

LESSONS TO LIVE BY



Spiritual Illustrations
Volume II

Volume II contains a second collection of illustrations used in various sermons given over the years. Since further illustrations existed it was thought to publish a second volume. Its purpose remains the same—it is our hope that these illustrations might be used by God's people to further equip, edify, and inspire those who believe in, and strive to live God's way of life.

John 10:27

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

J. Edgar Hoover, was the director of the FBI from 1924-1972. One day he received a lengthy report, and while reading it he became annoyed because the writer did not respect the margins on the paper. Mr. Hoover wrote a note on the top of the document saying, “Watch the borders!”

The report was then passed on to the rest of the administrative staff. No one knew exactly what he meant by the note on the top of the report, and all were too afraid to show their ignorance and ask. Instead they sent inquiries to the Border Patrol about any strange activities on the Canadian and Mexican frontiers. It took a week before a HQ staffer realized the message related to the borders on the document—not the entire nation.

God uses various methods to relay His message to us. It may come directly from the Bible during our study. It may come through sermons we hear, by friends and family members, from circumstances we experience, or He may use complete strangers to tell us something about ourselves.

The question is, do we really hear God speaking to us or do we make our own assumptions? Are our ears open to the sermons we listen to, and do we look for ways they apply to us? Are we listening when people make suggestions, offer correction, or give advice? Do we perceive the various ways God is trying to get through to us, or are we self involved, close minded, or too proud to pay attention?

We never know who, or what methods God may be using to communicate to us. So, let’s always remember to keep our ears open to the sermons, the people and the events around us. Let’s have ears to hear as God continues to prepare His people—relaying messages of correction and instruction to us through His Word, His ministers, our brethren, and even the situations and events we experience throughout our daily lives.

Luke 16:9

I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

In Luke 16, Jesus tells the story of an individual who held the position of personal steward to a rich man. The steward, who was responsible for managing the rich man's household and financial affairs, was accused of mismanagement—wasting his employer's money.

Faced with the prospect of unemployment, the steward struck a bargain with all those who owed money to his boss. He altered the books to show a greatly reduced amount that each one owed, thus buying favor from each of his boss's debtors. By this, the steward cheated his boss out of a significant amount of money. However, the lord actually "...commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8).

Shockingly, the lord's act of complimenting the unjust steward has left many scratching their heads. Did Jesus seemingly commend the unjust steward for stealing? No—of course not! The commendation does not come from Jesus, but from the steward's boss, the rich man.

What then is the meaning of this parable for Christians? What is it saying to us, and what lesson are we to learn from it? Are we to be like this unjust steward? The answer lies in the verses that follow the story. Christ is speaking to those who reject His way of life. If they are not going to store their treasure in heaven, Christ tells those of this mindset "I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9).

By this the Savior makes it clear that we are never to imitate this unjust steward. They are to be honest in their service and seek to take care of what God gives them, and not seek mammon as our ultimate reward.

Luke 23:4-5

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Bill found it hard to let go of an old argument with a one time friend, Joe. However, as he laid on his deathbed, he began to experience great fear. He knew he was still harboring hostility against this old companion. Years before, they had experienced a harsh disagreement. Now, unsure of his future, Bill was deeply concerned. He could find no peace. Finally, he sent for Joe. His old friend came to the hospital and stood by his bed. At this, Bill made overtures of peace and expressed his desire that the two forgive one another. They shook hands in friendship, but as Joe left the room, Bill lifted himself into a sitting position, and said, "Wait a minute Joe. Remember, if I get over this, the old quarrel still stands."

In another story, as Christ's blood flowed toward the dirt below, his mouth was parched. He called upon His remaining strength to say a few last words. As He was dying, one of His profound statements was to pray and ask forgiveness for those who were torturing Him.

This is an amazing example for us. Christ was able to do what so few of us can. Letting go of our anger and resentments is extremely difficult for many. And yet, Christ shows us that it can be done. It can be difficult, but there will always be times in our life when someone does us wrong. It may be accidental or even a result of malice. Nonetheless, we should always strive to follow the example of Christ and be willing to forgive.

As Jesus said, we really don't fully know what it is we do. We often don't understand how the things we say or do will hurt others. Simply because we are Christians does not mean that we are innocent. We too sin against our neighbors. Therefore, Christ said that if we don't forgive others, God will not forgive us (Mat. 18:35). Not forgiving is unpardonable, and it simply adds more grief and sorrow to our own lives. So, if there is anyone we have not forgiven, why not take some time today to sincerely pray for them, forgiving their trespasses against us.

Luke 24:49

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Power can be bottled up, unleashed, or it can be harnessed. For example, it is possible to put 20 gallons of gasoline in a container and store it safely. The power is still there, it is simply stored as potential energy. The container can also be opened to the atmosphere. There a lighted match can turn it into a raging fire in which the power of the gasoline is released in an explosive display. That same gasoline can also be channeled into a car's engine. There, the controlled burn in the cylinder can be used to transport people hundreds of miles. Large fires are often spectacular and devastating events, but controlled burns have a staying power, a lasting, positive affect.

There is a parallel to God's Spirit. It has always existed, but it was not always available to man. Then, on that famous Pentecost when the New Covenant Church was born, God gave the power of His spirit to the Church in flaming tongues of fire. In giving men the power of that spirit, His desire was that it be channeled through the lives of each individual Christian.

The apostles were wonderful examples. When they were filled with the spirit, they no longer lived in fear. They preached powerful sermons. They healed the sick and prophesied of future events. They used their new power to keep going in spite of persecution. They had the power to love their enemies and do good deeds—even to those who desired to hurt them.

We have been given that same spirit. It is the power of God in us, but do we use it? Do we channel that power into good works? Or do we bottle it up inside us like fuel in an old gas can?

When Jesus walked this earth, He was filled with the spirit, and He went about doing good deeds. Let's follow His example. Let's not allow the spirit of God to be dormant, bottled up inside us. Let's use the spirit for good.

Luke 21:36

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

There was once a farmer who owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He was constantly in need of hired help. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic coastline. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the sea, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops as they made landfall. As a result, when the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals.

Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer and asked for work. "Are you a good farm hand?" the farmer asked. "Well, I can sleep when the wind blows" answered the little man. Although puzzled by this answer, desperate for help, the farmer hired him.

The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work. Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, "Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!" The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, "No sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows."

Enraged by the response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead he hurried outside to prepare things himself. To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down. Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what the hired hand meant.

Preparation is a vital aspect of every person's life, but especially for a Christian. We are to seek the Kingdom of God, and the way we seek it is by our preparing every day to be kings and priests in God's soon coming Kingdom.

When a person is prepared spiritually, mentally and physically, they have little to fear. That is why Christ's behavior shocked the apostles when they saw Him sleeping during the stormy sea. Jesus was prepared spiritually. He could "sleep when the wind blows."

He is our example to follow, and He warned us by saying; "watch ye." By this He meant watch yourselves! Be aware of how we conduct our lives and continue being busy in the work of preparing ourselves for the things to come before His return at the end of the age.

As the storms of life come upon us, we often do not know exactly what they will be like or how things will play out. But, we can be assured of our spiritual safety if we are now doing our "prep" work, grounding ourselves in the Word of God.

Luke 12:32

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

A negative fear seems to be a constant in the lives of many people today. Volatile economies, social strife, sickness, environmental concerns, wars, corruption in government and general instability plague the nations.

Of course there are also fears that can be positive. We should fear a car racing toward us, a gun pointed in our direction, or a fire out of control. This emotion is part of God's creation to help us avoid negative consequences (Pro. 22:3). However, for many in modern society, far too many negative fears have taken up residence in our mind.

Today, some suffer from post traumatic stress disorder—a legitimate reaction to violence. For other types of fear we use the more mild term anxiety. This latter condition is generated when fear occurs that is not generated by a specific threat to us. The various pharmaceutical companies make millions of dollars selling behavior modification drugs for these types of fears.

An example illustrating how a fear based anxiety can occur is reflected by a situation beginning in 1945 at the end of World War II. The emperor of Japan had signed a peace treaty, and the war was finally over. Nevertheless, a thousand or so Japanese soldiers were hiding, in jungles, mountains, and caves. These men had been told by their commanders that, if they were discovered, Americans would do terrible things to them.

As a result, upon hearing that the war was over, many believed it was U.S. propaganda designed to seduce them out of their hiding places. Finally the emperor himself made a speech declaring that the war was over. He pleaded with the hidden men to return home. His message was broadcast repeatedly over the airwaves, and one by one, many of the Japanese soldiers accepted the message. They turned themselves in to the U.S. military and were freed.

Still, others waited longer to be certain. Within a few months all but a few had surrendered. After 12 months, it was assumed that all living soldiers were accounted for—the rest were presumed dead.

However, in March of 1974, a lone Japanese soldier came out of hiding. It was some 29 years after the war had ended and the United States and Japan had long shared friendly relations. Shocked by how long this man had stayed hidden, the press asked why he dwelt in the jungle for so long. His answer was, “It took me this long to get over my fear of the Americans.” This fearful soldier was held captive, not by bars and chains, but by his own mind.

Shocking as this story may sound there are millions of people who do something similar today. They sentence themselves to a life of fear; locking themselves out of many of life’s enjoyable experiences. They remain ensnared in prisons of their own making, and this kind of fear can lead to great damage. It can even cripple our relationship with God. It may turn us into cowards becoming like a turtle that tucks its head into a defensive shell and refuses to go forward. For this reason God warn Christians that the fearful will not inherit the Kingdom.

As a people who understand God’s truth, in the uncertain world we live in, we need to live a life of faith and move forward in our calling with steady confidence. We must believe Christ’s words that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). We must be courageous and resist the wiles of the devil—the source of many of our fears. Do not let fear keep us from obtaining those things we desire in this life, and more importantly, those we hope for in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:18

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

The Taxi cab driver told this story: “When I arrived at the building it was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Under these circumstances, many drivers would just honk once or twice, wait a minute, and then drive away. But I had seen too many impoverished people who depended on taxis as their only means of transportation. Unless a situation smelled of danger, I always went to the door. This passenger might be someone who needs my assistance, I reasoned to myself.

So I walked to the door and knocked. ‘Just a minute’, answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor. After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 90's stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it. She was like someone out of a 1940's movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no knickknacks or utensils anywhere in sight.

‘Would you carry my bag out to the car?’ She said. I took the suitcase to the cab and returned to assist the woman. She took my arm, and we walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking me for my kindness. It's nothing, I told her. I try to treat all my passengers the way I would like to be treated. ‘Oh, you're such a good boy,’ she said.

When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, and then asked, ‘Could you drive through downtown?’ It's not the shortest way, I answered quickly. ‘Oh, I don't mind,’ she said. ‘I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice.’

After hearing this, I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening, and she said, ‘I don't have any family left,’ she continued. ‘The doctor says I don't have very long.’

I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. What route would you like me to take? I asked. For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator. We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and she would stare into the darkness, saying nothing.

Suddenly she said, 'I'm tired. Let's go now.' So, we drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were obviously concerned and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her.

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair. 'How much do I owe you?' she asked, reaching into her purse. Nothing, I said. 'You have to make a living,' she answered. There are other passengers, I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent over and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly. 'You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,' she said. 'Thank you.' I squeezed her hand, and then walked away. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly lost in thought. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had only honked once, then driven away?

I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life. We're conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unaware—beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one."

This story is well worth reading. The reason is that the gospel of Jesus Christ, and His coming Kingdom, is preached by God's people every day by the way they live. It is preached not just by words, but by attitudes, behaviors, actions and reactions. Most of the time, it is done through small acts of kindness and love.

Like individual granules of salt sprinkled upon a meal, the seemingly small things we do can make a difference—enhancing the quality of an entire life! Every righteous act we commit, every good work we do, can have a huge impact to an otherwise drab situation, or can brighten the eyes of someone who is having a bad day.

Maybe we do act this way toward those near to us, but do we treat less familiar faces differently? On the other hand, perhaps it could be the reverse. We treat strangers better than those we are close to.

Like this taxi driver realized, let's recognize the difference we can make in the lives of others—no matter who they may be. Let's strive to treat everyone with kindness, love and respect. After all, we never know when God is presenting us with an opportunity to help others. In addition, we never know who God may be using to teach us a lesson of great value.

God's people are the salt of the earth, and as such we are to add zest and zeal to this world through the exciting truth and love of God. By such, we enhance the quality of life—which without God is bland and distasteful. Consider the words of Christ and remember also that if we do not act in love, Christ says that we are good for nothing more than common dirt to be cast out and trodden under foot.

Matthew 12:34-35

...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Have you ever seen the poster of a young boy building a tree house? Portrayed in this scene are nails sticking out, boards barely hanging in place, paint spilled and splotted everywhere. At the bottom of this image it reads, "Every job is a self portrait."

Everything in life reflects something. For example, the Tabernacle was made according to a pattern shown to Moses that portrayed the heavenly one. The animals reflect angelic beings that surround God's throne. Some have the face of an ox, others an eagle or lion. Our nightly sleep pictures death, and we awake each day picturing the resurrection—the beginning of a new day and a new life.

In like manner, everything we do is a reflection of who and what we are. Some can read our handwriting and tell characteristics we have. Others can see what we are like by how we dress and carry ourselves. The truth is, a person could study any aspect of us and, after a while, get a pretty good idea of who we are.

Our imprint in life is all around us. How we go about accomplishing projects at work, or at home reflect our values. The friends we keep, our behavior, the tones of our voice, the expressions on our face—everything about us is reflecting something about our thoughts and beliefs. Everything we do is ultimately a reflection of our attitude.

A professional high jumper was once asked, "What do you focus on when attempting to get over the bar? Is it your head, your feet or your rear?" The athlete answered, "It is none of those—it is my mind. First I must develop the right attitude. I mentally feel the lift off and my muscles straining as start my jump. I picture myself clearing the bar with great strength, and landing on the mattress."

Mental imagery is an essential part of any performance. Coaches and sports trainers today realize this vital aspect of becoming successful, and we do too. This week, let's see ourselves as one of God's chosen few. Let's work at becoming a part of God's family by having the characteristics and positive attitude of a representative of that Kingdom today. Let's have the attitude of one who loves God, and loves our neighbors—fulfilling our duties in life with the love and standards of a future king and priest.

Matthew 16:18

*...upon this rock I will build my church;
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Gregory Elder tells the story of growing up on the Atlantic Coast. There he spent long hours working on intricate sand castles by the sea. He would sometimes build entire cities with his hands.

One year, for several days in a row, he was accosted by bullies who would smash his creations. Finally, in desperation, he tried an experiment. He placed some cinder blocks, rocks and chunks of concrete in the base of his sand foundation. Then he built his sand kingdom on top of the rocks. When the local toughs appeared, he ran off. Watching from afar, he saw them begin to ruin his work. However, this time, their bare feet met their match.

Many people today view the church as being in grave peril. Like those bullies, politically correct, secularists, atheists, and Marxists assault Christianity and God's Church. We need not fear any of this, however. The church is built on the foundation of our Rock, Jesus Christ and the gates of hell can never, and will never, prevail.

Therefore, take a moment today to consider this great truth; wherever we may attend God's Church, we should do so with confidence—not in men or organizations, but in Christ—our Rock. Make a commitment to be more dedicated—to grow where we are planted. To contribute our talents, skills and passion for Christ's sake where ever God has placed us. The Church may face trouble, persecution or trials, but in the end no one can destroy the work we are building.

*That work rests upon the foundation of Jesus
Christ.*

Matthew 19:24-26

Again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Money can come between us and God. For example, you can take two small dimes out of your pocket, place them over your eyes and they can impair your vision. For example, individuals can travel to the most exquisite place on earth, such as the tropics of Tahiti. There the landscape would radiate the beauty of the clear blue sea, the lush green vegetation, and the incredible tropical orchids. Yet, if the traveler placed only two dimes, one over each eye, he or she could not see the incredible beauty. In like manner money has become an obsession to many in our culture. That is all some see with no vision of anything beyond this physical plane in which we dwell.

Being wealthy is not a sin, but it can become a serious distraction, turning us away from God and His ways. When our lives are filled with riches and possessions, it can cause us to feel that we are self sufficient and in need of nothing. Many of those who are wealthy may also find contentment with their treasures and life on earth. This can result in having little desire to seek salvation and a better life in the world to come. This is why Christ said that it was difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom. They generally feel no need to come to God for help in their daily lives.

Even those who are not wealthy can still fall into this trap. We can get caught up in the cares of this life, seeking the treasures found on this earth. In that context, give the above Scripture some thought. Ask ourselves, are we becoming too satisfied with physical pleasures and the "stuff" of this life? Do we find ourselves having less need or desire to go to God for guidance, instruction and help? If so, then let's STOP and take the dimes out of our eyes and restore our spiritual vision.

Matthew 6:33

*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
righteousness; and all these things shall be added
unto you.*

Golf champion Arnold Palmer tells a story about a time that he lost his focus and it cost him the game. It took place during the final hole of the 1961 Masters Tournament. Palmer had a one stroke lead and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. He remembered feeling really good about that shot.

As he next approached the ball, he saw an old friend standing in the crowd who was motioning him over. As Arnold neared him, his friend reached out to shake his hand saying congratulations. The champion took his hand and shook it.

However, as soon as he let go of his hand, he knew he had lost his focus. On his next two shots, he landed in the sand trap. The third stroke went over the green. Then he missed a putt and therefore lost the Masters championship that year. Later Arnold said, "You don't ever forget a mistake like that. You just learn from it, and never do it again."

There is a great lesson to learn from this story. Professional athletes know the importance of staying focused on their game. Any distraction can make the difference between a win and a loss.

What about us? We are to live our lives seeking the Kingdom of God and Christ's righteousness first and foremost. In so doing, we must stay focused on that goal in order to succeed. Today ask yourself, have we allowed anything to distract us from our goal? Is it possible that materialism, entertainment, perceived needs, or selfish desires are distracting us? If so, is it possible that we could we lose out as a result?

Matthew 7:8-11

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

John Bisango describes a time when his daughter Melodye, age five, came to him and asked for a doll house. John promptly nodded and promised to build her one. Then he went back to reading his book. Soon he glanced out the study window and saw her arms filled with dishes, toys and dolls, making trip after trip until she had a great pile of playthings in the yard. He asked his wife, “What is Meloyde doing.”

“Oh you promised to build her a doll house, and she believed you. She’s just getting ready for it.” “You would have thought I had been hit by an atom bomb,” John later said. “I threw aside that book, raced to the lumber yard for supplies and quickly built that little girl a doll house.

Now why did I respond like that? Because... Her daddy had given his word and she believed it, and acted upon it. When I saw her faith, nothing could keep me from carrying out my word.”

As parents we give good things to our children because we love them and they believe in us. In like manner, our Father in heaven loves us and will also give good things, such as the Holy Spirit, to those who believe in Him. However, in order to receive this gift we must ask Him, seek Him, and do the will of the Father.

Let’s never forget to ask God not only for the bread to sustain the life we now live, but for the bread of eternal life through the grace, knowledge and body of Jesus Christ. If we seek and do the will of the Father by following Christ’s example, God will lovingly give us His Holy Spirit—that which is necessary to enter His Kingdom.

Matthew 10:22

... but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

There is a story of two frogs that fell into a tub of cream. The one frog looked at the sides of the tub, and they seemed far too high—impossible to climb over. He quietly resigned himself to his fate, using his last words to say “It is hopeless.” So he reconciled himself to death, relaxed, and sank to the bottom.

The other frog took a different approach. He was determined to keep swimming as long as he could. “Something might happen,” he thought. And it did. He kept kicking and churning and the cream began to thicken. The cream continued to congeal until he found himself on a solid platform of butter and was able to jump to safety.

The Christian experience of conversion is a process that has led each of us into a life that sometimes presents us with seemingly insurmountable difficulties. As we seek to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we often find ourselves in situations that appear hopeless.

When this occurs, do we relax and slowly sink back into the ways of the world that will ultimately lead to death? Or do we keep struggling, swimming, and fighting to do our best in our quest to attain the Kingdom of God and Christ’s righteousness?

If we continue to fight and endure, like the wise frog, God promises that He will provide a means of escape—a way to stay afloat in a world that so often tries to pull us down. Ultimately, with the Almighty as our rock, we will find His way of escape—His Life Preserver! He will produce a way to save us from the world that we find ourselves in and which so many are allowing themselves to drown in its sin.

Matthew 12:36-37

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (ESV).

One has to wonder, how many citizens of our nation today still believe the adage that “honesty is the best policy?” In the book entitled *The Day America Told the Truth*, Patterson & Kim conducted a survey in which 91% of all those who were queried said that they lied routinely in matters they considered trivial. 36% said they lied about important matters. 87% lied regularly to parents. 75 % said they lied to friends. 73 % lied to siblings, while 69% lied to their spouses. This is the sad world that Satan has created and in which Christians must now live.

Today, we hear lies from our teachers, our politicians, and from advertisers on a regular basis. It is becoming common place. Even in our personal lives, most have told a lie at some time to escape embarrassment, or we made a promise that we did not keep. However, we must not let the way of this world rub off on us. It is impossible for God to lie, and we are called to imitate Him.

The Kingdom of God will not be filled with those who put their personal spin on the truth. It will be inhabited by beings who tell the truth no matter what the consequences might be. As King David wrote, “LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. *He that* backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. *He that* sweareth to *his own* hurt, and changeth not” (Psalm 15:1-4).

If He has not done so already, God will test all of us on this aspect of our Christian growth. Therefore, let’s strive each day to be a people who are transparent. The familiar saying “What you see is what you get” should apply to us. Let’s always be honest with God, with others, and with ourselves.

Matthew 16:27

*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his
Father with his angels; then he shall reward every
man according to his works.*

There exists a plaque marking Abraham Lincoln's birthplace near Hodgenville, Kentucky, on it is a short recorded conversation that says: "Any news down t' the village, Ezry?" "Well, Squire McLain's gone t' Washington t' see Madison swore in, and ol' Spellman tells me this Bonaparte fella has captured most o' Spain. What's new out there, neighbor?" "Nuthin' nuthin' a'tall, 'cept fer a new baby born t' Tom Lincoln. Nothin' ever happens out here."

There are small events that take place like a birth in Hodgenville or the one in Bethlehem that may have seemed uneventful and insignificant to many. However, in some cases they can be the tiny beginnings of what may one day, become great conclusions.

This is especially true for true Christians. There are times when we repent in our lives. There are times that we sacrifice for others, we give, and we do the right thing. Some may not see it. Others may see but take no notice. In fact, no one may seem to care. But we must always remember that the Father and Jesus Christ do see, and they do care. They always see our work, our service, and love no matter how small it may seem to others. More importantly, in the end of this age these things will ultimately make an enormous difference.

Today as we go about our daily lives, let's remember that the little things we do for Christ's sake—even those that no one else sees—are of great importance. While just tiny pieces of our lives, bit by bit they are literally building a magnificent destiny—a destiny in which each faithful Christian will have an integral part in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 18:3

...Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Dr. Fred Epstein held the title of Chief of Children's Neurosurgery for many years. At the top of his field, he was as successful as any man could expect to be. One day, as he rode his bicycle, his front wheel dropped into a hole, and he was tossed over the handlebars landing on his head. His body went limp and he remained in a coma for 26 days.

After he awoke, he could only open one eye, and that only half way. He could feel his wife's hand on his, but could not move his fingers, speak, or even breathe on his own. He was helpless, but refused to remain hopeless. He was now the patient and not the doctor, so he knew what lay ahead. He would have to spend endless hours, days and months in rehabilitation, relearning how to breathe, swallow, talk, and eventually walk again.

As he lay there, he thought about what he had learned from the hundreds of children he had helped. In *If I Get to be Five*, a book he later wrote, Epstein explained that while children must depend on their parents for direction and guidance, he could learn much from their courage, persistence, resilience, and their love for life.

In one true story, he writes of four year old Naomi. Years earlier, she entered his hospital in grave condition. She was in a coma caused by a brain tumor that had developed from birth. It had wrapped itself around blood vessels in her brain, finally breaking one of the veins. This filled her cranium with blood, leaving her comatose. Epstein relieved the cranial pressure and determined that if she revived, he would perform a second surgery to remove the tumor.

Eventually Naomi did regain consciousness, but her life was still unsure. It was then that she taught Epstein a wonderful lesson. One day, with her head still swathed in bandages, she blurted out, "If I get to be five, I am going to ride a 2 wheeler."

The doctor continued to visit her daily as she gained strength for the next surgery. Each day, she would stand on the bed and announce another one of her plans. “If I get to be five, I’m going to beat my brother at Tic Tac Toe. If I get to be five, I am going to learn to tie my shoes in a double knot. If I get to be five, I’m going to learn to jump rope backwards” she would say.

Epstein was amazed at the courage and determination of this little girl who understood there was a chance she might never get to be five. Despite her serious situation, she would not let this tragedy stop her. She kept raising the bar for herself.

Naomi came through the second operation and now works as a clerk in a market. Still thankful, every year, for 35 years, she has continued to send a note to the doctor.

Now in painstaking rehabilitation himself, Dr. Epstein decided to follow Naomi’s example. He would start raising the bar for himself. The first thing he did was begin to set personal goals. He repeated to himself: when I get on my feet, I’ll sail my boat again. When I get my right arm strong, I will play catch with my son. When I get to be myself, I’ll be a surgeon again.

The Doctor’s experience provided a great lesson for him—and for us. We’ve all experienced setbacks in our life, and we too can learn from Naomi. No matter what our circumstances are, we need to keep raising the bar. We are in a spiritual war, and must not become debilitated by the trials of this life.

Like the apostle Paul, who could envision the Christian’s magnificent destiny, we must continue to raise our bar. The reason, he explained was “... that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus... but *this* one thing I *do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:10-14).

Matthew 24:44

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

On the morning of September 11th, 2001, Americans woke up to an enormous tragedy. Millions watched their television sets as frightening images flowed across the screen. Those images were so shocking that they still continue to live in the minds of many. Cameras recorded planes crashing into the twin towers. Millions watched in horror as the towers exploded like an inferno. People literally jumped to their death rather than die in the flames. We stared in shock as the massive buildings collapsed, crushing the life out of people trapped in those offices.

If only we would have known that this was going to occur, we could have stopped it. But caught off guard, we were openly exposed to destruction. We had no idea our airport security was so porous. The instructors at the flight schools didn't see the irregularity of these terrorist students wanting to learn how to fly the planes but not seeking how to land them. Police officers had some vague knowledge of suspected terrorists, but did not know what they had planned.

Not seeing what was obvious played the largest role in our failure. Before the attack, we had the opportunity to prevent the tragedy. Our national security systems had all the intelligence necessary to prevent the attack. However, they failed to properly utilize the information they had in their possession. Government agencies were not sharing information. Even the President of the United States had received a memo explaining the possibility of such an attack just days before, but he ignored it.

The plain fact is that we did not seriously consider the potential consequences of what we already knew. Within the lessons of the 9/11 attack, one stands out above all others. It is the most common of all our human lamentations. We know the truth, but don't act on it. Afterwards, we say: "If I only would have known!"

This is the lesson of a lifetime. How many times do we need to say it to ourselves before we take action in our lives? Christians know that they will face a time of great terror in the future. There is coming a great tribulation that will be unlike any other the world has ever seen. When it comes, it is going to hit like 9/11. Of course, there will be indications that it is coming, but many will still be caught off guard when it does!

Jesus makes this point clear. Some of His people will be will not be watching events, and will be surprised by what occurs. They will allow themselves to slip into wrong habits, and ungodly behavior. For this reason, Christ reminds us: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Mat. 25:13). When Christ returns, some will find them self unprepared. They will be weeping with this very same time worn lament.

Let's not be caught off guard. Let's heed the warning signs, be prepared, and watch our behavior. Let's build our faith so we are ready for that terrible and glorious day. We have the knowledge of what we must do. We know how we are to live. Let's use the information we have been given to protect ourselves from the wrath to come. In this way, we won't have to say those famous words, "If only I would have known."

Matthew 25:6

*And at midnight there was a cry made,
Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out
to meet him.*

Today, the preparation and celebration of marriage has grown into a vast industry. There are many businesses devoted solely to making matrimony one of the most special days in an individual's life. One offshoot of this business is numerous wedding magazines. These are filled with photos of extravagant facilities, elaborate gowns, cakes that reflect works of art, and accessories galore. As one wedding service touts, "Your hopes and dreams for the perfect wedding will come true when you allow Grand Canyon Wedding Photography to serve you!"

These affairs can be quite extensive. In fact, the third richest man in the world spent over 70 million dollars on his daughter's wedding. However, there is a wedding that will far exceed any that has ever taken place on earth. It is the wedding of Jesus Christ to His saints.

It will be held on the resplendent sea of glass before the very throne of God. It will be adjacent to the greatest glistening gold edifice ever created—the New Jerusalem. It will also be attended by millions of righteous angels, and the bride will be composed of the heroes of faith who have lived throughout the ages.

One joyful aspect of this ceremony is that many today have been called to literally be a part of that grand wedding. True Christians are espoused to Christ, and after the seventh trump, the faithful will be raised to marry Him. They will eat and drink at His table, and it will be the most magnificent, multi-course feast ever prepared.

If you belong to God, the honor is beyond imagination. It means you are bidden to this magnificent affair. However, in order to attend, we have to first prepare. If we do not, we will not be permitted to attend (Mat. 22:11-13).

As John wrote, “And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:4-9).

As the end of the age draws near, let’s keep this glorious future in mind. As we live our daily lives, let’s always strive to live by the spirit and intent of God’s Commandments in order that we will be ready when the Father finally bids His chosen to the marriage of His Son.

Matthew 28:29-31

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

In the Philippines, the driver of a caribou wagon was on his way to market when he overtook an old man carrying a heavy load on his shoulders. Having compassion on him, the driver invited the old man to ride in the wagon. Very grateful, the elderly man accepted. After a few minutes the driver turned to see how the man was doing. To his surprise he found him still straining under the heavy weight. He had not taken the burden off his shoulders.

Many of us carry heavy burdens in our lives that weigh us down. But we have been called by the Father. We have been placed in Christ's care. He has offered to help by giving us His yoke, lightening our load. However, sometimes we take His yoke, but remain burdened by this world. We don't trust that He will help us to bear our burdens. We continue to worry, fret and anguish as we try to control our own lives.

Today let's make a change. Certainly, we must continue to do our best each day. We must still plan, perform and accomplish our work. However, what we don't have to do is agonize in worry about it. We can leave that burden with our Savior. Christ will take care of us. He has a great plan for our lives, and by His calling, we are in a position to one day inherit an awesome destiny. He has started that work in us and He promises to finish it.

Therefore, whatever happens in our lives, we need not stress about it. God is in control. Nothing is impossible to Him, and He has our best interests at heart. Let's take that burden of worry off our shoulders. Let's trust God.

Numbers 30:2

If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.

Most Christians believe they are faithful. If asked, most would say that they are resolute and can be trusted to keep their word. However, all of us need to honestly consider an important question. Do we live up to our commitments—not just to God, but to others—or ourselves? Consider that everything we do in life affects our future in the Kingdom of God.

When we tell a friend, neighbor, or co-worker that we will do something, do we follow through? When we are made aware of an ungodly attribute, do we resolve to overcome it? Or, do we easily find an excuse—a seemingly valid reason not to follow through. If we do, consider that wavering is a reflection of how we are treating the vow we have made to God—our Master.

Booker T. Washington was an admirable African-American who lived during the years of slavery and into the years of freedom. In his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, Mr. Washington tells a story of his meeting of an ex-slave from Virginia. He writes:

“I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation. The agreement was that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body; and while he was paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labor where, and for whom, he pleased.”

Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom finally came, he still felt bound according to the contract he signed. He was still three hundred dollars in debt to his previous master. However, even though the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this honorable black man walked the greater portion of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands.

...the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay the debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and he had never broken his word. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom until he had fulfilled his promise.”

Today, the world is filled with people who make empty promises. Every year millions make New Year’s resolutions that are not kept. Every one of us is living in a world filled with sin. Because of this, in many ways, we are all slaves to that sin. However, as Christians we are told to come out of this world (Rev. 18:4) and this is something we struggle with every day.

In order to be liberated from this corruptible world in which we live, we must be a people of our word. Christ reaffirmed this point when stating “But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these comes from evil.” In other words, we are to say what we mean and do what we say. The Palmist also wrote that those who will enter the Kingdom are individuals who swear to their own hurt (Ps. 15:4). Equally important, the Savior reminds us that we will be judged by every idle word (Mt. 12:36).

Salvation is a gift, and one day we can be free from this mortal body. But, in order to receive that gift we must have Christian character that requires an internal resolve to fulfill our commitments. We continually make resolutions to overcome sin, but we must be a people of our word. Only then will God be able to say of us, “Now I know that thou fearest God.” Only then can we be entrusted to govern in His coming Kingdom.

Philippians 1:20

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

In 1996, the U.S. Women's Softball Team won the gold medal in Atlanta's Olympic Games. They lost only one game that year. However, from that single loss, there is a remarkable story of the importance of staying focused on our goal.

The team was playing against Australia and during the fifth inning Danielle Tyler hit a home run over the center-field fence. She seemed to fly as she rounded the bases with a rush of adrenaline. As she headed for the home plate, she was greeted by a swarm of teammates, and in the excitement, she became distracted by the cheers of the crowd and never actually touched home plate.

When all the cheering subsided, the Australians appealed the score. Ultimately, the umpire called Tyler out, and she did not get the run. In fact, her blast over the fence netted her team a loss! If she would have stepped on home plate, her team would have won by a score of 1-0. Instead, in the extra innings, Australia emerged with a 2-1 win, and the U.S. softball team took their only loss in the Olympics that year.

This mistake can teach us an important lesson about keeping our eyes on the goal. It demonstrates the need for us to focus on what is really important in life. Danielle had done well. She hit a home run. However, as she crossed the 3rd base, her focus shifted from the home plate to celebrating her triumph, and in doing so, she missed the mark entirely.

This example is a pattern of what can happen to some of God's people during the end time. A number will be distracted by thinking all they need to attain the Kingdom is to believe in Christ and be part of His Church. By this, they may think they have attained and are in need of nothing before actually reaching their spiritual "home plate."

But, even the apostle Paul did not think he had it made. Instead, he pressed toward the goal, saying: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

Today some are focused on ultimately being part of the resurrection, and not on finishing our final character growth. We are becoming distracted by what is going on around us and our immediate needs. In so doing, we may have lost some of our focus on the Kingdom of God and what God seeks to perfect in us.

As we cascade into the last days, let's not lose our focus. Let's be certain we are committed to doing the will of God, and keep our eyes on the Kingdom. Let's not become heady and believe that we have somehow achieved the transcendent reward which is yet to be given.

Philippians 3:8

... I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

Bre-X Minerals Ltd. was a major division of a group of companies based in Canada. At one point, this company sky rocketed to become one of the most lucrative stocks in the market. Their instantaneous success occurred when the corporation dug a mine in Indonesia. Their geologists reported the gold content of their mineral samples to be the richest ever found. The company's stock soared from \$2.00 a share to \$280.00 almost overnight.

However, it did not take long for the stockholders to discover the truth. It was all a scam. The geologists had surreptitiously put the gold ore in the original core samples, and there was no real value in the mine. As a result, the stock plummeted to zero. There was nothing that could be salvaged from the loss.

This is similar to what occurs to any Christian when we invest in the things of this world. In Paul's case, he sought status and prestige among his peers in Judaism. After he was called by Christ, he no longer counted those things of any importance. He realized that he had previously invested in something that was of no real or lasting value. This was his response to his past life:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Php. 3:7-9).

Paul was once dedicated to a man-made religion. When called of Christ, he understood that it had absolutely no value. He no longer sought his own righteousness from man's religion.

Paul ultimately came to seek the righteousness of God. From this time forward, he would strive to live, not only by the letter, but by the spirit of the law through the faith of Christ. We should learn from his example and seek to live by the Apostle Paul's creed.

Philippians 3:13-14

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Harry Hartman was a gifted young ball player who was picked up by the Brooklyn Dodgers. He is noted for having the shortest career in major league baseball. His day of glory arrived in 1918 when he was called up from the minors. He was going to pitch against the Pittsburgh Pirates. This was the moment he had dreamed of. In his mind, it would be the beginning of a great career.

However, his dreams quickly began to fade that first day on the pitcher's mound. His first pitch was hit for a single. The next batter tripled. Rattled, Harry walked the next batter for a single. The next batter also tripled. Even more shaken, he again walked the next batter, and then threw a fast ball that was hit for a single.

At that point Hartman had enough. He headed for the showers, dressed, and walked out of the stadium. He went directly to a naval recruiting office, enlisted, and was in a military uniform the next day. Hartman was never heard from in professional baseball again.

Hartman's story is a demonstration of raw human nature. For some, if they can't succeed easily, they just stop trying. If it is too hard, they take the easy path—or quit. Far too many give up when the going gets tough. However, in most cases, if they would have kept going, with both time and effort they could have ultimately achieved their hope.

Every one of us faces obstacles in our life. We all reach a point where we want to give up. However, when it comes to our calling we cannot. Christians are called to leave sin behind and pursue the ways of the Kingdom of God. But, what happens when we come up against obstacles? How do we react? As one noted religious leader once wrote:

“Nine out of ten people at least once or twice in a lifetime, come to the place where they appear to be totally defeated! All is lost!—apparently, that is. They give up and quit, when just a little more faith and *perseverance*—just a little more sticking to it would have turned apparent certain failure into glorious success.”

As the apostle Paul also admonishes us, we must press forward and keep going, while trusting that it is God who will give us the victory if we persevere to the end.

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.

God designed the world to be filled with creatures that seem to defy all logic. For example, the ant can lift 50-80 times its own weight. The tiny flea is able to jump 200 times the length of its own body.

However, if you put a flea in a box from birth, it will jump and hit the top of the box over and over. Eventually, it will come to accept the fact that it can only jump as high as the top of that box. When you take the flea out of its box, it will only leap as high as the box. It has come to believe that it can jump no higher.

In another example, the huge elephant is one of the most powerful animals on earth. However, when the great animal is first born, the owners put a rope around one of its legs. Then, they tie the rope to a stake and drive it deep into the earth. The baby elephant tries over and over to pull away from what is holding it back. The baby elephant comes to accept the fact that it cannot break its bonds. Eventually, the beast grows large enough to easily pull out the stake, but it believes that it cannot, and therefore never tries to break free.

These are powerful examples to learn from. Most of us grow up in bondage to the values and standards of our particular society. We come up against various limitations and become used to our lives the way they are. As such we too can be held by invisible bonds in our mind.

However, once we are called, we are given the power to break those bonds. God made it possible for us to obtain true freedom. As we develop as Christians, we are able to see things differently. As Christ tells us, "For with God nothing shall be impossible." With His help, we can break free from our past and the sin that so easily besets us. We can be all that God has created us to be. It is time for us to sever the bonds that are holding us back. Today let's ask God to show us those things that are limiting us, and give us the strength to make a breakthrough in those areas.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride is a terrible thing. Today it is viewed by most as an attribute, but to God it is a destructive character flaw. There is a story of the captain of a ship who looked out into the deep dark of the night and saw a light. He told the signal man to send a message stating, “Alter your course 10 degrees south.” A message came back saying, “Alter your course 10 degrees north.” The captain was angered by this disregard for his commands, and sent back a message saying, “Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am the captain.” The message came back saying “Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am seamen third class Jones.”

Immediately the captain sent a third message trying to evoke fear stating, “Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am a battleship.” A message came back saying, “Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am a light house.”

We all would like to think we are the captain of our own destiny, but the truth is we are not. There is one Captain of our salvation, and he has thoughtfully given us instructions on how to avoid disaster. We have been given what we need to keep from being dashed to pieces by the dangers of this world. Sadly, the proud don’t want to listen.

Do we believe that we are something special and that we have all the necessary tools to be successful and prosperous on our own? Do we feel that we have learned enough, and now we have all that we need to be chosen? Do we feel that we are rich and increased with goods?

Christ states that if we feel this way, we do not understand the fact that spiritually we are seriously lacking. To this end, the Savior says, “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17).

Just because we have been called, and understand some of the truth, it does not mean we are in need of nothing. God did not call us because we are better than others. We were called to learn that we need Salvation from the sin that lies in our being, and we need God to help us! We did not earn our calling because we were smart, good looking, or talented. God called the foolish and the weak of the world (1 Cor. 1:27). He called the ones who are not great. How proud should that make us?

Most tend to believe that their way is the best. We all are inclined to think we are right. In this, everyone has a problem with pride to one degree or another. We have all witnessed someone who feels the need to let others know that what they think is right. Others go so far as to allow pride to damage relationships, even the one they have with God. This can set us up for a fall, a genuine need to be brought down to where we belong.

Consider that no human alone can do anything of real and lasting value. Christ told us this truth when he said, “without me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). This was explained hundreds of years earlier when God told Zerubbabel: ...Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts (Zec. 4:6).

We might think we are special, and that we have all the necessary tools to be successful and prosperous on our own. But, God tells us that our gifts, whether they are physical or spiritual, do not come by our own might. They come by His power.

Today, we have been given the opportunity to learn this vital lesson and avoid the suffering that pride will ultimately bring. Let’s listen to God’s word intently, and honestly look at our own behaviors in comparison to what He desires. Let’s not be proud of our own achievements, but be humble and give the deserved glory to God.

Proverbs 20:1

*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging:
and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*

When attendees at a "drunk-driving awareness picnic" saw a woman being given a field sobriety test by police, they gathered around to watch the "demonstration." Later, they learned that this wasn't just a demonstration.

A police officer was waiting for Linda M. Harris, the coordinator of the Dona Ana County Drunken-Driving Prevention Program. She arrived in her car, and as they talked, he smelled alcohol on her breath. A breath test recorded her blood-alcohol level at .09 percent, just above the legal limit, and she failed four out of five coordination tests. The officer arrested her in front of the onlookers and charged her with driving while intoxicated.

Alcohol has its place, but like many other things in life it can be abused. We can be mocked by it, and many have. Today more than 18% of Americans experience alcohol abuse some time in their lives. It is estimated that 25-40 percent of all patients in U. S. hospitals are there for alcohol related reasons. The total cost of alcohol abuse in the U.S. has reached 175.9 billion dollars, and more than 100,000 deaths each year.

A member of Alcoholics Anonymous once sent columnist, Ann Landers, the following:

- We drank for happiness and became unhappy.
- We drank for joy and became miserable.
- We drank for sociability and became argumentative.
- We drank for sophistication and became obnoxious.
- We drank for friendship and made enemies.
- We drank for sleep and awakened without rest.
- We drank "medicinally" and acquired health problems.
- We drank for confidence and it caused us to doubt ourselves.
- We drank to make conversation easier and slurred our speech.
- We drank to forget and became forever haunted.
- We drank for freedom and became slaves.
- We drank to erase problems but it caused them to multiply.
- We drank to cope with life and invited death.

Bits and Pieces, May, 1990, p. 18

All Christians experience trials, overwork, and suffering. Drinking can seem to ease the pain, but are we imbibing too much? Are we fooling ourselves? Are we being mocked and deceived by wine or strong drink?

Proverbs 21:2

*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes:
but the LORD pondereth the hearts.*

In 1995 it was reported that a Chinese company, Norinco, was offering to export a weapon that used laser beams to damage the eyes of enemies. The weapon is called the ZM-87 portable laser “disturber.” According to the Chicago tribune, the company states that “one of its major applications is to injure or dizzy the eyes of an enemy combatant with high-power laser pulses to cause him to lose his combat ability...”

Blinding a soldier renders him worthless for battle. Satan knows this, and he has weapons that blind the eyes of people too. One of the powerful devices he uses is our human nature. For example, many believe that it is natural for us to lust after things we desire. Most think that selfish behavior is natural to humanity. But, contrary to what most believe human nature, as we know it today, is not natural to us.

Many of the inner pulls and desires that we call human nature are the result of the original sin by Adam and Eve. Thus, many instincts that come naturally to us have been tainted by the first man and woman's wrong choice. Since that act, our minds are now open to the knowledge of good and evil, Satan uses this against us. In the mind of mankind that which is unlawful according to God's standards has become a legitimate choice.

Because of this, our selfish human nature alters our perception of what we do. We become blinded to those things that are wrong because they have fallen into the category of self pleasure, self defense, and self advantage. That which is done out of love of self instead a love for other, is an option that many feel justified in taking.

We see our actions as justified in self defense. Hurting someone becomes reasonable to get what we want. Our desires blur our perception of good intentions, and collateral damage becomes reasonable to achieve our goals. Immoral practices are vindicated in feeling good, and we pass it off as simply natural.

Tainted, selfish human nature is like the ZM-87. It immobilizes us from fighting against the wiles of the Devil. It renders us incapable of perceiving our faults and wrong doings. However, God sees right to the heart of the matter. He knows what our intentions are, and whether they are good or bad. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we too can distinguish our motives and actions as being good or bad.

This week, and throughout our lives, let's examine ourselves carefully to see what our motives are. Let's put them into the context of God's law to see if they are based upon love for Him and love for others (Mat. 22:37-38). Let's try to see ourselves how God sees us, and then make the right choice according to God's will—not our own (Mat. 7:21). Let's do so knowing that this is the only way we can be included in the Kingdom of God.

Proverbs 23:4-5

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

Almost every day, many of us receive emails inviting us to either make, or save, enormous amounts of money. These ads come to us as a result of our society being in the throes of a malady called greed. Having abandoned God, greed has become the theology of modern-day America.

In this regard, the movie *Wall Street* almost seems prophetic as Gordon Gecko delivers a speech in which he states: "...Greed—for lack of a better word—is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit... and greed—you mark my words—will not only save (this company), but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A."

Ironically, on July 16, 2002, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan went before the Senate Banking Committee and told them that "Our national illness was infectious greed."

As a Christian, we must realize that the philosophy of greed will not save the U.S.A. In fact, from the time Lucifer ruled the world, through the age of ancient Israel, down to our modern time of digital economics, greed has only created evil.

Therefore, as our economy continues to inflate, as sales bog down, and the common people lose out financially, the wealthy will temporarily continue to profit. However, the issue for us, in such times, is not to become caught up in the desire to have more and more.

One day this world will be burned up, and the gold, silver, and currency will burn up with it. Then, the only thing that will remain will be the treasure of our righteousness that we have stored in heaven. In these times, and those yet to come, we must stay focused on our spiritual goal and not be seduced by the god of mammon—money (1 Tim. 6:8-10).

Proverbs 25:28

*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like
a city that is broken down, and without walls.*

Anger is a growing emotion in today's world, and its affects are becoming more apparent in our society. Statistics from one anger management web site show that 45% of Americans regularly lose their temper in the workplace. In fact, nearly 1,000,000 workers are injured every year by attacks from angry coworkers. It is also estimated that in the U.S. there are 960,000 incidents of violence against a spouse, girlfriend or boyfriend annually. America is becoming an angry place, and perhaps one of the most tragic results is the increasing number of homicides. Some 25,000 people are slain every year in America. As Will Rogers once said, "Whenever you fly into a rage, you seldom ever make a safe landing."

Jesus Christ said something even more profound to each one of us: ...I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Matthew 5:22).

As Christians we are not to let to the sun go down on our wrath (Eph 4:26). The anger we feel when we believe someone has done wrong to us should motivate us to take action. But what kind of action are we supposed to take? Jesus explains:

I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:44-48).

As the world becomes a more hostile place, let's be on guard. Do not allow angry attitudes or resentments to influence our lives. Further, if something does cause us to become angry, let's not allow it lead us to sin. Instead, let it be a motivation for us to take action—actions that flow out of the love of God in us. Take a positive approach that can be the foundation upon which we can build something of value, and not acts of hostility that only lead to negative consequences.

Proverbs 27:5-6

*Open rebuke is better than love carefully
concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a
friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*

When Lee Iacocca took over as chairman of the failing Chrysler Corporation in 1979, the first thing he did was to call a meeting of all department heads. However, prior to the meeting, he concocted an unworkable plan to propose to them. As the meeting began, he explained this bogus plan to the leadership. Most praised Mr. Iacocca, commenting on what great insight he had. "We are with you" they stated. However, a small number adamantly objected. They argued that if followed, his plan would likely ruin Chrysler. .

At the end of the meeting Mr. Iacocca asked those in favor of his plan to stand up. All those seeking to incur his favor proudly stood up. Lee then said to them, "You're all fired, please leave the room and the company." To those who remained seated, he said, "I want you to help me turn this company around. You are the people I know I can trust. You actually care more about the company than yourselves." With loyal opposition Mr. Iacocca turned Chrysler around and saved a dying company.

As painful as correction may be, we should desire faithful reproof. It should be welcomed by those of us who care more about God's Kingdom than ourself. People who admonish us out of love, and from truth—they are our true friends. In addition, God is the One who loyally opposes man's way, and has our best interest at heart. You never know whom God is using to relay a message of correction to us. Like the Chrysler Corporation, we can be turned around if we will listen to correction with an open heart that is willing to do what is right in God's eyes.

This week, let's listen carefully to our friends, family, neighbors, and even our enemies to see if God might be using them to speak to us. Difficult as this may be, it is a necessary process if we are to overcome that which we don't see in ourselves and receive eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Proverbs 29:18

*Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint:
but he that keepeth the law, happy is he (RV).*

About 350 years ago a shipload of travelers from Europe landed on the northern coast of America. The first year they established a site for their town. The next year they elected the town's government. The third year the new government planned to build a road five miles westward into the wilderness. In the fourth year the people tried to impeach the government because they thought it was a waste of public funds to build such a road. They questioned, "Why built it? No one needs to go there anyway."

These were the same people who once had the vision to see a future in a land 3000 miles across the ocean. They were once willing to overcome great hardships to arrive in the new territory they had envisioned. Ironically, after settling in, they soon lost any desire to explore the richness of the land they had worked so hard to attain.

Today, many in the Church of God are like these early American settlers. We were first called by God and given a vision that set us on a passionate quest for Kingdom of God. Our calling began with great enthusiasm and a clear vision of what the future had in store for us. We were willing to go all the way and do whatever God required in order to be part of God's plan for us.

Sadly, over time, our vision has become clouded by complacency. We have settled in, and sought our personal comfort zone in our obedience to God. Justifying our behavior as is has become widespread, and with it, a certain false sense of being righteous has permeated many.

As a result, we are not as willing to move forward as we once were. Few are passionately seeking to expand their knowledge and obedience to the incredible truths found in the Bible. There is no question that we have become lukewarm (Rev. 3:15). But, let's not allow this to continue. Let's not be like those early settlers, and think we have gone far enough. Let's remember the greatness of our God given vision and pick up our pace in seeking His Kingdom

Proverbs 31:28-30

*Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her
husband also, and he praiseth her...
she shall be praised.*

The founder of Focus on the Family, Dr. James Dobson, is quoted as saying, “Countless times each day a mother does what no one else can do quite as well. She wipes away a tear, whispers a word of hope, and eases a child’s fear. She teaches, serves, loves, and nurtures the next generation of citizens. Moreover, she challenges and cajoles her kids to do their best and be the best. But no editorials praise these accomplishments. Where is the coverage our mothers rightfully deserve?”

On Mother’s Day we focus our attention on our wives and mothers. Many will send a card, make a long overdue call, buy flowers, or take Mom out for dinner. However, the proverb asks the question, “Who can find a virtuous woman?” Then it reminds us of this enormous truth—“Her price is above rubies” (Pro. 31:10).

A true Christian woman is absolutely priceless. Without them, our world would not be a place worth living in. As Virgil Reed wrote, “There is something in mothers that shows us what God is really like. From their unconditional love, we see that the Lord is the kind of God who is totally committed to our welfare.”

As proverbs 31 continues we are told not neglect showing appreciation for the many things that mothers contribute to our lives. Theirs may well be the most important job on earth. For this reason, God actually commands both children and husbands to praise our mothers. This we should do, but why wait for Mother’s Day? Why honor her just once a year?

This Mother’s Day, why not make a commitment to continue to show our appreciation all year long. Let’s persist in demonstrating our gratitude in kind compliments and thoughtful actions of endearment every day, and not just one time each year.

Psalms 19:12

Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

During the civil war, in one particular skirmish known as “The Battle of the Wilderness,” the soldiers on both sides were entrenched. As the Union general John Sedgwick was inspecting his troops, he came to an elevated area of their defenses.

There he stopped, and gazed in the direction of the enemy. When his officers saw it, they suggested that it was unwise to stand in such a position. “Perhaps you ought to duck while passing this spot,” they said. “Nonsense,” snapped the general. “They couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance.” Less than a moment later, Sedgwick fell to the ground, fatally wounded.

General Sedgwick paid the ultimate price for his presumptuousness. By presuming that the enemy was not capable of an accurate shot over a long distance, he made a fatal mistake. Presumption is considered a “great transgression” and it is one that many commit on a regular basis.

Are we presumptuous, assuming that we alone are right? Have we forgotten the vital truth that “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it?” (Psalm 127:1). We must remember that unless we make God a part of our plans, the things we strive to accomplish will be filled with ego and pride, and this can lead to our ultimate failure.

Let us make a commitment to build our lives in a partnership with Christ. By doing so, we can avoid the great sin of our time—believing that we have all the spiritual wisdom we need, and require nothing more. By humbly working with the Savior, as He seeks to work with us, we can avoid being guilty of the sin of presumption, and be certain to attain our final goal of God’s Kingdom.

Psalm 34:19

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous:
but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.*

It was not long ago that the world watched as three gray whales were ice bound off Point Barrow Alaska. Battered, bloody, and gasping for breath, they floated at a hole in the ice. Their only hope to survive was to somehow be transported five miles past the ice pack to the open sea.

Rescuers began cutting a string of breathing holes about twenty yards apart in the six-inch-thick ice. For eight days, they coaxed the whales from one hole to the next—mile after mile. Along the way, one of the three vanished and was presumed to be dead. Finally, with the help of Russian icebreakers the remaining two whales, Putu and Siku, were cut free and swam to freedom.

In one sense, our path to the Kingdom of God is like a string of breathing holes. Like those whales, we are sometimes battered and bruised by this world's greed, selfishness, and hostility. In order for us to survive, God provides points in our lives where we can be refreshed.

Every week the Almighty gives us the Sabbath rest. In addition, there are also annual holy days that also serve to give us a breath of fresh air as meet together and hear God's refreshing truth. As we live our lives, the Almighty coaxes us along from one Holy Day to the next.

His Sabbath days are like our breathing holes, giving us messages of truth, fellowship with believers and the experience of being loved and encouraged. At these times, God gives us space to come up for air. He gives us periodic breathing room in our Christian walk, until that day when He returns to free us entirely from the bondage of this world.

As we go through our daily struggles, let's mediate on, and be grateful for those times that God gives us rest—a breath of fresh air—in a cold world.

Psalm 37:4

Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Treasures

One by one God took them from me
All the things I valued most
Till I was empty handed.
Every glittering toy was lost
And I walked earth's highways
Grieving in my rags and poverty
Until I heard His voice inviting,
"Lift those empty hands to me."
And I turned my hands toward heaven,
And He filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches
Till they could contain no more.
And at last I comprehended
With my mind this slow and dull,
That God could not pour His riches
Into hands already full.

Like Job, we sometimes feel like we are forced to lose things in order to prove our worship God. We may look around us and see all that others have and feel pangs of envy or jealousy. There may be times that we even experience depression.

During such times, instead of looking outward at what we or others may, or may not have, we should look inside. Consider the many gifts God has given us both in this life and what He is preparing to give those who love Him in the world to come. In addition, even in the midst of times of loss, let's strive to be like Him and look to see what we can give to others.

Psalm 37:5

*Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him;
and he shall bring it to pass.*

Do we know where we are going? Most of us have committed ourselves to the goal of attaining the Kingdom of God. However, sometimes we forget exactly how to get there. We fail to have a clear cut defined plan of how to ensure arrival at our goal. As a result, many end up simply drifting along an undesired path, yet still hoping to achieve our transcendent goal.

In that context, it is important to realize hoping for something means that we have a longing that is coupled with an expectation of one day attaining that desire. Conversely, too few realize is that in order for us to attain our aspiration, we must have a detailed plan. We must clearly see that plan and know exactly where we are headed.

A story involving the famous thinker, Albert Einstein illustrates this point. Years ago, this brilliant, but somewhat absent minded, man was on a train headed for New York City. When the ticket taker came through the car, he approached the well known scientist. As he came near, Einstein reached into his pocket to retrieve his ticket. However, as he sought for the envelope, the ticket was not to be found. The scientist frantically searched his coat pockets. He turned his pants pockets inside out. Still—he could not produce the ticket.

The ticket taker said, “Don’t worry Mr. Einstein. We know who you are. Just forget about it.” About twenty minutes later, the ticket taker returned, passing through the car. By this time, Einstein was on the floor searching everywhere. He was frantically looking for the lost ticket. Again, the conductor attempted to reassure the brilliant man, saying, “You don’t have to worry about the lost ticket. We trust that you purchased one, and that is good enough for us.” At that point, Einstein looked up at the railroad employee and said, "Young man, this isn't a matter of trust. It is a matter of direction. I need to find that ticket because I don't remember where I am going."

As we live our frenzied, distracted lives, we sometimes forget where it is that we are going. From time to time, we remember where it is we wish to go, but we misplace our ticket that shows us the way to ensure we get there. Thankfully, Jesus gave us both our destination and the way to reach that divinely inspired end when He said: But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Mt. 6:33).

The Kingdom is certainly our goal, but we are told that the way to realize that goal is to seek the righteousness of Christ. This is our price of admission to God's Kingdom. Therefore, as we live through this sometimes frantic paced life in our modern world, let's not forget where we are going or the means by which we shall arrive at that destination. We must have a plan for seeking the righteousness of Jesus Christ and diligently follow that plan.

Continue on our journey by choosing a personal sin, and create a realistic plan to overcome that sin day by day. Then, choose another sin and do likewise. By doing so we won't ever forget where we are going and instead of ending up somewhere we never intended—we will arrive in the Kingdom of God.

Psalms 139:23-24

*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me,
and know my thoughts: And see if there be any
wicked way in me, and lead me in the way
everlasting.*

God commanded His people to remove any leaven from their homes for a week every year. As His people removed the leaven from their lives, they were to focus on the spiritual meaning of His Feast of Unleavened Bread.

That purpose was to remind His followers that they were to remove all that puffs up, is prideful, and leads to sin. Let's continue to be receptive toward that message of God today. Let's ask Him to help us search our hearts and minds, and remove any proud, vain, and sinful aspects we find in ourselves.

Secondarily, the people were to eat unleavened bread seven days. The unleavened bread pictured the humble way of Christ. Let's follow this example of these profound biblical symbols, and do so with the understanding that our human nature is not automatically on the side of God. In fact, it is hostile to God's law.

As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:5-9).

Only God is righteous, and only He can make us clean and pure. By partaking of the unleavened bread, picturing the body and the way of Jesus Christ, let us put God inside of us by living His way of life daily. By this, we can feed on that which will lead us to a better life physically, and eternal life in the world to come.

Revelation 2:4

*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee,
because thou hast left thy first love.*

In the book *Hurrying Big for Little Reasons* the author tells a story of the time when he visited some friends on their farm. One night, suddenly out from the sky, came the sound of wild geese. Everyone in the household ran to look. There was a sense of excitement as they watched the geese fly through the darkened sky against a bright moon. It was a beautiful and inspiring moment.

The experience might have ended there except for another sight—that of the tame mallards floating on the nearby pond. They too heard the geese and the familiar wild call they had once known. The honking geese in the night beckoned their wild past. The urge to fly—to take their place in the sky for which God had made them—was prompting the hearts. Their wings fluttered in a somewhat feeble response, but they never rose from the water.

For the tame ducks, the matter had been settled long ago. The steady flow of corn from the barn was too tempting! Now their prompting to fly only made them uncomfortable. The mallards had become content. It was too easy and to stay where they were. They had lost the love of their natural freedom, the miracle of flight, and the call of the wild. Over time, these things had become nothing more than a faint memory.

In some cases Christians today are like those tame mallards. Is it possible that we have become too comfortable and content with our lives as they are? We assemble each week, celebrate God's days, pay our tithes and generally live a decent life. We read our Bibles and pray some, but—have we lost our first love? Have we lost our passion for God and His Kingdom? Have we lost our sense of excitement to learn and grow along with our absolute reliance on the Almighty? Rather than upset our lives by soaring, have we settled for the comfortable?

We may not hear the honking of geese right now, but we do feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit prompting us to fly higher spiritually. Does it only make us uncomfortable, or does it motivate us to do and to be more? Let's respond to our God given calling. Let's make a commitment to be what we were made for. Let's reach higher and farther in our quest for the Kingdom.

Revelation 3:11

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

In our modern Church age, Satan has been on the attack. An apostasy has been assaulting the Church for decades. It has mauled and scarred many in its wake. There are many distractions, and the pulls of this world have never been so strong. They often leave their mark on each of us. Additionally, various “strange” doctrines have surfaced, and those who propagate them seem to be desperately trying to draw people away from the truth. Today, the Church of God faces the challenge of helping the Eternal’s people to hold fast under all this pressure. The following story helps illustrate this struggle.

Years ago, on a hot summer day in Florida, a young boy named Jimmy was sweltering and anxious to get home and cool off in the swimming hole behind his house. Excitedly, he ran for the water leaving shoes, socks, and shirt behind as he literally flew off the dock and into the cool water. He then began to swim vigorously toward the middle of the pool.

Jimmy’s mother was in the kitchen, and she could see him through a window. As she fondly watched her son swim out, she also witnessed an alligator on the opposite side enter the water and begin to swim directly toward Jimmy. In absolute terror his mother ran to the water, screaming at the top of her lungs, “Jimmy, come back! Jimmy, get out of the water!” Thankfully, her son heard her voice, and made an immediate u-turn, swimming back with all his might.

As he approached the dock, Jimmy’s mother could see the ridged back of the alligator close behind him. Then, as the young boy reached his mother, the gator also reached him. Just as Jimmy reached up, his mother grabbed his arms, however, the alligator grabbed his legs. An incredible tug of war began as the strength of the serpent and the love of Jimmy’s mom both fought for the boy. Of course the gator was much stronger than Jimmy’s mother, but in her passion, she would not let go.

A farmer happened to be driving by and heard the horrific screams. He raced from his truck, rifle in hand, and as soon as he was close enough, he took careful aim, and shot the alligator.

Young Jimmy survived the ordeal, but was in the hospital for months recovering from the wounds and receiving reconstructive surgery. His legs would be forever scarred by the attack.

When he was finally ready to be released, the local newspaper sent a reporter to cover his story. After hearing the stirring narrative, the reporter asked Jimmy if he could see the scars. The young boy eagerly lifted his pant legs to reveal the marks from his ordeal. Then, with enormous pride, Jimmy said, "I have other scars too. Do you want to see them?"

Without waiting for an answer, he lifted his shirt to show his arms. "Look at these scars on my arms," he said with pride! On his arms were not marks left by the teeth of the alligator, but they were those left by his mother's nails. She had literally dug them into his flesh in her desperate attempt to hang on to him. Jimmy displayed them proudly, saying, "I have these scars because, my Mom loved me so much that, no matter what, she would not let go!"

There is a unique and beautiful symbolism for us in this story. Consider an analogy in which God's people are like this young boy, swimming in our modern day sea of temptation. The alligator is like Satan, the devil, and the mother is a type of God's Church. The devil preys on us and once he gets hold, he tightens his grip and pulls on us with all his might. Inspired by the Spirit of God, the Church is passionately reaching out in an effort to save God's children. The Church will not let go.

As we near the end of the age, like the apostle Paul, we will all bear the marks of our monumental struggle. Hopefully, like Jimmy, and the great apostle, we will take enormous pride in our scars of God's love and faithfulness toward us (Gal. 6:17).

Revelation 3:16

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

It was William Osler who said, “By far the most dangerous foe we have to fight is apathy—indifference from whatever cause, not from lack of knowledge, but from carelessness, from absorption in other pursuits, from a contempt bred of self satisfaction.”

There is probably no worse time to allow apathy to take hold of our lives than right now. We live in a society that breeds indifference. We are consistently deluged with shocking information regarding issues over which we have no control. Life has been accelerated to a frantic pace and sometimes it seems as if all we are able to concentrate on is keeping our head above water. We are forced to live in the tyranny of the urgent and this pressure affects our outlook on life. However, this is a crucial time in the history of man, and we must not allow ourselves to become self absorbed and numb to potential immorality. As Jesus told us:

“Watch ye therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come. But this know ye, that, if the goodman of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch and would not suffer his house to be broken open. Wherefore be you also ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come. Who, thinkest thou, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath appointed over his family, to give them meat in season? Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find so doing. Amen I say to you: he shall place him over all his goods. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart: My lord is long a coming: And shall begin to strike his fellow servants and shall eat and drink with drunkards: The lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not and at an hour that he knoweth not: And shall separate him and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 24:42-51).

This has always been a sign of spiritual apathy. People tune out God and tune in to self indulgence. This is exactly what happened to ancient Israel. It is what occurred to the Jews during the time of the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah. Tragically, it is happening to America right now! Perhaps the worst part of all is that it is also occurring in the Church of God. As Christ said, "They all slumbered and slept" (Mat. 25:5). We are being anesthetized by our modern culture.

Further, within the church, there is division, infighting, and spiritual error that lead to a stronger sense of apathy as brethren lower their standards and go along simply to get along. Some have even said, "Every church is wrong somewhere," insinuating that we should simply accept false doctrines and support any organization we personally like.

Let's not allow these things to impact our spiritual lives. The time we live in is critical. God is making His final choices for the bride of Christ. He is finding out where each of us stand, how much we value our calling, and if we will are willing to give all of ourselves to God in order to obtain His kingdom.

Revelation 3:19

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

As the young boy sat home playing a video game, his frustration began to grow. He tried and tried, but could not win. Finally, he could take it no longer. In a fit of frustration and anger, he broke the machine to pieces. Shocked and frightened by what he had done, and knowing he might be found out, he threw the broken pieces of plastic and electronics in the dumpster.

That evening Dad found the player missing and questioned his son. At first the boy tried to squirm out of it. Making matters worse, he even lied to his parents. He did everything he could to maneuver his way out of accepting responsibility, but all the evidence pointed to one and only one conclusion.

His parents were beside themselves. Nothing like this had ever happened before. As much as they hated the thought, they knew they had to punish their son. It was the first real spanking they had ever administered to their child who they loved so much.

Afterward, his parents took the boy aside. Together they explained how hurt they were for his wrong doing and how such behavior eventually leads to become untrustworthy as grown-ups.

As the realization set in, the boy began to cry tears of sorrowful repentance. Young as he was, he had realized what he had done was wrong. He discovered how his actions had hurt, not only him, but his mother and father as well. His parents held him in their arms as he sobbed. After it was over, and they had all gone to bed, his mother and father laid together, and they too wept for having put their child through such an ordeal. But, they also wept in joy as they realized that their boy had really understood the truth and had repented.

In a manner, Christ rebukes and chastens those in His Church. Upon being corrected some react much like this little boy. They resist, thinking they don't want or need correction. However, others are more like the young boy after talking with his parents. They truly repent realizing that we all make mistakes, all need correction, and we even need God's hand of punishment at times.

The question we should ask ourselves today is, how will we react when we are corrected by God? Will we see the correction as a necessary step in our growth as the children of God? Will it lead us to real repentance?

Certainly, when God corrects us, the pain and embarrassment we feel is not pleasant, but do we understand that the Father and Christ, in heaven, are pained even more? Do we realize that, like the parents in this true story, they likely have watery eyes as they see our attitude change? Do we remember that God's correction is a sign that He is still working with us? Are we reminded of His transcendent love for us and His desire is that we grow spiritually to become respectable, loving, and law abiding Christians?

Let's strive to keep this big picture in mind. Let's meditate on God's great love for us and how He corrects us so that we can live in His Kingdom and family forever.

Revelation 19:7

*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him:
for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife
hath made herself ready.*

Ovid was a well known Roman poet who wrote many volumes on the subject of love. One of his famous works was that of Pygmalion, a talented sculptor who lived on the beautiful island of Cyprus. There, this great sculptor created masterpieces in marble and ivory.

Pygmalion loved art and beauty, and he believed no human woman was perfect enough to be worthy of his interest. He must make her himself. To this end, he procured an enormous piece of priceless ivory, and fervently worked on it to create an extraordinary female statue.

After months of painstaking labor, he created the most magnificent woman out of the flawless ivory. To him, his statue was no less than—the perfect woman.

Because she was perfect, Pygmalion fell head over heels in love with her. As his love grew stronger each day, he eventually tried to woo the statue. Of course—this “perfect woman” was unmoved by his advances. No matter how dedicated his admiration was, she would not respond.

As his desperation grew, Pygmalion finally went to the goddess Venus. He prayed to this goddess of love, begging that she provide him a wife as beautiful as his statue.

Upon returning home, he kissed the statue and suddenly she responded by coming to life! The sculptor was completely taken with her. His creation met all of his qualifications, so he married her.

While this story is a myth, it should have a familiar ring to Bible readers. Jesus Christ is creating the perfect bride for Himself right now. That bride is His church. In so doing, God the Father has called us to work at becoming this bride (John 6:44, 65). Once we have been called, God intimately works with each of us to shape and mold us into the perfect wife for His Son.

It is a joint effort, however, and to become the bride of Christ, we need to make certain we are allowing Jesus to fashion us to become the betrothed He desires. Today, let's meditate on ways that we can more closely fit the standards and values of our future Husband. Then, let's tirelessly work at conforming to His ways so that we can ultimately fulfill God's will.

Romans 5:8-10

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (NKJV).

Ashley Paine was only 12 years old when fatally injured during a bicycle ride. One Friday afternoon, she fell off her bike on her way home from school and tumbled into an access lane that led to a turnpike. She landed under the rear wheels of a passing school bus and was run over. The lovely seventh-grader died two days later.

Thinking of others in need, Ashley's parents donated her organs to five people. One of the chosen recipients was a young girl, Jordon Hensley who suffered from a congenital heart defect—a condition that would result in a very short lifespan.

Already hospitalized, Jordon's doctors told her early Monday morning that she was receiving a new heart and she started to cry as she later spoke to her parents about the news. The heart was to be transplanted that same day.

The mother of the young girl who was killed was quoted as saying, "I feel better knowing Ashley is still touching lives..." The Paine family sent a bouquet of flowers and a get well card, and the Hensley's attended the funeral of a child they never knew but would now be a part of them forever.

"Thank you so much for donating her heart," Jordon said as she eagerly awaited running around with her friends—a joy she was never able to experience before. The parents of Ashley were consoled by their child's ability to give such a precious gift to another. In a sense, they felt that part of their daughter lived on through her heart that kept beating in the body of another human being. The new heart had brought life and hope to a girl whose future was otherwise bleak.

This story relates to every believer. Christ died so that we may be reconciled to God. It was by His life, through His resurrection, that it became possible for us to have a spiritual heart transplant and thus be saved.

This change of heart comes through the power of the Holy Spirit—sent to dwell in the body of those who love God and keep His commandments. This Spirit is the very essence of the divine nature of God! It guides us into all truth, gives us a Godly perspective, and makes it possible for us to accomplish and achieve that which would be impossible without Him.

The Father has called us to receive this change of heart, and by it we must be conformed to His way of life as His heart lives inside of us. Are we thankful that Jesus' died for us to have this change of heart? Are we grateful for His resurrection that has made this conversion possible? Do we appreciate the example he has set for us regarding how we are to live? Do we treasure receiving God's divine nature so that we can be comforted and helped through the tests and trials of life?

If we do, let's listen to that still, small voice of God's Spirit that prompts us and pricks our conscience. Let's follow Christ's lead and allow Him to live in us by dwelling in our hearts and minds. Let's bring into subjection every thought, and not quench the fire God's divine nature has started within. Let's do so realizing that it is through Christ's life, His life even now, and by His life in us through God's Spirit that we can have real life—eternal life.

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Romans 6:2

... How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

A man recalling his youth tells the story of one of his earliest jobs of a paper route. He said, “I threw the Houston press for a couple of years during junior high school. It was a good job but it got tiring. After one long afternoon of folding about two hundred papers, throwing my route, and heading for home on my bike, I remember riding through the backyard of a large home at the corner across the street from our house.

I thought to myself, I’m tired . . . no need to go all the way down the end of the street and around this big yard. I’ll just cut across this yard once and be home in a jiffy. It was a quick and easy shortcut. The first time I did it, I entertained a little twinge of guilt as I rode my bike across that nice, plush grass.

This was a beautiful yard, and to make matters worse, our neighbor was very particular about it. I had watched him manicure it week after week. Still, I figured it wouldn’t hurt just this once.

Late the next afternoon I was tooling down the same street, thinking, I wonder if I ought to use that same shortcut. Well, I did . . . (and) with less guilt than the first time. Theoretically, something inside told me I shouldn’t: but on a practical level, I rationalized doing what I knew was wrong.

In less than two weeks my bicycle tires had begun to wear a path across the yard. By then, I knew in my heart I really should be going down and around the corner, but I didn’t. I just shoved all those guilt feelings down and out of sight or mind.

By the end of the third week, a small but very obvious sign appeared near the sidewalk, blocking the path I had made. It read; **KEEP OFF THE GRASS—NO BIKES**. Everything but my name was on the sign! I confess. I ignored it: I went around the sign and rode right on over my path, glancing at the sign as I rode by. Admittedly, I felt worse! Why? The sign identified my sin which in turn, intensified my guilt.

What was so interesting was that the sign didn't stop me from going across the yard. As a matter of fact, it held a strange fascination. It somehow prodded me on to further the wrong.

Is there something that we continue to do while knowing that it is wrong? Do we compromise our perspective of what is right so that things may go a little easier for us? However small these things may seem, this attitude is not one that God views as insignificant.

As Christians, we are to put to death our old self that lived in sin. Now we are to walk in a new life. The life that we now lead is one in which every part of our being is to be changed—completely converted to one of seeking the mind and way of Jesus Christ.

Let's consider where we might be compromising our morals and integrity and ask ourselves; are we fascinated with sin and the ways of the world that lead to death, or are we attracted to righteousness and the way of Christ that will bring us to eternal life? If the latter is our desire, then we must make the effort to not continue sin of any kind—no matter how attractive it might appear.

Romans 6:11

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial is striking in its simplicity, beauty, and meaning. Etched in a black granite wall are the names of 58,156 Americans who died in that terrible war. Since its opening in 1982, the stark monument has stirred up deep emotions. Some visitors walk its length slowly, reverently, and without pause. Others stop before certain names, remembering their son, a sweetheart, or fellow soldier. Some wipe away tears as they trace the letters of a name with their finger.

For three Vietnam Veterans, Robert Bedker, Willard Craig, and Darral Lausch—a visit to the memorial is especially moving. These three individuals can walk up to the long ebony wall and find their own names carved in that stone. As a result of data coding errors, each of them had been incorrectly listed as killed in action.

There is a striking parallel for Christians today. When we accepted Christ, we put our old man to death. We were buried in our baptism. We died to our human nature and the love of the world that was an integral part of us. However, we are still alive.

As we go about the life we now live, we should always remember that the old man we once were with the lusts, pride, and sinful nature is to no longer be here.

We are to be dead to sin, but alive to Christ. Let's make a real effort to live out what our baptism pictured symbolically.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The scorpion provides an interesting lesson for all of us. When it finds itself surrounded by fire, or a situation in which it has no escape, it will stab itself in the back with its poisonous tail and die. As Christians, there are cases in which we too stab ourselves in the back. One of those times is when we cannot forgive ourselves. By holding on to our past failures, we actually undermine and discount all the good we do in our current lives.

There are numerous cases in the Church of God in which people have done things that they are ashamed of. However, in some instances, even after sincere repentance, people find it hard to forgive themselves. They understand that God is merciful, and yet somehow, to them, it seems nearly impossible to believe that He would completely forgive them.

In some cases, this feeling of guilt becomes continuous. It leads to self loathing, depression, and a lack of prayer and study. Consequently, it becomes a hindrance to spiritual growth.

The wonderful thing about God is that, by His nature, he cannot lie. We can take great comfort in knowing that if we have repented, God promises to forgive us. We can let past failures go like a piece of garbage tossed in the trash.

As the psalmist so beautifully explained, "He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is His mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalms 103:10-12).

If there is something in your past that you have hung on to, thinking it was so terrible that you cannot let it go, and forgive yourself, realize that this is actually a form of idolatry. We are putting our past sin above the mercy of God. We can, and we should, let go of the sin we have repented of and embrace God's forgiveness and everlasting love.

Romans 8:14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

One day a man started hiking through a forest so thickly covered with trees that he could not see the sun or sky. After traveling for a long time he knew that night was approaching so he started heading east for what he thought was home. He was so certain that his direction was right that he did not look at his compass. Later, when he did look, he was surprised to find that he was going west when he thought he was going east. He was so certain he was right that he sometimes thought the old compass must be defective. He started to throw it away, but then paused and thought, “You have never told me an untruth, and I’ll trust you now.” So he followed the compass and came out of the forest in the right place.

As Christians we are to be guided by an internal moral compass that influences everything we do in life. That moral compass is the Holy Spirit. When those times occur that we become lost in our daily “wilderness of sin,” we need to trust that compass.

We should ask ourselves, “Where do our moral standards come from—the lusts of the flesh or the Word of God and the Holy Spirit?” These two opposing influences that dwell within us often war with each other. Subsequently we are sometimes pulled to go one direction, but then feel prompted to go the opposite way. We need to choose the way that is right and follow that way—God’s way of holiness.

As we live our lives we are to strive to go that one way, to be led by God through His Holy Spirit working in our conscience. When we are prompted by that Spirit, what is our response? Do we heed to the guidance of God or do we choose a different path, one that will satisfy our fleshly desires?

As we go about our daily tasks today, let’s not forget to use the moral compass God has given us. Let’s strive to be led by His Word and the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

We tend to automatically tend to think we know what is best for ourselves. As a result, we often strive to take matters into our own hands without considered thought.

In one example, a man woke up in the morning to a puddle of water in the middle of his king size water bed. He just knew it was some kind of puncture in the mattress. In order to fix it, he rolled the unwieldy thing outdoors. There he looked for the leak, but could not find it.

He thought, "I'll just put some more pressure in the mattress and the leak will have to show up." As he added more water, the bag became enormously round. Finally, it became impossible to control. He lost his grip, and the huge oval ball began to roll down the hilly terrain. He tried to hold it back, but it was headed down hill like a giant beach ball. Finally, the overfilled mattress bounced into a clump of bushes that poked dozens of holes in it.

Disgusted, the man threw out the waterbed and its frame in the trash and went out and purchased a standard bed to put in his bedroom. The next morning, he awoke to find a puddle of water in the middle of the new bed. It turned out that the water's source was actually a leaky pipe in the upstairs bathroom.

There is a great lesson for us in this story. Humanly, we automatically lean toward thinking we know what's best for us. We tend to choose our own path, and it can seem a source of great personal satisfaction to our human nature.

In fact, in our culture today, being self made is thought to be an admiral goal to attain. Such persons are considered rising stars in business and in the eyes of society. However, when a Christian chooses to take matters into their own hands, and do things "their way," they can end up in a real mess.

The truth is that the self made person is only a temporary illusion. Such a pursuit often leads to wrong decisions, cutting corners, using or abusing others to get to the top. On the other hand, God's ways are far superior to ours, and our only real and lasting value is found in the degree to which we allow God to lead us by His Spirit.

The talents and abilities that we possess are not even our own. They are God given. Christians are not successful because they determine to be. They are successful when they yield to the Creator's laws of success, and allow Him mold their character. God must be the Potter and we His clay.

We should always remember that the way that seems right to a man leads to death, and at our best state we are only vanity. Therefore, let us always strive to live by paying close attention to God's spirit in us, and strive to be led by it and not just the self.

Romans 11:33

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

God's greatness, His goodness, His mercy, power, and wisdom are too magnificent for us to fully understand all at once. However, we can understand certain aspects of His nature when taken one at a time.

To help us comprehend this concept, consider that, as a city is built, the architects draw different maps. There is one of the underground with the subway system, sewers, and conduits. There is the topical map showing the terrain. There is a map showing the homes and buildings and also a street map showing the various freeways and roads.

Each map does not give the complete picture. To see the entire picture, all the various maps would have to be printed one on top of each other. If this were done it would create a view that would be too confusing to be understood. It would be extremely hard for anyone to read, and nearly impossible to understand. Therefore, we look at only one such map at a time.

The Bible is Jesus Christ in print. In it, we find many powerful and descriptive stories and terms. For example, there are words like sacrifice, love, redemption, sanctification and reconciliation. Each of these words is describing something that is accurate and correct, yet not one by itself conveys a complete picture of our Savior. To comprehend the fullness of Christ, we need to place each layer of understanding on top of another. Yet such a view can be too overwhelming and confusing for us to understand. It is difficult to see the forest for all the trees.

For this reason, it is often helpful to separate each incredible concept and detail of Christ and strive to understand each one individually. When we do this, we can absorb and understand Christ one aspect of His character at a time, and when we do, we come to realize that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Understanding this principle, we should study the Bible in our quest to know Jesus, but we should realize that we need to look at each part of Him individually. Thus, we should study and mediate on each aspect of God's character that we discover and learn in the Bible. Choose one aspect today and mediate on it as we learn from our creator. As the days of our lives move forward, choose another and learn more. In this way, we will slowly begin to see a bigger, more complete, and richer picture of whom and what God truly is.

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The declaration of America's independence is an admirable document. Within it are unforgettable phrases in which Thomas Jefferson expressed the convictions of the American people. What Jefferson did was to summarize the American philosophy in what were "self-evident truths." He also set forth a list of grievances against the King of Britain who acted tyrannical toward this land. The final paragraph of this historic document is particularly intriguing.

It reads: "...We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and things which independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. Their conviction resulted in war and much bloodshed. People lost their homes, families, legs and arms, and thousands of lives were given before an eventual victory could be claimed. Throughout this process untold sufferings would come upon those who signed this declaration.

Of those fifty Six Signers

- Five were captured by the British and tortured before they died.
- Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.
- Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army.
- Another had two sons captured by the enemy.
- Nine of them fought and died from wounds or The hardships of the war.
- Carter Braxton, a wealthy trader, saw his ships sunk by the British Navy. He was forced to sell his home and properties to pay his debts and died in poverty.
- At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson's home was taken and used for a British headquarters. Nelson ordered George Washington to open fire on his own home and it was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt.
- John Hart had to flee for his life being driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their thirteen children also fled for their lives. His fields and mill were destroyed . For over a year, he lived in forests and caves, returning home only to find his wife dead and his children vanished. Latter he died of exhaustion.

More than half of the men who signed the Declaration suffered great personal loss. Still, this did not stop their dream! Their losses did not end their hope for a land free from tyranny. If they were alive today, would they regret making the decision to fight for what is right?

No! These American heroes found themselves in a land rich with opportunity. They had been given much, were deeply committed, and even felt required to fight for a country that would be free from oppression. In hopes of a better life and future for their countrymen and future generations, these individuals considered this fight to be their reasonable service. They were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

The lesson for Christians is clear. How much are we willing to give in pursuit of God's Kingdom? What sacrifices are we willing to make in order to lift the bondage of sin? Will we give our all, or give up on our pursuit of the ultimate goal of God's Kingdom?

As in all war, the independence of this country was not won by a single battle. It was won by many victories that took place over several years and on different plains of fighting. Some of these conflicts were small in scale. Some were won by strategic planning. Others were taken by pure force or determined will. However, each battle fought was a necessary step toward the dream of a liberated United States of America.

As Christians, we too have a dream. Ours is on a much grander scale and includes the liberation of the entire world from the tyranny of sin! Like America's forefathers, our vision is the creation of a better life and a prosperous future for all of humanity. As those brave and dedicated men and women gave of themselves, we are also required to have a unbending commitment and make sacrifices along the way to attaining our God given, glorious vision.

We have made the commitment to wage war against a trinity of foes—Satan, this world, and ourselves. Like any war, there will be many battles on the path to victory. It is extremely important that we express courage, faith, and obedience to our Captain—the Christ. Only this way will we prevail over each conflict in our lives and ultimately triumph over evil.

In the war against human nature in our pursuit of holiness, let us focus on the great and precious promises God has made to faithful Christian soldiers. We can be certain that through the power of God, and by our obedience to that power, we cannot fail.

Remember the commitment we made when counting the cost prior to our baptism. We must make the ultimate sacrifice by giving up our own desires, fighting the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, battling the influence of this world, and resisting Satan the Devil. Every aspect of our lives must be turned over to God. Only through Him can we be triumphant, and this is our reasonable service as we pursue the freedom of His everlasting Kingdom of God.

Romans 12:3

I say ... to every man ... not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; But, to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith

John Killinger tells an interesting story about a manager of a minor league baseball team who may have thought a little too highly of himself. During an important game the manager became so upset with his center fielder's performance that he ordered him to the dugout, replacing the fielder with himself.

The first ball that came into center field took a bad hop and hit the manager in the mouth. The next one was a high fly ball, which he lost in the glare of the sun until it bounced off his forehead. The third ball that came to him was a hard line drive. He charged at it with outstretched arms. Unfortunately, it flew between his hands, hit his foot and bounced straight up, smacking him in the eye.

Furious, the manager ran back to the dugout, grabbed the center fielder by his uniform, and shouted at him, "You've got center field so messed up that even I can't do a thing with it."

His humorous example demonstrates how difficult it is to see our own sins. It certainly is not easy. Human nature tends to over rate the self and blame others for failure. We often scrutinize others, believing our thoughts and actions are far superior to theirs. Many times we will excuse and justify ourselves while condemning someone else.

Let's always keep this truth in mind. We should strive to see our part in the mistakes that occur, and not lay the blame solely on others. Consider that the view expressed by somebody else may be valid, perhaps even from God as He uses others to help us learn and grow. Let's not judge anyone by the standard of our self, but use righteous judgment based only on the perfect Word of God.

Romans 13:11

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Jim tells the story of the time he was young, and out on a camping trip with his friends. The day the group arrived was an exhausting one. They had hiked a long way to the site, set up the camp, and made dinner. Exhausted, that night, they each felt wonderful as they drifted into sleep after the arduous day.

In fact, Jim remembered having seemed like he was dead to the world in no time, but slowly a dim awareness began to make itself known.

It felt as if ants were crawling on him. However, Jim was so tired, and the sleep felt so good, he actually resisted awakening. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew that if he roused himself at all, he would have to acknowledge that his sleeping bag had become an ant freeway. At this point, he just did not want to accept the awful truth. Instead he laid there, and for several seconds, he tried to tell himself, he was asleep, and it was only a dream.

This phenomenon can happen to all of us spiritually. We can find ourselves going along, feeling content with our life. In fact, it can feel so comfortable; we easily become oblivious to the fact that we are picking up little habits that are beginning to cling to us. Because we are so contented, we don't want to admit that there are any problems. We put correcting ourselves off thinking it might not be that important. However, the stark truth is that we will only have to address these things later, and it could be much worse for us then.

Today, let's admit we are all subject to this occurring in our lives, and in that context, ask ourselves. Are there some things that we have been asleep to? Is it time to wake up about some things creeping in to our lives?

Romans 13:11

*And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to
awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer
than when we believed.*

Nearly everyone in modern society owns some kind of clock. We need time pieces to schedule our lives. One of the most elaborate ever built is found in the town hall in Copenhagen. There stands the world's most complicated clock. It took forty years to build at a cost of more than a million dollars. This unique clock has ten faces, fifteen thousand parts, and is accurate to two-fifths of a second every three hundred years. The clock computes the time of day, the days of the week, the months and the years. It even computes the movement the planets will make for twenty-five hundred years. This clock is so elaborate that some of the parts inside will not move until twenty-five centuries have passed.

What is intriguing to consider about this particular time piece is that in one sense, it is like all others. It cannot really tell us exactly what time it is. It is not perfectly accurate. It loses two-fifths of a second every three hundred years. Like all clocks, this magnificent time piece in Copenhagen must be regulated by a more precise time keeper—the universe itself. Our astronomical clock with its billions of moving parts formed by its atoms, its planets, stars, and even its vast collection of galaxies, continues to roll on century after century with movements so reliable that all time on earth is measured by it.

Put this in perspective. In our busy daily lives we are driven by schedules and all the daily details that must be tended to. It is so easy to fall into the habit of living our lives by the clock. Yet, no single clock can ever tell us what we each want to know—when will our time run out? No matter how expensive our time piece—no matter how beautiful or intricate it may be—no matter what clock we use, whether it is the incredible one in Copenhagen, the vast universe, or the watch we wear on our wrist, none can tell us how short our time on earth is.

God's spirit, and His Word can and do tell us that ultimately there is an end. Time will run out. Today let's take some of our allotted time on earth to consider and mediate on the fact that we are living in what the Bible calls the end time. We are nearing the end of the age, yet, we still have a brief window of opportunity to change and prepare for the coming kingdom of God.

Like the intrusion of our alarm clock into our dreams in the morning, there is coming a rude awakening for this world. Let's not allow ourselves to be lulled to sleep only to be startled awake by the events that will come on the world like a thief in the night. Let's strive to stay awake and alert. Let's seek the Kingdom now while there is yet time.

Romans 13:11

And that, knowing the time, now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Colonel Rahl was a commander of the British troops stationed in Trenton, New Jersey during the American Revolution. He was playing cards with some officers when a courier brought him an urgent message. Rahl took the letter and put it in his pocket as he continued his game.

The message read that General George Washington was crossing the Delaware. Rahl didn't bother to read it until he finished playing his the game. When he finally read the note, he realized its seriousness. He hurriedly tried to rally his men to meet the coming attack, but his procrastination ruined his chance. He and many of his soldiers were killed while the rest of the regiment was captured.

Nolbert Quayle made an interesting comment about this incident and others like it. He wrote, "Only a few minutes' delay cost him his life, his honor, and the liberty of his soldiers. Earth's history is strewn with the wrecks of half-finished plans and unexecuted resolutions. Tomorrow is the excuse of the lazy and refuge of the incompetent."

This is a profound lesson of history that should be deeply considered by God's Church in this, the last era (Rev. 3:14-22). God has given each of us a personal message to repent and change before Christ returns. Through the printed Word inspired by His Spirit, God further points out sins that we need to deal with and issues that must not go unresolved.

It is as if God has placed a message in our pocket, and there it sits waiting for us to pick up His words to us, read them and take action. If we hope to win the personal war we are engaged in to achieve the better resurrection, we must not delay (Heb. 11:35).

Are we currently trying to eradicate any ungodly behaviors written to us? Have we dealt with issues that God has brought to our attention through the hearing sermons, reading Church literature and in our study of the Bible? Or, are we putting these warnings off to possibly consider at some other point in time? If this is the case, consider this truth. When we finally come to our senses—it might be too late (Rev. 22:11). Now is our moment to act!

We should remember the words of the apostle Paul as he wrote to us and to every Christian down through the ages. We cannot procrastinate any longer. The time of the end is nearer than we would like to believe. Let's seriously work on the sins that so easily beset us so that we might win our spiritual battles and obtain the Kingdom of God (Heb. 12:1).

Romans 14:4

Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

There was once a minister who was traveling on a train through Europe. He was the only other occupant of the compartment besides a young man who was busy reading a newspaper. A little later, as they began to talk, the youth told the minister he was also a Christian. However, he admitted to the older man that he was very weak in his faith. He said there were so many temptations in life, “Sometimes I just feel overwhelmed. It seems very hard to do what I know I should do,” he said.

At that, the minister took a bible from his pocket and a round pen. He said, “Do you think I can make this pen stand up straight on this Bible in spite of this rocking train?” The young man, laughed and said, “There is simply no way you can do that.” Then he watched the minister with great interest as he held the pen up straight on the cover the bible and said, “There I’m doing exactly what I said I would do.” The young man laughed again and said, “O yeah sure—but you are holding on to it.” “Why of course,” said the minister. “Did you ever hear of a pen standing up on its end without being held up?”

“I see,” said the young man. “You are saying that none of us can stand upright unless Christ holds us. Thank you for reminding me of that.”

Today, we all need to be reminded of this truth. Who are we to judge one another? None of us can live God’s way by ourselves. We cannot stand upright on the Bible alone. We can only stand if we let Christ into every part of our lives. We must allow Him to guide every step we take; to influence every decision we make. If we do, then He will hold us up. If we are striving for the Kingdom together, in a close relationship with Him, we won’t fall. This is why Paul admonishes us to, “...stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved” (Php. 4:1).

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

There was an unused block of marble that lay untouched in a storehouse in Florence, Italy for decades. Two capable sculptors attempted to make something beautiful out of it. Leonardo De Vinci turned down the opportunity to transform it, and another artist started the project but he too quit. Eventually, Michelangelo agreed to do what the others could not.

First he built a shed around the block of marble. For three years he pondered a way to transform it into a piece of art. First he examined the marble minutely to understand its limits. He made sketches and models of various possible positions. Finally he picked up his mallet and his chisel and began to perform a magnificent work.

When Michelangelo looked at this piece of marble, he did not see what couldn't be. He saw the potential the stone possessed. He did not reject it because it was flawed. Instead, he saw ways to work around those flaws. In some cases he even incorporated the flaws into his design. What he eventually produced was so great that even its flaws could not scar its awesome beauty. Eventually, this at one time hunk of stone became known as the famous statue of David.

Still, as famous as this sculpture is, it is not perfect. There are drill marks in its thick curled hair. Some of the original quarry marks are on its head to this day. It is even possible to see vague traces of the cuttings made by an earlier sculptor. Yet, in spite of these things, Michelangelo created one of the greatest masterpieces in history.

The history of the sculpture of David reflects the method God is using to work with us. He is sculpting those He has called. We are all imperfect, but He molds and shapes us—even though we have flaws. Sometimes, the pounding of His chisel might hurt, but we need to appreciate what He is creating in us.

We must allow ourselves to be malleable in His hands so that we can ultimately fit His mold of holy and righteousness character. Perhaps more important, if we allow Him to shape us, we can expect Him to create a wonderful masterpiece. As the Apostle John wrote, “now are we the Children of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1Jn 3:2).

Zechariah 4:6

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of host.

Former pro basketball star Bill Bradley tells of a time when he was 15 years old and attended a summer basketball camp. At that time Ed Macauley, who was both a former college and pro star, ran the camp. Bradley says he still remembers something Ed taught him one day.

Ed took Bill aside, and said, “You must always remember this truth. You have to always work your game to the very best of your ability. If not, there will be someone out there with equal ability. They will be working to the utmost of their ability, and one day you’ll play each other, and he’ll win.”

How applicable this advice is to those who have received the high calling of God. We must be working at overcoming to the utmost of our ability. If not, Jesus tells us that it is possible to lose our crown to another (Rev. 3:11).

This tragedy can occur when Christians do not use the power we have been given to the utmost of their ability. We were baptized, had hands laid on us, prayer was made, and by this we received the gift of God’s Holy Spirit. The purpose of this gift is to help us change in a process of conversion. It is how we live by that Spirit that will make the difference. As the apostle Paul wrote:

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God (Romans 8:5-7, 14).

Today, many in the Church are resisting God’s influence in their lives. They are grieving the Holy Spirit by fully striving to do all they can to keep His Commands—both in the letter and in their spiritual intent.

The only way we can hope to become a king and a priest in the coming Kingdom of God is to wholeheartedly seek to live by God's Spirit. As it prompts us, gives us urges, and pricks our conscience, we must react in a positive way to this divine influence. We must seek to follow its promptings to the best of our ability as it leads us through this mortal life. Each one of us must give our calling the best we have. This is what will make the difference between just being called and ultimately being both called and chosen.