

1991 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 1, 1991 A GOOD/BAD YEAR

Several months ago my wife and I were preparing to go to the Hospital to see some of our members. When we got in the car it would not crank. I was mystified at first until I looked under the hood of the car and found someone had stolen my battery during the night!

Several days ago I returned home from visiting and found someone had broken into my home. The way I knew they had broken in was by finding the box of home made cookies they had left us on the kitchen table.

Two unexpected events. One was very disturbing while the other was very delightful. I thought about them today as I was contemplating a new year. A new year filled with tremendous potential for bad and tremendous opportunities for good.

The difference will depend a great deal on your attitude. If you enter the New Year thinking only about what you can get it may be another bad year for stolen batteries. If, instead, you enter the New Year with an attitude of concern and compassion then there may be a lot more smiling faces over home made cookies.

1991 is a clean sheet of paper. What sort of mark will you make on it??

January 3, 1991 TRASH OR TREASURE

One of the constant battles a sailor has to fight is the corroding power of salt water on the metal parts of a ship. Chipping away the rust and repainting the ship is a never ending job.

When we arrived in Hong Kong harbor for some "R and R" we were approached by several ladies who wanted to repaint the ship for us while we all took liberty. Naturally we were excited about the prospect but concerned about the price.

Their price surprised even us. They were willing to paint the entire ship, using rags wrapped around their hands for brushes, in exchange for the garbage from the ship that we normally threw over board. We laughed at them for doing it so cheap and they laughed at us for being foolish enough to pay them that much.

I thought about that recently as I rode around town and saw all our trash cans overflowing with left over Christmas trash. I don't know all the answers; I'm not even sure I know all the questions! I do know, however, that the Bible says that to whom much is given, of him shall much be required (Luke 12:48).

We have been given a tremendous amount. Are we ready to answer for the way we've used it??

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January 4, 1991 JDI

If "If and Ands" were pots and pans the world would be a kitchen! Many people today are crippled by the "If" bug. If I had the money I'd do certain things. If I had the time I'd change certain things. If, If, If...

They need a good case of JDI- Just Do It! If I have a distasteful or difficult job to do I can sit in my office and think of multitudes of reasons why I can't or shouldn't do that job. Instead, I have learned to Just Do It. It's not going to get any better by waiting but it will feel better when it's completed.

The thing you have to do is stop looking for excuses to stop you and instead look for opportunities to help you. If life gives you a lemon use it to make lemonade! The heroes of life are simply people who have looked at the obstacles of life and have seen opportunities. Then they have just done what they needed to do.

Paul told the Philippians "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". The Power is available; now it's up to you to Just Do It.

January 8, 1991 Home Made Ice Cream

We were having a special Youth service at the Church. The program called for some singing, a short message, some activities, and some Home Made Ice Cream to finish out the Evening.

Several couples in the Church had volunteered to make the ice cream while I led the activities. They assured me it would take only a half an hour for the ice cream to make.

An hour and a half later I had played every game I knew and the "natives were getting restless". I had asked if the ice cream was ready a half dozen times and each time was assured it would only be a few more minutes.

I finally told them that we would have to eat the ice cream a little soft because it was getting late. When the churns were opened we found out why it had taken so long.

One churn had "too many cooks" and both of them had added sugar to the mix; it was nothing now but a syrupy mess.

The other Churn was even worst. When we opened it we found they had forgotten to put the beater in the churn and the mix was frozen around the edge and liquid in the middle!

We didn't have Ice cream that night but we learned a couple of valuable lessons- Too much of a good thing can cause problems; and agitation is a necessary part of development.

Reflect on that this year when things don't go the way you think they should.

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January 10, 1991 Goals

A wise man once said, "He who aims at nothing usually hits it". If you are going to accomplish anything of value this year you've got to have a Goal. That's because Successful People are Goal Setters. They have a Desire to accomplish something plus the Discipline needed to turn that "Dream" into a reality.

In order for your Goal to benefit you this year there are several things you need to remember.

Make it a DEFINABLE GOAL. James said, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). You must know where you're going and what you hope to accomplish. A General Goal that simply says, "I want to do better" will never motivate you to specific action.

Make it the RIGHT GOAL. How sad it would be to spend all your time and energy trying to accomplish something and then learn it was the wrong thing. Ponder in making your goal that this world and it's values will pass away one day. Every goal should be made with a realization that one day it will be examined by God.

Finally, make it a REACHABLE GOAL. Don't try to lose 20 pounds this week (If you could you would damage your health). God expects continual Growth, not instant maturity. You read the Bible a chapter at a time. Just try to understand it a little more each time you read it.

What are you aiming for this year??

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January 11, 1991 WRONG PAGE

At the beginning of our service recently the Song Leader announced the opening hymn number and the piano player began playing another song! It seems the Song Leader unintentionally reversed the

order of our songs and announced the second song first. It was just a funny little moment for us but it reminded me of some real life situations.

Sometimes husbands and wives, or parents and children, "sing different songs" because they're on the wrong page thru failure to communicate. And there will be no Harmony in the Home until people begin to speak the same language.

This incident also reminded me that you need to address a problem as soon as it occurs. Sometimes in life we try to pretend a problem doesn't exist but the longer we ignore it the worst things become. You need to stop long enough to correct the problem before the disharmony becomes disaster.

If your life is all confused because it's on the wrong page just remember that Jesus can turn chaos into melody if you'll let Him.

January 15, 1991 WAR OR PEACE

I have to write this article a week ahead for publication purposes so it may be "old" news by the time you read it. It's on everyone's minds right now, however, and I wanted to share some Biblical Principles about the Iraq Situation.

Should we go to war? I was in the Viet Nam war and I know that war is one of the most awful things that can happen to a people or nation. It's not a movie, it's madness. I do believe, however, that Good must take a stand against Evil; even to the point of sacrifice and death.

My main concern is that we might not simply be fighting Iraq; we might be seeing the Plans of God unfold. If we are, then we will lose, and lose badly. America will then become a third rate spectator power as the events of Revelation unfold in the Middle East.

If Americans are faced with a large number of deaths, economic ruin (our oil supply completely cut off to add to our present recession), and an unpopular, unstable government; the Christians in America will find out if the Faith they've talked about can stand the Fire. Jeremiah put it this way "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer 12:5).

If you aren't faithful in Peace, will you stand in War???

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January 17, 1991 WAITING ON WAR

This is such a difficult article to write. By the time you read it people we know and love may be bleeding and dying in the desert. There is a time and place for cute sermonettes about character building topics but this is not one of them.

I think America has the Physical might to defeat any army they face but I fear we may also be involved in Prophetic events. If so, we are in for a long difficult winter.

What can we do as we await the outcome?

PRAY- For the safety and salvation of our troops. Pray for wisdom for the leaders of our nation.

PROCEED- with your life. Don't be paralyzed by Fear or Worry.

PREPARE- to meet God. This is not the time to be lukewarm or lazy. The Trumpet may sound at any time. The Bride of Christ needs to be washed and waiting.

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will rest in the name of our God.

January 22, 1991 PEACE ABOUT WAR

How do you find peace about war?? How do you maintain Christian values and warlike attitudes? Should we fight or should we allow the bullies of the world to kill, destroy, and rob by turning the other cheek? What does the Bible say about War?

The word "War" is found 225 times in the Bible. It is used to describe physical combat, emotional battles, and spiritual conflicts.

The Physical conflict concept of war; that is, violence of people against people, is found throughout the Bible. From the first family, in which Cain killed his brother Abel, until the final chapters of Revelation in which God and Satan are engaged in all out battle; War is the rule instead of the exception.

Most of the wars in history have been fought with the idea that God was on each side. Even today, Iraq and America are both asking for God's Blessing on their efforts and protection for their troops.

I wish this was a world in which there was no war and no reason for war. In the real world that we live in, however, there is more war than peace. I can only encourage you with the words that Jesus gave me; "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation (war): but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). If there must be war, make sure you're at peace with God.

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January 24, 1991 WAR

A lot of people have a lot of different opinions about war. Let's see what the ultimate authority; the Bible, has to say about the subject.

THE REALITY OF WAR:

- Exodus 15:3 "The Lord is a man of war: The Lord is his name".
- Deu 20:12 "If it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt beseige it"
- 2 Sam 22:35 "He teaches my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken in mine arms."
- I Chron 5:22 "For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God."
- Psalm 120:7 "I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war"

THE REASSURANCE IN WAR:

Psalm 27:3 "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

THE WRONG WAR: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4). If there must be war; You'd Better be at war with the world and at Peace with God.

January 25, 1991 WAR AND DEATH

It seemed it would never end. Hour after hour he screamed, and cried, and, just before daylight, he died.

One ship had run into another during some anti-submarine maneuvers on a dark moonless night. This young man was trapped below deck and we were unable to get to him.

It was my first experience with "war death" and it was nothing like books or TV describes it. There was no gallant heroism, only pain and hurt and frustration.

I've seen many people die since that time (First during Viet Nam and then during 20 years as a Pastor). I've never gotten used to it.

The two questions I'm always asked about death in general and violent death in specific are, "Why?" and "Why ME?"

The answers are "simple" when you know the reasons for death (Sin- Rom 6:23) and accept the fact that all must die (Rom 5:12); but it's never easy when it's someone you know or love.

The Good News I have is that in Christ, "If a man die, he shall live again". One day Christ will set up a kingdom of peace where death will be no more. I long for that day when men "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isa 2:4).

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January 29, 1991 FRIENDS

A friend is a wondrous thing. It's almost like falling in love; there is no logical rhyme or reason to it.

When my best friend and I first met we were uncomfortable around each other. For years I had been the number one male scholar in my class. He moved into our area and began attending our school when we began the ninth grade. Immediately I recognized him as a threat to my position because he was smarter than me.

Soon, however, we found ourselves drawn to each other and instead of competing we became companions.

That was 30 years ago. He's now married and living in Washington state. His family, his job, and the distance between us mean we have hardly anything in common now. In fact, we only get to see each other every three or four years; yet, when he walks in the door it's like we saw each other only yesterday.

That's the way it is with friends. You can't explain the chemistry but it's clear when it clicks.

This is also one way of describing our relationship with the Lord. We don't see Him because He lives in Heaven and we live on earth. Communication is by the "phone" of the Holy Spirit or the "letters" of the Bible; yet, He's a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

I'm glad Christianity is not a religion I endure but a relationship I enjoy. A relationship that will one day allow me to see him face to face whom so long I have known heart to heart.

January 31, 1991 CALL WAITING

One of the modern "conveniences" that I find really irritating is call waiting. People call me from time to time to talk about problems or discuss difficulties. In the middle of our conversation they will receive a notice that someone else is trying to call them and they will put me on hold while they find out who is calling.

Invariably they will come back on the line after awhile and tell me that they will call me back later. The implication is that the other call was more important than talking to me!

Sometimes we feel that God treats us that way also. We know that He said, Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not (Jer 33:3). Sometimes

this command works great as we ask God for things and they come immediately. Sometimes His answer is "No" and, while we may not like it right then, we know that in the long run that's the best thing for us.

Sometimes, however, we pray with complete faith and confident hearts and, while we're assured by God's word that He hears us, the answer doesn't come. So we become disappointed and discouraged; and just a little bit aggravated with God.

We want Him to send our young men home NOW. We want Him to improve our economy Yesterday!! We're impatient for answers and don't like being told to wait.

Waiting doesn't change God's love or concern. He has a time; and it's always the right time. When God puts you on hold rest in His Love and Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD (Psa 27:14).

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February 5, 1991 MINDING OUR MORALS

The barbed wire glistened atop the tall metal fence. Through the checkered pattern of the fence you could see numerous people milling about. Off in the corner two people wrestled on the ground as a crowd shouted their encouragement.

The solid brick building in the center of the compound loomed cold and forbidding. Numerous people in the crowd kept casting apprehensive glances toward the metal doors in the building until finally two heavy set men appeared. Quickly, the crowd dispersed and left the two combatants to their fate.

Outside the fence, a visitor approached the main entrance with confident steps; but hesitated upon reading the warning sign. Confused, and a little apprehensive, the visitor followed the signs to the main office in order to sign in and get a visitor's pass.

Another day of public school in America was underway.

Thirty years ago America decided the only goal of public school was to educate the minds of our Children. Moral training and common courtesies were discouraged and even forbidden.

Now our schools look like prisons and our children live like heathens. When will we finally wake up and give our educators the right, as well as the responsibility, to train up our children in the way they should go.

A Child's Morals, as well as their mind, is a terrible thing to waste.

February 7, 1991 WHEN GOD SAYS NO

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

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

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

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

Remember, God's "No" shows just as much love as His "Yes" does.

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February 8, 1991 THE POWERS THAT BE

A Preacher once had to tell the President of ancient Iraq that he would be disposed from his kingdom in order that "the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (Dan 4:17).

There are several things we can learn about our modern day battle with Iraq from this Preacher's message.

First, "The most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will"; or as Paul told the Romans, "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom 13:1). God did not set the world spinning into motion and then take a vacation while it wobbled it's way through time. He is actively involved in the selection and stability of the governments of the world.

Second, He "sets up over these kingdoms the basest (the word means "The lowest of morals") men". The Iraqi government Daniel talked about was an awful, deadly, dictatorship. The Roman government Paul talked about was immoral and cruel. God allowed them to exist in order to punish sin and to push the people toward Him.

The drama in the desert hasn't taken God by Surprise. That means you can replace your worry and anxiety with trustful peace of heart.

February 12, 1991 ITCH GOD CAN'T SCRATCH

When I announced I was getting married 21 years ago one of my neighbors told me a saying about marriage that I've remembered many times since- "Married people have to learn to scratch where it doesn't itch!". The saying puzzled me at first but it began to make more and more sense the longer I was married.

I thought of that the other day as I was reading the Bible about the first marriage. Basically, the Bible says that the first marriage came about because man had an itch God couldn't scratch.

Man had animals to befriend him, work to occupy him, and God to care for him; yet, God saw that in all this there was a loneliness in man that needed a special relationship only the woman could provide.

When you give your sweetheart her valentine this week remember that, although she's caused you to scratch your head many times in wonder at the logic of women; yet, she's a provision for you for an itch in your life that even God couldn't scratch.

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February 14, 1991 LONELY LOVE

We were in Kaouchong Harbor, Nationalist China for resupply and repair. The Corpsman aboard ship thought it would be a good time to send me to the Naval Hospital at Subic Bay, Philippines for some needed medical test so I was put ashore to catch a plane.

Several of my ship mates were being transferred back to the states and so they came ashore with me. This was our first visit to China so we walked around town for awhile taking in all the sights. It was the middle of June so it wasn't long before we were tired and thirsty.

The only place we could find to purchase something to drink was a local bar. My friends went inside but I didn't frequent bars so I sat at a table on the sidewalk and drank the local equivalent of a Pepsi.

Soon one of the bar girls came out to spend some time with a rich American sailor. I told her as politely as possible that I was a Christian and she was wasting her time.

That's when her face changed. She told me about her family and how she was sold by her father to the bar owner when she was only 12 years old. Now she spent her whole life giving "love" but never feeling real love.

I think of her from time to time when I deal with troubled Teens or adulterous marriages. The clothes are different but the look is the same. And, like this young girl, they hear me talking about the real Love of God but refuse to accept it.

This Valentine's Day I hope you Discover that the difference between Lonely and Love is to center your relationship around God.

February 19, 1991 SPOON FED

My wife and I don't have any children but we kept one of our nephews for several years and we feel for him almost like we would one of our own. When he's with us he visits with me in the hospital and in homes, helps me with the "errand" work I have to do around town, and makes sure that I get at least one cone of ice cream every day!

He's four years old now so he's not exactly a baby anymore. One of the problems we have with him when he stays with us is that he gets so excited about all the things we do until he doesn't want to take the time to eat. I try to tell my wife he'll eat when he's hungry but she still worries about it the entire time he's with us.

During a recent visit he wanted to watch "Peter Pan" instead of eat supper. I told him to eat supper first. Just then I had some visitors come to my office. When I returned from the office I found him sitting in front of the TV watching the movie while my wife fed him his supper. I quarreled with my wife as much as I did with him!

Later on I realized that I do the same thing all the time. People come to church and expect to be effortlessly "entertained". They want great singing and a wonderful sermon; but they want it spoon fed to them without any involvement on their part. That ends up working the Pastor to death and spoiling them rotten.

When you come to Church bring a good appetite. I'll spend all week preparing the "meal" but the fork is on your side of the table.

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February 21, 1991 GOD'S HANDS

Our denominational annual conference was in Fort Worth, Texas that year. Three car loads of preachers from our area were planning to attend so we decided to drive together in a caravan.

Just before we left we all gathered around for a time of prayer. The Preacher leading the prayer said over and over for God to keep His hand of protection upon us.

It's always difficult trying to keep up with the other cars in a caravan but it's especially difficult when the car is loaded with preachers; all trying to talk at the same time! We did pretty good until we got through Atlanta, Georgia. That's when a car directly ahead of the lead car in the caravan realized he was in the wrong lane to exit for "Six Flags" and decided to stop in the middle of the expressway.

We slammed on our brakes and waited helplessly as the cars skidded along the road. They came to a sudden stop with a tremendous jerk and we thought we had wrecked. We all got out to look at the damage and found there was not even a scratch.

We were a little perplexed until I slid my hand between the bumpers of the cars and found that the front of my hand touched one bumper and the back of my hand touched the other. I believe that God put His hand between the cars and prevented the wreck!

As you go through life remember, you're in good hands; as long as the hands belong to God.

February 22, 1991 REPAIRING DAMAGED LIVES

You could almost hear the panic in her voice. The secretary of another church in the area was working on the church bulletin on her computer and she couldn't get it to work properly. I talked to her on the phone for a while and then went to where she was working. I found that she had been using the same disk to record her files on for a long period of time and it had been damaged. Now all the files were "linked" together.

After much work and manipulation I was finally able to get her computer working and save some of the files. I took the remaining files home to work on them at my computer. As I was working I received a phone call from a church member desiring to talk about a problem she was having with someone else.

After I hung up the phone I realized that the computer problem and the Personal problem were a lot alike; both were caused by failure to completely deal with past problems and both were complicated by being tied to other problems.

The Good News is that God completely deals with our past through the shed blood of Christ and changes our present through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Your life doesn't have to be inoperative and ineffective. God has just what you need so you can have peace and be productive.

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February 26, 1991 How Cheap Will You Sell Out?

It is often said that "every man has his price". A statement that may or may not be true. But it is true that a lot of people have given up a lot for a very small return:

Judas sold the Savior for 30 pieces of Silver and lost his Apostleship (Acts 1:20) and his life (Matthew 27:3-5). Then, when he got the money, he didn't want it after all! He threw it away like he threw away his life (Matthew 27:5)

Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of beans (Genesis 25:34) and "afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected" (Hebrews 12:17). He thought momentary Pleasure was better than future Profit and ended up with nothing but bitter memories.

The servant of Elisha, Gehazi, sold out for 2 talents of Silver and 2 changes of clothes (II Kings 5:20-27) but it cost him his health (He was stricken with the Leprosy that Naaman had been cured of!). He couldn't wear the clothes and he couldn't spend the money. As the Leprosy slowly ate his life away I wonder if he thought clothes and money were so important after all??

Jesus said, What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mk 8:37). Good Question! What in this world do you think is worth going to Hell over? How cheap are YOU selling out??

February 28, 1991 NAVIGATE OR STEER??

I always drive when my wife and I go on trips. She normally reads, does cross word puzzles, or looks for yard sale signs I might have missed.

One day I began thinking that she might enjoy the trips more if she were more involved. I gave her the map and told her she could navigate and I would do the driving.

It did not work as well as I had anticipated. I would ask her about a specific turnoff and, generally about 2 miles past it, she would say, "Yes. That's the one." It made for some very interesting trips!

The good thing about being a Christian is that God always knows the right turn off at the right time. If you will follow His directions you will never make the wrong turn or end up at the wrong place.

The problem many people have, however, is that they want to navigate their lives as well as do the steering. Then, when they get in trouble, they quarrel at God.

The Christian's duty is to find God's Road map for their life and then follow that plan. It will make for a peaceful and prosperous journey and a marvelous reception at journey's end.

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March 1, 1991 BOUNCING CHECKS

It happened very early in my first pastorate. Just before I was to enter the pulpit for the Sunday Morning Service the chairman of my Deacon board pulled me to the side and said, "By the way, Preacher, your tithe check to the church last week bounced." That really puts you in a good frame of mind for a worship service!!

After the service I checked into the situation and found the problem. For several weeks I had been putting my pay check into the pocket of my car intending to deposit them when I had an opportunity. The bank, however, failed to honor checks deposited in the pocket of my car!

It was an embarrassing and instructive situation for me. I fear it will also be the same type of situation many will face when they finally face God.

Jesus described it in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Their intentions were correct but they had deposited their "checks" in the bank of public opinion instead of the bank of heaven. It's going to be a horrible thing to face God and find your "Check" has bounced.

March 5, 1991 POWER TO PERFORM

To try to do the work of God without the Power of God is like trying to empty the ocean with a pitchfork; you'll work yourself to death and never accomplish anything.

The greatest thing about the work of God is that it is a supernatural work that God does in spite of our limited abilities. The worst thing about the work of God is that it is a supernatural work that requires God's power to be effective.

The Apostle Paul said it this way, "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor 2:4-5).

The Church today has more equipment and education than it has ever had; yet the world is getting worst and worst. We don't need the wildfire of fanaticism, but we do need the burning fire of the power of God to fall on the people of God so that they can accomplish the work of God.

It's time the church put down their pitchforks and picked up their pails! It's time we stopped just being active and started accomplishing something.

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March 7, 1991 MUSINGS ABOUT MONEY

The Bible says that "the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim 6:10).

That makes it very important that we have a Proper Perspective about Money:

"A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Psa 37:16).

"Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov 11:4).

"There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches" (Prov 13:7).

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Prov 22:1).

"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jer 9:23-24).

Remember MORE IS NEVER ENOUGH- "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?" (Ecc 5:11).

"Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Prov 23:5).

Don't go Mad over Money. Love people and use money; don't Use people and love money!

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March 8, 1991 ASHAMED

My family has never had a great deal of Material possessions. I was literally raised in a barn (We converted it into a home and enjoyed it just as much as we would have a mansion).

My dad and mom always worked hard and instilled tremendous principles in all their children but they never "struck it rich". That meant the children always has to work during the summer to earn money for school and to learn to share the only family car between dates and family functions.

One thing my dad did teach me, however, was to always be respectful of the name I carried. He taught us that there were many circumstances in life that a person can't control but they should always control their character and conduct.

As a preacher for 29 of my 43 years, I have seen many varieties of Christians. Some have Blessed me with their dedication, some have disappointed me with their careless living, and some have surprised me with their willingness to sacrifice.

One thing I try to instill in all these Christians is to live such a life before God and their fellow man until "God will not be not ashamed to be called their God." (Heb 11:16).

That's a principle I try to live by for my Earthly father as well as my Heavenly Father.

March 12, 1991 STIRRING THE AIR

I appreciate the modern appliances we have today. I have no desire to go back to the old wood stove days. Besides, I don't know how the modern home maker could exist without an electric can opener and a microwave to heat left overs!!

One of the "gadgets" we have in the Parsonage, however, has always baffled me. The vent fan over our stove doesn't force air outside the house; instead it simply removes the hot air from over the stove and forces it into the rest of the house. I know it was probably installed that way to save the time and effort needed to cut the hole in the ceiling but it is about the most useless thing I can imagine.

It's sad, but true, that this is also the way some people's lives are lived. They have all the ingredients necessary to perform a needed, useful function but because of laziness or carelessness they spend their time going through the motions instead of accomplishing something.

You need to commit your life to God so you can become a person who solves life's problems instead of being one who simply stirs the air.

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March 14, 1991 CHOOSING A CHURCH

There are over 100 churches within a fifteen mile radius of Lake City. Almost every denomination, class, and race of people are represented. How is a person supposed to choose which of these Churches they should attend?

Number One- What is their stand on the Bible? Do they believe it is the complete, authoritative Word of God.

Number Two- What is the basis of Salvation? Do they add anything to, or take anything from, the fact that Salvation is by Grace through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ; not of works lest any man should boast.

Number Three- What is the goal of the Church? Do they seek political reform, social acceptance, or the glorification of a person; or do they seek to win the lost, develop the saved, and glorify the Lord?

Number Four- Do you feel that this Church is where you can use your abilities for God? Do you feel comfortable with the People and the Program of the Church?

These are four basic guidelines for choosing a Church. The main thing, however, is to choose a Church!! Don't build your life on the shifting sands of the world; attend and participate in a church so you can have a solid, eternal foundation.

March 21, 1991 REASONS TO WIN SOULS

We know that Jesus went to the Cross to die for lost mankind as a result of God's great love for us. What we fail to realize, however, is that we also have a responsibility in God's plans. That responsibility includes sharing the Good News of the Gospel with others. We have that responsibility because:

1. Sinners are Perishing- Rev 20:15 Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.
2. God is Commanding Us- Mark 16:15 Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.
3. Hell is Requesting us- Luke 16:15 The rich man cried, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

4. Heaven is Encouraging Us- Luke 15:15 There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.
5. Joy is Awaiting us- Ps 126:5-6 They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him.
6. Wisdom is Calling us- Prov 11:30 He that winneth souls is wise.
7. Responsibility is pressing us- Ezekiel 33:8 If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from the error of his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

When's the last time YOU told someone how to receive Pardon and Peace in Christ??

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March 22, 1991 WHICH SUNDAY?

This Sunday is Psalm Sunday. Next Sunday will be Easter Sunday. The significance of this is often overlooked. On Psalm Sunday the crowds hailed Christ as King and gave him a "hero's welcome" into Jerusalem. The reason the next Sunday is Easter Sunday is because in four short days after proclaiming Christ as King the same people called for him to be crucified (How fleeting is fame!).

It's easy for us to look back at these people's foolishness and wonder at their fickleness. The sad thing is that we make the same kind of mistake.

Men admire Christ today and Praise Him but aren't willing to serve Him. Blind in their trespasses and sins, they continually stumble and bumble their way through life. That's because they have felt the warmth of the Sun but have never seen the beauty of the Light; they admire the charm of religion but shun the commitment of relationship.

God appreciates our Praise but requires our participation. Are you one of the crowd that crowns Him on Sunday and Crucify him on Thursday or are you daily taking up YOUR cross and following Him? Every one likes the praise of Psalm Sunday but only the cross brings the promise of Easter Sunday.

March 26, 1991 IT IS FINISHED

The gloomy darkness had descended several hours earlier. Now it had become oppressive as the tension mounted. The taunts and catcalls of the crowd had gradually subsided and now the only sound was the occasional moan of pain from the men on the crosses.

Suddenly the man on the middle cross pierced the air with a cry as sharp as a lunging spear, "It is Finished"! The soldiers, the crowd, and even his followers looked at each other in shock and confusion, wondering what he meant.

Then the ground began to tremble; and the subdued silence was replaced with yells of panic and fear. Trees were uprooted, rocks began tumbling down the hill, and one of the soldiers even saw many of the graves in the valley below burst open.

God had completed His part in the plan of Salvation; the penalty for sin had been paid, Jesus had died in our place. Now all that's needed is for man to put faith in God's provision.

God's part is done; Peace and Pardon are now available for all. It's up to you now whether you will accept God's offer before your life is finished and your hope is gone.

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March 28, 1991 THE CROSS

Without the Cross, Christianity is a failure! Jesus taught some marvelous lessons; so did many other great men, and many of their lessons make more "sense". Jesus performed many miracles; but so did many of the Old Testament Prophets, and the New Testament Charlatans.

It is the Cross that sets Christianity apart and gives it meaning. The reason for this will shock some people. Basically, God gave up on man's ability to learn and to change. Through the years man educated his mind and improved his living conditions but nothing affected his heart. New inventions only meant new ways to kill people or destroy morals. The greater man's opportunities the more he plunged into sin and wickedness.

The Cross is God's answer to this problem. Jesus' death on the cross paid sin's debt (Eternity in Hell apart from God). The taking up of the cross changes man's character as he denies himself and follows the example of Christ.

The Cross brings man face to face with the fact that he can't change himself by his own efforts or education. He must humble himself before God and accept God's terms. That's why men try every way they can to "get around" the cross; but if you don't come by the cross you can't come.

March 29, 1991 ROLLING THE ROCK

There were many reasons they forgot. First, there was the shock and grief they were experiencing over the sudden loss of someone they loved. Then there was the fact that they had to get up before daylight, get all their supplies in order, and walk several miles to the tomb. You can understand why they would have forgotten.

As they approached the garden of the tomb, however, it suddenly dawned on one of them. They were on their way to properly anoint the body of Jesus for burial but they had forgotten to get someone to come with them to help roll the stone away from the door of the tomb. They stopped in the middle of the road and started to turn back but somehow it seemed the best to go on to the tomb and see what they could do on their own.

We all know the story. When they arrived at the tomb God had rolled the stone away and Jesus was resurrected from the dead. It turned these ladies into witnesses for a living Christ instead of undertakers for a dead friend.

People tell me about a lot of "rocks" that keep them trapped among the dead. My hope is that they will realize that Easter means the "rocks" have been removed, as well as the resurrection accomplished. No need to worry, God knows about your situation as well as your sins; and He can handle both.

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April 2, 1991 PEANUT BUTTER MEMBERS

The story is told of a Pastor who was visiting a member of his congregation who had missed the previous Sunday services. After inquiring about the health of the man and his family and finding that all of them were fine the Pastor then asked the man why they had missed Church Sunday.

"Well, Pastor," said the man, "we were completely out of Peanut Butter."

The Pastor sat in thought for a moment and finally had to ask what being out of Peanut Butter had to do with attending Church.

"It's this way, Preacher" the man said. "When you're looking for an excuse, one thing is just as good as another."

I know a lot of "Peanut Butter" Church members. Their conscience tells them they ought to carry their family to church every week but their heart is not really in it. A sneeze becomes the flu, an ache becomes arthritis, or a cousin who you normally have little time for suddenly becomes one of the most important people in the world.

I expect to see you in church Sunday. And in case an emergency comes up, I've got a spare jar of peanut butter in the cupboard.

April 3, 1991 THE CIGAR BOX

The first church I pastored was unable to support me so I took a job at a TV repair shop during the week. My boss was extremely understanding of my situation and would allow me to instantly leave work if one of my members called with an emergency.

When I first went to work, however, the boss knew very little about me. We didn't have a cash register so we kept the daily receipts in a cigar box in a drawer in the repair shop. When people came in to pay a bill we would simply put the money in the cigar box. I only found out later but the boss kept a careful eye on that cigar box for the first month I worked there.

Once he knew I was consistently honest, he began allowing me to run more and more of the business until I was soon running it like it was my own.

The same principle operates in our work for the Lord. He entrusts us with resources and, depending on our faithfulness with them, he either increases or decreases our responsibility. Still more amazing, this principle carries over into our responsibility during the Millennial reign of Christ (Will you be a Mayor or garbage collector during the Millennium???).

There is someone watching the way you handle the "Cigar Box" in your life today. Will you come up short or will your accounts balance?

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April 5, 1991 PENCILS AND PUZZLES

I could hear her when I walked through the door. She was quarreling about everyone in general and thieves in particular.

"If I bought a thousand pencils a week, someone would still steal all of them!" she complained. "And I don't think it's just the customers walking off with them either. I think some of you are taking them as well."

On and on she muttered as I searched for the part I needed to repair my faucet. When I finally found it, I sort of eased up to the counter, put the part down, and took out my wallet. She continued to mutter the entire time she was ringing up the purchase and giving me my change.

Finally, with purchase in hand and ready to make my exit I spoke up, "Lady, I hate to tell you, but that pencil you're quarreling about is sticking in your hair."

She reached up, found it, and stood there open mouthed as I beat a hasty retreat.

We're in a verse by verse, chapter by chapter study of the book of Revelation at my Church right now. The most difficult problem I have is the fact that people are so interested in finding a new puzzle until they overlook the obvious. I have to constantly remind them, you may already have the answers if you look in the right place.

Before you spend all your time complaining (or accusing); check your own head. You may find more up there than you think.

April 10, 1991 FISHING FOR TAXES

Several years ago when I first became a "full time" pastor and started living in a parsonage I didn't know you had to pay taxes on the rental value of the parsonage so I hadn't paid enough estimated taxes during the year. When I figured up my taxes I found I owed the government \$100.

On a very limited salary, One Hundred Dollars is a very LARGE amount of money. I went to bed worried about how to pay it and, after tossing and turning for several hours, finally decided it was no use trying to sleep. Sitting in my chair praying and trying to decide what to do I opened my Bible to Matthew 17:27 and saw that Jesus had faced a similar situation. In his case he told Peter to go fishing and find the money he needed. I took that as a sign that God would supply my needs and went back to bed and peaceful sleep.

When I checked the mail the next morning I had a letter from a man from another state and inside the letter was a check for \$100!! He had enclosed the check in a bulletin from his church. Guess what was on the bulletin, "Let's go fishing"!!!

Taxes are taxing, but even taxes are no match for God. God knew I need this money several days before I knew it and instructed this man to mail it to me. Isn't it marvelous what God can, and Does, do?

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April 16, 1991 FROG MAN

My nephew decided to "adopt" a frog the other day. He built it a nest in one Styrofoam cup and a "swimming pool" in another. He would even catch bugs and other critters to put in the cup so the frog would have plenty to eat.

While, in his own way, I believe he loved the frog; he tried to attribute powers and abilities to the frog that the frog did not have. These powers (such as the power to fly when tossed across the garage) and abilities (to do a swan dive into a can of water from great heights) that the frog did not possess ending up putting the frog to tremendous pain.

Some people seem to think that we're related to God in the same way the frog was controlled by my nephew. They believe that, in His own way, God loves us; but that love ends up doing us more harm than good as we are put through continuous trials and tribulations. Somehow we're just supposed to smile and say, "I've got cancer. Isn't God good!".

I'm not a frog and God is not a little boy. God sometimes allows things in my life for my Good and His Glory but He never "plays games" with me. God doesn't just love the thought of me; He love me. That means He'll give me an escape from, or strength for, any problem that comes my way; even if it seems as tough as the games little boys play with frogs.

April 17, 1991 THE RAT RACE

More and More people talk to me about abandoning the "rat race" of life. They're tired of the endless cycle of going to work, coming home, watching silly TV programs, going to sleep, and going back to work. They're sick of endless debts; being ripped off by insurance companies, hospitals, and the government; and, as much as anything else, they're tired of being tired.

How does a person escape the Rat Race and begin to enjoy life instead of endure it??

FIRST- Turn control of your life over to God. Ask Him to forgive your past, assure your future, and work out His plan in your present.

SECOND- Don't let money be your Master. In the Bible and in real life, Less is more: the less you can be happy with, the happier you'll be.

THIRD- Time is more important than money, therefore, Use time, don't waste it. Give your family and your church an hour instead of a dollar; the interest you earn will amaze you.

FINALLY- Don't listen to the rats who invite you to race. The cheese they're chasing is the bait for a rat trap. I know the broad way is well populated and paved with good intentions but destruction is it's destination.

Don't race with rats. Come to Christ and soar with eagles.

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April 19, 1991 LIFE'S LOTTERY

It was an official looking envelope from an out of state bank. It was even written in official "jargon" as it informed me that my main problem in life for a while would be to figure out how to spend the Ten Million Dollars I was ALMOST sure to win in a magazine sweepstakes.

Upon closer examination the letter in reality said that I had passed Two of the Three steps necessary to win the prize; step one was the selection of my name and step two was the fact that they had send me the entry form! Step three was to send the entry form back (with magazine subscriptions, of course) so it could be selected as the grand prize winner.

I threw it in the trash and went on with my work. I just believe that God is more concerned with meeting my needs than some magazine company so I'd rather work for Him than play games with them.

There is an important principle here, however, regarding Salvation. God has already accomplished the first two "Steps". He loved man enough to want to save him. Then Christ paid for our sins on the cross. Now the only "step" that remains is for you to accept God's offer by Faith.

It always saddens me to see people more excited over a CHANCE for money than over a SURE Salvation. Which one excites you the most??

April 23, 1991 THE WITNESS

One of the most important duties of a Christian is bearing Witness of their faith. That makes it important for us to know the three qualifications of a Witness:

FIRST- Experience the Event. A court refuses to accept "hearsay" or "Circumstantial" Evidence. The Person must bear witness to what they Experienced or Saw. They don't have to understand everything; they simply have to experience it. A witness for Christ is merely someone who has been born again and now shares that fact with others.

SECOND- Be Truthful with your Details. A false witness brings confusion in the court as well as judgment on themselves. Don't exaggerate (You're a new creature but you're not perfect!). Don't make Christ a "magic portion" who will solve all of life's problems; A Christian has to bear a cross before he wears a crown.

THIRD- Be Willing to Witness. I don't know what the movie "The Silence of the Lambs" is all about but I see "The Silence of the Sheep" every week. Christians will talk about everything in the world except the most important thing, Jesus.

Witnessing is not an option, it's an obligation. Tell someone what Jesus has done for you, and can do for them, this week.

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April 24, 1991 LAST DAY PROPHETS

Last Day Prophets are not popular. People like Prophets who bring the thrill of Revival; not the thunder of Repentance. Yet, the task of a last day prophet is to condemn evil ways, correct wrong attitudes, and convince people to return to God.

The sad fact, and most difficult part, of such a ministry is that God tells the Prophet before he begins that he'll be a failure!- (Ezek 3:4,7) "And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted."

Despite this fact, the Last Day Prophet must continue to faithfully proclaim God's Message and complete his God given task. That's because the Prophet will be accountable to God for his faithful warnings- "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." (Ezek 3:18-19)

Every Christian today is, to some degree, a Last Day Prophet. We have been given the job of witnessing to a wicked world that grows worst each day; and is ultimately headed for destruction. We can't allow this fact to discourage us or tempt us to quit. When God rewards a "Last Day Prophet" it will not be based on his success; but on his faithfulness. And all of us can be faithful.

April 30, 1991 BUDDY GUARD

My nephew and I were playing "Cops and Robbers" the other day. We used pretend "Cops" so we could run and hide together. He hid behind the Night stand while I stooped beside the bed. I asked him what we were supposed to do next and he said, "You protect me when the police come because you're my Buddy Guard." (He meant to say Body Guard but since I call him my Buddy all the time he said Buddy Guard).

I began to think about that later and came to the conclusion that God is my "Buddy Guard" also. He's not a "hired gun" that protects me from death and disaster because I pay Him by being good. He's my Buddy Guard because He loves me.

As my Buddy Guard, He loved me enough to lay down His life for my sake. He's a Buddy Guard that helps me be victorious in my battles with Temptation- "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15). And He's a Buddy Guard that has invited me to live in His "Safe Haven" where I'll be free from attack by pain, death, or sorrow.

I'm glad Jesus is my Buddy Guard. I hope He's yours also.

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May 1, 1991 WHAT'S IN A NAME?

One of the most frequent questions people ask me about writing newspaper articles is why they don't spell my name right! It is spelled right (Mircheal is an Irish version of Michael). The awkward spelling has led to some interesting pronunciations; including my being called "Miracle" Jones by some of my teachers.

Oddly enough, one of the most memorable incidents I've had with my name has to do with my common last name, Jones. When I joined the Navy a group of us were flown from Columbia to Chicago

for basic training. Once the flight began the stewardess came down the aisle making a list of everyone's last name for record purposes.

The young man sitting beside me introduced himself as Howard Smith. When the stewardess got to our seats I told her, "My name is Jones and his name is Smith." "Sure," she said, "And what are your real names?" No matter how much I explained she still thought I was trying to fool her. Even when we left the plane in Chicago she said, "Goodby, Jones and Smith!".

Names ARE sometimes confusing. That's why it's important for you to recognize the name above all names; Jesus. His name is important because the Bible says that there is no other name given among men whereby you must be saved expect the name of Jesus.

Jones and Smiths may confuse you but Jesus will set you straight. Call His name today.

May 3, 1991 ESCAPING FROM LIFE

Jeremiah expressed the desire of many people when he prayed for a "lodging place in the Wilderness" (Jer 9:2); where he could escape the disasters befalling his nation. This is a common problem today as more and more people look for a "blanket" to hold on to, or hide under, in order to escape the problems and stress of life.

For the Rich, it's a house at the lake, beach, or mountains. For many of the poor, it's staying where they are physically but escaping the realities of life by allowing chemicals to numb or drug their minds. For multitudes of the "middle class", it's staring at the shifting colors of a TV screen hour after hour in the hopes of forgetting the bills and burdens that are closing in all around them.

It's true that everyone needs to relax and renew. The problem develops when we begin looking for a way to ESCAPE FROM life instead of PREPARE FOR life. The Good News that Jesus offers is that you don't have to Run From Life to find peace; you can find that Rest you're craving in a relationship with Jesus- "Come unto me, all ye that labor 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." (Mat 11:28-29).

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May 7, 1991 CABBAGE HEARTS

Recently one of the ladies in my Church purchased several head of cabbage. She said they were the nicest looking cabbage she had ever seen and she looked forward to making slaw from them.

When she broke them open, however, she found the hearts were black and unappetizing. What started out as a cheerful chore turned into an unpleasant task as she was forced to separate the good parts of the cabbage from the bad before she could make her slaw.

Jesus said sometimes people are like this; all white and clean on the outside but full of dead men's bones on the inside. He also said that some people spend all their time cleaning up the outside of the cup while the all important inside is left dirty and nasty- A man who would never get caught in adultery thinks nothing of his uncontrolled anger; A woman who dresses to the height of good taste seeps her mind in the mud and mire of daily soap operas; and young people who would never rob a store think nothing of destroying a classmate's reputation with gossip.

Men look on our outward appearance but God looks on our heart. Which one do you spend the most time keeping clean??

May 8, 1991 MOTHER'S PRAYERS

A famous General was once asked why he was so faithful to his job and so courageous under fire. His reply surprised everyone, "I owe everything to my Mother."

He then explained why. When he was a young man he obtained work on a canal boat against his mother's wishes. One dark night, when he was alone on the boat, he fell overboard. It was in a lock, where the water was deepest and he could not swim. As he was sinking beneath the water his hand touched a rope hanging over the side of the boat, apparently by accident. He used it to climb on deck and found that the rope was only held by the slightest twist around a block.

He felt it was God's hand which had saved him, and resolved to start for home at once to tell his godly mother. When he arrived home and described his miraculous escape she immediately asked, "What hour was it?". He told her, and she said, "At that very moment I was praying for you, my son, that God would protect and bless you."

He said he could now face any task or danger because he had God as his guide and his mother's prayers as his support.

Mothers, Do your children know you're praying for them??

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May 10, 1991 MOTHER'S KISS

It's easy to become a Millionaire. Simply find a way to put all the ingredients of a Mother's Kiss into a pill!

Wouldn't that be great? When someone at work mistreated you or made you feel bad all you would need to do would be take a "Mother's Kiss" pill and suddenly everything would be better.

Or on those mornings when you find it difficult to get out of bed and get ready for work because you just don't feel good, you could take a "Mother's Kiss" Pill and rush happily off to do a good day's work (It works for kids. They come in bruised and crying. Mother kisses them and they run happily back outside to play!).

Or think what a Blessing it would be to be able to take a "Mother's Kiss" Pill and suddenly discouragement, disappointment, or depression would vanish like the morning fog.

They haven't invented such a pill yet because we haven't figured out how to capture and contain a Mother's Love. The next best thing would be to go to your Mother and give her a big hug; she'll automatically give you a kiss back. And no matter how bad things are, they'll suddenly become a lot better!

Solomon said a Virtuous woman had a price far above rubies. I guess he knew that even her kiss is worth a million.

May 14, 1991 The Job God Wants You to Have

Three of the most important decisions in a person's life are normally made by the time they are twenty-five (Marriage, Job, and Salvation). Since many people are graduating from college and High School right now, and beginning to look for a job, I thought it would be good to find out how to find the Right Job (One of the worst things I can imagine is having to get up and go to a job you hate each day).

1> Does the Job Violate Biblical Principles? God does not want me to become a murderer, thief, or drug dealer. He will not lead me into a job that requires me to be dishonest, unholy, or unchristian.

2> Is it contrary to my natural inclinations? Some people would feel trapped in an office. Some people work well with their hands while others work better with their heads. Some prefer to work with

other people while others are better as "loners". Some people need the structure of given orders while others need the freedom of giving orders.

When your job goes against your God given personality then you develop inner conflicts that affect your performance, your family, and your attitude.

3> Have you Prayed about it? I've never been turned down for a job I prayed about and was told of the Lord to seek. When you pray about a job it gives you confidence and courage as you apply for it; both are qualities sought by employers.

I believe there should be no unemployed Christians who are physically and mentally able to work. God has the right job waiting for you. Remember, A Job becomes a Joy when you know it's God's plan for your life.

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May 15, 1991 SUCCESSFUL SEED

One of the most intriguing Bible verses about Success is Mark 4:20 "And these are they which are sown on the good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred."

Same Sun, Same Soil, Same Seed; Different Results.

In the success oriented society we live in today it's important that we grasp this principle. Equal effort does not always produce equal results.

Some very very good Pastors labor in obscurity and adversity in small struggling churches. Other Pastors, who are no better (maybe not as good), find fortune, fame, and popularity at a growing developing Church. They preach from the same Bible, serve the same God, and exhibit the same zeal; but one reaps only Thirty "Bushels per acre" while the other brings in a bumper crop of One Hundred "Bushels per acre".

When God counts your crop it won't be based on bushels per acre but on faithfulness in the field. Don't be discouraged into leaving your seed in the Barn. Sow with all your might and rejoice in whatever the seed produces. After all, Thirty Bushels per acre is much better than no bushels per acre!

May 17, 1991 ACCEPTING FAULTS

I love good singing. I envy those preachers who can sing a special before they preach or burst into song in the middle of a sermon. The problem is, my heart has the desire, but my mouth doesn't have the ability! (I have been politely, but firmly, removed from the choir of every Church I've pastored!).

That's the way it is in Life some times. Your voice is not good, or your mind is not quite as sharp as other people, or, no matter how hard you try, you still fumble the ball. You want to be the quarterback but you know you'll never get pass waterboy!

It's important that a person never use their limitations as an excuse for laziness but it's equally important that they learn to accept their limitations. That way they won't waste their life trying to become something God never intended.

God has a unique and special place for every person. When you try to be something else you end up with feet that hurt because you're trying to wear shoes too big for you. Or you end up with a headache all the time as you try to put a size Seven head in a size Six hat.

Don't fight your faults. Be the best you can at what you are. While the Choir practices now I enjoy the music as I write these messages. I can't sing; most of them can't write articles. We go well together.

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May 21, 1991 DISCIPLINE

One of the fundamental reasons for the anarchy that exist in Homes and Society today is our failure to understand the purpose and need of Discipline for wrong doing. Like the person who doesn't understand the difference between a murderer and a doctor (The murderer plunges a knife into you to harm you; the Doctor to help you) we have confused Punishment and Discipline; and the result has created chaos.

Punishment is "payment in kind" for continued rebellion. Throughout the Bible (The flood, Sodom's destruction) God punishes those who continually rebel against His Word. The Purpose of the Punishment is not meant to correct or convert the person but to DESTROY those who continually defy God.

Discipline, however, is an act of love (Heb 12:6) designed to bring a person to the realization of the dangers involved in their present course of action and then to cause them to TURN FROM their present path back to the correct way. It is to DEVELOP the person instead of destroy them.

People who continue in wrong and rebellion should be dealt with severely. Those who err from the right should experience the pain necessary to convince them to leave the wrong path; and avoid it in the future. Anyone willing to change should be given every opportunity to do so.

If capital punishment in Society and Corporal punishment in the home were administered by these guidelines we might be able to walk our streets again in safety.

May 22, 1991 NORMAL PEOPLE

Every person faces 4 common problems as they travel through life. The way they master these problems will determine if their life is joyful or full of sorrow.

First- BAD JUDGEMENT. The sad truth is that each of us must Learn from life. We aren't born "knowing it all" (in spite of what some people think!). Our lack of knowledge causes us to make the wrong decisions; or even the right decisions at the wrong time. We must learn from our mistakes, but we WILL make mistakes.

Second- SELFISH DISPOSITION. Everyone thinks the world, at least to some degree, revolves around them. That's why they're impatient with waitresses and stop lights; and can't understand why everything shouldn't be made to accommodate them. The big "I" and little "You" are a world wide problem.

Third- LAZY NATURE. The average American no longer works to build a company or establish a fortune. They simply put in the time necessary to allow them to enjoy their special brand of recreation. We're couch potatoes because we Want to be.

Fourth- CIRCUMSTANCES. The Bible says "Time and chance happen to all men". Sometimes we simply end up at the wrong place at the wrong time. We can curse our circumstances; or use our stumbling blocks as stepping stones.

The marvel of Christianity is that it deals with all of these problems. The Holy Spirit gives us Wisdom, the Cross teaches us to deny ourself, the Bible shows us the need of employment and service, and a Relationship with God allows us to know that all things work together for the good to them that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose.

Don't let normal problems plague you. Become a new person in Christ Jesus.

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May 24, 1991 INVITATION MISTAKES

The preacher was waxing eloquent on the evils of alcohol. Over and over he exhorted sinners to throw their intoxicating beverages into the river and begin a new life. But the message lost most of its impact as the song leader chose for the closing hymn, "Shall we gather at the River?"!

When the regular piano player was absent during a recent service at a friend's church the "fill in" was only able to play certain songs. Things still went along pretty well until the conclusion of the stirring message that called on sinners to come to the altar and receive Christ as Savior. The "Fill in" Pianist picked for an invitation song, "I shall not be Moved"!

During the course of my pastoring I have seen many mistakes made during the all important moment of Invitation. Eternal life and death decisions are being made as music seeps into the air but, all too often, it's at just this moment the baby begins to cry, a kid develops an overwhelming thirst, or someone decides to beat the crowd by leaving now instead of waiting five more minutes.

The Climax of the sermon is the Invitation to Salvation, Dedication, or Commitment. If you're going to make a mistake, don't let it be here. Ask God to "Pass me Not" but accept you "Just as I Am" as you "Let Him In" because you went from being "Almost Persuaded" to saying "Jesus, I Come".

May 28, 1991 The Lord is With Me

One of those little "catch phrases" we find in the Bible during critical times is "The Lord was with him".

It is used to give honor to the king in 2 Chron 1:1- "And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly."; and it's used to show the basis of Revival in 2 Chron 15:9- "And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him."

One of the times I like it the best, however, is when it's used in places like Acts 7:9 "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,".

My dad suffered tremendously with kidney stones before his death, "but God was with him". My wife was assaulted in our home, "but God was with us". My mother in law recently died while my wife was in the hospital, "but God was with us". In the middle of Trouble, God is still there!!

And the greatest comfort of all is that even when "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psa 23:4).

The Lord is with me; I wouldn't trade that for anything. Is He with you? Are you with Him??

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May 29, 1991 Take Up Thy Bed

"And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately" (Acts 9:34).

One of the oft voiced criticisms of Christianity today is that a lot of people who claim to accept Christ as Savior still "lay on their bed".

Christianity is supposed to produce "new Creatures" in Christ. Many claim to believe, however, but still stay in the same situations they were in before they professed to be saved. They aren't willing to work, they won't attempt to mend broken relationships, and they're just as helpless now as they were

before. The only difference people can see is that they now expect the Church to support them instead of the government.

Over and over Jesus commanded people He healed to "take up their bed" and walk. This was to show physically what had taken place spiritually- "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Mat 9:6).

Your faith in Christ ought to get you off your "bed" and into the work of the Body of Christ. If it doesn't, you need to check and see if you're really "healed" after all.

May 31, 1991 LIFE'S RACE

The most common illustration used in the Bible to typify life is that of a runner running a race. The runner has a distinct beginning, an established course, and a goal at the end.

Many of the Moral and Medical dilemmas society finds itself in today come because we have ignored these principles.

Sex is fun; but it has consequences. These consequences include lost of self esteem, the spread of disease, and conception of children. I believe that Life begins at conception. The Blurring of this starting point of life has caused tremendous harm and death.

Life is difficult but exciting. It becomes painful or perplexing when we "run off the race track." When we're lost in the crowd we lose peace of heart, purpose in life, and become disqualified from winning the race.

Death is on everyone's calendar. We try to use every means possible to escape it but everyone must cross the finish line sometime.

One man said life was like a clock without hands. You can hear it ticking but you don't know when it will strike midnight. The goal of every runner should be to be able to say with Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness..." (II Tim 4:7-8).

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June 4, 1991 CARS AND COMMITMENT

While on my way to the Hospital early one morning I noticed the passengers in the cars along the way.

Some seemed to be eating breakfast as they traveled. Some seemed to be doing last minute primping. Several were in animated conversation. Some even looked as if they were three-fourths asleep.

Some seemed to be well organized in their daily routine and were content to patiently drive the speed limit. Others zoomed by with anxious, harried looks on their face as if that extra 5 minutes of sleep was just enough to make them permanently late.

Car drivers, like many other things, reflect varying human personalities. These personalities are given to us at birth, developed by the circumstances of life, and cause us to be "set in our ways" when we reach adulthood.

It is possible for God to change our Personality; BUT it takes more than a mental acknowledgement of our problems at the end of a stirring sermon. Paul said a person who had a selfish personality was to not only stop seeking for himself but also to begin giving to others. That's a radical

change that will only occur when you make a life commitment instead of a lip commitment. And that's the kind of commitment Christ calls for.

June 5, 1991 SPOTTED REPUTATION

One of the principles we promote in the Helping Hand Ministry of our Church is turning Welfare into Workfare. If a person needs help we attempt to find a compatible task for them and then pay them for the work. This builds the person's self-esteem while allowing the Church to follow the Biblical Admonition that "if a person will not work, neither should he eat" (II Thess 3:10).

Recently someone in this situation was given the opportunity to do some yard work around the Church in exchange for a payment on their light bill. When I checked the completed job in order to pay the person I was impressed with the quality of the work.

Several days later, however, a problem became obvious. In spraying the weed killer around the parking area he had become careless and allowed the spray to get into the yard. Now we have a number of brown spots in our otherwise beautifully green yard.

This was a careless mistake that is more aggravating than harmful but it tainted an otherwise good job.

Solomon described it like this, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the Apothecary to send forth a stinking savor; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor" (Ecc 10:1). Remember that when you're tempted to be careless with your reputation.

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June 7, 1991 The Cure

A missionary recently told about a beautiful fruit tree in the yard of a neighbor. It was a rare tree and always produced abundant fruit. One day when the Missionary came to visit he found the tree had been cut down. When he asked why he was told it was because people kept stealing the fruit.

A lady in the Church had problems with her water pump. One day when I was visiting she told me she wished she had a stick of dynamite to blow it up.

In Both cases the cure was worst than the disease!!

That's the way some people handle their life. When things go bad they destroy their marriage with adulterous affairs, their body with drugs or alcohol, or their character with violent acts of anger.

One of the earliest lessons I learned was that you can't run away from your problems. Destroying fruit trees still leaves thieves for neighbors. Blowing up water pumps makes for a terribly thirsty time. Drowning your troubles only adds to your troubles.

The Good News from God is that He is able to help you Overcome your problems. He begins by changing YOU. Then He works on changing your circumstances. And it's amazing how thieving neighbors can turn into good neighbors when fruit is shared instead of hoarded.

June 11, 1991 BILLY'S RETURN

He could hear the creak of the rocker on the porch again. Every since Billy had left home over a year ago Mr. Joseph seemed to find time every day to sit in the rocker and stare down the road. The eldest Brother, John, had said, "Good Riddance to bad Rubbish" and was now trying to make this the biggest farm in the area. Mr. Joseph had never given up, however.

Billy had always been a little rebellious, and a whole lot stubborn, but he always seemed to have that impish grin that made you want to hold him instead of spank him. It just hadn't been the same since he left.

Suddenly he heard a startled grasp from the porch. When he got to the window he could see Mr. Joseph running down the road. At first he didn't know what was wrong but then he recognized the ragged stranger stumbling down the road as none other than Billy!

Now he could hear Mr. Joseph calling for him to fix his best meal and bring some clean clothes. Billy was Home, let the rejoicing begin!

If you have wandered from the Father's house; and find yourself in the hog pens of the world, let me invite you to return home. The Father's looking for you and we're waiting to rejoice with you.

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June 12, 1991 DUTIES OF A DAD

A Dad had a lot of responsibilities in life- earning an income, teaching his children to play ball, and taking out the garbage! With his Responsibilities also come some duties.

1. Begin a new Household- "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen 2:24). That's why the wife changes her last name; because the two individuals now form one household. That's why married couples should not live in the same house as their parents. That's why we would do well to spend less money on Weddings and more on Marriage.

2. Train His Children in Spiritual Principles- "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deu 6:6-7). The Husband is the Priest of the Household and should take the leadership in training the children in the ways of the Lord. Just like you take time to teach them to hit a ball or learn to fish so you should take time to teach them the Word of God and make spiritual applications to real life situations.

The mother bears the Children, the father bears the responsibility for training them. Both are hard, but necessary, obligations.

June 14, 1991 Loving Husbands

Possibly one of the most difficult commands in the Bible for a Husband to live is Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;". It's easy to talk down to a wife, and "put up with" a woman; but it's difficult to understand and practice the principles of love.

Let me give you Three Principles that will help a Husband love his wife correctly.

1> **LOVE HER MORE**- Jesus kept asking His Disciples if they loved Him more than anything else. Every wife needs to know that also. If ball games, being with "the guys", alcohol, or anything else consistently comes between you and your wife then you need to find which one you love more.

2> **LOVE HER REGULARLY**- Paul told the Corinthians to be consistent in making love to avoid temptations. This is not the selfish sex the world promotes. It's the "knowing" one another the Bible talks about that make two as one. It brings security and stability to the relationship. One man said it like this, "A man with a Cadillac in the garage doesn't look at a Volkswagen in the street".

3> **LOVE HER "TO DEATH"**- Christ was willing to die for the Church. Your wife should know she's not just a convenience, a cook, or a caretaker but she's your companion til death do you part. This kind of love sacrifices for the mate and shares your very being.

Love your wife; not just a good thought, a command from God.

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June 18, 1991 **LIES ABOUT LOVE**

The Adult Sunday School Teacher in my Church told people recently that most of them would not recognize Moses when they got to Heaven because everyone would be looking for Charlton Heston!

The same thing has happened to many people's concept of God. Mushy Preachers and Hollywood Movies have convinced most people that God is a senile old grandfather who wouldn't hurt a fly. His authority and Judgment have been overshadowed by a false idea about his "Love".

The Concept is widely believed, but totally wrong, THAT GOD LOVES EVERYONE. There are times the Bible says God hates Individuals ("Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Rom 9:13) as well as "Classes" of People ("The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth" Ps 11:5).

God's Love is Available for everyone but it is not blind to a person's conduct or character. The Bible is very clear, in spite of what people think, that someone who continues in Homosexuality, Adultery, or Drunkedness will not go to Heaven (1 Corinth 6:9-10).

God is willing to forgive anyone who will forsake their wicked ways but it's wrong to comfort or condone those who continue in these sins with a false hope of Heaven.

Hollywood is not Heaven; and the fact that you can get someone to tell you your sin is alright doesn't change the Bible. Don't believe the lies. Come to the real Love of God.

June 19, 1991 **PEOPLE PREACHING**

One of the most difficult things about being a Pastor is learning to "lead the Flock". A Pastor's training and desire all point toward preaching the Word. He soon learns, however, that preaching doesn't place nearly as high on his Members's agenda as it does his.

It becomes evident rather quickly that Church Members will accept an extremely wide diversity in preaching styles and contents without saying a great deal (At least to the preacher's face!); but woe to the Pastor who changes a Church custom or offends a Church member.

The Pastor soon finds himself becoming a People Manager instead of a Sermon Preparer. And that's the way it's supposed to be!

Jesus met with a preacher who wasn't sure how to be saved, a woman who wasn't sure who she was married to, and multitudes of sick and suffering people with no hope in their future. His sermons to them are what we base our sermons on today.

A good pastor is one that has learned that a sermon from the mind affects only the mind; while a sermon from a broken heart helps heal other broken hearts. You must never preach to please the people but you must never forget the purpose of the sermon is the people and not just the preaching.

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June 21, 1991 **Putting up with Garbage**

It began as more of a nuisance than anything else. First it was just odd bits of trash on the lawn. Nothing to really get angry about; just an aggravation.

Then came the beer cans and whiskey bottles. Now the trash was not just aggravating it was dangerous. Broken glass was dangerous to Children playing and lawn mowers threw beer cans across the yard which could break windows or injure someone.

But everyone has to have their rights; and I didn't want to "make a scene", so I tried to keep ignoring it. Besides, when I talked with other people they seemed to be having a worst time than I was. So I let it go and tried to look the other way.

Then one day when I opened the door to my house I almost gagged with the smell. There, in the middle of my floor, were bags of their decaying garbage!

How could they be so insensitive? I know I have to give them a right to live like they want but must I put up with the stench of their garbage in my house??

I made a decision. That cable channel is no longer welcome in my house. Everyone else may think it's great to watch movies full of cursing, violence, and nudity but they didn't SHOW me any good TIME and I made a stand against garbage in my house.

I can't keep TV from putting beer cans and trash in my "yard" but I'm not going to pay to let someone put decaying garbage in my house.

If enough people get tired of living with garbage the distributors will have to find something else to do; something productive instead of destructive.

June 25, 1991 **Thinking about Christmas**

This article is for June 25, 1991. That means Christmas was exactly 6 months ago! A lot has happened in those six months. Our nation has fought and won a war in Kuwait; our state has grown jaded with seeing Legislators accepting bribes on hidden cameras; and I've managed to keep all those pounds I gained during all those Christmas dinners!

During these hot muggy June days I look back with longing at those cool crisp December mornings. When I walk around town and see everyone hot and harried and talking about nothing but vacation; I remember with fondness the cheery hello and the "Merry Christmas" that was a part of our life for a few days in December.

But today's date not only means it's been six months SINCE Christmas; it also means it's only six months UNTIL Christmas! Presents, parties, programs, and pageants are just over the horizon. It won't be long until everyone will begin thinking about Baby Jesus and mangers and shepherds again.

All of that is good but let me remind you that He who came as a baby the first time will come as a King the next time; and He may not wait until Christmas to come! You'll have to start making preparations for Christmas soon but you should have already made your preparation to meet Christ.

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June 26, 1991 **LAWYERS**

The old joke goes like this. The fence between Heaven and Hell had fallen down. Saint Peter and Satan held a meeting to discuss it. Peter told Satan that he was responsible for maintaining the fence. Satan said he wasn't going to fix it. Peter took out the contract and showed Satan in Black and White where it was his responsibility to fix the fence and then told him he'd sue if he didn't fix it. Satan looked back and said, "Yea, and where will you find a lawyer in Heaven!"

Admittedly, Lawyers don't have the best reputation in the world when it comes to ethics (Is that why so many Lawyers become Legislators?) but part of that is a misunderstanding of Biblical terms.

Jesus soundly condemned "Lawyers" in Scripture but these "Lawyers" were religious scholars, not Lawyers as we know them today.

It's a genuine shame that contracts in America today have gone from a handshake to the courtroom but that's not the Lawyer's fault; it's the result of society's declining morals. And we always find it easier to condemn the results of a problem than to find the root of the problem. The sad truth is, there wouldn't need to be so many Lawyers in America if Christians followed Biblical Principles instead of Worldly practices.

By the way, the Bible does name a saved Lawyer- Zenas in Titus 3:13. So the "fence" between Heaven and Hell is still intact. Which side of the fence are you on??

June 28, 1991 GOERS AND SENDERS

I had wrestled with the decision for several weeks. My job was doing well and I was content with my situation; yet an inner voice kept nagging me to take the plunge. Finally, sitting beside a dirt road on a Sunday Afternoon, I made the decision. With a settle mind and peace in my heart I drove home to tell my parents.

When I arrived home I found utter chaos. Mom was crying, Dad was fighting back tears, and everyone else looked devastated. Through all the confusion I was finally able to find out that my oldest brother had just called from Hawaii to tell the family that he was on his way to Viet Nam.

In the midst of all those tears and concern I had to drop my bombshell; I was going to join the Navy and would probably end up in Viet Nam also. It was a tough announcement; and one I could not have made without God's Peace and Assurance in my heart.

During our celebration of Independence Day I want us to consider those who have waited and worried and prayed while sons or husbands were living in Harm's way. The Bible says those who stay at home and care for the stuff will share equally with those who have borne the heat of the Battle.

So while we honor our fighters this Fourth let's also say a special Thank You to those who loved our country enough to share their loved ones as well as their love. That's the same principle God used when He sent His Son to die for you.

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July 2, 1991 A Nation's God

Officially America has no God. Everyone has the right to worship (or abstain from worshipping) who and what they please. Yet, one of the most basic laws of human nature is that everyone will worship something. With that in mind, let me point you in the right direction.

1. CHOSE THE RIGHT GOD- "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." (Psalm 33:12).
2. FOLLOW GOD'S GUIDELINES- "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Prov 14:34)
3. REALIZE THAT GOD BLESSES ACCORDING TO PRESENT ACTIONS- "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." (Jer 18:7-10).

A Nation is made up of people. People don't serve a God by accident; a decision must be made. When God runs a survey of YOUR heart, who will He find is the God of this nation??

July 3, 1991 MODEL CITIZENS

One of the ladies in my Church recently did some painting in her home. Now I notice that a lot of the ladies in my Church are involved in painting something in their home. Isn't it strange how the activity of one person will inspire others to similar action?

That's something the good citizens of our country need to recognize again. Most people will readily admit that America has a real problem with drugs, crime, and moral decline. But talking about how bad it is does not change it!

Paul told Titus to "show himself a pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7). That's what America needs today; some good patterns for people to follow [Even many in the news media have begun to recognize the value of positive example over negative condemnation and opportunities are now given to show what works instead of what went wrong].

It can be "simple" things like keeping up your yard. Several people on my street worked hard to have beautiful yards. Now it's spread down the entire street until we have one of the most beautiful streets in town.

As we celebrate our country's Birthday let's remember what it means to be "Model" Citizens. America is great as long as her people are good. That doesn't come from a Government program, it comes from individual citizens who live right and become patterns for others.

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July 5, 1991 COMMUNICATION CONFLICTS

I hate it when anger is the only weapon you have left. The man's family was in trouble and he needed help. Instead of accepting help, however, he wrapped himself in bitterness and anger and cast off all my overtures as mere "clichés".

Thankfully, there was another pastor present that I could depend on so I turned this man's weapon back on him. I kept prodding and poking him with verbal truths until he exploded in anger and frustration.

Having accomplished my objective I eased out of the situation. Now the other preacher was able to share God's help and comfort with someone who had come to realize that anger is a sorry ally.

It left me with a bad reputation; but I didn't go to build my reputation, I went to help this family.

We live in a world that has more means of communication than in all previous history combined. Yet, we have less real communication than ever.

Jesus came as the "Word" to communicate God's message to man. We're so wrapped up in our own world, however, until we fail to really listen? We would do well to remember the story of the man who kept a two by four to "get his mule's attention".

The book of Revelation shows what happens when God gets angry. If I were you I'd listen while God is still pleading, instead of pronouncing judgment.

July 9, 1991 **The Robber**

At first he didn't even think about it. Then one day someone mentioned it and it began to gnaw at his conscience. He passed it off by saying everyone else did it; and, besides, he needed it more than they did anyway. But, somehow, it always seemed to come back to haunt him.

Everyone in the community thought he was a fine upstanding citizen. He wondered what they would think if they found out about his secret sin. Worse than that, he wondered what he would do when he had to face the Lord and try to explain why he had continued to do wrong.

Finally, it began to affect his sleep. Almost every night he'd toss and turn while he dreamed the same dream. In the dream he was standing before the judgement bar of God while the accusation rang out for all to hear, "Behold the man who robbed God!"

Now he knew that missing a week of Church during Vacation was no excuse to miss paying his tithes. When he went on Vacation he thought Disneyland needed his money more than the Church but now he knew how important it was that he cheerfully give God his offering EVERY week.

Use your Vacation for Rest, not Robbery. Leave your tithes with God so you won't be tempted to spend them on the world. God has blessed you with all you've got. He doesn't like it when you steal the part you're supposed to give back to Him.

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July 10, 1991 **CHURCH NAMES**

I think it was about ten or fifteen years ago when I began to notice the change. At first, I thought it was just another "phase" we were going through but then I saw the pattern begin to form.

It was about that time that churches began to be called "Fellowship", "Unity", or "Peace" instead of "Grace", "Calvary", or "Bethel". The names represent a change in attitude about the purpose of the Church.

Let me say immediately that every "Fellowship", "Unity", and "Peace" church I know are fine Bible teaching Churches. It's not the individual churches I'm concerned with; it's the attitude of people in general that cause names to be chosen.

People have stopped looking at the Church (regardless of it's name) as a place to Preach the Word of God. Now it's a place to encourage People and comfort them in their sorrow (and sometimes their sin!). The focal point has changed from man worshipping God to God meeting man's needs.

People used to want a church name to identify some aspect of God's Salvation because they knew the most important thing in the world was being Born Again. Now they're looking for a place to help them be "Better" people. It's time the Church got back to being God's Church instead of a people sanctuary.

July 12, 1991 **GAMES AND LIFE**

Our Church normally has a time of Food, Fun, and Fellowship to celebrate the Fourth of July. It gives us a chance to show the world that Christianity has a fun side as well as a serious side.

I try to give a Spiritual lesson for every game we play and I think these lessons would be good for you to learn also.

1. Watermelon Seed Spitting Contest- I use this example all the time to tell people that they have to learn to accept the good and throw away the bad in life.
2. Sack Race- It's hard to run the race of life if you're still hobbled by your sins. Cast aside that sin so you can be free indeed.

3. 3-legged Race- You must learn to get in step with your partner in life or there will be chaos. A marriage joins two into one; joined in some areas and separate in others, but working together toward a common goal.
4. Tug of War- The Flesh wars against the Spirit and tries to drag you away from God.
5. Bucket Brigade- Christians must learn to Work together if they are to deliver people from the "fire".
6. Water Balloon Toss- Many Things in life require delicate handling or you'll end up "all wet". That's where you must pray for wisdom.

Life is not a game, but many games remind us of life principles. I hope these guidelines will help you learn to live right.

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July 16, 1991 THE CHURCH MEMBER

This is the first in a three part series about what it means to be a Member of a Church. Church Membership does not save you but I believe EVERY saved person will want to be a member of a Church. Sometimes, however, people don't understand what to expect from the Church and what the Church expects from them. I hope these articles will help you realize the great privilege, and great responsibility, of being a Church member.

The FIRST requirement of being a Church Member is to JOIN THE CHURCH! More and more people attend Church but refuse to become a Member because they don't want to obligate themselves to anything. They look at the Church as a place to GIVE them Comfort instead of a place to SERVE the Lord. As a result they look for a Church just like they do a Grocery Store; the cheapest price on the "products" they like. And all it takes is a "sale" at another Church to get them to attend there.

Once you make the decision to join the Church you must meet the Requirements for Church Membership. Our Church has Three Such Requirements- (1) You must be willing to acknowledge the fact that you have repented of your sins and by Faith have accepted Christ as your Savior. (2) You must be Baptized by immersion. (3) You must be willing to follow the faith and practices of our Church.

Next week we will look at what is expected of you as far as Church attendance is concerned. Meanwhile, why don't you attend Church this week. You might find you like it even better than the Grocery Store.

July 17, 1991 HOME SICK FOR HEAVEN

Sometimes I get so home sick for Heaven until I can hardly stand it. I come in from visiting sick people in the hospital or comforting a bereaved family over the lost of a loved one and my answering machine is full of calls for help from people with heartaches and troubles. I pick up the paper and it's full of crime, crooked politicians, and chaos. I turn on the TV and it spews out violence, vulgar language, and mindless people laughing about other people's sins and problems.

I long for that celestial city where troubles and tragedy are not allowed. I crave to live in that Heavenly Bliss where no Hospitals are built, where mansions have open doors because criminals can't practice their crime, and where the noise I hear is the sound of joy and praise and worship.

I yearn for the time when tears are all wiped away, when pain is hardly remembered, and when death doesn't darken any doors. And, most of all, I hunger for the time when I shall see Him face to face whom so long I have known heart to heart; my Savior, my Lord, my Life- Jesus Christ. He's coming for me one day, I hope it's today.

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July 19, 1991 EVALUATING THE SERMON

The highlight of the Church Service is supposed to be the Sermon. To many people, however, it's dull, dry, and dreary; and they can't wait for it to conclude so they can go home. I want to see today how the sermon can become a Blessing instead of a Burden.

First of all, Determine the Topic of the Sermon. This is usually found in the Bulletin or given by the speaker at the beginning of the message. This allows you to focus on one area instead of wondering where the Preacher plans to go with the message.

Second, Know what to look for in the Sermon. A good sermon contains 3 main ingredients: (1) Inspiration- It is a Message FROM God FOR the People. (2) Illustration- Different ways to explain the point of the message so you can find somewhere to "grab on" to it's meaning. (3) Application- One man said this is where God's Word and Man's Works Meet. This means you find something in the message you can use in your life or situation.

Finally, Realize the Speaker has only 30 minutes to help you live your life and face your death. Think of how carefully you would listen to his instructions if he were telling you where to find a hidden treasure worth over a Million Dollars. If his message is from God, it's worth more than that!

God has decreed that men would be saved thru the "foolishness of preaching" (1 Corinthians 1:21). I hope you'll ignore the foolishness and listen to the Preaching.

July 23, 1991 THE CHURCH MEMBER (II)

Last week we looked at the requirements for becoming a Church Member. Today I want us to see Why we should Attend the Church.

First, Every Christian has the Desire to Attend - "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psa 122:1). Most people do what they really want to do. If their heart is at the Church then their body will be also. If their heart is at the beach...

Second, There is the Duty to Attend Church- "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb 10:25). Jesus died to establish the Church and He expects us to be faithful in attending it's services. If most people attended their jobs like they attend Church there would be a lot of unemployed people in this state.

Third, There is the Dividend from Attending Church- The Church is a place to find Rest for your Spirit, Comfort for your Sorrows, Guidance for your life, and Salvation for your soul. It even teaches you where to put your treasures so you won't have to worry about them decaying or being stolen.

When Sunday comes you know where you belong.

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July 24, 1991 LORD OF THE LIONS

Sin had led to captivity. It always does. In ancient Israel the captor was a foreign nation. In America today Sin leads to bondage to disease, drugs, drudgery, or drunkenness.

When Assyria captured Israel it moved the Israelite to another country as slaves and replaced them with people from modern day Iraq. They soon found, however, that their new home was not the paradise they had envisioned.

The Lord sent lions among them because they did not respect God as they should. This brought fear, death, and confusion among the people. So they sent for a Priest of Israel to teach them enough of God's way to enable them to escape the plague of the lions.

Soon the Bible says they were busy fearing the Lord and serving their own gods (II Kings 17:33).

Reminds you of America today, doesn't it? Beaches are crowded with people who wear less clothes on the beach than they do to bed; and who continually cry over the decline of moral values in America today. Church members party all Saturday night to the roar of Rock Music and then try to escape the lion's roar by struggling thru a few verses of "Amazing Grace" on Sunday Morning. And every Politician in America finds time for the Church, as well as the bar, during an election year.

Some people want just enough religion to escape the lion; and end up afraid of life and scared to die. If you really want to live, don't just fear the Lion; love the Lamb.

July 26, 1991 **MISSING THE TARGET**

We had done it so many times before until it was all part of the routine now. The spotter gave the coordinates and we plotted them into the gun control computer. We would then fire a salvo to allow him to judge the distance.

This time it took longer than usual before the spotter called back. When he did he asked us why we hadn't shot. We told him we had shot and were awaiting his correction.

There was silence on the line for several moments and then he came back with, "I think we goofed.". Another set of coordinates were given and this time everything went according to procedure.

I have often wondered what happened to that shell.

It's interesting to note that the Bible calls Sin "Missing the Mark". It refers to the fact that when an archer missed the target someone would called, "You've Sinned."

We don't know what destruction we did when we missed our target but the Bible is very plain about the destruction sin causes in our life and in our relationship with God. Don't let mistaken information about what God calls sin destroy you and those around you. God's target is well defined; don't miss the mark.

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July 30, 1991 **THE CHURCH MEMBER (III)**

We've already talked about How to become a Church Member and why you should Attend Church. Now let's find out How to Get Something from the Service.

You must come to the service with The Right Attitude. Some people come in expecting God to "Cram a Blessing down their throat". They think that once they walk thru the Church doors they've done their part. One thing I have noticed thru the years is that the people who GET the most from Church services are the people who Participate in the Services.

There are many ways you can actively Participate in the services. Don't just hold the Hymn Book, sing the songs. Don't critique other people's prayers, pray yourself. Don't look for things to distract you from the sermon, look for Blessings in the sermon (I've always found that taking notes helps me to concentrate on what the preacher is preaching, as well as receive the full benefit of the message).

If you will actively seek to Worship God and make yourself "Blessable" during the Church Service you will leave the Church saying "It was good to be in the House of the Lord." Hope that's where you'll be this Sunday.

July 31, 1991 WHO'S AT THE DOOR?

I was in my office talking on the phone with a lady who had a marital problem. The door bell rang and I was starting to interrupt the lady on the phone so that I could go to the door when I saw a brief flash of a young child at the window. The neighbor kids like to ring my door bell in fun sometimes so I assumed that's who it was.

Then it rang again. A little angry at being interrupted on such an important matter I asked the lady to hold while I went to the door.

There was a child there, but not the child I expected. Instead, one of the members who had missed church the previous Sunday had sent a check for the church of over \$100 for me to give to the Treasurer.

Sometimes I wonder if opportunity doesn't always knock when we're in the middle of something. We know we need to attend Church to learn how to live and to prepare to die but somehow the problem on the phone is more important than God's knock on our door. It's just so easy to get so busy trying to manage the problems of life until we don't have time to find the meaning to life.

Jesus said He was knocking on your door, so He could come in and fellowship with you. I know your problems are pressing but "lay down the phone" and answer the door. You'll be surprised at what's awaiting you.

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August 2, 1991 THE DARK SIDE

I've seen Church Members destroy other members with gossip outside the church and then stand up in Church and cry about how much they love the Lord. I've seen singers sing beautiful songs for God from hearts full of bitterness and anger against other people. I've seen Deacons who wouldn't attend Church, Trustees who acted as if they owned the Church, and members who only attended church when it was time to vote out the Pastor.

I've sit in my office and maintained a straight face while Sunday School teachers told about their addiction to pornography. I've wept with members over wayward wives and with parents whose children were raised in church but were now living for the devil.

I've prayed and cried and fasted and then delivered my very soul during a Sunday Morning Service only to be met at the door by a member with hard eyes who said, "You never even mentioned that I brought flowers today".

I've been in this way for 30 years now and I've seen the dark under belly of the Church and Church Members. I don't have any illusions about the Church being a perfect place full of perfect people. I learned a long time ago that Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven.

But I'd rather live among these imperfect Christians, striving to be better, than cast in my lot with sinners who have worst problems, no answers, and a horrible end. I have no illusions but I do have confidence; confidence in God's power, and love for God's People.

August 6, 1991 LOOKING AHEAD

It had been a long hot day of putting in tobacco and a bunch of us boys had gone to the river to wash off and relax. Some of us were diving out of trees, some were swinging off ropes, and some were just enjoying the swimming.

One of those who was just relaxing with a swim was my cousin. He had his head buried in the water and was just swimming down the river.

Suddenly, one of the boys in the trees looked ahead of my cousin and saw he was headed directly for a water moccasin in the middle of the river. By the time our shouts could get his attention he was "eyeball to eyeball" with that snake!

Luckily, he had enough present of mind to scope a hand full of water into the snake's open mouth and beat a hasty retreat.

Jesus said that in the last day men would be so busy "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Mat 24:38) until they would fail to prepare for His return. None of these things are wrong; in fact, they're normal parts of life. What becomes wrong about them is that we become so preoccupied with the present until we don't lift our eyes to see what's coming down the road.

Are you so preoccupied with the present until you haven't prepared for the future?

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August 7, 1991 ADELE'S EXAMPLE

It was a rotten end to a good day. My wife and I were on vacation and had spent the day touring some of the farms in the Amish country of eastern Pennsylvania. We had stayed longer than we planned at several places and when we began looking for a place to stay we found every hotel was booked solid.

Finally, after driving nearly 75 miles we found a room in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.

It was late but we hadn't eaten lunch or supper so we looked for somewhere to get a quick meal. We found a steak house several miles down the road and decided to stop.

That's where we met her. Our waitress was named Adele. When we sat down my wife realized she had ordered the wrong meal. Adele corrected the order, gave us wonderful service, and, most important of all, brightened our day with her wonderful smile.

People ask me all the time how they can be a better witness for the Lord. Follow the example of Adele; do your job well, have a good attitude, and show people something they'll want to have for themselves.

Thanks Adele, You changed a depressing night into a memorial meal. "Go and do thou likewise."

August 13, 1991 MINISTRY AND MONEY

There are a tremendous number of misconceptions today about the Ministry and Money.

First, Many people believe Ministers pay no taxes. In fact, I pay twice as much tax on my salary as the normal person; in addition, I must pay tax on the rental value of the parsonage, on gifts the church gives me, and on money made preaching Revivals.

Second, Preachers are only in it for the money. I have been offered the position of vice president in a major drug wholesale company, a starting salary of over \$50,000 a year from an electronic firm, and a leading position in one of the major growth industries in S.C.. Instead, I have never asked a church what they paid before they hired me and have never asked for a raise. I also write hundreds of newspaper columns and give away thousands of books each year, all absolutely free.

My gold "Rolex" is a 10 year old \$12.95 watch, I have no saving account, and I don't even own a home, much less a vacation resort!

There are probably some crooks in the Ministry, just like there are in most occupations. But most Pastors could earn twice as much money on half as much work if they wanted to. Instead, they give up riches down here to tell you about the riches up there.

If someone cared that much about me, I believe I'd listen to what they have to say.

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August 14, 1991 GOD'S ERASER

Several times in Scripture God talks about "blotting" a person's name out of the book of life- "And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." (Exo 32:33) "Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they." (Deu 9:14) "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev 3:5).

In both the Hebrew and the Greek, the word "Blot" means to "Rub out" or to "erase". It's a difficult thing when we realize God's pencil has an eraser on it!

Remember this, When a person repents of sin and accepts Christ as Savior he is placed in the protective hand of God and nobody or no thing can take you out of that hand. The only way to get out is for you to walk out yourself. That should never happen; and it never will, unless you start looking at circumstances or sin instead of the Savior and begin to put your faith in something other than God's Provision.

The fact that God's pen has an eraser doesn't cause me to despair; it simply increases my determination that nothing will cool my love for, or confidence in, Christ.

August 16, 1991 FORGOTTEN

It started out as a fever, but it wouldn't go away. The doctors made every test they could think of and finally decided it was "normal" for me to run fever at that time in my life. While they were determining that, however, I missed almost the entire last six weeks of the second grade.

I was able to keep up my home work and, by taking tests at home, I was able to maintain my "A" average. As time progressed the doctors became pretty well convinced I didn't have anything contagious so they allowed me to attend the last day of school because that was when awards were being given out.

The teacher asked for everyone who had made all "A"s to come forward for their award and I started to the front of class. I could see the look on her face even before she spoke. She told me she didn't have an award for me because I had been out so much she had forgotten about me.

I relive that moment from time to time when I visit some of my members who have become ill and are now shut-ins. They can pray and read their Bibles and maintain an "A average" but they're often forgotten because they aren't in sight.

When God gives out rewards you can be sure they won't be embarrassed because God forgot them. You shouldn't forget them either.

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August 20, 1991 PERSISTENCE

In the city of Rangoon, in the Buddhist temple of Shwee-da-gone, hangs one of the largest and finest bells in the East. The story of how this bell came to belong to that particular temple shows us a striking example of persistent effort.

During one of the Anglo-Burma wars the bell was dropped into the river to keep it out of the hands of the invading army. When it became safe to retrieve it they found that nothing they had was strong enough to lift this huge bell from the mud of the river bottom.

One of the priest from the Shwee-da-gone Temple asked permission to attempt to retrieve the Bell, but only on the condition that it be placed in his temple. The city finally agreed and the priest set to work.

He had his assistants gather an immense number of bamboo rods. These were then taken down to the bell by divers and attached one by one. After many thousands of them had been attached to the bell it finally began to move; and eventually came to the surface where boats directed it to the shore and arrangements were made to transport it to the temple.

The Bible says, "The Just shall live by Faith". Faith means you keep on doing your job for God despite discouragement or disappointments; knowing that EVENTUALLY your "bell" will float.

August 21, 1991 MAIN THINGS

It was during our Vacation Bible School and several ladies were presenting a Puppet Skit. The Skit called for the lady who was the "Puppet" to throw out trash from behind the stage while the speaker was giving the introduction. This allowed them to gain the children's attention and make the point of the program.

Every thing went fine until the Puppet lady finished throwing out her trash and reached down for her puppet. That's when she realized she had left the puppet in the Class room where they had been practicing. She ran back to the class for the puppet while the speaker, not knowing what was going on, found that when she called for the puppet nothing happened!

The speaker, bless her heart, kept ad libbing until finally the puppet appeared and the skit was presented.

God has given you a Purpose in Life, a Pardon from Sin, and a Promise of Heaven. Are you so busy with the trash until you've forgotten the Main Things??

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August 23, 1991 COFFEE AND CHARACTER

Several of the men and I were doing some odd jobs around the Church while the children were in Vacation Bible School. As usual, I had a cup of coffee sitting on a table and I would get some whenever I had the opportunity.

One time, as I was hurrying by, I grabbed a quick swallow and almost choked!! One of the Deacon's wives had loaded my coffee down with sugar. It was all I could do to keep from gagging.

I immediately knew who had done it because her reputation preceded her. In fact, she has such a reputation for practical jokes until the police would not investigate the thief of her boss's car until she convinced them she hadn't hid it!

The old saying about, "Everyone is known as something" is pretty well true. Over the course of time your actions and attitude will cause people to form an opinion about you. An opinion, that once formed, is hard to change.

Jesus said we were to "let our light so shine before men until they would see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven". Do your works cause people to groan, or glory at the change made in you by the power of God??

August 27, 1991 THE MARRIAGE MYTH

I had heard it so often until even I started to believe it. One out of every two marriages in America ends in Divorce. The truth is, this is completely false.

The rumor started from a misunderstanding about numbers. Several years ago there were 2.4 million marriages in one year and 1.2 million divorces the same year. So someone said that means half of the marriages end in divorce.

The problem with this is that it does not take into consideration the 54 million people that are already married.

Here are the real facts. Only one out of eight marriages ends in divorce (and many of those are part of the group that marries and divorces many times). In a given year only about TWO PERCENT of existing marriages will break up!

When the going gets tough in your marriage (as it does in all marriages from time to time) don't let false facts about marriage cause you to believe everyone else is bailing out so you might as well do the same. God's goal for every marriage is "until death do you part". If you'll do your part then your marriage will probably never come apart.

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August 28, 1991 GRACE VOLUNTEERS

One of the things I have learned about Human Nature is that people do not Voluntarily look for responsibility. Most people will accept responsibility when it is thrust upon them but they don't go looking for it (Sort of like the old Army adage, "Never volunteer for anything").

That's the premise behind one of the most successful programs at our Church, "Grace Volunteers".

The Program works like this. The Pastor determines what needs to be done in and around the Church. He makes a list of "Volunteers" and informs them of their selection. If for any reason they feel they can't accomplish the task they inform the Pastor (That's all they need to say). Otherwise, they're responsible to do the job when it's their time.

This program gives us Church Greeters, changes the sign at the Church each week, provides refreshments between our first Worship Service and Sunday School, staffs our nursery during Worship Service, and accomplishes many other church related tasks.

Paul rejoiced in, and prayed for, those who "labored with me in the gospel,... whose names are in the book of life." (Phil 4:3). That's just the way I feel about "Grace Volunteers".

August 30, 1991 WRONG ROOM

My sister-in-law and her husband recently attended a Farmer's Convention. They were staying at a large hotel and were excited about having a few days away from the normal routine.

The mornings were filled with meetings and seminars and it was fun for awhile but, eventually, my sister-in-law decided to go back to the room while her husband stayed in the meetings.

She got in the elevator, pushed the button for her floor, and got off when the elevator stopped. When she got to her door she inserted the Key card to unlock the door but couldn't get it to work.

She stood there trying her best to get the door to open, all the while quarreling about how sorry cardboard keys were in comparison to metal keys. Suddenly, the door opened and a strange man asked her if anything was wrong.

It was then that she looked at the room number and found she was at the right number but on the wrong floor!

All of us have times we get so excited or so preoccupied until we assume we're right without checking the facts. We assume our family knows we love them but we never tell them, we assume that because we're abusing our bodies with over work instead of with drugs that we won't have to face the consequences, and we assume that God doesn't care what you believe as long as you're really sincere.

Just remember this, no matter how determined you are, your key won't work if you're at the wrong door.

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September 3, 1991 THE LANDING

I was lucky enough to get an outside seat when we left Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. Several times the clouds limited my vision but most of the time I got a marvelously panoramic view of the Western part of the United States and, especially, the Rocky Mountains.

When we arrived over San Francisco the pilot circled the city and I could look right down into the harbor and the city. It looked like the best of picture post cards.

As we began our landing approach I noticed we had gone out over the ocean and were approaching the airport over water. I could see a little ways in front of the plane from where I was sitting and all I could see was water.

Closer and closer we came to the water; and I still couldn't see any land for the plane to come down on. Finally, when it seemed as if our wheels would touch the water at any second, the land rose out of the water and the plane touched down almost as soon as we were over it.

God has been the "Pilot" of my life for many years now. Most of the time He leads in paths that are plain and simple. Sometimes, however, He decides to develop my Faith a little and "lands my plane from the ocean side".

Deep in my heart I know the land will arrive before the plane hits the water; but sometimes my mind has a hard time accepting that! That's when I stop walking by sight and start living by faith.

If your situation looks bad and you're tempted to take the controls from God; just remember this- He's make millions of landings before and never crashed yet. Keep on trusting, there's land up there.

September 4, 1991 WITHOUT EXCUSE

One of the questions I'm frequently asked is why men remain sinners if it's so great being a Christian.

I don't know that I can improve on the way Paul said it to the Romans (Rom 1:20-22 Amp Bible)- "For ever since the creation of the world God's invisible nature and attributes, that is, His eternal power and divinity have been made intelligible and clearly discernible in and through the things that have been made. So men are without excuse- altogether without any defense or justification; Because when they knew and recognized Him as the God, they did not honor and glorify Him as God, or give Him thanks. Instead, they became futile and godless in their thinking- with vain imaginings, foolish reasoning, and stupid speculations- and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools- professing to be smart, they made simpletons of themselves."

The problem is not in the Salvation that God offers. The problem is man's arrogance in believing that he's smart enough to get along without God and his desire to do what he want apart from God.

One day God will show man his wealth is worthless and his wisdom is folly. Sadly, it will be at the Judgment seat instead of the Mercy seat. God doesn't want it that way; but man won't let it be any other way.

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September 6, 1991 THE TREE

It was a beautiful day for a walk so she decided to satisfy her curiosity. There was a tree in the middle of the garden that she really wanted to see. Her Husband had told her not to go near it but that only intensified her determination.

From a distance it looked like any other tree and she wondered why everyone made such a big deal about it. It was only when she got closer that she could see it was loaded with the most beautiful fruit she had ever seen.

Suddenly, she heard a noise and when she looked around she saw a creature of amazing beauty. The creature didn't look dangerous but she still thought it best to leave when suddenly the creature spoke.

"I wonder why God won't let you eat that Fruit," he said.

"Because we would die," she answered.

"That's not true," he said. "God is just trying to keep you from experiencing the real joys of life. Try it, it'll make you feel better than you've ever felt before."

Sad but true, Satan's tactics to destroy man still work as well today as they did in the Garden of Eden. Curiosity about forbidden fruit, lies about the character of God, and doubts about the Word of God still lead men and women down the path of ruin.

Satan has convinced People that the Good Life comes from Bad Things and that a moment of happiness is better than a life time of Joy. How can we get them to see the snake for what he really is?? How can we get them to realize that when they bite into the fruit they end up with a mouth full of worms?? That's the challenge facing the Church today.

September 10, 1991 **SETTLING FOR THE SILVER**

I thought he looked familiar but I simply could not place him. My wife had taken ill while we were at her father's home and I had gone to a town near by to get some medicine for her. When I walked into the Drug store I nodded to the man behind the counter and proceeded to look for my wife's medicine. The entire time something kept nagging my brain that I knew the man behind the counter from somewhere.

I found the medicine and went to pay for it and the clerk called me by name. I was embarrassed, but determined, so I finally told him I couldn't place him and asked his name.

It turned out he was the older brother of one of my class mates in high school. I thought he had gone to college so I asked him about it. He said he had completed college and gotten his master's degree but he had returned home to "settle some things in his mind".

That had been several years before. Now he had accepted being a college educated clerk. He had tremendous potential but little motivation. Like a lot of Christians I know, he had found that reaching for the gold requires hard work and dedication and he had decided to settle for the silver. They aren't "Bad"; they're just satisfied being lukewarm. I wonder when they'll remember that lukewarm makes God sick???

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September 11, 1991 **TOMBSTONE TESTIMONY**

It began partly from curiosity and partly as a result of my "job." As a Pastor, I have to visit cemeteries on a regular basis; either helping with or attending funerals.

At first I just noticed them in passing, but then I began to start looking for the messages on the tombstones. Some contain just the bare facts; name, date of birth, and date of death. That's helpful to some degree because it allowed me to determine how old the person was when they died (Lots and lots of people die very young!!).

If it was a husband and wife tomb it might also contain the wedding date of the couple. That allowed me to see how old they were when they were married (Sometimes people marry VERY young) and how long one lived after the other's death.

Some times, however, the tomb will also contain a short saying or a poem. Those are the ones that allow me to see how the person was perceived by their loved ones. You can almost feel the aching heart of parents for small children and husbands for lost wives.

Tombstones indeed have a testimony. They tell us that everyone has to die, that many die a lot sooner than they expect, and that those that are left behind will reflect on the way you lived.

When the tombstone is placed over you will your family rejoice in the life you've lived and look forward to seeing you again in Heaven? Or will it be just cold hard stone over a wasted life and missed opportunities?

September 13, 1991 **FLESHLY FAULTS**

Five or six years ago I became interested in computers because I wanted something to help me with the tremendous amount of paper work I do. I didn't have the money to purchase one and didn't know if it was worth the money if I had it.

One of my Deacons works in a company with several computers and he arranged for me to come in several times and "Play" with one they had in an office. I told him I was afraid I'd mess everything up but he assured me I couldn't do that much harm.

He didn't know me as well as he thought he did!! After working for several days I knew that I would eventually get a computer because it was such a useful tool for my work. With that in mind, I decided to save the work I had done so I could put it on my computer when I purchased it.

In the process of preparing a disk to store my information I accidentally wiped out everything on the computer!! I mean to tell you that it wouldn't even say "hello"!

Happily, the deacon forgave me, his boss didn't fire him, and now I'm able to do a tremendous amount of work on my own computer.

All of us make mistakes from time to time. One of the things I like about God is that He doesn't expect us to be mistake free- "But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." (Ps 78:38-39).

As long as you're human you'll make mistakes. The biggest mistake you can make, however, is doubt God's Love and His willingness to forgive you. That's something you should never make a mistake about.

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September 17, 1991 PEE WEE

It's strange that it happened on the same Friday. Two men named "Pee Wee" were much on my mind that day; and death was the reason. One was "Pee Wee" Gaskins. A convicted mass murderer who died in the electric chair.

His life was filled with crime and destruction. He was turned into a "cult" figure as his story was told on the front pages of the newspapers in the state for over a week. His death evoked a wide range of emotions ranging from curiosity, to celebration, to contemplation (Depending on the person's view of capital punishment).

The other "Pee Wee" was Rev. Lloyd "Pee Wee" Gore. This "Pee Wee" and I were ordained the same January night in 1964. He was afflicted in life, little known outside local church circles, and ignored by the news media at his death.

Pee Wee Gaskins is scheduled to be cremated and his ashes scattered over the earth. Pee Wee Gore was buried amidst shouts of victory and an invitation for lost men to find eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Two men named "Pee Wee". Totally different lives and totally different deaths. Which example would you prefer to have followed when you have to meet God??

September 18, 1991 NO PARKING

It's there in 3 foot letters- "DRIVE THRU ONLY". In addition to the writing on the pavement there is also a sign "Drive Thru Only. NO PARKING". Why then do people insist on driving up in front of the post office and parking while they check their mail?

The attitude they display is this, "I'm the most important person in all the world. Everyone else needs to obey the rules but, surely, they aren't meant for anyone as special as I am." The fact that other people may want to use the Drive Thru mail boxes while they're in the Post Office is either not thought of or not considered important enough to inconvenience themselves about.

And since these people only think of themselves, they think that if they do it it won't matter. What they don't realize is that many other people in town think themselves just as special. That's why I find someone parked in the drive thru almost every time I go to the Post Office.

I would like to believe that none of these people are Christians. How could a Christian think only of self when the very essence of Christianity is Denying Self? How can a Christian sing about taking up the cross for Christ if they aren't willing to walk 3 extra steps for their mail? If a person's Christianity is not real at the Post Office then I can't help but wonder if it's real at Church.

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September 20, 1991 MISSING NAMES

He drove up at the same time I did. I had been out visiting and had come home to finish some work in preparation for Prayer Meeting. I didn't recognize him but I'm used to strangers coming to the parsonage.

He introduced himself as my newspaper carrier and said that, according to the records at the newspaper office, I hadn't paid for my paper in over six months! I knew there had to be some kind of mistake so we went into the office and I looked it up in my computer. I couldn't find any record of the payment there but I have just started putting my checks on computer so I didn't panic yet.

When I looked in my check book and couldn't find any record of payment, then I panicked! I could almost read his mind, "This lying Preacher assured me he had paid and now I've found him out."

Things looked bad for me until I looked back in the checks for December of 1990 and found where I had paid in advance for the first six months of 1991. Evidently, someone in the business office had failed to log my payment.

I felt panic and fear over the fact that my name was missing from a \$50 dollar paper payment. I wonder how much more fear people will feel when they stand before God and He doesn't find their name in the book of life?? Then they'll realize that the only "check" that would put their name in the book of life is the check of Faith; that they failed to cash.

September 24, 1991 GLASS ROADS

I have advocated it for years and now Society is beginning to like the idea- paving roads with glass. Right now it's simply crushed glass mixed in with the asphalt but one day I think they'll go the whole step and make the entire road of glass.

Think of it, No more street lights because the light would travel inside the glass road (no more need for headlights on cars!). It could even be tinted so that each lane was a different color. What a safety help that would be on dark rainy nights (Of course, the road would contain patterns that would allow tires to grip and water to drain).

It would also save a tremendous amount of money because glass roads would not have potholes. That would save in repair cost for the government as well as for the car owner. It would also decrease our dependence on foreign oil.

Where did I get such a crazy idea as "glass roads" from?? I figured that if they were good enough for Heaven then they should be good enough for us- "and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." (Rev 21:21). I realize we aren't able to pave our streets with Gold like God but I assume regular glass will work for mere mortals.

The Bible has the answers you're looking for; and all of them aren't "pie in the sky" promises. Some times God is practical enough to tell us how to make better roads; so it'll be safer and easier to get to Church each week!

September 25, 1991 LABELS

A Florida Farmer began to have trouble with his teen age son. He had raised him the best he knew how. He taught him to work for a living, to treat other people right, and to honor the Lord in everything he did. He even took him to Church each week, he didn't send him.

Now his son had begun to hang around the wrong crowd. And the effects were beginning to show; in the boy's talk, manners, and attitude.

He knew something had to be done so he and his son took a ride one day after school. He told his son he had something special to show him and drove to the heart of his biggest orange grove.

When they arrived in the center of the grove he told his son to look closely at the orange tree in front of the truck. The boy got out of the truck and went up to the tree where he saw a sign nailed to it's trunk. The sign read "Apple Tree".

"Why, that's no apple tree," he said. "That's one of our best orange trees."

"Right", said the dad. "It looks like an orange tree and produces oranges so no label can turn it into an apple tree. In the same way, a boy who labels himself a Christian but looks like the world and acts like the world will be considered worldly."

The Boy got the point. He realized that life was more than labels; it was living on the outside that which was real on the inside. After all, apples aren't oranges.

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September 27, 1991 SOUNDS OF SILENCE

When you get in the car, the first thing you do is turn on the radio. When you arrive home, the first thing you do is walk by the TV and turn it on. That's because the most uncomfortable thing that can happen to most people is the "sounds of silence".

We live in a society that is fast paced, action oriented, and, above all, noisy. This constant assault on our senses wears out our bodies, tightens our nerves, and depletes our strength (Hence, the large number of "chronic fatigue syndrome" cases now).

God told the Children of Israel that "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength:." (Isa 30:15). Let's look at a few ways we can find rest and strength; and become happy Christians instead of grumpy, grouchy, harried citizens.

(1) Designate a day a week in which you will not turn on the TV or Radio (I know you're addicted but make the effort). This would be a great time to have every member of the family sit at the same table at the same time for a meal (and when is the last time that's happened!).

(2) Do not allow the TV to dictate when you go to bed. Try going to bed an hour earlier than normal for a week and see what a difference it will make in your feelings, nerves, and attitude.

(3) Give God a Half Hour of "Quiet Time" EVERY day. Use that time to Pray, read the Bible, and simply enjoy being in the presence of the Lord. A month from now your friends and family will look in wonder at the change in your character and conduct (And that will give you a perfect opportunity to witness to them).

Remember, "Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit." (Eccl 4:6).

October 1, 1991 LITTLE THINGS

A group of men were talking one day when one of them made a remark that seemed strange to his companions. "Would you believe," he said, "that a little thing like a pair of socks changed the entire course of my life?" "I can hardly believe that," replied another man.

"Well, it's true! Once I planned to take a trip with some of my friends on a canal boat, but two days before we intended to leave, I injured my foot while chopping wood. It was only a small cut, but the blue dye in the homemade socks I wore poisoned the wound, and I was compelled to stay at home. While my friends were on their journey, a powerful preacher came to our town to hold revival meetings. Since I didn't have anything else to do, I decided to attend. The message touched me deeply, and as a result, I surrendered my heart to the Lord. Afterward I saw that I needed to change my life in many ways. New desires and purposes took hold of me. I determined also to seek an education, for I trusted that this would enable me to live more usefully for my Lord."

The man who made these comments was none other than the former President of the United States--James A. Garfield!

Jesus said that if we were faithful in the Little things that we would be given authority over the big things. That's why we should never under estimate the importance of the little things in our life. God may be using them to develop us into presidential material.

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October 2, 1991 THE EYES

You noticed it as soon as you entered the gallery. It was a beautiful picture with a many colored scene. The thing that struck you, however, were the eyes of the main character. They were the "piercing eyes" everyone talks about; and they followed you everywhere you went.

I admire the artistry of the painter and think of that picture from time to time when I'm faced with difficult or dangerous situations. That's because I know that no matter where I am "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry." (Psa 34:15). There is not a place I go or problem I face that the Lord doesn't know exactly where I am and what I need. That's an encouragement to me!

It's also a help to me to know that "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (2 Chr 16:9). Isn't it great that God is looking for way to Bless me!!

Finally, Whenever I'm tempted to sin, this picture reminds me that "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Prov 15:3). I can hide some of my sins from men but I know that God know even the thoughts of my heart. That's why, like Noah, I'm glad I have found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8).

October 4, 1991 SIGNS OR SUPPER

I had been to Florence to visit some people in the hospital and decided to surprise my wife by purchasing supper on the way home. I stopped at a local Bar-Be-Que place and ordered a couple of plates to go.

While I was waiting for them to fill the order I looked around at the advertisements this establishment had. There was absolutely nothing to indicate the type of restaurant this was, or even the fact that it was a restaurant, except a single small sign. This sign was perched atop a pole that someone had backed into and was now leaning precariously over the parking lot.

Without a sign and with very little advertisement, this establishment was carrying on a booming business that has lasted for a number of years. It just demonstrates something I've believed for years; a good product is the best advertisement you can have.

A friend of mine has the fastest growing church in this area. It's located in a place so remote until one wonders if the sun needs a map in order to get sunshine there! But people somehow find there way through all those back roads because of the excitement and evangelism that's evident in the Church.

I talk with many Christians who use circumstances and conditions as excuses for their failure to reach people with the Gospel. I try to get them to realize that if they will consistently live the way God wants them to then they'll have all the opportunities they can use. After all, People don't come to admire signs, they come to eat good "bar-be-que".

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October 8, 1991 BEHIND THE SCENES

It's sort of interesting sitting where the Pastor sits sometimes. I get to look at the "smiling" faces of people as they sing hymns of praise and glory (The things that people do as they sing never ceases to amaze me!). I observe the little "by plays" between husbands and wives and parents and children during the offering and Choir special. And I get to see behind the scenes of most activities.

That's pretty interesting also. One group of lady singers always took off their shoes while they sang. I know there must have been a reason for it but I'm not sure that even God can figure out ladies reasoning about shoes! ("I know they hurt my feet so bad I can't walk in them but they look so pretty!").

Then there are the speakers who rock on the edge of their feet as they talk or else sway back and forth as if some inner tune keeps playing thru their brain.

All of these things keep reminding me that the Lord sees behind the scenes also. He knows what we do in secret as well as on "stage". And He has said that "there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad." (Mark 4:22).

Sort of like the Pastor who thought he would include the Children in a service so he asked them, "What do you like best about coming to Church?". Every thing was fine until one boy said, "I like coming to Church because Mommy and Daddy stop fighting when we come inside"!

"Nothing hid, which shall not be manifested."

October 9, 1991 ON THE SHELF

The other day I was sitting behind the puppet stage as they prepared to put on their presentation and I noticed that one of the young girls had laid her glasses on a ledge behind the stage. I was worried at first that they might fall off and break but then I began to wonder why they were there in the first place.

She's an attractive young lady and her glasses only add to her beauty so why would she take them off? In addition, the area behind the puppet stage is fairly dim and most people would need all the help they could get in order to see the puppet script.

Maybe her reasons are the same reasons so many Bibles gather dust atop night stands or become buried under TV Guides and Women's magazines.

Sometimes the Bible, like glasses, get in the way of what we want to do and we lay it on the shelf so it won't bother us. Sometimes we fear people will make fun of us if we wear glasses (or read the Bible) so we stumble around in the dark while help is just an arm's length away.

Whatever our reasons, if people would take the Bible off the shelf and put it into practice they would have an entirely different view of things. And the way people are stumbling thru life right now, that's something we desperately need.

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October 11, 1991 APPEARANCES

It surprises people how little we know about how he looked. We don't know if He was short or tall, fat or thin. We don't know how fair his skin was or even the color of his hair.

Basically, all we know about His Physical appearance is that He (like me) "has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa 53:2). If we were describing Him today we would say it like this, "Jesus was just a plain sort of fellow".

Yet, to every man who knows Him, He is exactly what they need. To the Artist, He is altogether lovely. To the educator, He is the Master Teacher. To the Philosopher, He is the wisdom of God. To the lonely, He is a Friend that sticks closer than a Brother. To the Sorrowful, He is a Comforter. To the bereaved, He is the resurrection and the life. And to the Sinner, He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

Even God had to take four books to describe His main characteristics. In Matthew, He is the King of Kings. In Mark, He is the Humble Servant. In Luke, He is the Perfect Man. And in John, He is the Bread of life, the light of the world, and the wonderful Son of God.

Take heart today, you don't have to be a movie star or sports hero for God to Love you. Remember, the Bible doesn't describe a perfect body for us to work toward but a perfect man for us to believe in.

October 15, 1991 WEDDING STINGS

Although I began preaching when I was 14 years old, the first Protestant Wedding I can remember attending was my own. I didn't get nearly as nervous as most people because I was so busy taking in all the details; knowing that one day I would be standing where my wife's pastor was standing now.

It was only after the wedding that I became aware of the sacrifice this Pastor made for us.

Right about the time he told me to kiss my new wife, a bee stung him on the top of his ear. He didn't utter a sound as the bridal party marched out and the congregation was ushered out. Only then did he put his hand to his ear and feel the drop of blood that was just about to drop on his suit.

I thought about his sacrifice the other day when I began thinking about the next time I plan to get married. The next time I'll be the Bride instead of the Groom! Because the next time I'll be part of the Bride of Christ and the wedding will be the marriage supper of the Lamb.

This time the Groom (Christ) will be the one who felt a sting (The sting of Death). He bore the pain of that sting so that I could be part of the Wedding. No wonder I love Him so; and long for the day we can dwell together in Heavenly Bliss.

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October 16, 1991 BUILDING BLOCKS

I recently attended a wedding in the first Church I pastored. While we were waiting for the ceremony to begin I looked over the interior of the Church. A look, I must say, of more than casual interest. That was because my wife and I, and one other family in the Church, had painted every block in the Church with a mixture of paint and putty when it was being constructed.

I admired those blocks and thought of all the hard hours of work we had put into painting them.

Those blocks exemplify to me the mission of the Church in the lives of its members.

They are stacked in a straight line, one upon another. This represents the goal of the Church to get its members to walk in the straight and narrow way.

These blocks weren't cracked because they were built on a solid foundation. In the same way, the Church has endured for nearly two thousand years because it doesn't depend on the strength of individual "blocks". Its strength lies in the Rock that is its foundation.

Finally, these blocks were special; not because of their construction, but because of their location. Take them out of the wall and they are just common pieces of cement. As part of the wall, however, they become part of the house of God! What a transformation.

Are you part of the wall, or are you just a cement block lying among the weeds of the world?

October 18, 1991 ONE BODY

I was on my way to the Hospital to visit someone and I stopped at the Post Office to check my mail. When I was returning to my car I saw an elderly lady step off the curb and fall. I immediately rushed to her aid. So did several other people.

A young Black man, holding a Child, arrived just before I did. An elderly man stopped his car and rushed to help her also. Luckily, she was not injured and was able to continue on her way after we helped her up.

The thing that impressed me was who came to her aid; Black and White, Young and Old. Skin color and age all seemed to fade away in the face of need. I noticed the same phenomenon during Hurricane Hugo, and during snow storms. Somehow, when Push comes to shove, normal prejudices are the first thing to get shoved out of the way.

One of the great things about Christianity is that it acknowledges the need everyone has and, as a result, looks at everyone on an equal footing. Because ALL have sinned and NO ONE can escape sin's penalty apart from God's intervention; then we all must enter thru the same door. Because NO ONE has enough money or ability to enter by works; God makes salvation available to ANYONE who will come by faith.

When we can stop looking at the tint of a person's skin or the gray in their hair and see instead the needs they have or the abilities they share; then we will really know what God means about many members but only One Body.

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October 22, 1991 BIRD IN HAND

Their parents kept talking about how smart the Old Man was so the young boys decided to fool him. They captured a small sparrow and one of them cupped the bird in his hands.

Then they went to ask the Old Man if the bird was alive. Their plan was simple. If the Old Man said the Bird was alive then the boy would push his hands together and kill it. If the Old Man said the bird was dead then he would open his hands and let the bird go.

They found the Old Man sitting under a tree and asked him about the Bird. After a moment of thought, the Old Man replied, "The answer to that question, young man, is in your hands."

Many people look at God as the "Old Man". They think they can fool Him with a little "slight of hand". They find, however, that God is aware of all their tricks and they only end up tricking themselves.

Like the young boys, they think they will be able to manipulate the way God views them at the Judgment Bar. They plan to use "Good Works" "Ignorance of the Law", or "I was a good as..." as an excuse. These excuses may bring them comfort now but they will not allow them to escape condemnation later.

Your future does not depend on how good you are with your hands. It depends on being in God's hands; where no man can pluck you out.

October 23, 1991 THE GREASE BARREL

The story is told of a Pastor who was visiting among the families in his country Church. The father was in the field working when he arrived so he spoke to the mother and was about to continue on his way.

Suddenly, they heard loud cries from the direction of the barn. They rushed over and began looking for the child in distress. Finally, the mother discovered him in a barrel of grease. He had been playing on the hay machine and had fallen into the barrel.

The mother lifted him out of the grease by his collar, looked him over, and put him back into the barrel. The Pastor was stunned.

"Are you going to leave him there!" he cried.

"I think so," replied the mother. "It'll be easier to raise another one than to clean up that one!"

I know several parents that have about arrived at that point. Their children have fallen so far into the mud and filth of sin until the parents are ready to throw up their hands and admit defeat.

It's true that some Prodigal Sons need to be left in the "Grease Barrel" until they come to their senses. But never forget that Jesus was able to save a Samaritan women with 5 husbands and a live in lover; as well as Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

Jesus can take even "grease barrel" children, clean them up, and make them the joy of their parents once again.

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October 25, 1991 SELLING LIFE AND HEALTH

I went by my insurance agency the other day to pay my totally unreasonable car insurance premiums. As I walked thru the door I noticed a big sign, "We sell Life and Health". I know they meant Life Insurance and Health Insurance but it rang a bell with me anyway.

Pastors today continually have to defend themselves against accusations and anger due to the actions of well known television evangelist. These Tele-evangelist sold "Life and Health" for a contribution or a condominium and then were caught with their pants down! Now those of us outside the glamour and glare of the Television lights are having to pay for these men's mistakes.

It makes much better Television to sell Health and Wealth in a gold plated mansion down here; and a guaranteed ticket to Heaven, than to talk about dying to self and living like Jesus. You can sell a lot more "tickets" that way but, after watching the life of the conductors, you wonder if it's for the right train?

I don't sell "Life and Health". I preach Jesus, who died for our sins and was raised for our justification. He GIVES eternal Life to anyone who will repent of sins and accept it by faith. In fact, when He found people trying to make the Church a "religious store" He took a whip to them.

Just as I can't blame my Insurance Agent for exorbitant insurance prices, so you shouldn't blame all preachers for a few profiteers. A true preacher goal is not your gold but trying to save your soul.

October 29, 1991 MICROWAVE MISTAKES

One of the ladies in my Church was calling a number of other ladies about a church project and trying to cook supper at the same time. She had dialed one lady's number several times and it was busy each time. She decided to try it one more time and had dialed the first three numbers before she realized she was pushing the numbers on the microwave!

My wife likes to heat her coffee cup in the microwave for about 10 seconds each morning so the cold cup won't cool the coffee off too quickly. One morning when she started to do so she found a half gallon of ice cream in the Microwave. It seems someone (possibly her husband) had gotten some ice cream and put the carton back in the microwave instead of the freezer!

All of us tend to get so busy and pre-occupied at times until we make little mistakes. Sometimes these mistakes are simply silly, like the Microwave mistakes. Sometimes they're very serious. I hate to admit it but I have almost wrecked my car several times because I was not paying attention as I should.

Mistakes are a part of life and everyone will make their share. My concern is not with the "microwave mistakes" everyone makes. My concern is for the people who make the fatal mistake of leaving God out of their life and their future.

Remember, you can't dial the phone from the microwave; and you can't find life and joy apart from God.

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October 30, 1991 HALLOWEEN

It began as a day to honor "All Saints", it became a night to honor witches and ghosts. Some people in the Church felt that special days set aside to honor certain Saints caused other saints to be neglected. It was decided to set aside the first day in November as "All Saints Day" to honor all the Saints who did not have their own special day. The Evening before this special day was called "Hallowed Evening"; eventually corrupted in old English to Halloween.

The customs associated with Halloween come from the Celts. The old Celtic calendar began the new year on November 1 (The year ended with the harvest of their crops) and the night before became known as a time when witches and goblins roamed around trying to hold back the new year.

People began having New Year's Eve parties (just as we do today). At these parties they would dress up as witches or goblins to placate the demons. Eventually the serfs began to go to the main house demanding an offering (treat) from the landowner in exchange for protection from the demons during the coming year (or I'll trick you).

There are several reasons our Church has changed Halloween to Family Fun Night. We don't believe it's right to promote witches and demons. We don't think it's right to teach children to demand a treat under the threat of a "trick". And, in the sick world we live in, it's just plain dangerous to allow Children to accept candy from strangers.

We make it a Family time at the church where they can dress up as "good" people, eat all the candy they want, and enjoy a good time of games and fellowship. We think that's the Christian way- defeating bad by making it good.

November 1, 1991 SPILLED

I had a number of things to do that day but I decided I'd better change my oil anyway since it had turned warm again. I drained the oil from one car and replaced the filter. Then I let the oil drain from the second car while I replaced the oil in the first car.

Everything went just great and I was thinking about how easy an oil change this was until I finished pouring the last quart of oil in the second car. That's when I noticed I was standing in a pool of oil!

It seems in my pre-occupation with the day's activities I had forgotten to put the plug back in the second car and four quarts of oil ran right through the car onto the garage floor. My wife was not happy!

I have been working with a young married couple the past couple of years trying to get them to attend church regularly. They're always too tired or too busy. The other day I found that their oldest boy is cutting school, running with the wrong crowd, and headed for deep trouble.

It breaks my heart to know that they probably won't realize they have forgotten to "put the plug" in their family until a big mess has been made. But by then, all the "Things" they have bought him will just make his spilled life that much more tragic.

No matter how good your intentions or how hard you're working; you're going to end up with a mess if the plug isn't in place.

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November 5, 1991 MISSING PRAYER MEETING

I recently preached a sermon on the subject, "Why I would be Afraid to Die if I consistently and deliberately missed Prayer Meeting each week". In it I acknowledged that a person is saved by Grace through Faith, not of works lest any man should boast; so coming to Prayer Meeting will not save a person. Then I stressed the fact that Faith without works is dead, being alone; and listed several reasons a Christian should consistently attend EVERY service at the house of God.

First, The Bible says we ought to attend Church even more as we see the end of time coming- "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Heb 10:25).

Second, If Jesus were living today I believe He would attend Every Service of the Church- A Christian is supposed to follow the example of Christ.

Third, In every Church, the Prayer Meeting crowd always seems to be the dedicated working group of the Church. That's the kind of testimony I want to have when I face God.

Finally, I would hate to die and see the look on God's face if I had consistently acted as if work and the world were more important to me than worshipping and learning of Him.

Will I see you in Prayer Meeting This Week??

November 6, 1991 RAHAB

She had gone to the market place to purchase some vegetables. Suddenly, a stranger approached her and asked if she had any rooms at her "inn". Business had been slow lately and she needed the money so she said yes.

When they arrived at her home she asked what their business was in Jericho. Their answers were vague enough that little warning bells went off in her mind. So she asked them where they were from. Their darting eyes and shifting feet really set off alarm bells now.

Suddenly, it came to her. "You're with the invasion army, aren't you?"

"Yes," they replied. "We're from the people of Israel."

Her first thought was to run screaming into the street. Instead, she began to ask them about their people and their God. As they explained who they were, how God had delivered them from Egypt, and how God had provided for them in the desert, something stirred in her heart.

Curiosity led to conversation. Conversation led to conversion. Conversion led to commitment as she hid the spies from the army patrols. Commitment led to salvation as the scarlet rope was tied to her window to provide deliverance for her and her family when the city fell.

That's how God took a woman of loose reputation, exposed her to the Gospel, saved her, and, eventually, brought her into the line of Christ. Isn't it great what God can do if we give Him the chance!

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November 8, 1991 THE FIRE

It looked like a wall of orange as it advanced through the forest. You could hear it's roar, like that of a mighty train, from a great distance away. The smoke ascended into the heavens and blotted out the noon day sun. Everyone knew that this was not a simple little brush fire; this was a real forest fire.

With almost unbelievable speed, it swept it's way through the tall pine trees that had taken years to grow. My grandfather had treated those trees almost like a garden.

I'll never forget the times we walked together under their high canopy. It was cool and dusky dark even in the middle of the day. The ground was almost as level as the floor in a home because the shade kept the weeds and bushes from growing. You wanted to whisper when you talked because you almost felt you were in a cathedral.

Now fire leaped from tree to tree and turned this "cathedral" into a charred ruins. It was a tremendous economic loss but, for a small boy, the real loss was a secret, sacred place that inspired awe and wonder.

After the fire, loggers came in and took all they could salvage. I've never been back.

The best we could determine, someone was burning some trash in their back yard, the wind came up, and the fire took off. The people didn't mean any harm and they were very sorry; but the trees are gone.

Remember those trees the next time you're tempted to spread a "little gossip". You think you can contain it in your own back yard but the Bible says, "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell". (James 3:6).

November 12, 1991 THE DEAL

A preacher friend of mine recently decided he could save \$50 by purchasing a computer system in Columbia rather than locally. He drove all the way to Columbia, they loaded some boxes in his car, and when he arrived home he had to put everything together. Then he found they had forgotten to include a part he needed. Back to Columbia.

When everything was finally together and working, it didn't! He had to reload everything and take it back to Columbia where they had to replace a defective part. He and I estimate that so far the \$50 dollars he saved has only cost him \$250!!

A lot of people are looking for deals on Christianity today also. They want to go to Heaven but they don't want anything to do with sacrifice and cross bearing. If they look around long enough they will find a church or preacher to pat them on the head and tell them to live like they want, Heaven is assured, because God loves them.

I wonder what they'll think of their "deal" when they hear Jesus say, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ...And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:21,23).

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November 13, 1991 THE HIPPIE PREACHER

I began pasturing my first Church soon after I was discharged from the Navy. I also had to work full time at a local TV Repair shop because the Church was unable to pay me an adequate salary.

Things were very difficult financially for my wife and I so we cut as many corners as possible. I had numerous sets of Navy dungarees left so I began to wear them to work. Everyone else was wearing bell bottom pants as a Fad; I was wearing them because they were what I had!

I had also developed very bad eye problems during my tours of duty in Viet Nam and had to wear dark glasses when I went into the sunshine. My glasses were "Granny Glasses" purchased from an old man in Bangkok, Thailand (Some of the best glasses I've ever owned).

As you can imagine, I was soon called the "Hippie Preacher". I lived right and preached right but many condemned me because I didn't dress "right". At the time, it was the best I could do.

I believe people should dress modestly and cleanly. Once they meet those qualifications we should remember the words of James "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (For) if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin," (James 2:1-4,9).

November 15, 1991 BIKES AND BIBLES

I can see it almost like it happened today. Dad had an old dug out log canoe upturned beside the back porch of our home. I stood on top of that canoe, ran down it's length, and jumped astraddle of the bicycle. It wobbled and tittered but it stayed up!

I can almost feel the wind blowing across my face as I rode that bike down our driveway for the first time. All the effort, all the falls and skinned knees; none of it was important now. I was finally able to ride a bike. For a few moments (until my brother came yelling out of the house, "What are you doing on my bike?") I was "king of the world". I was grown up now and nothing was impossible for me; I could ride a bike.

I don't ride bikes anymore (I gave the last one I had to a young boy who didn't have one) but I could still ride one today if the opportunity arose. Once you've learned now, it just comes natural.

That's the way it is with Christianity. When I knelt on an altar nearly 30 years ago and asked Christ to forgive my sins and come into my heart, I didn't know enough about the Bible to fill a tea cup. But I'll never forget the wonder and peace I felt that March night.

There are a lot of "trick moves" I can't do on a bicycle or with the Bible; but I still know how to ride, and I still have faith in the Book.

If the Bible has always baffled you, come to Church this week. We've got an "old log canoe" you can get a running start on. You'll be amazed at how good it feels when the Bible changes from an old dusty book into the Bread of life.

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November 19, 1991 MORE THAN ENOUGH

I arrived a little late for a minister's meeting the other day and most of the other Ministers had already gotten their coffee. There were several empty cups sitting beside a friend across the table so I asked him to pass me some coffee. He misunderstood what I meant and passed me the coffee Pot instead of a Cup! I told him that was just like God, always giving me more than I asked for.

Like this example, God's gifts to me sometimes make me stretch myself in order to enjoy the gifts He's given me. In this case, I had to reach across the table and get a cup to enjoy the coffee. In situations

when God Blesses, it means things like additional duties because of additional people or more studying when more sermon opportunities are available.

Many of you pray for God to Bless you every day. Be aware that most of the time God Blesses you THRU a problem instead of OUT of the Problem. God knows that if He just hands you everything on a "silver platter" you end up spoiled instead of strong.

God is willing to give you the whole pot of Coffee to enjoy. Don't let it get cold because you're too lazy to get your own cup.

November 20, 1991 DUCK-MAIL

Ted and Judy were staying at Grandmother's home for a month during Summer Vacation. On the first day they were there, Ted tried skipping a rock across the duck pond. One rock skipped very well, so well in fact, until it skipped all the way across the pond and hit a duck in the head on the other side. Ted and Judy ran around the pond and found the duck lying in the edge of the pond, dead.

That night it was Judy's responsibility to wash the supper dishes. She confronted Ted and told him she would tell grandmother about the dead duck if he didn't wash the dishes for her.

That began a two week reign of terror for Ted as he was "Duck-Mailed" into doing all of Judy's work.

Finally, He had all he could take and went to his grandmother to tell her about the duck. What a surprise, and a relief, when she told him she had seen him kill the duck and knew it was an accident.

Just like Ted, many people are "Duck-mailed" into lives of sin and shame because they don't realize God already knows about their sin and Jesus has already paid the penalty for it. Don't do Satan's dirty work; claim God's pardon and peace today.

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November 22, 1991 THANKS GIVING

One of the most anxiously awaited services at our Church each year is our annual PRAISE SERVICE. It is held the Wednesday Night before Thanksgiving and involves everyone in the Church.

We place a microphone at the front of the Church and people come forward a family at the time. Each member of the family is encouraged to give Praise to God for His Blessings during the past year with a testimony, a song, or a musical selection on the instrument of their choice. It's Great.

Our key verse is always Psalms 116:1 "I love the LORD, because....
That allows for a lot of latitude!

The children always seem to find things to thank the Lord for that no one else would think of- frogs, passing grades, and a brother who is "not as mean as he could be!". They always cause the Adults to look with new eyes at all the "little things" we take for granted.

The Adults find reasons to rejoice in healthy families, in making ends almost meet one more year, and in the love of family and friends.

As we approach this Thanksgiving Season, it's important to remember that it's a time of Thanks Giving. The pressures of Christmas shopping, the Cold season, and Cash shortages will pressure you to "wallow" in your troubles. Instead, why don't you triumph in your thanks.

November 26, 1991 **REAL JOY**

A sad thing about the day we live in is that many people find it hard to find something to be joyful about. They are "happy" when their favorite ball team wins or when they get a day off work but they don't have any real joy. That's because Happiness results when things happen to happen happily. Joy, on the other hand, is a state of heart that acknowledges circumstances but is not controlled by them.

Joy replaces Happiness when we "know that ALL things work together for the good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28). This centers our faith in Christ instead of Circumstances. What a difference that makes when we face the real problems of a real world.

With this kind of Joy, Paul could sing in a jail in Philippi at midnight after having been falsely arrested, wrongly beaten, and imprisoned in stocks in a dark, damp cell.

With this kind of Joy, the Bible says the early Christians faced persecution and pain and "took JOYFULLY the spoiling of their goods, knowing in heaven they had a better and an enduring substance" (Heb 10:34).

With this kind of Joy, YOU can triumph in life instead of struggling through living. This kind of joy satisfies your aching heart, eases your troubled mind, and makes it easier for everyone to live with you!

Joy like this comes from only one source; Jesus. You accept Him as your savior and serve Him as your Lord; and the joy of the Lord becomes your strength. And what a Joy that is!

November 27, 1991 **RESULTS OF REJOICING**

We normally think of Thanksgiving as praise we give to someone else. The Bible says, however, that Thanksgiving helps the one giving the Praise even more than the one receiving it!

Rejoicing helps our Health- Prov 17:22 A merry heart doeth good like a medicine. Everyone knows that depression and worry sap our strength and make us more likely to become ill. Rejoicing, on the other hand, gives us the energy we need to withstand the stresses of life.

Rejoicing helps our Looks- Prov 15:13 A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken. What a difference it makes when you have a smile on your face and joy on your lips. Even a "plain person" is suddenly transformed when the light of a smile comes bursting through. And you ladies will be glad to know that smiling develops less wrinkles on your face than frowning!

Rejoicing helps our attitude- Prov 15:15 He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast. You know how it is. I complained about the color of my shoes until I met a man with no feet. What a difference it makes in your attitude when you learn to be thankful for what you have instead of grumbling about what you want.

So Rejoice this Thanksgiving. God deserves all the thanks and honor you can give Him; and you'll be surprised at what it does for YOU.

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November 29, 1991 **A GIFT OF LOVE**

No one knew exactly how she got there. The first to notice her was John. He immediately started to arise and see what she wanted but the hand of Jesus moved and he remained in his chair.

John, and then the rest of the disciples, watched as the tears began to flow down her face. Silently, they fell from her cheeks and chin onto the feet of Jesus. There they mingled with the dust of his feet and formed a thin coat of mud.

Lifting her tear filled eyes, she suddenly realized that everyone was watching her. Hastily, she looked for a rag or a towel to dry his feet. Finding nothing, she reached over her shoulder, grasp her long flowing hair, and used it to wipe away the tear stained dirt.

Suddenly the voice of Jesus broke the silent scene. He spoke to his host about real love and said that this woman was an example of that love. She had given what she had, of her own self, and from the heart.

Wouldn't Christmas be great this year if people followed this woman's example in giving. The gifts would meet real needs, come from a heart felt desire to share what you have with someone else, and bless those that give as well as those that receive.

I'm sorry it won't happen. It's just that People find it much easier to BUY a present than to GIVE a gift.

December 3, 1991 GENERATIONS

I recently attended a service at which my brother preached the dedication sermon for his granddaughter (I can't believe how OLD he's getting!). At this same service my youngest brother helped sing the choir special (And you don't believe in miracles!). And my mother was sitting there proudly watching the whole thing.

As I looked around the Church that night I saw old school mates singing in the choir, the cute little girl next store when I was growing up now playing the organ, and many of the saints that helped me in my early Christian life sitting all over the congregation. Friends and family all rejoicing together in the dedication of another generation into the work of the Lord.

There have been a lot of changes in our world recently. Governments have fallen, banks have collapsed, and morals have fallen to an all-time low. It's great to know that the changeless God is still working in churches today as He has for the past 2000 years. He reaches people a person at the time. That person then helps reach their family and their friends; who, in turn, reach others.

What a tremendous responsibility that places on each generation to make sure that the next generation learns that Jesus is the only way to truth and life. Thank God for the Faithful people in my home church who week after week faithfully carry on that task.

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December 4, 1991 THE OUTER SHELL

A friend of mine recently brought me a shell when he returned from an ocean trip. It was one of the most beautiful shells I have ever seen; intricately made and beautifully colored.

The thing that attracted by attention was the fact that the outside of the shell was very plain and common looking. It was only because the outer shell had been cracked that I was able to see the beautiful colors and marvelous detail within.

Like this shell, many people have built a "wall" around their true beauty. They fear rejection or pain if they allow anyone to see the real person living within. So they use the walls they've erected to keep everyone at arms length. And wonder the entire time why they're so lonesome and unhappy.

The only way God can expose the beauty and abilities within them is to allow something to come into their life that will break this hard outer shell. It's not pleasant for them, or for God, but it's necessary for their development.

If you are going through a difficult time right now pause and consider. Maybe it's just God's way of making it possible for someone to see the "real" you. And you will find a joy you never imagined when you use your energy to build bridges instead of hold up walls.

December 6, 1991 SOCIETY'S MORALS

Could it be that I've been wrong all these years?? Could it be that Society knows better than God?

Maybe it IS best that we give young people condoms and let them make up their own mind about sex. After all, most young people want to experiment with sex anyway and we might as well make it as safe as possible.

Maybe Society's view of sex is right. Maybe the best thing I can do is let our young people be taught that "love" is simply lust; to be satisfied whenever, however, and with whomever they please. After all, if everyone has a pocket full of condoms then there shouldn't be any unwanted babies or diseased bodies.

But I can't help but think that a man with a thousand wives looked at that kind of life and called it "vanity of vanities".

I know that Society has made a hero out of the "Magic Man" in spite of the fact that he acted like an alley cat and ended up with Aids. That doesn't seem to matter now since he has taken to telling other people that if they are going to use him for an example then they better wear protection.

But my heart breaks for his family and for the sickness they may have to endure because of his actions.

Maybe Society is right. Maybe Morals don't matter. Maybe Women ARE simply "play things" put on earth to satisfy man's basest needs.

But I wonder what kind of world we're going to have when the guidelines become pleasure instead of purity. And I still can't help but wonder if a person would rather face God with condoms in their pocket instead of Christ in their heart.

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December 10, 1991 WARNINGS

My wife was driving home from her dad's home recently and noticed a red light glowing on the dash of the car. She thought she would mention it to me when she arrived home. She almost didn't.

The light was telling her that her emergency brake was up. When she tried to slow down to turn in at our home her brakes were almost completely gone. The car tried to tell her there was a problem but she ignored the warning.

My wife and her sisters were shopping the other day. When they arrived at the Mall and started to get out of the car a buzzer went off. They wondered what it was but found that if they closed the car doors it stopped. So they got out, closed the doors, and went shopping.

When they returned to the car the battery was dead. The car had tried to warn them that the headlights were still on but they ignored the warning.

Of course, YOU would never ignore a warning, would you?? Especially, from the Lord- When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people;

Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul (Ezek 33:1-5).

December 11, 1991 TIMING

It had been a rotten morning. I was working as hard as I could and accomplishing nothing. I tried to copy videos and the tape player broke. I tried to write articles and people kept coming to the door. I tried to work on sermons and they sounded dry and dull even to me.

I had planned to mail newsletters, pay some church bills, and be back in the office before noon. The interruptions and break downs had cost me the entire morning and I was a little angry at my schedule being thrown out of schedule.

Then a lady called. She had been listening to one of my sermon tapes and had a very pressing question about her salvation. She needed answers only I could give.

Almost as soon as she hung up, another lady called about her sick child. She was tired, discouraged, and depressed and the doctors still didn't know what was wrong with her child. She needed me to tell her God was still on the throne and still cared about her.

If I would have been on "schedule" I would have been rambling the road instead of sharing the Gospel.

Maybe that's what the Bible means when it says, "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son..." (Gal 4:4). If we could just learn to see God's Timing instead of looking at our watch; maybe Christmas would indeed be Joy to the world.

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December 13, 1991 FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH

One of the many good things about being a Christian is the fact that we don't have to worry about Superstitions. Friday the Thirteenth is just another day to us. Black cats just have darker colored fur than white cats. Broken mirrors are an extra cost; not a special curse.

Christians have problems like anyone else but they realize that everything that comes our way falls into one of three categories:

- 1) "time and chance" happen to all men and, as a result of that, bad things will sometimes happen to good people. The fact that you were careless and broke a mirror had nothing to do with what happened. Either your carelessness or someone else's carelessness, brought about the problem you're facing.
- 2) Persecution comes our way as a result of our relationship with God. Sometimes that persecution is a physical or verbal attack by someone. Sometimes that attack is a spiritual attack by demons or the Devil. These attacks can cause pain, depression, and frustration. The good news about this is that "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).
- 3) The Divine Plan for our life. God works the bad and the good things in our life into a plan that allows us to face life's circumstances with confidence. We know we're not forgotten or left simply to the whim of some superstitious force. The God of Love is in control, and we rest in His strength.

Friday the Thirteenth is just another day that the Lord has made. Instead of allowing it to control our actions, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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December 17, 1991 LIVING THE LESSONS

A preacher friend was recently having a baptismal service. One lady he was baptizing loved the Lord but was afraid of the water. When he tried to baptize her she became frightened, stiffened up, and he couldn't get her to go under.

The situation finally worked out but I was reminded of many people's problem with serving the Lord. Their heart is willing but their body won't cooperate! Sunday morning sermons stir their hearts but Monday morning laziness controls their actions.

Sunday Morning they leave church with an desire in their heart to witness for the Lord but Monday Morning their mouth talks about everything in the world except the Lord.

Sunday Morning they sing about loving everyone but Monday Morning they have to really concentrate to keep from cursing that slow driver ahead of them.

Sunday Morning they sing about Longing for Heaven but Monday Morning they only think about living in this world.

Many people talk about putting Christ back into Christmas. The only way that will ever happen is when we learn to translate the lessons learned on Sunday into the lives we live on Monday. Then people will have a reason to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

December 18, 1991 THINKING OF OTHERS

I recently rode to a minister's meeting with several preachers. The preacher who was driving had a very bad habit. He drove in the left lane all the time. He also slowed down and speeded up depending on how much he talked; and he talked a lot!

I finally asked him if there was a reason he drove in the fast lane all the time. Just not thinking was all he said.

He might not be thinking but those cars stacked up behind him were surely thinking; and it wasn't nice thoughts about a church van!

One of the clearest lessons Jesus taught was to Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I wouldn't want to be late for an appointment because someone was blocking traffic so I try to pull over out of their way. I don't want people to be rude to me so I try to be as nice as possible to cashiers and sales' clerks. I wouldn't want people to shove and push me so I try to watch out for them as the stores become crowded at Christmas.

On that first Christmas, everyone was worried about taxes, crowded conditions, and daily living. In the process of thinking only of themselves they missed the birth of the Savior of the world. I wonder if we're any different today?

December 20, 1991 SURPRISE

Like most kids, I knew for a long time that S.C. was really my mom and dad. And, like most kids, I managed to find the hidden presents several times as I was growing up. Somehow, that just added to the excitement of Christmas.

One year, when we were all in our teens, Dad told us he was going to let us chose our own Christmas that year. He and mom took us to town, gave us a limit, and allowed us to buy exactly what we wanted. Then we took it home, mother wrapped it up, and we had to wait until Christmas to use it (Mine was the bow and arrow I had always wanted).

I slept late that Christmas. After all, I already knew what I was going to get. That's when I first realized that the surprise is as much fun as the present.

Even God knows that. He had announced the coming of His son for thousands of years and even told exactly where he would be born. Yet, it came as a surprise to everyone because he wrapped him in such a humble "package" and put him in such an unlikely place (a stable).

I hope you will enjoy this Christmas as you watch young people's faces light up as they open their presents. You see, they really do enjoy the package almost as much as the present.

I hope you'll also take time to accept God's present to you. It's plainly wrapped but it's contents are life changing. And you'll be surprised what a difference it makes when you take Christ out of Christmas and put Him into your heart.

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December 24, 1991 REASON FOR CHRISTMAS

It's almost Christmas. Let me introduce you to the reason for the season. Christmas is a celebration (Old English word for celebration was "Mass") of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He was born in a stable in Bethlehem as angels proclaimed His birth. He was sought by humble shepherds and honored by Eastern Wise Men. His birth brought joy to a few, death to all the boy babies in Bethlehem, and angry concern to the King of the Country.

Most of the people in the world thought the first Christmas was just another day. They didn't realize that the birthday of the Babe of Bethlehem would soon be the beginning point of the world's calendars.

The commotion in a small town in the Middle East did nothing to affect the pain and problems they were enduring; or so they thought. Now we know that the only hope this world has was born on that first Christmas morning.

Christmas will simply be another holiday unless you realize what God was doing on that first Christmas day. He was sending His Son into the world so men would have a way to escape death and obtain eternal life. It's God's gift to you. It's free, it's accepted by faith, and it's fabulous! It changed my life, and the lives of thousands of other people. Why don't you really enjoy this Christmas? Let the babe of Bethlehem become the Lord of your life.

December 25, 1991 THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS

Who is this "Christ of Christmas?" Why do we have such a big celebration to honor His birthday? What makes Christ so special?

Born in a stable in Bethlehem, He lived a sinless life and died as a perfect sacrifice. He was raised from the dead by the power of God where he now sits on the right hand of the Father ready to assist all who believe. One day he's coming again to deliver those who have chosen to follow him from sin, sorrow, and death. Then he will establish a kingdom of righteousness and peace where He and His followers will live together in heavenly bliss.

He offers freedom for those who are bound by sin's power and control. He offers hope for those who sink in despair. He offers love for those who think they are unlovable. And He makes His offer to "Whosoever will". He doesn't check your financial records or your family history. He just looks at your faith!

His entrance into lives has mended marriages, saved suicides, repaired reputations, and converted sinners. I have never met a person who was sorry they asked Him into their life; but I have met numerous people who were sorry they weren't saved.

Make this a truly Merry Christmas. Invite Christ into your heart today.

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December 27, 1991 TRACKING TIME

My computer has a "screen saver" as part of its operation. If nothing is typed on the screen within a five minute span the screen dissolves into various patterns (This "saves" the screen by preventing the words on the screen from "burning" in).

Time after time, it also reminds me that I haven't typed anything in the last five minutes! I'll start a sermon or an article and get "bogged" down. Then I just stare at the screen trying to make some sense out of what I've written; or try to find a way out of the dead end I've written myself into.

Calendars serve a similar purpose. There is little difference between the last day of December and the first day of January. Yet we mark it as a very special occasion because it's a warning to us that life doesn't sit still. So we make resolutions to lose weight, be better parents, or pursue a different course in our life. All because we are suddenly reminded that time is passing and we are sitting still.

Some people's "screen saver" has been on for a long time. They started out doing something, got side tracked, and now their life is just a series of confused patterns. Others realize that it's good to be aware of the passing of time. They use these time markers to measure their progress.

God has a perfect plan for your life. Once you find what that plan is you won't just sit and stare at life. You'll be living life to its fullest.