

*A Word in Season
Devotional*

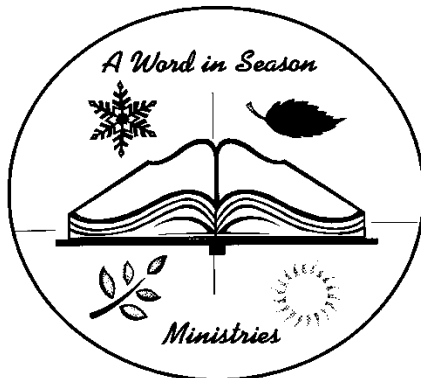
Second Quarter – Spring

By
Earl Cooper, Ph. D

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A note from Earl:

While pastoring in Bracebridge, Ontario the Lord opened the door for me to write a weekly Bible Devotion newspaper column. This provided a wonderful means of sharing God's word in a broad public format. Over the years of these newspaper column submissions I received many notes of appreciation.

Although I was unable to carry on this column after joining ABWE Canada as a travelling teacher, I added a selection of these devotional submissions to our website to offer a full year of daily devotions for the many who continued to request them. The expressed appreciation of the website devotionals led to publication of these as four Daily Devotion Books – Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall.

It has never been my intention to encourage God's people to substitute written Daily Bible Devotions for daily, personal Bible reading and Bible study. I urge each reader to be encouraged by these devotional thoughts personally, and to use these devotions to minister to others by any means appropriate. However, I also urge each reader to go beyond reading Bible devotions written by myself, or any other, and develop the essential Christian disciplines of systematically reading through the entire Bible regularly, daily studying the Bible inductively, and writing your own Bible Devotion Journals of what God has taught you through study. Although the labour is demanding work, the rewards are 'out of this world.'

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God,
a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly
dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15*

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew. 4:4

April 1

John 13:3-17

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?” Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.” So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Father’s Letter

Dear Friends

A few weeks ago my daughter asked me a very revealing question. "Daddy," she said, "Is God dead?" "No dear," I replied, "Why do you ask?" "Because I never hear you talking to Him," she replied. I then realized my oversight. Although I sent her to Sunday School every week, I was my daughter's greatest teacher. My attitudes, my conduct, my values were being implanted into her life, and I had left God out.

Minutes later, I found myself in the den, my daughter's Bible opened in my lap. My eyes fell upon these words "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I remembered how my father explained so often that I was a sinner and

couldn't save myself; how that God in heaven loved me so much He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for my sin. I remembered my father's last words to me "Son, if you never receive Christ, I'll never see you in heaven."

Right there in that den, I bowed my head and asked Christ to come into my heart, to save me from my sin, and help me have the right influence on my daughter. Today, our family goes to church together, studies God's Word together, prays together. My daughter knows that God is alive because He lives within my heart.

Signed - "Concerned Christian",

P.S. Is there a famine or a feast of living faith in your home?

Personal Notes:

April 2

Deuteronomy 6:4-12

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. "So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, "houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full— "then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. "

A Healthy Appetite

One of the blessings of our Canadian multi-cultured society is the privilege of seeing how people from other cultures live without travelling half way around the world to experience another way of life. This is perhaps best evidenced in the great variety of culinary preferences in our land. At a recent youth gathering some of our children were introduced to a highly nutritious meal of bugs. Surprising enough, after getting over the "cultural barrier", these bugs were found to taste "not bad at all", which just goes to prove that people can develop an appetite for practically anything. The sad corollary to that is the ability for people to develop uncontrollable appetites for that which can destroy them. With this potential for destruction, the importance of parental input in their children's "appetite forming" is crucial. It is with this in focus that the scriptures urge parents to help their children develop an appetite for God.

The Bible states " Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. The Hebrew word "khaw-nak", translated in this passage as "train", is a derivative of the Hebrew word for palate or mouth. The significance of the choice of this word in reference to raising children is understood in light of the

custom of the day in which a mother/nurse would touch the tongue of a baby with a sample of the food in order to stir up the appetite. This is a custom still practised among nomadic people, made necessary by the limited choices of food and therefore, necessity for children to learn to eat what is presented for survival's sake.

God urges parents, with the same sense of necessity for survival, to give their children a taste of spiritual food in their earliest formative years. This can be done by ensuring the home is the place where God's name is heard in prayer rather than in curse, and where the Bible is the foundation for values and goals.

Moses' words to Israel are wise counsel to all parents: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [is] one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6). Can you say that your children are developing a healthy spiritual appetite?

Personal Notes:

April 3

1 Peter 3:11-17

"Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil." And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

A Shadow Cast

I'm sure most people at one time or another played shadow games. In doing so, one quickly learns that the closer you get to the source of light, the larger the image of the shadow. When compared to the Christian life, this law of light also holds true.

The Bible tells us that "God is light" (1 John 1:5) - this refers to the absolute purity of God. Christians are exhorted to "draw near to God" (James 4:8). This is done through prayer and meditation upon God's Word as we open our hearts and minds to God's examination and leading through "daily quiet time".

The Psalmist expresses this devotion to meditation in the first Psalm. "Blessed [is] the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight [is] in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." (Psalms 1:1-2). This word "meditate" is the translation of the Hebrew word "daw-gaw" and suggests the continual plotting of plans within a person's heart with such intensity that quiet murmuring to oneself is the result. Meditation on God's Word is a discipline that involves the mind and heart in deep interaction with the truth.

This time alone with the Lord was so important to Daniel that he risked his own life to maintain it (Daniel 6). The Bereans were given the distinction by the apostle Paul of being more noble because they searched the scriptures every day (Acts 17), and even Jesus who

was God incarnate began each day in prayerful communion with his Father in heaven (Mark 1:35).

As believers "draw close" to the revealed truth regarding God's holiness, purity, righteousness, justice and love, our likeness of Him increases. Christ's attitudes, actions, compassion and love penetrate more of our daily lives. This greater Christlikeness in turn, has an effect on those around us.

Dear Believer, how great an image of Christ does your life cast? Are you "drawing close to God" and affecting those around you? Won't you determine to follow Peter's exhortation to "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer about the reason for your hope." (1 Peter 3:15)?

Will you, with the hymn writer, say "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, all his wonderful love and purity."? Commit today to a regular time of daily Bible study and prayer and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Personal Notes:

April 4

Psalm 139:14-24

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvellous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skilfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made.

In our modern world with all its advanced technology, we are reminded, more than ever, of the delicate framework of our physical being. As the astronauts report from space, we are reminded of that little piece of earth they brought with them which maintains the environment of air and temperature so critical for life. Daily weather reports, which now include the ultra violet radiation levels for our protection, are another reminder of how frail we are. This reminder was impressed upon my mind vividly during a past vacation when our family joined friends at a cottage, where we witnessed the daily routine of insulin injections for a four year old girl. To hear that child, throughout the day, speak of her blood being 'up' or 'down' brought, not only smiles to our faces, but the reminder of just how delicate and sensitive our physical framework is.

How sad it is that although consciously aware of specific physical needs, modern man has for the most part, completely neglected those spiritual needs equally essential. Christ reminded us of the delicacy of our spiritual framework in these words: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus spoke of God's word as essential

to our spiritual life as food to our physical life. The apostle Paul, in a similar manner, reminds us that "all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV).

I invite the reader to discover, along with me, the riches of God's Word in season. To come to understand with King David, that "the Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statues of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure, and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, then much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, then honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned. In keeping them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:7-11, NIV).

Personal Notes:

April 5

Ecclesiastes 5:1-8

“Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool’s voice is known by his many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God. If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.”

For Whom the Bells Toll

Across this land in years gone by practically every community was gently awakened each Sunday morning by the ringing of church bells calling people to worship; now those bells have grown silent. Is it time for our land to ask itself "For whom did those bells toll"? Did they ring out to call people to a mere religious observance or did God intend worship to be more than a routinely followed custom?

Jesus addressed that very issue when confronted by a Samaritan woman: "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem ... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks." (John 4:19-23 NIV)

The word "proskunew", used here by Jesus and translated "worship", expressed deep reverence and respect in the culture of that day. The term meant 'to kiss the hand' or 'fall upon the knees and touch the forehead to the ground'. The word focused on the outward

form, yet Jesus implied that a change was taking place. Jesus was clear, God the Father is seeking true worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth. In the words of Charles Spurgeon, "Merely outward worshippers were false worshippers ... acceptable worship is wholly mental, inward, and spiritual. It is not your worshipping God by words in hymns or prayers, or sitting in a certain place, or covering your faces at certain times that is acceptable to him; true worship lies in your heart paying reverence to him, your soul obeying him, and your inner nature coming into conformity to his own nature by the work of the Holy Spirit. If a man, hearing the story of the cross, the full atonement made by God's appointed sacrifice, calls upon God for forgiveness, he has worshipped. Whether a man sings in the assembly or sings alone, whether he prays aloud or prays in silence, if he expresses gratitude to God for pardon received, he offers true worship."

If in the past the bells called people to an external expression of worship only, they have justifiably grown silent. "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalms 51:16-17 NIV). If however, the bells were a call to true worship, have they become silent through deafness first to the message of the cross and a resistance to a contrite heart before God?

Personal Notes:

April 7

Philippians 1:3-11

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

Tested by The Son

When Rome was at the height of its glory, men competed with each other in the construction of noble palaces made of choice marble. Gifted sculptors were much in demand and large sums were paid for their skills. Some less skilled artists, upon chipping the valuable marble, or making some obvious flaw, would fill up the error with specially prepared wax to hide the mistakes and deceive prospective buyers. Such deception could only be detected by exposure to the heat and light of the sun, which discoloured and often melted the wax, revealing the falsehood. A term was soon coined in the trade; the highest prices went to those works which were 'eilikrines', "judged by the sun."

This same word was used by the apostle Paul writing to the believers at Philippi. Translated into English, He said "I pray that you may be sincere and without offence" (Philippians 1:10). God places great value on the lives of those believers whose conduct is recognized as 'eilikrines,' "judged by the Son of God." A Christian's actions and attitudes must be absent from deceit and falsehood. Whatever believers say or do should be checked by this statement "Would Christ say or do that?" To every believer, Paul's testimony stands as a model: "In godly sincerity (as judged by the Son), we have behaved ourselves in the world." Christianity has had its share of falsehood and deception.

Recent investigations into the moral and ethical behaviour of assumed "model denominational leaders" has left a bad taste in the mouth of society for anything related to Christ's gospel. If as a reader you are a professing Christian, a weight of responsibility rests on your shoulders.

Don't shame the name of the Lord, remain in fellowship with the one who bought you with his own blood. Remember the words of Paul: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Rather be sincere, be true to your God.

Personal Notes:

April 8

Psalm 4:1-8

“Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer. How long, O you sons of men, Will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness And seek falsehood? Selah. But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The LORD will hear when I call to Him. Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And put your trust in the LORD.

There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”

The Agony of Defeat

The lakes of Muskoka are witness each year to the precarious adventures, and often hilarious antics, of the amateur skier. I speak in particular of that adventurer who for the first time attempts the skill of skiing, doing so with only a minimal amount of assistance to begin with before he or she is left on their own. Very few sports bring such an immediate sense of 'thrill of victory' or 'agony of defeat'. Friends can only shout encouragement from a distance and watch with anticipation as this novice adventurer seeks to keep balance and enjoy the thrill of skiing.

How grateful I am that the Christian life, with its thrill of victory and agony of defeat, is not faced alone. Perhaps that fear of facing life alone was on the disciples' minds (having heard that Christ would depart from them) when Christ himself, in John 14, made two great promises. He promised that He would go and prepare a place for them (future security) and He would not leave them alone (present security).

It is this second promise that brings such day to day comfort. Jesus said, "I will pray the Father and He will give you another Comforter that He may abide with you forever, even the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17).

God evidenced the fulfilment of this promise in Acts 2 when, at the birthday of the church, the Holy Spirit descended upon God's people in the form of tongues of fire. To the minds of those Jewish believers this was the evidence of the presence of God, even as the Shekinah glory, which descended on the temple, was the evidence of God's presence in the Old Testament.

However, the promise that Jesus made in John 14 has a marked difference. He stated that presently Christ was `with' the disciples now and would be `in' the believer then. The very name that Jesus used for the Holy Spirit describes this unique ministry of God being 'in you'. Christ called Him the *paracletos*. This name is a combination of two words meaning "one that is drawn alongside another; a helper; an assistant." Every person who calls upon the name of the Lord for salvation, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. One of the greatest joys and comforts of the Christian is to know that whether caught in the crowd of strangers or in the quiet solitude of the forest, whether in the hospital bed alone with one's thoughts or in the silence of an empty home where the footsteps of loved ones have passed on, the believer is truly never alone. The Comforter, our helper, God Himself, is with us to encourage and to strengthen.

To the Christian facing the agony of defeat this brings practical meaning to those words of Christ which begin John 14, "Let not your heart be troubled".

Personal Notes:

April 9

Mark 1:9-15

"It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him. Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Trapped

Reviews of the Battle of Diepe remind us of the consequences of being trapped, without cover and ready escape. Thousands lost their lives and Canada still, rightfully, mourns the loss. There is a Spiritual parallel where not a company of soldiers, but the entire human race has been trapped by a real and vicious enemy that no changing political environment will ever unite. Jesus knew well the power of this enemy when "he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan." (Mark 1:13)

Satan originally sprang his trap upon mankind by a direct attack on the authority of God's Word. Genesis chapter three records the attack. Here, Satan first deceived Eve by doubting God's Word. His opening remark "Hath God really said", cast seeds of doubt. Satan next distorted God's Word by changing God's "You may eat of all but one tree" to his own "You shall not eat from every tree". Finally Satan, denied God's Word with "Thou shalt not die."

Because of Satan's lie, Eve was deceived and Adam following, sinned. Therefore, "as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Since Adam, all mankind has been born into the sin-trap, all that is, save Christ. But there is an escape. Anyone can be free from the clutches of Satan's lie by acknowledging the authority of God's Word. To accept the Bible's declarations: first; that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Romans 3:23), second; that "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the

unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: (1 Peter 3:18), and finally; that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

For many of our countrymen Dieppe was a place of no escape; consequently, they lost their lives. There are those who see life as an inescapable pattern of guilt and shame. Let not the reader be trapped by Satan a day longer. He is a real foe. Scripture warns "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:" (1 Peter 5:8). Mankind is urged to "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Escape is found by admitting the truth of God's Word and accept Christ's offer of deliverance.

Personal Notes:

April 10

John 1:1-14

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Religion is A Crutch

I heard a radio interview in which a man flatly declared that "accepting Christ is a crutch". My friends, nothing could be farther from the truth. It is true that 'religion' is a crutch, because 'religion' involved man leaning on his own merits and good works. Such an attempt to find approval before a Holy God is impossible to achieve "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23 NIV). Religion is man's attempt to tip the scales of his sin by his good life. This amounts to man seeking to reach up to God. To this God states "There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12)

Religion is a crutch that ends in eternal separation from God. However, accepting Christ is not religion, it is a relationship; it is not a crutch, but spiritual healing. The Bible says that Christ "was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, the chastening of our well-being fell upon him and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5). True Christianity is God reaching down to man by sending His Son to pay the penalty of sin. It is an offer of pardon and forgiveness by a Holy God whose wrath upon sin was satisfied by the

sacrifice of Christ. Salvation is not through religion but by relationship for "as many as receive Christ, to them God gives the authority to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name." (John 1:12).

This relationship is so intimate and personal that God defines it with the term "children of God", and further describes it as a whole new outlook on life: "because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore, all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:14-17 NIV). Along with this new outlook comes the ever present certainty of a better tomorrow (tomorrow being defined as the believer's promised future). "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-3 NIV). Accepting Christ brings not a crutch, but new life, meaningful purpose, certain hope. Are you trusting in the crutch of religion or the cross of Christ?

Personal Notes:

April 11

Ephesians 6:1-9

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."

Little Tornados

The story is told of the man who was asked to look after his nephew for a while because of a tornado threat. After two tedious days, the lad was returned with this note: "I'm returning your son, please send the tornado!" This story may raise a few smiles; however, if child psychology and parenting book sales are any indication, it would seem that the homes of our nation are filled with "little tornados". Our "latch-key-children" society is fast finding out the truth of God's Word. "The rod (switch) of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother." (Proverbs 29:15 NIV).

Today parents are crying out for help, looking for solutions to child discipline problems that work. Those who look to scripture as a guide will not be disappointed. Christ called such people wise, and indicated that the results would be stability. "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down... the winds blew... yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." (Matthew 7:24-25 NIV).

Accepting the Bible as a guide for parenting means more than quoting a few texts now and again. Paul describes successful parenting as a process that involves "raising your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). These words are very

specific. "Nurture" refers to what is done to a child, emphasizing the establishment of moral and ethical boundaries based upon God's values, followed by loving but firm correction when those boundaries are exceeded. This has its greatest impact when a child is young. "Admonition" refers to what is said to a child, emphasizing counsel and direction from God's Word in a setting of interaction and mutual understanding as a child gets older.

Now, 2000 years later, the value of this approach is being rediscovered. Psychologist Diana Baumrind of the University of California studied three groups of nursery school children. The parents of one group were permissive, undemanding, insecure about how to influence their children, not well organized in running their households, somewhat warm toward the kids, but tending to baby them. A second group of parents were authoritative. They ran better-coordinated households, set clear rules and gave reasons, demanded a good deal but were consistent, loving and secure in handling their children and trained them in independence. The third group were "authoritarian." They exerted firm control and used power freely but showed little affection. They gave no reasons for their directives except perhaps "an absolute moral imperative". The parents who followed the middle course were the most successful and most satisfied. Their children were self-reliant, self-controlled, realistic, and able to get along with others.

The Bible, when carefully followed as a parenting guide, can turn tornados into treats. "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul." (Proverbs 29:17 NIV).

Personal Notes:

April 12

Acts 4:32-37

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

Encouragement

Jackie Robinson was the first black athlete to break into baseball's white dominated Major League. He did so with much verbal abuse from fans. While playing one day in his home stadium he committed an error causing the home town fans to jeer and ridicule. As he stood humiliated at second base, with stooped shoulders and bowed head, shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese came over and stood with Jackie. Reese put his arm around Jackie and stared the crowd into shameful silence.

That baseball scene graphically portrays God's intention of Christian encouragement: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV). Here "encourage" is translated from the ancient Greek word "para-ka-leo", meaning literally "to call to one's side", and was used to describe the act of drawing close to a person for the purposes of comfort, instruction and strengthening. What "Pee Wee" Reese did for Jackie Robinson, God calls all Christians to do for each other. Believers here are called upon to give thought to how they might draw close to stir each other toward expressions of God's love and care.

It becomes an easy thing for those who love God to fall into the self-centred lifestyle of our society, focusing more on the interests and outcome of our efforts than on our affect on others. God is telling all

born-again believers to take the lead in being cheerleaders for others, to give our best shot at push-starting the other and delighting in seeing him cross the line as victor. There can be no room for petty jealousy or the slightest shades of envy.

Perhaps the best way of achieving this is to recognize that the love and good deeds we are to encourage others in are actually the work of Christ in that life. Therefore, even as John determined to exalt the Lord, we should daily state with John: "He must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:30 NIV).

Jackie Robinson later said that Reese's arm around his shoulder saved his career. Christian friend, there are a lot of hurting people who need such an arm today, will you set aside your own cares and give thought to how you might strengthen and comfort someone today?

Personal Notes:

April 13

Romans 5:1-11

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Getting Excited

What do you get excited about? If you are a hockey fan, there has been much to keep the adrenalin pumping of late, if you are an outdoors person, this great spring weather will delight you. The answer to the question of what excites us indicates much about our personality and values. The New Testament word "kaucaomai", translated glory, boast, and sometimes rejoice, expresses this concept of "excitement".

In Romans chapter 5, Paul shares three things that should excite every Christian. Paul states: "...we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:2 NIV). Here he speaks of the glory to come to every believer, in seeing the living and true God as well as being made like His Son when we are called into His presence (see 1 John 3). For those whose bodies ache with pain, and hearts break with sorrow, this is indeed an exciting hope, because pain and sorrow will be no more (see Revelation 21).

Paul also shares another point of Christian excitement, perhaps a surprise to most: "we also rejoice in our sufferings" (Romans 5:3 NIV). Because suffering is a proven character builder, which in turn

accomplishes the work of God through confirmation of the Lord's love, care and personal dealings, even tribulation is something to get excited about. King David found this to be true, coming to the conclusion through much suffering that God never disappoints his children who trust him fully. David said: "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." (Psalms 37:25 NIV).

Finally, Paul expresses the excitement of just knowing God: "we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:11 NIV). Paul never ceased to be amazed about the wonder of the sacrifice of Jesus, God's Holy Son. Christ's work of paying the debt of mankind's sin by a substitutional death on a cruel cross paved the way for wicked man to be reconciled to Holy God. Paul came to appreciate that truth beyond mere excitement: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8 NIV).

Although both the hockey playoffs and this spring weather have kept my heart on high, when put in perspective with God's great scheme, I quickly agree with Paul, nothing gets me more excited than contemplating the Lord's goodness and grace. "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him" (Psalms 34:8 NIV.)

Personal Notes:

April 14

Mark 15:33-39

"Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

The Day God Died

A mission appeal came across my desk recently which cited a story from *The Globe and Mail* about a little boy who was found alive at the site of one of the mass graves in Rwanda. The young lad of about five was rushed to a medical centre where he was able to share his name, and the fact that he had become separated from his mother. Attempts to save his life failed. As I read the story of this lad my heart went out to that mother who must be frantic about her lost son. A name and some small details made this boy more than a statistic, and my heart grieved.

This is how the Lord God sees our world; not as a distant and uncaring supreme being who watches human history roll by as a compilation of statistics, but as a loving and caring creator who knows each person intimately by name, who feels each person's heartache and sorrow, and who grieves for each individual lost in the sin that separates man from God.

God did more than just sit back with an ache in His heart regarding mankind's lost state, He chose to humble Himself and become a man in order to provide a way back to Himself for all who would believe. The cost of this return fare for man was God's own heartbreak: the separation of God the Son (who is the very heart of God being "in the bosom of the Father" John 1:18) from God the Father and Spirit. This separation took place on the cross of Calvary where Jesus died.

The words of Christ on the cross expressed the horror of that separation. "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Christ's death was one of substitution; his death for man's hell. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV). God Himself brought light out of the darkness of that hour when He raised the Lord out of death and gained final victory over man's lost state: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57 NIV).

Unlike the medical team which could not spare the little lad from death, God can and will grant life to those who come to Him by faith. Written across the pages of human history are these words that come from the heart-breaking of God, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:11-12 NIV). Will you accept God's gift of life?

Personal Notes:

April 15

1 Timothy 4:1-10

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.”

The Spiritual Gymnasium

Rocky Bleier was drafted as the running back by the Pittsburgh Steelers (football team) in 1968. Shortly afterwards he went to war in Vietnam and had part of his foot blown away by a grenade. He was told that he would be lucky if he ever walked again. Although crippled and weak, Rocky was determined to make a comeback effort using running, weight-lifting and any other exercise that seemed to help. After four years of gruelling self-discipline, he could run faster than before the injury and returned to football, eventually helping the Steelers win the Super Bowl. Such mental concentration and physical determination is the explicit meaning of "goom-nad'-zo", from which we get the English word "gymnasium". Rooted in the era of the Greek gladiators, this word literally meant to exercise in nakedness and suggested a life completely void of all possessions and all ambition except for the strengthening of the body for competition or battle.

It was in this very context that God opened the eyes of the early Christians to the disciplines of Spiritual life. Through the apostle Paul, God declared: "... exercise thyself unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having

promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:7-8). The Lord calls each believer to pursue spiritual strength with that same mental concentration and physical discipline as the training athlete. This requires the regular diet of the Word of God (see 1 Peter 2:2), as well as the spiritual exercise of prayer, meditation and worship. Paul states the blessings of such determination is the promise of THE LIFE, now and to come. That LIFE is the gift of eternal life from God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Christ himself qualified that life: "... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10 NIV).

Although salvation is free to all who confess personal sin and accept Christ as the Saviour who died in man's place (see Romans 5), the abundance of that Salvation-Life is found through spiritual exercise. Even as determined athletes devote themselves to exercise for the thrill of competition, so Christians should devote themselves to spiritual exercise for the richness of Salvation-Life.

The apostle Paul was so determined: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (1 Corinthians 9:25-27 NIV)

Paul's testimony is a constant challenge to each believer to rise to the call of Spiritual Exercise.

Personal Notes:

April 16

Mark 16:5-14

“And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. “But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either. Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.”

Counterfeit Christianity

In the trading world of "painted masterpieces", with so much money at stake and counterfeits so prevalent, great care is taken to ensure that the genuine article is being presented. The average person in society stands distant from such concerns of the wealthy, but can be victim to a greater counterfeit effort. I speak of those who may be victim to counterfeit Christianity. Just as there are certain essential characteristics that define the authenticity of the great masterpieces, so there are essential characteristics that define true Christianity. One of those basic essentials is the acceptance of the resurrection of Christ.

The bodily resurrection of Christ, mentioned over 108 times in the New Testament, is the very cornerstone of the Christian faith and assures us that Jesus was the very Son of God who died for our sins. The apostle Paul, who gave us 13 of the 27 New Testament books, expressed the importance of the resurrection. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not

raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:14-17 NIV). According to Paul, the very gift of salvation through faith is dependent upon a belief in the resurrection. "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9 NIV)

The Laodicean church, who had grown "lukewarm", was in God's view ready to be cast out by Him (see Revelation 2:14-22). It is significant that the Lord called such a church to reaffirm the essential teaching of Christian Faith, His Resurrection. "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Rev. 3 NIV).

In view of the hopelessness of "Counterfeit Christianity" that denies the bodily resurrection of Christ, Dr. Henry Morris's challenge is appropriate: "How urgent it is for churches today, with all their emphasis on introspective spirituality and so-called abundant living, to get back to an understanding and proclamation of the bedrock doctrines of creation and resurrection." (*IMPACT*, April 1984). In the real world of spiritual life, where the commodities are eternal, don't be deceived by counterfeits.

Personal Notes:

April 17

John 14:1-12

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. "And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves." Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."

Not Just a Holiday!

For many, Easter is just another holiday from work and a chance to get away or catch up on the household chores. Yet the celebration of Christ's resurrection from the grave has deeply practical implications as Charles Swindoll suggests in his book, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*.

"It is very important that you understand heaven, our eternal destiny, is an actual place. It isn't a misty dream or a floating fantasy. Don't let any of the mystical religions confuse you. Heaven is a reality. It is literal real estate which He is preparing for His own. Jesus says so in the next statement: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

The body of every believer that now resides in a casket, every believer torn apart by ravenous beasts, or by the elements of the sea, or by warfare, or awful murder will be received by Christ at His return.

Regardless of the condition of that body, the Lord Jesus says, "I will come again, and I will receive you unto Myself." That's a direct promise from His lips. Most of those men who heard His words that evening died horrible deaths. More than one of them was sawn in two. Some were torn apart by wild beasts. Yet their Lord said, in effect, "I will come again, and I'll receive you unto Myself. The condition of your body doesn't concern Me. This promise stands firm."

Shortly thereafter, Jesus went to the cross. When He died He was placed in a tomb. Three days later, He emerged in bodily form from the tomb, victorious over death. He is the only one thus far who has ever been resurrected - the only one to come back to this earth in a glorified condition. So He has overcome death. In light of that, it shouldn't surprise us that He is able to bring us from the grave when He returns.

Forty days after His resurrection He stood on a mountain with His followers. While there, just before He ascended to heaven, the same subject was brought up again - His return.

"And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." (Acts 1:6-9).

Personal Notes:

April 18

Acts 17:5-12

“But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. “Jason has harboured them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore, many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.”

Habits

A habit is defined as an act or practice so frequently repeated as to become relatively fixed in character and almost automatic in performance. Habits, it has been said, are like soft beds, easy to get into but hard to get out of. Others have compared habits to cables; we weave a thread every day until they are impossible to break.

As Moses gave instruction to Israel regarding the character of the family blessed of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), he made reference to the process of repeated teaching. It was this human inclination toward habit that Moses further encouraged families to develop: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts...Tie them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates." (Deuteronomy 6:8-9 NIV).

God's Word should be integrated into family habits so that our labour is automatically performed with God's virtue (symbols on our hands); so that our attitude and thoughts are automatically checked by God's purity (bind them on your foreheads); so that our private lives (door-frames) and public lives (gates) are automatically tempered by

God's values. Like habits, the practical truths of God's Word should surface in every area of our lives.

However we view habits, to acknowledge that we are all creatures of them is the beginning of understanding much about why we do what we do. Too often families that claim to be Christian have not developed as habit the integrating of truth to life. They fall into the same dilemma as the recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews fell into, "though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:12-14 NIV).

The family that seeks the blessing of God will not be content with a passing knowledge of God, but will "train themselves to distinguish good and evil" through the good habit of integrating scripture into all of life. Form good habits - godly habits, they are as difficult to break as bad ones.

Personal Notes:

April 19

1 Corinthians 6:9-18

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.”

Marriage on the Rocks

A man passing by a Little League baseball game asked one of the youngsters the score. "We're behind eighteen to nothing," the youngster replied enthusiastically. "Well," said the man, "You certainly don't sound discouraged." "Discouraged?" the boy said, "Why? We haven't been to bat yet!"

There are times when it appears that the status of marriage within our society has "dropped eighteen runs." The external pressures that have been brought to bear on marriage in the last couple of decades have so corroded society's view that its very essence is being redefined. With the recognition of common law marriages and the movement toward equal rights for same sex marriages, even our school systems are teaching a new definition of marriage and family.

As much as I am disturbed by the trend, I am not discouraged because the Lord God has provided His definition of marriage. This has stood the test of time. Ages ago God performed the first marriage by presenting Eve to Adam, and then defined the marriage

relationship: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh." (Ge. 2:24 NIV).

Although much of modern society would mock this definition, it is God that will have the final bat. Whatever man's acceptance of the vices that destroy marriage, whether promiscuity before marriage, adultery in marriage, pornography, homosexuality, incest, or even sodomy, God's declaration that these are sins will be vindicated by his final judgment. God's holiness demands it, God's justice will ensure it, God's Word declares it: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (I Cor. 6:9 NIV).

I am not discouraged; not because of the judgment of God, but because of the love of God which can overcome these vices in the lives of people. The passage quoted goes on to say "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (I Cor. 6:11 NIV).

The vices that destroy marriage have been around almost as long as marriage itself. There have always been people who recognize the destructiveness of these vices and turned to the Lord for forgiveness and newness of life. As with the Apostle Paul, my hope for marriage is in God: "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phili. 1:6 NIV). This good work of salvation includes the potential for victory over the power of these vices destroying marriage. Marriage may be down, but it is by no means out!

Personal Notes:

April 20

Ephesians 5:22-33

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Purposeful Marriage

The complexity of rules and the speed of play in Canada's "national" sport makes hockey confusing to a complete stranger to the game (if indeed there could be such a person!). It is helpful to explain that the single objective of hockey is to put the puck in the opponents' net. There are times when the players themselves would do well to be reminded of this. Often singleness of purpose becomes clouded by personal agendas or emotional vendettas. The same is true in marriage; personal agendas and emotional vendettas cloud the single objective.

At such times, it is good to be reminded that God has a single objective for marriage as seen in His definition: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24). Along with marriage's prerequisite (leaving), and commitment (cleaving), the very heart of the definition of marriage is the goal of oneness. In the context of creation, woman coming from man followed by their becoming "one" again; this demonstrated the unique binding of husband and wife in a

relationship unlike any other. So intimate and beautiful is this oneness that the Lord devoted an entire book of scripture to it - The Song of Solomon. The depth of this relationship is the foundation for understanding the church's relationship to Christ.

This goal of oneness involves a necessary determination and a progressive direction. In his book *Magnificent Marriage*, Gordon MacDonald sheds light on these truths. "Marriage success begins with commitment, is sustained by discipline, and is evaluated by its productivity in making human beings something better than what they were when they entered into the relationship... The "one-flesh" of Gen. 2:24 is more than something physical. It is descriptive of the full dimensional return of women to man. That means that one-flesh will not be only physical but mental, emotional and spiritual. Together a couple will progressively tear down the barriers that sin has created, and love their way to wholeness. Cleaving is the process; one-fleshedness is the result...Biblical marriage in its most profound sense is a stepping off into the recovery of the original state of humanness, when men and women were not exploiters of one another but helpers of one another."

A renewed understanding of God's intent of oneness in marriage by husbands and wives would go a long way in restoring a measure of harmony and stability in our homes. My prayer is that readers will look to God's Word themselves to find the real meaning of oneness in marriage.

Personal Notes:

April 21

Genesis 2:18-25

“And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

Oneness in Marriage

In the fascinating world of chemistry where various components are mixed to create specific results, there are several critical areas of precision required. Most would readily understand the necessary precision of quantity; however, order and rate of mixing are often as critical. Error here has produced destructive results in the lab. Marriage, with its God-given goal of "becoming one," has its own critical order of relationship. This order corresponds to the created essence of each human being: "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Gen. 2:7 NIV). Here, God reveals that man is a union of material (a physical body composed of the elements of the earth) and immaterial (breath of life). Scripture further defines the immaterial as soul and spirit. "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thess. 5:23 NIV).

God's critical order of relationship begins with "spirit oneness", where a man and a woman are compatible in their relationship to God. Paul, writing to the church of Corinth, states "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." (2 Corinthians 6:14). God is not

addressing a racial issue, or even a religious issue, He is addressing a relationship issue of vital importance to those who have put their faith in Christ as Saviour. For those who choose to follow Christ, looking in God's Word for life's purpose and values, the framework for a deepening relationship that could lead to marriage, is the mutual relationship with Jesus where each partner knows the grace and sufficiency of a personal Saviour.

Next in God's critical order of relationship is "soul oneness"; the soul being the essence of man's intellect (thinking), volition (will) and emotions. Soul oneness is the compatibility and growing unity of a couple's thinking, activity and emotions. This can be defined as "liking one another," but involves a continued growth in that "liking" which leads to an unreserved commitment to be an instrument of God in sacrificially ministering to one another's personal needs.

With spirit oneness and soul oneness in proper order and growing measure, the core of human personality has found an unbreakable bond allowing "body oneness" to become God's intended consummation of marriage. Body oneness is the expression of sexual pleasure with deep personal meaning, a shared experience growing out of a total-being commitment to one another which heightens each partner's awareness of the bond between them.

In a society where relationships often begin with physical attraction, it's easy to see why marriages become destructive. God's critical order is being reversed. Christian young people cannot afford to ignore God's order of oneness.

Personal Notes:

April 22

Song of Solomon 2:6-14

“His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please. The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”

Romance in Marriage

In the Old Testament book *Song of Solomon*, the shepherdess expresses her attraction toward the King. "Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the maidens love you!" (Song of Sol. 1:3 NIV). Although that must have been some powerful cologne the king used, the point that needs to be made is that romance is alive and well in Biblical record! Whether it is the romance of King Solomon with the Shulamite shepherdess of the Song of Solomon or the beautiful story of Ruth and Boaz, the scriptures do not overlook the importance of romance in the development of relationships that lead to marriage.

Gordon MacDonald, in his book *Magnificent Marriage* states that Biblical Romance "...is more a series of pictures of a relationship than a hard and fast definition. But it appears to centre in the "up-front" part of the experience men and women have together. It is the most visible of all the things they do in relating to one another. I think it may include all of the qualities we actually lump together when we say of a member of the opposite sex, I like him, or I like her...Romance and like are the same basic experience."

A look at such Bible couples as Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel, and Ruth and Boaz reveals great diversity in their growing relationships. Yet, despite hardships and often personal failures, the "liking" aspect of each of these relationships had two component parts. First, they were drawn together by some compatibility subject to certain conditions that stimulated their emotional feelings toward each other. Second, there appeared to be a renewal experience weaving its way through a lasting commitment which was dependent upon a constant flow of positive stimuli to the emotions. In other words, when they first met there was a common "kindling" to start the fire of romance, and throughout their lives they kept the fire going.

Gordon MacDonald suggests that "liking" is the first of the levels of cleaving that the Bible definition of marriage sets forth (see Genesis 2:24) in the goal of becoming one. All too often couples delegate "liking each other" (romance) to the early dating period and fail to realize that the continuance of romance is part of the marriage commitment. If liking is a prelude to mature love, its death is the preface to the disintegration of love. For this reason, even romance is something requiring planning and effort as a positive and deliberate exercise.

Romance is not something left to the movie screen, it is the necessary labour of keeping the emotional flames burning in each other's heart. Romance, in God's design, is the furnace of growing feelings between husbands and wives that keeps the whole family warm. The warmth of your home will be directly proportional to where your "romance" thermostat is set!

Personal Notes:

April 23

Song of Solomon 8:1-7

"Oh, that you were like my brother, Who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I should find you outside, I would kiss you; I would not be despised. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, She who used to instruct me. I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, Of the juice of my pomegranate.

(TO THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM) His left hand is under my head, And his right hand embraces me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.

A RELATIVE Who is this coming up from the wilderness, Leaning upon her beloved? I awakened you under the apple tree. There your mother brought you forth; There she who bore you brought you forth.

THE SHULAMITE TO HER BELOVED Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised."

Likeability in Marriage

Schroeder, in the *Peanuts* comic strip, has no trouble creating the mood for romance; a masterful rendition of one of Beethoven's symphonies is enough to sweep Lucy off her feet into a "kissable" repose. Unfortunately, like many men, romance is the last thing on Schroeder's mind. Much to the chagrin of Lucy, she finds herself being kissed by Snoopy the beagle.

It seems that folks, even in the cartoons, struggle to keep the fires of romance burning. Because romance, (the fabric of liking one another) is fundamental to the maturing love to which God calls husbands and wives, it is important that couples continue to provide a climate where romance is cultivated.

The Song of Solomon suggests several things that stimulate romance. First, likeability is stimulated by mutual attractiveness. "Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes (cologne)" says the maiden of her man (Song of Solomon 1:3 NIV); "let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely," says the King of the shepherdess. (Song of Solomon 2:14 NIV). Second, likability is stimulated by verbal affirmation: "How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves." (Song of Sol. 1:15 NIV), "How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant." (Song of Sol. 1:16 NIV).

Third, likability is stimulated by appreciation. "You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes," (Song of Solomon 4:9 NIV). Fourth, likability is stimulated by sharing special times alone. "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom - there I will give you my love." (Song of Solomon 7:11-12 NIV).

Fifth and sixth, likability is stimulated by touching and tenderness: "His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me." (Song of Sol. 2:6 and 8:3 NIV).

Starting a fire in the right conditions is quite simple with a little kindling and a match, however, even in the best of conditions, a fire must be fed to continue to burn. The fires of romance are meant by God to continue to burn throughout the lifetime together of each husband and wife. With a little planning and caring on the part of both husband and wife to pursue these areas of stimulation for romance, man and wife will learn to "love each other t'death!"

Personal Notes:

April 24

Psalm 1:1-6

“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Vertical Communication in Marriage

In the days of the Czars, guards were posted at each end of a park bench outside the winter palace of the St. Petersburg. An enquiring lieutenant discovered that the order to post the guards had come from the palace 200 years earlier, to prevent ladies from sitting on a freshly painted bench. The order had never been rescinded. This example of non-communication, which results in the performance of duty while losing sight of purpose, is common in our society. Marriage is no exception.

In marriage, the lines of communication must be well used if effort is to be productive. These lines of communication are in two directions: first, family members in communication with God and second, family members in communication with one another.

When Martha complained to the Lord about her sister's seeming neglect of duty, Jesus replied: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better." (Lu. 10 NIV). What Martha had chosen was to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word. The text continues with Jesus responding to the disciples' request to teach them to pray.

There is no greater priority of communication than this - God speaking to people and people speaking to God. With this line of communication open daily, families are able to discover and pursue meaningful relationships and responsibilities with clear and current purposes.

Listening to the Lord was evident in the team ministry of Aquila and Priscilla. They took the apostle Paul into their home, helped supply his needs, embraced his ministry in travelling with him to Ephesus, and later aided Apollos in understanding God, (see Acts 18). Such sensitivity to the leading of God is not a thing of the past.

The prayer that the Lord taught His disciples is as relevant and needful today as at any time in history. Imagine the pain and heartache that would be avoided if, each morning, families asked with genuine sincerity: "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." (Luke 1:4).

This privilege of communication with God is afforded to all who accept God's avenue of restoration with Him: "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it is not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you are redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect...Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. (I Peter 1:17-19, 21 NIV).

Personal Notes:

April 25

Genesis 3:8-13

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Horizontal Communication in Marriage

"The boneless tongue so small and weak, can crush and kill, declared the Greek; "The tongue destroys a greater horde," The Turk asserts, "than does the sword." The Persian proverb wisely saith, "A lengthy tongue - an early death."

No matter where you go in this world, mankind is aware of the destructive power of the tongue. Scripture states: "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:7-8 NIV).

If we are really interested in understanding how the tongue, mankind's foremost instrument of communication, became such a weapon, we must look again at the disruption of human relationships. When Eve and Adam sinned, all relationships were radically altered; the first shock waves of that breakage came in the communication area.

First, man's touch with God was cut off. "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD...and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden." (Genesis 3:8 NIV) Also, his touch with his own inner being was severely limited. He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (Genesis 3:10 NIV). Adam and Eve had lost their inner sense of confidence and well being. Fear replaced peace.

Finally, the beautiful intimacy of their relationship was also destroyed. "The man said, "The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:12-13 NIV). Rather than express concern and support, each passed on blame and sought his own justification. Someone has said: "Beware the tongue, it's normally wet and likely to slip." Such slippage is rooted in human self-justification as a result of sin: "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder" (James 3:16 NIV).

Dr. James Dobson's "Focus on the Family Bulletin" of May '94 reports that couples who stay together utter 5 or fewer put-downs in every 100 comments to each other, whereas couples who inflict twice as many verbal wounds per 100 comments usually split up.

Is your family communication a build-up or tear-apart experience? Because God loved man, He instituted the great act of reconciliation - making it possible for shattered relationships to come back together again. In the Bible definition of marriage which is found in Genesis 2:24, the goal of "becoming one flesh" is achieved through the process of "cleaving." Cleaving is, in effect, a part of the great reconciling act. It is the progressive effort to reclaim some of the communicational capacity we lost, to recover the genius and joy of the relationships that God meant for us to experience.

Personal Notes:

April 26

Ephesians 5:21-25

"...submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself."

Marriage Givers and Takers.

In his seminars on the family, Dr. Lawrence Crabb Jr. compares the modern approach to marriage to ticks on a dog - the tick is only out to get, not to give! When both man and woman take this approach to marriage, the union amounts to two people each striving for their own needs. The result is a forgone conclusion.

This approach is in complete opposition to God's intention. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." (Ephesians 5:21-22, 25, 33 NIV)

Gordon MacDonald, in his book *Magnificent Marriage*, expresses the significance of this passage well. "Every Christian approach to marriage sooner or later arrives at Paul's great series of relational admonitions to the Ephesians in the fifth chapter of his epistle. The specific teaching on the subject of marriage begins many words earlier when he first concerns himself with the unique lifestyle Christians are supposed to possess. He had warned them in Ephesians 4:17 that being members of the body of Christ meant that they had to step away from the accepted way of life which the Gentiles lived. He dealt with many relational problems such as anger, stealing, and exploitation. When he begins chapter five he becomes positive in his teaching. "Be imitators of God, and walk in love, as Christ loved us...."

Then Paul again launches into the dimensions of Christian lifestyle which followed in the steps of Jesus. It is in this vein that he brings up the subject of mutual surrender in Ephesians 5:21. Christians do not exploit one another; they submit to one another. That is a universal principle among all Christian relationships: it is the element of servanthood. The best way to bring out the best from one another, Paul is saying, is to serve one another. The cleaving process of God's definition of marriage (Genesis 2:24) involves a deepening relationship of romance, communication and mutual surrender in the spirit of servanthood. With this principle of servanthood in mind, each husband and wife should ask "Do I approach marriage as a giver or taker?"

Personal Notes:

April 27

1 Peter 1:3-21

"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Spiritual Drowsiness - a Danger

The highway stretches out before you as an endless trail to which your vehicle seems glued. The rhythm of the engine falls into harmony with the strobe effect of the passing dashes of the centre line. The heat waves rise up from the hardtop giving the allusion of a gentle rolling sea, and your mind in response drifts off quietly to days gone by. Your eye lids droop in surrender to the pleasantness of the coming dream when suddenly, you awaken to the shock of your tires hitting the soft shoulder- if you're fortunate; if not, your vehicle strikes rock and you never wake up.

When driving, physical drowsiness is a danger that must be recognized and avoided, its consequences are devastating. This is true as well of spiritual drowsiness. The Epistle of Peter states:

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

In the literal sense, the word "*nepho*", 'sober' in English), meant to be absent of the influence of alcohol, and therefore a parallel could be drawn to the dangers of drinking and driving as well. However, Peter is using sobriety in the figurative sense of avoiding the spiritual drowsiness that comes not so much by choice as by complacency. He refers, with this term, not of being spiritually lured

but of becoming spiritually lulled. The thought is of the sentinel who falls asleep, not of the sentinel who abandons his post. Yet the end result is the same, personal shame and danger to self and company.

Too many Christians have become spiritually drowsy and are oblivious to the imminent danger to themselves and their families. There has been a quiet slip from true devotion to simple motion. Although there may be a lot of religious activity, when entrance is made into the sacred precincts of the heart's personal religion, all enthusiasm is lost.

This state of drowsiness is so dangerous that the risen Lord made specific reference to it: "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:14-16 NIV).

A.W. Tozer repeats the call to spiritual sobriety in these words: "If He (Jesus Christ) is who and what the Christian message declares Him to be, then the thought of Him should be the most exciting, the most stimulating, to enter the human mind." In reference to Christ's warning of Revelation 3, Tozer suggests: "The low level of moral enthusiasm among us may have a significance far deeper than we are willing to believe."

Be sober in all its senses, drowsiness can lead to disaster!

Personal Notes:

April 28

Isaiah 53:6-12

“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Opportunity Knocks

In olden days, a ship had to wait for the flood tide before it could make it into port. The term for this situation was "ob portu", that is, a ship standing off port waiting for the single moment when it could ride the tide into harbour. The English word "opportunity" is derived from this meaning. The first Easter was just such a situation for mankind.

Says Spurgeon: "Christ longed for the cross as the goal of all his exertions. He could never say "It is finished" on His throne: but on the cross He cried it. ... He paid your debt, and paid it all at once; so that there now remains not one farthing of debt owing from Christ's people to their God, except a debt of love.

Jesus died: the crucifixion was no delusion, the piercing of his side with a spear was most clear and evident proof that he was dead. His heart was pierced, and the blood and water flowed from there. As a dead man he was taken down from the cross and laid in Joseph's

virgin tomb. No man in this world was ever more surely dead than he. "He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." As dead they laid him in the place of the dead, with napkin and grave clothes, and habiliments fit for a grave. Then they rolled the great stone at the grave's mouth and left him, knowing that he was dead.

Then comes the grand truth: before the third sun, Jesus rose again. His body had not decayed for it was not possible for that holy thing to see corruption, but still it had been dead, and by the power of God -- by his own power, by the Father's power, by the power of the Spirit -- for it is attributed to each of these in turn, before the sun had risen his dead body was quickened. The silent heart began again to beat, and through the stagnant canals of his veins, the life blood began to circulate. The soul of the Redeemer again took possession of the body, and it lived once more. There he was within the sepulchre, as truly living as to all parts of him as he had ever been. He literally and truly, in a material body, came forth from the tomb to live among men till the hour of his ascension into heaven. This is the truth which is still to be taught, refine it who may, spiritualize it who dare. This is the historical fact which the apostles witnessed, and martyrs bled and died. This is the doctrine which is the key-stone of the arch of Christianity, and they that hold it not have cast aside the essential truth of God. How can they hope for salvation for their souls if they do not believe that "the Lord is risen indeed"?

The First Easter, a single tide by which man can approach God's harbour of life. Now for each person, there is the "opportunity" to be saved.

Personal Notes:

April 29

2 Peter 1:1-11

“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

The Great God Entertainment.

As bass season approaches, we die-hard fishermen take time to review the condition of our equipment to ensure that reels are oiled, lines are free of nicks and tangles, and hooks are sharpened to a fine point. For every Christian who takes the Lord's marching orders seriously, there is a similar responsibility.

To the disciples, and through them to the church, Jesus said: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19 NIV). The mandate of each Christian is to share the good news about forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Peter said it this way: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). The church is weak in fulfilling this commission due to a failure to keep personal lives sharp and untangled.

One of a Christian's greatest hindrances is what A. W. Tozer calls 'The Great God Entertainment': "... the present inordinate attachment to every form of entertainment is evidence that the inner life of modern man is in serious decline... For there are millions who cannot live without amusement; life without some form of

entertainment for them is simply intolerable... No one with common human feeling will object to the simple pleasures of life ... as may help to relax the nerves and refresh the mind exhausted by toil. Such things if used with discretion may be a blessing along the way. That is one thing. The all-out devotion to entertainment as a major activity for which and by which men live is definitely something else again.

The abuse of harmless things is the essence of sin. The growth of the amusement phase of human life... has been built into a multimillion dollar racket with greater power over human minds and human character than any other educational influence on earth... She (the church) appears to have decided that if she cannot conquer the great god Entertainment she may as well join forces... Religious entertainment is in many places crowding out the serious things of God. Many churches these days have become little more than theatres... It is a strange thing and a wonder that the professed followers of Christ should be giving themselves up to religious amusements? That at an hour when mature saints are so deeply needed vast numbers of believers should revert to spiritual childhood and clamour for religious toys."

Christians who clamour for entertainment allow their lives to become entangled and dull, and their witness to become ineffective. In order to become the die-hard fishers of men God intended, there is need to hear again God's words: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Pt. 1:13-14 NIV).

Personal Notes:

April 30

Psalm 141:1-10

"LORD, I cry out to You; Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice wicked works With men who work iniquity; And do not let me eat of their delicacies. Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked. Their judges are overthrown by the sides of the cliff, And they hear my words, for they are sweet. Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave, As when one plows and breaks up the earth. But my eyes are upon You, O GOD the Lord; In You I take refuge; Do not leave my soul destitute. Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, And from the traps of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I escape safely."

Foot in Mouth Disease

Robert Orben wrote: "Every speaker has a mouth; An arrangement rather neat. Sometimes it's filled with wisdom. Sometimes it's filled with feet." This awkward position is a plight common to all.

Perhaps one of the foremost reasons for man's perpetual problem of putting his feet in his mouth is the all-to-common tendency to lie. I quote from an article in the Toronto Star (January 7, 1995). "A lot of people have become so inured to the idea of the so called harmless lie, they don't know the difference. At that point, you're just lying out of instinct". Although lying has become instinct, its destructive power has not diminished. "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." (James 3:6 NIV).

One of the joys of salvation is to see the Lord change the inner man in such a way that the message of the lips takes a complete turn-around. Says David, "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God." (Psalms 40:3 NIV). Nevertheless, a personal relationship with the living Christ still requires the spiritual disciplines to see that "transformed tongue" emerge.

The Christian must commit to God's guide for speech: "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15 NIV). The truth must be spoken in love, putting the total interests (spiritual, emotional, relational) of the listeners first.

A believer must pursue God's goal for speech: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." (Psalms 19:14 NIV). To determine in any situation to think, "What Jesus would say?" is one approach to measure what would please Him. The key is to determine to do so.

Finally, to know Christ is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit (see John 14), and therefore avails the Christian of the ever present guard for speech: "Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips." (Psalms 141:3 NIV). To commence each day in prayer with a request for the Lord to help us consider what is appropriate to say before our lips go into action, is an answer to prayer that the Lord is anxious to fulfil.

Paul's words to each Christian must be taken seriously. "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices." (Colossians 3 NIV).

There is no guarantee that Christians will avoid that common problem of "foot in mouth" disease; however, becoming tangled in the web of lies is inexcusable for those who are called by God's own name.

Personal Notes:

May 1

2 Peter 1:15-21

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

God's Certain Word

With a sense of panic I jumped from my stalled car, seeking desperately to push it off the railroad tracks before the oncoming train destroyed it. Knowing that I had about ten seconds before impact, I pushed with all my might, but to no avail. The car-devouring train continued to advance upon me with what seemed a smile, delighting in the inevitable demise of my rubber wheeled intruder. Then, just before the crunch of impact, I awoke from sleep, soaked with sweat, muscles aching from the strain. My emotional and physical framework had "experienced" what my mind had fabricated.

"Experiences" are very subjective things, and therefore should not be the sole foundation of something as vitally important as a relationship with God, our hope of salvation. Peter stated this very truth. Speaking of His real experience of being with Jesus on the mountain and seeing Christ "transformed" before him as the glory of God shone forth, Peter writes: "For he (Jesus) received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And (yet) we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it" (2 Peter 1:17-19 NIV).

Although Peter had enjoyed the wonderful "experience" of seeing Christ in His glory (see Mark 16), he declared the scriptural

record to be a "more certain" source. Peter uses the grammatically proper form of the root word "beb'-ah-yos," meaning "steadfast, sure, stable". He is declaring scriptures to be the certain foundation for knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus declared the same truth in these words: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matthew 5:18 NIV).

For many today, "Christianity" is nothing more than a subjective experience of emotional euphoria. To stake eternity on such shaky ground is a dangerous thing. The reality of salvation (the receiving of new life in Christ - see Romans 6), is defined in objective truth. "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10:9-10 NIV), resulting in a true and real confidence: "...we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." (Hebrews 6:18-19 NIV). Friend, how real is your relation to Jesus?

Personal Notes:

May 2

1 Samuel 2:27-36

"Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? 'Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire? 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honour your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?' "Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the LORD says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. 'Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. 'And you will see an enemy in My dwelling place, despite all the good which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house forever. 'But any of your men whom I do not cut off from My altar shall consume your eyes and grieve your heart. And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age. 'Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them. 'Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever. 'And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and say, "Please, put me in one of the priestly positions, that I may eat a piece of bread."

Count the Cost

How much does it cost? Many parents teach their children to ask this question before they buy, in order to gain an understanding of material values. It is important for children to learn the value of a dollar, but what about eternal values?

Have you asked yourself these questions: What will it cost eternally when my child received five dollars for spending money and

fifty cents for the offering plate? What will it cost eternally, when I insist on taking my son to ball or hockey practice at six a.m. on Saturday and we both sleep in and miss church on Sunday ,or for that matter, we forego worship altogether for sports activity? What will it cost eternally when my daughter hears me preach at her about better marks at school, but never hears me pray for her about her need for the Saviour?

Eli was a priest of God who indulged his sons more than he honoured God; as a result the Lord let him reap what he sowed. "Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honour your sons more than me? Every one of you that I do not cut off from my altar will be spared only to blind your eyes with tears and to grieve your heart, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life." Eli suffered great eternal loss for his family.

God declares to every parent that His Words "shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way." This can only be accomplished when each parent has accepted Christ as personal Saviour and allowed God's Word to be the authority in the home. The Bible states "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he shall not depart from it." What set of values will guide your children when they grow older, material or eternal? Have you counted the cost eternally of refusing to let Christ be the centre of your home?

Personal Notes:

May 3

Matthew 16:24-28

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Hand-out Mentality

Without doubt, one of the negative by-products of our socially conscientious society is a growing "hand-out" mentality. By this I mean that a growing number of people actually believe that society owes them. The great sacrifices of our forefathers to bring freedom and comfort to our land have created not gratitude, but graft. Shared costs for mutual privilege have led to demands for free education, free medication, and free accommodation. The needy have been overrun by the greedy. This "give me" approach to life has even entered into the church.

Charles Colson writes: "The roots of the church's identity crisis are found in the consumer mentality so pervasive in our culture... Ask people what they look for in a church and the number one response is "fellowship"... Spiritual consumers are interested not in what the church stands for but in the fulfilment it can deliver."

How far from Christ's call this is! "Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24 NIV) Believers can be so far removed from this heartbeat of Christ that understanding of personal denial and a cross escapes them. On January 8, 1956, Jim Elliot and four other missionaries were killed by the Auca natives to whom they had sought to bring the message of Christ. Perhaps the words of Elisabeth Elliot regarding her martyred husband will shed some light on denial and a cross: "When I was a student at Wheaton, I asked Jim to autograph my yearbook. He wrote: "The dust of words would smother me. II Timothy 2:4." The text cited says, "No man at war

entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier."

His death was the result of simple obedience to his Captain. Many thousands of men have died in obedience to their captains. The men at Gettysburg were among them. Abraham Lincoln's great words, spoken on that battlefield, apply as well to other soldiers whose obedience to commands is not the less to be imitated.

"We cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men ... who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. ...It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that ... we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion."

Lincoln and those who were present at that ceremony viewed once again the ground whereon the men struggled -- common green fields of Pennsylvania, but fraught with new significance. As I read again Jim's own words, put down in battered notebooks during the common routine of life, they become, for me, fraught with new meaning. To them I can add nothing: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (1949)

God seeks committed Christians not consumer Christians!

Personal Notes:

May 4

Matthew 1: 24-30

"But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Hopelessness

In 1977 the 36,000-ton liner "Windsor Castle" found itself fourteen hundred miles from Cape Town and missing a passenger. Leslie Fuller reported at 9:00 a.m. to the Captain that his wife had been missing for an hour. Captain Beadon immediately ordered the liner to turn around and begin a search. Finding one lone soul in that great sea seemed an impossible task, nevertheless, the captain knew he must try. Fortunately, one hour and thirty minutes later, the woman was simultaneously sighted by a number of passengers, a boat was lowered, and she was taken aboard within another thirty minutes.

Imagine how that woman must have felt when she first recovered from the fall and realized that the ship was proceeding without her. Lost in a vast ocean with no personal means of rescue, no land in sight, no hope of her cries being heard, she must have felt the sword of loneliness and the spear of desperation pierce her heart.

There is nothing quite as horrible as hopeless, despairing loneliness. Yet the same sword and spear tear at the hearts of countless numbers of our society daily. As lost as mankind is in its great sea of godlessness, rescue is nearer than most would believe. It was the very nature of our loving Creator to seek to restore man. Christ came to the rescue.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8 NIV)

The vessel of rescue was Christ himself when he "was lowered" to the death of the cross. Yet He arose and not only offers rescue as a living Saviour, but companionship as a personal friend. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:29-30 NIV).

Whatever circumstances you may find yourself in, there is no reason to continue in hopeless, agonizing loneliness. God promises "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13 NIV).

Personal Notes:

May 5

Psalm 96:9-13

O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice. Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth!

The Final Word

In *Men at Work*, author George Will comments about baseball umpires. "They are professional dispensers of pure justice. Once when Babe Pinelli called Babe Ruth out on strikes, Ruth made a populist argument: "there's 40,000 people here who know that last one was a ball". Pinelli replied with the stateliness of John Marshall: "Maybe so, but mine is the only opinion that counts!"

There are those who believe that what is popular, or what is held by the majority, is always right. They choose to believe this even when the whole world seems to align itself against the moral laws of God. Today, segments of our society seek, in the name of popularity or political correctness, to redefine God-declared sins such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, no-fault divorce, and abandonment, as normal behaviour and classify Scripture Truth as intolerant bigotry that must be dispensed with. The battle lines of conflict are even now being drawn within the school systems and courts and the sound of war will continue to reach all the way to the Supreme Court.

If and when that last appeal is heard and the supreme courts decide, whatever the verdict, it will not be the last word. The Lord God, whether believed or not, will hold in the end, the only Word that really matters. God cannot be untrue to Himself or to His word which states: "... rejoice before the LORD: for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His Truth." (Psalms 96:13)

Although God's judgement is coming to individuals and nations alike, the Lord makes this appeal to Israel in particular and to all nations in general: "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn

from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die" (Ezekiel 33:11 NIV). The Lord, through His Son, has made a way of forgiveness and restoration possible. Both individuals and nations hearts must turn to Him to find it.

For all those who both love the Lord and this nation of Canada, God sends a tender plea of participation. He presents a privilege and responsibility that cannot be overlooked. "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14 NIV).

God's judgement shall come as the last word! They that hold to "popular persuasion" should fear. They that have Christ should rejoice that judgement is past because "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1 NIV).

Personal Notes:

May 6

Ecclesiastes 12:1-5

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them": While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after the rain; In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down; When the grinders cease because they are few, And those that look through the windows grow dim; When the doors are shut in the streets, And the sound of grinding is low; When one rises up at the sound of a bird, And all the daughters of music are brought low; Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.

Getting Older

According to George Gallup's "America Wants to Know", in 1940 the life expectancy of a man was about sixty-three years, and in 1980 life expectancy exceeded seventy-five years. It is obvious that as we are living longer as well as growing older! This fact however, does not necessarily mean happiness is enjoyed longer. Charles Swindoll cites several common feelings among the aged: uselessness, guilt, bitterness, resentment, and fear (*Living on the Ragged Edge*). He sums up the agony of many older folks in this sentimental poem: "Across the fields of yesterday -He sometimes comes to me -The little lad just back from play -The boy I used to be, -He smiles at me so wistfully - When once he's crept within, -It is as though he had hoped to see -The man I might have been."

The reality of life is that along with its length, there is diminishing strength, and increased stress. Aging, no matter how we may seek to deny it, to hide it, or to escape it, happens to us all! Mankind would be wise to listen to God's treatise about aging. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them", before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain (the mind weakens); when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop (strength goes), when the grinders cease because they are few (teeth go), and those looking through the windows grow dim (vision

goes); when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint (hearing goes); Also [when] they shall be afraid of [that which is] high, and fears [shall be] in the way..."(Ecclesiastes 12:1-5 NIV)

The only comfort and hope in aging, is to know the creator! The earlier in life we remember him (to drop our self-sufficiency and commit ourselves to him), the greater our opportunity to deepen our knowledge of him. And , as Paul says, to deepen our knowledge of him is to find strength and hope and joy that transcends age and circumstance. "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8 NIV).

Whatever your age, responding to God's plea is wise and fruitful. As Swindoll states, "Now is the time to prepare for eternity. Preparing for retirement is commendable. In fact, these days, it's quite wise. But have you prepared for the life beyond retirement? That's more than wise- that's essential. If you have, you can smile at whatever life throws at you. You have the hope of looking into the Saviour's face and hearing Him say, "Welcome home!"

Personal Notes:

May 7

Ephesians 5:8-16

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Wasteful Activity

How strange it is that although the average labourer works less hours in a week now than forty years ago, has more resources to ease the burden of labour in the workplace and in the home, and spends more on leisure than ever before, weariness is a common complaint! Is it possible that waste, not work, is the great "zapper" of strength?

It was the prophet Isaiah who cried out to the Lord: "But I said, "I have laboured to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due to me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God." (Isaiah 49:4 NIV). Isaiah made this statement because he saw no results in his purposeful labour, many Christians today must admit the same, but for an altogether different reason; they have no godly purpose for their efforts. Too often the labour of the believer is toward self-gratifying purposes that are a waste of time, energy and resources.

Among other things, A. W. Tozer suggests that the time, energies and resources of God's people are wasted upon "the great god, Entertainment". "Men think of the world not as a battleground, but as a playground. We (Christians) are not here to fight, but to frolic. We are not in a foreign land, we are home. We are not getting ready to live, we are already living, and the best we can do is rid ourselves of the old inhibitions and our frustrations and live this life to the full... So today we have the astonishing spectacle of millions of dollars being poured into the unholy job of providing earthly entertainment for the so-called sons of heaven."

How, like Sarah William's poem, believers must confess:
"Because I spent the strength Thou gavest me, -in struggle which Thou never didst ordain, -And have but dregs of life to offer Thee, -O Lord, I do repent, (and will refrain)!"

May God's word through Paul sober the mind and heart of every believer whose life is being squandered away with wasteful activity. "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (Eph. 5:13-17 NIV)

Personal Notes:

May 8

Colossians 3:2-10

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Purity

More people are learning to appreciate the value of clean, pure, fresh-water because many communities have suffered from contaminated water, leaving residents scrambling for a safe water supply. Ontario is one of the largest sources of fresh water in the world. Who would have believed that any community in this province would have to purchase bottled water, and all because of one essential factor called "purity"?

The same can be said of the church! Who would have thought that the "Redeemed of the Lord", "the Body and Bride of Christ" would have to struggle with the same essential element of purity? Nevertheless, knowing the pull of lust and the power of Satan, Paul delivered many exhortations to the church regarding the danger of compromising a walk in purity. To the Thessalonians he wrote: "For this is the will of God, [even] your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication... For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." (1 Thessalonians 4: 3, 7) to the Corinthians he wrote. "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:18-19).

Similarly, Paul also challenged the Christians of Galatia, Ephesus, and Colosse: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery...envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19, 21 NIV), "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." (Ephesians 5:3 NIV), "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." (Colossians 3: 5 NIV).

Let's put the Bible teaching straight; it does not matter whether society or government, man made law or human justice, determines that such things as common-law marriage, homosexuality, or "consenting adults" is acceptable or not! The fact of the matter is this: God has defined all sexual indulgence outside the marriage of one man to one woman as sin, and God will call into account all who proclaim or practice otherwise. God calls all people to repent of such, and find forgiveness and new life through faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ.

It is not with casualness, nor as a matter of cultural preference, but with Truth that changes not, even as God himself changes not, that God through Paul made this sobering warning: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders" (1 Corinthians 6:9 NIV). Purity in Christ is still God's essential factor for His people!

Personal Notes:

May 9

John 3:11-21

"Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Inauthentic Christianity

There is a lake that my son and I frequent which has a unique characteristic; it supports a floating island. Mostly made of marsh with a few small bushes, this island remains in place by the root system of the plants; there is little solid ground beneath.

This island reminds me of much of what is called "Christianity" today. There is a measure of activity and resemblance of life; however, there is no real foundation. This inauthentic Christianity, though claiming Christ, does not hold to the basic prerequisite mentioned by Jesus himself: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Without new birth, there can be no fellowship with God and no true, spiritual foundation for life and worship.

So what does it mean to be born again you may ask? Jesus gave the answer Himself: "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."(John 3 NIV). Jesus

declared that there is a part of man called "spirit" that must be "born", even as the physical part of man has been born.

This birth takes place when a person believes what God says about himself or herself, that they are separated from God because of sin. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19 NIV). Then, upon accepting God's verdict about personal sin, the person believes what God has done for him or her. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NIV)

This expression of belief involves a repentant heart and a firm confidence that Jesus died on the cross to take the man's judgement for sin upon himself, and rose from the grave to offer true everlasting life. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

Inauthentic Christianity has been described as "a style of Christianity based more on external methods than on internal change, an attempt at godliness that lacks the power." It is religion without relationship to God, an island of activity, adrift on the sea of human preferences and purposes, trusting in human effort and personal goodness. It is void of the sure and true foundation of Jesus, and ignores the very Word of God. "For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11 NIV).

A storm will some day come and this island will be no more. Be sure of the foundation of your life.

Personal Notes:

May 10

Romans 6:5-12

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

Flying High

The story is told of a native who found an eagle's egg and placed it in the nest of a prairie chicken. The eaglet hatched and grew up among the brood of chicks, doing what prairie chickens do best, scratching in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat. The eaglet grew into a beautiful bird; however, it continued to cluck, cackle and fly like the prairie chicken, in short distances a few feet from the ground. One day the changeling saw a magnificent eagle soaring with grace high above the prairie.

"What a beautiful bird", the changeling cried, "O, how I would love to soar so high!"

"Don't be silly" charged the other prairie chickens, "What possible benefit would a prairie chicken have so far up in the sky" And with that rebuke, the saddened changeling continued to scratch out its existence, never realizing the wonderful privilege it had.

The essence of this story is lived out in the lives of many Christians! Having found the truth of deliverance from the penalty of sin, too many have missed the wonder that salvation affords over the power of sin. Such believers rejoice with Paul's declaration, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Romans 5:8-9). However, they overlook Paul's equally meaningful statement, "Knowing this, that

our old man (nature) is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Romans 6:6).

The dominance of harmful activities, the bondage to sinful habits, the personal damage of unreconciled relationships, are matters for every believer to gain victory over through the indwelling power of God! Soaring to new heights is the privilege afforded to the Christian through the living Saviour Jesus Christ.

Scripture defines the life of a believer as new, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17), as liberating, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1), and potentially abundant, "I (Jesus) am come that they (believers) might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Victory comes wrapped in the gift of salvation, and is appropriated by faith. "For in that he (Christ) died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:10-11).

Christian friend, in Christ you are free to soar above the grime of our society's vices; therefore, "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race... looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Why not fly high?

Personal Notes:

May 11

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

“Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Faithful Planters

Jean Giano visited the French Alps in 1913 only to discover a barren waste due to careless deforestation. While there, he met a shepherd who meticulously took upon himself the task of planting one hundred acorns a day. Giano revisited the area after World War I to find the beginnings of a new forest, all the results of one shepherd’s labour.

Again, Giano revisited the once barren area at the end of World War II. To his great surprise, the whole valley was renewed. Quoted in *Leadership* magazine (Spring '93), he writes: "On the site of the ruins I had seen in 1913 now stand neat farms... The old streams, fed by the rains and snows that the forest conserves, are flowing again... Little by little, the villages have been rebuilt. People from the plains, where land is costly, have settled here, bringing youth, motion, the spirit of adventure." Life from a barren wasteland, all because one shepherd faithfully planted one hundred healthy acorns every day for thirty years!

In a similar way God brings life out of the barren wasteland of humanity. Within this spiritual barrenness God has planted the seed of the gospel. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ...he was buried, and he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" ... "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Romans 10:9).

From this seed has arisen a believing people who are called by God's name, kept by God's promises and challenged to pursue God's purposes. "All things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5).

To the task of continuing to sow the seed, believers are also called to add the ministry of prayer. "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2 NIV).

Like the faithful shepherd of the French Alps, each believer should purposefully plant the grain of gospel and the seed of prayer. "Through these seeds, dry spiritual wastelands are transformed into harvestable fields, and life-giving water is brought to parched and barren souls." Christian friend, are you a reforester or deforester?

Personal Notes:

May 12

2 Kings 4:1-7

A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves." So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil." Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbours—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones." So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest."

Lonely Widows

Eight year old Danny from California shares this about God: "God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, since some people like preachers and things, pray at times besides bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV on account of this." Danny may not have it all correct, but he has grasped one of the greatest Bible truths - God listens!

In crisis and distress it is easy to doubt whether God really takes notice. Perhaps this very thought lay behind the widow mentioned in 2 Kings. "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen" (2 Kings 4:1). The story expresses the road to security in God by the assurance of His care.

The widow responded to the crisis she faced by seeking the Lord. For her, that meant seeking out the prophet Elijah. In so doing, she expressed the attitude of her family toward the Lord. Though her husband was dead, he had left a valuable heritage not in wealth, but in "Fearing the Lord." In this household, God was given first place. This

heritage prepared them for the difficulties ahead, and afforded the widow the privilege of claiming the promise of God: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things (personal needs) shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

The confirmation of God's care and their security came through simple obedience. "Elisha said, "Go round and ask all your neighbours for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side."... (her sons) brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing. She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left" (2 Kings 4:3-7 NIV).

Consider the following-- Question One: At what point was the widow secure in God? Answer: From the beginning God had her in His care. Question Two: For what reason did these trial come? Answer: To stretch the woman's faith and confirm God's abundant love. Question Three: At what point was the widow aware of God's care? Answer: When she had exercised faith and followed.

Seek Him, reverence Him, follow him and find His care. "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation" (Psalms 68:5). May this be a comfort to the husbandless mothers this Mothers Day.

Personal Notes:

May 13

Genesis 16:5-13

Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me." So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?"

Single Moms

She was an expectant mother, a victim of circumstances outside her control; as well, she was verbally abused as the object of intense jealousy and treated harshly as a slave. Her life was so unbearable that she decided death would be a better choice than living under such pressure. So, feeling completely alone and totally rejected she ran! But she was not alone, the living God knew her troubles, and cared for her condition. He came to her with these words: "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." (Genesis 16 NIV). Hagar took such courage from God's intervention that she called the Lord "El Roi" (the God who sees), and returned to Sarai.

Fourteen years later Hagar was asked to take her son and leave! Once again abandoned, with an overwhelming sense of despair Hagar travelled into the desert to die. And once again, God delivered her from her fears. "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, 'What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.' And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer" (Genesis 21:17-20).

For many single moms, Mother's Day is no more than a reminder of loneliness and a heightened sense of despair. Take heart, God still lives and cares for you! He has made this promise: "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows (the husbandless), is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing" (Psalms 68:5-6 NIV). He gives this invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29 NIV)

Today, as we thank the Lord for His gift of mothers, let each who know Him as Saviour make a special effort to reach out to those single moms and their children as well. May the homes of God's people become the families in which the Lord places the lonely. Why not invite a single parent family to your family celebrations - and make a habit of it throughout this year?

Personal Notes:

May 14

1 Samuel 1:9-20

So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head." And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!" And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now." Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him." And she said, "Let your maidservant find favour in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad. Then they rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked for him from the LORD."

A Godly Gal

There was a time in the history of Israel that the living God desired to do great things but His chosen people gave little more than a yawn in response. Considering that Eli, the priest at Shiloh could not even influence his two sons to abandon their corrupt behaviour, it is not surprising that the nation had no heart for God. The nation needed a man to turn the people back to the Lord. What may surprise many is that God raised this man out of the unlikely place of the distant hills, as the answer of a sincere prayer from a frustrated housewife. "O LORD

Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me..., "(1 Samuel 1:11 NIV)

Here was a woman distressed; wronged in marriage (her husband took a second wife probably as a result of Hannah's barrenness), reproached by the second wife (for her apparent infertility), and shamed in public (by her husband's well-meaning but insensitive "double portion"), as well as mistaken for drunkenness in the midst of her prayers. Yet Hannah was a woman devoted, steadfast in faith (year after year she made her pilgrimage of prayer), sensitive in spirit (her vow reflected just what the Lord was looking for - a child raised to love and serve God), and sacrificial in commitment (Hannah was willing to give her son up at an early age for training in the priesthood). Is it any wonder that she became a woman delighted: in response to the birth of her son Samuel, Hannah prayed: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no-one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." (1 Samuel 2 NIV)

On this Mother's Day, it would be appropriate to offer a special prayer to the Lord for the great gift of godly mothers like Hannah, for people in every age have been influenced and blessed by them. God says: "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate." (Proverbs 31:30-31 NIV). Here also are the ingredients for a "praise" cake to offer: 1 can of obedience, several pounds of affection, 1 pint of neatness, some holiday, birthday, and everyday surprises, 1 can of running errands (the willing brand), 1 box of powdered "Get up when I should", 1 bottle of "Keep smiling all day long", 1 can of pure thanksgiving. Mix well, bake in the warm oven of the heart and serve big portions to Mom every day!

Personal Notes:

May 15

Psalm 66:5-12

“Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land; They went through the river on foot. There we will rejoice in Him. He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah

Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living, And does not allow our feet to be moved. For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water; But You brought us out to rich fulfilment.”

Anything Goes Morality

A CBC radio commentary reflected upon the intent of an atheist group to have reference to Canada's acknowledgment of "the sovereignty of God" removed from the preamble of our constitution. This reminded me of the losing battle that was waged in the mid 20's among our American neighbours to the south. At the time the "Charter Education Institution" in Washington sought to remove all reference to God's standard of morality as expressed in Scripture, from the nation's schools. The Institution's "Five-Point Plan for Character Education in Elementary School Classrooms" replaced God's moral standard with: "The teacher presents the Children's Morality Code as a reliable statement of the conduct which is considered right among boys and girls who are loyal to Uncle Sam, and which is justified by the experience of the multitudes of worthy citizens who have been Uncle Sam's boys and girls since the foundation of the nation" (from *Education, Christianity, and the State* by J. Gresham Machen).

The U.S. Federal agencies succeeded, for the most part, in removing reference to God from the school system. Man became the moral standard. The results are all too obvious; now there is an "anything goes" mentality that has left the U.S. school system in a black hole of moral decay. This is where our own school system is fast descending!

When morality is founded upon human experience, as the atheistic humanists would choose, there results a descent into moral

darkness. Machen explains the American moral slide: "It had its roots in a fundamental deterioration of the American people. Gradually the people have come to value principle less and creature comfort more; increasingly they have come to prefer prosperity to freedom, and even in the field of prosperity it cannot be said that the effect is satisfactory."

Solomon foretold the inevitable decline of society that abandoned God's moral precepts when he stated: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law" (Proverbs 29:18 NIV). A nation that has once held to the basic tenants of God's moral standards in law and in practice as defined in Scripture, as Canada has, will find no restraint when those tenants are cast aside.

History has witnessed the end of such atheistic humanism marching to the tune of evolution: "To see evolutionary measures and tribal morality being applied rigorously to the affairs of a great nation, we must turn again to Germany of 1942. We see Hitler devoutly convinced that evolution produces the only real basis for a national policy" (Arthur Keith in *Evolution and Ethics*).

It was a practical denouncement of the sovereignty of God and a belief in developmental morality that led Hitler to state: "He who would live must fight, he who does not wish to fight in this world where permanent struggle is the law of life, has not the right to exist" (Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*). Hmm... sounds a lot like today's school yard ethic to me!

Personal Notes:

May 16

1 Peter 1:13-19

"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Blotch or Blessing

In his book entitled *Mistreated*, Ron Davis cites this interesting story: "Over a hundred years ago, in a Scottish seaside inn, a group of fishermen were relaxing after a long day at sea. As a serving maid was walking past the fishermen's table with a pot of tea, one of the men made a sweeping gesture to describe the size of the fish he claimed to have caught. His hand collided with the teapot and sent it crashing against the whitewashed wall, where its contents left an irregular brown splotch.

Standing nearby, the innkeeper surveyed the damage. "That stain will never come out," he said in dismay. "The whole wall will have to be repainted."

"Perhaps not!"

All eyes turned to the stranger who had just spoken. "What do you mean?" asked the innkeeper.

"Let me work with the stain," said the stranger, standing up from his table in the corner. "If my work meets your approval, you won't need to repaint the wall."

The stranger picked up a box and went to the wall. Opening the box, he withdrew pencils, brushes, and some glass jars of linseed oil and pigment. He began to sketch lines around the stain and fill it in here and there with dabs of colour and swashes of shading. Soon a picture began to emerge. The random splashes of tea had been turned into the image of a stag with a magnificent rack of antlers.

At the bottom of the picture, the man inscribed his signature. Then he paid for his meal and left. The innkeeper was stunned when he examined the wall. "Do you know who that man was?" he said in amazement. "The signature reads "E.H. Landseer!" Indeed, they had been visited by the well-known painter of wildlife, Sir Edwin Landseer.

The Bible says: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). To be "in Christ" means to receive Him as Saviour: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Accepting Christ as personal Saviour is God's way of restoring our blotted lives to usefulness, of taking the stains and disappointments of our lives and not merely erasing them, but rather turning them into a thing of beauty. Is your life a blotch or a blessing? Is it in ruin or in restoration? Let Christ paint it with His love!

Personal Notes:

May 17

Psalm 69:16-21

"Hear me, O LORD; for thy lovingkindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee. 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. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Real Life

D'SOUZA, in "Bits and Pieces" is quoted as saying: "For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin - Real Life! But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business ... time to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life."

It would seem that most of society, like D'SOUZA for a time, believes that life should be painless, effortless, perpetual happiness. Society is also willing to pay big time to find it, up to \$1200 per day to attend Mental Health clinics according to David Larson of the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health. And according to the 292 specific disorders labelled in the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders", psychologists seem inclined to comply, considering that anything less than perfect happiness stems from some mental disorder!

How different Paul's life of faith was! He suffered great personal and physical hardships: "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11 NIV).

Yet Paul did not consider these trials as an occasion for leaving himself a maladjusted soul. In fact, how Paul viewed these "trials" is the secret to life in Christ: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4 NIV). The measure of Paul's "Real Life" was his growth in the knowledge and likeness of character of Jesus Christ his Saviour: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:10).

For Paul, and for any born again believer, the only "label" that really mattered was "new creation": "Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul discovered what also John stated: "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). Dear reader - have you considered Christ to be Real Life?

Personal Notes:

May 18

Luke 1:46-55

"And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever."

Portraits of Prayer

It has been said that art defines the heartbeat of society. Although some may argue this, most would agree that "a picture is worth a thousand words!" Yet God's Word is filled with a thousand pictures, some reflecting the heartbeat of God. This is evident particularly in regard to motherhood. Turning to God's Word with the question "What is God's favourite portrait of motherhood?" reveals the six-time repeated picture of a mother's passion.

In Genesis 21 Hagar's passion is portrayed. Here Hagar and her son Ishmael are sent away from the household of Abraham, to fend for themselves in a strange land. Yet Hagar remembered God's promise fourteen years earlier and "lifted her voice in weeping" unto God. God answered her cry demonstrating that He sees and cares. Hannah is another portrait of a mother's passion. In "the reproach of her barrenness" she is found "praying and weeping in anguish" (1 Samuel 1). God answers her with the gift of a child that became Israel's priest and judge and turned the nation's heart back toward God.

In 2 Kings 4, two portraits of a mother's passion are evident. A widow who is about to lose her sons to creditors "cries to Elisha, the man of God." She discovers that God knows her trouble and provides a miracle of oil to redeem her sons. Next a Shunammite mother cries in the motherly passion of grief at her son's death. Her previous

graciousness toward Elisha, God's prophet, is rewarded with the miracle of life being returned to her son.

In the New Testament the pictures of a mother's passion continue. Luke 1 records Mary's prayer of surrender to God as the appointed mother of the Christ-child. She marvelled that God regarded her and enriched her life with the privilege of bearing her own Saviour: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46-47). Matthew records the passion of the Canaanite mother who cried out to Jesus: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon" (Matt. 15:22). Again God acknowledged her plight and granted her petition.

Whistler's mother is perhaps the most famous portrait of motherhood. The one unique feature that brought such prominence to the painting is the capture of her smile. Similarly, the portraits of a mother's passion put forth in Scripture all have a unique feature, each mother is pictured in earnest prayer. God's favourite portrait of the passion of motherhood is a woman in prayer.

"Prayer is no petty duty, put into a corner, no piecemeal performance made out of the fragments of time which have been snatched from business and other engagements of life; but it means the best of our time, the heart of our time and strength must be given to it." God's favourite picture of motherhood can still be captured across our land as many mothers continue their passionate vigil of prayer. May God multiply their number! Will you join their ranks?

Personal Notes:

May 19

Job 29:11-25

When the ear heard, then it blessed me, And when the eye saw, then it approved me; Because I delivered the poor who cried out, The fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, And I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, And I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, And I searched out the case that I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, And plucked the victim from his teeth. "Then I said, 'I shall die in my nest, And multiply my days as the sand. My root is spread out to the waters, And the dew lies all night on my branch. My glory is fresh within me, And my bow is renewed in my hand.' "Men listened to me and waited, And kept silence for my counsel. After my words they did not speak again, And my speech settled on them as dew. They waited for me as for the rain, And they opened their mouth wide as for the spring rain. If I mocked at them, they did not believe it, And the light of my countenance they did not cast down. I chose the way for them, and sat as chief; So I dwelt as a king in the army, As one who comforts mourners.

Tumbleweeds and Oak Trees

Galen Anderson wrote, "A man's life is like either the tumbleweed or the oak tree. Some people just grow like the weed. They are of no value in their youth, and as the years of life come they break loose and become a blotch on society... Then there are those whose lives are like the oak. They have turned from the frivolity of this life and have invested in things that have genuine worth. Their influence for good, will live on in the lives of others after they are gone."

Job was such an oak tree. His is a testimony of care, comfort and concern: "I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy" (Job 29:12-13). The reason for Job's impact on others was acknowledged by God: "...there is none like him (Job) in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8).

Job's "uprightness" was not a coincidence! In defending his integrity, he reveals that his life was the outcome of a defined commitment before the Lord (see Job 31). Job was committed to mental purity: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1), to total honesty: "If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hasted to deceit; Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity" (Job 31), and, to moral integrity: "If mine heart have been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbour's door; Then let my wife grind another man's grain" (Job 31).

Unlike most of the society of his day, Job was committed to social equality: "If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; What then shall I do when God riseth up?" (Job 31). Further, Job was also committed to human sympathy: "If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone" (Job 31). The remainder of the chapter indicates that Job refused to trust in his wealth rather than God (Job 31:24-34), and always treated even his enemies with graciousness (Job 31:29-30).

Job was a model citizen, who's desire was not to be popular, but to live before His God with an upright heart, as an expression of gratitude in the Lord for the gift of eternal life: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

A life given to God will influence through time as well as last an eternity. Are you oak or tumbleweed?

Personal Notes:

May 20

Titus 1:7-11 (NIV)

“Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.”

Old and Faithful

One of the celebrated features of Yellowstone National Park is "Old Faithful." Long before the park was established, this geyser had been recognized as an unique natural phenomena, erupting at consistent intervals of time, sending about 40,000 litres of water 52 meters in the air. "Old Faithful" has been consistent longer than man has been keeping record!

Could it be that God places such wonders in nature to remind man that He loves faithfulness? This is certainly the case when considering the formula for entrance into His family, as evident at the "birthday" of the New Testament church. Peter's sermon defined this formula: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:22-24).

Peter preached Jesus Christ, approved of God yet delivered by God to be a substitute sacrifice for mankind's sins. Peter declared the guilt of all men, the death of Jesus for man, the subsequent burial and bodily resurrection of Christ. Peter called his audience to repentance (an inward change of mind and heart which accepts, with remorse, personal sin) and baptism (a public testimony of the inward change of heart). The text states: "Then they that gladly received his word were

baptized: and the same day there were added about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Personal repentance and faith in Christ was the essence of entrance into the family of God. Peter expressly repeated this truth: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19), "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).

How sad it is that, although "Old" many churches today are not "Faithful". They have abandoned faithfulness to the message and strayed from the foundation of the gospel, replacing God's truth with human reason such as: "God accepts genuine effort, God is love and condemns no one, do your best and God will overlook sin!"

Paul warned of such a failing of faithfulness: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4), and challenged believer's to: "...be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). Christian friend, be faithful to God's message, share Christ with others, and find a church faithful to The Word!

Personal Notes:

May 21

1 Samuel 12:20-25

Then Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. "And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing. "For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people. "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. "Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. "But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

A Fixed Focus

In his monthly devotional "In Touch", Charles Stanley shared these appropriate words on encouragement: "For your work shall be rewarded... And there is hope for your future, declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 31:16-17). Perhaps someone who is reading this is being tempted to give up. You feel you have been overlooked, forgotten, and you want to quit. Satan's goal for your life is to get you to do just that - throw in the towel and quit. Discouragement is his favourite weapon.

Once we yield to his debilitating whispers of doubt and fear, we quickly find ourselves trapped in a web of self-pity. This is the time when we try to justify our feelings of anger, envy, and jealousy. If we are honest, we'll admit that our eyes are not on Christ but on ourselves.

Encouragement rarely comes to those who are looking for ways to justify themselves. When you are tempted to yield to discouragement, go to God in prayer. Tell him how you are feeling - the ways you have been treated that do not seem fair.

God has the objective view on the situation. He sees the future and knows the direction your life will take. He also wants you to be totally dependent on Him and not on the compliments of others. When encouragement does come, be grateful and not condescending. Make it your goal never to seek the praise of men above the praise of God. Instead, pray that the only glory that shines forth from your life will be the glory of Christ. While disappointment will because you live in a

fallen world, you can live above it by setting the focus of your heart on Jesus Christ."

To those who have believed on the name of the Lord and received the gift of eternal life, these words are truly meaningful. Focus is the call of the Christian. The prophet Samuel said as much to Saul at the inauguration of his kingship over Israel: "And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain [things], which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people (1 Samuel 12:21-22). Had Saul followed that advice and turned from envy, jealousy and bitterness, he may not have fallen into such destructive disobedience that caused him to forfeit the kingship.

Christian friend, how much of God's blessing have you forfeited by falling into Satan's trap of discouragement and self-justification? Dear friend, fix your focus!

Personal Notes:

May 22

Acts 4:8-12

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The Guarantee of Life

Just before he died, D. William Sangster printed a note to his daughter. He had been spearheading a renewal movement in the British Isles after World War II. Then his ministry, except for prayer, was ended by a disease which progressively paralyzed his body, even his vocal chords. But the last Easter Sunday he spent on earth, still able to move his fingers, he wrote: "How terrible to wake up on Easter and have no voice to shout, 'He is risen!' Far worse, to have a voice and not want to shout."

Paul "shouted" on the pages of Holy Scripture, to the believers in Rome, that Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). The fact of Christ's resurrection assures the Christian of the Lord's unique and continuing provision in life. As the living Son of God raised from the dead, Christ ministers through the Holy Spirit His own loving care. As the Son of God, Jesus' ministry can be viewed from His own "I Am" statements in John's gospel. This includes being the "Bread of life" (John 6:35), "The Light of the world" (John 8:12), "the Door" to the father's sheepfold (John 10:7), the "Resurrection"(John 11:25) - that is to say the power of the resurrection and therefore, the sure hope of the believer's resurrection. As God's Son, Jesus is declared to be "The Way, The Truth, and The Life" (John 14:6), the only means to eternal life and "the Vine" (John 15:1) from which Christian's derive strength and purpose.

These guaranteed ministries of Christ within believers are essential for eternal life as well as productive life. "Christ in you, the Hope of glory" marks the distinct life of the believer. This is a life that bears "the fruit of the Spirit [which] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self control" (Galatians 5:22-23). This is a

life that is guarded by God's promise that, despite hardship and trial, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28). This is a life that aims toward the believer's own resurrection as John Donne so aptly describes: "I shall rise from the dead, from the prostration of death, and never miss the sun, which shall be put out, for I shall see the Son of God, the Sun of Glory, and shine myself as that sun shines. I shall rise from the grave, and never miss this city, which shall be nowhere, for I shall see the city of God, the new Jerusalem. I shall look up and never wonder when it shall be day, for the angel will tell me that time shall be no more, and I shall see and see cheerfully that last day of judgment, which shall have no night, never end, and be united to the Ancient of Days, to God Himself, who had no morning, never began."

Personal Notes:

May 23

Luke 10:38-42

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. "But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

Meaningful Fellowship

Don Aycock in *Leadership Magazine* shares this story: "A fellow who had been reared in the city bought a farm and several milk cows. In the feed store one day he complained his best cow had gone dry.

"Aren't you feeding her right?" asked the store owner.

"I'm feeding her what you've been selling me," said the man.

"Are you milking her every day?"

"Just about. If I need six or eight ounces of milk for breakfast, I go out and get it. If I don't need any, I don't get it--I just let her save it up."

The feed store owner had to explain it doesn't work that way. With cow's milk, you take all that's there, or you eventually have nothing."

Many Christians approach their relationship with God in the same way, when in need or crisis, they tap into God's resources and ask Him to assist, they go to church to church once a week to get their "worship fix" that keeps them going for the week, when they are sleepless they open their Bibles to find a fast remedy, otherwise they go about life void of any continuing fellowship with God.

This they do not realizing that God Himself desires their fellowship. From the time that Adam and Eve sinned and lost fellowship with God, He has been seeking to restore fellowship. Jesus, God's own Son, became man to establish a relationship to man by providing Himself as a sacrifice for sin, thus reconciling every believer to God through the forgiveness of sins. His promise to return for His own is wrapped up in God's expressed desire for fellowship with man: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and

prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-4).

Prayer is more than just a S.O.S. line, it is the privilege of the believer as a child of God, to talk with his Father in heaven. Worship is more than an emotional fix to get me through another week, it is the expression of a child of God in response His goodness. The Bible is not just a guidebook when sleeplessness inflicts, it is a letter of love, an expression of God's own character, a revelation of a Father's will and testimony to His children.

Immanuel, a name for Christ, means "God with us." We are meant to be God-inhabited. Our religion is not organized around keeping God at a distance. The quality of your life will be determined by the amount of time you spend alone with God in reading, praying, and planning. Christian friend, cultivate the fullness, pleasure, sheer excitement of meaningful fellowship with God on earth. Walk with Him!

Personal Notes:

May 24

Galatians 5:13-18

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Liberty's Sweet Music

As a little boy I often visited our kindly neighbour. This dear lady was the picture of patience; she did not seem to mind my constant barrage of questions about the barn, the animals, the wood stove. She even tolerated my "free-spirited" musical expressions on her piano. However, it did not take me long to appreciate the difference between my pounding out a noise and her soft touch that produced sweet music. As a trained musician, she understood the "principles of music", she operated within the "law" of scales, of timing, of harmony.

Christian liberty must be understood in a similar context - the freedom to do right within the operating principles of our heavenly Father. Jack Hayford writes in *The Power and Blessing*: "In the judgement of some, a "life of submission" sounds like a page out of the handbook for membership in a religious order... In fact, in much of today's church, many have almost sanctified the notion of autonomy, of independence, of "I can do just whatever I want, because of my freedom in Christ"...

"In terms of spiritual reality, we are made free. But our liberty in Christ isn't a program of perpetrating self-rule in the soul. Our freedom is (1) to free us from practising sin, (2) to free us from smallness of soul, and (3) to free us from a "Lone-Ranger" order of independence which proposes "me" as the single-handed controller of everything in my life."

Christ's model of humility puts perspective on our Christian liberation: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he

humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8 NIV).

True liberty in Christ operates within God's principles of humility. It is a life bowed to the laws of submission ("made himself nothing"), of service (becoming a servant), of sacrifice (death on a cross). The result of Christ's humility was the availability of eternal life through faith in Him: "...the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The result Christian humility is a life of liberty lived within the principles of God. This is a life producing sweet music that draws a world which is pounding out its own noise, to the one who can turn chaos into harmony: "Come unto me... and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Warren Wiersbe captures the essence of Christian liberty: "Freedom does not mean I am able to do whatever I want to do. That's the worse kind of bondage. Freedom means I have been set free to become all that God wants me to be, to achieve all that God wants me to achieve, to enjoy all that God wants me to enjoy." This, friend, is sweet music indeed!

Personal Notes:

May 25

2 Timothy 4:1-58

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Selling Religion

In the classroom setting of one Peanuts comic strip, on the first day of the new school year, the students were told to write an essay about returning to class. In her essay Lucy wrote, "Vacations are nice, but it's good to get back to school. There is nothing more satisfying or challenging than education, and I look forward to a year of expanding knowledge."

Needless to say, the teacher was pleased with Lucy and complimented her fine essay. In the final frame, Lucy leans over and whispers to Charlie Brown, "After a while, you learn what sells."

Too often churches have increased their audience by reducing their mandate to "learning what sells." Paul warned the church leaders: "Preach the Word... reprove, rebuke, exhort... For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NIV).

A.W. Tozer sheds light on the grave danger of falsehood: "Strange as it may seem, the danger is greater for the fervent Christian than for the lukewarm and the self-satisfied. The seeker after God's best things is eager to hear anyone who offers a way by which he can obtain them. He longs for some new experience, some elevated view of truth, some operation of the Spirit that will raise him above the dead level of religious mediocrity he sees all around him, and for this reason he is ready to give a sympathetic ear to the new and the wonderful in religion." For this reason Paul challenges believers to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and repeatedly calls the church to hold to "sound doctrine" (1Tim. 1:10, Titus 1:9, 2:1).

The religious experiences of life must be viewed through the lenses of Scriptural Truth. If a "new approach" or "wonderful discovery" in any way *DIMINISHES* a thirst for God's Word, a dependence on God's promises, and repulsiveness toward sin, or in any way *INCREASES* a thirst for worldly values and favour, then "what is being sold" cannot be of God!

True Salvation experience will progressively separate the believer from the practices the paths and the pursuits of the world as the apostle clearly states: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13-14).

Jesus warned: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). Some new and wonderful religious experiences may sell, but the guarantee falls far short of eternal life! Worshipper beware!

Personal Notes:

May 26

1 Corinthians 12:18-26

“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

The Ecstasy of Community

Paul Brand wrote "...the individual cell can share in what I call the ecstasy of community. No scientist can yet measure how a sense of security or pleasure is communicated to the cells of the body, but individual cells certainly participate in our emotional reactions. Hormones and enzymes bathe them, bringing on a quickened breathing, a trembling of muscles, a flapping in the stomach. If you look for a pleasure nerve in the human body, you will be disappointed; there is none. There are nerves for pain and cold and heat and touch, but no nerve gives a sensation of pleasure. Pleasure appears as the by-product of cooperation by many cells." (Paul Brand in *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*).

God designed the church to function in just the same way. The cooperative effort of each member working toward Christian maturity is God's picture of unity: "From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16 NIV).

That "pleasure" or joy of working together for God's glory, whether it be in expressions of worship and praise, or the labours of love in meeting the needs of the poor and ill, or in the cooperative efforts of sharing the good news of Christ's gift of life, is the unique privilege of believers. David pictures it beautifully as a special anointing: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious

ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psalms 133:1-2).

Just as that cooperative effort of cells cannot compromise the integrity of the body (its chemical balances, its temperature, its purity etc.) so Christian unity must not compromise the integrity of Christ in abandonment of His values, His purposes, His purity. These He freely sets forth in His Truth, the Holy Scriptures. In this letter to the Ephesians Paul set the path of unity in the context of "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), to the Romans Paul actually urged separation from those who dismissed doctrine (Romans 16:17).

Love has often been put forth as the call to Christians to overlook doctrine for the sake of unity; to dismiss varying views on the essence of salvation, the ordinances of baptism and communion, the moral qualifications of church leadership, and so on. Yet Christ Himself defined love in the context of obedience: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14:21 NIV).

The ecstasy of "church" community is found in cooperative effort within the context of faithful obedience to God's Truth. To violate that principle is to introduce a cancer to the body! In an effort to express unity, there is still a call to "contend for The Faith" (Jude 1:3).

Personal Notes:

May 27

2 Chronicles 6: 34-40

"When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, wherever You send them, and when they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name, "then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. "When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to a land far or near; "yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, and have committed wickedness'; "and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been carried captive, and pray toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name: "then hear from heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You. "Now, my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and let Your ears be attentive to the prayer made in this place."

When a Nation Denies Prayer

Darrell Scott, the father of Rachel Scott, a victim of the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, was invited to address the House Judiciary Committee's sub-committee. What he said to the national leaders during this special session of Congress was painfully truthful. Here is a short excerpt from his address:

"I am here today to declare that Columbine was not just a tragedy – it was a spiritual event that should be forcing us to look at where the real blame lies! Much of the blame lies here in this room. Much of the blame lies behind the pointing fingers of the accusers themselves. "I wrote a poem just four nights ago that expresses my feelings best. This was written way before I knew I would be speaking here today: "Your laws ignore our deepest needs, Your words are empty air. You've stripped away our heritage, You've outlawed simple prayer. Now gunshots fill our classrooms, And precious children die. You seek for answers everywhere, And ask the question "Why?" You regu-

late restrictive laws, through legislative creed. And yet you fail to understand, That God is what we need!"

"The real villain lies within our own hearts. Political posturing and restrictive legislation are not the answers. The young people of our nation hold the key. There is a spiritual awakening taking place that will not be squelched! We do not need more religion. We do not need more gaudy television evangelists spewing out verbal religious garbage. We do not need more million-dollar church buildings built while people with basic needs are being ignored. We do need a change of heart and a humble acknowledgment that this nation was founded on the principle of simple trust in God!

"....As my son Craig lay under that table in the school library and saw his two friends murdered before his very eyes - He did not hesitate to pray in school. I defy any law or politician to deny him that right! I challenge every young person in America, and around the world, to realize that on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School prayer was brought back to our schools. Do not let the many prayers offered by those students be in vain. Dare to move into the new millennium with a sacred disregard for legislation that violates your God-given right to communicate with Him."

Canada, also frowning upon prayer in schools while pressing the theory of evolution, has left a similar void leading to its own school tragedies. While some school districts encourage Pastoral counseling, parents complain of "religious interference". Will our nation ignore the warnings or heard God's own invitation from 2 Chronicles 7:14? "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Personal Notes:

May 28

Mark 10:13-16

"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them."

Putting Kids in Their Place

Someone has said "raising kids is like pushing a '58 Edsel in first gear, with a jammed emergency brake from New York to Honolulu and back." Society still struggles with the raising of children! A recent meeting with Teen Challenge Ministry reminded me of how vulnerable our children are. Several of these teens who are struggling were introduced to drugs by their own parents. Others from broken homes carry the scars of rejection and bitterness.

Society needs a fresh reminder of the value that God places upon children. It is a significant truth that the only record of Christ being angry toward his disciples came as result of their disregard for children. They had apparently viewed children as unimportant to Christ and prevented their access. The Lord set them straight with these words "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for such is the Kingdom of God."

The disciples had failed to note God's attitude toward children. In Psalm 127 children are viewed as a Sacred Trust defined as a heritage. Such heritage focuses on the responsibility of the parent with a view to eternity. Here children are viewed as a Solemn Gift defined as a reward received from God himself. As well children are a Sustaining Army referred to here as arrows in a soldier's hand. In the context of Christianity the children of today are the soldiers of the cross tomorrow. Here also, children are a Satisfying Investment expressed as a source of blessedness. Proverbs 17:6 speaks of children as a special treasure. Children who follow the Lord in life are crowns for grandparents.

James Dobson has said "children are not casual guest in our home. They have been loaned to us temporarily for the purpose of loving them and instilling a foundation of values on which their future

lives will be built." It is no surprise that Psalm 127 begins with this is valued truth: "Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it."

Raising children is a challenge that can be a blessing or a burden. The difference is an attitude. Children can be viewed as a wonderful inheritance or a miserable encumbrance, they can be received as a meaningful reward or with bitter regret. Children are our most valuable possession. The parents\teachers\guardians who put kids in the right place according to God's values, will embrace a positive attitude and have a meaningful impact upon their children.

"Lord, give me the wisdom to discover in each child his spark of divinity, the gift that You have given him, and through love and guidance nurture this spark into a glowing flame. Let me not favour any one child at the expense of others. Let all be equally worthy of my devotion without regard to their intelligence, their religion, their race, or their wealth. Let me teach a love of God and man by keeping ever alive a living example of your love toward these treasures."

Personal Notes:

May 29

Ephesians 1:3-10

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

Complete Acceptance

In a day when business operates on the principle of ‘profit at all costs’ and human pursuit is ‘pleasure by all means,’ people become the means to those ends and therefore, people become expendable. At work, in the community, even in the home, if performance is below expectations, people are replaced. There is very little effort made to develop meaningful relationships that give rather than take. As a result many who have “been rejected” suffer from a deep sense of failure and overwhelming loneliness. So much so that despair settles upon the heart.

Into this threatening environment of uncertainty stands the wonderful truth that God, who has the highest standards (being perfect in all things), bids imperfect man to feast at His dinner table, join his family and be part of His plan. This invitation is extended to man unconditionally because of the potential relationship that all who believe in Christ as Savior enjoy. It is a relationship anchored in God’s grace “by which he made us accepted in the beloved.” because “In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” (Ephesians 1:6-7).

Jesus demonstrated this grace time after time as He lived among His created beings. He welcomed the prostitutes, the thieves, the social outcasts whose diseases marked them unfit and rejected.

Christ extended his care to the sorrowing, to the shamed, to the hungry. He took time to minister to the weak as well as the bold, to the poor as well as the rich. Although he was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” as he saw human suffering resulting from original sin, he rejected only those who rejected him. Although he “came unto his own and His own did not receive him” he persisted in his ministry in the face of hate and threat. Finally, he offered himself as the sacrifice for sin and yielded to the horrors of separation from God as he died on Calvary’s cross. All this he did in order to provide a means for man to find forgiveness from sin and acceptance into God’s own family.

She was a grotesque figure of a child, rescued from a house fire that took the lives of her family. Scarred for life, she was left in the care of an orphanage already crowded with children. What chance would she have among so many “beautiful” children to be adopted? Nevertheless the day came when a couple approached the orphanage with this unusual request, “We are here to adopt a child that no one else wants.” This couple had so much love to give that they knew any human barrier to relationship would be dissolved by their love. And so it did. That couple adopted and loved this child deeper than any parent toward their own flesh and blood children. That little girl grew to a lovely, successful woman because she knew complete acceptance. So it is with the child of God. To understand complete acceptance from God is to find the confidence to accept self and the joy to delight in life.

Personal Notes:

May 30

Psalm 12

“Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things, Who have said, “With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; Who is lord over us?” “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, Now I will arise,” says the LORD; “I will set him in the safety for which he yearns.” The words of the LORD are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever. The wicked prowl on every side, When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.”

Third World Needs

There is no doubt that North America has been blessed with prosperity. Even the poorest in our society have more than what the rest of the world can only dream of. K.P. Yohanna, in *Revolution in World Missions* cites economist Robert Heilbroner, who describes the luxuries a typical American family would have to surrender if they lived among the one billion hungry people in the Third World:

“We begin by invading the house of our imaginary American family to strip it of its furniture. Everything goes: beds, chairs, tables, television sets, lamps. We will leave the family with a few old blankets, a kitchen table, a wooden chair. Along with the bureaus go the clothes. Each member of the family may keep in his ‘wardrobe’ his oldest suit or dress, a shirt or blouse. We will permit a pair of shoes for the head of the family, but none for the wife or children.

We move to the kitchen. The appliances have already been taken out, so we turn to the cupboards ... the box of matches may stay, a small bag of flour, some sugar and salt. A few moldy potatoes, already in the garbage can, must be rescued, for they will provide much of tonight’s meal. We will leave a handful of onions and a dish of dried beans. All the rest we take away: the meat, the fresh vegetables, the canned goods, the crackers, the candy.

Now we have stripped the house: the bathroom has been dismantled, the running water shutoff, the electric wires taken out. Next we take away the house. The family can move to the tool shed... Communications must go next. No more newspapers, magazines, books—not that they are missed, since we must take away our family’s literacy as well. Instead, in our shantytown we will allow one radio...

Now government services must go next. No more postmen, no more firemen. There is a school, but it is three miles away and consists of two classrooms. There are, of course, no hospitals or doctors nearby. The nearest clinic is ten miles away and is tended by a midwife. It can be reached by bicycle, provided the family has a bicycle, which is unlikely....

Finally, money. We will allow our family a cash hoard of five dollars. This will prevent our breadwinner from experiencing the tragedy of an Iranian peasant who went blind because he could not raise the \$3.94 which he mistakenly thought he needed to receive admission to a hospital where he could have been cured."

Scripture states: "He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done." (Prov. 19:17). Christian friend, Jesus reached out to the poor. Third World Missions such as "Gospel to Asia," (245 King Street East, Stoney Creek, ON L8G 1L9), where every penny given goes to third world people, desperately needs support, why not put God's Word into practice and share today!

Personal Notes:

May 31

Acts 2:41-47

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

What Christianity Is!

Sociology professor Dr. Elaine Walters found that for love to persist, it has to move beyond that first romantic frenzy into a warm intensity of deep friendship. Forgiveness is the capacity to accept reality as different from what one expected. Forgiveness of a person is the acceptance of one who has qualities that one, if given the chance, would not naturally accept. Forgiveness carries one into a dimension of life that is beyond where we would be if left alone. Relationship, friendship and forgiveness are what Christianity is all about!

God provided a means for people to find forgiveness before Him though the substitution sacrifice of His Son: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). This provision must be personally received by faith as a free gift: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). This point of decision secures a relationship to God by the “making alive of a person’s spirit” by the indwelling Spirit of God: “Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water [natural birth – the flesh] and the Spirit [spiritual rebirth – the Spirit], he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5-6).

The wonder of this new relationship is that it involves the adoption of the believer into the family of God: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12). It privileges each believer with

the opportunity of being a friend of God: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” (John 15:14-15).

The responsibility and beauty of this new relationship is the ability God gives His family to forgive others as God Himself forgave them: “Take heed to yourselves: If your brother trespass against you, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to you, saying, I repent; you shall forgive him.” (Luke 17:3-4). This new freedom of human forgiveness carried the church into a “dimension of life” described in scripture as the bond of love and the unity of the Spirit: “And all that believed were together, and shared everything they had. ... continuing daily with one accord.... and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people.” (Acts 2:45-46).

Friend, does this describe *your Christianity*?

Personal Notes:

June 1

Ephesians 4:1-6

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

True Unity

According to Bob Johnstone's popular *Today in History*, June 1 marks the anniversary of the Massey Report, presented by Vincent Massey and his fellow commissioners, to the Canadian government in 1951. "Academics and scientists and professors and artists and musicians and writers, philosophers and industrialists all appeared before Massey's Commission and told what sort of country they wanted to live in." Massey in turn reported this to the Canadian government with particular recommendations regarding developing a unique Canadian culture, particularly promoted through the media.

Defining life as citizens of a multi-culture country is not always easy. A similar problem faced the early church. Although the church began primarily among believers of Jewish culture as the continued revelation of God, (a task that Israel was chosen to preserve as the Old Testament), a great variety of peoples from all nationalities and cultures soon were drawn to the liberating truth of the gospel. As a result, the church quickly faced the dilemma of cultural differences.

It was in this context that God led Paul to deliver several treatises on the nature of the body of Christ - His church. To the Ephesians Paul wrote: "...Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19 NIV). To the Colossians Paul stated: "...the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3 NIV).

It is not power nor persuasion, neither is it politics that unites humanity with all its distinctive of race, colour, language and culture. It is new life in Christ. Only as each person surrenders to the truth of

personal sin and believes that Christ paid the penalty of sin on the cross, destroying its power and conquering its consequence of death through His resurrection, can true unity be found.

The wonderful truth is that no matter what culture or language, salvation "has broken down the middle wall of division" (Ephesians 2:14), making all believers "a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). As such, God, even as He set forth the matters of the Old Testament Temple, has set forth the pattern of life for those He indwells. His people do not collectively decide, as the Massey Report, what they want to do and how they want to live. Rather, God sets forth His own purposes, designs and will: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8 NIV). God's single criteria for life is obedience to His word. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

It is in the context of following His will as revealed in His Word that believers find true unity in the Spirit, and stability in the faith (see Ephesians 4). Friend, how do you see people united?

Personal Notes:

June 2

Nehemiah 8:9-12

“And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.”

The Joy of the Lord

When the prophet Nehemiah declared to the people of Israel that the "Joy of the Lord" was their strength (Nehemiah 8) he was not speaking in terms of mind over matter, or the power of positive thinking. Nehemiah spoke of the real abiding peace available through the ministering presence of God to His believing children. The Lord himself restated that promise in the context of abiding in His love: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11 NIV).

While accompanying her father on a trip to Gothenburg, Linda Sandell (1832-1903) saw her father fall overboard and drown, yet through that tragedy she penned these words: "Day by day and with each passing moment strength I find to meet my trials here, trusting in my Father's wise bestowment, I've no cause for worry or for fear." Horatio Spafford, upon hearing of the death of all four of his daughters was moved to write these familiar words: "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say It is well, it is well with my soul". To these and thousands like them, the joy of the Lord was a real, abiding strength.

But you may ask: Where does this joy come from?

Perhaps Charles Spurgeon answers this best: "If there is one place where our Lord Jesus most fully becomes the joy and comfort of His people, it is where He plunged deepest into the depths of woe.

Come hither, gracious souls and behold the Man in the garden of Gethsemane: behold His heart so brimming with love that he cannot hold it in, so full of sorrow that it must find vent. Behold the Man as they drive the nails into His hands and feet. Look up, repenting sinners, and see the sorrowful image of your suffering Lord." In the faith that looks up and beholds Jesus dying for us, there is found life, and with that life there is the abiding presence of God to confirm His personal care and to acquaint the believer with the assurance of God's eternal promises in contrast to our temporal troubles (John 16:13-14).

With news of His pending death burdening their hearts, the Lord stated this clear promise to the disciples: "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no-one will take away your joy." (John 16:22 NIV). This joy is the privilege of those who will put their faith in Christ as Saviour.

Aaron's staff budded and produced almonds as a confirmation of the genuine presence of God in his ministry (Numbers 17). Similarly, the Joy of the Lord blossoming in the life of a believer, though beset by difficulties, is a confirmation of the real presence of the risen Lord in that life. May the Joy of the Lord be your strength.

Personal Notes:

June 3

Romans 5:6-15

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many”.

Without Strength

Several years ago a family was sailing off the coast of Florida when their boat capsized in a large wave. All the members of the family managed to climb onto the overturned boat and cling to the keel. For several days they drifted with no nourishment except a seagull they managed to kill. When the current began finally to drift them toward shore, and rescue seemed in sight, the youngest child lost hold and slipped into the sea. Due to the weakness of the remaining family members, they could do nothing but watch the sea swallow their loved one.

Our hearts are torn by the thoughts of the agony which that family must have gone through, an agony comparable to that of God's as He views countless numbers of people slip into eternity in view of the safety of eternal life found in His Son, Jesus Christ. Scripture states: "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away... how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first

announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him." (Hebrews 2:1,3 NIV)

For each individual who has heard (or read) of God's free offer of salvation by faith through the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus, there is a window of opportunity. This is not an opportunity to prove oneself before God, sin prevents this (Romans 3), but an opportunity to accept a gift from God: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no-one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV).

Unlike the family members who were powerless to help their youngest, God has secured the means of spiritual rescue from eternal loss by dealing with the penalty and the power of sin on the Cross of Calvary. It is now up to each individual to reach out by faith and be saved. Like Jacob, who wrestled with the Lord, we must be determined to "cling until blessed" (Genesis 32). The beauty of that expression of faith is that no one will ever be disappointed, Jesus' promise is always kept: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 5:6, 10:13 NIV)

Personal Notes:

June 4

Psalm 107: 1-9

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, And gathered out of the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south. They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; They found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, Their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, That they might go to a city for a dwelling place. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness."

Meaning in Life

"What most people want - young or old - is not merely security, or comfort, or luxury, although they are glad enough to have these. Most of all they want meaning in their lives. If our era, and our culture and our leaders do not, or cannot, offer great meanings, great objectives, great convictions, then people will settle for shallow and trivial substitutes. This is a deficiency for which we all bear a responsibility... This is the challenge of our times". So stated the *Rockefeller Report on Education* of 1958. People are still settling for the shallow and the trivial as never before, living empty lives without meaning. Years of human attempt at rising to this challenge has failed simply because these efforts, although genuine, cannot reach the void in each heart only fillable by God: "For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness." (Psalms 107:9)

The nation Israel also tried to find meaning in life through human effort: "Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to the chariots. Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made." (Isaiah 2:7-8 NIV). In the midst of such "prosperity" there was a vacuum of life's meaning as Jeremiah describes: "Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD. "My people have committed two sins:

They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." (Jeremiah 2:11-13 NIV). All human effort to find meaning in life amounts to no more than making broken cisterns incapable of holding water.

A.W. Tozer summarized this truth in *Man The Dwelling Place of God*: "At the far-in hidden centre of man's being is a bush fitted to be the dwelling place of the Triune God. There God planned to rest and glow with moral and spiritual fire. Man, by his sin forfeited this indescribably wonderful privilege and must now dwell there alone. For so intimately private is the place that no creature can intrude; no one can enter but Christ, and He will only enter by invitation of faith. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)." By the mysterious operation of the Spirit in the new birth, the God of living waters enters the deep-in core of the believer's heart and establishes residence there. Here alone can man drink deep of the meaning and fullness of life.

Personal Notes:

June 5

Jeremiah 2:7-13

"I brought you into a bountiful country, To eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land And made My heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me; The prophets prophesied by Baal, And walked after things that do not profit.

"Therefore I will yet bring charges against you," says the LORD, "And against your children's children I will bring charges. For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, Send to Kedar and consider diligently, And see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, Which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory For what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, And be horribly afraid; Be very desolate," says the LORD. "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water."

More!

If there is any one word that epitomizes our modern society, that word must be "MORE", if two words are necessary, they must be "MORE, MORE". Laurence Shames in his book *The Hunger for More* correctly assesses the appetite of a nation without contentment, gone mad after prosperity: "During the past decade, many people came to believe there didn't have to be a purpose. The mechanism didn't require it. Consumption kept the workers working, which kept the pay checks coming, which kept the people spending, which kept inventors inventing and investors investing, which meant there was more to consume. The system, properly understood, was independent of values and needed no philosophy prop it up. It was a perfect circle, complete in itself-and empty in the middle."

People never have and never will find complete contentment in material prosperity. In seeking to do so, the true source of fulfillment is overlooked: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." (Jeremiah 2:13 NIV)

Paul found the source of real contentment and, though in prison at the time, shared in a letter to the Philippians its secret. The focal

point of contentment was a personal relation with Jesus Christ: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21 NIV) This living relationship privileged Paul with the secret of experiencing contentment by a trust that was affirmed in three ways.

First, because Paul knew Christ as his Saviour, he could say "I can accept all things" (Philippians 4:11). Paul had a firm trust in the providence of God. He could accept any circumstance that came his way because, in Christ he knew: "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28 NIV)

Next, because Paul knew the Lord, he could say: "I can do all things" (Philippians 4:13). Paul trusted in the power of God. Like the apostle John, Paul understood the principle of the vine and the branches: "I (Jesus) am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5 NIV) Paul lived in the power of the Lord.

Finally, because Paul was in Christ, he could say: "I have all things and abound" (Philippians 4:18). Paul had evidenced the provision of God and did not need a closet full of clothes nor a freezer full of food to know that God would meet his every need. He was, therefore, free from the worry of possessions.

Paul discovered what is the privilege of every Christian to discover, that "Christian contentment is the God-given ability to be satisfied with the loving provision of God in any and every situation." This is true contentment. If there is "more" to be wanted, let it be "More, more about Jesus".

Personal Notes:

June 6

Acts 20:28-35

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. "I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive. '"

Beware of Imitations

It doesn't take the mind of a rocket scientist to recognize that the world of espionage for the purpose of takeover is not restricted to the political arena. Every conceivable industrial, medical, scientific and marketing breakthrough risks the encroachment of "imitations" bent on securing the gains of the original. In some instances, the "imitation" has actually gained approval and support with financial benefits to the general public.

There is one area in which imitation is very prominent; however, there are no benefits, only losses. This is area of imitation Christianity. Paul warned of its persuasiveness: "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough." (2 Corinthians 11:3-4 NIV)

Vance Havner, in his column entitled "Imitation Christianity", makes these astute remarks: "Christianity is fundamentally a personal adventure of living by faith in and fellowship with Jesus, actually

undertaking to know Christ, to live like Him and to present Him to others. That, of course, is a tremendous challenge calling for intense faith, loyalty and discipline. The Way is narrow and few travel it. But millions of people who never really live this life avoid its actual requirements and still call themselves Christians by substituting for its fundamental experience church membership and the conventional round of religious observances... An appalling percentage of the modern church for all its machinery, paraphernalia and propaganda strikes one as knowing everything about Christianity except Christ. It seems almost sacrilegious to say so but one must never be blinded by external brilliance nor silenced by mere bulk. For this counterfeit Christianity is the most serious impediment to the growth of the real Christian experience; it substitutes an easier observance of church formalities for actual loyalty to Christ; it shifts the emphasis from a personal adventure of faith in Christ to a sublimated legalism under Christian auspices, and it stands arrogantly and pompously in the way of the True church, impressive in its robes and ritual but at the heart a monstrous deception."

Imitation Christianity may satisfy the expectations of social standards and even appease the troubled conscience; nevertheless, it still amounts to "a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12 NIV) As with anything else" concludes Havner, "insist on the genuine when you "get religion." Beware of imitations."

Personal Notes:

June 7

Jeremiah 32: 8-15

"Then Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said to me, 'Please buy my field that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance is yours, and the redemption yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. "So I bought the field from Hanamel, the son of my uncle who was in Anathoth, and weighed out to him the money—seventeen shekels of silver. "And I signed the deed and sealed it, took witnesses, and weighed the money on the scales. "So I took the purchase deed, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open; "and I gave the purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses who signed the purchase deed, before all the Jews who sat in the court of the prison. "Then I charged Baruch before them, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Take these deeds, both this purchase deed which is sealed and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may last many days." 'For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.'"

Feeling Low

Bathophobia is not a fear of taking baths as most five year old boys would have their parents believe; rather it is the very real fear of depths such as wells or descending caves. Perhaps the definition needs to be broadened to include the fear of "deep-felt solitude". Through uncontrolled circumstances, there are many who feel that their life is cast low, down and out, closed up and totally disregarded by the rest of mankind.

The prophet Jeremiah was in a similar situation. Having faithfully delivered the Word of the Lord, including the sad news that Israel's enemies would succeed in taking Jerusalem, he was rewarded with being placed in prison as a traitor. Shut up in the inner court, his life must have seemed cast aside, his ministry a failure.

It was in these circumstances that God sent a special word of encouragement: "Hanameel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth.'" At first this might

seem a slight diversion from his troubles, however, God was bringing to Jeremiah a deep sense of security.

His purchase of the property was a sign that the land would be returned to Israel as God had promised: "In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: `This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so that they will last a long time. For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'" (Jeremiah 32:13-15 NIV). This was a confirmation that God had neither given up on him nor forsaken His promises to Israel. Hope for the future was guaranteed.

Similarly, the Lord has given to each believer today a "down payment" and "seal of ownership" for promised blessings to come. "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1 NIV) The promise of God's presence as seal and guarantee excludes the believer from ever really being in a place of hopeless despair, the present is under control, the future always bright.

Regardless of uncontrollable circumstances which bring that "down-low" feeling, the Lord, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, has presented the believer with a great hope of better things to come. Like Israel in their coming tribulation, believers are reminded to "look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28 NIV)

Personal Notes:

June 8

Mark 8:34-38

"When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

The Cross of Sacrifice

There is a spider that carefully lays her eggs and disguises them in the bark of a tree. After the eggs hatch, the mother spider exhausts all her energy providing food until the little ones can care for themselves. The sacrifice of sustaining her babies costs the mother her life.

Sacrifice is the great advancer of any cause; this is particularly true of Christianity. It is through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross in payment for sin that man has the privilege to be restored to God through faith. It is by the principle of sacrifice that the evidence of this salvation gains its greatest impact in the world. Christ said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34 NIV)

Although there is only one sacrifice for sin - that of Jesus on the cross, each believer is called to a path of self-sacrifice: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1 NIV). In a practical sense this means that Christians should be more interested in serving than being served, in ministering than being ministered to. For example, in the marriage relationship, each spouse is called to love the other. That means putting the interests and welfare of the other first. In other words, each spouse should seek to minister to the other for the other's good, not manipulate the other for their own good.

In the work relationships, the Christian employee should do the best job they can as serving the Lord, not the least they can for the

most they can get. Likewise, Christian employers are to treat their employees with generosity and justice as Christ treats His own, not with an overbearing attitude, seeking the most for the least. (see Ephesians 6:5-10) The way of sacrifice is the way of faith. Of course some will take advantage! Of course others will mock! Of course the business might not enjoy as great a profit! But to live in such a way is to truly follow Christ, trusting to His care the results, believing that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28 NIV) as Paul shared: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33 NIV) Imagine the impact if each believer would truly accept the call of self-sacrifice!

As God's Word says: "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them... We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised" (Hebrews 6:10,12 NIV). Christian reader, will you take up your cross of sacrifice?

Personal Notes:

June 9

John 14: 1-11

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. "And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."

Paranoid with Pursuit

A man, driven by a passion to confirm a suspicion, spends all his time and energy looking for the illusive "bigfoot", another man is consumed with chasing down every story of a UFO sighting, driven by the need to "be able to believe in something." We live in a world where the desire to know, to affirm, to believe, to search out, to "go where no man has gone before" drives people to such levels of dissatisfaction that they have become paranoid with pursuit. It would seem that the real illusive factor in such people's lives is contentment.

The apostles expressed a similar passion. In their soul's thirst they made this request of Christ: "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." (John 14:8 NIV) These followers of Jesus knew that true contentment, ("arkew" - that which is "enough for us"), could only found in the Lord God, that only He could satisfy the searching heart, and fill the deep well of longing in each soul. Perhaps in their request, their thoughts were on David's words: "How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast in the abundance of your house; you

give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." (Psalms 36 NIV)

Whatever the motive for their request was, it was obviously prompted by Christ's announcement that He was returning to His Father (see John 14:1-4). Nevertheless, Christ's reply was uniquely revealing: "Jesus answered: "Don't you know me... even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14 NIV)

In this short discourse, Jesus Christ gives answer to the soul's thirst in man: It is sufficient to see Christ. Christ's revelation of God is the most complete and comprehensive revelation conceivable to man. Therefore, to know Christ is to find true contentment!

For this cause Paul kept a very focused pursuit: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8 NIV)

And how might men come to know Christ, now that He has returned to the Father? Here is the answer: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:30-31)

Do you want to find the source of this illusive contentment? Pick up the Bible, read the Gospel of John, and come to know Christ!

Personal Notes:

June 10

Psalm 84: 1-12

“How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, And the swallow a nest for herself, Where she may lay her young—Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You. Selah Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah O God, behold our shield, And look upon the face of Your anointed. For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, Blessed is the man who trusts in You!”

Missing Out on Abundance

There is a picture that stays burned in my mind, a picture of great heaps of grain, piled similar to Canada's winter salt storage, yet left to spoil in a land where people are starving. The reason for such waste is the inability to get the grain to the people. In a spiritual sense, this reminds me of many Christians whose inner life seems unable to grasp hold of the harvest of abundance available in the promises of God.

Peter described these promises in relation to Jesus Christ: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." (2 Peter 1:4 NIV)

In his book *The Bondage Breaker*, Neil Anderson includes four pages of promises relating to who believers are in Christ, and suggests that Christians read aloud these promises as reminders of the freedom

God has granted them. Here is a sampling: From John's Gospel, "I am a child of God (1:12), I am part of the true vine, a channel of Christ's life (15:1,5), I am Christ's friend (15:15), I am chosen and appointed by Christ to bear his fruit (15:16)"; from Paul's Epistle to the Romans; "I am a slave of righteousness (6:18), I am enslaved to God (6:22), I am a son of God; God is spiritually my Father (8:14,15), I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance with Him (8:17)." Along with these promises about our position must be added other "exceedingly great and precious promises" such as: "rest to the weary", "comfort to the sorrowing", "peace to the troubled", "joy to the saddened", "strength to the weak", "care to the castaways", "hope to the dying", "reward to the faithful". The list goes on and on. The point being that the potential for abundance in the promises of God is as limited as the resources of God, and God's resources are as limitless as God Himself!

Why then do so many believers miss out on the abundance of blessing in the promises of God? The answer seems clear; our vision is too small! We see God's promises like a hungry man sees a meal of grain - delivered one bowl at a time.

However, to enter into God's Word and begin to make note of the abundance of promises is to catch sight of the whole harvest; first as a bag of oats, then as a bin of grain, perhaps next as a silo of produce, eventually though we begin to see the fields stretching out as far as the eye can see, full of the abundance of a complete harvest of God's promises.

Like Robinson Crusoe, believers can learn to see the place of our sojourn as the place of God's precious promises, and find true joy and fulfilment.

Personal Notes:

June 11

John 4: 13-24

"Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' "for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father."You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

True Worship

It was a surprised woman who met Jesus beside the well and was asked by Him to supply a drink of water. Her surprise only increased when she found Him to be a unique man who knew all about her life. In their short conversation recorded for us in John 4, Jesus made this great statement: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4)

Contrary to all custom of the day, Jesus raised the traditional concept of worship from the focus of a people gathered with common religious beliefs, to the focus of a people changed in heart and declared right before God (true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth). The truth of Jesus' words bear repeating today; true worship begins with a relationship to God based upon His Word of Truth and man's renewed spirit. Such a relationship is founded upon a personal

acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and commences with the Spirit of God taking up residence within the life of the believer. To such individuals, God declares: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19 NIV)

Regarding the wonder of true worship by God's people, William Law has written: "The pearl of eternity is the temple of God within you, the consecrated place of divine worship, where alone you can worship God in spirit and in truth. When once you are well grounded in this inward worship, you will have learned to live unto God above time and place. For every day will be Sunday to you,... for when God has all that he should have of your heart, when you are wholly given to the obedience of the light and spirit of God within you, to will only in His will, to love only in His love, to be wise only in His wisdom, then it is that everything you do is a song of praise, and the common business of life is a conforming to God's will on earth as angels do in heaven." This is true worship!

Has our understanding of worship, like that of the woman at the well, been reduced to the outward activity of a gathered people rather than the inward surrender of our heart? Do hymns and choruses pass our lips without our minds and hearts giving any true expression of the words? Are our ears tuned only to the messages of people delivering pleasant thoughts, being turned away from God's own Truth? May God answer this prayer of C. Spitta: "Now shed Thy mighty influence abroad, -On souls that would their Father's image bear; -Make us as holy temples of our God, -Where dwells forever calm, adorning prayer."

Personal Notes:

June 12

Jeremiah 5:20-24

"Declare this in the house of Jacob And proclaim it in Judah, saying, 'Hear this now, O foolish people, Without understanding, Who have eyes and see not, And who have ears and hear not: Do you not fear Me?' says the LORD. 'Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, Yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it. But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; They have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

The Spoiled Elite

According to the great organizations that evaluate the standard of living in countries, Canada still scores among the highest. In fact, for several years, Canada has been considered the top choice of countries in which to live. Yet another poll suggests that Canadians are among the most dissatisfied people in the world!

As much as I do not want to admit it, and I hope I'm wrong, but it sounds like Canadians have become the "spoiled elite" of the world! Is it possible that through political compassion (whatever the governing party), Canadians have been handed so much, that now, when things are tight and we must pay our own way, we have begun to cry foul?

Whether or not this is true, it does serve to remind us of how truly ungrateful people who are blessed can become. The Israel of the Old Testament was no exception, therefore Jeremiah was called upon to bring them this sobering message: "This is what the LORD says: "What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They did not ask, 'Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no-one travels and no-one lives?' I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable... Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they

are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols" (Jeremiah 2 NIV).

Israel forgot the goodness of God and turned His blessings into indulgence. In their abundance, they themselves became the "spoiled elite", complaining and critical of their changing condition. Although the relation of Israel to the living God is unique, the error of Israel of old is the error of our nation today; Canada has lost sight of the God that has blessed with abundance. Canada has left its Judaeo-Christian heritage, choosing to recognize "the sovereignty of man" rather than "the sovereignty of God."

Let, therefore, those who know the living God through His Son Jesus Christ, and who recognize that "every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17) choose not only to be good citizens, but grateful citizens as well. Paul's exhortation is simple enough: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Ephesians 4:31-32 NIV). Let all who are a part of the family of God learn to apply Paul's exhortation as part of the family of Canada and leave a heritage of gratefulness as well.

Personal Notes:

June 13

Psalm 27:1-6

"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD."

The Fear Buster

During World War II, a military governor met with General George Patton. When he praised Patton highly for his courage and bravery, the general replied, "Sir, I am not a brave man -- the truth is, I am an utter craven coward. I have never been within the sound of gunshot or in sight of battle in my whole life that I wasn't so scared that I had sweat in the palms of my hands." Years later, when Patton's autobiography was published, it contained this significant statement by the general: "I learned very early in my life never to take counsel of my fears."

Unfortunately, in the seemingly uncertain world we live in, fear often rules the mind and binds the heart in misery. Yet, those who have put their faith in Christ as Saviour have available liberty from fear. For the believer there is the promise of the indwelling Spirit of God, who enables the individual to turn from the path of fear: "For you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15 NIV)

Liberation from fear (especially of "fear of want"), is found in the heart-felt prayer to God that secures the sense of His protective presence: "God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13 NIV)

Continued liberation from fear comes through the Holy Spirit's work of building faith or trust in the believer's life: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,... FAITH" (Galatians 5:22), "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid" (Psalms 56:11). This trust rests upon the nature of God's promises to the believer, promises that guarantee the special attention, provision and protection of a loving Father: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31 NIV).

I recall a story about a man who had to cross a wide river on the ice. He was afraid it might be too thin, so he began to crawl on his hand and knees in great terror. He thought he might fall through at any moment. Just as he neared the opposite shore another man glided past him nonchalantly sitting on a sled loaded with iron. How like some Christians, headed for Heaven, they tremble at every step lest the divine promises break under their feet.

By resting completely upon Him and taking His promises at face value, we can drive out the paralyzing fear that hinders our effectiveness for Christ. The biblical antidote always works: "I will trust, and not be afraid."

Personal Notes:

June 14

2 Peter 1:1-8

“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Building Bridges

In his book *Get What You Deserve*, Jay Conrad Levinson suggests the following things matter most to the people that we know: keeping promises, punctuality, honesty, demeanour, respect, gratitude, sincerity, feedback, enthusiasm, initiative. Pamela Reeve in *Relationships* writes: "Involvement with people is always a delicate thing... It requires real maturity to become involved and not get all messed up." If these statements are true, is it any wonder that good relationships are hard to keep when such personal disciplines must be found in such an undisciplined society?

Part of the joy and wonder of the Christian life is to be the recipient of the work of God that builds discipline and character. Christ affirmed this on the occasion of His last evening with the disciples when He promised to send them the Holy Spirit after his departure. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17).

Paul explains that one of the ministries of the indwelling Spirit of God is producing the fruit of Godly character in the believer's life. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,

goodness, faith, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22). What person would turn away anyone with those life disciplines?

To accept by faith the message of the gospel, that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again for our justification, and to put personal trust in Jesus as Saviour, not only brings a living relationship with the true God, but provides a work of God in the heart of man that enhances good human relationships as well. The fruit of God's love alone, goes far to enhance personal relationships: "(love) ...always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:7 NIV).

Lawyer and statesman Daniel Webster once said this: "If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work on brass, time will efface it. If we rear temples, they will crumble to dust. But if we work on men's immortal minds, if we impress on them the high principles, the just fear of God, and love for their fellowman, we engrave on those tablets something which no time can efface and which will brighten and brighten to all eternity."

This, God himself, begins in the believer's life and promises to do throughout that life: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). With this great work of character building going on in each believer's life, God woos a world unto himself through His children: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Christian friend, let God build a bridge through you.

Personal Notes:

June 15

Mark 1:6-11

"Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The Hat of an Encourager

Of all the forces within the means of man to motivate fellow man, the two greatest must be love and encouragement. It is no small coincidence that God the Father extended His own expression of these to Jesus, His Son: "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11 NIV)

It is important for fathers to follow after the example of God our Father. In God's mandate for fathers to: "not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4 NIV), the value of love and encouragement is maximized through a modelling of life (living God's Truth) as well as sharing a message (teaching God's Truth).

Gordon Dalbey in his book *Father and Son* makes an interesting observation about the difference between making a living and making a life. "As the father's appreciation for a son's job well done gives the boy joy, so joy is not generated from work itself, but rather, from the heart of the Father who has ordained the task and empowered the worker. A worker who has forgotten the Father God has cut himself off from the source and vitality of his task. He therefore labours without joy-much like the Pharisaic moralist, who coldly performs the "work" of righteousness without relationship with the Father."

In a day when the level of commitment to and satisfaction in labour is at an all-time low, one of the most significant impacts that a Christian father can have upon his children is to model God's work ethic: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men," (Colossians 3:23 NIV).

As Charles Stanley reminds us, "The prestige of money or job status offers few condolences if our children grow up disrespectful, unruly, unwise, and uncaring. The failure to devote time and attention to effective fathering is one of life's greatest disappointments." However, 'to live a life before our children that finds delight and fulfilment in pleasing God at whatever our life's work is,' now this is the difference between making a living and modelling a life. The former may leave our children with some material substance; however, the latter will leave a heritage of love for God, and encouragement in service to God, within our children.

Scriptures state: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6 NIV) Fathers, are you preparing your children for a living or for a life?

Personal Notes:

June 16

Ephesians 5: 25-33

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

The Hat of the Lover

A little boy once asked his father, "Dad, what is a weapon?" The father answered, "Something you fight with." The boy replied, "Oh, you mean Mom!" This short anecdote is too often the true state of affairs in our homes. The hat least worn by fathers but most missed is the hat of the lover. God said: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25 NIV).

It must first be understood that in the New Testament language of Koine Greek there are four specific words translated as love in English. "Erao" is the word for sensual passion which describes the selfish, "pleasure rules" lust of hedonism. This by the way is the Hollywood-marketed "love". "Stergo" is the love of natural affection that ties a family together with a sense of loyalty. This love is sadly lacking in our society. "Phileo" is the love of emotion where feelings rule the heart. This has been called "brotherly love" but is more accurately a responsive love which says "I get love, therefore, I give love!" The final word for love, the word used in the text cited is "agape". This is sacrificial love that has no view to any return and always puts the interest of others first. This is the love God commands husbands to have for their wives.

The best description of this "agape" love is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Put into the context of God's hat for the husband, this love looks like this: "Love (a husband) is patient, love (a husband) is kind... A husband does not envy, does not boast, he is not proud. A husband is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs. A husband does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. A husband always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. A husband never fails."

This love affirms God's love as a perpetual reminder of Our Heavenly Father's unconditional love: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NIV) As such, "agape - love" is not dependant on a wife's behaviour, but sacrifices self for a wife's and family's good. One of children's greatest needs is not only for Dads to love them, but for Dads to love their Moms!

Personal Notes:

June 17

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

The Hat of the Instructor

Several years ago a young man flew his kite one summer evening in a canyon near Santa Barbara, California. A gust of wind took the kite into high voltage power lines. The kite burst into flames and fluttered to the ground causing a \$50 million dollar fire which destroyed 740 acres of bush, 385 homes and businesses, and which resulted in 3000 people being evacuated, 32 with injuries. Modern society has seen various "kite-flyers", -philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists- who have sent their ideas aloft, only to drift down with destructive force damaging lives and homes. Solomon wisely said: "Be warned, my son... Of making many books there is no end " (Ecclesiastes 12:12 NIV). Paul also warned: "See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." (Colossians 2:8 NIV)

God, in His wisdom, has placed a protective agent in the home to counter the power of ungodly and destructive philosophy. That agent is commonly called "Dad". One of the most important hats a Dad is called by the Lord to wear is the hat of the instructor. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4 NIV)

The training referred to is the establishing of Biblical rules/values for the home. It involves setting the boundaries of appropriate behaviour and exercising discipline when the boundaries are exceeded. Training is most effective with the younger children. The instruction mentioned involves giving counsel and direction, sharing God's principles, and discussing the reasons, and blessings for

choosing God's values. Instruction is most effective as the children get older.

The instruction for which God calls a Father to be responsible needs to be constant, practical and thorough. (see Deuteronomy 6). This requires a Dad to have meaningful relationships with God themselves. The greatest teachers are those who have learned themselves the truth of what they teach. Dads who acknowledge their own personal sin before God and have accepted the sacrifice of Christ as their substitute, believing also in His resurrection, have a deep awareness of the wonderful grace of God and first-hand knowledge of the value of His care. These are the fathers who will impact their children with protective teaching. Like the bank teller who senses counterfeit money from handling the real thing, so families that are taught truth will recognize destructive error. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6 NIV) Dads, in what condition are your instructor's hats?

Personal Notes:

June 18

Genesis 2:4-10, 15

"This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads... Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."

The Hat of the Provider

It has been suggested that the reason mothers cry at their daughter's weddings is because daughters often marry men that are just like Dad! Although this is undoubtedly speculation, one thing is certain- the pressures placed on men in today's society leave very little time for serious evaluation of the role of husband/father. A review of God's responsibilities for the husband/father in these next few weeks surrounding Father's Day seems appropriate.

The Lord seeks to produce a far better husband/father than the world could imagine. His Word indicates His specific call to husbands. God calls husband/fathers to put on the hat of provider. "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5:8 NIV) God, from creation, has intended for man to work for his keep, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." (Genesis 2:15 NIV)

Work is God's programme for provision, "Then I realised that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given him-- for this is his lot." (Ecclesiastes 5:18 NIV) Work is

God's prerequisite for blessing, "He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty." (Proverbs 28:19 NIV)

In these tough economic times, there are many men who have sought for, yet not found work. To take advantage of unemployment insurance or even social assistance is no shame; we can thank God for such available means. However, there must continue to be a willingness to work if this hat is to be responsibly worn. Someone has said "you can tell a man's character by what he turns up when an opportunity to work presents itself - his sleeves or his nose!

God is serious about men being providers, he warns those who rest comfortably in the rut of laziness that seems so easy to fall into in these days. God says: "He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son." (Proverbs 10:5 NIV) Nevertheless, to those who seriously and faithfully labour (or are truly willing to), this hat of the provider comes with a deep sense of wellbeing and peace from God. "The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether he eats little or much" (Ecclesiastes 5:12 NIV).

Personal Notes:

June 19

Psalm 76:1-12

“In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, And His dwelling place in Zion. There He broke the arrows of the bow, The shield and sword of battle. Selah. You are more glorious and excellent Than the mountains of prey. The stout-hearted were plundered; They have sunk into their sleep; And none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands. At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, Both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep. You, Yourself, are to be feared; And who may stand in Your presence When once You are angry? You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; The earth feared and was still, When God arose to judgment, To deliver all the oppressed of the earth. Selah. Surely the wrath of man shall praise You; With the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself. Make vows to the LORD your God, and pay them; Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared. He shall cut off the spirit of princes; He is awesome to the kings of the earth.”

Fearful Awe

It is usually a quiet and pleasant experience to stand on the bridge above Muskoka Falls and watch the babbling brook cascade down the ravine to the Muskoka River off in the distance. However, during spring runoff, this peaceful experience turns to fearful awe as the quiet brook is changed into a rushing torrent, spewing mist high above the bridge, foaming with rage as it engulfs the immediate area with its incessant roar and shakes the ground with its force. Standing above this spectacle gains the viewer a new respect for the bridge railing, knowing that the slightest carelessness, placing spectator into contact with that torrent, would mean certain death. This sense of awe brings great care in conduct.

In Scripture, this "sense of awe" is termed "yaw-ray" and describes the proper response of man before Almighty God (Psalms 76:7). Here, Asaph refers to a deep sense of reverence and awe resulting from God being known in Judah (verse 1), where the people trusted Him to deliver them from battle, and God intervened with power and might. This practical, active fear of God caused the midwives of Israel to risk their own lives while protecting the children rather than report their births and be destroyed. Such fear produced

Israel's desire for righteous living and was learned through the reading of Scripture, "when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people--men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns--so that they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law."

(Deuteronomy 31:11-12 NIV)

There was a day when God descended upon Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning and thick cloud to give Moses the record of this law. The people trembled with fear in the presence of Almighty God, and rightly so, because to approach meant death (see Exodus 20, 21). Those of Israel who held that occasion within their minds learned to fear the LORD and were blessed. Nevertheless, many ceased to fear the Lord (2 Kings 17:25) and found only emptiness.

So it is in our present society, emptiness from fearlessness. How our world needs to cast its eyes anew upon the Lord, to see afresh the glory of God: "For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them." (Psalms 89:6-9 NIV). God does not change. The same message given to Israel in its forgetfulness is applicable to all today: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (Proverbs 1:7 NIV).

Personal Notes:

June 20

John 6: 31-40

"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. "But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Formula for Life

Here are a few of our famous American fibs: "the check is in the mail; money cheerfully refunded; we service what we sell; one size fits all; this hurts me more than it hurts you; it's not the money, it's the principle." We laugh at the use of such tactics to win approval or make a sale, and dismiss such "white lies" as a part of our cultural norm. But does this send a mixed message to the young? Does such "trivial untruth" condition children to believe that the end justifies the means?

To many, such a pragmatic approach to life is legitimate, the only way to get by in this world! The motto goes something like this: "Do unto others before they do unto you!" Think for a moment where such a life formula leads: it moves to the heartbeat of selfishness, it cuts off opportunity for benevolence, it robs life of trust. Such an approach to life is an erosion to relationships, yet, truth be told, too much of business, politics, and even employment is built, albeit with weakness, on such a formula.

God's Word has something to say about this approach to life. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get

it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:1-3 NIV).

Such an approach to life, according to God's word has several inherent weaknesses: 1 - it leads to quarrels and fights because, 2 - it stems from greedy desires which, 3 - put trust in personal power that fails rather than, 4 - trusting a loving God who supplies what is needed rather than what is wanted. Israel of old was guilty of the same thing, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

Israel abandoned the Lord who promised to meet their needs, and fabricated certain means to gain their desires, but in the end they lost all. Israel became sheep without a shepherd, which is a good description of our society today. Nevertheless, the Lord is still the God of living waters who provides a better way: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13 NIV).

This fulfilling life formula is found in Christ's promise of abundant life to those who trust fully in Him.

Personal Notes:

June 21

Psalm 112:1-10

“Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, And his righteousness endures forever. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man deals graciously and lends; He will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he will never be shaken; The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established; He will not be afraid, Until he sees his desire upon his enemies. He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever; His horn will be exalted with honour. The wicked will see it and be grieved; He will gnash his teeth and melt away; The desire of the wicked shall perish.”

The Spiritual Man

There are those that believe that history repeats itself as naturally as the water cycle, and man is an ever-recycling being. Of course, this belief human history is contrary to the truth of the Bible which states: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Nevertheless, I will concede this point- the mistakes and rebellion of man are repeated throughout history.

Take for instance God's instruction to Israel as they prepared for entry into the land of promise. God said: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children," (Deuteronomy 6:4-7). Nevertheless, just one generation later this assessment is given: "and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). The parents of the first generation failed to pass on God's truth to the next. In this, history repeats itself!

God gives clear responsibility to parents, particularly fathers. "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). There

is a crying need for spiritual leadership among fathers. The world needs godly men!

In *The Best of A.W. Tozer*, this gifted pastor suggests that the marks of the spiritual man are: "1. The desire to be holy rather than happy... The truly spiritual man knows that God will give abundance of joy after we have become able to receive it without injury to our souls, but he does not demand it at once... 2. (a desire) to see the honour of God advanced through his life even if it means that he himself must suffer temporary dishonour or loss... 3. The spiritual man wants to carry his cross... that extra adversity that comes to us as a result of our obedience to Christ... 4. When he sees everything from God's viewpoint. The ability to weigh all things in the divine scale and place the same value upon them as God does... 5. To die right rather than live wrong... He wants most of all to be right and is happy to let God decide how long he shall live... 6. The desire to see others advance at his expense... 7. Habitually making eternity-judgements instead of time judgments... Such a man would rather be useful than famous and would rather serve than be served."

Such a Christian man would, by life example, model the love and purity of God. Such a man could, by spiritual counsel, win the heart of his children to the Saviour, who in turn would pass on the nurture and admonition of the Lord. O God, give this nation such men.

Personal Notes:

June 22

Lamentations 3:21-31

"This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because God has laid it on him; Let him put his mouth in the dust—There may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, And be full of reproach. For the Lord will not cast off forever."

The Lost Act of Worship

The English word "worship" comes from "worthscribe" and suggests that the centre of the activity defined is an expression of worth or value. In essence, worship of God is an expression of the sense of worth of God. In a society that is increasingly embracing atheism (Canada is now classed as an atheistic country), it is no wonder that real worship has slipped from our grasp.

J. Oswald Sanders, in his book, *Enjoying Intimacy with God*, makes this valuable comment: "The essence of worship is illustrated in the return of Scipio Africanus from the conquest of his enemies. As he went, he scattered the largesse of the victor to the crowds that lined the way. Some were stirred to gratitude by his liberality; some because he had rolled away from their homes the fear of the invading army; still others, forgetful of their personal benefits, praised the qualities of the victor- his courage, resourcefulness, liberality. It was in that last group that the highest element of worship was present."

When the Lord sat at the well asking for a drink of water from a Samaritan woman, he spoke of the living water that was found only in Himself. As the conversation turned to worship, Jesus made this powerful statement: "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23).

The greatest calling of man is still to worship the living God. Some might do so out of gratitude for His benefits, and rightly so, for salvation itself is a gift from God secured through the personal

sacrifice of Jesus as substitute for man in payment of sin. Others, who know Christ as personal saviour through faith, worship God salvation and daily blessings. However, as Oswald Sanders suggests, those who respond to who God is, reflecting upon the perfection of His character, contemplating the glory of His being, and marvel at the wonder of His love, to such belongs the reward of deepest worship, a moment by moment sense of the presence of God.

Jeremiah, as lead of the Spirit, stated such worship in these words: "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). In his hymn, F.W. Faber grasps the essence of true worship. "How wonderful, how beautiful - the sight of Thee must be, Thine endless wisdom, boundless power, and awful purity. O how I fear Thee, living God, - With deepest, tenderest fears, And worship Thee with trembling hope, And penitential tears."

Worship that is man-centred, whether by emotional frenzy or ritualistic rhetoric, is not worship at all. Only as the believer responds to the revelation of who God is, can worship in Spirit and truth be expressed. Are you a true worshiper of God?

Personal Notes:

June 23

Genesis 2:18-25

“And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

A Plague of Loneliness

Loneliness is said to be one of our society's greatest maladies. A deep sense of despair resulting from lack of close, meaningful relationships plagues Canada. This is not because of the physical isolation of people in a vast country, (the greatest proportion of Canada's population live within a hundred miles of the U.S. border), but because of the emotional isolation of people in an overly self-conscious environment. People want to talk, to share, to be friends, but the fear of rejection and dread of cultural difference binds them to agonizing silence. In truth, what God said at creation, many are painfully reminded of daily: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

Originally, God created Eve to be a suitable companion for Adam, providing a human relationship that modelled God's own love and care for Adam and Eve. Sin drove a wedge between that relationship. Although God's plan to continue the human race through husband-wife relationship was not abandoned, the paradise of "completely ministering relationship" was lost to self-directed manipulation. Wonderfully, God Himself promised to undo the strife

and overcome the sin. This He did in Jesus Christ. As a result of His provision for man's salvation through Calvary, those who receive Him as Saviour find fulfilment of relationship in the one who "is closer than a brother."

Hudson Taylor discovered the meaning of loneliness and, as well, the uniqueness of Jesus "ministering relationship." In *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, he is quoted as declaring: "How lonesome were the weary hours when confined to my room! How I missed my dear wife and the voices of the children far away in England! Then it was, I understood why the Lord had made that passage so real to me, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give shall never thirst." Twenty times a day, perhaps, as I felt the heart-thirst coming back, I cried to Him, "Lord, you promised! You promised me that I should never thirst." And whether I called by day or night, how quickly He came and satisfied my sorrowing heart! So much so that I often wondered whether it were possible that my loved one who had been taken could be enjoying more of His presence than I was in my lonely chamber. He did literally fulfil the prayer: "Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me, A living bright reality; More present to faith's vision keen, Than any outward object seen; More dear, more intimately nigh, Than e'en the sweetest earthy tie."

Are you lonely? Jesus knows your heartache; He will come to you, if you but put your trust in Him, and claim His word as True.

Personal Notes:

June 24

1 John 3:11-19

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.”

Real Love

A psychology experiment involved placing money in a pay telephone coin return and arranging for a woman with arms full of books to pass the phone booth and drop a book or two at the exact time a phone user completed a call. The experiment indicated that the people who found the money upon hanging up were four times more likely to help the woman pick up her books. The study suggests that when people feel good, they tend to do good.

This is a reminder of the principle of reciprocated love that is to be found in every Christian. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17-18)

Each true believer in Christ knows the wonder of God's gift - eternal life through faith in Jesus as the substitutional sacrifice for man's sin (see Romans 6:23). The receiving in prayer of this free gift of salvation begins in the Christian's heart the production of the love of God: "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith..." (Galatians 5:22). This love of God, in turn, overflows to the world in deeds of goodness and acts of gracious

care: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

Simply stated, the Christian's love for fellow man is not the means of salvation as is often taught, but the result of salvation. Philanthropy (love toward mankind), as much as it is a good thing, can never secure forgiveness nor earn salvation. However, new birth in Christ will produce a heart of love for others. This, says the apostle John, is one of the evidences of new life in a believing soul. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4).

To accept this gift of salvation is a life transforming act. It exceeds any human achievement and surpasses any personal experience of happiness because it secures the Holy Spirit of the Living God within the life. From the point of decision to accept God's gift, the Spirit of God and the Word of God effectively guide, comfort, build and equip the believer, deepening faith and instilling peace. It is in this continuing state of spiritual growth that God's love begins to shine forth with greater intensity, like a light pointing to the beauty not of the believer but of God. Hence Jesus said: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Friend, what is the measure of your love?

Personal Notes:

June 25

Titus 2:1-10

“But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourselves to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”

Real Christianity

There is a grave danger in what is loosely called ‘Christianity’ today. The danger lies in an emphasis on unity at the cost of sound doctrine. Greshem Machen identified the danger in the mid 1920's in His comments in "What is Faith". He said: "The opponents of Holy Scripture do not become less dangerous, but they become far more dangerous, when they are within ecclesiastical walls... Let us above all, men say, have no controversy in the church; let us forget our small theological differences and all repeat together Paul's hymn to Christian love. As I listen to such pleas, my Christian friends, I think I can detect in them rather plainly the voice of Satan."

The Apostle Paul repeated, especially in the pastoral epistles, the importance of sound doctrine. Yet today "Christianity" defines everything from secular humanism with its core of evolutionary theory to extremist cults promoting their new age worship; all in the name of Christ! Biblical Christianity allows for no such diversity.

The characteristics of a true Christian church are evident in Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having

received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-7). First, there was evident in the lives of these folks, a personal commitment. In faith, they "received the Word" (v5), the gospel (v7) of Christ: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

This personal commitment to Christ resulted in a visible change of life. They became "followers" of Christ. The word implies an intense study and complete imitating of Christ's life and Truth: "you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In turn, the church "became examples to all" of faith toward God in their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Upon personal faith in Christ, the focal point of this church was God's Word, received with a willingness to allowed it, by the Holy Spirit's leading, to formulate new purposes, new patterns, and new values in life. "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Biblical Christianity does not compromise God's Word of Truth, it lives it. Let the reader beware- all that is called Christian may not be Christian at all.

Personal Notes:

June 26

Matthew 28:16-20

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. "

Real Witness

Christ gave a threefold purpose for the His church: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). The first purpose is evangelism- to "make disciples" by sharing the good news of forgiveness by faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of God's Son as substitute for man. The second is integration- welcoming new disciples into a loving family of God (local church) through the testimony of believer's baptism. The third is education- the practical teaching of God's Word.

The church of Thessalonica began by Paul's efforts to follow Christ's purpose in sharing the good news. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). The success of Paul's effort was certainly not a result of some high tech performance, nor was it a media blitz, nor even a demonstration of spectacular miracles. As a matter of fact, according to Acts 17:1-9, Paul's initial ministry was received by a few, yet resulted in a riot that nearly cost Paul his life!

The power of persuasion was not in gimmicks, demonstrations, miracles or tricks, but in the simple sharing of God's plan of salvation. "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures. Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:2-3). Even as God's Word was powerful enough to bring creation into

existence out of nothing, so the gospel itself has power to change lives because it is the Word of God.

Regarding the church's first purpose to evangelize, E. M. Bounds made this perceptive comment years ago: "The church is looking for better methods, God is looking for better men." Three characteristics marked Paul as a "better" man than most believers today. His entrance among the Thessalonians was a corporate effort of prayer, a conscious effort in priority, and a concentrated effort in perseverance. The book of Acts evidences that Paul and his assistants saturated every decision and every activity with prayer, that they purposefully sought out occasion in the local synagogues to present the gospel, and that they pressed on even through great persecution.

God desires His own to be effective witnesses. He did not promise the church a method, but he did promise a power that can turn timid lips into purpose filled expressions of God's gift of eternal life- "you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be witnesses to Me... (Acts 1:8)

Christian friend, God's call is to be different from the world in focus and in values, but there also must be an "entrance" among unbelievers that the gospel can be shared. Seek after renewed dependence, not new method!

Personal Notes:

June 27

Matthew 7:21-27

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." "

Home Environment

Winston Churchill once stated, "There is no doubt that it is the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society are created, strengthened, and maintained." Scripture qualifies the development of these home grown virtues- "Through wisdom is an house built; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3, 4)

In order for this to be accomplished, the environment of the home must be proper. The model for that proper environment comes from God's provision for the original family found in Genesis 2. Here God provided an *environment of refreshment*, expressed in the creation of Eden (verse 8), a "place of delight", as the name suggests. In Eden, God provided an environment of physical care with an abundance of food and water, comfort with the refreshing coolness (Gen. 3:8) and "pleasant to the eye" beauty. Here God also provided an environment of communication, coming to Adam and Eve each morning for fellowship (as suggested by the text of Gen. 3:8).

There is a great departure in modern society from the all-important *environment of refreshment* in the home. God's model home was a place of care, comfort and communication. It was a quiet oasis

in paradise. Today's homes are more like a bomb crater in a war zone, a place to pop into for a fast reprieve with no certainty of safety.

In his book *Growing Wise in Family Life*, Charles Swindoll quotes Dr. Stinnett on what makes a strong family. "All together we studied 3,000 families and collected a lot of information. But when we analysed it all, we found six main qualities in strong families. Strong families: are committed to the family, spend time together, have good communication, express appreciation to each other, have a spiritual commitment, and are able to solve problems in a crisis." In essence, strong families have sustained an *environment of refreshment* within the home.

This is the first essential of the proper environment found in the original family and it is all important. Dear reader, is your home an oasis, where the refreshment of care, comfort and communication can be found, or a war zone?

Personal Notes:

June 28

James 4:13-17

"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

A Guarded Boast

A leading economic expert, Irving Fisher, had this to say about the future of the stock market: "Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau." This boast was spoken in early October 1929 just a couple of weeks before the crash that caused the Great Depression.

The word "boast" or "glory" in Old Testament scripture is drawn from a term meaning "to shine" and suggests that which makes the face glow in pride and the countenance glory in accomplishment. Man's tendency to boast in human accomplishment is warned against. "This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:23-24 NIV).

Truly man's only boast is to be privileged to know personally and understand marginally, God Himself. John the apostle summarized the privilege of knowing Jesus as follows: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (1 John 1:1-2). Saul (Paul), who was confronted by Christ and became a believer and an apostle, desired only continue to know Him. "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:10).

The greatest joy man can experience is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and enter into a meaningful relationship with the living God. To do so is to become a part of God's family (John 1:12) and enjoy the fellowship of God that privileges man to get to know the kindness, justice and righteousness of the Lord.

The story is told of an eagle perched on a block of ice just above Niagara Falls. The swift current carried the ice and its majestic passenger closer to the edge of the great precipice. The cries of other birds and animals warning the eagle of danger that lay ahead were to no avail. "I have great and powerful wings," he boasted. "I can fly from my perch at any time. I can handle it." Suddenly the edge of the falls was only a few feet away. The torrent of water rushed the block of ice over the great falls. The eagle spread his powerful wings to mount up over the impending doom only to discover too late that his claws had become frozen to the cake of ice. Friend, beware of the boast that ends in destruction, receive Christ as Saviour and boast in the Lord!

Personal Notes:

June 29

Isaiah 5:16-24

“But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness. Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich. Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, “Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so that we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so that we may know it.” Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

Please, Please God!

A fable: An elderly man was travelling with a boy and a donkey, the man was leading the donkey and the boy was walking behind. The townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding, so to please them he climbed up on the animal's back. When they came to the next village, the people said the old man was cruel to let the child walk while he enjoyed the ride. So, to please them, he got off and set the boy on the animal's back and continued on his way. In the third village, people accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk, and the suggestion was made that they both ride. So the man climbed on and they set off again. In the fourth village, the townspeople were indignant at the cruelty to the donkey because he was made to carry two people. The frustrated man was last seen travelling down the road carrying the donkey on his back!

The decision of our supreme court to grant equal rights to same sex partners reminds me of that old man, attempting to please everyone within a values-divided society. Wiser it would be to recognize that the values of God out-weigh the values of man, and pleasing God has far greater rewards (2 Chronicles 7:14) than pleasing man (Proverbs 14:12).

It matters not whether man dismisses or denies the Word of God, God's truth still stands! Although He loves the sinner (so much so that He sent His Son to pay the penalty for man's sin), God's assessment is

clear on this point, as with other government or court decisions such as legalized gambling and abortion on demand, homosexuality is sin. "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Leviticus 18:22 see Romans 1:27-31 for the New Testament denouncement).

As those who should hold greater importance to pleasing God than man, and whose final authority should be God's Holy Word, Christians are not called to be militant with such decisions, but are rather to be ministering agents of God's grace and truth. Christians should do so first in prayer: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (1 Timothy 2:1-2 NIV), and second, in sharing: "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us... Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20 NIV).

Perhaps with prayer and purposeful sharing of God's gift of reconciliation in Christ, believers will have a measurable impact upon the decision makers of society. Nevertheless, the Christian path is clear: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8 NIV).

Personal Notes:

June 30

Matthew 6:25-34

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Losing Unnecessary Weight

Caution is advised during heat waves to those who suffer from heart or respiratory ailments. This hot, humid air causes extra work for the body's cooling system, literally "weighing it down." It might seem strange that something usually unseen, like air, could weigh down a person and cause health problems, but the hospital emergency wards confirmed the reality of it!

Worry is to the soul as heavy air is to the body, a destructive weight. "An anxious heart weighs a man down" (Proverbs 12:25 NIV). Too often the weight of worry crushes the soul to the point of being an emotional invalid and social casualty. In the "Sermon on the Mount", Jesus, seeing man's inclination toward worry, offered an effective remedy (Matthew 6:25-34). He first calls men to a proper perspective of life- "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing" (verse 25). Spiritual life is more important by far than physical, and Christ himself answers that need: "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Secondly, Christ reminded men of their preciousness to God- "Look to the birds of the air... your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (verse 26). God cares for all

creation, but for man He offered His own Son on the cross: "...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Christ further calls man to be prudent- "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:27 NIV) Experience reminds us that worry accomplishes nothing, wisdom dictates: "Don't go there!" Rather, as Christ continues, acknowledge the willingness of God to provide all our needs- "So do not worry, saying, `What shall we eat?' or `What shall we drink?' or `What shall we wear?'... your heavenly Father knows that you need [these]" (Matthew 6:32 NIV).

Having settled the matter of the source of all need, Jesus gives two final steps to erase worry: 1. Choose the divine priority - "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33 NIV), and 2. Exercise wise practice - "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34 NIV).

Simply stated, worry can be overcome by entering into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, focusing our minds on the loving care of God toward His children, determining to put Him first in all things and living one day at a time in the promise that He will provide all needs.

To follow these steps requires letting go of the issues that cause worry, this is done through prayer: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV). Friend, why be weighed down with worry when the Lord can lift you up by grace?

Personal Notes:



Earl has 25 years of pastoral experience and received his Ph.D. degree from Pensacola Christian College. During his 20 year pastoral tenure in Bracebridge, Ontario, Canada, Earl was involved as a chaplain at the Muskoka

Centre, was administrator and instructor for the London Baptist Bible College Satellite Campus, and became the founding president of A Word in Season Ministries, a devotional newspaper column and radio ministry. In 2003 Earl joined ABWE Canada as a missionary professor of theology where his responsibilities include writing college and seminary curriculum, and teaching these courses in developing countries throughout the world. Along with serving the Lord and enjoying his family, Earl's favourite pastime is fishing the lakes of his home area of beautiful Muskoka, Ontario, Canada, where he and his wife Kathi reside.

