and blind, but remember, he "knows not what he does." Knowing God will change that entirely. Praying for that acknowledgment, all the while thanking God that the child is alive and "savable."

I praise my God that You give us hope in what You can accomplished even in our unsaved loved ones, and faith despite not being able to see any results of our prayers, all the while knowing that You do incline Your ears to the prayers of a righteous person. And, washed in the blood of the Lamb, I do stand righteous before You, Father. Amen.

June 14 —

"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of the evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

— II Tim 4:5

In Season

Buds. A sign of growth in trees and bushes. Interesting that you see them after the winter and during the spring — no other time. Once summer sets in, **all** the growth turns green —

new and old alike in various shades of green... and until the fall... then, after the next winter will again come new buds of growth.

It's as though, after enduring a hard struggle, a thing will grow. The same is true with us, isn't it? We grow after a hard time. Then it seems we don't (although that's arguable) during the easy-going periods (summer). Perhaps this is a principle of God for all of nature — man and vegetation alike. Good thing, I guess, though it's hard to confess it during the "winter." Right? So, be steadfast whether you are "budding" or not.

This new season seems so refreshing, Lord. Thank You so very much for the tangy mornings, the fresh smells, the promise of a new time in my life. Amen.

June 15 —

"Death is naked before God; destruction lies uncovered." — Job 26:6

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account."

— Heb. 4:13

Clarifying the Issues

I was noticing today that as the sun moves over the earth, everything beneath it changes. This is particularly true in the forest, where there is such a diversity of growth, from saplings to majestic pine, from fern to fir. As the sun moves, the dark

woods brightens. Shadows shift. That which was indiscernible is discernible... So with God. As He moves we can see things more clearly. Problems, issues, questions become exposed to His truth and suddenly He answers, the solutions appear. The Light comes into the world...

Actually the earth rotates around the sun, not vice versa... and so do we revolve around God. He is the center, not us. He is the "gravity" that holds everything in place. And as we **see** Him (behold and are enlightened by Him) so will we change, be transformed by His light.

*Thank You, Lord, for shining Your light on the quandaries of my life, for clarifying my issues for me. Touch every life like this,
Father! Amen.*

June 16 —

"Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as you Father in heaven is perfect." — Matt. 5:48

A Perfect Love

Perfection is the constant of God. He is perfect and His creation reflects that. A little less nitrogen, a little more hydrogen and this world would not exist. Without the trees and grass, we would not breath. All life is intricately linked in some way.

Similarly, God seeks that in us. But to understand Matt. 5:48 you must read the entire chapter. When you do, you will understand that this verse refers not to living up to all the

commandments but rather to an all-inclusive love that seeks the good of all. Jesus's long list of topics here, from the beatitudes to being salt and light in the earth, His fulfilling the Law, murder and adultery beginning in the heart, marriage being sacred and binding, and going the extra mile — these do not pertain to the moral code of the commandments. They have everything to do with love and the Golden Rule.

Dear Lord, I know You want me to have an unconditional love for everyone I come in contact with. Boy, is that difficult! Only through leaving my feelings at the cross can I do that; so that is what I do. Help me to walk in that perfect love, Lord. Since You said to do it, I know it can be done. Amen.

June 17 —

"Do not neglect your gift..." — Tim. 4:14a

Using the Gifts

Funny how, when you have a dominant sense, like sight, you tend to concentrate on it and depend on it, paying little attention to the other senses. Try this: Sit in a forest glade or by a gurgling brook, then close your eyes and notice God's multi-dimensional creation. The aroma this morning (is it fern?) is wonderful. The touch is moisture in the air despite no sign of rain (a thunderstorm coming?). The splash in the water (a trout snatching a fly off the water's surface?) tells me life is around me, and, if I know my bird calls, I can tell you which ones are flitting about in the trees.

Without our other four senses, sight would not tell us nearly as much.

The same is true with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Neglect some of them and the others won't be as fruitful. Neglect the preached Word and your understanding will not be as full. Neglect prophecy and you will not be as prepared for future events. Neither will we understand as fully as the Lord would have us understand.

Your gifts, Oh Lord, are all perfect and when combined with one another form a complete package for the salvation of our souls and the living of full lives. Thank You, Father! Amen.

June 18 —

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

— Matt. 12:34

Father's Day: Number-One Role

My most important role is not as a husband, or as a father. It is as a son of God, then as a brother of Jesus, and as an instrument of the Ru Hakadesh.

As a son I must follow the rules of life laid down by the Father. Obey the Ten Commandments, love the Lord my God above all things and love my neighbor as myself. A good son does his father's bidding, does not let his own actions hold his father up for ridicule, is not ashamed — but is proud — of his father. So, too, should we esteem our Heavenly Father and do only what would please Him. I am born of a perfect seed — imperishable. Proverbs are Father-to-son lessons.

As a brother and co-heir with Jesus, my utmost allegiance should be to He Whom I love. Since He is my Big Brother, I should look up to Him for guidance, do as He does, stand up **for** Him against His detractors. Just as He laid down His life at our Father's will, so should I when Father asks it. Jesus walked in love; so should I. He prayed often; so should I. He healed the sick, cast out demons and walked in full authority of the Almighty.

We are **co**-heirs, He and I, of our Father's will and testament.

As an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and filled with the Holy Spirit, I can walk with healing in my **shadow**. The Holy Spirit is the power switch — the trigger on the gun. The flesh can accomplish little — and nothing of eternal value.

The Pentateuch and Proverbs are the groundwork of Father's teaching to His son.

The gospels are the groundwork of Jesus's example to His brethren.

The prophets serve as an example — as do the epistles — and the groundwork to understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in His instrument: the believer.

Father, Brother, Holy Spirit — their words are the Bible. Know that and you will know them.

Help me, Lord, not only to be all that a husband should be, but also a good brother and son. Amen.

June 19 —

"I (the Lord) struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me." —
Haggai 2:17

Are You Bent But Not Broken?

It is six months since the great ice storm of the century which snapped off the tops of so many trees and broke so many others in half, leaving no tree untouched. Today, you look at these trees and see three things:

- some have recovered from the storm;
- some, especially the flexible birch, are bent forever; and
- some are broken but at full-blown full-leaf on this fine June day.

I wonder: Are they like God's people?

If we are being attacked in some way, we must turn to the Lord. If not, we end up twisted and bent forever. We never recover.

Turn to God and we blossom again. We straighten.

Two verses after saying, "I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands," the Lord said: "From this day I will bless you."

The Great Husbandman is standing by to nurse you back to health, despite how harsh the storm you have struggled through. Just turn to Him!

Father, I have been bent and broken, but I call out to You now. Help me to recover. I want that new growth! Amen.

June 20 —

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." — II Cor. 2:15

Giving a Sweet Offering

A sweet, sweet aroma fills the woods today. Not lilacs even though lilacs are in bloom. But just as wonderful. I would love to bottle it and take it back home with me. I suppose then it would become too common to me and I would enjoy it less. No more the treat.

I feel that it is like God is giving us a taste of what He tastes when we worship Him and offer up prayers to Him. Our praise "is like a sweet-smelling aroma to the Lord." Wouldn't you like to treat Him more often than you do? Then go ahead, do it!

I apologize, Lord, for not worshipping You more often and with more intensity. For I know that You enjoy that communion with all of Your people. I intend to be more mindful, even and especially when I am by myself, to offer up praises to Your throne room. Amen.

June 21 —

"Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite." — Psalm 147:5

An Infinite God

Infinite Wisdom. Yes, God is that. But He is also Infinite Innovation. Look around this short stretch of woods and you have:

Animals on four legs, humans on two;
Birds flying and bats, too.
You have beech trees and birch, pine trees and fir;
Ryegrass and blue, shrubbery and fern;
Flowers of every color in the rainbow,
And myriad creations we don't even know.

If you were to discount the heavens, the moon and the sun,
You'd still barely scratch the things God has done.
Remove the wind, the waves and sea,
And you'd still be confronted with how the Infinite God
would be.

*Thank You, Lord, for Your creation — for creating me and
mine and all that is Thine! Amen.*

June 22 —

*"Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people
lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they
bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the
ground."*

— Nehemiah 8:6

Humbling and Magnifying

"With their faces to the ground."

Yes, for those who give their hearts to the Lord, He is their
Abba (Daddy). Yes, He is "closer than a brother." Yes, He
counts every hair on your head. Yes, He wants to be intimately
involved in our lives.

But He is, nevertheless, God! He is our Creator. Without Him, we would not be able to take one breathe. And yet we so often take Him for granted instead of stand in awe that He would even deign to give us a moment of his time. Do you think that if you went to the castle of a king and sought audience with him, he would immediately and personally open the door for you, show you to his dinner table, serve you bread and wine and ask, "What can I do for you?"

No way. But the one and true great God does this for us and, no, we do not deserve it at all. We should be on our knees in thanks. More than that, like the Jews of Ezra's time, we should praise God with our faces to the ground.

In the scripture "fear of the Lord," its full meaning is "the reverent fear and worshipful awe of the Lord." (Prov. 8:13).

Acts 10:35 Amplified states: "But in every nation he who venerates and has a reverential fear for God, treating Him with worshipful obedience and living uprightly, is acceptable to Him and sure of being received and welcomed by Him."

He **is** an awesome God.

Thank You, Lord God my Creator, for allowing me to even look up into Your light. I bow humbly before You in gratitude for Your everlasting grace. Amen.

June 23 —

"In Him was life and that life was the light of men." — John 1:4

Sunrise, Sunset

The most beautiful parts of the day are sunrise and sunset. Sunrise brings to mind the birth of Messiah, sunset His crucifixion. Interesting that He was called the Son of Righteousness. The Son's actions caused birth and salvation (sunrise and sunset), while the righteousness of God brought on both.

The most beautiful — the most remembered and memorable — parts of Jesus's life were when He was born and the act of love by which He took on our sins at Calvary.

Photographers say there are sunrise and sunset, and the rest of the day is not as photogenic. I thank Jesus for the "daytime" of His life — the healings, deliverances and other miracles. But most of all, I thank Him especially for His salvation that He brought in His wings!

What gorgeous beginnings and endings You bring to our days, Oh Lord. Thank You, also, for what they bring to our remembrances! Amen.

June 24 —

"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

— Luke 6:37

Simple Yet Profound

God's greatest gift to us is **forgiveness**. **Not** love, forgiveness — a gift because of His love for us..

With **it**, He made available **eternal life**.

Therefore, it is what He demands from us.

Jesus died so that we might be forgiven. He died for that. So why do we treat it so lightly?

God even tells us to help others **forgive**, even if it is us they're forgiving. Scripture says, "If anyone has ought against you... " go and set things straight with them, so that unforgiveness does not turn to bitterness and hatred.

Yes, I do praise You for Your gift of love, Oh God. But, first I thank You for forgiveness, for without that I could not experience the other, let alone possess the promise of eternal life. Amen.

June 25 —

"In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel." — Is. 17:7

"Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments." — Psalm 119:6

It's in the Attitude

Placing my yamulke on my head and my talith around my shoulders put me in the attitude of prayer and worship — in the attitude to receive wisdom. They show respect to God.

So many people come to church nowadays "dressed down." What? Do you respect the world, the office, the clients more than God? Trying to impress them more than God?

Children go to school nowadays "dressed down" every day. Does that have a little to do with the reason learning is

decreasing? Lack of respect for teachers and for education itself? Perhaps.

Wearing my talith and yamulke remind me to be serious with God, to shut up (except to praise Him) and to listen. Do you have a reminder to do so. If not, consider it.

Dear God, You created the heavens and the earth. How can I but respect You above all others. You formed me in my mother's womb. How can I but graciously and humbly come before You. Help me to remain humble and respectful before You every moment of every day, Lord. Amen.

June 26 —

"He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

— Matt. 5:45

A Wet Place — Everywhere

A downpour fills the woods with a steady hum-m on the leaves of the trees and the forest floor. I seldom begrudge rain nowadays, instead thanking God for the provision for our well. Sometimes I think we deserve it because we love Him; then I reason that everyone in the neighborhood is receiving the same blessing whether they acknowledge the Lord or not.

Rain for All

"The Lord makes it to rain upon the just and the unjust."
He doesn't look upon a miser and feign love, or turn an ugly banker into dust.

"I've never seen the righteous
Or their children begging bread..."
Be they serious or frivolous,
Those who believe on Jesus remain well fed.
But all of that being said,
What of the Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus
Who turn their back on God's Son and, instead,
Bow to false gods and despise the Jews?

Darkness and death are the order of the day.
Salvation in India, oppression in Islam,
Mantras on mountaintops, what more can I say?
God must be miffed, but He still holds out His arm.
He offers shelter, love, and — yes — rain
Because in His eyes we're all made the same
And salvation is an easy gift from Jesus of Bethlehem.
Refuse it and you have no one else to blame.
The rain? God's gift, eternal life, falls upon us all.
Reject it, if you will, or accept it in Jesus' Name.

*There is no Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor in
Your eyes, Lord. And I thank You for that. It is an example for
me to follow in loving even those who hate me or You. You
hold out the same options to us all. Amen.*

June 27 —

*"My soul yearns, yes, even faints, for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."*

— Ps. 84:2

That Spot in the Woods

Our youngest son went to Christian camp one summer when the children were given a wonderful task: Find a spot where they felt they could be alone with God, and visit that spot often to commune with their Maker. Once he returned home, he prepared a place on our property to do the same, and he journeyed there often.

We should have in our hearts as our desire, our aim, and our destination: the Lord.

Psalm 84 spells out the attitude God desires from us:

- "Blessed are those whose strength is in You ... They are ever praising You ... who have set their hearts on pilgrimage." (vv. 2-5)

- "Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the **highways to Zion**." (v. 5)

- "They go from strength to strength... (v. 7)

- "... no good thing does God withhold from those whose walk is blameless." (v. 11)

I will find a place, Lord, a special spot where I can be alone with You regularly, with no outside interference. Thank You for meeting me there!. Amen.

June 28 —

"Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they

*should believe (acknowledge Me as their Savior and **devote themselves to Me**) and be saved (here and hereafter)."*

— Luke 8:12 (Amplified)

Being Devoted to Him

The female robin who earlier walked our corral and lawn hunting for worms and then eating them, now hunts them and carries them to her nest to feed her babies. She is absolutely devoted to her young ones; they are first and last on her mind — unlike just weeks ago.

It makes me wonder: Are we believers **devoted** to the Lord? Am I devoted to Him?

What is "devoted"? Do our heart and soul **yearn** after Him? Does He consume the lion's share of our hopes, dreams and aspirations?

Are you as devoted today as yesterday, or a year ago? Because past devotion may not count much when we face the judgment seat.

Ezek. 18:24 says: "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die."

As Paul encouraged the believers to do, we should run the race to the end.

Lord, I ask for the willpower, strength of purpose and, most of all, continuing passion to carry out my devotion to You until I see You in Paradise. Thank You, Father! Amen.

June 29 —

"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Jesus." — Phil 3:14

Along the Way

Each day on our walks I set a target spot, a landmark, in my mind, a place where we will turn around and head back home. And sometimes the concerns of the day, perhaps anxiety over having the time to get all the things done that need to be accomplished, mean that I miss the life swirling around me in the woods.

There exists the possibility of focusing so much on one thing, even a good thing, that we miss other, grand experiences along the way, experiences the Lord would have us fully enjoy.

"Keep your eye on the prize" is one of those nuggets of wisdom that, if not taken in balance, can be deceiving. If you keep your eye on the prize (where you're headed) and focus solely on that, you can miss both physical and spiritual things along the way that God has planned for you.

I think to truly get "the prize" and a better "reward" in Heaven, we should take advantage, along the way, of the opportunities to praise God and give Him honor by spreading His love. Hey, that does give Him honor, doesn't it ... when we do a good thing in His Name? And it increases our adoration

for Him to witness a bit here and there of His magnificent creation around (not just ahead of) us.

What fine and wonderful things are happening all about me, Lord, if I will just take the time to observe them. What grand and glorious creatures and people all around me, Lord, if I will just stop and communicate with them. Help me, Lord, to absorb all rather than just crank full-steam ahead from Point A to Point B. Amen.

June 30 —

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

— John. 6:63

Where the Spirit Blows

Did you ever observe the wind? You can't see the wind itself, but you can both see and feel the effects of it. The tops of the trees move and twist and bend — swaying in the wind, refreshed. The further down the tree, the less the wind is felt until it is not felt at all.

The closer you are to Earth (the land, the flesh), the further you will be from the wind of the Holy Spirit. It's just like when the wind blows outdoors.

If you reach up to God — in repentance, love, worship... If you are free and apart from the world (except your human roots that hold you here)... then you will be moved by the wind of the Spirit when it blows.

It's like you have to feed your body food (nourished from the ground through the roots) but your freedom comes from the Spirit. Which part of the tree, after all, is having more fun?

Lord, keep me "at the top of the trees," flowing in Your Spirit, yet nevertheless grounded and rooted in Your Word. Amen.

July 1 —

"Blessed be the Lord, Who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses.

"May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us."

— I Kings 8:56-57, King Solomon after giving the Jews a history lesson of God's work in their lives.

Our Extended Family

The Lord said in the Old Testament to pass on His Word and His law from generation to generation. Solomon does so in I Kings 8. Isaiah does so in Isaiah 41. These recollections of God's deliverance and salvation are faith-builders for His people.

Likewise, in the New Testament we are encouraged to pass on the Word. Not only that, but when we pass it on to Jews we are passing it along in our **own family** — for the Lord calls us all to be one Body.

Stephen spanned both these eras. When, during his trial he recounted the entire history of the Jewish people, Stephen was passing along the Word from Old Testament Jews to New Testament Jews.

God wants us to have a burden for His people just as did Paul, who wrote in Romans 11:11-14: "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall. Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them."

Despite this command of God, we should beware of rejection, as Stephen received at his trial in Acts 7 after he recounted the entire history of the Jewish people.

Lord, use me to share the Good News with Your people, for I know You sent Your Son "to the Jew first," and how great will be the Gentiles' reward when Your people come home to You! Amen.

July 2 —

"If a man cleanses himself from the latter (ignoble purposes), he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."

— II Tim 2:21

The Lord Will Fix It

Boy, loggers have really muddied things up here, clearcutting a part of the forest and then carrying mud from the site out onto the road. I had not paid much attention to the property being cut until they started trucking out the pulpwood and messing up where we walk. When it directly affected me, then I took notice. Ouch! I don't know if I want to touch that spiritually right now, but the Lord did illustrate something else with these circumstances.

He told me not to be concerned when someone messes up the road we are taking; God can clean it up. Between His rains and winds, God will wash it away and no one in the future will even be aware it was once a mess. Similarly with our "walk": No matter how messy we make it, God can clean us up. He's as concerned with our walk as He is with our road.

Bless You, God for being Jehovah Who Cleans Up. I have been as messy in my walk as those loggers are in their work, and yet there You stand, cleaning up behind me. Thank You, Father, for Your help every step along the way! Amen.

July 3 —

"The fruit of the [uncompromisingly] righteous is a tree of life. And he who wins souls is wise."

— Prov. 11:30 (Amplified)

No Compromise — Rigidly Just

As strong as the winds can get here, there are a handful of trees in the forest that can not be swayed. Blustery, howling

winds barely disturb them, and they are little budged even by hurricane-force winds. That is how God wants us to stand in the face of the winds of the world that scream at our doors, the howls of the demons of hate, or fear, or unforgiveness, or lust, or... insert the name your own tormentor here.

Stand strong, unaffected, uncompromising in your faith — righteous — emulating the Lord. The Amplified Bible gives us a fuller understanding of the scriptures about righteousness:

- "[Rigidly] righteous are You, O Lord....." Psalm 119:137
- "The thoughts of the [consistently] righteous are honest and reliable, but the counsels and designs of the wicked are treacherous." — Prov. 12:5

Rigid, consistent, uncompromising in our righteousness — that is the fullness of what God wants.

As we read in Malachi 3:17-18: " 'They shall be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.' Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him."

Help me, Lord, to stand consistently rigid and unmoving in righteousness, to stare the enemy in the face with strength of purpose and remain unbent by his wiles and deception. Amen.

July 4 —

"Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water, or a path for the thunderbolt... Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, 'Here we are!'"

— Job 38:25,35

"Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?"

— Job 40:9

Powerful Right Hand

We were treated to some of the best fireworks I had ever seen; what a magnificent sight, full of booms and bomb-whistling blasts in the air. Then, on the way home, as if to answer men today as He did Job, the Lord sent the most fearsome, audacious display of lightning bolts across the sky, from cloud to cloud and cloud to ground (accompanied by cannon-boom), that I have ever witnessed, by far. I have sat in a house that was shaken by thunderbolts booming all around us. But this night, immediately after man's Fourth of July fireworks, was awesome on a plain all its own.

And I knew, God was saying "out of the whirlwind" (Job. 38:1): "So, you can make nice fireworks. Impressive. So, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? (Job. 38:4) and have you commanded the morning since your days began and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?" (Job. 38:12:13)

So, I can ask: Whose fireworks are greater, man's or God's? — Whose are more fearsome? — Whose are more thunderous or carry further across the sky?

And I can surmise: Man, you are but a puny thing, when compared to the Lord.

God, You are most awesome and awe-inspiring! Thank You for reminding us that no matter how grand we men think ourselves, You are so far superior that we can not even fathom You. And yet, You love us so!

July 5 —

"I will seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands." — Ps. 119:10

Unveiling Life's Mysteries

In the woods where I explore
God has opened wide the door,
Unveiling life's mystery on the forest floor
To those who truly seek Him.

Like a pine cone on the ground
That reveals His plan when found,
Unfolding secrets, it expounds,
To those who truly seek Him.

Or a fallow feather fallen
From a lovely molting swallow,
Showing life's continuum is not hollow
To those who truly seek Him.

Or a tiny field mouse funnel
Leads to an intricate tunnel
And a wee baby bundle
To those who truly seek Him.

Or a maple leaf upon the earth
To a new flower seeing girth,
Death for life, a new birth,
To those who truly seek Him.

Or an acorn's a reward
For a squirrel seeking food,
A heavenly example to exude
To those who truly seek Him.

Just as all life is a treasure,
Its worth impossible to measure,
So all the earth's a pleasure
To those who truly seek Him.

Your woods and Your creatures are all such a wonderful lesson, Lord. Help me to look more closely, at every opportunity, to understand the nuances of all You want to teach me. Amen.

July 6 —

"Now to Him Who is able to keep you without stumbling or slipping or falling, and to present [you] unblemished (blameless and faultless) before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy and exultation [with unspeakable, ecstatic delight]..."

— Jude 24 (Amplified)

Holiness Adorns His House

II Chron. 3 details how God adorned His temple: "He overlaid the ceiling beams, door frames, walls and doors of the temple with gold and He carved cherubim on the walls." (v. 7) Even the nails were gold (v. 9)

Paul tells us that we are "the temple of the living God." (II Cor. 6:16) And if we are His temple, how would He adorn us? With pure gold like the Jewish temple? No, even better. He would live within us! And how much greater than pure gold is He!

When the Lord adjures us to "Be holy as I am holy," He helps us to live so, as Jude 24 declares. Oh, how great is our God!

Thank You, Father, for adorning me with Your holiness, for the pure gold of righteousness, for being the Craftsman of my soul — my Savior, Deliverer and Sanctifier. Amen.

July 7 —

"Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, 'First seek the [whole] counsel of God.' " — I Kings 22:5

"For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." — Acts 20:27

Oh Man, How Foolish!

OK, a lesson learned...

During our morning walk three days ago, I shut my eyes for a **few** seconds to experience the other senses and try to hear what God would tell me. Bam! In less than a half dozen steps I

had badly twisted my ankle, fallen to the ground and soiled my slacks. I had a painful ankle for three days.

Lesson: Keep your eyes open! Yes, use all your senses on your walk with God — that "all" includes physical and spiritual sight. Look how quickly I went off the path! I could hardly stand up at first, it hurt so badly. Then I envisioned how God had made the ankle and ligaments to withstand twists. He got me home relatively easily considering how much it hurt.

The Lord very much healed my ankle today.

God is showing me there are a lot of things we can't see but that are going on.

An example: Batteries change just sitting there; it is the ions in the air.

We're so used to operating in our five senses that we don't even realize they do not experience all the picture. When we move in the Spirit, that is one of those areas and, like touch, sight and hearing, the more we use it, the more real it is and the more aware we are of that realm.

Continue to remind me, Father, to walk fully aware of the Spirit, and not just my physical senses. I know that to be the best warrior in Your army, I must always be "seeing" in the realm that transcends this earthly existence. Amen.

July 8 —

"For it is: Precept and precept, precept and precept, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there." — Is. 28:10

The Word — From Near and Far

I learned something today from my walk through the woods observing the sun's rays. These rays were elusive, like God's light is, sometimes. When in the shade, I could see its rays through the mist around the corner. But when I was in the sunlight, I could no longer see those rays.

The lesson? In God's Word, to get the whole truth, examine it close-up, verse by verse, and also from afar, the entire chapter or chapters around it. This is, in its context, the entire passage.

I hope, Lord, from now on to examine Your Word in its immediate context and in the context of the entire passage surrounding it, so as not to misinterpret Your meaning and do detriment to Your teaching. Thank You for discernment! Amen.

July 9 —

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord..." — I Peter 3:15

Decrease So He Can Increase

Focus on God, not the idea.

Focus on God, not the desire.

Focus on God, not the vision.

Focus on God, not the circumstance.

The power is in God, not the idea, desire, vision or circumstance.

You **decrease**. He **increases**. Then you can tune in to His power, not your own.

If you imagine the plan, **you** increase.

- Circumstances: Shadrack, Mechak and Abednego kept their belief in God regardless of what He would do in their circumstance. They focused on God, not the circumstance; had faith in God, not just His deliverance.

- Desires: In Daniel 10, the angel did the battle, not Daniel. Daniel was praying for the salvation of his people. The spiritual battle is which kingdom will control you and your body.

When we pray for the salvation of certain people, God will do the battle and break the bondage.

- Visions: Matthew 1 says that, like Rahab and Ruth, if you put your focus on God He will use you in His plan. Rahab and Ruth had no focus on a vision, only God. Abraham had no vision, but focused on following God's marching orders.

Keep God as your vision and He will bless you for you will be walking humbly with Him, doing justly and having mercy. As it says in Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Here is the rule: Do not bring God down to the situation (flesh), but lift the situation up to Him (Spirit). Let the Holy Spirit reign over our flesh: that is the Kingdom of God. And forget formulas.

Our armor is all "defensive" armor **except** the sword; the sword is God's Word; and the Spirit of God wields the sword. So He increases even in that.

Praise be to You, God. For from You come the true visions, desires and ideas in all of our circumstances. Help me to see, Lord, that it is You Who fights the battles. Amen.

July 10 —

"But seek the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you." — Luke 12:31

For God's Sake

Get to the point that God (not you) is the most important part of your prayers. Pray for God's sake, not man's, that God's Son not be blasphemed, that His honor not be sullied, that His Son not be ignored, His laws broken, His Name profaned, His Book forgotten, His house made a circus of social efforts.

Pray that He be recognized as Creator, Savior, Sanctifier, Deliverer.

The saints of the past put God first and He took care of their circumstances — from Abraham to Moses to Gideon. Do as they did: Trust in the Lord and the power of His might; uphold His Name above all others — even your own.

Great and glorious God, it hurts when I hear others use Your Name in vain, or blaspheme You, or mock Your Word. Give me the unction to act on Your behalf and to pray for the salvation of those people, so that you will be magnified in their lives as You are in mine. Amen.

July 11 —

"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way."

— Ps. 25:9

Oh, Preparedness, Where Art Thou?

Jesus told the Pharisees they could discern the sky for the approaching weather but could not discern the coming of Messiah. I read that and cheer Him on: "Yeah, You tell 'em!"

Well, today I did not prepare for the rains when we went for our walk! The sky clearly showed signs of rain. Yet all I took was a hat. We got drenched.

The Lord wants us to discern the signs — physically and especially spiritually. Then be prepared. Put on your armor, or your garment of praise, or whatever will be necessary.

Psalms 78 tells how God appointed a law in Israel and delivered His people, yet they sinned even more against him (v. 17). But, in the end, God "shepherded them according to the integrity of His heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of His hands."

Look for, seek His skillful guidance before launching out to do anything — even take a walk in the outdoors.

Thank You, Father, for a discerning spirit, for wisdom. Help me to walk with eyes wide open and to be listening for Your still small voice as a warning for me. Amen.

July 12 —

"And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord."

— II Kings 19:1

A Deep Call

The Lord would have us all be like Hezekiah in the instance of II Kings 18 and 19. Faced with dire circumstances, his people facing sure defeat at the hand of an enemy, Hezekiah came before the Lord in sackcloth and called out to Him for deliverance, to show Himself the one true God against a people who did not believe in Him. God heard and delivered Israel.

When you repent, is it as if you are wearing sackcloth? Have you "rent your garments" and "covered yourself with ashes"? Is that at least your state of mind? That is the state God wants. Like Rachel, weeping between the porch and the altar, we need to oftentimes be on our faces before Him, imploring His action on our behalf.

Lord, I may not have sackcloth to wear or ashes with which to cover myself, but I do humble and prostrate myself before You, knowing that You are the only God and the only Deliverer. Help me in my needs, and all Your other children as well, Lord. Amen.

July 13 —

"But if he (the prince) gives a gift of some of his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty,

after which it shall return to the prince. But his inheritance shall belong to his sons; it shall become theirs."

— Is. 46:17

The Gift To Really Be Concerned About

The neighboring dairy farm has absolutely the most beautiful birch tree I have ever seen. A stunning rack, like a majestic deer's antlers, and it stands alone in the middle of a pasture with no competition. I would love to have that tree in my field.

There is a gorgeous Burning Bush in town; in fact, we gave that Burning Bush to friends who once lived there. I would certainly not complain having that bush turning fiery red in the fall in my yard.

Oh, the forsythia down the street. And the lilac bushes at the end of the road! My, I would love for them to be mine. But, it is not to be. And I am reminded of one of God's commandments, the one that tells us not to covet our neighbors' possessions. That is one commandment I wonder if believers think of when they have their times of repentance before the Lord.

But we should treat Isaiah 46:17 as a point of fact in our own lives as well. Do not be upset or discouraged to see people in the world receiving riches here on earth.

Remind yourself that you have the gift that keeps on ticking: The Gift of Eternal Life! That is your inheritance from The Prince.

Thank You, Father, for giving gifts to others. I know that what I need You will supply. If You don't, then I don't need it. I will try to remind myself of that and not be jealous or covetous, but I would appreciate Your help in that, Lord. Amen.

July 14 —

"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.' "
— Is. 30:21

Bloom and Go!

The expression "Bloom where you're planted" has truth to it. We should spread the Light of God wherever we find ourselves. But it also can be very dangerous. You can use it as an excuse not to **go forth** with the Gospel, not to hear God's call to move on, move away, to "expand the pegs of your tent."

If the Lord wants to expand our territory — spiritually as well as physically — and we are totally content with "blooming where we are planted" we may never fulfill the total call on our lives for His kingdom.

Yes, "bloom" but also be prepared to "go into all the land and spread the Good News to the Jew first and then to the Gentile."

Your territory, O God, is the entire earth. That may be mine as well and I will be prepared to either bloom where I sit on this very day, or go to the outermost corners of the world,

*whichever road You have planned for me. Just keep my eyes open, Lord, and increase the courage of my convictions.
Amen.*

July 15 —

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children..."
— Eph. 5:1

Evidence of Our Father

My first border collie was so much like her father. A former Welsh national champion, he was brought to America to herd cows here in Maine. One of his daughters, our dog, was so intense around our sheep, so attentive to every movement, so desiring to herd them. Evidence exists everywhere in the world that animals and people inherit certain characteristics from their parents. Their character is evidence of their parentage.

Should not **we**, likewise, be the evidence of God — that we are **like** our Father?

Shine Your Light

The day is up.

The sun is shining.

The Lord is good

And His countenance shines upon the world,

His countenance shines upon the world.

Does **my** countenance shine?

Am I uplifting, life-giving?

Am I the "sunny day" in other people's lives?
That's what Jesus would have me be.

Thank You, Lord, for using me as a conduit to shine Your life, Your love, Your promise into the lives of those around me. I want to be evidence of Your existence within me. Amen.

July 16 —

*"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."
— Gal. 5:25*

Strawberries and the Spirit

I walked by a strawberry patch today and my senses jumped to the alert: My smell kicked in to the point that I could almost taste the strawberries. Not long and I can touch them and behold them. The only sense I do not use is hearing unless I hear the Lord say: "Smell, touch and taste, for the Lord your God, He is good!" When I walked by that patch, I did not have to remember to smell the berries; I simply smelled them.

God wants us to be alert to the Spirit like we are to the flesh. He wants us to use our Spiritual sense the way we do our physical senses, exercising it so often we do not even have to think about it — it just comes naturally. We are body, soul and spirit. We walk in the Spirit the more we exercise the Spirit. Be in Him and you will be in the Spirit. Just as He and the Father are one, so should we and Jesus be one — us in Him and Him in us.

Please help me to accomplish this walking by the Spirit, Lord. I want to see, touch, taste, smell and hear spiritually as well as physically. Thank You! Amen.

July 17 —

"Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger. " — Job 17:9

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." — Gal. 6:9

Hang In There, Part One!

This may seem strange, but hang in there with me, please. This is the horsefly time of year. Ugh-h. I have noticed over the last few days that, while horseflies descend upon us in hordes when we begin our trek, the further my dogs and I walk, the fewer the horseflies until... at the end of the walk there are none at all. Zero. Clear sailing.

Lesson? Hang in there, run the race, and the little pests that hound you will fall away (exhausted by the effort to "suck your blood").

Persevere. Persevere along God's road. Persevere in righteousness, truth, patience, gentleness, kindness, joy and, most of all, love.

Thank You, Lord, for dispelling all the pests that make my walk uncomfortable, as long as I do my part and persevere. Strengthen me to that task, Father. Strengthen me. Amen.

July 18 —

"You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday ... For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all of your ways; they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent."

— Ps. 91:5,6, 11-13

Hang In There, Part Two!

These horseflies are truly horrible pests. If I did not know that God created all things, I would think the devil made these big black buggers! As my dogs and I walk, they don't bother me so much as my dogs, flitting around their heads, landing on their ears or backs to bite them. Horses and cows have deadly tails to swat away their nemesis, but my poor dogs can only try to snap them with their teeth. So, I swat at these flies, with a hat, a hand, a leash, whatever is handy.

I can almost visualize Abba (Daddy) and His angels doing this for His children. They watch over us and swat away pesky demons that bother us... much like we swat away horse flies that attack our dogs. The dogs may notice them, but just as often, or more often, they don't and they won't **until** it's too late. They've been bitten and pain follows. If the Lord were not swatting at our demons, how often would we be bitten before we even realized the threat?

Thank You, Lord, for watching over us all, slapping away the demons from our lives! You are a great Deliverer, and so often we do not even realize we have been delivered.

July 19 —

"The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden like a spring whose waters never fail."

— Is. 58:11

In God's Garden

In My garden
Some of My flowers have blossomed,
Some are about to,
Some need their old blossoms picked,
So they may bloom again.

Do not faint. Which are you?
Some of My flowers look sickly,
Some are lush yet without blossom,
Some seem to blossom forever,
Do not be discouraged whichever is you.

For I plant, I care and I reap
In My time, My will and My way.
I nourish and water and keep
You from being pulled astray

Do not be anxious, My flower,
As long as you seek Me and give your will to Me
You will blossom at just the right time.

I want to "blossom," Lord. Help me to grow into the person of God you want me to be, and to not be either lethargic or impatient along the way. Amen.

July 20 —

"(...when the enemy rises against you like a flood... the Lord will deliver you.") — Is. 59:19

Unmoved by the Flood

I am always amazed when I drive over this bridge in Lisbon Falls, Maine, during a storm, or immediately after one when the dam is overflowing with swiftly flowing waters from the Androscoggin River. Out in the middle of the dam, rising out of a ledge of rock, stands a tree. It is no more than eight or 10 feet tall, but it stands there unmoved. Even when floodwaters crash into it for hours and days on end, it stands unmoved.

When I feel floodwaters crashing against me for whatever reason, I sometimes think of that stalwart little tree. It defies the odds. It defies reason. The Lord wants us to stand tall and firm like that tree. He wants us to persevere, to trust in Him, have faith that He will, in His time, deliver us. If a tree, which has no brains and emotions, can stand against the floodwaters, can't we who are made in the image and likeness of God do the same?

I know that I want to always stand against the storms the enemy brings against me, Father. Please give me Your strength to do so! Amen.

July 21 —

"If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast."

— Ps. 139:8

God Nearby

Someone coined the expression: "They have a pipeline to God."

And another: "Make a phone call to Jesus."

Today you can search for God on-line.

High-powered space probes and telescopes search for Him in outer space.

But while so many are seeking deep-space contact with Him, He is actually nearby — all around us. He is here, omnipresent as well as omniscient and omnipotent. Yes, He is "closer than a brother" relationally; AND He is "closer" than a brother (Pr. 18:24), physically.

If you are walking these woods, you need not imagine He is somewhere far away, up in the heavens; His presence is all about. The idea that He is afar off physically can fool us into thinking He is also distant and difficult to contact. The opposite is true.

Scripture says the Lord "dwells between the cherubim" here on earth (Ps. 99:1). Yet "clouds and darkness surround him" (Ps. 98:2). Jesus spoke of ascending to meet His Father in the heavenlies. And we are told God "inhabits the praises of His people." God's being everywhere means He is truly at your side. And that near a presence, by itself, should cause changes in your life as well as encouragement in your search for Him.

Lord, in my woods I recognize You are close by to me and all around me. I can see and feel Your nearness. Thank You for Your presence. It is truly a comfort to me. Amen.

July 22 —

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged." — Matt. 7:1

That's Their Story

Walking along our country road, the dogs and I passed a woods lot that was being clearcut. Few trees were left standing, and it created an ugly sight. It galled me to think that these men had apparently not considered selective cutting. But God told me He had other things than clearcutting that should be occupying my mind.

Whether in the world or the Body of Messiah, do not waste your time complaining about what someone else has done, or is doing, or how poorly they are handling a certain situation.

"That's their story. Focus on your own," He said.

Likewise, avoid gossip. Do not be angry. What good can either the act or the emotion accomplish?

Only they and God know the circumstances — and their own heart even deceives them.

If the person who concerns you is not saved, pray for their salvation. If they are saved, pray in love for their eyes to be opened.

The Lord tells us to "think on things that are lovely, pure and of good report." (Phil. 4:8)

Father, I struggle with being judgmental. Sometimes I think it is in my genes; but I know that is just an excuse. I can choose my actions. I can choose the path of my thoughts. Please help me to think on the good and not the bad. Amen.

July 23 —

"For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light."

— Psalm 36:9

A Seed Today, a Flower Tomorrow

Notice the wildflowers, the fern that were not even noticeable a week, or a month ago but that are so prevalent, so beautiful now. They were there but dormant, or a seed ready to burst forth and beautify the landslide, or like the fern which is at first just a little stub with little promise that it will burst forth in ever-expanding plumage.

Is that like God's people? — invisible today but anointed and powerful in the Holy Spirit tomorrow? Not used today, but a crucial tool tomorrow in beautifying His road and His creation?

Yes, I think so. We have our time — our own time... then we pass away, joining Him in eternity.

Lord, how much of a part do I play in determining when is my time? If it is entirely in Your hands, then I am ready. Like Samuel, I say, "Here I am, Lord." Amen.

July 24 —

"For after seven days I will cause it to rain on the earth 40 days and 40 nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made."

— Gen. 7:4

"These [who do not know God and do not obey the gospel] shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

— II Thess. 1:9

God and Destruction

Who is in control? You hear it preached that Satan brings the flood and destruction, that God is a God of love and therefore does not cause death or harm. Many concede that, yes, God did destroy in the Old Testament but not since the "new and better testament." Wrong.

Yes, God is love. But if you examine all of Scripture you will see that God's love can not embrace what His righteousness can not endure. He does not give a stamp of approval to everyone just because He is love. And who sends the droughts or flooding here and there? Check out the Word of God.

Here are just a few proof texts:

- "lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you." — Deut. 11:17

- "When He utters His voice there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain. He brings the wind out of His treasures." — Jer. 10:13

- "Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His Word." — Psalm 148:8

- "For He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth'; likewise to the gentle rain and the heavy rain of His strength." — Job 37:6

Yes, the Lord brings floods, droughts, ice and snowstorms, etc. And He also parses out judgments in other ways. Witness that He allowed Moses, Aaron and their entire generation to die without entering Canaan because of their unbelief. Num. 20:24 says: "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My Word at the water of Meribah."

The Lord took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament. "Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last." ... "Then she immediately fell down at his feet and breathed her last." (Acts 5:5 and 10)

And the Lord imparts sickness as a judgment for sin. As Lev. 26:15 says: "and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I will also do this to

you..." and He lists a myriad of actions like allowing their enemies to destroy them and shutting off the land from producing produce or fruit.

Lord, I know You cannot embrace unrighteousness. Help me to walk sinless before You — not because I must, but because I want to. Amen.

July 25 —

"When the hay is removed and new growth appears and the grass from the hills is gathered in, the lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field."

— Prov. 27:25-26

Go Winter, Come Life

This time of the year you can easily see the growth in the trees and shrubs. The branches are a lighter green, obviously fresher, newer, younger. It's new growth, a spurt of change during which the tree or shrub was watered, grabbed hold of the sun's energy and grew. This happens within us as well. Take courage that a season of winter (it could be spiritual coldness and dryness, a testing, something of that sort) results in a fresh growth in us.

True, disease would wilt or kill. But the winter is simply a time before spring. A "winter" in our life is simply a time before renewed spiritual growth.

I pray, dear God, that times that seem so lifeless, spiritually, will pass into great times of incredible closeness to You. If You

are simply seeing my true heart and it is not a heart for you, help me change! Amen.

July 26 —

"Study to find yourselves approved by God." — II Tim. 2:15

Do Not Let Decay Abide

God allowed the storms to knock trees down. There they lay, on the forest floor. Slowly decaying. The stage is set, the circumstances ready, for a raging forest fire to catch and then sweep through the woods, setting ablaze those trees first — and then healthy trees.

Liken those downed trees to people who were once healthy in the Word but got lax, stopped reading the Scriptures and applying them to their daily lives; stopped acting on their principles and following God. No longer covered in the blood and washed in the Word, they fell susceptible to the storm. Indeed, they themselves fell, backslid, and were opened up to decay.

When the fires of hell come upon them, they will go up in flames! We can not let that happen to us.

Cover me, Lord, in Your blood. Reinstate me in Your Word. I must dedicate myself to You and ground myself in the Word. Amen.

July 27 —

"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered." — Prov. 21:3

Beyond Salvation, What?

Beyond salvation, what is most important? Waiting to go to heaven? Preparing for that day? Counting the moments?

Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, and when Peter said that he did, Jesus said: "Feed My sheep." (John 21:17)

He also said when we visit those in prison, feed the hungry, help the poor, clothe the needy, we are doing so to Him. As we do unto the least of those among us, we do unto Him, He said.

So, the game is far from over when we get saved. Like Robert Frost, we must realize there are "miles to go before we sleep."

Meanwhile, although we should do this out of love for our Lord and our "neighbors," nevertheless we have the promise of special thanks from God.

II Cor. 9:6 says: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

And Luke 6:38 promises: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

I must ask: Have I visited the sick, ministered to prisoners, fed the hungry...?

Lord, give me the heart, the strength and the endurance to fulfill my mission on this earth, helping the poor and needy along the way.

Be Glorified

Jesus, be glorified
In my life today.
Jesus, be glorified
In my life, I pray.

Dear Lord, give me an expanded heart toward the infirm, the poor, the hungry, the widows and orphans. And help me to help them, Father. Amen.

July 28 —

"Sing praises to the Lord enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what He has done." — Ps./9:11

Sing Forth His Praises

Shine the light of the love of the Lord on the world.
Praise Him. Praise Him!
Let the joy of His love in your heart be unfurled.
The Lord our God is the King of the world.
Every man and woman, every boy and girl
Praise Him. Praise Him!
Speak forth the Word, the life-giving Word.
Like a beacon on a hill, it keeps men on course.
Whom Satan has bound, be their light, set them free.
Whom the world has crushed, heal their hearts, you and me.

Use me, Lord, use me. Help me to be that light on the hill, salt on the earth, sharing the Word with the unsaved. Amen.

July 29 —

"Let both [wheat and tares] grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: 'First collect the tares and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

— Matt. 13:30

Are You Wheat or a Tare?

Jesus often said, after telling a parable, "He who has ears let him hear!"

Notice the exclamation point! Not often do we see exclamation points in Scripture, so when we do we should take special notice. We should listen to that parable and apply it to ourselves first — not our neighbors, nor the lady in the next pew, nor the man with 20 items in the 10-item line. I need to ask myself if I am wheat or a tare.

Every person in this world is one or another, according to the parable of the wheat and tares. The seed has been planted in the field and all has grown up, wheat and tares together.

Heb. 3:1 calls believers "holy brethren who share in the **heavenly calling**." Are you living up to a "heavenly" calling. Are you being wheat? Are you fulfilling that calling? Then, are you wheat or a tare?

O Lord, show me my own heart because I want to be Your heavenly wheat in this world. Help me to live so that when the

harvesters come, they will be able to tell me apart from the "tares." Amen.

July 30 —

"I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

— Ps. 16:8

Blinded? Keep Walking

There are times walking along the road when you can't see ahead because of the brightness of the sun. I've been blinded walking the snow fields in the wintertime, and now simply by the dazzling summer sun. But, blinded or not, you must keep on walking. Eventually you will reach a shady place where you can see again.

The Lord wants us to keep on plugging, though it seems useless; though the road seems endless. Stay on the road, He says. Otherwise you stagnate (by not moving at all), or get lost in the woods (if you attempt to change directions to avoid the brightness).

God, I trust that You will keep me in sight, to use in Your great plan, even when I can not see where I am headed, though I am blinded from knowing my destination. Thank You, Father, for protecting me along the way. Amen.

July 31 —

(He is not a God of confusion..., but of order)

The Genius of Order

Think how **awesome** God is.

He set the universe in motion! Planets are traveling at breakneck speeds; so is the Earth. Yet look at the clouds, how slowly they move, at us and the world around us. We're traveling at 3 miles per hour down here. We know the moon rotates around the Earth every 24 hours, the Earth around the sun every 24 hours. Haley's Comet will appear every 80 years. This is **not** a random thing, this universe in motion. This is genius!

If God could make order out of chaos in the universe, how easy it is to do so in your life. He may have used a Big Bang to bring order to the mass of disorder in the universe (He spoke and "Bang!" it happened.). For each of us, He can bring order through a low whisper, one just loud enough for us, and no one else, to hear. When we see utter chaos in our lives, He does not want us to be anxious or fearful, but to be observant, watchful for the order He is about to cause.

Oh, God, You are great. I see it in the order of the stars, the Milky Way, the moon as it rises and moves in its steady arc overhead at night. So, I know how simple it is for You to work in my life, and I promise not to be anxious, but rather to expect Your delivering hand. Amen.

August 1 —

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us..."

— Rom. 12:6a

"It was He Who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers."

— Eph. 4:11

Uniquely Individual

They say every snowflake is unique from others. So, too, trees. Out of billions, no, quadrillions, of trees, no two are identical.

So, also, has God done with mankind. We're all from the same original seed, yet different. Even identical twins have different personalities. And because we are different and unique, we are fit for different purposes.

Discouragement hit me full-force yesterday. Two books I had written were not published. My daily routine was monotonous. There was a big auto repair bill. I discovered that a mission trip I was considering was too expensive. I didn't know what to do. But I do know that these issues I face at least are a little different from those facing anyone else.

The Lord wants us to acknowledge who He made us to be, and then to reach toward the sun and grow. Jump into a new challenge. Perhaps even consider another career, or mission field. Be ready to be "individual."

Thank You, Lord, for the individual You made me to be — for my particular gifts, and the life circumstances in which You have set me. Help me to see and take advantage of them. Amen.

August 2 —

"For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar."

— Rom. 3:3-4a

A Constant God

No matter what man does, God goes on. "He never slumbers nor sleeps."

There were no signs of people on our walk today. Yet it was 60 degrees (as always), the sun was rising (as always) and the rest of creation was singing His praises (as always). Flowers were rising up to meet the sunlight. Birds flittered through the trees. Wind rustled through the leaves. Water gurgled down a brook that passes beneath the road.

Yes, God is constant — the same yesterday, today and forever.

As it relates in Romans 3, even in our unfaithfulness He is faithful. We may turn away, but He will not.

I praise Your Name, Lord, for being so reliable, relentless in Your righteousness and carrying out Your Word and promises. Thank You for Your presence in my life, for being the stable influence, my Rock and High Tower. Amen.

August 3 —

"You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did." — James 2:22

Awesome God, Awesome Relationship

How puny we are, compared to God! Look at how we travel, or communicate. Ugly roads, bumpy pavement and weavey, tottering telephone lines.

God speaks (Boom!) from the heavens and He is heard instantaneously the universe over. And He is already "there" because He is omnipresent (He is everywhere, always). "Travel" is foreign to Him.

Look at our attempts to build things. Trucks, cars, airplanes, houses. Some even look good to us. But then look at the beauty, intricacy, symmetry and absolute genius of what He creates. Phew-w... Our God really is a-w-e-s-o-m-e!

And yet, despite the beauty of His creation, the most important thing to God is relationships, what's inside us — our relationship with Him and with each other. We don't think of relationships in that way, like we see the beauty of a tree or flower. But God "sees" our relationships that way. The **ultimate** beauty is Jesus. And while we can not come **close** to doing what God does in creating, we can attain to being **like** Him in relationships.

And that is good enough for Him.

Oh, how I want to live up to the rest of Your creation, Father. Give me wisdom and discernment to walk in right relationship with those around me — and especially with You. Amen.

August 4 —

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' "

— Matthew 3:1-2

And Yet Life Lurks

It is a desolate field, this one before me. What few shrubs there are, are puny. Even the hay does not want to grow. And yet life exists here.

When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, it was much the same as this field. There seemed to be little life and what was there was meager, under-watered, starving for nutrients. John brought the Good News that the kingdom of God was at hand, the Messiah was coming — it was time to "repent and be saved."

The same is true today:

- The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus is coming again.
- People must repent.
- Preach, even in the wilderness, and people will come to hear.

Bring the water, the nutrients to nurture new life in those souls in these droughty times.

When I told God I felt like I was in the wilderness, His response was: Take advantage of it!

Lord, when things look dreariest, You are there and Your Word brings hope, faith and life. Use me as Your instrument to water souls in what appears a desolate society. Amen.

August 5 —

These six things the Lord hates, yes seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look..." — Prov. 6:16-17a

Pride: An Ugly Thing

Solomon goes on in this proverb to list "a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devices wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren." But first off his pen was Pride. It's an ugly thing. When a certain person called yesterday I had pride that the Lord had told him that he just **had** to call me. I hate to observe "an abomination to God" within myself, but the nasty thing rises up. Just like the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, so pride is the root of all kinds of **wrong** character.

First among the fallout of pride is placing yourself above God. Once that happens, the greatest of downfalls can not be far behind.

My advice? Be proud of NOTHING.

Forgive me, Lord! I know pride is obscene before you and it should be equally so to me. Purge it, Father. Purge it! Amen.

August 6 —

"As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone; and its place remembers it no more." — Ps. 103:15

"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall... — I Peter 1:22

Redeem the Time — Part One

Did you ever look at the forest's treeline and wonder how high it would be if trees lived forever? **Way** up there where aircraft now fly the skies!

But obviously they don't live forever. They live (maybe a couple hundred years) and then die. So that skyline, that treeline, essentially never changes. The old passes. The new rises up to take its place.

Something like people. That's God's cycle, isn't it? It works for all His creation — except the stars, perhaps. And we're a part of it... like grass: here today, gone tomorrow.

Therefore, make use of your time here. "Redeem the time," we are urged.

Paul writes in I Cor 7:29a: "What I mean brothers, is that time is short."

We must use our time wisely for the Kingdom of God.

Thank You, Father, for granting me the time here on Earth to accomplish that which You have planned for me. Remind me daily not to waste that time. Amen.

August 7 —

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." — Psalm 90:12

Redeem the Time — Part Two

Fairy rings are everywhere this morning. Beautiful little wisps that are here for a moment, then gone when the sun rises on them. Sort of like us: Here today, gone tomorrow. Yes, we must wisely use the time we have here on Earth. But maybe there's another message here in these intricate and beautiful fairy rings.

For instance, as simple as they are, I'll bet man can't make fairy rings. What would an atheist say to that? Man can't create a blade of grass. What would an atheist say to that? Man can clone, using material that already exists, but he can not create even the very simplest of things out of nothing. What would an atheist say to that?

Simply incredible. That is our God, our Creator, **for** Whom we should "redeem the time."

Oh God, You are complicatedly amazing! And man, Your creation, despite feelings of grandeur, can not begin to do what You do. I humbly kneel before You and ask that You simply use me in the short time I have here on Earth. Amen.

August 8 —

"As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people both now and forevermore." — Ps. 125:2

Safe Harbor

In the midst of a storm,
The Lord's a safe harbor.

Whether you've done wrong
Doesn't matter to this King.

When raging winds howl
At you door, know once more
That whether the weather is fair or foul
God stands more firm than anything.

Don't be bothered by driving wind, or sleet,
Or other of nature's tendencies.
He is your bunker, shelter, canopy
And saves from destruction with mercy.

*Lord, though the storm rages around me, I do know and
believe You are my Protection. Thank You for harboring such
an unworthy vessel. Amen.*

August 9 —

*"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me.' " — John
14:6*

The Way

Consider the door.

I've lived here 15 years and never really looked closely at the front door, at the beauty of it, its beautifully designed panels. If you had asked me to describe it, I could tell you only its color. Yet it is the entryway to the house and all the bounty

inside. And now that I scrutinize it, I see its charm and elegance.

It's like the Word. The way to the Word is Jesus's death on the cross and His resurrecting, overcoming death. He opened the door for us to the bounty, the eternal life beyond. So often, we do not think deeply on that cross, that death and what it meant then and means today.

"I want only to know Jesus and Him crucified," Paul wrote.

The Lord wants us to concentrate on Him crucified and risen, for that is our door to salvation...

Thank You for making the way for my salvation, Lord, and for marking it so clearly. In all of history, events either looked forward to the cross or backward to it. We are blind when we do not see this fact. Thank You for eyes to see! Amen.

August 10 —

"Jesus HaMachiach is the same yesterday and today and forever."

— Heb. 13:8

Here Comes the Sun

So, here's the sun, right? Slowly moving northward in the sky, further north each day... Then, at the peak of winter it will start moving southward again. Wrong! The sun is constant. It's the earth that's moving. Likewise, the Lord is constant. And we tend to move toward or away from Him in our walk. We may continue in the same direction, but our choices make the difference in how precisely toward Him we walk.

He does not change. We do. And hasn't He always appeared to man as light? That's because He **is** Light, and think as we might that we are the center of the universe, we will always be proven woefully wrong.

Forgive me, Lord, for being navel-centered and not God-centered. I know each choice I make during the day determines if I am getting closer to or further from You; I determine now to make those choices that will lead my walk ever closer to You and Your Light. Amen.

August 11 —

"...if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear."

— Job 11:14-15

"Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon."

— Is. 55:7

Beware the Person in the Mirror

I am my own worst enemy. Aren't we all?

It's me, not Satan, that commits whatever is the sin of the moment.

We are, it seems, too quick to lay all the blame at Satan's doorstep, declaring **he** comes to "steal, kill and destroy," **he** is the enemy of our souls, he, he, he...

But it is I myself who decides to give in to this temptation, to ally myself with that malicious statement, to fall to this or that trap "of the world."

Does Satan **make** me sin? No. It is a freewill decision by my own worst enemy: me!

Solution: Love God. Obey His commandments. Put on His armor daily. Put on the mind of Messiah. The sin I commit is ultimately **my** decision, **not** Satan's.

Lord, I have been so quick to lay the blame for my actions at the feet of another — my enemy. But, I do realize I can only blame myself. Help, me, Lord, through Your strength, to stand fast against whatever temptations come my way. Amen.

August 12 —

"Therefore since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." — II Cor. 4:1

The Coolness Will Come

After the seemingly unbearable recent days of heat and humidity, God has brought the cool weather. Did you notice that He does the same in our lives? After hard times of trial, He delivers times of refreshing.

As discouraged as we may get at struggles, obstacles, entanglements of this life, the Lord wants us to walk by faith, knowing like the psalmist that God is our Deliverer. That means He **will** deliver. But that deliverance will be in His time, not ours, and He may choose to toughen us up through a "hot and humidity" period — both of the flesh and the spirit.

As difficult as these times are, Lord, I continue to believe You will hold out a refreshing time, an enlivening period for me. I am so glad that You see the future. Thank You for Your deliverance! Amen.

August 13 —

"The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it." — Prov. 27:12

Danger in a Tranquil Setting

Just beyond the road's wooded edge lies destruction where a crew of loggers is at work. The loggers are cutting down nearly every tree in an area of the forest. But along the roadside you can not tell this at first glance. You must look more closely to detect what is beyond.

Similarly, the Lord wants us to beware in our lives: Danger can lurk behind a tranquil facade — behind a seemingly peaceful situation, or a person who is calm and "nice" on the exterior. Look closely, asking the Lord for discernment, and you can see the truth beneath. Otherwise, you might not.

Walk by the Spirit, listening to His wisdom and insight. Check every "premonition."

Thank You, Father, for heightening my awareness of any evil that lies beyond the apparent in my life. Please increase my discernment, Lord. Amen.

August 14 —

"...but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." — I Cor. 2:10

Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus." — Eph. 4:21

Uniquely for Each of Us

Check out God's creative variety in the sky. Today, you look one direction and the clouds are all little blobs, north to south. Look the other and below the blobs are big wide, wispy clouds. Both sky-views are unique. Both are beautiful. Both are created by the forces that God set in motion.

As I sat trying to relate this to each of us being individual and different, it occurred to me to view it regarding the Bible. Different parts of the Bible speak different to each one of us. It may look differently from your eyes than from mine, according to our circumstances. And part of a verse may have special insights pertaining issues in my life today, while another part of that verse will address whatever I face tomorrow. It is truly a "living document."

I John to me says: "Whoever loves God must also love his brother" and "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

To another person, it might be: "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us."

The Holy Spirit will reveal to each of us what speaks most precisely to what we need to learn or hear that day.

From You to Me, Directly

I love Your Word, O Lord.
It is meat to my spirit, drink to my soul.
I revere Your Word, My God.
It is wisdom and wit and knowledge precious as gold.

A "love letter" it has been called.
A love letter to Your people and me,
A lesson dating back to the fall —
To all who will but believe.

At its heart, the love (Psalms and Song) surrounds wisdom
(Proverbs)
And it is bracketed by Your plan, beginning (Genesis) to end
(Revelation).
To think! We have the Word penned
By our Creator, unveiling Your love, grace, compassion.

No wonder for ages this Book has been a mentor,
Attaining man's greatest attention,
Explaining Your love, Your promise, Your redemption.
That's why I feel it's a love letter
That can melt the hardest of hearts,
That comes from the Very Lord God, directly to Mark.

*Thank You, Father, for a Word that teaches, admonishes,
encourages, unmask... whatever I need each and every day.
For I know my needs change, but You are always there with
whatever truth I need to hear at the moment. Hallelujah!
Amen.*

August 15 —

"Who [Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

— Phil. 2:6-7

One for All, Not for Oneself

At a time when "oneself" is often one's favorite person ...

At a time when "self-serve" has replaced "a helping hand"...

At a time when the popular magazine of the day has evolved from the '50s' *Look* to the '60s' *Life*, '70s' *People*, '80s' *Us* to today's *Self* ...

At a time when newspapers are filled with stories of people pushing their own agendas at any cost — lying and terrorism notwithstanding ...

At a time like this, believers can bring a refreshing to the world around us by showing selflessness, love, compassion and all the fruits of a righteous spirit before God.

I am so often so selfish, Father, help me to look toward the needs of others first and not my own, to be "others"-centered and not self-centered. Amen.

August 16 —

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." — Eph 4:1

Walk Along, Not Across

I learned a lesson today from, of all things, road kill: If you're only walking across, and not along, God's highway, you're apt to get — well — squashed. I was startled that there were so many frogs that I counted them — 16 — that got flattened last night while **crossing** the road.

What's the analogy? The Lord needs commitment from believers. He needs people who will not just check out "the walk," but believers who will walk the long walk. First, we need salvation, which is more than words, but a heart change. Then, we are to **continue** in His ways, not just put our toe in and test the waters.

If we do — and our roots are strong — we can survive nearly anything — even speeding cars (read: devil's attacks).

Lord, please help me to walk along Your highway, not across it and then across it again and again. I know this takes commitment and courage, and those, too, I ask in greater quantities. Thank you! Amen.

August 17 —

"And God raised us up with Messiah and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Messiah Jesus." — Eph. 2:6

"Let Your hand rest on the man at Your right hand, the son of man You have raised up for Yourself. Then we will not turn away from You; revive us and we will call on Your name."

— Ps. 80:17-18

Well-rooted Is Well-nourished

I noticed this morning the trees that had gotten shellacked by the ice storm in January. They lost major branches. Some even suffered their entire top half being snapped off. But just six months later, new growth, leaves and all, is flourishing! How can that be? The roots are strong and supplying nourishment. Despite the crippling, when the Lord created trees, He made a way for them to sprout new branches.

Only if someone (the enemy, in our case?) saws the tree off at the ground do we see death. In our lives, that would be the death of the martyrs. The enemy kills us and we live! Eternally! Hallelujah!

Bless You, Father, for making a way for us to survive even when assailed in the most vicious, treacherous ways. Despite seemingly life-destroying damage, you make a way for us to survive. And when we finally do leave this earth, we have an eternal prize! Bless You again! Amen.

August 18 —

"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."

— Ps. 37:7

Right Over the Horizon

God can change the outlook in a matter of minutes. Well, of course He can **instantly**, for when He makes up His mind you can count it as done. It was **completely** overcast when we stepped foot outside for our walk today. When we returned 20

minutes later, the canopy of clouds had moved off half the sky.

Always remember: What you can't see, in this case the end of the clouds, may be right over the horizon. The end of a long period of attack, or a lingering illness, or nagging injury, or an habitual temptation may be just out of sight.

Remember this, too: God's blue sky is **always** there — even if it is momentarily screened out by the clouds.

So hang in there. Remember, patience (sometimes translated "long-suffering") is a fruit of the Spirit.

O Lord, give me the patience and endurance to wait for Your "clearing skies" in the midst of my darkness. Increase my faith, Father. Increase my faith. Amen.

August 19 —

"...ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name. Bring an offering and come before Him; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness."

— Chron. 16:29

In One Accord

We march in one accord
For the Living, Risen Lord,
Saying to the enemy of man,
"On His truth and love we stand."

Worship, worship, worship in holiness.
Oh, Lord, I pray, that You will be blessed.

Worship, worship, worship Him always.
Every minute, every hour, all your days.

We march in one accord
For the Living, Risen Lord,
Saying to the enemy of man,
"On His truth and love we stand."

Glory, glory, glorify His Name.
He's love today, forever the same.
He's Master, Shepherd, Risen Lord,
So worship Him in one accord.

Lord, purge from believers those doctrines which are not of You; unite us through our common faith; and strengthen our resolve to worship and glorify You in the midst of this dark world. Amen.

August 20 —

"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them."

— Luke 12:37

"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled." — I Thess. 5:6

Watchmen Do Not Sleep

God woke me up with a lesson this morning after I continued to sleep right through my alarm.

"You slept through **your** alarm, don't sleep through **Mine**," He said. "A watchman can't fall asleep on the wall!"

Do I fall asleep on the wall? Do I forget to be watchful? Yes, I admit that has happened; and God used the alarm this morning to remind me of just that. But I must continue to run the race, aiming for perfection, asking Him to alert all my senses, especially spiritually, to be alert and to call the warning to His people. Just like the watchmen on the wall. They kept watch whether late in the day or early in the morning. In the heat and the cold, they kept watch. Through drought and storm they kept watch. In every circumstance they kept watch. And so should I.

Lord, keep me awake and alert, on guard against any advances of the enemy. Help me, Father, to overcome my flesh, which would simply slumber so much of the time! Amen.

August 21 —

"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." — Amos 3:7

Forecast: A Storm Is Brewing

The Lord lets us know what He's about to do. The Scripture states this, and the heavens attest as well — in rumblings before a storm. Today the sky to the north turned a dark, steely gray. Soon you could nearly taste the air and a balmy breeze

picked up, coming from that direction. It was unmistakable: a storm was about to sweep over our home.

It has been reported that birds and animals can tell when an earthquake is about to occur. If that is so, should we not be able to tell when a storm is about to strike spiritually? Do you have your "antennas" up constantly? Are you watching the "barometer" to see if the pressure is rising or falling? If not, now is a good time to start.

Open my eyes, Lord, that I may see the secrets You reveal to Your servants the prophets. Remove any veil from before my eyes that has been blinding me from Your truth and from my future. Thank you, Father. Amen.

August 22 —

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched..."

— Mark 9:43

Cut Off the Cancer

My, how the caterpillars attack the trees along the side of the road! Awhile ago their nets were little. Then, as they grew, the nets enlarged, the little larvae consumed more of the succulent green leaves, turning them to brittle brown — and more still, destroying as they grew. Finally, whole limbs, and some entire small trees, are completely encircled by these deadly nets.

It's like a cancer, isn't it? If left untreated, it grows and grows until it kills. And cancer is like a sin in us. If left untreated, it devours and consumes until it is out of control. And in the end it kills us — body, soul and spirit.

Proverbs 5 warns us against this, first relating the warning and then the result if the warning goes unheeded. "Remove your way far from her [an immoral woman], and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the cruel one; lest aliens be filled with your wealth, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner; and you mourn at last, when your flesh and your body are consumed..." (vv. 8-11)

Dear Lord, remove any "cancer" from me before it gets dangerous and my very life endangered. Cleanse me and purify me by Your precious blood. Amen.

August 23 —

"Therefore they sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their dragnet; because by them their share is sumptuous and their food plentiful."

— Hab. 1:16

The Job, the Idol

The prophet Habakkuk spoke of the Babylonians idolizing their jobs, burning incense to their dragnets and sacrificing to their nets.

How about you? Does your focus center on your job? Is your job "you"? Is it the centerpiece of your existence? Jobs

can be all-consuming, even to people who are not workaholics. A job does, after all, consume anywhere from 35 to 60 hours of each person's week, perhaps more. When I worked 70 hours a week, my job was pretty much my existence despite a wife and two children. Now that it takes up many fewer hours of my week, it is much less a centerpiece. But, regardless of the length of our work week, the Lord wants His kingdom to be our focal point. He does not want us idolizing anything but Him, "burning incense" to anyone but Him. So, I suggest taking stock of your work life, keeping the Babylonians in mind.

Father, I look to You, not my job, for my fulfillment. I look to You, not my job, for my provision. I look to You, not my job, as that which sets me apart from others in the world. Praise Your holy and glorious Name for overshadowing the "things" in my life that could sponge up my time. Amen.

August 24 —

"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbor?"

— James 4:12

"A Slave to Sin"

We are **slaves** to sin until God regenerates our minds. What the unsaved do, they cannot help but do. If leaders in the government, or Supreme Court justices, or abortionists violate the laws of God or make other unrighteous decisions, that is

simply because they are slaves to sin. They know no better. In fact, as the Scripture says about the end times, Good will be called evil and evil will be called good.

When you see a person wallowing in sin, pray that God saves him and breaks the chains of his slavery.

Do not judge someone who is beyond judging — because they're **all** sinners in the **enemy's** camp. Believers are the ones who are to set the example.

Father, help me to look with Your eyes at others who are in sin: They are sinners and know no better, or they are saved but backsliding and need to be woken about to their sin. Both need my prayers. Amen.

August 25 —

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." — Eph 5:8

What You See...

A perfect half moon shines down on us tonight. Someone seeing a moon for the very first time might think it is shaped like this. The illusion is perfect — unless perhaps you have a telescope and some discernment.

This is the lesson: What you see is not always what is **really** there. So, don't let what you see deceive you. This is even more important spiritually. As good as something looks, or sounds, we must examine it with our spiritual telescope, or microscope. We must measure it against Scripture. How does it stack up: 60 percent, 80 percent 100 percent? If it is less

than 100 percent, remember, "a little leaven leavens the whole loaf."

Lord, grant me to remind myself whenever I look upon a thing to examine it and not simply accept that I already see its entirety. Amen.

August 26 —

"The [righteous and worshipful] fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..." — Prov. 9:10 (Amplified)

Delight in the Fear of the Lord

Isaiah 11:1-4 identifies Jesus this way:

- The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him.
- The Spirit of wisdom and understanding.
- The Spirit of counsel and power.
- The Spirit of knowledge and fear of God.
- **And He will delight in the fear of the Lord.**
- He will not judge by what He sees with His eyes,
- or decide by what He hears with His ears,
- But with righteousness He will judge the needy.
- With justice He will give decisions for the power of the earth.
- He will slay the wicked.

Just like Jesus, we are to **delight** in the fear of the Lord, and we are not to judge by what we see or hear with eyes and ears. Imitate Him!

I know that You are great and mighty to behold, Lord, and I am privileged beyond words to be able to come to You in prayer. I fear Your mighty actions but not because I think You a tyrant — rather a Righteous Judge. And so I ask Your help in keeping me sinless before You, Father. Amen.

August 27 —

"And everyoe who calls on the Lord will be saved..." — Joel 2:32

Lowly, Yes — But Heard

The sun rose to meet me on my walk in the wood,
As You always greet me whenever You should.
Yet who am I, mere man — and of them the lowest, indeed —
To speak directly to my Creator in words Satan can not
impede?

No, I'm in no way special, just humble,
Knowing You will hear my cry,
Sensing Your presence around me,
Needing neither hello nor good-bye.
And even if I were to stumble
From Your face I would not flee
Because as long as on this earth I am living
I know You are ever forgiving.

Praise Your Name. Oh, praise Your Name.
Praise Your Name on high.
You are Alpha and Omega, forever the same,

And Your holiness fills the sky.
Hallelujah to the living God.
May my life honor You, Lord.
May my life honor You, Lord!

I do not deserve Your listening ear, Lord, but thank You for inclining Your ear to my prayers. I do very much want to honor You with my life. Help me to accomplish that, Father. Amen.

August 28 —

"Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you." — Matt. 20:14

Never Too Late

So, you think it's too late for God to use you; you blew it; and any blessing you get will be minute?

Wrong!

Read the account of The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20. Even the 11th-hour harvesters — those whom the landowner hired to work in the field with just one hour of harvest remaining — received the same reward. And in verse 1 the landowner is identified as being like the kingdom of heaven.

And what of Abraham, Sarah, Noah, Moses, Anna ... the list goes on. Abraham was well along in years before God fulfilled His promise to him. Moses spent 40 years tending sheep for his father-in-law before the Lord sent him back to Egypt to bring His people out. Anna waited in the temple praying for

the Messiah for decades before that Messiah was born. Noah spent 120 years building the ark, with not a drop of rain in sight.

The mother of a friend of mine had been a pastor most of her life, but in her 90s she became bedridden. I visited with her at my friend's home and she told me she could not get out of bed but the Lord had given her a new ministry: Praying for others. "I can at least do that," she said.

Do not be discouraged and do not even entertain the idea that you are beyond helping with the harvest.

If I'm 20 or 120 you can still use me, Father. Please do so. I am Your laborer for Your harvest. What better job can there be? Please use me to my fullest extent in whatever time I have left on this Earth. Amen.

August 29 —

"For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with..."

— Rom 6:6

In the Garden

In the Garden God created Adam.

In the Garden Adam and Eve sinned.

In the Garden Jesus wept tears like blood.

In the Garden Jesus gave Himself up for Adam's sin and ours.

In the midst of beauty, great wonder and joy.

In the midst of beauty, great distress and woe.

In the midst of beauty, sacrifice and great victory.

The Garden is where God gave eternal life to me.
It is in the Garden where He prunes us and we bear fruit.

Do the same as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane: Die to your flesh when someone else sins. Put your flesh to death and forgive them. That sets them free from condemnation and they see the love of Messiah, which leads men to salvation.

The heart of man was revealed in the Garden. So was the heart of God.

Put on the mind of Messiah and you will put on His heart as well. Then you can walk in the Garden with Him. He restored our "walks" with Him in the Garden, so, just like Adam did **before** sin, we can commune with Him.

August 30 —

"Listen to the parable of the seed." — Matt. 3:18

Be Good Soil

What kind of soil are you? You can **determine** to be good soil. How? Add fertilizer, water and nutrients.

Being good soil involves choices. We make those choices that determine what kind of soil (repository, if you will) we are for God's Word.

Be a doer of the word.

Walk in the fruits of the spirit. The first? Love.

Think on things that are lovely, pure and of good report.

Forgive others as you have been forgiven.

Determine to be a willing "implant" patient. You know, for that spiritual operation when God replaces your heart of stone with a heart of flesh.

I am ready for the fertilizer, water and nutrients, Lord. Pour it on, for I am good soil, receptive of Your Word and a doer of it! Amen.

August 31 —

"O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."

— Ps. 63:1

"Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge Him. As surely as the sun rises, He will appear. He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

— Hos. 6:3

Out of Desperation, Victory

Parched, this earth, screaming out for water. Do you suppose that it, being dusty-dry, will more appreciate rain when it comes?

And how about us who feel we are in a desert place with the Lord?

Will we more appreciate His living water when it pours upon us?

Then, perhaps, that is His purpose for these dry, dry times in His people.

Are you parched? Picture that perfect day when the Lord opens the windows of heaven and pours His blessings upon you. Oh, glorious day!

Moses shepherded sheep far away from Egypt for 40 years. Then came the call of God on his life. After Malachi, there were 400 years of silence. Then came the Messiah's birth. The Israelites wandered 40 years in the desert wilderness. Then came Canaan. The Lord ends every drought with a wondrous watering.

Feeling Dead

I feel spiritually dead.
Is it all in my head?
We're not supposed to move by feelings.

God, light the fire,
Fulfill my desire
To put You first in all my dealings.

I look forward to your living waters ending a drought in my life, Lord. In earnest expectation, I know You will not leave me dry and scorched. Thank You, Lord, for Your perfect plan coming to fruition in my life. Amen.

September 1 —

"I will bless them and the places surrounding My hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing."

— Ezek 34:26

The Rain Before the Storm

You've heard of the calm before the storm. Here we're getting the rain before the hurricane (Floyd) and I believe God will do this before His storm (the end). He will refresh the saved, pour His Spirit upon the unsaved to bring them to salvation, and He will replenish the Living Waters for His church.

Feeling dry? Pray for that rain before the storm. Let it saturate you as you look **up** from whence your help cometh. For the Lord is not afar off, but nearby for those who love Him and are called by His Name.

As soon as I saw what You were showing me in the spiritual realm what I was experiencing in the flesh, You brought torrents of rain to quench the drought. You have a sense of humor, Lord, but I do thank You for Your supply of that which I need. Hallelujah.

September 2 —

"Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander for lack of food?"

— The Lord in Job 38:39-41

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight..." —
Heb. 4:13a

Trusting God's Timing

A hawk and a field mouse happen upon the same meadow at the same time. Danger for one; dinner for the other. Coincidence? A woodpecker sits upon a hardwood tree and drills a hole precisely where a bug "happens" to be passing by. Coincidence? I think it is, rather, Godincidence.

God sees where we've been, where we are and where we're going ... and where we're going in relation to each other, and to Him. He knows when storm clouds are over the horizon, when lightning is about to strike and when the river will flood. Trust Him, put your life in His hands and you will be all right. After all, how far ahead can **you** see?

I can't see tomorrow, or even the next hour, Lord. So I am depending on You, believing and trusting in You, to lead me and protect me in the way I should go. Thank You. Amen.

September 3 —

"Therefore, wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do."

— Ruth 3:3-4

Planning Ahead

I discovered a bird's nest today amid our blackberry bushes, protected by the long thorns, yet providing food without even

leaving the nest. Those birds could just stretch their necks a little and nibble the nectar of an abundance of blackberries. How brilliant, I thought. No predator in its right mind would walk through those brambles; and there were three square meals a day without moving a bit.

Although the Lord says we can't make even the hair of our head change color by worrying about tomorrow, He does suggest that we plan ahead. He encourages us to take a lesson from the ants and store up provisions; to be wise in the world; and to have a vision for our lives.

Remember His warning statement: "My people perish for lack of vision."

I pray for a vision, for wisdom in planning, for discernment in the days ahead, Lord. Thank You for helping me to put on the mind of Messiah as I prepare the "nest" for my family. Amen.

September 4 —

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" — Jer. 17:9

The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Else

... above all else? Yes.

And, think, we rely so much on our emotions. For instance, how often have you heard someone (yourself?) say, "I don't feel the Holy Spirit today in my prayers"? (Yet, wasn't He there?)

Or, "It feels dry tonight."

Or, "I didn't feel anything when I prayed for his/her healing." (Is God no longer in the healing business?)

Is the heart more deceitful than even the devil? Scripture does say "above all else." Well, is Satan all else? Perhaps the reason this is true is that we trust ourselves not to lie to ourselves. And yet our heart deceives us; but because it is **our heart**, we do not even doubt it.

We should take the tack of Hezekiah in Isaiah 37. Faced with certain defeat at the hands of Sennacherib's army, Hezekiah went to the temple and prayed to the Lord. Then God sent Isaiah with directions. Feelings might have persuaded Hezekiah to surrender to the enemy. But He sought the Lord's advice instead. Good example.

Father God, I plan starting this moment to stop relying on my feelings and to begin relying on Your direction. Thank You for setting me free from my own heart and its failings! Amen.

September 5 —

"And those who are Messiah's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." — Gal. 5:24

Saved Still? Protected Still?

The prophet Joel warns God's people in Joel 2 to sound the alarm, for destruction is at hand! Despite the Lord's deliverance last year, or last week, or even yesterday, we need to make sure our hearts are rent toward Him this very day and this very moment.

Too often I feel content, perhaps too content. I am saved, after all. Oh-oh... because that is a time of danger when the enemy can be in my house. I may be saved, but I still must be alert to Joel's admonition, keeping at bay any lusts of the flesh, or other attack against my soul. Notice the progression here:

Verse 12: "Now, therefore," says the Lord, "turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning."

V. 13: "So rend your hearts and not your garments. **Return** to the Lord your God..."

V. 18: "Then the Lord will be zealous for His land and pity His people."

V. 19: "The Lord will answer and say to his people, 'Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them...' "

V. 23: "... and He will cause the rain to come down on you — the former rain and the latter rain..."

V. 25: "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten..."

V. 28: "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions..."

V. 32: "... and it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved..."

Father, help remind me from being so content that I am no longer rending my heart toward you. I want to continue being zealous for You because You are zealous for me. Thank You. Amen.

September 6 —

"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to each other, so that you do not do the things that you wish." — Gal. 5:17

Word-Faith and the Devil

Is not Satan using the same devise as he did when Jesus went out in the wilderness? After 40 days of fasting, he asked Jesus to speak bread and drink into existence. Jesus turned him down.

Two thousand years later, Satan comes with the theology that we can "speak things not as if they are."

A tantalizing prospect. Of course, those things are all our "wants of the flesh." They cause us to concentrate on the flesh and not the Spirit, and how often we are all too willing!

Don't these word-faith teachings encourage works of the flesh, like some of these listed in Gal. 5:19-21? They include idolatry, sorcery, jealousies, selfish ambitions and envy.

We are told to walk in the fruits of the Spirit, none of which is wealth, possessions or power — the supposed "fruits" of word-faith.

Word-faith tells us all things are subject to us — not to pray "Thy will." But if we can't trust God's will, whose **can** we trust? Who knows what is for the best in every circumstance — us or God?

Yes, words **are** powerful, but why? A far different reason than word-faith teachings would have us believe. Just as God (not works) saves us so that no one can boast, faith in God

(not our ability to “speak into existence”) accomplishes good **so that no one can boast.**

I know that You know best, Lord, and so I will not step over that line in which I declare what should happen. No, I leave that up to You, so that I can not boast. Amen.

September 7 —

"May the God Who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Messiah Jesus..."

— Rom. 15:5

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes."

— Ps. 133:1-2

Rigid or Flexible — Part I

Walking the dogs today, I noticed all the big trees, sturdy at the base, that have never recovered from last winter's ice storm. No new branches, no new tops. And these are the hardwoods. Meanwhile, it is the softwoods that have grown new tops and branches.

Likewise, believers can look so strong and even have a firm foundation and strong roots. But a traumatic experience can remove our beautiful fruit and we can remain so harmed that we never recover. To exacerbate the problem, since they are in the midst (of a forest) of other believers, we may never be

detected as "lacking." That is, until winter arrives. Then we are all naked and exposed, and then the ones without branches and tops are more obvious.

Let us draw strength from God, and from others in the Body of Messiah, so that we may recover from heartaches and defeats and not stand exposed to the enemy's attacks.

Thank You for Your power of deliverance, Lord, and for surrounding me with an army of believers for encouragement and support. May I also stand with others in the Body, to help them through hard times. Amen.

September 8 —

"James and John said to Jesus, 'Shall we call down fire upon them?' And Jesus replied, 'No.....' "

Rigid or Flexible — Part II

So the flexible — evergreens — survived the ice storm so much better than the inflexible — hardwoods.

My analogy here is not to suggest compromise is best for our survival, but an absence of the "attitude" of non-compromise. Am I showing Messiah's love to a sinner, or to someone who is blind and supports, say, abortion? Or are they seeing a bitter rigidity in me? Am I damning them or loving them? Did Jesus call down fire and hail when hanging on the cross, or did He say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." He was non-compromising yet loving.

If I am "evergreen" I have foliage (fruit) all the time, even when the worst of storms strikes. And my roots still reach as far as my canopy.

Father, I find I am so rigid sometimes that I do not display Your love for people. Help me to have a tender heart, a forgiving attitude while maintaining a non-compromising Spirit. Amen.

September 9 —

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." — John 14:21a

Obey, Obey, Obey!

What do you say to your dogs? They are good **when** they obey, bad when they **do not** obey.

How often do we ask ourselves if we love the Lord? How often just before we sin rather than just afterward? Ask it just **before** and you can easier purpose not to sin... The grumbling, the gossiping, whatever the temptation, will become easier to deal with because you are flat-out saying: "Lord, I love You more than that sin." The only other option is "Lord, I do **not** love You more than that sin."

Jesus said, in John 3:19: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

If He first loved us, as it says in John 3:16, what can we do other than love Him for sacrificing His Son so that our souls

can be saved? If we do not obey, we willingly lay out our own condemnation.

(Couple this devotion with that of September 10.)

Resolve, that's what I need, Lord. Resolve to flee from evil, resolve to follow after You, resolve to always make the Godly choices in my life. Help me to do that, Lord, please. Amen.

September 10 —

"Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth." — Rom. 2:2

The Option to Obeying Is Destruction

The prophet Amos tells of the Lord's destruction of Israel's neighbors and of Israel itself two years before the earthquake in 760 B.C. Why the destruction? Because God's own people did not follow Him.

That should be an example and warning to us today so that we will seek Him and live.

Amos 5:4 says: "This is what the Lord says to the house of Israel: 'Seek Me and live. Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing.' "

And in Amos 5:14 he warns: "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. So the Lord God Almighty will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph."

It is very clear: Seek God and obey, or put your trust in the god of this world. Remember John's declaration in John 1:4: "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men."

I will seek You and none other, Father. I will abstain from the "Bethels" and "Gilgals" of this world, and in the power of the Holy Spirit seek and obey the one true Lord God Almighty. Thank You for always being here for me and mine. Amen.

September 11 —

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." — Eph. 4:30

"Into Your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth." — Ps. 31:5

Redeemable — Not Worthless

Walking down the roadside, it is disheartening to see a soda can here, a beer bottle there, discarded. This is disheartening for three reasons: first, because it is an eyesore; second, it illustrates someone's disregard for the people living on this road and for the simple legacy of the act of littering; and third, because the cans and bottles were considered worthless, not worth holding onto.

This third reason is the one that the Lord related to us, mankind. Before cans could be redeemed they were left by the roadside as worthless. With the law of redemption here in the State of Maine, cans and bottles gained value and people started to rescue them to redeem them (return them for money).

Jesus and God started the law of redemption for us. Jesus rescues us out of the bushes, off the roadside, often crushed,

scuffed up, rancid and wretched. He takes us to the Lord, Who buys us back (redeems us).

Thank you, Father! I was worthy of being discarded, nothing more. And yet You redeemed me. And the price with which you bought me back — the death of Your Son on the cross — was priceless.

September 12 —

"And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: 'Shout, for the Lord has given you the city!' "

— Joshua 6:16

The Shofar and the Shout

I heard a loud screeching up in the trees one day and immediately knew a battle was on, or being diverted. The Lord has equipped birds, as well as other animals, with "trumpets" of their own. And it made me ponder the shofar and the shout mentioned in the account of Joshua and God's people bringing down the walls of Jericho.

The priests continually blew the shofars as the people circled Jericho those first six days; then, on the seventh, the people shouted and the walls crumbled so that they could possess the city.

And Isaiah 42:13 says: "The Lord shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; He shall prevail against His enemies."

I Thess. 4:16-17 relates the rapture this way: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

The Lord had the Jews use shofars as a battle cry, for warning and as a call to worship.

Why the shout? When you shout you forget embarrassment and yourself. Use it to "come out of" yourself, release your faith and what you're feeling.

What better example than the defeat of Jericho?

It sounds so simple, Lord. Shout and blow the trumpet. Yet, You use the simple things to confound the wise. Use those simple things in my life, please, Father! Amen.

September 13 —

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction."

— II Tim. 4:2

Preach It!

Preach God's miracles and salvation,
His mercy and compassion,
The beauty He has wrought,
The sins He has forgot.

Preach His death on Golgotha's hill,
What He accomplished there, and does still.
For our sins He was whipped again and again,
Stripped, beaten, spit on and, finally, slain.

Preach His bringing salvation in his wings
And helping us to overcome our sins;
His rising from the grave,
and the millions of souls He has saved.

You give us so much to praise You for, and to preach to others about. Thank you for the miracles, deliverance and salvation, Lord. Amen.

September 14 —

"And such [fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and extortioners] were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

— I Cor. 6:11

Not Perfect and That's the Example

I feel so not holy so much of the time...

Often, in Bible studies and sermons, teachers/preachers refer to Old Testament people, especially Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as heads of "dysfunctional families" and even as "idiots" themselves. As a lover of God's people, this upsets me. And yet I think their actions and parts of their character —

and God's response to them — are supposed to serve as a sign and an encouragement to believers today.

Whatever they did — Abraham inferring that Sarah was his sister, Jacob "stealing" his brother's birthright, Solomon marrying pagan women — God did not forsake them, did not renege on His promises, but rather rewarded them with the Holy Land. His gifts and calling are irrevocable.

So I see that although I am to live a Spirit-filled, not a flesh-driven, life, when my flesh prevails, God will not forsake me.

And those who feel that they have sinned **so** badly, or backslidden **so** much that they are beyond help, well, they are wrong. The examples are plentiful.

Besides Jesus, the person most written **about** in the Bible is King David. Look at what he did that was evil — from murder to adultery — and yet he was "a man after God's own heart" because he was repentant.

The person who **wrote** the most in the Bible was Paul. Look at what he, as Saul of Tarsus, did before his Damascus road experience. He oversaw the stoning to death of Stephen, a righteous Messianic Jew.

Now look at your own life. Are you beyond repair? Better to ask if God is unfaithful. The answers are: No and No.

For look what God did for the Colossians who believed in Him. They were all sinners, yet after receiving Jesus as Lord (Col. 2:6), they were "complete in Him Who is the head of all principality and power." (Col. 2:10)

Indeed, Paul told them in Col. 2:13 and 14: "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all

trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

Lord, I am encouraged! Though I have been the worst of sinners, You hold out Your hand of salvation. Praise Your Name. Show all who have a heart of flesh that You hold out this promise to them as well. Amen.

September 15 —

"Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

— I Cor. 13:12b

God's Timing

It has been just one week since our last walk, and yet you can notice the difference in the sun at this hour. It's slower, a bit farther south than seven days ago.

I ask: God is the same yesterday, today and forever, but does His **timing** change? — like the timing of the sun's rise?

Truly, the earth's tilt and rotation remain the same. So what we see and when we see it change. Reality remains constant, but we only see a part of it. Yet how often do we think we know it all? We should, instead, go to God and ask Him Who has all the answers, Who set the stars in motion, Who began the earth's spin around the sun, Who surely has His loving hand upon our own special circumstances.

I seem to need to be reminded, Lord, that I don't know much. But that which I know is that You are in control — of the world around me as well as the universe around this world. I can depend on Your dependability. Hallelujah and amen!

September 16 —

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." — Prov. 25:21

"But I tell you Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." — Matt. 5:44

Through God's Eyes

Life is so different when you see it through God's eyes,
With His mercy and His grace...

When you see where someone's going and you see where he
has been

And you see him with God's love.

Love is so different when you see it through God's eyes,
And you measure eternity beyond your own few years here,
And you see that each person's worth is valued
In the death of the Savior of the world.

Life and love are different — and you **can** see them through
God's eyes

If you give **your life** to **Him**,
Asking the Holy Spirit to indwell you
And for Messiah's love for mankind.

It will change your heart forever
When you see the world through Him
And you love every person
Unconditionally and unrestrained.
When you show each one you meet
The Master's eternal joy.

Your vision is perfect, Lord. Make it my vision, too. You know men's hearts, Lord. Show me their hearts as well. Your compassion is full, Adonai. Please help me to have that same compassion, though I so often am so distant from being a compassionate person. In Jesus's name. Amen.

September 17 —

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

— Prov. 16:18

Passing Glory

Boy, talk about "the lesser light that rules by night." It was still there, in the west, during my walk this morning: a full harvest moon, **huge** and hanging low in the sky. You could see its face, its lines clearly with the naked eye.

Twenty minutes later, when we had returned home from our walk, it was gone from sight, either because the sun had totally risen or because of the trees.

Huge and full, it had ruled the night. Now its glimmer had passed in the light of day.

Is that a lesson for us? Pride cometh before the fall. During your "15 minutes of fame" do not act superior. For you do not know what the next minute, not to mention the next day, will bring.

I want to remain humble, no matter the circumstances, Lord. Help me to do that, to put aside pride and self-content. Amen.

September 18 —

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven..." — Ecc. 3:1

Even Slugs, Lord?

To everything there is a season, even slugs. Yuch! Even slugs?

Yes, but we have reason to celebrate: The Lord has promised us much more beyond our seasons here on earth. He has promised us eternal life, in a glorious heavenly place, if we simply believe on Him and make Him Lord of our lives.

Despite a rainfall last night, I encountered only one slug out on the road today. Tomorrow there may be none — because their season has nearly ended. But for us? Hallelujah! Isn't God's promise wonderful?

Thank You, Lord, for the eternal "season" beyond my short "season" here on Earth. I look forward to a long, long worship service with You! Amen.

September 19 —

"My sheep listen to My voice, I recognize them, they follow Me, and I give them eternal life. They will absolutely never be destroyed and no one will snatch them from My hands."

— John 10:27-28

How Far Would You Go?

The people in the morning found out that Jesus had left and they got in their boats and went out onto the Sea of Galilee in search of Him.

Would you go across the street to hear Him preach today? Yes? Then why not go as far as your livingroom, pick up your Bible and listen to His words afresh? Seek the deeper meanings, examine them in relation to your own life, and hear what the Word tells you **today** about **you**.

It is by God's GRACE that we are saved. So don't study to earn anything. Study to better know your God, Savior, Best Friend. Study because it pleases Him. Study to draw closer to Him and further from the world. Study to grow in grace yourself, to know the heart of God, to fill up with love and all the fruits of the Spirit.

Your Word, Lord, is eternal and I know I should forever examine it for the wonderful fruits found within it. Remind me, Father, when I pick up the latest novel I am reading, to set it back down and pick up Your Word for enrichment. Amen.

September 20 —

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." — I Cor. 9:25

"To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me." — Col. 1:29

Wrestling with God

Jacob wrestled with an angel for his blessing and earned the name Israel. That was in the Old Testament. (Genesis 32)

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," Paul wrote. That was in the New Testament. (Ephesians 2:12)

When God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden:

- He told Adam he had to work (the word meaning "wrestle with") the land.
- He told Eve she had to "wrestle with" childbearing and with her affections for her husband.

We can not just lay back, do nothing and expect to get, get, get from God. We have to wrestle for our blessing. Better to be like Enoch, who was so close to the Lord that God simply whisked him away to heaven.

It is just too easy to not expend any energy after we have been saved, to sit back and relax for the long ride until we die. But "taking it easy" is not what the Lord envisions for any believer.

Lord, forgive me for being too apt to "sit pretty" in my salvation and not take the time to get near to You as Enoch was close to You. I will wrestle for the closeness, Father, like Jacob. Amen

September 21 —

"You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believe." — I Thess. 2:10

Be Perfect!

Paul, Silas and Timothy did it. They were "blameless," Paul told the Thessalonians whom they had lived among. And he continued on to tell them in I Thess. 4:3-6 that it was God's will that they should be sanctified: that they should avoid sexual immorality; each control his own body "in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathens who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him... for God did not tell us to be impure, but to live a holy life."

So many preach that we can not be expected to be "perfect." They preach that the Jews had too many laws to keep them all. But the Bible says differently. God Himself said the Jews **could** obey the law.

Deut. 30:8 says: "And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today."

Deut. 30:14 declares: "But the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

Sounds pretty clear

You will be well on your way to accomplishing this if you can do what Paul writes in I Thess. 5:16-18: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for

this is God's will for you in Jesus HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah)."

Oh, Lord, thank You for explaining that, yes, I can stand perfect before You. I know I have a long way to go, but it is not an impossible goal. And You say You will work out Your perfection in me. Go ahead! Amen.

September 22 —

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Messiah Jesus."

— Rom. 3:23-24

The Reward Beyond

If there is anything about God that is true, it is that He is never-changing in His steadfastness, steadfast in His constancy — you get the picture. Fall arrived yesterday and, true to form, it is more than cool today. Last week, shirt sleeves; this week, coats. So He is changing (in this parable), but only within the confines, or parameters, of the **order** He set for the world. Four seasons that constantly change, yet constantly rotate.

We can rely on Him to bring the cold, the snow, the hard times after refreshing us with the easy. But then the cycle continues. His constancy is that He is continually challenging and then rewarding us. Even in the midst of a "winter" experience, we can look expectantly to the "new life of spring" — because He is never-changing.

Taken another step, since we are to be like God, then we should be steadfast and constant with others in our life.

Lord, thank You for the promise of changing seasons in my life, along with the knowledge that it is You Who are in control. Help me to remain constant as You are constant. Amen.

September 23 —

"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Messiah Jesus." — Rom. 6:11

A Changed Life

If you're saved, look at yourself as a victory for God.

I used to be:

- blind
 - death
 - far away
 - in the camp of the enemy
 - an abuser
- enemy
- holler at the kids
 - sick all over
 - living in lack
 - foul-mouthed and vile
- from my
- share dirty jokes with friends

But now I:

see
hear
nearby
choir of the Almighty
kick sand in the eye of the

scream at the devil
well from head to toe
have plenty
sweet — living water flows
lips

- ugly "goin' some place to happen" saved, delivered,
sanctified and waiting to be glorified when
my Savior returns!
- dead am ALIVE, praise Jesus!

And, do you know what? None of this change was done in my own strength. I did nothing, except choose life, choose to acknowledge my sin and need for salvation, then accept Jesus and proclaim Him as my personal Lord and Savior. He did all the rest. He washed me clean of my sins by His blood and set me free from Satan's prison ... into the glory of His light.

Hallelujah! Thank You for that salvation and a glorious life praising You, Lord. No better gift can lie ahead in this life on Earth. Amen.

September 24 —

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit."

— II Cor. 3:18

Shine on Others

As the sun rises over the woods here, it turns the tops of the trees golden, transforming them in a beautiful brightness. As the Son rises in your life, let your light shine on those you touch.

Psalm 34 defines just how you can accomplish this:

- God's praise will continually be in my mouth. That sets the tone for the rest of me.
- My soul shall make its boast in the Lord. That gets rid of pride.
- Fear God and trust in Him. There is no want for you then.
- Keep your tongue from evil deceit. That, says Prov. 21:23, will keep your soul from troubles.
- Depart from evil and do good.
- Seek peace and pursue it.
- Be like the Lord by being near to those who have a broken heart.
- Tell all you meet that He saves those with a contrite heart.

Lord, use me to shine Your light upon those I meet — family, friends, neighbors and even strangers wherever I go. Amen.

September 25 —

"For everything in the world — the cravings of the sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world."

— I John 2:16

What Glitters Is Not Always Gold

Foliage in Maine in the autumn is so stunning that people fly here from all over, and travel the state to absorb every last eyeful. It is gorgeous. It is enchanting. It is so scintillating in its beauty, in fact, that it reminds you of the attraction of sin:

something that looks good, that is presented in a pretty wrapping, that is enticing. It is difficult to take your eyes off it — unless you focus on One Who is even more beautiful, Whom you absolutely do not want to offend...

Wrappings and Trappings

Free me, my soul, Oh Lord.
Free me from sin's trappings,
All those bright birthday wrappings.
In Your work make me whole, my God.

Thank you, Lord, for the will and strength to resist even those temptations that look alluring and beautiful. Thank you for giving me "eyes to see" the truth behind that beauty and the "ears to hear" Your warning. Amen.

September 26 —

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." —
Matt. 5:8

Looking into the Fog

It was a foggy walk today, and it occurred to me that it was just like our walk with God: He will show us what's ahead, only as far as we need to know. Yet, if we look back to where we've been, we can see far.

We should "not be anxious for anything," Scriptures say, no matter whether we know what lies ahead. Though we can't see beyond the immediate distance, we should be confident in our Lord, Who will reveal our steps to us as we need to take them.

As we contemplate this, we should concentrate, also, on what we **do** know. We **do** know His Word, His rules for living. We **should** know His heart, His desires. And by knowing these, we **should** know to avoid certain pitfalls.

Another thing: Even when we do not hear God speaking to us in that "still small voice," when danger comes we should know to get out of the road, or get run over.

Father, I would love to see in the far future of my life, but knowing that I can not, I trust You to reveal to me just as much as I need to know. Amen.

September 27 —

*"From (Messiah) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and **builds itself up** in love, as each part does its work."*

— Eph. 4:16

Build Up the Body

Examine the fern or the tree, the flower or the shrub and you will discern one thing: Each part needs the others in order for the entire organism to survive. Flowers don't blossom unless they get moisture from the root; the roots dry up if the stem is broken off. It is part of God's design, and it is evident in His Body of Believers as well.

In Paul's exposition in I Corinthians 12, he states "the body is not one member but many." (v.14) And he adds: "But now God has set the members each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would

the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body." (v.18-20) If one member suffers, all suffer; and if one is honored, all rejoice with it, Paul continued as he led up to God's appointment for the Body: apostles, prophets, teachers, and after that miracles, gifts of healings, helps, administrations and varieties of tongues.

These "appointments," he said in Ephesians 4, are "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Messiah..." (v.12)

The body — God's people — build each other up. That's one reason fellowship is so important. You can't build others up if you are not fellowshiping. But the fact that you are fellowshiping does not mean that you are encouraging, supporting or otherwise building others up. Think on that.

Father God, I promise to regularly examine myself to see if I am doing my part as one member in Your Body of Believers. No matter how small a part, or how large a part, I exist as a necessary part of the whole and rely on others for their help as well. Thank You for such a grant plan, Lord. Amen.

September 28 —

"So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." — Eph. 5:28

Husbands, Be Aware

This "love" husbands are to have for their wives means to esteem them and delight in them. Husbands, you have to stay

aware of your wives' flesh and state of mind, just as you are of your own.

From the outset, God established this rule, stating in Gen. 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

As Adam said of Eve: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." (Gen. 2:23)

Just as a husband knows when he himself has a neck ache or a heart ache, he should be aware of the same in his spouse.

Be aware — and treat accordingly — just as you would be aware of yourself and treat yourself accordingly.

Oh, Lord, I so often go on in my daily life, aware of only myself, my feelings, my hurts and pains, my aspirations and joys... and am unaware of what is happening inside my spouse's body and mind. Remind me to be more in touch with the "flesh of my flesh," Lord, and to serve her needs. Amen.

September 29 —

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." —
Eph. 5:22

Submission and Obedience

So many women balk at this verse at the same time that so many men use it to lord it over their wives, ignoring the following verses that call for the husband to be prepared to give his life for her, just as Messiah did for His church.

The entire sentiment of this verse revolves around the word "submit." Here is the key: Submission is an attitude. Obedience deals with an action.

The Scripture says: "Wives, have an a attitude of submission to your husband."

It does not say, "Husbands, demand that your wife submit."

Jesus is the ultimate Bridegroom of the bride, and yet He never said, "Church, submit to Me." No, he knelt before His disciples at the Last Supper and washed their feet.

Isaiah 1:19 says: "If you are willing (submissive) and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land."

I want to walk with an attitude of submission toward You, Lord, being obedient to Your every command. Please give me the fortitude to continue that lifestyle each and every moment of each and every day. Amen.

September 30 —

"He reveals the deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him." — Dan. 2:22

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

— I Cor. 1:25

Logic Versus Reality

The world is deceptive. We walked today through the shaded road into the sunny meadow and it was when we reached the sun that we could see our breath. Completely the opposite of logic; you would think our breath would be more

noticeable in the coolness of the shade. Perhaps **that** is the message: Man's logic doesn't always lead to the Truth.

Because there was dead silence in the woods this morning, my reasoning would tell me there were no birds. Yet, the trees were probably teeming with birds.

God, indeed, is **beyond** logic in many ways, isn't He? We must learn to live by the Spirit, which reveals things to us that are beyond the capabilities of our body's senses.

Lord, I know You make my "logic" seem like foolishness in the light of Your Truth. But help me to walk in the Spirit, "seeing" the true reality around me, with insights that my eyes, ears, nose and fingers cannot fathom. Amen.

October 1 —

"I must decrease so that He might increase..."

"So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.' "

— Is. 28:16

A Prayer to the Lord, Our Foundation

Oh Lord, You are the Cornerstone of my faith, of my life. I set it all on the firm foundation of You. You are the Word. You are the Light, the Illumination of that Word, the Source of all true wisdom and revelation, the Nourishment of all truth.

Lord, help me to decrease, so that You may increase and be **not only** the foundation but the whole house of me — from

basement to rooftop, from front doorstep to rear, from gable to rollway...

When I invite You to reside in me, Lord, I realize it can not be a partial habitation. Sweep the whole house clean, Father! Amen.

October 2 —

"Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us."

— I John 3:24

One Size Fits All

I was lamenting my growing shirt size. And Jesus said, "I'm the only 'perfect fit.' "

The armor of God is "form fit" for whoever puts it on. One size fits all.

His is the only perfect redemption. It fits us all perfectly.

Scripture says, "Put on Christ."

Do so.

Our Savior's Love

Pierced through with spear and spike,
He could have called on angels of might.
But like a lamb He went to the cross,
Enduring torture, death — a heavy cost.

Oh, what a concept of God to behold.

Oh, what a love — gentle yet bold.

Oh, what a Savior Who would die for me.
Oh, what a bridegroom to wed with glee.
Sanctifier, Justifier, my Best Friend,
He is Alpha and Omega, His love knows no end!

*Wow! What a revelation of Your sacrifice for me, Lord.
Thank You for bearing that heavy, heavy cost upon Yourself.
Help me to live righteously, so that You will see more fruit for
Your pain. Amen.*

October 3 —

*"He [the Lord] will raise a banner for the nations and
gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered
people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth."*

— Is. 11:12

Called Out to Aliyah

I call out to My people;
I call them by name.
But they want not to hear,
Nor return to the land I claim.

They aliyah by thousands from the North
And have emptied from the lands of the South.
But to the East and to the West
They incline not their ear to My mouth.

I love them and hold them
And I gently enfold them

In My arms, showing favor.
And yet so many labor
For things of this world.

Father God, I pray that Your Holy Spirit would free Your Jewish people from the enslavement of the things of this world. Break the chains that bind them, Lord. Amen.

October 4 —

"Obey God, resist the devil and he will flee." — James 4:7

"Obey" Comes First

The second part of that sentence is quoted — as a battle cry — almost like a drumbeat in Christianity. It sounds good, stirs the senses, makes one **feel powerful**. Resist the devil and he will flee! He will sprint away from you, shaking in his boots!

But what about the first part: Obey God? Does that not come first? And is it not a **pre-requisite** to even being able to resist the devil? Yet it is really tougher to "obey God." We all like to think that we do, but how many would actually pass the test if their day-to-day lives were played out on a grading scale? Would yours pass?

I recommit myself to obeying You, God. I know that is the only way to ably resist Satan. Strengthen my resolve in this, Lord, and each time I face a temptation to disobey, jolt me with a reminder of this commitment. Thank You. Amen.

October 5 —

"I know that You can do all things; no plan of Yours can be thwarted."

— Job 42:2

"Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' "

— Matt. 19:26

Present and Awesome

It is bitter cold outdoors.

The trees are naked as they will ever be,

And yet He is here —

Potent and awesome is He.

The clouds are steel gray

From East to West,

No sun in thought or sight,

Yet I am here to lift you from the blight.

And carry you through fear and darkness into the Light.

Yes, it can be cold, bitter and barren.

It can be dark, dreary and full of dread!

But think on My warm and loving heart,

On forgiveness, salvation and deliverance instead.

When all seems lost, think "found."

When all looks defeated, think "victory."

When all appears dead, think "life abounds."

When depression is a weighty force, think on His story.

For faith is being "sure of what we hope for
And certain of what we do not see."
Faith is not necessarily knowing who **you** are,
But being absolutely sure of Who is He.

*Yes, God, You are great and mighty. To You I look for truth
and life, for victory and salvation. Hallelujah to Your Name!
Amen.*

October 6 —

*"A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit
gains honor."*

— Prov. 29:23

*"Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the
greatest in the kingdom of heaven." — Matt. 18:4*

Rights Versus Humility

Can you balance the two?

George Mueller's words speak to the issue: "Our work is to lay our petitions before the Lord and in childlike simplicity pour out our hearts before Him, saying, 'I do not deserve that You should hear me and answer my requests, **but for the sake of my precious Lord Jesus; for His sake, answer my prayer.** And give me grace to wait patiently until it pleases You to grant my petition, for I believe You will do it in Your time and way."

Humility begins with recognizing that you are a sinner and need a Savior. Pride in many peoples' hearts keeps them from making this determination. But for those who can humble

themselves before the Lord, admit their state of damnation, ask for His salvation and make Jesus Lord of their lives, for them God has wonderful promises. For them, their humility has paved the way to claim the "rights" of a believer.

Mark 6:12-13 relates that the disciples "went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them."

And when they came back rejoicing, Jesus told the disciples to rejoice, instead, that their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

I kneel humbly before You, Lord, because I know that You are almighty, all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing and all-loving. I am a mere creation of Yours and have no rights except those You impart to me. Thank You for whatever blessings You deem to bestow on me and mine, Father. Amen.

October 7 —

"And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord.'"

— Job 1:21

Taller, Fuller, More Beautiful

Are we like the trees? As we near the end of our lives we, hopefully, are more beautiful to God because we are more mature, more devoted, more full of Him. I say "hopefully" because we should be letting Him work out our perfection

within us; we should be stepping away from the rule of our flesh and letting His Spirit control our lives. Like the great oak, or the trees of Lebanon that the Lord refers to so often, we should stand taller in the "forest of people" as we grow older. Proverbs speaks of the wisdom of white-headed men. Likewise, Paul instructs the church to appoint mature believers to leadership positions. The Lord clearly intends for us to mature in the Spirit as we get older, not to backslide or lose our enthusiasm for Him and His Word.

Then, at the end of our lives, like the trees, we leave our beauty (of this world) behind. Just as the dead tree decays and makes later generations flourish, our deaths should manifest the fruits of our lives through the lives of those we touch.

I want to grow taller, fuller and more full of faith as I grow older, Father. Thank You for Your wonderful Word that encourages me to do just that. As long as I remain in the Word I know that these hopes will be realized. Amen.

October 8 —

"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth..."
(Eph. 6:14a)

Truth and Lies

Part of your armor is the belt of truth. The belt on a suit of armor served to hold the shield and the sword — in the believer's battles, that is the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit. The shield of faith extinguishes all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

And as Eph. 6:13 warns us: "Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the evil day comes, you may be able to stand your ground..."

Truth is a crucial element to our daily living, as witnessed by other Scriptures:

- Prov. 12:19 — "Truthful lips last forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment."

- Lev. 19:11 — "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another."

- Ps. 101:7 — "No one who practices deceit will dwell in My house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in My presence."

- Col. 3:9 — "Do not lie to one another since you have taken off the old self with its practices."

One measure of your consistency in this area is to examine your life in the light of James 3:11 (which asks the rhetorical question: "Does a spring send forth both fresh water and bitter from the same opening?") and of James 3:6 ("And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.")

The bottom line, if you find anything less than truth in your life, is this: Confess your sin and ask forgiveness from whom you have deceived. The alternative? Contemplate Luke 6:49: "But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

Lord, please keep my tongue from evil and lies; keep my heart true to You; and help me to reconcile with any whom I have deceived. Amen.

October 9 —

"When they had all had enough to eat, He (Jesus) said to the disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' "

— John 6:12

Leave No Waste

The question of why Jesus gave this command has plagued theologians for two millennia.

I believe it was because it was a miracle from God and, as such, none of it should be wasted. Do not waste what God gives you.

Remember the Passover lamb when the Jews were preparing to leave Egypt? It was to be eaten that day, all of it, so that the Angel of Death would pass over each home.

Remember the manna in the desert? It was to be eaten that day, all of it.

Likewise, the lamb sacrifice to God was to be entirely eaten.

The Lord says He provides "more than enough." We should take that scripture to heart.

Look, also, at verse 14: "Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet Who is to come into the world.' "

The leftover bread served as proof of God's provision, just as when Jesus told the lame man to "stand up and walk" and asked the blind man to relate what he saw.

Whatever You provide us is precious, Lord. May I never lose sight of the awesomeness of Your love and the extent to which You have gone and will go for our well-being. Praise Your Name! Amen.

October 10 —

"For in Him [God] we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.' "
— Acts 17:28

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them... God saw all that He had made, and it was very good."
— Gen. 1:27, 31a

That Which Is More Beautiful

The woods are in peak foliage — absolutely stunning, like jewels hanging on every branch of all the hardwoods, and those colors set against the deep green of the evergreen trees. How beautiful.

Yet — **not** as beautiful as we are ... in the eyes of God. Trees are inanimate creations, showing God's handiwork — yes. But how unique and complex we are — **and** we can walk and talk with Him and imitate Him, like good children.

Yes, we are more beautiful to God than even the woods in full-bloom beauty.

*Actually, Lord, **You** are most beautiful. We are mere reflections of Your stunning presence and glory. But thank You for creating us thus. This way we can communicate with You; and what greater gift is that?! Amen.*

October 11 —

"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."

— I Thess. 4:1

Being "comfortable" for God

I walked two of the dogs today and noticed something as I held their leashes separately: how much easier — more comfortable — it was to hold in our young "lady," Scotia, than our male border collie, Yancey. I could keep both moving in the right direction and along with me. But it sure was comfortable on the left side where Scotia was satisfied just walking along whereas Yancey constantly strained against the leash to eat grass, smell smells or mark his territory.

Oh, how pleased God must feel when we walk along with Him and keep abreast stride for stride, compared to when we constantly tug and pull against His will and His direction. When you notice you are not totally in His will, think on this example.

Father, I so do want to remain under Your heavenly control and not wander off in opposition to Your desires for my life. I

will remind myself daily to be on the alert to notice when I drift astray. Amen.

October 12 —

"Pray, that you may not enter into temptation." — Luke 22:40b

The Correct SOP

God set up an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) when He created the universe. These are constant things by which the universe operates: gravity, centrifugal force, an atmosphere around the earth perfectly "mixed" so that humans and animals can breath and plant life and grow, that sort of rule and regulation.

That led me to ask myself: What is your SOP?

Which led me to answer: It had better be prayer.

Jesus Himself was always retreating up into the hills to pray and be alone with the Father. The next morning He was prepared for whatever was in store for that day.

Having an SOP means maintaining discipline, no matter what.

When I stop writing I'm less insightful, less apt to look deeply or closely at things, less thoughtful, use my brain less and am less creative. Likewise, when I stop praying, I am more distant spiritually from the Lord, find it more difficult to hear His still small voice, and discover that Jesus was correct when He implored His disciples to pray lest they "enter into temptation."

Keep me praying, Lord, never forgetting that cornerstone of a true walk in righteousness. Amen.

October 13 —

"Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel answered, 'Speak, for Your servant hears.' "

— I Sam. 3:10

Do It All

When a car approaches us while we are walking on the road, I always say to the dogs, "Off the road," and they comply. Sometimes the drivers of these cars are not good at keeping a safe distance from us even as we stand off the road on the shoulder. They may be distracted, or blinded by the sun, or just bad drivers, but their actions can endanger our lives. That is why it is so important for the dogs to pay attention and do exactly as I command.

So, it goes to say that doing "most" of what God says, or "to the most part" can still be dangerous. If He says, "Off the road" and you move all but a leg off the road, that leg (and thus you) are in danger.

When young Samuel answered God, he listened to all God said to him, not just the first words of that first call in the night. And through Samuel's life, all Israel hung on his every word because they knew he was God's man.

Do it all.

Do it totally.

And be assured when you do that your Commander and Chief, the One Who watches over you as you walk life's byways, will protect you every step of the way.

Thank you for the warnings, Lord, for keeping my health and my very life in mind. I will pay attention and I will follow Your commands, Father, listening for Your voice every step of the way. Amen.

October 14 —

"I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."

— Is. 44:22

*... "having been buried with Him in baptism and **raised with Him** through your faith in the power of God, Who raised Him from the dead."*

— Col. 2:12

Past Tense, the Deed Is Done

God buys us back (redeems us) even while we are in our sins. Notice, it is past tense, accomplished on the cross. But even before that — in Isaiah's time — God bought back His people through sacrifices.

He sees us as perfected long before we can even approach that state. And He rewards us before we deserve that reward. Oh, what a great and loving God! Oh, what a God to thank and worship and praise!

*Lord, please raise up (the backslidden) as from the dead.
Infuse them with life, with power in the Spirit, with a zest for
the life You put in motion for them.*

*Thank You, Lord, for I deserved not your redemption.
Forgive me, Lord, for those sins, carelessly done, that crucify
Your Name if not Your Body... for as Your representative here
on Earth, my actions reflect on You. **That** should cause me
fear and wailing.*

October 15 —

*"Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can
bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you
bear fruit unless you remain in me."*

— John 15:4

His Instrument

If God "takes up residence" in you, then you are His instrument. Whatever He might want to do, He will do **through** you... if you let Him; if you believe.

So get that in you: You are His instrument: His hands, eyes, feet. He heals — so He will heal through you. He loves — so He will love through you. He casts out demons — so He will cast out demons through you.

Reside in Me

Take up residence in me, Lord.

Come and abide in me.

Live and move and have Your Being

Dwelling within my own.

Your awesome power,
Your wondrous touch,
Your loving hand
And all-knowing heart —
Let it all be shown through me.

Whatever God might want to do
He will do it through you...
If you let Him; if you believe,
If to His promises you cleave.

Be His instrument — His hands, eyes, feet —
So He can heal through you,
Extend His hand through you,
All His love, through you, be seen.

Your blessed presence in my life, Lord, is so wondrous a thing to think on and too glorious for what I deserve. Use me, in any way You want, to work Your love in this world. Amen.

October 16 —

" 'My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to My name because My name will be great among the nations,' " says the Lord Almighty."

— Malachi 1:11

No Contradictions Here

Is God contradictory? It may seem so at first blush. But think about each of these...

God is constant,
Yet ever-changing in His beauty.
He is steadfast,
Yet never-failing in His mercy.
He is a strong tower,
Yet loaded with loving compassion.
He is a warrior,
Yet devoted to peace.
He is a destroyer,
Yet holds His hand out to His enemy.
He is righteous,
Yet came to live among the corrupt.
He is just,
Yet will redeem a lifelong sinner.
He is to be feared,
Yet loved, worshipped and adored.
He alone created you. He alone can bring an end to you. He alone can welcome you to heaven.
He is Yahweh — and forever our King. Amen.

October 17 —

"Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of His servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."

— Is. 50:10

Even in the Darkness

God's road is always there to travel. Even in the darkness when all is dim and dreary, when there is no light in sight, know that your God is present to lift you up and carry you through what lies ahead.

It is easy to walk the road of faith in the bright sunlight of God's presence. It is in the darkest hours of our lives, when we can't see where we are going and must take the next step nevertheless, that we need the greatest faith.

It is in the darkness that you need to give up your life. And by giving it up, you will gain it. I recall a scene in the movie, *In Search of the Holy Grail*, where the hero needed to step out into an apparent abyss, trusting that an unseen stone would be there to catch his weight. It was. The Lord says: "That is the type of faith I want you to have in Me."

Lord, I do know You count every hair on my head and know the number of my days, and are working out my perfection within me. Increase my faith, Lord, so that I will not fear walking the road You have set before me, even in the darkest and most frightening times. Amen.

October 18 —

"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far has the Lord helped us.' "

— I Sam. 7:12

Ho-hum, The Noun

Do you ask for dreams and visions, then when you get them, treat them nonchalantly? Ho-hum! Rather than being thankful God has visited your spirit? You seem happier when a friend walks in the house than your Creator? Do not disdain the gifts of the Spirit — or answered prayer.

Miracles of God, dreams and visions are not a "ho-hum." Beware that if they become "ho-hum" to you, you may not see any more. God told Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to build monuments to His miracles at the places they occurred. He told my wife to build one on our property once He showed us to buy our house. And when we pass by this small pile of stones, it is to remind us of His provision.

Do not forget. Give thanks. Use those miracles to build your faith. Never let them become "ho-hum." I wish I had kept all my kidney stones. I could keep them in a pile as a reminder and to thank God for delivering me through those difficult half-dozen attacks.

Remember whatever miracle God has done in your life and that will help your unbelief.

I will look back on the miracles You wrought in my life, Lord, and be encouraged and build my faith. I will start to build monuments when You deliver me, Lord. And I will know that You will continue to show Yourself the one true God — the God of miracles! Amen.

October 19 —

"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."

— Dan. 12:3

"Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." — John 12:36

Great and Lesser Lights — Part I

Who hung out the stars and the solar systems? And who hung out the moon so it was full and still remained in the sky this morning — the full moon to the west and the rising sun to the east? The sight was so rare that it made me think: The greater light is rising even while the lesser light is here.

Is that indicative of what God will do here on Earth? He is the Greater Light. Who is — or are — the lesser lights? We are. And that is why we must fill ourselves with His Word. It is not "Word Faith." It is "heart belief."

What we have been proclaiming, speaking and reading determines what comes out of our mouths in a certain situation.

So, fill yourself with the Light of the Word so you can be a light in God's galaxy of born-again saints, shining forth His brightness in the darkness that pervades this fallen world.

Holy Lord in Heaven, shine Your glory in my life and impart Your wisdom into my spirit so that I might be a light to others and help fill their lives with the knowledge that You love them so very much. Amen.

October 20 —

"So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteousness."

— Is. 41:10

Great and Lesser Lights — Part II

Did you ever sit indoors with the light on as the sun had not quite risen — in the morning dusk? Look outside and you can not see anything. Yet, if you were outside yourself, you could indeed see around you. We, likewise, may be a light to the world but we will not know what is happening in that world — what struggles, diseases, hurts, etc. — unless and until we step out into it — into the darkness... Like Sister Teresa, John G. Lake, and Jesus Himself, Who communed with "sinners and tax collectors."

Do you feel inadequate to be this lesser light. Then remember:

- "I can do all things through Messiah Who strengthens me."
— Phil. 4:13

- "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us." — Rom. 8:37

Thank You, Lord, for using me in whatever way You care to, as a "lesser light" reflecting Your life-saving Light — caring for, loving, setting an example for, encouraging, whatever You call me to do... Amen.

October 21 —

"' 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.' Saul said to David, 'Go, and the Lord be with you.' "

— I Sam. 17:37

Rise Up in Righteous Anger

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" said an indignant shepherd boy, David, when he heard the giant Goliath railing against the God of the Hebrews. This boy was angry enough that he had no fear and no doubt: He feared not defeat despite the size of this Philistine and despite the fear of the entire Hebrew army; and he doubted not His God, Who had delivered a lion and a bear into the boy's hands in past encounters.

David's attitude is the same as the Lord wants us to have in regards to the enemies in our lives. We should rise up and cry out: "Who is this uncircumcised sin? — this uncircumcised disease? — this uncircumcised temptation? — this uncircumcised enemy of my faith?"

Yes, rise up, sling the tiny stone of belief and knock the giant to the ground!

Hallelujah to Your might, Lord, my Deliverer! When any enemy of my God makes noise against you — or threatens an attack against Your children — I will rise up and defeat it by Your great right hand. Amen.

October 22 —

"And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil."

— Luke 7:37-38

Treat Jesus Well

Do we treat Jesus like this woman — when He "comes into our home"?

When we visit with Him in our prayers, do we give Him water for His feet/wet His feet with our tears? — Give Him a kiss/kiss His feet? — put oil on His head/pour perfume on His feet?

The rewards of this attitude are great, as Jesus told the Pharisee: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much." (v.47)

How much do we love Him? How humble and honored do we feel that the King of Kings would deign to visit with us, for how worthy are we, really, to be visited by our Creator, our Savior?

Here is the Person Who is in every book of the Bible. Every book is about Him, in the Old Testament pointing ahead to Him, or in the New Testament pointing back toward Him.

He is John 1:1 and I John 1:1

He is the sword in the armor. And, so, when He visits us it is a greater honor than a Presidential visit to our parlor!

Oh, Lord Jesus, I have taken Your Presence for granted so many times. And yet, Your coming into my humble room, or inclining Your ear to my prayer is the greatest of all honors. Forgive me for my presumptions. I come with weeping of gratitude in my heart for Your sweetness! Amen.

October 23 —

"Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus HaMachiach with an undying love." — Eph. 6:24

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy..."

— I Peter 1:8

Romancing The Rock

When you find "the one" you want to marry, what do you do? Romance them? Pay attention to them, talking, sitting, learning about them and their wishes, desires, plans, their morals and beliefs?

Woo them with poems and flowers — awake to thoughts of them and go to sleep with them in your prayers?

Jesus, our Bridegroom, wants that kind of attention from us. Before we ever do so, He is already setting the example, doing the same for us.

Spending quality time with Him, with all distractions turned off and tuned out, you grow to know Him. And in Him you grow to know His creation.

Remember the old song, "Wouldn't you agree, baby, you and me, got a different kind of love?"

Well, His is a different kind of love. His is unconditional. No matter how you affront or otherwise treat Jesus, He loves you. We must also walk in unconditional love — first with Him, then with others.

I realize Your love is unconditional and that You know every intimate detail about me and still love me, Lord. I want to know You better, understand You better, and have a closer walk with You, to prepare myself for an eternity in Your throne room. Thank You for that opportunity. Amen.

October 24 —

"Say among the nations, 'the Lord reigns.' The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity."

— Psalm 96:10

Judge AND Deliverer

Note that our Judge is also our Deliverer. How can you ask for a better, fairer Judge than He Who is your Deliverer?

In Daniel 3:18, Shadrach, Mechach and Abed-Nego tell King Nebuchadnezzar, "But even if He does not [deliver us], we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

There are all kinds of "idols" Satan tempts us with — not just statues of gold. We must refuse to worship each one. It can be a "want" or a lust as well as a Buddah. The God we serve is able to save us. Yet, even if He does not we should be

prepared to not bow to the things of the god of this world. For, in the end our Judge offers us deliverance! Hallelujah!

Praise You, God, for being my Deliverer, for never leaving nor forsaking me — even in the midst of great trouble and even death. Thank You, Father, for not allowing what I deserve to befall me, but for keeping me in Your arms always. Amen.

October 25 —

"For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

— Eph. 2:10

God Prepares Good Works

God creates the good works for us to do and then puts us in the path so that we may walk in those good works. Now, exactly what good works do You, Lord, want us to walk in?

This is a foundation for faith, though we must always remember that we are "saved by grace, not by works, so that no man can boast."

So, even the "work" of God is not real "work," or else we might boast.

John 6:29 says, "Jesus answered them, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.' "

Here is John's bottom line: If you are in bed or in prison, in a desert or alone in a forest, you can believe. And that is all God ultimately requires.

Other "works," as we think of them, will follow as God orders our lives.

I do believe in the One You have sent, Lord. What easier "work" can there be? And yet, I stand ready to perform the "works" that You have prepared for me to walk in. Use me, Father. Amen.

October 26 —

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account."

— Heb. 4:13

Beware Bitterness

Did you ever take a bite of those little blue berries that are not blueberries at all — the ones that grow on chest-high bushes? Not only are they very bitter, but they may be poisonous. Similarly, bitterness in our own hearts is poisonous. It can cause spiritual sickness that leads to spiritual death, for bitterness and unforgiveness grow hand in hand, and Scripture tells us the Lord can not forgive us if we do not forgive those who offend us.

Sweep Out Bitterness

Sweep those tokens of bitterness from your life.
Store up, instead, treasures of love.
For bitter, unforgiving hearts always breed death.
And your Father is watching from above.

So sweep those tokens of bitterness from your life.
Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Lord, cast out the bitterness from my heart. I know it can only lead to ugliness and death. Cleanse me from all that is not freshness and light and love! Amen.

October 27 —

"'Return home and tell how much God has done for you.' So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him."

— Luke 8:39

"Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

— James 5:20

"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." — Dan. 12:3

The Piano Needs the Pianist

The Bible and the believer are like the piano and the pianist. The Bible is finite. Likewise, the piano has only so many white and black keys.

Just as the piano cannot produce beautiful music without a pianist, so the Bible needs a believer to produce. And there is no limit to what the Holy Spirit can produce when allowed to play on God's Word.

In God's great moves, He used man as an agent, a supporting actor in His plan. In the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham took him to the mount.

In the flood, Noah built the ark.

Before the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, the Hebrews circled the city seven times and then shouted.

In the Great Commission, Jesus sent out His disciples, armed with the Holy Spirit, to spread the Good News.

In all this work, He is the pianist, we are the keys.

Oh, how glorious is Your Word, O Lord. It contains the history of Your creation and of Your people. It succinctly states Your commandments and the blessings or cursings that await those who obey and those who disobey. It gives life, hope, love, promise. It tells of life, death and resurrection. Help me, Father, to use this Word to reach out to those who need to hear from Your throne room. Amen.

October 28 —

"And His Name, through faith in His Name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him (Jesus) has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of You all."

— Acts 3:16

Increase Our Faith, Lord

Col. 1:3 says, "We always thank God when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Messiah Jesus and the love you have for all the saints..."

Their very faith was due to the Lord. As Acts says: "faith which comes through Him..." He gave faith to them and He gives it to us. It is not something we can conjure up. BUT we should ask God to increase our faith. That is why the man said to Jesus, "I have faith. Lord, increase my faith."

Ask God: Increase my faith, Father. For in the same way, He, not we:

- reconciles us by Messiah's body through death (Col. 1:18, 22);
- rescues us from darkness (Col. 1:13);
- commissions us (Col. 1:25);
- makes Messiah known (Col. 1:27);
- forgives us our sins (Col. 2:13);
- cancels the written code (Col. 2:14); and
- disarms the powers and authorities (Col. 2:15).

*I can claim no great accomplishment because of the faith I possess, Lord, for that comes **through** Jesus. I simply ask You to increase my faith. Make it large and impregnable, like Superman able to leap tall buildings in the spiritual world! Amen.*

October 29 —

"The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah.' " —John 1:41

Each Day...

God provides the illumination, but **after** you make the move to seek it. It's like opening the bedroom curtains in the

morning. After you do so, you see the light of day. It is the same with the Bible. Open it and see the Light God provides!

Start each day that way, opening your life to the Light.

Each day, celebrate being born again. Today is the first day of the rest of your life.

Each day, pass on the gift you have been given by Almighty God.

Today... is the first day. Rejoice in it.

Rejoice in your salvation.

Think of the promises God has given you. Hallelujah!

Each day, as the sun rises, let the Son rise in your heart to brighten your way.

Bright morning glory, today, Lord. You are bright morning glory. Remind me daily, Father, of my salvation, or my joy in you and my thanks for my salvation. You are wonderful to behold ... each day, even today. Amen.

October 30 —

"A man of many friends may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." — Proverbs 18:24

So Very Close

Thinking on this scripture, I wrote the following lyrics to be sung to the tune of "Jesus, O How I Love You."

Jesus, You're never apart from me.

You're worthy and true.

Jesus, You're closer than a brother.

You never walk away from me
Each day Your love's brand new.

Jesus, how I love you,
You won't leave nor forsake me
All my hope relies on You.

Jesus, You bought me with Your blood, You took my sins
away.
You're trustworthy and true.
Your love is always brand new
And I'll always be true to You.

*I owe You so very much, Lord. I promise never to lose sight
of the myriad blessings, abundant miracles, healings of body,
soul and spirit, and the fact that You never left nor forsook me
even when I turned my back on You. Thank You, Father!
Amen.*

October 31 —

*"And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall
assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us,
God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved,
if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward
God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we
keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing
in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should
believe on the name of His Son Jesus HaMashiach and love
one another, as He gave us commandment."*

— I John 3:19-23

Reinventing God

Mankind has spent so much time, effort and money developing this and that medicine for cats, dogs and cows, this and that engine for cars and airplanes, this and that computer software for "life applications." And it wants to, in its human mind's view, "perfect" God. To do that, we invent this formula for prayer, that prayer for salvation, this salvo to Heaven to get certain perks that we want.

One day the Spirit of God spoke to me: "I am already perfect," says the Lord. "And no man can boast about anything that he has to do with Me.

"I heal because I want to.

"I provide food, shelter, fortune and success because I want to.

"Nothing manmade can 'perfect' how I do My job. Only a man's heart counts to Me."

Oh, cleanse my heart, Lord, that You may find it pure. I do believe in the name of Your Son and I will do my very best to love others. I do want to be honorable as You are honorable. Help me in this, Lord. Amen.

November 1 —

"No soldier when in service gets entangled in the enterprises of civilian life; his aim is to satisfy and please the one who enlisted him."

— II Tim. 2:4 (Amplified)

Apolitical

When Jesus walked on the earth the Roman government controlled Eretz Israel with a stern hand — far more stern than the British did the American colonies. And yet He never preached rebellion. In fact, His only mention of the Roman government was to "give unto Caesar what is Caesar's" when He spoke of paying taxes.

If Jesus had spoken against the Romans what would have happened and, perhaps more important, what would **not** have happened?

Let's take just one example. Who was Paul? A Roman.

Who wrote most of the New Covenant? Paul.

Recall when Paul wrote, "The brethren here send their wishes, especially those of Caesar's household." Do you think any Romans, let alone those of Caesar's household, would have even entertained the name of a man in their household if he had spoken against Romans and against their government? It would be like you or me sitting and listening to a neighbor's dialogue on religion after that neighbor had spoken vilely against us. It would not happen.

Politics and religion? They did not mix with Jesus. Do they, then, mix with us?

Today, our society, even the Body of Messiah, places so much emphasis on politics, on this darned Democrat, or that misguided liberal. How can the Body of Messiah reach the lost with the Good News of Jesus if we constantly speak out against them?

Should we be hermits and make believe the government does not exist and does not affect us? No, we are prompted to "pray for your leaders." But we should not be consumed by them, or their actions.

Believe it or not, even a President who has shamed himself, his family and his country can some day be saved. Even a Vice President who is a compulsive liar can some day be saved. The chances of both will increase if believers are praying for them rather than reviling them.

Help me, Lord, to be a "good soldier," involved in the affairs of the Kingdom of God rather than this earthly kingdom in which I am simply a sojourner. Amen.

November 2 —

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." — Prov. 11:30

Jumping into the Fray

Oh, Lord, let me be a help today
To somebody and in some special way.
Let me jump on into the fray.
Let me have encouragement to say.

Let Your Word be on my lips, in my heart
Giving each day a Holy Spirit start,
Putting Satan and his demons under my feet,
Bringing Your victory and his defeat.

Help me to center each moment on You.
There is no higher calling for me to do.
Because You are the Cornerstone, the Tower,
The entire weaponry to survive each hour.

You are the Fort
And with Your support
I will help some soul
To be fixed and made whole.

Father, I so often stand aside, put forth too little effort for others, keep my encouraging words to myself, fail to do my best for You. May Your priorities be my priorities today and every day. Amen.

November 3 —

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."

— Col. 3:2

World Views

Matt. 7:1-2 tells us, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged, for in the same way you judge others, you will be judged and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Other people simply have a different world view than you.
Look at society to bare this out:

- God versus no God.
- Government rules everything versus Human individual control.

- Washington, D.C., versus the States.
- One World Government versus independent countries.

Meanwhile, the **protection** for you is safety from that judgment against you.

We tend to listen to politicians, of either party, and get upset at this program or that initiative that they think will actually solve a problem. And it sometimes angers us. But should we not "think on things that are lovely, pure and of good report"? Should we not "guard our minds"? This will pour lime on bitterness, still resentment and quiet animosity.

"Putting on the mind of Christ" is not wallowing in political crud... even during this election-day time of year. When tempted to anger against this or that politician, remember: Unsaved politicians do not know God, so we can not expect them to **act** Godly. They can't. And they can't help it. Yes, unrighteous stands taken by politicians deserve our condemnation; but the politicians themselves? They need our prayers for their salvation.

Lord, I tend to get so carried away by the issue of the moment that pits righteousness against ungodliness. It instills an anger that I must battle against. None of this is lovely, or pure, or of good report. It gives birth to unforgiveness and sin. Purge it from me, Lord. Thank You! Amen.

November 4 —

"God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations."

Life or Death?

A man stands with a chain saw ready to cut down an old oak tree and the environmentalist chains himself to the tree, or takes up residence in it. But we see loved ones on the way to hell and do less to prevent it.

If salvation, or lack of it, means life or death, then why are we not on our knees praying for our loved ones who are not saved? Why do we not cry out in anguish to Him Who can answer our prayers? Why do we not persevere for even our children, parents and in-laws?

Does that environmentalist have more devotion to a tree than we do human lives?

We should pray not just for loved ones, but for neighbors and others as well.

They called Jeremiah the "weeping prophet" because he was always weeping, in travail, for His people. Should we do less when all around us are people just as lost?

Lord, how precious is every person on this earth, and how important their destination when they die! As I approach You about salvation, I will try to be less self-centered and pray more for friends, neighbors and even those whom I do not know. Amen.

November 5 —

"For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark..."

— Matt. 24:38

Flee to Protection

I can spot them, here and there: abandoned birds' nests in the bare trees. It is a reminder that places the world considers safe will not be when winter (The End) arrives. They will be barren and exposed.

Though you may be comfortable, private and protected in the summer when all is warm and well, beware. Worldly protection is temporary and temporal. Flee to God's protection, which is everlasting and unaffected by the world.

Closer to You, Lord, I want to get closer to You. That means cuddling up to Your Word, drawing near to Your "nest of protection." Keep me stayed in Thee, Father. Amen.

November 6 —

"And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it."

— Prov. 35:8

Toll-free Highway

Strolling down our road, it occurred to me: Everyone's driveway leads to the road. Simple analogy, isn't it?

We've all got a freedom to drive onto His way and travel it. No toll or charge of any kind. And it is so nearby we can be there in a moment or two.

A lady who lives down the street today drove out and onto the road. The vehicle stalled and she had to restart it, but all went well.

Often we, too, stall just after deciding to go His way. But we need to stick with it, restart our engine and Go!

As you walk down your own street or country lane, pray that all your neighbors along the way will make the free choice to travel God's highway. No charge, and a **great** ride!

You are the Way, the Truth and the Light, Lord. Draw my neighbors to You and Your perfect "ways" as well. Amen.

November 7 —

"Now the body is not made up of one part but many." — I Cor. 12:14

Pray for Other Parts of the Body

If not for the roots of the tree, its trunk, limbs and leaves would never receive the nourishment to live. Without the leaves blooming in the spring, the tree would wither and die. One part depends on the other, just like the Body of Messiah.

I am not the only part of the Body; neither are my wife or sons. I need to be praying for the other parts as well — more so, actually, since there are many more of them.

The apostle Paul wrote, "I pray for **you** always..." NOT "I pray for **us** always."

Pray for the other parts of the body, even those far removed from you: apostles, evangelists, ministers, teachers and prophets ... all the saints, the Body of Christ ... locally, nationally, in persecution in the far reaches of the Earth.

So many parts of the Body of Messiah, and we are all dependent upon one another, Lord! Remind me to be praying daily for each of the others, and not just those whom I know personally. Amen.

November 8 —

"I say, then, have they (Jews) stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles."

— Rom. 11:11

"Spiritual Israel"? Uh-uh!

Luke 2:32 says that Jesus came to be a revelation to Gentiles and to bring praise and glory to the people Israel.

The church has turned that all around.

Eph. 3:6 — "... through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Messiah Jesus." It also says that Gentiles were brought **into** fellowship with Jewish believers, not vice versa.

"Spiritual Israel"? You hear that phrase a lot in Christendom today, but I don't think so, not by reading this. Gentile believers can not replace the Jews, but rather they must be grafted in.

In Romans 4:16, Paul distinctly includes keepers of the law along with those who are of faith, as attaining salvation: "Therefore, it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, **not only to those who are of the law**, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all..."

The church has Westernized "Christianity." And we have usurped the place at the head of the table. We should be ready to be last, take the seat at the back, to be "servant to" — just as Paul was servant to. (Eph. 3:7)

As Abraham was made a Jew because of his faith, when we get faith God makes us Jews, grafting us into the olive tree — His people. It is **not** the other way around.

We become part of Israel. When it began, "Christianity" was not called by that name. It was a sect of Judaism. It still should be. In fact, it **is** the fullness of Judaism. Jesus came to fulfill the Law — the foundation of Judaism — not to create a whole new religion but to fulfill an old one ... with love because He is love. He in effect inserted Himself into the Law as the slain Lamb.

Lord, forgive me if I have believed or spoken the belief that believing Gentiles could or have replaced the Jews as Your people. Gentiles are, indeed, grafted in to Your tree and have not supplanted that tree. I pray, Father, that You would open the eyes of Your people to their Messiah. Amen.

November 9 —

"But you (Jesus's apostles) shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me (Jesus) in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

— Acts 1:8

"Indeed He (God) says, 'It is too small a thing that You (Messiah) should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob. And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

— Is. 49:6

Jews a Light to the Gentiles

How quickly Gentile believers lost sight of the fact that it was Jews who took the Good News with them to the outer parts of the known world, and, under threat to their very lives, preached Jesus to every ear that would hear.

In fact, when Peter returned from his visit to the Roman centurion Cornelius's house and related how the entire household received Jesus as Messiah, his Jewish friends "were astonished ... because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on Gentiles also." (Acts 10:45)

The Lord had told Isaiah this very outreach would happen through Messiah when Isaiah wrote: "I, the Lord, have called You (Messiah) in righteousness, and will hold You and I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. (Is. 42:6-7)

And yet, as we are told in Romans 9-10, except for a remnant, the Jews lost out through a great rejection of Messiah. And now, we are to receive God's plan — that the gospel came to the Gentiles through the Jews; and take the Gospel back to the Jews. And in the Last Days, the whole of Israel will be saved.

Thank You, Father, for a plan of salvation that has included the Gentiles through the falling away of Your people the Jews ... but which also includes the return again of the Jews to Your bosom. Use me, Lord, whenever the opportunity arises, to share my faith in the Jewish Messiah with one of Your chosen people — and to thank them for sharing Who is now OUR Messiah. Amen.

November 10 —

"Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding." — Prov. 23:23

"Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar. As it is written: 'So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.' "

— Rom. 3:4

But It SOUNDS So Good!

If I believe whatever sounds good to me and it doesn't square with the Bible it is not Christianity. It's another religion — Leslieism, perhaps.

For instance, being "good" is not enough to get anyone to Heaven "lest they could boast." (Eph. 2:9) That is why God

had to come to Earth in the flesh (Jesus), so there would be a perfect sacrifice for our sins. (Heb. 9:28) We do nothing — can do nothing — to earn that salvation... except believe. (I John 2:3-5) and (Gal. 1:4) Everyone who believes in Jesus is saved. Anyone who does not is condemned already. (Titus 2:14) All the "good" and "nice" Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and atheists are condemned already because they deny or reject Messiah.

What anyone believes does not make it true. The real truth depends not on what we think is the truth. God gives every person the opportunity to accept Him. By His grace alone we are saved because not one of us deserves "so precious a salvation."

Too many times people get carried away with the "love" side of God. This neglects the fact that God's love can not embrace what His holiness rejects. The gay community (and others) say, "God loves me and saves me because I'm a good person and He is love."

Wrong! Yes, He does love them, but He can't accept what His holiness rejects — and homosexuality is "an abomination" to Him. (Leviticus 18:22) People must read the whole Bible to know God — and that includes His judgments.

Many men think they will ride into Heaven on their wives' coattails. Sorry, but we will each appear before the judgment seat of Messiah (II Cor. 5:10) "to receive what is due us for the things done with the body, whether good or bad."

Anyone who denies he has sinned is "a liar and the truth is not found in him" and "Satan is the father of lies."

Because of God's grace and compassion He has provided a

way out of hell — 9-1-1 in reverse (I John 1:9): "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us of all unrighteousness."

It is that simple. Jesus said we are called to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." If we truly love God we stop "continuing in sin" because we want to please Him. If we love Him we believe what He believes — that is in the Bible — not what we fancy ourselves.

He is the Creator. The only way to eternal life is by His rules.

Father, when I hear a doctrine remind me to check it out against Your Word before accepting it as gospel truth. Thank You for discernment in this search, Lord. Even well-meaning people regurgitate statements, beliefs and doctrines that are not truth. And I do not want to fall because of a falsehood. Amen.

November 11 —

"For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others." — Ps. 49:10

Three Appearances

As the promise of winter nears, I noticed three things today on my walk along the road:

1) Off the sides of the road, the forest's plumage is gone and it stands naked to the winter to come. Likewise, outside God's path, all the world is dead or dying. We should pray for them

— the lost and dying — that they would see before it is too late.

2) Notice that only the evergreen trees are not barren. The same with us: Only those who are always in the Word will be saved from devastation. The rest will be stripped bare as "winter" (the end) approaches. Stay **ever** refreshed in the Word — in the Lord.

3) Yet do not be deceived by outward appearances. What is the most beautiful tree in the forest? The white birch, no doubt. But white birch is also the least substantial of the trees. It is very light-weight and often basically hollow. Remember, because someone "gussies" up well for church, and even says all the right things, they may not be right with the Lord. Do not be led astray by such, but rather minister love, truth and the Word to them, that they might be brought closer to the Lord.

Let me see beyond appearances, Lord, to be discerning and wise. Keep me ever refreshed by Your Word, Father, for Your Word is life and strength unto my bones. Amen.

November 12 —

"Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life; so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together."

— John 4:36

Never Too Late for Either

I am reminded of the quote: "I preach as never to preach again and as a dying man to dying men."

Is it too late for them — the dying men? Look! The sun rises, shining golden brilliance on even the dead-looking trees of the forest!

No, it is never too late — either for us or for those whom we have neglected to share the living waters of the Word. Look around you today for such as these: men or women whom you have thought it was too late to reach. There are testimony upon testimony of people who were saved in their later years, or even on their death beds. Count no one "out," for none of us are "out" in God's book.

Now, look around again, only this time at yourself. Is it too late for you to preach — perhaps not to an assembly but to one person or two? No, again. Not until your last breath on this earth! ... "as a dying man to dying men."

I can share You, Father, until my dying day and that which I share I can share to people until their dying day. May Your Holy Spirit simply give me the words to speak — and may I have that opportunity this very day. Amen.

November 13 —

"For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Messiah will shine on you.' "

— Eph. 5:14

Clouds, Glorious Clouds

Notice how a sunrise is much more beautiful when there are clouds in the sky. Think of it... If there were no clouds, there

would be no billowing pillows of pinks and reds and yellows; no swirls of flourishing colors sweeping across the sky.

The same when God comes into our lives, shines light on a dark situation and appears in the midst of a personal storm.

If there were no hard times (no clouds), His appearing would not **seem** quite so marvelous. Ah, but it is marvelous, and glorious to behold — just like the most beautiful sunrise you have ever witnessed.

I can't say that I am gleeful, Lord, when hard times come into my life. But I sure am thankful when You appear in glory to bring me through them. Forgive me if I ever go through a day not being thankful for Your presence because life has gone so smoothly that day. Amen.

November 14 —

"No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death..." — Ecc. 8:8a

No Sense of Time

It's a gray sky from horizon to horizon today. So gray, in fact, that you wouldn't know if it were early morning, late afternoon, or even high noon. That is like your life, isn't it? Though we don't look at it that way. That is, you never know if you're at the beginning or the end. You could die today, or in 50 years. Does that scare you into "getting a move on"?

A friend called as I was writing this entry and he informed me he is retiring at the end of the year. He will turn 60 soon, so he is a young man. But, he said, not only do you not know

what will happen the next day, you do not know what will happen the next minute.

Now, are you prepared to take up that calling you know God has had on your life? Now could be the set time. Tomorrow could be too late. "Pick up your cross and follow me," Jesus said. Better late than too late.

Thank You for the jump-start, Lord. Though I have delayed and procrastinated, I am now ready to "get a move on." Strengthen me to the task, Father! Amen.

November 15 —

"His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars."

— Song of Solomon 5:15

Unique Among God's People

In the forest every tree is different in some way than any other. In His "forest" of people, God has accomplished the same.

The cedars of Lebanon were tall, straight, sturdy and distinct from any other — perfect to use to build a tabernacle.

Here in Maine we have our own examples — from the fir to the maple, from the beech to my favorite: the birch. Birch trees are a fascinating look at God's thought process, and especially noticeable in the winter time when they are more visible because so many trees are bare. All the woods is various shades of brown and green, so God created a white tree, with slashes of black to give it character. Other trees

stand basically stiff and straight, so He gave **most** birch trees the flexibility to bend almost "in two" without snapping. Sometimes birch grow in clumps, as though they were a little family. And yet, so that we will not "box Him in," God here and there sprouts up a birch tree unlike others for miles around: sturdy, with a broad canopy, one that a person could even climb.

As the birch trees in the forest are an example that we are all beautiful in our own way, so do those sturdy birch standing regal serve to show that God creates uniqueness among His people.

Thank You for making me a little different, Lord, than others in the Body. I can serve a different purpose, share different insights, see from a different perspective. As in a choir, we can all sing with different voices but making one single joyous sound! Amen.

November 16 —

"Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?' And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it."

— Rev. 5:2-3

Remain Humble, Oh Unworthy

Even in heaven, there was no one worthy to open the seals — only Jesus — as it was revealed in verse 5: " But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe

of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.' "

But only Jesus could — not the angels, nor the apostles, nor anyone else.

Consider yourself righteous? No, not near it in this earthly body. And apparently, according to Revelation 5, not even in our heavenly body!

Be thankful.

Be praising Him.

Be humble.

Remember, the meek shall inherit the earth. (Matt. 5:5)

Whenever I become prideful, Lord, nudge me to remember that even Your saints in Heaven could not open the scroll. I know You want me to have a humble spirit, and so I will attempt to always put aside any tendencies to claim greatness and achievement for myself, for I know that all perfect gifts come from You. Amen.

November 17 —

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

— Gen. 1:2-3

"And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

— Matt. 12:31-32

Unpardonable? Evolution?

A snowfall from last night covers God's glorious creation, and as I looked upon the wintry scene around me I wondered about the work of the Holy Spirit and about the unforgivable sin.

Jesus's statement that the unforgivable sin is blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32) came in response to the Pharisees claiming that Jesus drove out evil spirits by the power of Satan. According to Jesus, blaspheming the Holy Spirit is denying His power and accomplishments. Then, is believing in evolution, rather than creation, an unpardonable sin? It is a concern if we, or anyone we know, believe in evolution. Read, and then share, "Darwin's Little Black Box" or a number of other books that show that science supports God's Big Boom rather than Darwin's theory of evolution.

Lord, I will never deny Your work in this world, and I will do my best to show others proof that Your hand moves in this world. Give me wisdom in this endeavor and unction to carry it out, Father. Amen.

November 18 —

"When he (Satan) lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." — John 8:44b

Smoke Screen

Beware not to be deceived. Walking along our country way today and looking across a pasture, it appeared there was a

band of fog that swept across the field and into the woods near a neighbor's home. The band was about 15 or 20 feet off the ground and about five feet wide. A fascinating sight, how it twisted and turned and spiraled. But arriving at our neighbor's, it became obvious that the "fog" was actually smoke from their chimney which was kept low to the ground and swept to the east by an unnoticeable wind.

Not Godmade, but manmade, not fog but smoke.

It was a reminder to always be on my guard not to outright accept things as they appear. Shopworn phrases like "Beauty is only skin deep" and "Things are not always as they appear" exist for a reason: They are fair warning. Paul warned believers to beware of men coming into their homes speaking fine-sounding words: "By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people" (Rom. 16:18b); and "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Messiah." (II Cor. 11:13)

And John warned the church against deceivers: "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully." (II John 8)

Keep me alert, Lord, and give me eyes to see and wisdom to discern truth from fiction, honesty from deceit. Help me to tell the smoke from the fog. Amen.

November 19 —

"Yet God does not take away life, but plans ways so that the banished one may not be cast out from Him."

— II Sam. 14:14b

Darkness Persists in Some

Snow from a recent snowfall has melted in most places — the fields and lawns, the roadways and even a ways into the woods. But deep in the forest, where thick bushes keep out the sun, that snow persists.

God shines His light on everyone. Those unwilling to listen to Him stay in the darkness — in the woods where even His light won't melt their icy souls. Even the greatest of news will not be accepted by many, if not most, people. As John related in John 1:4-5: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

But those who want to hear Him, to bask in His light, step into the open where He melts away the coldness from their hearts. This is where we receive God's wonderful promise, as again John describes in I John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus HaMashiach cleanses us from all sin."

Bring those who are in the darkness out of it, Lord, that they might have the ice melted from their souls and that they may receive Your promise, Your light, Your life! Use me, Father, to speak light into the darkness of their souls and blast away the death that surrounds them. Amen.

November 20 —

"... according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Messiah Jesus our Lord, in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him."
— Eph. 3:11-12

Draw Near Spiritually

Matthew 4:24 says that people from throughout Syria brought the paralyzed, the sick, the demon-possessed, and Jesus healed them all. That was a physical act — accomplished after physically drawing men to Jesus.

Spiritually, He will do the same and in a more lasting way, for the spiritual deals with the eternal while physical deals with the temporal. So, draw near to Him in prayer, in praise, in supplication, and He will heal you and make you whole spiritually.

As Psalm 150 encourages us, Praise Him in all ways — song, dance and music. Praise Him everywhere — in His sanctuary and in His heavens.

God's "eternal purpose which He accomplished in Messiah Jesus our Lord" was that we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

I am so grateful that I can come to You spiritually, Lord, since You no longer dwell here in bodily form. I am so thankful that You incline Your ear to my prayers and supplications and that you can heal and deliver just as powerfully and permanently as when You walked among men. Thank You for Your promises. Amen.

November 21 —

"For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

— Mark 4:25

Sow and Keep on Sowing

We have a huge pine tree next to our home. In the late fall it begins dropping its pine cones. This year I decided to gather the cones and use them when I started fires in the fireplace. I cleaned the yard of them and a week later I needed to pick up another batch of cones, which I did. A week later and there were even more cones.

I had never known that this one tree shed so many little cones — God's method that by sheer mass, one was apt to land in the right spot to be covered, watered and grow into a new tree.

Matthew 13 and Mark 4 both contain the Parable of the Sower. Note that after telling the parable in Mark, Jesus says: "For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." (v. 25)

He wanted His listeners to be sure to sow and keep on sowing; to water the seed within them and within others. Then, He said, more will be given you, **or** if you do not sow, what you have will be taken away.

Lord, I do want to plant and keep on planting, to see souls saved and lives changed. Help me to do that, Father, and I will expect more to be given me. Thank You! Amen.

November 22 —

"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.' " — Acts 1:7

"My times are in Your hands..." — Ps. 31:15a

God's Perfect Timing

In **My** time, says the Lord.

So, the sunrise is blasé at the moment and you expect the color to join the sunrise right away? No, I had to wait five, 10 minutes — at least today. It's like God's timing. It is **His**, not ours. And when He does it, it is beyond compare.

Noah set out to build the ark, at God's command, and had to wait 120 years for the flood. God's timing. Moses escaped into the wilderness and shepherded sheep for 40 years before God called him to service. God's timing. God had Jesus walk on the Earth as a man for 30 years before beginning His ministry. God's timing.

Things often do not happen when we want, but we must rest assured that, like the sunrise, God's timing will be perfect for our lives.

Father, perfect the work of patience within me. I am so often anxious for this or that, or get upset when something does not turn out when or where I had anticipated. Give me a calming assurance that You are in control — of even the smallest details. Amen.

November 23 —

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised those who love Him."

— James 1:12

Choose Ye This Moment

Choosing between God and the world is like the choosing between filet mignon and road kill.

When Joshua declared, "Choose ye this day whom you shall serve," (Josh. 24:15) it might be exclamation-pointed: Choose ye "this **moment**."

To accomplish this, assume an attitude of denial — that is, deny yourself from doing something you shouldn't do.

The reasons we, and society, contrive to sin is that we so seldom deny ourselves any pleasure if we can help it. So, when temptation to sin comes, neither do we deny that. In America, especially, we really have programmed ourselves to give ourselves whatever we want.

But, our spirit man should not want any of that which is not from God.

"Second nature" to us should be denying temptations, not acceding to them.

Otherwise, we have become our own idols.

"As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord," Joshua promised in Josh. 24:15. That is a perfect refrain for every believer.

Oh, God, choosing You is so much better, so much higher, so much more fulfilling than any other choice. Strengthen me

against temptations, Lord, that I may stand, always, in Your camp. Amen.

November 24 —

"And to love Him (God) with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offering and sacrifices."

— Mark 12:33

The Source for Doing Good Works

First is, love God.

Second is, love your neighbor. Then watch to see what happens: Faith comes first, then the fruits. If you love your neighbor — if you love God — you will do good works. That is what James was talking about when he said in James 1:22: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

The neighbor that the Lord would want to have is the man or woman who spent her time worshipping Him. He or she is the one who is heavenbent. The person with works but not faith is, simply, hellbent.

I know I am saved by Your grace and not by works, God. And You, O Lord, and my love for You are the source of anything good that I may do. Help me to focus on loving my neighbor and therefore do the good work. Amen.

November 25 —

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast."

— Eph. 2:8-9

Good Works Earn You Heaven?

The Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses might want to investigate the Scriptures more closely if they truly believe their works can get them into Heaven. Whether it be Old Testament, or New Testament, the message is unswerving, just like our God: By grace you are saved.

In Romans 4:2-3, Paul writes: "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' "

Ezek. 18:32 relates: " 'I take no pleasure in the death of **anyone**,' declares the sovereign Lord. "Repent and live!" "

God does **not** say, "Repent, do good works and live." No, it is simply "Repent and live."

In verse 24 He also says the good works of the righteous will not be remembered if that person turns to sin.

Lord, give me strength to resist temptation. Remind me always, Father, what You say in Matthew 5:6: "Blessed is he who hungers and thirsts for righteousness..." I want to always hunger and thirst for Your righteousness. Amen.

November 26 —

"If then you were raised with Messiah, seek those things which are above, where Messiah is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Messiah in God."

— Col. 3:1-3

The Real Center of the Universe

I was watching a spider weave a very intricate web between the eave and wall of our shed. He was completely absorbed in his task at hand; it was the center of his universe. Pick any insect or animal you can observe and notice the same thing: It and its surroundings are the center of its universe.

Likewise with people. From the moment we are born we consider ourselves the center of our universe. Understandable. As we perceive it, everything **does** revolve around us. But as we grow older we should recognize that even though everything in our own lives centers around our bodies, we are not indeed the center of the universe... God is.

So we should focus on God, not ourselves. The centrifugal force in our lives should pull us toward Him, not vice versa.

Yes, Lord, I do realize that You, not I, are the center of the universe. Forgive me for so often thinking and acting otherwise. Help me to be less "navel-observant" and more God-centered. Amen.

November 27 —

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing off your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

— Rom. 12:2

Know the Time

Interesting that we live our lives one day at a time, year on end, decade after decade, and still need a watch to tell the time. In ancient times, before the invention of the watch, people could look toward the sun — or even their internal "body clocks" — and know the time pretty closely.

Even when it is "gray all over," no sun in sight, we Christians should know what "time" it is. The Word says we will not know the exact hour of Messiah's reappearing, but we should know the season. And we are told that the Lord does no work without first informing His prophets. So, we must discern and be prepared.

If we renew our minds, we may know the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

And, doing this, we will be prepared for what tomorrow holds in store.

Prepare my mind, Father, to discern. Prepare my heart to respond. And prepare my spirit to believe and trust in You — especially when the end of time arrives. Amen.

November 28 —

"The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters."

— Psalm 24:1-2

God Is Like the Sun

Where we're at does not change where God is — physically or spiritually.

When it is cloudy outdoors, or dreary in our lives, the sun is still there and so is He.

When the rain is pouring and the tears flow freely, the sun is there and so is He. And at the end of the clouds and when the rain stops, the sun will shine ... and so will He.

Take heart, dear soul. God is there. No matter the outlook, He is in control.

I know that You stand beside me, closer than a brother, Lord. Thank You for being ever-present, ever-loving, ever-caring, and ever in control! Amen.

November 29 —

"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

— I Peter 2:2-3

Change "the Oil"

Like an automobile, in which it is important (life or death) to keep changing the oil — freshening the supply — it is important to us to keep our "oil" changed and fresh.

Heb. 10:13-30 says:

- Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart. (v. 22)
- Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. (v. 23)
- Let us not give up meeting together. (v. 25)

But then v. 26 warns that if we keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins."

This is a twofold message to believers: continue in the Word and live by faith and a glorious eternity awaits you; but if you return to wicked ways, no sacrifice for sins is left.

Remind me, Lord, to "change my oil," to refresh myself in Your presence and to remain vigilant against becoming lackadaisical. Amen.

November 30 —

"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."

— John 15:20

Persecuting Christ

We read in Acts 9:5 that, while on his way to Damascus, Paul (then Saul of Tarsus) asked He Whom he saw in the light, "Who are you, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied.

He did not say, "It's **as if** you're persecuting Me," or "You are persecuting My followers."

When Christians are persecuted, Jesus is as well. Think how much He loves us; He actually feels our pain in persecution. Our persecution so hurts Him that it is, in effect, His persecution.

Now consider this: When we speak against somebody else in the body of Messiah, we are persecuting Jesus as well! Ouch!

Oh Lord, I am so sorry for every word that has come out of my mouth against a fellow believer. I am sorry for persecuting them, and persecuting You also. Forgive me, my Savior, and keep my tongue tamed against doing such ever again. Amen.

December 1 —

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

— Luke 19:10

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

— John 3:17

From Barren to Beauty

The Lord turns the barren into beauty
In the land as in the heart.

When it seems we're down and dirty
And to the grave is where we'll go
The Lord sees something in us that's worthy

And He brings His cleansing snow.
Then clean, for awhile, we will be
Until to the flesh we return
And again, to our rescue,
Comes the Lord with snowflake falling.
Like a curse, sin lives on.
You can see its tracks in the street.
Yet, again and again, when we beg forgiveness
He is there, cloud in hand, to send the snow.

The snowfall, turning barren woods and dormant pasture into a beautiful landscape, reminds me of Your cleansing blood, Lord. And I thank You for that gift — a gift that turned my ugly life into a beautiful one! Amen.

December 2 —

"Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, 'Yes! As You have said, so we must do. But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter.' "

— Ezra 10:12-13.

Rebuild His Work

Do not turn back when God
Has put a wind at your back.
But look at Ezra and Nehemiah,
Who pushed ahead with God's fire!

The Lord ordered Ezra and Nehemiah to go back — to **rebuild** — Jerusalem. And when they did so, it was the duty of each family to rebuild the portion of the wall outside their living quarters.

One message to us in this story is, if God's work has been abused in your life, if He has given you a ministry or a mission and you have let it be demolished, so to speak, return and rebuild it, if and when He says so. Each family has the responsibility for the particular work He has planned for it.

But first, before you do this, if you have transgressed, repent. Then ask for the Lord's wisdom and strength in restoring your personal Jerusalem.

Father, for the projects and plans, for the mission and ministry, for any work that I have left unstated or undone, forgive me. Then, Lord, help me to rebuild it and go on — to Your glory. Amen.

December 3 —

"The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and full of compassion."

— Ps. 111:2-4

He IS There

Bitter cold and gray today. Where is God? Oftentimes what we see in our natural mind is what we feel in our spirit. And

that can be depressing, especially in the wintertime when depression can set upon a person, bringing distress, fear, anxiety, any number of bleak thoughts.

But we must be encouraged, because God **is** there — in the midst of bleakness... When time and direction are indiscernible, He **is** there... When you're walking but not awake, He **is** there... And when you're not even in the picture, He **is** there... He was there **before** you and will be there **afterward**. Hallelujah to the Lord Who always promises a bright spring even after a long and cold winter season in our lives!

I know Your presence is always around me, Father. Continue to remind me that You exist despite the occasional barrenness I feel in my flesh. Thank You for the encouragement of Your Word found in the Psalms, Lord, Amen.

December 4 —

"My heart is made complete when a sinner is saved."

— (FROM Rev. 1:5-6)

Completed Joy

The cross was agonizing for the Messiah, but it was to become a source of joy — for all generations past as well as all generations future.

Rejoice as Jesus did. Make bringing a soul to salvation your aim, even if it costs you pain yourself, such as that suffered by Jesus on the cross.

Isaiah reveals that as rebellious as Israel had been, God was adamant that He **will** save them, and even grant Israel **splendor**.

If someone transgresses against you, nevertheless want only their salvation. Indeed, make it your aim and rejoice in it.

Have God's heart.

Exercise Grace and Mercy, Like God

Is. 52:8 says: "Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it in their own eyes."

God grants us what we do not deserve (grace and mercy) and keeps from us what we **do** deserve (death).

We should do likewise with others.

Give me Your heart, O Lord, that I would desire the salvation of even my enemies. Grant me courage to speak words of life to them, praying that they would come into the Kingdom. Amen.

December 5 —

*"And the Lord said, 'Judah **shall go up**. Indeed, I **have delivered** the land into his hand.' " — Judges 1:2*

It Is Completed, in God's Eyes

The Lord **had** delivered the land into Judah's hand, He said. God was working in the realm of completion, though Judah had not yet done its part. And He would like us to work in that realm of completion as well.

If we will but do our part in God's plan for us, He **has already** completed the purpose. Just "go up" as He tells you.

Recall that the Lord told Joshua to have the priests step into the River Jordan with the Ark of the Covenant. God had planned for the waters to roll back and allow safe passage. It was simply a repeat, in less dramatic fashion, of His deliverance across the Red Sea when Pharoah and his army were chasing after the Jews. Have faith, and know that God knows the future from the present.

I know You have prescribed the times and events to come, Lord, and that You have written the end of the book. I do trust in the fact that You go ahead of me as my Front Guard, my Protector and my Deliverer. Praise Your holy Name! Amen.

December 6 —

"For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess." — Acts 19:37

Speak FOR the Lord, Not Against Others

The city clerk spoke these words in Acts 19 when a crowd at Ephesus wanted to run Paul and his friends out of town for preaching Messiah.

Paul did not preach **against** Diana. Rather he preached **for** the case of Jesus. Rather than preaching against the bad news, he preached for the Good News.

Rather than preaching against the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses, or this denomination or that one, we should preach the wonderful saving grace of the One True God.

When you speak out against a person or their beliefs they often just turn you off or even bristle against you. Paul's actions should be a model for our own. Who else has preached and led more people to their Savior more effectively?

Your Word is so lovely and true and refreshing and life-giving that it is all I need to fill my mouth with, Lord. Remind me to not oppose error so much as to speak the Truth. Once that is done, I know You will deliver souls into Your Kingdom. Amen.

December 7 —

"For Messiah died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit."

— I Peter 3:18

Wrong-Headed

Think on this: In the Holocaust, the Nazis spent so much manpower, time and effort on exterminating the Jews that it may have cost them the war. (Hitler's scientists were very close to completing both the A-bomb and an incredible fighter plane that could easily outmaneuver the planes of the Allied Forces.)

If this murder of the Jews cost Hitler the war, their deaths meant life to mankind.

Sound familiar? The death of one Jew — The Jew, Jesus — meant life for mankind.

God often does in the physical what He performs in the spiritual. This is perhaps the ultimate case.

Lord, even in the darkest hour, You are at work. Even if I can not comprehend how, You are at work. In the midst of distress, even murder, You are maneuvering to have Your way with men's souls. Reveal to me, O God, the full understanding of Your mysterious ways. Amen.

December 8 —

"And he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears..."

— Is. 11:3

God's Perspective

Look at the world from God's perspective, not your own. What you see — or think you see — may not be true, right, or even important. God showed me this last night as we were driving into town and back. As we came over a hill and the houses and landscape on the other side of the hill came into view, it **seemed** like they were moving toward us rather than us traveling toward them. It was an illusion. It was the opposite of the truth, but that was my "perspective" at the moment.

Some exciting things happened to our older son last night. It looks like the world tugging at him big time. But that's my

perspective. God could be stirring the pot. Only through prayer and the Holy Spirit will I know the truth.

God's is also an eternal perspective. Ours is short-range at best.

*I must continue to remind myself, Father, that what I think I know is only that: what I **think** I know. You are the Alpha and Omega and know the beginning and the end, so I trust in You, Lord. Thank You for working out all things for the best. Amen.*

December 9 —

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Messiah to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

— Acts 8:5-6

We Are All Usable

On the one hand God is undeniable.

On the other hand He is unfathomable.

In Acts, fully rendered "The Acts of the Apostles," we're told how the Lord used both Stephen and Philip (neither of whom was one of the 12 disciples) to perform miracles. Stephen was killed for his witness. And, besides this one account of Philip's ministry, he is not heard of before or after.

Philip was much like us. Not a disciple. Probably not even living during the time of Jesus's life on Earth. Very much a man.

But he stepped out and boldly did God's work. Are you ready to also take that step?

Use me despite myself, Father. Speak through me, work miracles through me, touch people's hearts in the Name of Your Son — through me. Use me like Philip, Lord, that people would be healed and their souls delivered into Your Kingdom! Amen.

December 10 —

"You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written."

— Rom. 2: 23-24

Do Not Blaspheme God

Do you want to provoke blaspheming against God? Of course not. But did you ever explore the depths of this passage in Romans?

Even if you live righteously, it must be for God, so that God's Name will not be blasphemed.

If you break the law (His law), He is blasphemed among unbelievers. Sometimes God's worst enemies are those who claim He is their Lord. What an incentive to keep the law!

Forgive me, Father, for ever bringing reproach against You by my actions or words. Keep my mind stayed on You and my heart at one with Yours, Lord. Amen.

December 11 —

"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

— Ps. 23:6

Thank You, Lord, for a World Well Done!

As the sun rises to bring the dawn
So my heart rises to meet the morn,
Knowing You wait patiently there,
To say, "Hello" and hear my prayer.

Your sun rises slowly, gently
From my prayer closet's view.
I feel Your warmth surround me
And know I owe my life to You.

I thank, praise and worship You, my King,
For all Your actions, love and care
Have given me new life like this new day
And You have promised You'll always be there —
Never leaving nor forsaking,
Always watching and protecting,
Never asleep nor resting,
Always hearing and perfecting,
Never oblivious to our needs and cares,
Always providing, forever aware.
As Your day goes from darkness to light
So our hearts before You, come in to our lives.

And with all this, You bring to bear
To this Your children kneeling there.
Your gifts are free and freely given
To all us here among the living.

Your grace abounds, our sins forgiven,
Salvation rises like morning's Sun.
Your road leads its way to heaven
And wonderful eternity with Your Son.
Thank You, Lord, for a world well done!

December 12 —

"For where two or three come together in My name, there I am with them." — Matt. 18:20

Deer Yards and the Body of Christ

Here in Maine we are blessed with abundant deer, and these deer usually run in what are called "deer yards," areas of softwood trees that provide good cover and protection from the winter snowstorms and wind chill. Not just a family of deer but an entire community huddles together through the winter in this "yard," keeping each other warm, protecting each other by their sheer numbers against predators, and munching on the bark of softwood trees. The snow remains beaten down in this area, and so the deer can move about with relative ease. But if one were to wander from the pack, it could place itself in real danger. Not only is it leaving the safety of numbers, but high snow is difficult for a deer to run

through, while coyotes and wolves can more easily run over the top of the snow without getting bogged down in it.

The corollary is true with our walk with God. If we stay in the "yard" the Lord has prescribed for us, we will be safe. If we do not "forsake the fellowship of the saints," we are less apt to become fodder for the enemy, who stalks the earth looking for whom he might destroy.

Lord, give me awareness of the dangers that lie outside Your path for my life. Keep me within the bounds You have set up. And strengthen me that I might be a better co-guardian of my brothers and sisters in Messiah. Amen.

December 13 —

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Messiah Jesus our Lord."

— Rom 8:38-39

God's Forces — a Whisper, a Breeze

Oh, Lord, You are the Sun
That rises in our heart in the morn.
As the sun turns leaves to gold,
So do You brighten our souls.

Whisper to our spirit
Like the breeze rustles the trees

And move us in a mighty way
As Your forces push forth the ocean waves.

Secure us in a place of rest
Or uproot us from our little nest
But **do**, please, Lord, **do**.

December 14 —

"Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her."

"Now it happened at midnight that the man [Boaz] was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet."

— Ruth 1:14 and 3:8

Sleep at His Feet

In the story of Ruth, Boaz is a type of Jesus. And we are to do as Ruth did: Sleep at His feet. Approach Him to be a bride and He our kinsman redeemer.

One day I found our cat Pookie acting like I was her very best friend. God must feel like I do (about Pookie) when we come to Him and pay attention to him and lay down at His feet and make contented noises. It must be a special joy for Him when an inattentive human suddenly seeks Him out.

As Ruth "clung to" her mother-in-law Naomi and promised "your God shall be my God and your people my people," so we, too, should make the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob our God, and the Jewish people our people.

Father, thank You for the example of Ruth. I shall attempt to follow her lead, especially in abiding at Your feet and pursuing after You as my Kinsman Redeemer, for I know only You could redeem my soul from hell. Thank You, Lord! Amen.

December 15 —

"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

— Is. 61:10

"I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban." — Job 29:14

A 'Delivered' Wardrobe

The Lord took me:

- from the valley of need to the mountain of supply;
- from the thickets of disease to the meadows of health;
- from the depths of depression to the heights of joy; and
- from the filth of sin to white robes of righteousness.

He change my heart, mind — and my wardrobe — you know, what I used to "put on" when I got up in the morning: pessimism, depression, oppression, lusts of the flesh, booze, nicotine... It's a wardrobe heavy with dirty rags. Today they would brush it off as normal, call it the "layered look" and welcome me to "the family of man" where "it takes a village."

My wardrobe today? The garment of praise, the shawl of prayer, the helmet of salvation, belt of truth, shield of faith,

and armed with the sword of the Spirit — God's two-edged sword — the Word.

*Lord, You delivered me from even more than I can recall.
I'd be dead or on the way there, if it were not for You. Thank
You for that deliverance! Amen.*

December 16 —

*"It (the grace of God) teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness
and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and
godly lives in this present age."*

— Titus 2:12

Use Me, Lord

Help me, Lord,
To walk upright
To be a delight
In Your eyes.

Strengthen me, Lord,
To run from sin,
And to truly begin
The race for Your prize.

Waken' me, Lord,
To love my brother
And even all others
So I can rest with You at eventide.

December 17 —

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing."

— II Tim. 4:7-8

Sun, Son, God

The sun's progression through the day is like the Lord's presence in our lives from the time of our salvation onward.

The moment we are saved is so strikingly beautiful — like the sunrise. Then the sun shines throughout the day (and even when it's cloudy, we know it is there). Like the heat of the sun, we can feel the love of God. And like the sun's brightness, the Lord shines into our dark corners and His light illumines His Scriptures to us.

And when we die and join the Lord in heaven, it is magnificent — like the sunset.

Thank You for the progression of my life, Lord, but especially for that time since You pulled me out of the darkness of sin and destruction. Thank You for shining in my life and the promise of a glorious eternity with You! Amen.

December 18 —

"But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." — 1 Tim 6:11

Stars of Another Sort

The Lord placed the stars in the sky, and the heavenlies cry out His grandeur. Out here in the country, with no city lights gleaming into the sky, our naked eye can clearly see the constellations, the brighter and lesser stars and planets that God set in motion.

But it seems that the world is consumed by other "stars" — rock stars, movie stars, sports stars.

Are we believers set apart from the rest of the world? Do we refuse to "worship" as the world does its idols, its "stars"?

Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, are a grand example for us to examine and follow. Daniel 2:26-3:25 tells us how they refused to do what others were doing: worshipping an idol of gold made by King Nebuchadnezzar. They set themselves apart by their faith.

People living in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom turned Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into the authorities for punishment. I wonder, would people turn us believers in today? — Would they **know** to turn us in? — Is our walk that evident to the world around us? — Or are we as consumed by these rock-movie-sports and you-name-it stars as they are?

You first, Lord. I promise to put You first; to be consumed by Your "stars" and not the world's, to read of the example of such as Daniel and Joshua and Moses and Jesus and Paul

rather than the example of a favorite baseball player or popular singer. Amen.

December 19 —

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

"Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' "

— Is. 58:6-9

Shine Like Him

Observing how the full moon is so bright that it even casts shadows in my yard, I am reminded that God never takes long before He reveals Himself. Like the sun, which shines even through a lesser light (the moon), the Lord shines through His children even in the darkness. But we get so much more light from Him, the Source...

He tells us through Isaiah to undo burdens, free the oppressed, feed the hungry, clothe the naked. Do this, and we can be assured that He will be with us, at our side, performing miracles in our midst. Test Him and see if He does not speak

the truth. Test Him and see "your light break forth like the morning"!

May everything I do be for Your glory, Lord, that all might see the wonder of Your light, feel the warmth of Your love, and know the comfort of Your deliverance. Help me and my life to be a light to others as You are to me. Amen.

December 20 —

"There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked." — Is. 48:22.

A Microcosm of a Fallen World

Visiting San Francisco for a second time, I see it clearly as a microcosm: a people caught up in sin and purposefully blind to it.

God does love homosexuals. So should I.

We should see them as heterosexuals stuck in a quick-sand kind of sin that is destroying their lives — slowly.

The greatest love toward them is to share with them the message of salvation. Is it love to be silent and let them go to eternal damnation?

Jesus told us that "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar..."

Yes, God will judge that wicked place. He will not be mocked. Yes, He will save the repentant. But not the unrepentant.

Pray for them. Pray, also, for yourself. Is it not pride to think of yourself as better than a "gay" person?

Further, the Holy Spirit spoke to my spirit and asked, "Are you going to look on everyone as someone I love, as someone I created? They are all My children."

Think of them as you think of a child of your own who is in rebellion but savable. You love that child no less.

And also understand the reason that gays scream and holler and hate. As Is. 48:22 says: "There is no peace for the wicked." These people have no peace.

And through Whom can the only true peace come to them? Jesus.

The "Old Man"

In dealing with abortionists or homosexuals or others in deep sins, we must realize our "old man" could fall into any sin and that if we had not been saved, so could we.

...

Isn't the church largely like San Francisco, like Sodom caught up in pride and arrogance?

How is their demanding their "rights" different from believers demanding that God do this or that for His sons and daughters, "co-heirs of Christ"?

Forgive me, Lord, for considering myself "better" than the gays and other in-your-face sinners of San Francisco and the world in general. Remind me to think of them as I would my own child caught up in a sin, so that I will witness to them in love, pray for them in faith, and see them delivered from this lifestyle hell-bent for destruction. Amen.

December 21 —

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Messiah is head of the church, and He is the Savior of the body."

— Eph. 5:22-23

Love, Honor and Obey

Just as when the Law was given in the Old Testament — and God was the bridegroom while Israel was the bride — so when the Holy Spirit was given to usher in the New Covenant, Jesus is the bridegroom and believers are the bride.

And just as in the wedding vows, we are to love, honor and obey the Lord. If we are truly His bride, then we should act like it. And what do the scriptures tell us to do?

Ephesians is very specific. We, the bride, are to submit to the Lord, our husband. This word, "submit," has drawn so much ire from women over the centuries because they do not want to be "under the thumb" of anyone, including their husbands or their Husband. But we should read "submit" as "surrender." As the song says, "I surrender all," so should we do to our Lord and Savior.

You are indeed my Lord and my Bridegroom, God. I commit, and I submit, to You. Take me and use me in whatever way You want. Amen.

December 22 —

"So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the

trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city."

— Josh. 6:20

Jericho, on the Seventh Day

The walls of Jericho did not fall on the first, second or third day that the people of Israel walked around the city, or even on the fourth, fifth or sixth day. No, they fell on the seventh day — and that was as the Lord had planned.

So, if you do not see the answer to your prayer on the first day, or the sixth, do not give up. What if God's people the Jews had given up and not circled Jericho that glorious seventh day? The Lord would not have given them the victory. Run the race to the end, pray the good prayer of faith until the Lord acts. Then holler aloud praises to His name when those walls come crumbling down.

I know, Father, that if I trust in my worldly instincts or feelings, I will not succeed — at least in the fashion You desire. I know that if I quit praying, or doing, too soon, I will not see You answer my prayers. Thank You for the encouragement to keep up, to keep going, to keep praying and to keep believing because I know that in Your time, not mine, You will perform Your will. Amen.

December 23 —

"This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all... But if

we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."

— IJohn 1:5,7

The Great and Glorious Light

The Hanukkah Light and Christmas Light
Are very much the same.
They both send the enemy to flight
In our Lord Jesus's Name.

The candles on the menorah we light
Tell a tale of God's delivering glory.
Scant supply of oil burned eight days bright,
Making the Macabees a part of history.

A living remnant of His people the Jews
Who trembled not at their enemy
But knew their God a Deliverer Who
Would come to set them free.

The lights upon my Christmas tree
Remind me of that night
When He was born Who would set all men free
By His Spirit-powered might.

It reminds me that the world was dark;
Even the Pharisees' souls were dead.
But then Light was born and lit a spark

And many were saved instead.

From the light of the Menorrah to that of the Christmas tree
Our Lord's mercy is so clear everyone can see:
He comes not for a few: the rich, the pretty, the slim;
He comes for every person who will give their heart to Him.

He comes in bright brilliance
As the menorrah and tree remind us.
And I light these at this time
To tell the world the Savior is mine.

He is mine and I am His.
The message is clear and sublime it is.
Almighty God delivered the Macabee
And 2,500 years later He likewise saved me.

*Oh Light to believers — Jew and Gentile alike — fill my
heart with Your brightness, light a flame within me that may
be but a dim reflection of Your glory! Amen.*

December 24 —

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament
shows His handiwork." — Psalm 19:1*

More Handiwork Than This

Scripture says the stars proclaim God's handiwork.

Now look at the star when Jesus was born. The Magi saw it
and knew the Messiah was born. They didn't follow it to

Jerusalem, but rather went there to find out where the Messiah was. Herod did not know. When the Magi left him, the star appeared and led them (proclaimed Messiah) to the Babe.

That star actually "proclaimed God's handiwork" — His instrument for salvation!

Oh, Lord, You do work in wondrous ways — ways beyond understanding and ways which You are still revealing to us today. Thank You for the greatest work: sending Your Messiah to save the world! Amen.

December 25 —

"For there is born to you this day in the City of David a Savior, Who is Messiah the Lord." — Luke 2:11

UNTO YOU Is Born

The Savior was born **to** those shepherds, the scripture says. He was born **to** me. He was born **to** you.

Rather than Joseph and Mary, Jesus was a child of the world which He came to save and set free — a very personal and intimate Savior for us to love as **our own**.

We can see other peoples' children and admire them. We see our own and "Pow!" it is love at first sight. They are ours! See your Savior in that light. He was, after all, born **to you**.

*On this glorious day, Lord, when we celebrate Your birthday — and for all the days in the future — let me be reminded to think on You as born **to me**, as my personal*

Savior and Redeemer, closer than a brother and more loving than a mother or father. I love You, Jesus. Amen.

December 26 —

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

— John 3:16

Fountain of Youth

"God uses the simple to confound the wise." This is not talking about "simple" people but "simple" concepts. The Lord uses the simple concept of John 3:16 to confound the wise. How many have sought the Fountain of Youth over the centuries, like Vasco deGama, sailing the seas and facing danger for their quest, when eternal life was such a "simple" matter?

There are no magic potions to discover, no storm-ridden oceans to push through. Simply, repent and make Him Lord of your life, and eternal life is a done deal. There is no complexity there. And that is what confounds so many.

I remember the response when I shared this with a friend who is a non-believer: "But I would not deserve it."

Correct. And none of us do...

Thank You, Father God, for not requiring great and complicated things from me. Thank You for the simple concept of salvation. I simply bow my knee to You and make Jesus the

Lord of my life. That is, eternal life. What a gift I thank You for! Amen.

December 27 —

"And from the days of John the Baptist until the present time, the kingdom of heaven has endured violent assault, and violent men seize it by force [as a precious prize — a share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion]."

— Matt. 11:12 (Amplified)

Storming the Gates

What does that mean: Heaven is being seized by men who storm its gates? We are to be, not violent but unmoved in our faith — absolutely rock solid. We are to be persistent, dogged.

Remember the persistent widow. She came to the judge day in and day out, unmoved by his continual denial of her petition. But eventually she wore down that unrighteous man. She was dogged, persistent. She stormed the gates.

It is like our older granddaughter: When you impede her way, she bullies right through to get to her destination. She is bull-headed and stubborn, unmoved in her determination.

Similarly, we are to be bull-headed and stubborn, unmoved in our determination to storm heaven with our prayers and actions. Satan will attempt anything to block our path to God. But we must be stubborn and persistent, bullying our way past him to the Father.

Lord, I stand ready to storm heaven's gates. Thank You for helping my steadfastness and determination. Thank You for strength in the Spirit, because I know I am not battling against the flesh but in the heavenly realms.

December 28 —

"When they [shepherds] saw the star they were overjoyed."
— Matt. 2:10.

Be Overjoyed

The meaning of the word "overjoyed" in this Scripture means "thrilled with ecstatic joy."

Psalm 91 should fill us with ecstatic joy. John 3:16 should fill us with ecstatic joy.

That God would sacrifice His only Son so that we might be saved, redeemed for our sins and promised eternal life in heaven — that should thrill us with ecstatic joy.

There is a Swedish saying: "Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow."

May we know God as God — not as a kind of cosmic intellectual righteousness. And may we be thrilled with ecstatic joy for all that He has done and does for us!

The joy You bring to my life, Lord, is so glorious. Forgive me for losing sight of just how wonderful You are to me and mine, or for taking it all for granted. Bless You, Father! Amen.

December 29 —

"And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, 'Here I am!' "

— Sam. 3:2-4

Sleep in His Presence

Samuel was not lying any old place when God called to him in the night. He was sleeping in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

Samuel was in God's presence — even while sleeping. That is where God wants us. All the better, all the quieter, all the clearer to hear Him and answer: "Here I am."

...

Christmas passes by and the world turns on — unchanged. Yet God does not give up — ever. He continues to bless us — with sunsets, with ice sculptures, bird parodies in the trees... and life. Be mindful, ever, of His handiwork all around you, day and night.

Remind me, Lord, to rest in Your presence, 24 hours a day, not just 12, or 14, or 16 — even in my sleep. Speak to me, Father, even in those nighttime hours, for you did say that young men would dream dreams and old men see visions. Amen.

December 30 —

"Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God."
— I Thess. 4:1

Do So More and More

(By the way, I Thessalonians was written by Paul **and** Silas **and** Timothy. Throughout the book it is we, we, we.)

So, Paul, Silas and Timothy write to believers in Thessalonica that they are living to please God. Then they urge them "in the Lord Jesus to do this **more and more**."

Later, in verse 10, they remark on their love for all the brothers throughout Macedonia. "Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so **more and more**."

The Thessalonians were already doing so — living to please God and loving the brethren — yet the three apostles told them to do so "more and more."

The Amplified Bible expands: "More and more abundantly [attaining yet greater perfection in living this life]" (v.1) "...that you excel in this matter more and more... (v.10) "...to make it your ambition and definitely endeavor to live quietly and peacefully..." (v.11)

For us today, whatever good we are not doing, we should do it. And whatever good we are already doing, we should do it more and more.

You urge me in Your Word, now strengthen me with courage and willpower to do more, Lord — especially to live to please You and to love the brethren. Amen.

December 31 —

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul
and your strength." — Deut. 6:5*

Sold Out or a Hold-out?

Are you sold out
Or a hold-out?
Do you mean it when you call Me Lord?

Do you put Me first,
Do you really thirst
For every last morsel of My Word?

How much do you care,
How much do you dare
To speak **boldly** in proclaiming My Name?

Put Me first in your heart,
With My love each day start
If the title "Christian" you claim.

Are you sold out
Or a hold-out?
Zealous for God
And jealous of your time with Me?

Be sold out,
Not a hold-out.

I'll give you strength, says the Lord,
And set you free.

**An Epilogue:
Still To Be Written**

Acts and Hebrews are the only two epistles without formal endings. Acts is written to the Gentiles, while Hebrews is written to the Jews.

The books are still being written, the last stages coming near. Both will end together — fittingly. Let the Lord write, through you and your life, a final chapter that will enlighten, enliven and enlist the lost to His Kingdom...