

2007 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 2, 2007 MOM'S FINAL MESSAGE

It was late when we arrived home from the Nursing Home after Mother's death. Although I had many details to take care of the next day I had previously made an appointment for an internet cable to be installed at my home so I had to take care of this before I could do my other duties.

In order to allow the service man to drill a hole in my floor against the back wall in my home office I needed to move a filing cabinet. Behind this filing cabinet I noticed a card that had fallen to the floor so I picked it up and threw it on my desk. Once the service man finished his work and left I finally looked at this card. It was a Christmas card sent from mother several years previously. Almost as if she was speaking to her family one last time from the grave I read this message inside the card- "I wish I could tell you how much you mean to me. All I can say is I love You, Mother".

This coming year will hold many circumstances and surprises. Some will be good and some will be bad. It is even possible that 2007 is the year that death will decide to visit your home. If your family found a final message from you in some hidden place after your passing would it be about love and encouragement or would it be a heartache?

"As the tree falls, there it shall be." (Ecc 11:3). If you live right then the tree will fall right; and any hidden message your family finds from you will be an emotional blessing instead of a shocking revelation.

January 3, 2007 SPEED DIAL NUMBER THREE

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For many years my brothers and I called mother almost every day to check on her and tell her about what we were doing (She knew my schedule better than I did!). Mother recently passed away and with her passing came many details as we dealt with her funeral and final preparations. So many things were going on until I never really had time to let her death "sink in".

Finally, I got back to the office to do some needed work. After several hours of work I automatically reached for the phone and started to dial speed dial number three. That was when it finally dawned on me that mother was gone and the person on the other end of speed dial number three would never answer again.

The good news is that although mother is not at the other end of speed dial number three I know she is resting safely in the arms of God and I will see her again one day and we will have all the time we need to catch up on everything I have done since last we talked. The end is not the end for a child of God. What a great joy to serve a God who not only forgives our sins but also gives us eternal life. Glory! What a great God.

January 9, 2007 **WRONG WAY**

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Due to disease, death, disasters, and such like among his members it is extremely difficult for a Pastor to take an entire week of vacation. My wife and I learned many years ago to take two day “mini-vacations” from time to time. We usually leave early Monday morning and return Tuesday night. Because we like to see new sights we normally journey to a different part of our state and find roads we have not gone down before and then see what is down those roads.

One such time brought us to a sign that said, “King’s Mountain Park” so we decided to check it out. We enjoyed the visit and spent several hours touring the park. When we left the park the exit road was separated from the entrance road. In discussing what we had just seen we did not realize that the exit road led to a four lane road instead of the two lane road we had entered on. Yes, I can testify that going the wrong way on a four lane road gets your heart pumping and your prayer life in order!

Nearly forty five years ago a fourteen year old boy realized he was headed down the wrong road and if he kept going in that direction he would end up in disaster. Thank God, he turned onto a different road and began a great new journey that has been filled with excitement and wonder and will one day end in the best destination imaginable. If he would have kept going the wrong way there is no telling how many lives he would have wrecked in addition to his own. Praise the Lord that someone told this young man how to get off the wrong way that leads to destruction and onto the straightway that leads to eternal life.

January 10, 2007 **DISTRACTED**

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A lady recently told me about an interesting after Christmas experience. She had been to her dad's home to take down his Christmas decorations and pick up some dishes from the family Christmas get together. When she put the dishes in the passenger's seat she put several cake plates on top of the pile and began her journey back home.

The problem came when she made a turn from one road onto another road. The cake plates started to tumble and she instinctively reached over to grab them. While she was busy grabbing the cake plates her car and a stop sign decided to go to war. The car won the battle and the stop sign ended up broken and flat on its back but the car came out with some pretty big “bruises” of its own (Can you say, “One Thousand dollars!?”).

Jesus shared with His followers that one of the greatest dangers they faced in their journey with God was allowing “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things” to distract them from their service for the Lord. Like this incident, these things do not stop the car but the consequences soon become apparent to everyone.

Distractions from your divine duty can be disastrous. Be careful what you allow to occupy the seat beside you. It may take your eyes off of God and that is always a disaster just waiting to happen.

January 16, 2007 STUFF STAYING SHARERS

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One of the great principles among God's people was established by King David. He and his men had returned from a military excursion to find their homes had been burned and their families had been taken captive. The soldiers were already exhausted from their previous obligations and now David had to ask them to begin a forced march in order to overtake the army that had taken their wives and children captive. Soon 200 of the 600 men in the army felt they could not go on so David left them to recover beside a stream while he and the remaining men pursued the enemy.

God greatly blessed when David and his men found the enemy's camp and David was able to win a great victory and recover all the captives, the stolen goods, and a large amount of spoils. When the victorious army returned to where the 200 exhausted soldiers were camped some of the men in David's army did not want these men to share in the extra spoils that were recovered. It was then that David established this great principle- "As his part is that goes down to the battle, so shall his part be that carries by the stuff; they shall part alike" (I Samuel 30:24). Glory! What a great blessing from the Lord.

Many people have greater talents and skills than I have. Sometimes I do all I can do but then find I must sit off to the side while those with more energy and abilities gain the victory. Praise the Lord. God knows my limitations but that does not limit His rewards nor His love. I have learned to do what I can where I am with what I have and then wait on a good and just God to make sure rewards are distributed correctly. What a discouragement defeater that becomes in my work for God.

January 17, 2007 SCORNING THE SCORNER

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"The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly." (Proverbs 3:33-34)

I cannot even imagine what it must be like to have the "curse of the Lord" on a home! I enjoy so many of the blessings of the Lord until it is hard to even conceive what it would be like if God decided to turn against me and do me harm instead of good. I would not be in the shoes of the wicked for the world!

Not only does the Lord curse the home of the wicked but He also "scorns these scorners" (In the Hebrew it says He "scoffs at the scoffers"). That simply means that God makes fun of those who make fun of His people- "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming." (Psalms 37:12-13)

Comedians in America today seem to think the "in" thing to do is to make fun of God's people or God's Word or God's name. I wonder how they will feel when God scorns these scorners and declares, "I will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;" (Proverbs 1:26). That will be a horrible day indeed. I am extremely thankful I belong to those who laugh with God instead of those who laugh at God.

January 23, 2007 EMPTY LIVES

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Young people are going crazy trying to find a new game or a new gimmick that will provide them the thrill they desperately seek. They abuse their bodies with drugs and alcohol, paint their bodies with tattoos, and give their bodies to casual companions in the hope that something will fill that nagging hunger deep in their heart. But nothing they do produces the joy they crave or prevents disease, disaster, and death from visiting their life.

Middle age couples are bailing out of marriages looking for that elusive thing called love. They join the party crowd and do everything within their power to be young again but they find that acting as foolish as a twenty one year old does not make you a twenty one year old. In spite of all of their efforts, even a "bow-flex" body does not satisfy the desires of their soul.

In the midst of all this spiritual hunger it amazes me to see the number of church members who pencil God into their schedule for an hour on Sunday morning and then spend half of that time worrying that the preacher's sermon will be so long until they will have to wait in line at the local restaurant. God to them is a mildly inconvenient but socially necessary part of life. This kind of Empty Religion produces empty hearts that rattle around in empty churches whistling in the dark instead of shining forth God's light.

Jesus Christ left Heaven to die for our sins in order for us to have eternal abundant life. What a shame He is regulated to a curse word by some or a spare tire when disease or disaster appears by others instead of becoming the life altering, eternity changing God He longs to be.

January 24, 2007 ETERNITY'S CALL

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I have a friend who is losing a battle with cancer. Recently, he told his wife that the most disappointing thing in his day was to wake up in this world instead of in Heaven. I know how he feels. People spend all their time and energy in this life trying to accumulate houses, land, and wealth but one day I will live in a city where gold is used for pavement and jewels are used to decorate walls. Wealth is not all it is cut out to be.

When Jesus found himself knocking at death's door His prayer was short and to the point. In that prayer He defined what the real goal of eternal life should be- "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3). Eternal life is not about mansions and money; it is about spending eternity with God and being able to fellowship with God's Son, Jesus Christ on a regular and continuous basis.

My life verse (Psalms 16:11) states that in the presence of the Lord is completeness of Joy. In this life I am able to get just a taste of that complete Joy as I worship and work for the Lord. One day I will finally see Him face to face whom so long I have known heart to heart and the joy will be so great until nothing will matter except to be close to where my Lord lives. It is that expectation that motives my life and helps me to anticipate my death.

January 30, 2007 YOU DID GOOD

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I talked with a lady recently who told me that her husband had taken the afternoon off from work in order to do some things the preacher has asked him to do around the church. I told her that I hoped the preacher would brag on him Sunday. I am tired of preachers who spend every service every week telling me how sorry I am! Sometimes even a blind squirrel finds an acorn!

I know that I am a sinner saved by God's grace and all my good works are just filthy rags before God. I also know that God loves me and thinks so much of my testimonies about Him until He writes them down in a log book in Heaven- "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name." (Malachi 3:16)

It is wonderful to me that Jesus bragged on a poor widow who gave a good gift at church (Matt 12:42-44) and honored a woman who washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:44). Jesus had a very sharp tongue when it came to dealing with Pharisees but He managed to say a lot of good things about a lot of people.

I can almost guarantee that you are not as good as you are supposed to be. I feel confident that you are probably not as good as you need to be. But, more than likely, you did a few things well this week and I am glad you did what you could, where you were, with what you had. God took notice of what you did; and that makes it pretty special.

January 31, 2007 PRAYING FOR YOU

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Thank you for taking the time to read this. For over seventeen years I have written these devotional articles and each week I pray that God will use them to speak to the hearts of the people who take the time to read them. Here are some other things that I pray God will do in your life.

- Your Words- May you have something to say and may you say it well. We will give account to God for what we say- "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." (Matthew 12:36) and for what we fail to say- "When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." (Ezekiel 33:8). May your words have purpose and power when they are spoken.
- Your Wealth- May you have money but may money never have you- "For 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 Timothy 6:10). May you have enough to spare, a heart to share, and the great joy that comes when you truly care.

This is the day the Lord has given you. May you be able to rejoice and be glad in it.

February 6, 2007 SNEAKY SNAKE

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I heard a story recently about an interesting series of events. A man was taking a shower. The weather had begun to turn cold so his wife decided to bring in some plants she had under the garage so the cold would not kill them. When she sat the plants down in the house she saw a small green snake slide out of the plant and slither across the floor.

Immediately she began to panic and scream. Her husband rushed out of the shower to see what was the matter. She told him about the snake so he bent down to see if it had crawled under the couch. About that time the dog put his cold nose to the exposed rear of the man. The man thought the snake had bitten him and jumped into the corner of the couch knocking himself unconscious.

His wife thought the snake had bitten him so she call 911. When the medics arrived they assumed the man had been bitten by a snake so they loaded him on a stretcher to transport him to the hospital. As the medics picked up the stretcher to move the man the snake came out from under the couch. One of the medics panicked and dropped the stretcher, breaking the man's leg!

Satan is first shown in the Bible as a snake. The next time you allow him into your house through the means of books, TV programs, or movies remember this story. You may think that allowing a little snake into your home will not cause you much trouble but you will probably end up with a lot more hurt and misery than you expected.

February 7, 2007 4 TREES

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(Gen 2:9) And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

When God placed man in the Garden of Eden He put 4 kinds of trees in the garden with him. These trees represent the 4 areas of a man's life that need constant cultivation.

1) Pleasant to the Sight- Cultural Awareness. Man does not live by work alone. He needs some things that exist simply because they are pleasant to the senses. God has given us a world of breathtaking beauty to enjoy. Take time to "smell the roses".

2) Good for Food- Physical Development. Man was originally a vegetarian so God provided exactly the trees he needed for proper nourishment. Man today needs to learn that God wants us to eat the right foods, in the right proportions. If we did, what an amazing difference that would make in the health and well being of mankind.

3) Tree of Life- Spiritual Nourishment. This tree represents the cross where the Son of God died for our sins. Yet it also brings forth fruit that enables us to live and show the abundant life we receive when we eat of this fruit.

4) Tree of knowledge of good and evil- Moral Discernment. God did not want "robots" who simply obeyed. He wanted "family" who would chose to choose Him because of the pull of His love. What a great privilege, and responsibility, God has given us. Four Trees, which ones will you eat from today?

February 13, 2007 COVERING LOVE

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Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins. (Proverbs 10:12)

God's love does not make any sense. It causes Him to forgive people who commit murder, abuse children, steal from the poor, and, in general, act like the sorriest form of humanity you could imagine. The human response to these people would be "kill them all, the sooner the better" but God reaches out in Love and invites them to become His children and share in His glory and His riches.

Amazingly, God's love goes even deeper than that. It allows God to forgive His own "children" when they act more like the world than they follow the example of His Son who died to save them. Some Christians spread much more gossip than they do gospel, seek earthly riches much more than they seek heavenly righteousness, and some even get so absorbed with life until they fail to worship and serve the source of life. Yet, the Love of God calls these people to repentance and renewal and exchanges hog pen poverty for robes and rings and eating fatted calf at the Father's house!

God's love does not make any sense. The creator of all could create anything He desires that would do His bidding instantly and forever. Why would He settle for weak humans who are prone to wander into wickedness and who have nothing to offer Him except love and adoration. Is that it? Is the Love of God extended because He wants it returned? I have little riches and few talents but I can love Him who loved me. If Love is what God seeks then I want Him to find it from me. After all, He has given me so much Love until surely I can return it to Him.

February 14, 2007 ABOUNDING LOVE

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And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: (1 Thessalonians 3:12)

The world calls for us to increase in lust for one another and to find ways to physically exploit one another in order to provide a moment of selfish pleasure for ourselves. But, like a man who drinks salt water to quench his thirst, lust living leads to deeper thirst. This lust living provides a moment of physical satisfaction that soon evolves into demanding desires that destroy a person's family, their health, and their life.

God calls on people to increase and abound in love, not lust, for each other. The maker of all men knows that the greatest need of a man's heart is a loving relationship with his creator and a loving relationship with other people. Nothing else; not riches or fame, or sexual experiences, or anything man can make or find will quench the heart hunger that dwells within every soul. Only an abounding love will produce an abundant life.

God demonstrated abounding love at Calvary. He extends this abounding love every time a Christian tells someone about the new life that is available through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul declared that such abounding love never fails. And we get to increase and abound in this love in our daily lives. What a privilege!

February 20, 2007 GUIDANCE GUIDELINES

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Sometimes Christians feel like a cat in a room full of rocking chairs. It is difficult to know what to do in order to keep out of trouble. Some churches say it is wrong to do certain activities while other churches do those things without a second thought. Or you try to live a Christian life at work or school and people continually criticizing you about something you did or did not do. How do you know how a Christian is supposed to live?

I have three Principles that I use for Guidance in my Christian life. They have been a tremendous help to me and I think they will be a great guide for you also.

1) WILL IT DEFILE ME? If I do the action or activity before me will it cause me to sin or bring evil thoughts into my life? Purity of heart is one of the primary requirements of fellowship with God. Is this something I can do in the presence of a Holy God?

2) WILL IT DISHONOR GOD? Would others think less of God because of something I, one of His children, did? My greatest desire is to please God and love Him with all of my heart. Will my actions or attitude hurt God's reputation or cause God heartache?

3) WILL IT DISILLUSION OTHERS? If other people see me do this thing will it cause them to doubt my relationship with God and make me less effective in God's work? Will it cause others to doubt God's Power and stumble in their own Christian life?

Don't allow yourself to be ruled by the whims and shifting standards of others. They go up and down like rocking chairs and you always end up being hurt no matter where you stop

February 21, 2007 IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY

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The most important responsibility in your life is to develop and maintain a relationship with God through faith in Christ. If you fail in this responsibility it will impact you greatly in this life and it will have eternal consequences in the next life! Here are four requirements for establishing such a relationship.

If you want to build a relationship with God then the first thing you must do is DECIDE to Trust God to forgive you of your sins and make you a new creature in Christ. This comes about when you repent of your sinful actions and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

Second, you must make a DEDICATION of yourself to God. This means you make yourself completely available to God for His use and His work. Christianity is more than a belief; it is a life changing relationship that demands our active involvement.

Thirdly, if you would build a relationship with God then you must acknowledge your DEPENDENCE on God. Without God's strength at work in your life then you will fail miserably as you fall for every trick of Satan. You must claim, and cling to, the promises of God.

Finally, there must be a human part added to the Divine work of God. That means you must make a DETERMINATION to follow God's purposes and plans. God will show you the path of life but you must determine to follow the guidelines given to you by God.

Life brings many things our way that demand our attention. Remember that your relationship with God is the most important of those responsibilities.

February 27, 2007 SOWING SEED

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Isaiah 32:20 is a good description of the mission of God's people—"Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass."

This verse describes our objective, as well as our equipment. Our mission is to Sow the seed of God's Word beside ALL waters. When Jesus wanted to emphasize this point he told the parable of the sower in which he said we should sow on the path to the field, on the rocky soil beside the field, among the thorns, and on the good ground.

That's the kind of attitude we need. We should never miss an opportunity to sow a seed. It may be a tract to a stranger, a devotion book in a hospital waiting room, a kind word to someone, a cake to a neighbor, or a clear presentation of the gospel in the home of a friend. The main thing is to use EVERY opportunity to reach EVERY ONE you can with the Good News of Salvation through Christ.

Not only is our mission in varied locations, our methods will also vary. Some will use the "ox" and some will use the "ass". The ox is steady, sure footed, patience, and dependable. The main asset of some people's Christian testimony is their steady dependable Christian living. The ass is faster than the ox, and more stubborn! Some Christians witness with a brief word and a determination that will not be swayed.

If you are a Christian, sow seed everywhere, using the personality God has given you. The fruit will make every sacrifice worthwhile.

February 28, 2007 UPSIDE DOWN SPOONS

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I did not have any sisters so my three brothers and I had to take turns washing dishes. I don't like washing dishes.

When I married a wife I gave up washing dishes except in an emergency or sickness. My wife doesn't try to preach for me and I don't try to wash dishes for her!

After we were married for a few years, I decided to "butter" her up by washing the dishes for her one afternoon while she was visiting a friend. Instead of telling me how nice I was, however, the first thing she did was tell me the spoons were lying in the drain the wrong way. So much for butter!

I hated to admit it but she was right. I had rinsed the spoons off and put them in the drain face up. That caused the rinse water to collect in the bottom of the spoons. I should have turned them upside down so all the water would drain from them.

That's a problem people sometimes have also. They come to God for cleansing but they don't turn over after they're clean and sin collects in their life again. They need to learn that God expects us to turn our back on sin when we turn our face toward Him.

If sin is continually defeating you today, maybe you're facing the wrong way. Turn over and let the sin drain out of your life.

March 6, 2007 WHO IS YOUR DADDY?

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There is a slang statement used by many people that has great implication for you today, "Who is Your Daddy?" It is used in a negative sense to insinuate that your mother was a harlot. It is used in a boastful way as a variation on the little boy taunt of previous years where children would say, "My dad can beat your dad!" In plain English, this statement simply asks a very important question, "Who is our daddy?"

According to the Word of God there are only two "spiritual beings" who can be your father; either the Devil or God- Jesus told some people that "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44). The Apostle Paul preached that, "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26). The determining difference about who is your "daddy" is based on whether you were simply born as a person or whether you have been born again.

I am glad to report to you today that Jehovah God is my Daddy because of the time I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior. That means I am not the son of a harlot because I know my Father. And, in case you are wondering, since I am a child of God, and if you are a child of the Devil; my daddy can beat your daddy!

March 7, 2007 STIR THE SUGAR

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The man came into the small town restaurant and asked for a cup of coffee as he sat down at the counter. When the waitress brought the coffee the man emptied the last two packs of sugar in the receptacle in front of him into the coffee and then started looking around for more sugar. The waitress noticed him and asked if there was anything she could do so the man asked for more packets of sugar. Almost all small town waitresses have a "mother" complex and it came out in this waitresses as she leaned over, looked into the coffee cup, and said, "You have plenty of sugar in your cup if you would just stir it up!".

Paul must have had that same thought in mind when he admonished young Timothy to "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." (2 Tim 1:6). He was telling this young preacher that he had everything he needed for success in the ministry if he would just put it to work instead of simply allowing it to "lay on the bottom of his cup".

Minister's today have advantages in education and equipment that Pastors in past years could only have dreamed about. I believe there is plenty of "sugar" in the cup and that ministers today could really make a difference if they would get stirred up. May God help us to stop looking around for more equipment all the time and, instead, begin using what we have to make a real difference for Christ.

March 14, 2007 THINGS THAT DEFEAT US

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1) Secondary Defeats- If Satan cannot defeat you he will try to defeat someone whose defeat will defeat you.- “And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him (Jesus): for they said, He is beside himself.” (Mark 3:21). The other Gospels tell us this was the family of Jesus. If Satan cannot stop you then he will try to get those close to you to stop you.

2) Lack of Discernment Defeats- Satan will try to get you to push on the brakes or push on the gas instead of going at God’s timetable (Jesus was tempted by Satan to worship Satan now and he would receive the kingdoms of the earth instead of following God’s plan to the cross)

3) Mixed Multitude Defeats- “And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?” (Numbers 11:4). There will always be “good” people in the church who want the “onions of Egypt” instead of the manna from Heaven; beware of them.

4) Example Defeat- “And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed.” (Daniel 11:35). When Leaders fall the ripples rock many boats

5) Faith Failure Defeats- “And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” (Matthew 13:58). How sad that our unbelief can limit God’s work!!

Satan wants to defeat you today. Team up with Christ and get on the Victory side!

March 15, 2007 DEFEATING DEFEATS:

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Satan is out to discourage, defile, defeat, and destroy you. Do not let him get you down. Here are a few verses you can claim to get Satan off your back. Remember that it was the Word of God that Jesus used when He was tempted by Satan- “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (Matthew 4:10 “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (1 John 5:4). You are a winner when you walk by faith, worship in faith, and war with the weapons of faith.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Satan cannot corner you into a place that God cannot reach and from which God cannot rescue.

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:4). Satan has a loud bark but he is just a little puppy when he tangles with the Holy Spirit who lives in the heart of Christians. Live in Glory instead of in Gloom- God is on your side and that means you are on the winning side!

March 20, 2007 RESISTING TEMPTATION

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Temptation is a troublesome problem. Here are some ways to win the battles.

1. GUARD YOUR GOING- (Prov 4:14-15) "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." If you keep walking by the Devil's house then he will invite you in!

2. TRANSFORM YOUR THINKING- (Rom 12:1-2) "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Recognize Temptation as a harm to defeat you instead of a help to delight you.

3. EXERCISE SELF CONTROL- (1 Cor 9:27) "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The limits you put on your life will end up giving you more pleasure than the pleasure sin promised you.

4. BE ACCOUNTABLE- (James 5:16) "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another,". Ever notice how easy it is to overcome temptation when others are watching? Remember that.

5. RELY ON GOD'S HELP- (1 Cor 10:13) "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Don't allow temptation to drive you into the rocks of ruin. God's lighthouse is pointing the way through dangerous waters into a safe harbor. God wants you to win and He will help you.

March 21, 2007 RECOGNIZING TEMPTATION

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Temptation is a troublesome problem. It varies from person to person- Things that tempt one person have little impact on another person or as I tell people, "one man's worm is another man's bait". But regardless of where it comes from, all of us face temptation on a regular basis; and, sadly, Temptation triumphs more that we would like to admit. Here are some things to help you recognize Temptation when it knocks.

Temptation tempts us by sneaking into our mind and heart. A worldly song several years ago proclaimed that the Devil came to the door wearing a "Blue Dress" instead of a red suit. Temptation lurks in Churches as well as in bars. Remember that.

Temptation tramples us by suddenly stampeding the desire for wrong desires into our life. Sometimes temptation explodes in our life like a dam has broken and a wall of "temptation" tries to drown us in an instance. We have to learn to just hold on until the wave passes and things return to normal.

Temptation taunts us by exposing the beauty and pleasures of sin in such a way until we look at sin as a need we must fulfil. Temptation sings her siren song of unmet needs so that we ultimately believe that wrong is right and a good God would really want us to have this bad thing that seems so good.

Temptation is strong; but not as strong as God! Temptation is pretty but it cannot compare to the beauty of God. Do not let Temptation trip you up.

March 27, 2007 HEARING GOD'S STILL SMALL VOICE

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The lovely Princess Paula gave me a portable MP3 player for Christmas. What a good wife I have! On a recent trip to India I loaded the player with the Psalms, the New Testament, and a large selection of music in order to help with the long flight times.

To avoid music monotony I mixed a large amount of Southern Gospel music with a few Contemporary songs, some Bible College Choir songs, and several Classical Music Albums. That way the tempo changes almost every time I change songs.

I was frustrated on the flight to India because the low part of the Classical Music was drowned out by the hum of the airplane. If I turned the volume up loud enough to hear the low parts then the rest of the music blared so loud until it hurt my ears.

I was reminded of this incident during my prayer time in India. As I sat just spending time with God I realized how soft His still small voice sounded. That was when I realized again how often the hum of daily living drowns out God's sweet voice and I end up only hearing part of what I need to hear.

Oh, how careful I need to be in order to make sure I take time regularly to still my heart and calm my soul so I will not miss a single word from my wonderful Lord- "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalms 46:10)

March 28, 2007 BOSOM OF GOD

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Translating the Bible from one language to another can cause some interesting problems. In English we use the word "Bosom" to represent a place of comfort and care close to the heart of God. In other languages talking about the "Bosom of God" would confuse people because it would mean God was a woman.

Almost all other languages translate the Hebrew or Greek word from which we get "Bosom" into the "Lap of God". People everywhere can relate to a young child getting into their parent's lap in order to find comfort and security.

No matter what you call it, I hope you will spend some time in the "Bosom of God" each day. You will know no greater joy; nor find any greater peace, than time spent in the "Lap of God" listening to His voice and basking in His Love. After all, that is where Jesus spent His time- "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:18)

April 3, 2007 DEATH'S DESPAIR

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“For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 9:4-6)

According to the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes Death brings “gloom, despair, and agony on me; deep dark depression, excessive misery”. According to him, the dead “know not anything, have no reward (It is over when it is over), and are soon forgotten”. He also declares that everything that made the deceased a person (love, hatred, envy) is perished and the deceased no longer have a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun. Talk about a “bad news sermon”! I sure would hate to have this preacher preaching to me each week.

Thankfully, God’s character and compassion would not allow such despair to go unnoticed and He devised a plan that would defeat Death’s Despair and turn “no hope” into eternal abundant life. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, came to earth, lived a sinless life, died a sin payment death, and rose from the grave a death conquering Savior. Death is defeated and eternal abundant life is available for all. What a glorious difference Easter makes! “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Cor 15:55, 57).

April 4, 2007 DO NOT DIE DEAD

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The most awful thing that could happen to a person is for them to die dead. The Bible declares that people who have not repented of their sins and trusted Christ to forgive and save them are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). They may be walking around “alive and well” but spiritually they are separated from God’s life and love and they are “dead men walking”. When breath finally leaves their body they will find themselves separated from God forever without help and without hope. What an awful situation, to face death dead.

When Jesus was on earth He raised from the dead a twelve year old girl who had just died, a widow’s son who was already in the coffin on the way to be buried, and a man who had been dead for so long until people assumed he had already begun to “stink”. Then, three days after His own death, Christ was resurrected from the dead and showed Himself to numerous individuals and groups before ascending to Heaven. He made it plain to all that men no longer needed to face death dead; they could now face the end of this life with their sin debt forgiven and the promise of eternal abundant life with God forever.

I can think of nothing worst to happen in your life than for you to die dead. Jesus wants to give you life and change your future. Will you trust Him today and accept the eternal life He freely gives?

April 10, 2007 WIFE, WORKER, WITNESS

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How does God expect you to live? Are we to be like the little Dutch boy and plug holes in the dam of life until we run out of fingers and toes? Is the Abundant life actually just rules and regulations we have to learn in order to live correctly?

Basically, there are three things God expects out of a Christian. He wants us to be a good wife, a good worker, and a good witness.

The Good Wife comes from the fact that Christians are the Bride of Christ. Christ expects His bride to love Him so much until she will leave everything for Him. He then expects her to bond with Him so closely in affections and actions until the two become one. That's easy to understand. These are the same things you want out of your husband or wife.

Secondly, Christ expects us to be good Workers. A good Worker is someone who comes to work on time every day, who gives an honest day's work, and who does his job without complaining. Simple ideas that should apply to your place of worship as well as to your place of employment.

Finally, Christ expects us to be a Witness. Witnessing is not throwing someone in a corner and making them believe as you believe. Witnessing is simply telling people the difference Christ has made in your life. Sharing answered prayers should be as natural as sharing an exciting news item from the newspaper. Sharing your love for Christ should be as easy as sharing your devotion to the Gamecocks or the Tigers. It's simple to witness when Christ is the main focus of your life.

What should you pray for God to do in your life today? Pray that God will make you a good Wife, a good Worker, and a good Witness.

April 11, 2007 RUBBER BAND CONVICTIONS

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We live in the day of "Rubber Band Convictions". Instead of being a rock in the midst of a stormy sea many church members now are driven with the wind and tossed like the foam on the waves. Instead of standing for righteousness and right these people, like the rubber band, stretch their convictions to fit the circumstances of the moment.

- Rubber band convictions justify live in lovers as simply a sign of the times instead of calling it adultery and fornication.
- Rubber band convictions sit hour after hour in front of a TV which is spewing cursing, corruption, and sex and never consider turning it off. Then that same person self righteously moan the next day at work about how bad the world is becoming.
- Rubber band convictions call Sunday the Lord's Day; unless company comes, or you get tired and think a day at the lake would relax you much more than an hour in Church; or you find you haven't been able to do all the shopping you want to do during the other six days of the week.
- Rubber band convictions believe in tithing your income; unless finances are a little tighter than normal this week, or you don't like something someone at the Church did or didn't do.

Sadly, many people have rubber band convictions today. I pray they will finally wake up and see that "rubber band convictions" is just another way of saying lukewarm Christians; and lukewarm Christians make God sick.

April 17, 2007 **HAND OF GOD**

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Gentle but firm. Tender but tough. This is how I would describe the hand of God. When He gently lays His hand on my shoulders stooped with despair or defeat His hand is as comforting as a warm blanket on a cold night. When I am being rebellious and stubborn His finger points in my face before His hand firmly grips my shoulder with enough pressure to let me know I need to straighten up and do right. The Word of God gives us three major areas in which the hand of God impacts our life on a regular basis.

The Hand of God holds the breath of Life- "In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." (Job 12:10). "But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified?" (Daniel 5:23)

The Hand of God helps us enjoy Life's Journey- "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God." (Ecclesiastes 2:24)

The Hand of God guards our Salvation- Jesus said, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:28)

Whose hand is on your shoulder today; guiding, keeping, and guarding you?

April 18, 2007 **DESIRE**

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When people ask me why some churches grow and prosper and other churches struggle along in survival mode I tell them there is a simple answer to this complex problem. If a church wants to grow then two "desires" must be in evidence. The Church must desire for people in the area to come to that church and the people in the area must desire to come to that church. In other words, in order for a church to grow it must really want to grow and it must have something to offer so that people will desire to be part of what is going on at that church.

Some churches talk about growth but their real desire is to have more people to attend so they can brag about their growth. They do not mind if these new people take some of the "less desirable jobs" in the church but they absolutely do not want them to disturb the present power base. They want to be able to brag about growing but they do not want anything in the church to change and as soon as new people bring in new ideas and new programs then problems arise. Soon the same little crowd is moaning in the same little church about their desire to grow and wondering if the problem could not be corrected with a new preacher.

If your church is experiencing "yo yo" growth; up and down, up and down, then I encourage you to prayerfully step back and look at the desire of your own heart about reaching a lost world for Jesus. And then ask yourself why people in the community should desire to join with you in building a work of God. The answers may surprise you.

April 24, 2007 ADULTERY COST

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If you watch TV or listen to today's music on the radio it will soon become apparent to you that everyone is either committing adultery or desires to commit adultery. The good news is that this is not true; there are still a large number of faithful men and women who live and love right. The bad news is that more and more people are saying, "If everyone else is doing it then I might as well join the crowd". Let me give you five reasons Adultery will cost you more in pain than the pleasure it will provide.

1) Disease- When you lay down with dogs there will come a time you will get up with fleas. This disease will impact you personally and will also impact your family.

2) Discontent- A one night stand with no responsibilities often leads to discontent with the spouse you have and the duties that are part of any real relationship.

3) Divorce- Discontent often leads to the breakup of a marriage. Now you find that the one night stand person is not so great when you have to face them every night! And it get really "interesting" when you have to maintain two households when you cannot afford to keep up one.

4) Divided Families- Children are often the victims of adults deciding to have some outside "fun". This broken foundation often leads to tremendous trauma, and life long scars, for children.

5) Displeases God- "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." (Hebrews 13:4)

Low living comes at a high cost. You might want to consider that cost before you listen to the world's "love song".

April 25, 2007 PASSENGER CHILDREN

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When I travel on public transportation I pray for the Lord to give me the right person to sit in the seat beside me. Recently I took a trip that involved flying a local commuter airline to Atlanta. On the flight to Atlanta and on the flight from Atlanta my travel companions were young married women. I have reached the "father figure" age so most young ladies do not mind sitting beside me.

I generally try to determine the purpose of a person's flight and then find out some things that interest them. This will usually give me some idea about what is going on in that person's life. Knowing this helps me to determine if I need to offer any spiritual help to this person.

On the flight to Atlanta the young lady beside me talked about her children and their involvement in a Christian School and about the wonderful Church she attended. On the flight back from Atlanta this young lady talked about her stress filled life and her concerns for her child because of the problems in today's society.

Although I have been a Christian for many years it still amazes me to see the difference it makes in a family when the parents of that family center their life around an active faith in Christ. And it still perplexes me when I see parents struggling through life when God is so ready to help them. As I told that second young lady, "If your life is so busy until it has no time for God then you are headed for some really rough days ahead".

May 1, 2007 REASONS FOR TROUBLE

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As I travel through my life journey I have observed that troubles generally come because of one of four reasons. Once I determine the reason for the trouble then it is much easier to get out of the trouble or better endure it.

1) Stupid Decisions- Sometimes all of us, for reasons that are still unclear to me, have an attack of the “stupid”. We do things that would make no sense to us if they were done by someone else and then we have to live with the consequences. This is a surprisingly common reason for trouble.

2) Sinful Activities- The Lust of the flesh and the Pride of life often cause us to do things that lead to trouble in our life. Repentance, restoration, and renewal can ease these problems but some of them have very long term consequences. For example, repenting over the fact that you robbed a bank will bring you forgiveness but it will probably not get you out of jail.

3) Circumstances of Life- “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Sometimes things happen because things happen. When a hurricane hits, the wicked and the righteous both endure the wind and the rain.

4) Spiritual Growth- Some troubles are allowed in our life for our good and God’s Glory (Remember the troubles that Job experienced). This is where we must be careful to allow trouble to make us better instead of bitter.

More than likely you will face trouble this week. Find out why and then deal with it accordingly.

May 2, 2007 VICTORY OVER TROUBLE

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The trouble with trouble is that it troubles everyone! “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.” (Job 14:1). Trouble will be different from time to time and it will vary from person to person but as long as you walk on this sin cursed earth trouble will knock on your door; and, always it seems, at the most inconvenient time. How can we thrive instead of just survive when Trouble decides to visit us?

When Trouble comes it should cause us to examine our life and see if Trouble has come because of our own wrong actions. If that is the case then we should repent of the wrong we have done and ask God to restore us to Himself and release us from the trouble our sin has produced- “But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them.” (2Ch 15:4)

Trouble should also drive us to God in Prayer as we seek a way God can use this situation to develop us- “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” (Ps 50:15)

We should be very careful, however, that we do not seek release from Trouble by leaning on Human wisdom and strength. People mean well but they can easily make things worse because they do not know all that is going on- “Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.” (Ps 60:11).

When Trouble comes then run into the arms of God for peace and protection. That may sound simplistic but it has worked in my life for over 45 years- “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Ps 46:1)

May 8, 2007 KEEPING MOMMA HAPPY

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A frequent comment with a great deal of truth is the statement, "When Momma is not happy then no one is happy". Here are some guidelines to help keep Momma happy.

1) Tell Mother you love her. Husbands and Children many times fail to realize the amount of constant work and stress that Mothers endure. It is so important that they hear those around them express love to them from time to time.

2) Partner with Mother in Life. Spend time with your mother. Learn from your mother (Good recipes and good advice many times die with Mothers). Help Mother with some of her work without being told (Please be careful about doing this if your Mother has a heart condition!).

3) Praise Mother often- In the great description of an ideal woman in Proverbs the writer declares that a great woman is one whose "children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." (Pr 31:28). I do not remember that I have ever met a Mother who was praised too much by her family.

4) Pray for your Mother daily. I hope that your Mother is a dedicated Christian who gives you Godly advice and shows you a daily example of how to live right. Praise God in this case and daily pray for God to guard and guide your mother. If your Mother is not a believer then pray every day that she will give her heart to God so she can meet you in Heaven.

"Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." (Pr 31:30). May your Mother be happy as you praise her for her love for God and her care for you.

May 9, 2007 MOTHER's KISS

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It is 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 for you 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, that kiss will suddenly make things 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 15, 2007 THE WORTH OF WITNESSING

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The most wonderful privilege given to Christians is the opportunity we have to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with a world that desperately needs to hear the good news we proclaim. Witnessing for Jesus is not trying to enlist more people to attend your church. Witnessing is not trying to put so much of a guilt trip on people until they reluctantly do what is right in order to get you off their back. Witnessing is allowing people to see that the greatest privilege in the entire world is to become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Becoming a Christian is the greatest opportunity you will ever receive because it meets the greatest need you will ever have. The sin that corrupts your life and condemns your soul also alienates you from God. The greatest need you have is to find a way to return to fellowship with God. That is the very thing that Jesus died to accomplish.

Salvation not only meets the greatest need of your life, it also achieves the greatest results. Nothing can transform a life like being “Born Again” by faith in Jesus Christ. It makes you a new creature in this life and assures you of a blessed eternity with God. Nothing else in this world comes close.

God’s gracious gift of salvation meets the greatest need of a person and achieves the greatest results possible but it also costs the greatest price ever paid; the death of God’s only Son. Salvation is free but it is not cheap.

Do not be angry when I witness to you about Jesus. Witnessing is not bad. It is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread so that you can satisfy that desperate hunger in your soul and enjoy the wonderful fellowship with God that I enjoy.

May 16, 2007 SINNERS NEED FROM SAINTS

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The Job of Christianity is to get men into Heaven; and to get Heaven into men! It is not an easy task but it will be much easier if we realize what Sinners need from Saints.

Sinners need COMFORT from Saints: “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” (Psalms 69:20). Sinners live in a troubled world full of change and chaos. They need someone to have pity on them.

Sinners need CARE from Saints: “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” (Psalms 142:4). Increasingly we live in a world where society shuts itself off from others behind locked doors where the only view they get of those around them is the distorted misshapen view given on TV. Christians must show they really care if they will make a difference.

Sinners need CLARITY from Saints: “And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:30-31). No wonder Paul preached, “if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Corinthians 14:8). Saints need to say what they mean and mean what they say.

Finally, Sinners need CHRIST from Saints: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). Saints, are you meeting the needs of Sinners?

May 22, 2007

SAINTS AS SOLDIERS

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Abraham, the friend of God, was a commander of the army that defeated 4 kings and rescued his nephew, Lot. Moses, the meekest man on the earth in his day (Num 12:3), was a commander in chief of a great army that defeated several nations. Joshua was the commander of the army of Israel that waged a conquering campaign throughout the Promised Land. David, the man after God's own heart, spent most of his time as king fighting, and winning, battles against a multitude of foes. And the list goes on and on.

Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christianity, was a career soldier. When Paul wanted to admonish his son in the gospel, Timothy, he told him, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:3). Throughout history, many of God's choice vessels have been connected to the military and have been actively engaged in protecting God's people and God's principles.

I honor these Sainly Soldiers today. Many times they must face an overwhelming force before them and a hostile media behind them but they stand fast and do their job day after day. Loneliness and fear are their constant companions but they get their orders, they pray for God's protection, and they do their duty. God Bless them.

Will you join with me in prayer for our military today? They are not perfect; they are just ordinary people who are doing an extraordinary job in order that you and I may have peace and prosperity in our daily life. They need wisdom in order to make correct split second decisions. They need protection from enemies all around them. And they need to know someone cares about them. Lift them up in your prayers and tell a veteran or an active duty military person today that you appreciate them.

May 23, 2007

LAW OF FAIRNESS

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The biggest stumbling block about God for many "intellectuals" is the "law of fairness". The "law of fairness" declares that God must treat everyone the same and love people without partiality in order to meet men's standards of what they believe a god should be. They believe this "law of fairness" is higher and more absolute than God and that all of God's actions must be in response to this law.

The problem with the "law of fairness" is that it was invented by man and is nowhere approved by God. The Bible is extremely clear that God chooses certain people to bless or to use based simply on the fact that He is God and He has the right to set His own standards of selection- Look at the first two children produced by mankind. Cain brought a gift to God of the best he had of his own works and Abel brought a bloody sacrifice. God rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's offering based on a "God guideline" about the necessity of the need of a blood sacrifice. It may not have been fair but it was (and is) the principle God operates on in establishing a relationship with man.

God declared that His thoughts are not our thoughts and our ways are not His ways (Is 55: 8-9). Remember that the next time you think God is not being fair to you or to someone you know. God will always do right but He will not be bound by a definition of fair established by those who believe that in order for God to be God then He must fit into a box that they have devised. God is much bigger than that.

May 29, 2007

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

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One of the great benefits of traveling all over the world to visit missionaries is the perspective it has given me about Christian responsibilities. When you attend the same church or very similar churches most of your life then you think Christianity is mainly showing up at Church on Sunday and trying to live a “good” life as defined by the standards of the society in which you live. Observing other cultures and understanding other viewpoints about a relationship with God has led me to reexamine this definition of Christianity. From this reexamination has come three basic principles about my duties as a Christian.

One responsibility I have as a Christian is to Handle my Wealth Wisely. Americans define Wealth as money or things. When you visit other countries where the bare necessities of life are scarce and where wealth is measured in food for that day you reexamine what Wealth really means. God has given each of us certain “talents” to use for His Glory. God will judge me on how I have used those “talents”; not on how big my bank account is when I finally come to the end of life. I have a responsibility to use whatever I have, where ever I am, to serve God and His people.

Another responsibility a Christian must assume is to See the World Correctly. It is easy to develop “tunnel vision” that only allows me to care about my community or my color. Traveling the world lets you see that God’s love is needed, and available, for everyone in the world. My heart can no longer be satisfied that my family knows Christ when I know thousands of families who desperately need to know this same life changing Christianity that I know.

(Continued Next Week).

May 30, 2007

STAYING STEADFAST

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Most people who attend churches today want to hear, ‘something GOOD is going to happen to you’ rather than “Be thou faithful unto Death and I will give you the crown of life”! Most church members are not interested in what it cost to be a Christian; their interest is in what they can gain by being one. “What shall we have therefore” has replaced “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me”.

Christ told the Church at Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11) to faithfully endure; even unto death. That kind of perseverance is sadly needed today. People leave churches these days if someone fails to speak to them! Or if they don’t like the singing. Or for almost any other reason you can think of. They have no loyalty to the church and the work of God. All they care about is having their needs met!

This kind of Church member wilts in the heat of persecution and runs off to a “church” where less is required of them. After all, they joined God’s army because they had a problem they wanted solved and they liked the retirement plan offered by Christianity. They never expected to actually be called on to fight in God’s battles or suffer as God’s soldier.

If God has assigned you a job then your job is to do that job! If God has put you in a place then your job is to stay in that place until God moves you to another place. Christianity is not about church shopping for the best church with the least expectations. Christ called men to be dedicated disciples. Time has not changed that call.

June 5, 2007 CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITIES (II)

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Last week we talked about the first two of the three responsibilities that help define a Christian's mission and motive in this world- A Christian is someone who Handles their Wealth Wisely and Sees the World Correctly. Christians realize they have been given gifts and responsibilities by God and they are accountable for how they handle this "wealth". Christians also realize that the world and all that is in it will pass away so they must do all they can to save that which God values (The souls of men) while, at the same time, not allowing the other things of the world to trap or tempt them.

Today we want to look at the final responsibility that defines the success of a Christian; learning to Cover Wickedness Rightly.

There are a tremendous number of "good" people in the world who are doing the best they can to be what their society tells them they should be. They do good works and live "good" lives. They are loved by many and they love many. It would be easy to say the good works of these people far outweigh the bad they may do so a just God will treat them justly and grant them entrance into Heaven. It would be easy to say this but it would be a really bad mistake to say this.

God has plainly declared that the only covering for the sin and wickedness of mankind that He will accept is the righteous sacrifice of His only son, Jesus Christ. Mankind can debate God, or doubt God, or deny God about this covering for his wickedness but nothing will change what God has declared about the only way to Heaven.

Christians have a responsibility to share that there is only one God accepted way to Cover Wickedness Rightly. Thank God if a Christian cares enough about you to share that way with you this week.

June 6, 2007 WORKING OUT SALVATION

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"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." (Philippians 2:12-16)

I love this passage in the book of Philippians. It comes immediately after the great passage where the humble mind of Christ is described and it plainly declares how a Christian is to live as he "works out his salvation" (Not work to obtain salvation but "work out" (bring to completion) what God has begun in him).

Four principles are given. 1) Submit to God so He can work in you correctly. 2) Do not grumble and complain about God's development program in your life. 3) Live in such a way until God will be glorified and people will want the life transforming power you demonstrate in daily living. 4) Share the bread of life that you have received with a world that is starving for something that really satisfies.

In a world of confusion and chaos may we "work out our salvation" each day. When we do then the abundant life will become a daily experience instead of a wishful dream.

June 12, 2007

EMPTY PLATES

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A drunkard sat at a table in a bar with several of his companions. His wife entered and set a covered dish down before him. "You were too busy to come home for supper", she said, 'so I brought it to you." She left as all his buddies laughed and congratulated him on having such a good wife. He invited them to share his meal but when he removed the cover there was no food inside. Instead there was a note which said, "I hope you enjoy this supper. It is the same thing your wife and children are eating!"

Over and over I have seen that Satan promises men pleasures and joy but he always gives them empty plates and hungry families. Like the prodigal son, men find companions and "friends" as long as they are spending their inheritance but as soon as the money runs out so do the friends and they end up hungry in hog pens. In the meantime, the family money is gone, the family's heart is broken, and family relationships are destroyed. Satan promised them the moon and gave them the mud!

Father's Day is upon us. It should be a time of rejoicing and honor as wives and children rejoice in the leadership and love they receive from the family husband and father. Sadly, many will cry at home over empty plates and broken promises.

It does not have to be this way. I have seen the life altering power of faith in Christ change men from drunkards into dads and from lazy no good wife abusers into loving caring husbands. That is why I tell men that Father's Day is a good time to load up the family and go to a Church where you can hear God's Word and respond to God's Call. If you do, it will be the best Father's Day you have ever experienced.

June 13, 2007

MAKING DAD GLAD

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There are many gifts you could give your Dad this Father's Day. Some he would enjoy and some he would endure (like funny ties). Here are a few principles from Proverbs that will please your Dad even more than a present.

1) Use that wisdom your Dad had tried so hard to give you- "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." (Proverbs 10:1). Your Dad has worked hard and sacrificed greatly so you could receive a good education in order for you to be properly equipped to be a success in life. Do not "blow it" by making foolish decision and ignoring all your Father has taught you - "He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy." (Proverbs 17:21)

2) Stay away from people and situations that will destroy your character and corrupt your conduct- "Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance." (Proverbs 29:3). When you are 16 you think your Dad is the dumbest person in the world. When you are 26 you realize he was one of the smartest men you have ever known. Remember that when you disobey your father's instructions about boys to date and friends to hang out with.

3) Get into a right relationship with the Heavenly Father- 'the father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him." (Proverbs 23:24). Nothing you could do this Father's Day will make your father any happier than you committing to live your life for God. It will cause your father to "greatly rejoice" and make this the best Father's Day he has ever had.

June 19, 2007

GOALS ENERGIZE US

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Jesus and the Disciples had traveled all morning and stopped at noon in a strange village for rest and refreshment. The Disciples went into town to get “peanut butter and potted meat” for lunch while Jesus sat by the village well. Along came a notorious woman to get water and Jesus told her about living water and changed her life. When the Disciples returned and offered Jesus something to eat He told them that His nourishment had already been provided because He had been accomplishing the goal given Him by God.

Jesus recognized a great principle; accomplishing goals energize us. In a day in which exhaustion is a constant word in everyone’s conversation we need to look again at the great benefit of setting and accomplishing goals. People tend to keep going when they know WHERE they are going and WHAT they hope to accomplish. Without a real Goal people tend to wander into inactivity or self pity and lose heart.

Goals must have a long range Objective while providing for short range victories. The normal formula for a goal is “Have a Dream, Tell a Dream, Do a Dream”. That simply means you get a vision of what you want or need to accomplish. Then you commit yourself to that goal by telling other people what you hope to accomplish. Finally, you begin working a step at a time to accomplish that goal.

Goals must be obtainable and worthwhile. A dream is a nightmare if it is something you dreamed up but will never be able to accomplish. Your goal must also be something you feel is needed or you will soon lose interest and quite when the going gets tough.

Goals energize us. Find out God’s Plan and get busy accomplishing His goal for your life. You will find energy and excitement that will change your attitude and energize your life.

June 20, 2007

THE STICK THAT SAVED A NATION

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One of the amazing stories in the Bible is about the ‘stick that saved a nation’. When God called Moses to lead the nation of Israel out of captivity in Egypt into the Promised Land Moses was less than enthusiastic about the task! In fact, God had to do some serious work on Moses to get him to accept the job.

One of the key things God did to convince Moses that he would empower him to accomplish this task had to do with the stick that Moses used as a shepherd’s staff in order to tend to his sheep. God told Moses to cast this shepherd’s staff upon the ground where it became a snake. When Moses picked it up it became a stick again.

Later God told Moses to hold this stick out over the Red Sea and God parted the sea so the Children of Israel could go across on dry land and escape the Egyptian army. At another time, when the Children of Israel were thirsty God told Moses to strike a Rock with this stick and enough water came out to quench the thirst of the entire nation!

On three different occasions this common stick was instrumental in delivering the nation of Israel. God can take common things and use them in uncommon ways. Remember that the next time you think God cannot use something you have to help His work and expand His Kingdom. You may think all you have is a stick but God may see it as a scepter that can change a nation and deliver a people.

June 26, 2007 IS IT WORTH IT?

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‘There is no sin for which it is worth your while to be damned.’ –Spurgeon

How very wise was this great preacher of the Gospel, Charles Spurgeon. Think of it. What sinful pleasure or activity could you do that would be worth the eternal pain and suffering it would bring?

Is a roll in the hay worth an eternity in Hell? Is a moment of sinful pleasure worth what it really costs? What sinful activity would a man think was worth so much until he would exchange his soul in order to participate in it?

From the very beginning of childhood instruction parents must teach their children to deny themselves some things they crave at that moment in order to live by God’s Guidelines. Giving a child anything they want anytime they want it leads to chaos and confusion, and, many time, leads to jail time. From the beginning people must be taught that enjoying life does not always come from giving in to every desire that comes into their mind or heart. Denying yourself something now in order to enjoy everything later is a tremendous anticipated joy. It does not take the fun out of life; it makes life abundant.

Jesus asked this heart searching question, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mt 16:26). Is anything in this world worth giving your soul in order to enjoy? When Satan tempts you to give in to the lusts of the flesh just ask yourself a simple question, Is it worth it? Is the pleasure I will enjoy worth the price I will pay?

‘There is no sin for which it is worth your while to be damned.’ Amen.

June 27, 2007 SIN IS EXPENSIVE

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I recently passed a church sign with a very though provoking message- ‘sin is expensive. Who is paying for yours?’ As I continued on my way to the hospital to visit some members I thought about how much I wish I could get that simple message across to the people in my community.

Sin is expensive in its Wages. ‘the Wages of Sin is Death’ (Rom 6:23). People think that an apology is all it takes to repay the debt they incur to God when they violate His laws. God, however, has declared that the debt of sin is death because sin teaches rebellion against God; which if left unpunished would destroy the universe. Payment for the wages of this sin cost Heaven the most precious thing it contained, the very Son of God, Jesus Christ. Sin’s debt is the most expensive item in the universe.

Sin is expensive in its “fruit”. Ask the wife abused by a drunken husband if Sin’s fruit is expensive. Ask the children who suffer lifelong health problems because of the drugs their mother used while she was carrying them if Sin’s fruit is expensive. Ask the parents on their way to the county jail to try to get their son out one more time if Sin’s fruit is expensive. Sin is like weeds growing in a garden. If it is not dealt with early and often it will turn a beautiful garden into a waste land.

Sin is expensive. Who is paying for yours in this world? Who will pay in the next world?

July 3, 2007 LIBERTY'S LIMITS

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Gal 5:13 14 *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

I have traveled over much of the world and I can tell you today that America is still the envy of the world. The world does not envy our crime or our corruption but they long for the Liberty that allows Americans greater privileges and pleasures than any other place on this earth. The freedom that Americans enjoy which allows us to travel as we please, to speak our minds (even as mindlessly as some speak!), and to pursue the "great American dream" of success is the constant "magnet" that draws people from all over the world to America.

The problems that have developed in America in recent years have mainly come from our failure to recognize that this great Liberty we enjoy comes with limitations. In the same way that you can not playfully yell "fire" in a crowded theater, we must realize that Liberty comes with responsibilities. The Bible relates two principles about the limitations to Liberty that help us understand these responsibilities.

Liberty must have concern for the Weak- 1 Cor 8:9 *But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.*

Liberty must promote Truth but expose Error- 1 Pet 2:16 *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.*

If the limitations to Liberty are applied properly they will help America return to greatness and make it much easier for the people in America to enjoy this great land God has given us.

July 4, 2007 LIBERTY GUIDELINES

[Menu](#) Gal 5:13 14 *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

Paul was writing this letter to a church which suffered under the tyranny of a corrupt government and which daily saw the agony of homes and lives destroyed by human slavery. Now that they were beginning to experience the wonderful liberty of Christianity they needed to guard against this liberty becoming simply another version of the corruption all around them.

Paul declares that the one Guideline People need to follow in order for Liberty to become all it should be is simply to "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself". What a difference it would make in America if this Guideline guided our Government and motivated the actions of the people of America.

Note how often God repeated this Guideline in Scripture- James 2:8 *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:* Lev 19:18 *Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.* Mark 12:31 *And the second {great commandment} is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.* Rom 13:9 *For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

July 10, 2007

WHEN A CHURCH GETS IT RIGHT

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When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi (2:1-4) he gave a simple description of what a church should look like when it “gets it right” and the people in the church begin to act the way people in church are supposed to act. If Churches today could get back to this model it would make a tremendous difference in the power they had with God and the influence they have in the community. With that in mind, here are the four characteristics Paul said should exist in properly functioning Christians.

Joy should increase. Paul said that Christians who relate to Christ as they should will bring forth joy. Jesus said we would have abundant life. Now contrast that with people who must be begged or browbeaten in order to get them to come to Church and worship God and tell me what is wrong that that picture.

Strife should decrease. Church should be a place of harmony and unity. Tell me how it advances the cause of Christ when Christians cannot get along with other Christians in a church so they go a mile or two down the road and build another Church or they abandon church services all together.

Pride should cease. Dying to self means just that. Paul calls self-exalting pride vain (worthless) glory. That is a good description.

Concern for others should be obvious. The world will know we are Christians by our love. This kind of love is not mushy sentiment but active involvement. It does not just talk, it acts.

When Christians get it right it changes them and it draws others to what they have. If that is not happening in your church then you need to look again at Paul’s formula for a correct Church.

July 11, 2007

THE DEVIL’S DISTRACTIONS

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The Devil delights in inviting people to smell the roses without telling them about the thorns that are set to prick them and imbed themselves under their skin where they prove a constant source of irritation. Satan’s goal is to harm those who follow him and to hinder those who follow the Lord. He enjoys sending people down a beautiful flowery path that looks simply great until those who follow it find themselves mired deeper and deeper in the quicksand of despair and despondency.

The Devil’s first goal is to control your life and condemn your soul. If you claim the victory in Christ so that he cannot accomplish this purpose he has two additional tactics he attempts. First, if the Devil cannot defeat you then he will attempt to defeat someone whose defeat will defeat you- a trusted Pastor will fall into sin, someone at church will say or do something that deeply hurts you, etc.

Secondly, if the Devil cannot defeat you he will try to distract you. Normally, these distractions will come in the form of powerful desires, overwhelming debts, family divisions, major diseases, or ever increasing duties which allow you no time for God or His work. The Devil does not care who he has to hurt, and how much he has to hurt them, as long as he ends up controlling or condemning you.

Do not allow the Devil to distract or defeat you. Remember that “whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

July 17, 2007

PARTYING WITH THE PUBLICANS

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Three times in Scripture the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him why he was “Partying with the Publicans”. The Publicans were the “common” people of the day and the religious leaders thought Jesus should avoid them so He could spend His time talking religion with the ‘religious’. Each time they asked Jesus “Why do you eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” Jesus would rebuke the Pharisee and tell how supping with sinners was the godlike thing to do.

When Matthew the tax collector became a follower of Jesus he immediately invited his former friends to meet the one who had changed his life completely. When the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for eating with Publicans Jesus told them that a physician was not needed by well people but by sick people.

When the woman washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head the Pharisees were upset about Jesus socializing with sinners. Jesus said sinners who knew they were sinners loved much, and served greatly, because they knew they had been forgiven much.

The third time the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for eating with Publicans and sinners Jesus told them parables about lost sheep, lost coins, and prodigal sons and explained the great joy which resulted when something of value was found after it had been lost. If the Pharisees did not have a party for prodigals then they must value their religious pride above the lost being restored to God’s family.

I am glad Jesus loved men of all stations in life so much until he socialized with them. He realized Publicans were sick with sin, stigmatized by society, and separated from a God who loved them. Jesus made it His business to share a meal with them as He shared God’s love with them. Not a bad plan for us to follow today.

July 18, 2007

GOOD ENOUGH FOR HELL

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Once upon a time two men went to church to pray. One looked up toward God and told God what a great man he was. The other would not even lift his eyes as he called on God for mercy. Jesus said this second man went home justified.

That is surprising when you look at the ‘religious’ qualifications the first man possessed. The first man, as a Pharisee, was good in the Eyes of Society, good in the Eyes of his Neighbors, and good in his own Eyes (He was convinced everything was alright). Everyone just thought he was a “good old boy”.

Not only was he Good, he also believed in God (It is good to remember that the devils also believe in God and tremble). This belief in God caused him to Pray to God, come to Church regularly, Tithe all he had, and even Fast twice a week.

Contrast that with the Publican, who could only cry out to God for mercy, Yet, God said the Publican went home justified rather than this Pharisee. The reason, the Pharisee came to God trusting in his own Goodness while the Publican came pleading for God’s mercy. The Pharisee was good enough to meet the standards of the world but he was not good enough to make it into Heaven.

Being good enough is not good enough. A person is saved by grace through faith and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God. It is not of works, lest any man should boast. Don’t get caught boasting instead of believing.

July 24, 2007

A HIT IS NOT A HIT

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I am legally blind without my glasses. We were very poor and I was in the fifth grade at school before I got my first pair of glasses. I remember leaving the eye doctor's office and riding home with my new glasses and actually seeing leaves on trees instead of a green blur! It was an exciting day for me.

Because of my sight problem I was the kid that was always chosen last when ball teams were selecting players. I could barely see the pitcher so it was a complete accident if my bat and the ball arrived at the same place at the same time.

After I got my glasses I could finally hit the ball from time to time (A big deal to me!). That was when I learned the next rule of playing ball; a hit is not a hit if you hit the ball and make an out. It is only called a hit if it is hit in such a way until you arrive safely at a base. Now I had to learn to not simply hit the ball but to hit it where I wanted it to go.

I was once blinded by sin. One day the glorious light of the gospel of Jesus Christ opened my eyes and I could see. That was the most wonderful and glorious day in my life! Soon I learned, however, that the goal of Christianity was not simply to get me to become a Christian. God wants me to actually live the Christian life without "making an out all the time". God gave me sight but He expected me to actually accomplish something in the game of life.

A hit is not a hit if it does not produce a base runner. This is a truth Christians need to remember

July 25, 2007

RULES MATTER

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If you are playing baseball you only get three strikes in order to hit the ball. If you are playing football you only have four downs to gain 10 yards. If you are playing basketball and the basketball is in your possession you must dribble the ball in order to move on the basketball court. These are guidelines of the games and you must obey them.

If you are playing baseball and you hit a ball outside of the drawn boundaries then it is a foul ball and you are not allowed to go to a base like you would if the ball was hit inside the boundary lines. If you are playing football and you catch the ball one inch outside the field of play it is not a catch and it does not score or advance the ball. Boundaries are binding.

Christ came to set the captive free and to give us spiritual freedom. We do not obtain this freedom by keeping a set of rules but once we are set free by God's Grace we are expected to follow God's guidelines and stay within the boundaries God has established. For example, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." (Heb. 13:4)

Freedom in Christ was not meant to let us live like the devil. God calls us to the abundant life but He gives us guidelines to follow and boundaries to stay within. Anything you do outside of these guidelines and boundaries will be disqualified for a winning reward from God.

July 31, 2007 TROAS

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The city of Troas is mentioned four times in the Bible biography of the Apostle Paul. Each time it has great implications in his life and ministry. Look at the way Troas impacted the Apostle Paul and see if God has such a place in your life journey.

The Troas Dream (Acts 16:8). God had just told the Apostle Paul that he should not go into Asia but He had not shown him where he should go. Paul was “wandering” through life and he ended up in Troas. One night, as Paul tossed and turned and wondered where God wanted him to go, he had a vision where he received the Macedonian Call. The rest is world changing history as Paul took the gospel into Europe for the first time.

The Troas Death (Acts 20:6). Paul stops in Troas on his return trip to Jerusalem to visit friends and lead in a church service. He is so excited about what God is doing until he continues his sermon until midnight. As usually happens in a sermon this long, someone fell asleep. The unusual event here is that when he fell asleep he fell off the balcony and was killed. Paul simply went down to the young man who had fallen, raised him back to life, and then went back for a midnight snack and more preaching!

The Troas Distress (2 Cor 2:12). Timothy was due to meet Paul at Troas but he did not come. Paul was greatly distressed because he was worried that something might have happened to Timothy.

The Troas Doctrine (2 Tim 4:13). Paul was in jail awaiting death. He writes to Timothy and requests Timothy to bring his cloak, his books, and his Bible that had been left at Troas. Even at the end of his life Paul wanted to read and study the word of God.

Troas was a place of vision, victory, vexation, and validation. Which Troas are you at in your life journey?

August 1, 2007 SIX DECADES

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Today I begin my sixth decade of life. Almost 46 of those years have been spent serving the Lord. It has been a wonderful journey. God has blessed me with wonderful Christian friends and I have had the privilege of working in great Churches and Christian Ministries. I have traveled all over the world sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and I have the tremendous honor to be able to call many missionaries my friends as well as my heroes. God has been good to me.

During my pilgrim journey through the wilderness of this world, I can humbly say that I have tried not to be lazy or lukewarm in my work for the Lord. I have made more mistakes that I have fingers, toes, and elbows but people have always been kind and forgiving and the Grace of God has enabled me to continue in my ministry for God even when I failed to serve God correctly or completely.

I am getting so close to Heaven now until it seems I can sometimes faintly hear the hallelujah choruses seeping over the walls of Glory. Like everyone else, I do not look forward to the pain of dying but I sure do look forward to the joy that will be mine after I draw my last breath in this sin cursed world. What a joy beyond description it will be when finally I see Him face to face whom so long I have known heart to heart. Glory! Sometimes I can hardly wait.

I look back on life with joy and I look forward to death with anticipation because of my relationship with Christ. It can make that kind of difference in your life also.

August 7, 2007 **GOOD SAMARITAN DID NOT DO**

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Sometimes one of the most difficult decisions a person has to make is deciding just how much to help someone in need. Most people have a good heart about helping other people but they are afraid they will be fooled by a con artist or latched onto by a continual beggar. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan we see four things we should NOT DO for those in need.

He did not pass him by. The Thieves thought this man was someone to exploit. The Priest thought he was someone to avoid. The Levite thought he was an object of curiosity. But the Samaritan saw him as a person to be loved.

He did not take him home. He cared for this “certain man” himself by binding up his wounds. He then took him to an inn where he could get rest, refreshment, and feel secure. (The Emergency Medical Services Act of S. C. allows for “Good Samaritan” transport of a victim to a place of safety without meeting the normal qualifications of an ambulance).

He did not obligate himself to long term care of the victim. He got him stable; made sure he had provision for adequate recovery; and then went on with his life. The victim’s need did not control the life of the Good Samaritan.

He did not expect this to happen again. He could reasonable assume that this “certain man” would learn from this robbery and beating and make necessary changes. He did not expect to find this man in the same ditch under the same circumstances the next week.

It is easy to find reasons not to help people. Instead, you should look for ways to really help and make a difference in a lonely hurting world.

August 8, 2007 **BARBER BREAKFAST**

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Several days of a stomach virus had left me weak and in need of something bland and soft for a meal. I needed to go visit some people in the hospital so I decided I would stop for some eggs and toast on the way. While I was traveling the Lord kept nudging my heart to go a restaurant that was not on the way to the hospital. I did not understand why I needed to go out of my way but I have learned that when the Lord guides you need to follow His directions.

I sat down, ordered my meal, and starting reading about the ministry of Jesus” Disciples in a book I am presently using as part of my daily devotion. About the time I received my meal someone came in and sat at the table beside me. As I glanced over I noticed that it was my barber. I politely spoke and went back to my meal.

When I finished my meal I sat there drinking coffee for awhile as I concluded the chapter I was reading. That was when the Barber slipped into the chair beside me. He wanted to talk to me about some spiritual items and we had a good time of Christian fellowship. As he left, He picked up my meal ticket and told me he wanted to pay for my breakfast- Glory!

Walking the “Path of life” with God is the most exciting and wonderful life imaginable. May you hear his guidance this week and may you see His glory as you walk in His way.

August 14, 2007 **CHANGING CULTURE**

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Far too often today the Church spends its time condemning the culture or compromising with the culture instead of changing the culture. Preachers stand each week and tell their congregation that the world outside the Church walls is becoming increasingly wicked and they wring their hands as they proclaim TV is a wasteland, Movies are a cesspool, Music is an abomination, and the “good old days” are gone forever. The congregation shouts, “Amen” and tells the preacher what a wonderful sermon he preached as they hurry to their cars so they can flop in front of a TV all afternoon and watch the very thing they just said was wrong.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the preacher ended his sermon with five practices Christians can do to change their culture and then asked people to commit to practicing these practices in the coming week? What if Christians committed to watching less TV each week and communicating more with their neighbors? What if Christian Families willingly shared hot dogs one night a week in order to use the money they would normally spend on an expensive meal to buy a bag of groceries for a needy family in the community? Cities have learned that painted house with neat lawns cut down on crimes and drugs; what could your family do to help make that happen?

Culture is changed one paintbrush, one caring conversation, and one compassionate act at a time. The Church can yell each week about how bad things are becoming or they can believe that Christianity in action can make a difference. A thermometer tells you the temperature. A thermostat connected to a heating / cooling unit helps change the temperature. Which one are you?

August 15, 2007 **THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH**

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One of the earliest Christian principles I learned was that it is fine for the boat to be in the water but it is bad for the water to be in the boat. By that I mean, it is great for the Church to be in the world but it is bad for the world to be in the Church. The Apostle James said, “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).

God does not dislike the people that are in the world (John 3:16) but He dislikes the world that is in people. God knows the damage sin causes in the life of a person and He wants His people to avoid sin while at the same time telling others of the destruction that will come upon them if they continue to fellowship with sin. God is not trying to limit life; He is showing the way to abundant, eternal life.

Is your boat leaking? Have you allowed the world to infiltrate your conversation and your character so much until it is difficult to distinguish you from the world? Do you feel like Lot who watched his family dissolve before his eyes in Sodom- “that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;” (2 Peter 2:8). Maybe it is time you plugged the holes and bailed the boat so you can enjoy life's journey instead of spending all your time in fear that your boat will sink at any moment.

August 21, 2007 SUDDENLY

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It almost seemed to be a theme during our prayer requests time at the beginning of our Wednesday Service. Person after person asked for prayer for a need that had suddenly appeared and had produced tremendous impact in each case.

One request was for the family of a young man who had died suddenly while exercising in a local gym. He was a fine young man who was heavily engaged in church work and well thought of in the community. His sudden death left a grieving family and a huge void to fill in church.

Another request was for a man who was traveling with his wife and was suddenly hit by another vehicle. The man ended up in the hospital in critical condition and his wife ended up in a funeral home. Suddenly the life of this couple; and their family and friends, was turned upside down.

The next request was for a person who seemed to be the picture of health until a minor ailment brought them to the Doctor who told them the dreaded "cancer" word and talked about life expectancy in the days instead of in years and months. Vitally important things before that Doctor visit were suddenly not so important after all.

Death and disaster come at you quickly; and many times without warning. That is why it is so important that you live for God each day so that no matter what suddenly comes your way you can face it unafraid because you are surrounded by the love of God.

August 22, 2007 LEASING LIES

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(Psa 4:2) O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?.

The word "leasing" here threw me for a loop until I looked it up in a Bible dictionary and found it meant "lying". The psalmist is declaring that men love vanity and seek to lie. Why would they do that? It made so sense until I found that this word for "lying" is where we get our word for "leasing" today. And when you begin to see the similarities between leasing and lying you will understand why men still find it easy to lie even today.

-Leasing is for a long term, so lying has long term consequences.

-Leasing cost a lot up front and at the end; so does lying.

-Leasing is not evident from outward observation. Unless you tell someone your car is leased they think it is purchased. Even so, lying may not be evident from casual outward observation.

-Leasing costs continue to escalate- the more miles you put on your car the more it costs you. The same thing happens with lying. The more you lie, and the longer it remains uncorrected, the more it will cost you.

-Leasing makes a car yours but it is not yours! Lying makes you think you have gotten by with something but eventually you find it got you instead of you getting it!

Do not sign a "lease" on lying. It is a very poor bargain.

August 28, 2007 **DISLIKE**

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Sometimes people in Church simply do not like each other. They worship together, they sing in the choir together, and they hug each other during fellowship time, but they have a real problem with an attitude or action of an individual that has hardened over time into a solid case of dislike. They do not “hate” each other because they have been repeatedly told that you cannot hate your brother and still say you love God (I John 4:20) but they sincerely dislike some things about some “brothers” and “sisters” in the church.

This dislike manifests itself in constant gossip, continual friction, and picky fault finding. It seems to always bubble just below the surface and is quickly manifest during times of stress. It is a constant source of discomfort and confusion in the function of the Church as the Body of Christ.

I wish I could tell you there was a “magic” cure for this problem that a good scolding or a quick trip to the altar would alleviate. The truth is that human personalities and personal perspectives will always be a part of this fleshly body. Do not let that discourage you. My wife and I are deeply in love with each other but we do not always like some of the things that the other spouse does. God allows this “friction” to continue in our lives (even after 37 years of marriage!) in order to shape us and mold us into the person we should be.

This is NOT an excuse to justify your dislike for someone. It is a way to point you to the fact that “Love covers a multitude of sins” (I Pet. 4:8). You do not always have to “like” everything about someone in order to love them and learn to live together with different perspectives. Just remember that God’s love in you will change you; and that is the beginning of changing those around you.

August 29, 2007 **HEARING WHAT YOU HEARD**

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Sometimes people hear what they hear but they did not hear what they heard. Several times I have had people ask me about statements I made during a service and when I would go back and listen to the recording of that service I could not find anything close to that statement in what I said or in what anyone else in the service said. The people who heard it really thought they heard it but it came from their mind instead of from a mouth.

Jesus used the phrase several times “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 7:16) to warn men about the need to clearly hear the message He was trying to convey to them. He knew it was easy to “filter” words through pre-conceived ideas, pre-held prejudices, and preoccupied minds until what was heard had very little to do with what was actually said. Almost every wife who has sent a husband to the grocery store to pick up an item can relate to this. Almost always the husband hears something like paper towels when the wife actually said dishwashing detergent!

The Word of God declares that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). Do not allow your pre-conceived ideas or pre-occupied mind to cause you to hear something that you did not hear and cause you to miss the opportunity to build your relationship with God and His people.

September 4, 2007 SCRIPTURE SENSE

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Sometimes I find it amazing that people know everything there is to know about events in the world news or happenings in the life of Hollywood stars but these same people know very little about the eternal Word of God. Heaven and Earth will pass away but the Word of God will remain a major part of our heart forever and forever. This means it is important that we have, and use a system, which will instill the Word of God into our mind, our character, and our life. Here are some guidelines that will help you make sense of the scriptures.

Read a portion of Scripture each day. Find time or make time but spend time each day reading the Word of God. Read for salvation. Read for sanctification. Read for relaxation. Read for edification. Read for memorization. Read for application. Read for meditation. But, whatever you do, read a portion of Scripture each day.

Relate the Scripture you read to the daily happens of your life. It will amaze you how often your daily Scripture reading will be exactly what you need in order to deal with that day's circumstances or challenges.

Reflect on the principles and practices of the Scripture you read. God's Word meditated upon has the answer to the baffling questions of life. God's Word applied to life will change your character and your conduct.

God has given you the privilege of reading and exploring the most important document in the history of mankind, the Word of God. Do not fail to take advantage of this opportunity.

September 5, 2007 UNWILLING GOODNESS

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It had not been a good day for little Annie. All day long her mother had called her down or threatened her and now it was finally bed time. As she knelt to say her nightly prayers her mother leaned over and said, "It might be a good idea for you to ask God to help you be a good girl tomorrow." Annie prayed her normal prayer until the end when she said, "God help me to be a good girl and do all the right things". Then she paused for a minute and added, "Nevertheless, Lord, not my will but thine be done!"

I am surprised how many people think like Annie. They know they are supposed to live right and do the right things but they keep looking for a loop hole that will allow them to feel good about doing bad. Their head tells them to do better but the desire of their heart always seems to win the battle. A preacher friend said it like this, "People generally do what they want to do. They make excuses to not do what they only pretend to want to do." There is a lot of wisdom in that statement.

What do you really WANT to do for God this week? If you really want to get to know Him better then cutting back on TV and spending more time in Prayer and Bible Study will not be a real problem. If you are only pretending you want to get to know God better then stress, an overloaded schedule, and "I am just too tired" will sit you in front of a TV instead of kneel you in front of a Bible. It will be interesting to see what actually happens in your life this week.

September 11, 2007

A WATCHMAN'S DUTY

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When Missionary Carlisle Hanna was just beginning his work in India he would go from village to village trying to share the gospel and introduce people to Christ. One method that proved effective was for him to open up a book store tent in villages during the monthly bazaar time. Almost everyone in the vicinity would stop in the village on this day to purchase needed provision so it was a good time for him to meet and talk to people. He would play his accordion, sell a few books, and make some very valuable contacts.

One afternoon several people in the village told Missionary Hanna about a sick lady and begged him to come and pray with her. A local man had been assisting Brother Carlisle with his book store so Brother Carlisle told him to stand guard over everything while he tried to help this lady.

Naturally, the person in need was outside the village and the huge crowd that followed Brother Carlisle made it difficult to go and come in a hurry. When he finally returned to the book store tent he found it deserted with no one watching over the books, the money, or the accordion. An hour later the man who was supposed to be watching the store came back and Brother Carlisle asked him what emergency had caused him to leave everything unattended. "Oh", said he, "I just decided to take a bath so I left everything as it was until I could return".

Jesus commanded His followers to faithfully do their duty until His return. I wonder if we will look as foolish as this man when the Lord questions us about why we were not doing what we were supposed to do?

September 12, 2007

MANAGING A MIRACLE

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Sometimes God cannot bless us because we do not know what to do with the Miracle He wants to involve us in! Here are some guidelines from the famous story of Jesus feeding the 5000 that will help you manage the miracle God wants to perform in your life.

1) IDENTIFY YOUR NEED- The people had gone without food for a long time and they were far from home. If food was not provided for them then they might die in the desert.

2) RECOGNIZE YOUR RESOURCES- All they could find to meet this need was a little boy's lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus would use these few resources to teach them to do what they could, where they were, with what they had.

3) ORGANIZE YOUR PROBLEM- Jesus made the people sit down in small manageable groups. Divide your problem into manageable areas and learn that the only way to eat an elephant is a bite at a time!

4) LOOK TO GOD TO BLESS YOUR EFFORTS- Jesus took the fish and loaves and blessed them. If you can solve your problem without God's help then you do not need a miracle. Learn to depend on an extraordinary God to do extraordinary things to meet extraordinary needs.

5) DON'T WASTE GOD'S PROVISION- Jesus told the disciples to gather up the fragments that remained- 12 baskets full (One for each Disciple!). Do you know why it is so hard to give money to a begging bum on the street? You are afraid he will misuse the gift you give him. Is that the reason God has not performed any miracles in your life recently?

September 18, 2007

WATCH YOUR STEP

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I serve as assistant to Pastor Mac Atkinson of Lebanon FWB Church of Effingham. God is tremendously blessing our church under Pastor Mac's leadership and it is wonderful to see God doing something new and difference each week. Recently Pastor Mac preached a message that contained information all of us need to consider. The message was entitled, "Watch Your Step".

Pastor Mac said that "Watch your step" was first of all a statement of loving concern because it was used by people to help us realize there was the possibility of danger on the path we were taking. It might mean there was a sudden drop in our path or an uneven step in the stairs we were climbing but it was spoken from loving concern.

Another meaning of "Watch your step" was a statement of stern admonition. Pastor Mac said when it was used like this normally the word "buddy" was added and the statement became, "Watch your step, buddy!" Used in this manner the statement meant a person was 'skating on thin ice' in some action or conversation they were engaged in and a word to the wise was being issued.

The third meaning of "Watch your step" was a statement of cleanliness concern. To illustrate this meaning Pastor Mac told about visits to his grandparent's home in his youth when his grandparents had numerous chickens that roamed freely over the yard. It was pretty obvious to everyone why you would need to "watch your step"!

Let me join Pastor Mac in advising you today to "Watch your step". Life is filled with dangers and disasters but do not despair. Just hold to God's Hand and everything will be fine- 'the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.'" (Psalms 37:23)

September 19, 2007

TWO FOR LIFE

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There are two life changing statements EVERY person needs to make. These statements will change your eternal destiny as well as revolutionize your earthly character. They will bring pardon to your soul and peace to your heart. And, on top of everything else, I have never met anyone who was sorry they made these two statements.

These two life changing statements are: "I am a Sinner, God" and "I Surrender, Lord". Simple, yet profoundly life altering statements.

"I am a Sinner, God" is your way of telling God you realize you have broken God's law as well as His heart. It agrees with God about your rebellious state and acknowledges you need His mercy and grace if you are to escape the punishment that results from your sinful actions. It leads to acknowledging that Christ died to pay for your sins and expresses your willingness to claim God's pardon by Faith.

"I Surrender, Lord" is that profound statement every person realizes they need to make after they have accepted God's pardon and forgiveness. It signifies that you have turned control of your life over to God. It means you are now willing to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow God's plan for your life with complete confidence in His love and care.

Would you like to change your life today? Then make these two life altering statements. Tell God you are a sinner and you desperately need His forgiveness. Then surrender your life to God and tell Him you are willing to love Him with all your heart and serve Him with all your life. The difference will be so drastic until you will begin to tell people you have been "born again"!

September 25, 2007

THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

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One of the most famous books which became a movie is the story of ‘the Wizard of Oz’. It is the story of Dorothy who is caught up in a tornado and shares her adventures as she seeks to return to her home in Kansas. It has always amazed me at how willingly the American public accepted a “wizard” as God who could grant those who came to him the desires of their heart. All I can say is that Satan is indeed a ‘sly old fox” who uses lies and deception quite readily and very easily as he seeks to invade the “hen house”.

Part of the reason the American public accepted this story so readily was because it had great songs and characters to which all of the family could relate- a little lost girl, a scare crow, a tin man, and a cowardly lion. These characters expressed needs that are felt by every person from time to time and needs for which all of us seek answers- Courage to do what we need to do (Lion). A Brain to help us realize our potential (Scare Crow). A Heart to change us from a mechanical person into someone who is able to enjoy life (Tin Man). And a place of safety and security we can call Home (Dorothy).

The way to find all these things you seek so desperately is not to follow the “yellow brick road” to the Wizard. Wonderfully, they all can be found by getting on the straight and narrow road that leads to God and His gracious offer of forgiveness and change through a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. ‘somewhere over the rainbow” for you could be as near as kneeling beside your bed; which will make the Home you go to a lot better than Kansas!

September 26, 2007

HALLOWEEN INFORMATION

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I guess I would have to say that October is my favorite month that has turned into my least favorite month. October brings in cooler temperatures after the scorching heat of South Carolina summers and God uses October to do some of His best art work in the magnificent colors as the leaves change into their fall finery. October is a great month to be alive in South Carolina.

Sadly, October has changed into my least favorite month because of the increasing trend of society to make Halloween a major holiday event. Everywhere you look in stores and in yards you will soon see welcome signs for witches and goblins. The TV will be filled with horror movies where people are supposed to find joy in watching blood spray everywhere as people are killed in every way imaginable. And, unbeknown to many people, their open invitation to demonic powers to come into their home and life through their decorations and their activities will gladly be accepted by those demons.

Soon you will note the increase in anger and irritation in people at home and work as evil spirits stir hearts to believe the bad about everything and to act their worst in daily actions. Demons are out to do you harm and to cause you to do damage to as many others as possible. Amazingly, even though schools outlaw anything to do with Christ they gladly sponsor activities and events concerning witches and demons. One day I hope they will learn that inviting Demons into your thoughts and activities is certainly not a smart thing to do.

More information about the origin of Halloween and some alternative activities can be found at www.ministerministry.com under “Halloween Information”.

October 2, 2007 WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN?

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There are three kinds of “Christians” in the world today. Which group describes you?

I. CRISIS CHRISTIAN. This is the person who does not have time for God or His work until some Crisis comes along. As long as the bank account is big, their health is fine, and their family is doing well they don't need to serve God. But as soon as a crisis arrives that messes up their play house they come running to Church expecting God to put everything back together again. They will make great promises and put on a good show but as soon as the crisis dies down they put God back in their emergency compartment until the next crisis comes along.

II. CHURCH CHRISTIAN. These are also called ‘sunday Christians’. They dress in their finery each Sunday and faithfully attend Church. They smile at everyone and wear a smug mantle of self-righteousness on Sunday but as soon as Monday comes along they are back to doing their own thing. They have a form of godliness but it never seems to reach their work ethics or their family life. Church to them is just one other item on an already busy agenda. They go to church to be respectable but they certainly would never take it too seriously.

III. COMMITTED CHRISTIAN. This is the minority group that believes the Bible is the word of God, that Jesus Christ is not just their Savior but also their Lord, and that God's will in their life is the most important obligation they have. Christianity is not a game they play; it is a life they live. They don't blow a lot of trumpets but by their lives they testify that God is real and that Christ is the answer.

Three kinds of Christian. Which group would your family and friends say you belong in?

October 3, 2007 DEDICATION

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Every Christian should desire to be the Dedicated Child of God that God calls them to be. Yet, many times this is not the case. What does it take to be ‘sold out’ for God??

First, there must be a DETERMINED DESIRE. If you are going to be committed to God's work and will in your life than you must really want God to be first in everything you do. Sadly, many only want God to Bless them with ease and comfort on the earth and one day take them to Heaven. They have no burning desire to be all they can be for God in service and sacrifice.

Secondly, becoming a dedicated Child of God requires an ACT OF THE WILL. You must resolve that you want to put God first in your life. It is not just a mental thought you think about; it is a deliberate choice on your part. Flesh, friends, and even family will oppose you but you must make a definite choice to commit your all to God.

Thirdly, commitment requires a STEP OF FAITH. You don't wait until you understand everything or until you can see far enough into the future to believe that everything will be alright. ‘the Just shall live by his Faith’ is one of the most important statements in the Bible and one you will learn the meaning of as you walk in full dedication to God.

Finally, there must be CONTINUED PERSEVERANCE. This is not a moment's decision but a lifetime commitment. It means burning your bridges and casting yourself completely on the Lord for now and forever. Your reward will be knowing a joy beyond description as you daily walk in dedication to the Lord!

October 9, 2007 5 KEYS TO RESISTING TEMPTATION

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Temptation tempts us by sneaking into our mind and heart. Temptation taunts us by exposing the beauty and pleasure of sin and then singing the siren song of unmet needs. Temptation is a foe we all must fight. Here are some ways to win the battles.

1. **GUARD YOUR GOING-** (Prov 4:14-15) *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.* If you walk by the Devil's house you will be invited in!

2. **TRANSFORM YOUR THINKING-** (Rom 12:1-2) *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* Recognize that Temptation is a harm to defeat you instead of a help to delight you.

3. **EXERCISE SELF CONTROL-** (1 Cor 9:27) *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* Recognize that boundaries are blessings when they keep us from things that would harm or hurt us..

4. **BE ACCOUNTABLE-** (James 5:16) *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another,* Ever notice how easy it is to overcome temptation when others are watching? Remember that.

5. **RELY ON GOD'S HELP-** (1 Cor 10:13) *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* God wants you to win and He will help you if you will cling to Him for help and support.

October 10, 2007 LEARNERS LEARNING

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Paul talked about people who would be "ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Tim 3:7). Sadly, that seems to be happening in many churches today. Teachers and teaching resources are better than ever but the moral climate of America continues to become increasingly worse. I believe the main problem is that teachers are teaching in such a way that learners are not learning.

There are 3 test of teaching that determines if real learning has taken place. Keep them in mind the next time you prepare a Sunday School lesson or preach a sermon. Learning only takes place when the Student can:

1) **Rethink the Thought.** If the learner can only repeat back to you what you have said to them then they are memorizing the message instead of learning the truth. A lesson must be given in such a way until the student can translate the truth being taught into something that is understandable to them.

2) **Apply the Application.** Knowledge in the head must be applied in the Life to have lasting impact. If you want students to be "better people" then tell them how they can achieve that goal.

3) **Pass the Principle.** If the student cannot convey to you, and to others, the objective of the lesson then they have not really grasp the principle of that lesson. It become their own when they able to give it away!

Life is too precious to pass up an opportunity to properly convey the teachings of Jesus to members of your Bible Study Class. Do not let them sit through twenty years of Bible Study and still not understand how God relates to the actions and activities of their life.

October 16, 2007 FEAR OF FLYING

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All his life he talked about wanting to visit Hawaii and see the beauties of this tropical island. Finally, friends and family decided to surprise him on his retirement with an all expense paid trip to Hawaii. Imagine their shock when they presented him his gift and he began to wail in distress. Finally, he calmed down enough to tell them that the reason he had not gone to Hawaii before was because he had an overwhelming fear of flying! He was not prepared to follow his dream when it finally came true!

One thing I have noticed in my study of the life of Jesus is that He did not invite people to be saved! Salvation was the Purpose of Jesus (The Son of man is come to seek and save that which is lost- Matt 18:11) but it was not His Invitation. His invitation always involved people denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Him. Jesus did not simply ask people to put their Faith in Him, He required that they commit to Follow Him.

I believe that many people will spend eternity apart from God because they are willing to BECOME a Christian but they are not willing to BE a Christian! They are willing to make a profession of faith in Christ but they are not willing to allow Christ to control their life and change their actions. To them salvation is simply granting God the benefit of their faith.

God wants you to be saved. You desperately need to be saved. But it is more than dreaming about Heaven. It is being willing to get on the "plane" and make the trip.

October 17, 2007 THREE CHRISTIAN DANGERS

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Jesus said the three greatest dangers Christians would face concerning the fruitfulness of their ministry were Cares, Cash, and Coveting- "And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." (Mark 4:19).

A non-Christian person would probably have thought that the greatest dangers a Christian would face would be Drunkenness, Adultery, and Worldly Living. A Church Member who just shows up on Sunday Morning would probably have listed Gossip, Anger, and Power Struggles as the three greatest dangers in the local Church. But Jesus listed Cares, Cash, and Coveting.

Jesus knew the day would come when men would be too busy to serve God, too burdened with debt to serve the Lord, and too besieged by their desire to live like the world to realize their soul was decaying and their ministry was dying. It would not be Satan as a roaring lion that crippled the church. It would be the little foxes of the flesh that sapped the strength and dimmed the vision of the Church.

Many churches are struggling and dying because they have ignored the warning of Jesus about these three dangers to their ministry. May God help us today to "pull these weeds" so the fruit of God can grow tall and strong.

October 23, 2007 BE JOYFUL

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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 do not have any real joy.

People often confuse Happiness with Joy. Happiness results when things happen to happen happily. Joy, on the other hand, is a state of heart that acknowledges bad circumstances come our way but it does not allow these circumstances to control the joy in the heart.

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 will make 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 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 struggle 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 it is to experience that Joy in your life each day.

October 24, 2007 WHY YOU ARE STILL HERE

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If God’s only purpose was to carry us to Heaven then the very moment a person repented of sins and by Faith accepted Jesus Christ as His Savior then God would take us out of this body and carry us to Heaven. But God has a plan and a purpose for each person and He leaves us here on earth to learn and develop and become the person that God desires us to be.

Many Christians have the idea that Christianity is built around them and they believe God got a really good deal when they decided to leave Satan’s crowd and join God’s Army. What they fail to realize is that God views our righteous works as filthy rags- “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; “ (Isaiah 64:6)- and there is nothing we can do for God that an all-powerful God could not do much better and much quicker for Himself.

God redeemed us in order to transform us into the image of His Dear Son, Jesus Christ. This transformation process takes place in the daily activities of life as we are put under pressure and persecution and learn to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow the example of Jesus (Matt 16:24).

As a Christian, you are on your way to Heaven. Will you crawl in as an underdeveloped baby or will you arrive as a fully developed servant?

October 30, 2007 THINGS THAT MATTER

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If you knew for certain that you would die at 9:45pm tomorrow, what would really matter in your life?

The Apostle Paul was faced with a situation like this. He didn't know the exact time of his death but he knew his days were numbered. As he writes his last letter to his son in the ministry, Timothy, he gives us 3 values that matter when death is knocking at your door.

I. A COURAGEOUS LIFE- "I have fought a good fight". Paul was satisfied with his actions during the battles of life. He had stood for God in spite of the opposition of family, friends, and foes. Now he could look back and rejoice in the way he had lived his life. Can you??

II. A COMPLETED TASK- "I have completed my course". Paul had not done everything there was to do but he had done everything God told HIM to do. Someone once said, "God buries his workers but His work goes on". Paul wasn't building his kingdom but God's kingdom; and he was satisfied to stop when God said enough. Is God your goal, or is God only a means to help you obtain what you want from life?

III. A CONFIDENT TRUST- "Now there is laid up a crown of righteousness for me". Paul had trusted God with his life and now he looked forward to standing before him at his death. His motto had been, "to live is Christ and to die is gain". He knew that the God who cared for him in life would crown him in death. Do you?

Can you confidently face God about the things that matter? There is still time to change, but you need to remember that you do not know how close YOUR clock is to midnight.

October 31, 2007 DATING DEATH

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It may excite people to see death and gore mixed in with enough nudity to produce a scary sexy tingle that horror movies seek to provide but in the real world of pain and suffering there is nothing exciting or sexy about death. Death is a bad dude who brings pain, suffering, and heartache. The only good thing about Death is that the one who controlled it has been conquered by the power of Jesus Christ- "...that through death he (Jesus) might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15).

One thing that people need to know about Death is that it needs to be prepared for. You need to have a will or the government will make your will to please their will. You need to prepare for your funeral or a distraught family will decide what to do at a time of extreme pressure and emotions. You need to keep your bank records and computer passwords in a safe place that is well known and easily accessible to family members when death knocks at your door.

Of course, you need to prepare spiritually for your date with Death. Death is coming and you cannot prepare for death after death; you must prepare now. After death is eternity and eternity will be a long time of regret, remorse, and never ending pain for those who thought living life was more important than preparing for their date with death.

November 6, 2007 GOD HUGS

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Sometimes God knows that you just need a “God Hug” to get you through the day. Recently, I had a difficult day with many people sick needing my attention while crisis after crisis came my way. I was visiting my last nursing home of the day and I will admit to you I was exhausted and ready to go home. When I arrived at the room of the lady I came to visit she was not in her room. I did not see her in the hall so I went to the community room where I saw they were having an organized activity. Not wanting to interrupt this service I turned away to go wait somewhere until the service was over.

That was when God did something extraordinary. The person leading the meeting saw me and came out to where I was. He told me the meeting was just concluding so I was welcome to visit the person I had come to see. That meant I was able to have a good visit with the patient and then go home for some rest.

This may not seem unusual to you but it was obvious to me that God had shaped circumstances in such a way until I could do what I needed to do without delay. God’s presence was so very real during this time and it felt just as if God had His arm around me saying, “Everything is OK, son. I am still here, I still love you, and I still go ahead of you and prepare your path”. Ps 142:3 “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path”. Glory!

I do not know what you will face this week but I do know that getting a “God Hug” along the way will certainly make things go much better. Keep you eyes open, your “hug” may come at a time and place you least expect.

November 7, 2007 IN PRAISE OF RECEPTIONIST

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On a recent Friday I visited four Nursing Homes and two hospitals (one of them twice) during a normal day of pastoral duties. As I was driving home I began to think about how helpful the receptionist at these institutions had been to me. Unless something very unusual happens, I visit the nursing homes where members from our church reside every week and it is a remarkable day if I do not need to visit in at least one hospital every day so I know the receptionist at most of these institutions very well. Without exception, they have always treated me kindly and courteously and have been as helpful as possible.

Receptionists in medical facilities sometimes have to deal with stress “crazed” families- “All I know is that someone called and said Mother was sick and I will disturb this whole hospital if I have to in order to find my mother”; the world revolves around me people- “I know there are rules but surely you do not expect those rules to apply to ME!”; and misinformed visitors- “they told me she was in this hospital so I know she is here somewhere (When in reality she was taken to another hospital). They have a hard job and I do not envy them their task.

The next time you visit a medical facility try to be nice to the receptionist. They are good people doing a difficult job and they will give you all the help you need if you just give them a fair chance- “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” 1Th 5:13.

November 13, 2007

A 400 YEAR MESSAGE

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The last of the Old Testament Prophets is named Malachi. His message was God's last word to His people for nearly 400 years. I wonder what your Pastor would preach this Sunday if he knew that his sermon would be the last sermon the people in his congregation, and their descendants, would hear for nearly twice as long as the United States has been in existence!

Truly, Malachi's 400 year message needed to be extraordinary if it was to make a difference during this time. God had dealt with Israel's sin of Idol worship by sending them into captivity for seventy years. Now he must give them time to realize that turning away from sinful activity does no good if you do not turn toward God with all your heart.

Amazingly, Malachi's message was relatively short (Four chapters with only 55 verses). One writer said that Malachi's message consisted of four basis commands- Remember what God has done for you. Repent of what you have done against God. Return to the God who loves you with an everlasting love. Rehearse the message and blessings of God to your family and friends so they will realize how important it is to keep God in first place in their life. That is a pretty good "400 year message".

Sadly, during these 400 years of "no word from God" the people invented strict religious laws in order to maintain a form of godliness while their heart became so indifferent to the real God until they did not recognize God when He became a man and came to live with them. Their 'religion' became more important than the God they were supposed to worship. I wonder if we are any different today?

November 14, 2007

THE DAY AFTER HALLOWEEN

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It was just a great day. Every patient I visited in the Hospital had a good report to give and they all told me they felt better than they had felt all week. Every home I visited that day gave me a good report, said things were going much better, and they rejoiced in the blessings of the Lord. Even the preachers I met that day had a smile on their face instead of a grumble on their lips!

When I finally arrived back home that night I told my wife it had been an extraordinary day that had left me just rejoicing in the goodness and blessings of the Lord. It was only when I sat down and started to read some scripture that it suddenly dawned on me what was special about this day; it was the day after Halloween.

For weeks, as people promoted demons and witchcraft and evil spirits, it had been almost like everyone was walking around with a dark cloud over their head. Minor sicknesses became major. Families were fighting and fussing. It seemed every store I visited the clerk's temper was on its last edge and everyone I talked to at church would begin their greeting with, "I do not know why but I feel so bad I can hardly stand it."

I know many of you think I am a "kook" but I am telling you that demons and evils spirits are very real. I see them greatly at work as I visit mission fields but for some reason people in America ignore their existence. But ignored or not, they are real and they have an impact on people's attitudes and actions and if we keep playing with this fire then I can guarantee we will get burnt.

November 20, 2007

FAMOUS FOLLY

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Nu 16:1-3 Now Korah, the son of Izhar... took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron...

As this scripture illustrates, the fact that a person is famous does not insulate them from foolish and hurtful mistakes. In fact, a principle that Movie Stars, Politicians, and Professional Athletes need to remember; and that trash magazines use to make millions of dollars, is that your talent can take you where your character cannot sustain you. Just because a person is famous does not mean they will always say and do the right thing.

Just because a person is pretty and can act does not mean the person they endorse for President is the best person for the job. The fact that a person has tremendous skills playing ball does not guarantee that the product they are selling on TV is not a piece of junk. Fame does not always equal character.

If God has blessed you to have influence over someone; whether in a family, a job, a church, or in a wider arena, then you need to understand the great responsibility that comes with this respect. It is very important that you Develop Character as you develop skills.

Do the best you can do with your life and skills but remember that character counts more than the ability to hit a ball a long way or to cry on cue in a movie. A very wise, rich man who was also famous once said, "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." (Ecclesiastes 10:1). Remember that.

November 21, 2007

PRAISE GOD FOR GOD

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I love the Lord. He is a marvelous, magnificent, merciful, and mighty God. He loved me when I was unlovable and brought me to life when I was dead in trespasses and sins. He rescued me from a master who was a murderer and a liar and who only sought to harm me in this world and condemn me in the next world.

God is a faithful friend and a loving father to me. He cares enough about me to spank me when I do wrong and yet loves me enough to wrap me in His warm embrace when I am hurting or afraid. He gives me daily bread in this life and is preparing me a mansion in which to dwell in the next life. His mercies are new every day and He continually finds new ways to express His delight that I am part of His family.

The heart of God is so pure until I can trust His every decision on my behalf and always feel confident in His leadership. There is no hole so deep, no mountain so high, nor any valley so dark that it separates me from the love of God and the light of His presence. As long as I walk in fellowship with God then nothing can come into my life that is not screened first by God so that it will ultimately result in good for me and glory for God.

This Thanksgiving I thank God for God. Becoming one of His children is absolutely the very best thing that has ever happened in my life.

November 27, 2007

FAULTY FRUIT

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And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. (Luke 8:14)

What an awful situation, to “bring no fruit to perfection”. In the Greek, the word used for “perfection” here is a word meaning ‘to not become ripe’. My wife bought some peaches that looked slightly green so she followed all the instructions in order to get them to ripen into the juicy fruit she desired. Long story short, they basically went from being green fruit to being rotten fruit; they never did become ‘ripe’.

I wonder how many people in the average church in America can point to fruit that they have “brought to perfection”. I wonder if they know anyone who has come to know Christ as a result of their efforts and evangelism. I wonder if they have any fully mature Christian “fruit” that came from their life and ministry. I am very afraid that many church members are so busy with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life until they never take the time and effort to mature the fruit God has given them.

Several large churches have recently spent a great deal of time and effort evaluating the results of their ministry. In the eyes of the world these churches are tremendously successful with their mass marketing methods but when these churches looked at the “fruit” they were producing they found shallow immature church members instead of vibrant victorious Christians.

Manmade methods and business tested philosophies may sound appealing but only God given directions produces fruit that ripens instead of rots. Which are you following in your life in order to be a success for God?

November 28, 2007

SYNAGOGUE SERMON

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Amazingly, although Jesus had a very extensive ministry in the Synagogues of Galilee, there is only one synagogue sermon by Jesus recorded in the Gospels. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus went back home to Nazareth and was asked to take part in the service by reading and speaking from the Prophet portion of the Scriptures (Normally, the service included reading from the Law- writings of Moses- and the Prophets). Jesus chose to read from the Prophet Isaiah about how the coming of the Messiah would bring healing and help to the people of Israel and then made the astonishing statement that this scripture was being fulfilled by Him!

Many times in His ministry Jesus “preached in the synagogues of Galilee” but none of those messages (except the one above) was recorded. There are several incidents recorded where Jesus heals in the Synagogue and then rebukes religious leaders because they were more interested in preserving the standards of ‘religion’ they had put into place than they were in helping people with their sin and sickness but nothing is told about His sermons. It is only when Jesus leaves the synagogue and begins His teaching and healing ministry outside of “organized religion” that God inspires men to record His teachings. I do not know exactly what that means but I find it interesting.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the promised one from God who came to heal and help and provide deliverance from sin for those who accept His message. I am excited to get to Heaven and hear the other ‘synagogue Sermons’ that Jesus delivered but until then I have about all I can do to follow the instructions He gave in the sermons that are recorded!

December 4, 2007 PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION

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O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD. (Psalms 31:23-24)

One of the great marvels of God's Gift of Salvation is that not only does He save us from our wicked past but He also preserves us for a wonderful future. The way that God preserves us is much the same way that we as humans use to preserve items we value.

To Preserve means to "put in a place of safety". God calls us His "Peculiar" people. The word "Peculiar" means 'surrounded' and shows that God encircles His people. No temptation or trial can come our way without God making a way of escape or providing strength to overcome. We are put in the hand of God and no power can pluck us out (Although I must remind you that YOU can walk out). WE ARE SAFE IN THE SAVIOR.

We also preserve things by putting them under heat and pressure to destroy germs (Canning vegetables)- God preserves us by allowing the trials of life to purge out those things that weaken us. Who does not find more time to pray when sickness or trouble comes our way?

Things are also preserved by sealing them away from the elements (Putting a lid on Paint)- The Lord preserves us by calling us to be separate from the World. God knows that if we do not put a "lid of holiness" on our lives then we will eventually dry out and become so hard until we are no longer useful for ministry.

Do not be afraid to accept God's wonderful Gift of Salvation. God not only wants to pardon you but He also want to preserve you. Come to God with gladness and serve Him with confidence for 'the Lord preserveth the faithful'.

December 5, 2007 SEASON REASON

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"Willmington's Guide to the Bible" declares that the Gospels cover a period of approximately thirty-five years. The Bible begins with man being made in the image of God. The Gospels begin with God being made in the image of man. The man made in the image of God would be defeated by Satan in a beautiful garden in the Old Testament. God made in the image of man would soundly defeat Satan on a cross and by an empty tomb in another garden.

Prior to this sheep had died for shepherds, but now the Shepherd will die for the sheep. The Gospels describe men acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God from under a tree, up a tree, and on a tree. Within the Gospels we hear from heaven above and from hell beneath. At his birth Christ was offered gold, frankincense, and myrrh by wise men who worshiped him, while at his death he was offered thorns, vinegar, and spittle by wicked men who ridiculed him.

The Gospels record that Jesus performed 36 Miracles, told 38 Parables, prayed 19 Prayers, preached 16 sermons, made 45 Predictions, and fulfilled 37 Old Testament Prophecies. He quotes the Old Testament 22 times, converts 27 souls, gave 10 proofs of his deity, experienced 15 kinds of suffering, and appeared 10 times following His resurrection.

All of this helps us realize this time of year is more than Santa and snowmen; it is a celebration of God coming to earth. It should be a time of adoration and exaltation. Do your part to make sure the world sees that kind of Christmas this year.

December 11, 2007 GETTING YOUR GIFT

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Here are some guidelines about gifts that may make opening your present on Christmas morning a lot more enjoyable.

1) Be Specific in requesting your gift- (James 4:2) "You have not because you ask not". Most people find it difficult to read your mind! If you want something specific then you need to let someone know exactly what you want.

2) Be Realistic about your gift- "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). Do not expect a thousand dollar gift from a person with a ten dollar budget!

3) Be Worthy of your gift- When the leaders of the synagogue came to Jesus to request help for a Roman soldier they preceded their request by saying, "that he was worthy for whom he should do this:" (Luke 7:4). It is hard to get excited about doing your best in gift buying for someone who has had a bitter or bad attitude all year.

4) Be Needful of your gift- It is hard to know what to get for a person who does not need anything! And an unappreciated gift does more harm than good. "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." (Proverbs 25:16)

5) Think Spiritual about your gift- Remember, rejoice, and receive the reason for the season: the Birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ- "thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." (2 Corinthians 9:15). Ask those who are buying your gift to consider buying a bike for mission work in India (\$65) instead of getting you something you really do not need (The gift can be sent to, and an acknowledgement received from, Friends of India, 2434 Allen Road, Effingham, S C 29541).

December 12, 2007 GIVING GUIDELINES

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One of the things that takes the joy out of Christmas is the burden that gift buying has become. Here are some Biblical guidelines that will help you know how and what to give.

Give because you want to; not because you think you have to give: *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.* (2 Corinthians 9:7). If you cannot think of a thing in the world that a person needs then it may be that they do not need anything more than a hug and some quality time with you.

Give from your heart so you can touch the heart of the one who receives the gift: *they... first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.* (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Give according to your ability; not according to people's expectations: *For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* (2 Corinthians 8:12). A fleeting smile in December is not worth a mountain of debt in January.

Give out of love for the receiver; not to impress other people: *For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.* (2 Corinthians 10:12)

Give (or receive) the greatest gift because that is the real reason for the season: *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.* (2 Corinthians 9:15). *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

December 18, 2007 REALITY CHRISTMAS

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What a miserable Christmas! The husband was unemployed, the wife was expecting their first child at any moment, the family had to relocate many miles away from family and friends right at Christmas time, and the housing market was so tight until the only place available to stay was a sheep stall! (For info- the word "cow" or "stable" is not found in the New Testament. The only thing that gives a hint that Jesus was born in that kind of environment was the fact that He was "laid in a manger" when He was born).

That first Christmas was a time of economic pressure as Joseph had to leave his job to journey to Bethlehem to pay his taxes. It was also a time of family discomfort as Mary and Joseph were forced to relocate completely across country. There was also the medical stress of Mary giving birth to their first child with no family doctor or family women to help with the process. And, to put the cherry on top, no home was available to provide Joseph and Mary comfort and privacy during this critical time.

I pray that your Christmas will be filled with peace and prosperity and plenty of time for family and friends. I am afraid, however, that it will contain more of the harsh circumstances of the first Christmas than the hazy dreams of childhood Christmas that everyone seems to want to recapture. Sickness and accidents and normal monthly bills just do not take a holiday simply because it is December!

Regardless of the situations you have to face this Christmas, let me encourage you to rest in the fact that the God who handled all those events on that first Christmas is still the same God. He still loves you and He still gives the same gift today that He gave back then, eternal life through faith in the sacrifice of that baby boy who was laid in a manger when He was born.

December 19, 2007 CHRISTMAS GUIDELINES

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People ask me regularly what they can do to really enjoy Christmas. I tell them there are a number of things I could suggest but having a good Christmas usually boils down to two simple principles; Keep the Devil out of Christmas and keep Christ in Christmas. That should be simply enough so that anyone can understand.

Keep the devil out of your celebration of Christmas. Getting drunk is not a good present to give God or your family. Acting like a fool in your morals or manners does not make Christmas better for anyone around you. Allowing Satan to goad your pride into buying Christmas presents you can not afford so you can impress people or try to make up for not spending time with your kids the rest of the year does nothing to truly celebrate the gift that God gave on that first Christmas morning.

Keep Christ in your celebration of Christmas. The reason for the season is to celebrate the birth of God's only begotten son so say, "Merry Christmas" loud and often. If you are going to decorate your yard then make sure the centerpiece in your decorations is something that tells people about your faith in the birth of Jesus Christ. When you get together with family and friends invite Christ into the gathering with songs and scripture and celebration, after all, it is all about celebrating His birthday.

May you practice the presence of Jesus Christ this holiday season as you give and receive your presents. And may you experience the joy the shepherds felt on that first Christmas so you will want to come to Christ and then go tell others about His birth.

December 25, 2007 MERRY CHRISTMAS

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MERRY CHRISTMAS. Next week I will begin my 18th year of writing these devotional articles. I thank you for your many kind comments and your continued readership. Some of the articles I have written you have loved and some you have hated. Some have made you glad and some have made you mad. Because of the depth of the subject and the limitations of newspaper space many time the articles have been misunderstood or misinterpreted but most of you have loved me enough to overlook that and continue your faithful readership. Words can never express how much I thank you for that.

Providing these articles is a nonpaying job with space provided by the kindness and generosity of the newspapers who publish them. Some would say that by being paid nothing I am overpaid! And, in some ways, they are right. I get the privilege each week of sharing the good news about the best news the world has ever heard, God becoming flesh, dwelling among men, and dying so that you and I can have access to eternity in Heaven with God- Glory. There is no greater privilege in the world that sharing this story.

This Christmas I pray you will celebrate and worship this Christ I write about all year. Jesus was born as a baby. He lived as a Man. He died as a Savior. He is coming again as a King. Who would not want to write about, and celebrate, that wonderful news? Thank you again for your support and prayers. May you have a wonderful Christmas in which you take time to once more hear the angels praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will, toward men".

December 26, 2007 AFTER CHRISTMAS

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:1-5).

The beginning has ended. We have announced the arrival of Christ on earth with songs, family feasts, and seemingly unlimited activities. Now, how do we live with that fact?

When the Apostle John announced the birth of Jesus he did it totally different from the other Gospel writers. He was concerned with the 'religious' implications of the birth of Christ instead of the physical circumstances described by Matthew and Luke. He knew that the "how" of Jesus' birth was not as important as the "why" of God being born as a man.

John said Jesus came to the world as the "Word" to communicate God's plan and as the "life light" to show God to us. Sadly, he also said that men did not comprehend or grasp the significance of this light that shone in the darkness. Instead of coming to the light they continued to stagger in the darkness.

What will happen in your life after Christmas? Will you continue to stumble through life in the darkness of your sin and sorrow and hurt or will you come to the light and find that the joy celebrated at Christmas is just the beginning of an abundant life?