

*A Word in Season
Devotional*

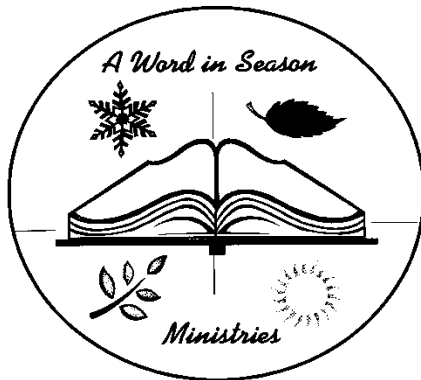
Third Quarter – Summer

By
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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 my 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

July 1

Proverbs 27:9-14

“Ointment and perfume delight the heart, And the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel. Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, Nor go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbour nearby than a brother far away.

My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, That I may answer him who reproaches me. A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; The simple pass on and are punished. Take the garment of him who is surety for a stranger, and hold it in pledge when he is surety for a seductress.

He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, It will be counted a curse to him.”

Sweet Friendship

In the frenzy of daily routine and people problems, my mind can capture a picture of peace and serenity by returning to my boyhood days of farm living. I picture myself sitting on the rail fence in southern Ontario watching the cows pasture quietly in the field as a breeze passes over the long grass giving the impression of a gently rolling sea. The closest thing to violent activity is the occasional flick of a tail or twitch of an ear by a cow to chase away flies. Peace prevails.

The shepherds of Israel must have found a similar peace among the flocks of sheep because their word for pasturing grew to represent the best of life's peaceful coexistence among fellow human beings. The idea of sheep or cattle grazing side by side (rah-gah) grew to include the tranquillity of two standing together in peace and harmony (rah-yah), translated companion, friend, and neighbour.

To this beautiful expression of human relationship, God adds His own standard of excellence: "A friend loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17 NIV). God's call to friendship includes the extension of unconditional love where an "accept me as I am" attitude predominates. The Lord expressed this Himself on Calvary where "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV). The call to

salvation is not "whosoever is worthy", but "whosoever will", may come! (see John 3:16 and Romans 10:11-13). To the emphasis of unconditional love in acceptance, the Lord adds unconditional love in action- "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24 NIV), "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you--better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away." (Proverbs 27:10 NIV) Here God's call to friendship involves accepting responsibility for a neighbour's needs when hardship comes. In calamity a true friend is there with open arms and open pockets. To this extent, God has promised to help all who call upon Him according to His will and purpose: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me." (Psalms 27:10).

With the Hebrew word for pasturing implying such significance in defining human friendship, and with God's own standard understood from scripture, Psalm 23 becomes very special. It begins: "The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (Psalms 23:1-3).

Two questions become self-evident: Is the Lord that kind of shepherd-friend to you, a source of life, peace and contentment? and Are you God's kind of friend to others, accepting and acting with unconditional love?

Personal Notes:

July 2

Isaiah 9:16-21

“For the leaders of this people cause them to err, And those who are led by them are destroyed. Therefore the Lord will have no joy in their young men, Nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows; For everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer, And every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand is stretched out still. For wickedness burns as the fire; It shall devour the briars and thorns, And kindle in the thickets of the forest; They shall mount up like rising smoke. Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts The land is burned up, And the people shall be as fuel for the fire; No man shall spare his brother. And he shall snatch on the right hand And be hungry; He shall devour on the left hand And not be satisfied; Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm. Manasseh shall devour Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh; Together they shall be against Judah. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand is stretched out still.”

The Hands that Keep You

A while ago I read a story by a young woman in memory of her father entitled "My Fathers Hands". In the story the author traced the memory of the love and care of her father expressed through his big but gentle hands. Her father, being a quiet and somewhat shy man, spoke little of his love for his family; nevertheless, the tender care of the work of his hands demonstrated daily his commitment to those he loved. How wise the author was to see this expression of love and take the time to write of it.

Men and women should do the same toward Our Father in heaven. As a matter of fact, the Lord rebukes His people when they chose to party "in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands." (Isaiah 5:12). Think for a moment with me about the works of God's hands.

God's hands are strong in that they made and hold the universe together. "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17 NIV). The earth will complete its purpose, the

sun will not burnout prematurely, the ozone layer will not collapse one second before God's original plan.

Peter spoke of God's steadfast hold on our universe: "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:7 NIV). Here Peter states that even as God has demonstrated His firm hand on history through the fulfilment of prophesy, so His hand will remain strong to fulfil the purposes of creation.

To those who have come to accept Christ as personal saviour, having believed in the substitutional death of Christ for sin as well as His resurrection from the dead as victory over sin, the hands of God are special: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:28-29 NIV). The same hands that built the harmony and intricacy of the universe, that designed and put together the galaxies as well as the molecules, atoms and DNA code, the same hands that hold the universe together, that sustain life, and that shall bring all things to His determined end, are the hands that hold the true believer in the embrace of His loving care, forever.

There is an old saying that merits attention: "Don't bite the hand that feeds you". To each reader I urge: "Don't forget the hands that keep you".

Personal Notes:

July 3

Psalm 55:16-22

“As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many against me. God will hear, and afflict them, Even He who abides from of old. Selah because they do not change, Therefore they do not fear God. He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; He has broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; His words were softer than oil, Yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.”

Careful Casting

A farmer and his family were on their way to the market with a truckload of produce when they came upon a man carrying a heavy load. Taking compassion on him, the farmer invited the man to ride in the back of the truck. Arriving at the market sometime later, the farmer was surprised to find the man still straining under the heavy weight, for he had not removed the burden from his shoulders. This story from the Philippines demonstrates the dilemma of many Christians who, though they have accepted Christ as Saviour, are still shouldering their own burdens. Peter makes a very clear appeal to every believer: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7 NIV).

In using this word cast “epirriptw” (epi-riptow), Peter explicitly declares that the believer's anxieties are to be thrown down as one would toss aside cumbersome clothes in order to seriously undertake any task. This, although it sounds easy enough, takes careful and prayerful thought. Lawrence Crabb, in his book *The Marriage Builder*, suggests that the first step in casting aside anxiety is to distinguish between personal desires and personal goals.

Personal desires are those legitimate wishes each of us has regarding people, events or happenings over which we have absolutely no control. With these wishes the believer is exhorted to

"Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." (Philippians 4:6 NKJ)

To find the peace this passage promises next, the Christian must be determined to hold onto nothing outside of direct personal ability to achieve. The attitudes, decisions and activities of others, although influenced by us, and important to us, are outside personal final choice. Therefore, these desires are to be "cast" on the Lord by prayer and thanksgiving, with reliance on and trust in Him for the outcome.

Personal goals are God-given responsibilities that are within our power to personally achieve. Even in these the Christian is not to be anxious but is, by prayer and daily obedience to the Word of God, to give these tasks to God in commitment to His will. Christ was able to accept the responsibility of bearing the sins of man. He gave the task over to God in a deeply meaningful, yet simple prayer: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42 NIV)

Paul, in casting His care upon the Lord also found strength to succeed: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13 NIV)

Christian friend, why carry a burden that the Lord is willing to bear, start casting and begin to enjoy the journey?

Personal Notes:

July 4

Romans 5:12-18

“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. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ). Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”

Living Death

Archaeologists who study the ancient Egyptian mummies have for years taken a unique, non-invasive approach. With the use of X-ray, xeroradiography, and even advanced laser technology the state of remains can be accurately determined without employing dissecting techniques (Prairie Overcomer). Thus the mummy stays perfectly intact. In this there is a portrait of people as they stand before God.

Although physical life seems intact, all people begin life in a state of spiritual death (spiritually separated) before the living God. Scripture declares this to be so as a result of man's sin nature passed on from Adam: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalms 51:5 NIV); "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12 NIV).

In this state of death or separation, God assesses the heart of man. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12-13 NIV)

There is a unique difference, however, between the scientist who assesses the ancient mummy and God who assesses the heart. The scientist looks, records and moves on. God sees, takes compassion and offers life. This offer is made possible through the sacrifice and resurrection of His son. "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17 NIV)

This life begins with the penetrating eyes of Holy God rejecting people in their sin, and the loving heart of God bleeding on the cross to wash away that sin. Christianity is personal acceptance of our state before God and of the Saviour from God. Salvation is God breathing life back into once "spiritually dead" flesh and bones. Christianity is the transition from death to life: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:1,4-5 NIV). Praise God that His interest in man goes beyond a non-invasive investigation, He takes the wraps off and cuts deep into the very centre of our being and offers life.

Personal Notes:

July 5

Daniel 5:4-9, 25

"They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished... "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN."

Weighed and Wanting

"Mene, mene, tekem, upharsin"- these were the words written on the wall of the palace of King Belshazzar, king of Babylon. The words struck terror into the heart of all, not only because a finger materialized to mark the text, but because of what the text meant for the nation. "This [is] the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5).

The people of Babylon had become proud of their accomplishments and indulgent with their prosperity. Despite the pleading of godly people such as Daniel, in their pursuit of self-interest they completely rejected the moral and ethical values of the living and true God. Consequently, He was about to end their glory!

Canada needs to see the same handwriting on the wall! In our prosperity and pride, we too have abandoned the living and true God. What a mockery of God's values our nation indulges in- we put tax money into abortions and set murderers free, we pass laws that forbid hunting as a way of life for those who want to remain

independent, and we supply needles for drug addicts. We financially favour single parents and common-law marriages and penalize moms who choose to stay home to raise their kids. We give great media attention to the small minority of homosexuals and, when responsible government acts according to the majority will, in denying same-sex benefits, we magnify the gay community crying "shame" to the politicians. Where is "shame" before God?

Perhaps these words of scripture might provoke a sense of sober thinking and shame- "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" (Isaiah 5 NIV).

If our nation of Canada is to find peace and prosperity again, then a response to the handwriting on the wall is in order. "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" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Personal Notes:

July 6

Proverbs 31:10-12

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships, She brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms. She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, For all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

The Crown of Dependability

"They say that man is mighty, he governs land and sea, He wields a mighty sceptre on lower powers than he, But mightier power and stronger, man from his throne has hurled, For the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world". The world recognizes the value of a good mother, but is very much confused by a definition of one. God's Word identifies the necessary qualities of a good wife and mother both by example and exhortation. Proverbs 31 identifies some of the basic attributes and responsibilities with which God has marked Godly wives and mothers. God shares these with a view to challenging Christian women to fulfil their responsibilities in His power.

God marks the queen of the home with the Crown of a Dependable Wife. She cares for her husband: "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. (Proverbs 31:11-12 NIV). She cares for children: "She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar." (Proverbs 31:14 NIV) Through industrious and enterprising activity she helps meet her family's needs. Because of her living faith her family is prepared for trouble, she plans and

builds a wall of protection for her family- "When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet." (Proverbs 31:21 NIV)

The Godly wife/mother also cares for herself by keeping mentally, physically and spiritually fit: "She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks... She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come." (Proverbs 31:17, 25 NIV) She keeps herself attractive by caring for her God-given beauty. "She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple." (Proverbs 31:22 NIV)

Unlike Job's wife who lost sight of God through the tragedy that befell their family, the queen of the home who conscientiously wears God's crown of a dependable wife will bring blessing. Such mothers have their own reward. Abraham Lincoln said, "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother"; Benjamin West said, "A kiss from my mother made me a painter". Of godly women, the Lord said, "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:" (Proverbs 31:28 NIV).

Personal Notes:

July 7

Ruth 2:19-3:3

“So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest. And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.”

The Crown of Diligence

Although some would say she is well paid for her responsibilities, even a casual glance at the pressures upon the Queen of the British Monarchy would leave few envious of her duty roster. However, before we dismiss the thought from our minds, a look at God's call to the queen of the home should stimulate new respect for the wives/mothers of our land.

Proverbs 31:10-31 expresses God's high regard and holy intent for the virtuous woman. In this text she is seen as wearing the crown of a dependable wife, as well as the crown of a diligent worker. The work ethic of the virtuous woman is above reproach: "She ... works willingly with her hands." (v.13); She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household,(v.15); She considers a field, and buys it: with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. (v.16); She perceives that her merchandise [is] good: her candle does not go by night. She puts her hands to the spindle, and

her hands hold the distaff. (v.18-19); She makes fine linen, and sells [it]; and delivers sashes to the merchants. (v.24)"

These glimpses of God's queen of the home portray a willing worker who enjoys her tasks, an early riser who is eager to labour, a capable helper who finishes the job, an industrious labourer who is willing to learn new tasks and expand talents, a conscientious producer who is concerned about quality not just quantity. With those qualifications on her resume, it's no wonder "her worth is far above rubies" (v.10).

A summary of the work ethic of this diligent worker affords an understanding of her motive for such diligence. "She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness." (Proverbs 31:27) The crown of a diligent worker can only be wore by a queen who knows and accepts the duty roster of a wife/mother's sacrificial love. Such was the case with a mother named Tillie whose sacrificial love reached the news columns of the Chicago Daily Times. Tillie had scrubbed floors eight hours a day for 11 years to pay for a \$5000 reward that would lead to the release of her falsely accused son. Her efforts caused the courts to re-examine the case, as a result her son was proven innocent and set free on Aug. 15, 1945.

In a day when society might look upon this picture of womanhood with disdain as selling oneself short, a fresh look at the diligence of the virtuous woman from God's perspective should result in a renewed respect for the queen of the home, and provoke new commitment to love for the household.

Personal Notes:

July 8

Psalm 82:1-8

“God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked. They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are unstable. I said, “You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations.”

A Mighty Witness

G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945), one of Britain's most popular Congregational preachers and religious authors, had four sons, all of whom became preachers. When asked who was the best preacher in the family, the sons chorused: "Mother, because she practices what we preach!" Mrs. Morgan understood the unique influence of Godly motherhood.

In previous devotions we have examined the Biblical responsibility of fathers as head of the home, including the responsibility of spiritual leadership. This by no means minimizes the great role a wife/mother is called upon by God to fulfil in that same vein. God's definition of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 includes the importance of the Queen of the home wearing the Crown of a Dynamic Witness. This is evident in her character (what is seen in her life) and her conversation (what is heard from her lips).

The Crown of a Dynamic Witness involves the character trait of strength and honour. "Strength and honour [are] her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come." (Proverbs 31:25). Strength here refers to a power over the changes of temporal circumstances, and necessitates a firm foundation in life, the foundation of faith in God. Honour refers to a confident assurance based on the promises of God. Such strength and honour equips a wife/mother in sorrow and care. This same thought is found in the New Testament. "Whose adorning ... [let it be] the hidden man of the heart, in that which is

not corruptible, [even the ornament] of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." (1 Peter 3:4)

The Crown of a Dynamic Witness involves a conversation graced with wisdom and kindness. "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue [is] the law of kindness." (Proverbs 31:26) This godly woman understands the destructive potential of the tongue and by God's strength turns from gossip, slander and angry speech to words of sympathy, understanding and gentleness.

Such witness to God does not end with words; this godly woman puts action to her witness by deeds of kindness and generosity to those less fortunate. "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." (Proverbs 31:20). Only eternity will reveal what great works of God were wrought through the quiet witness to God's love and grace of devoted wives/mothers. Who is the best preacher in your home?

Personal Notes:

July 9

Psalm 26:1-12

"Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the LORD; I shall not slip. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, And I have walked in Your truth. I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, nor will I go in with hypocrites. I have hated the assembly of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked. I will wash my hands in innocence; So I will go about Your altar, O LORD, That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, And tell of all Your wondrous works. LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, And the place where Your glory dwells. Do not gather my soul with sinners, Nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands is a sinister scheme, And whose right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in my integrity; Redeem me and be merciful to me. My foot stands in an even place; in the congregations I will bless the LORD."

Integrity

The nursery rhyme "Old Mother Hubbard" may have originally been a criticism of government with "bare cupboards and nothing for the poor dogs of society"; nevertheless, the rhyme also portrays the "empty cupboards" of human relationships within many families. In such situations parents are unable to pass on even the bare bones of relational development to their children. Is it any wonder that our society is fragmented and fractured at its most foundational point of human co-existence, of which the family is the primary training ground? It's time to look at 'our-shelves'!

God, who is the architect of both the family and society, gives clear insight through scripture of what the "cupboards" of family relationships should hold. In Proverbs 20:7 the personal integrity of parents is presented as a source of meaningful inheritance: "The just [man] walketh in his integrity: his children [are] blessed after him."

"Integrity" here means to possess the quality of being sound, unimpaired, undivided. This suggests a life that is consistent in faith toward God and wholesome toward others, morally and ethically. To walk in integrity is to be undivided in devotion toward God and loyalty toward family; it is to be uncompromising in Godly character and conduct.

Job illustrates a life that held to integrity. In all his troubles and losses his vow was clear: "Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity." (Job 31:6) His heart was determined to always honour the Lord. The result was doubled blessings and godly children. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before... He had also seven sons and three daughters... And in all the land were no women found [so] fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren." (Job 42)

J.C. Penny, the founder of the department store chain, attributes his success to the integrity that his father passed on to him. This was an integrity founded upon a commitment to Christ that cost J.C. jobs and promotions, but earned the respect of the business community and ultimately the success of his national chain of stores.

Although such integrity is modelled by parents, each person must choose that path for themselves. In the Proverbs text quoted, it is the just or righteous person who walks in integrity. Each person must come to Christ by faith in order to be forgiven and declared righteous. "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17) God then builds His integrity into the believer through His word- "I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." (Psalms 119:104-105 NIV). Do your children see Godly integrity as a part of 'your-shelf'?

Personal Notes:

July 10

Proverbs 23:1-7

When you sit down to eat with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat If you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food. Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven.

Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies; For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

The Obsession of Ownership

Have you ever noticed how much of our society's energies are focused on the obsession of "ownership". We insist upon a receipt for every purchase. We develop elaborate systems to keep track of land registry, automobile registry, even appliance registry. We build fences, post signs, install security systems and secure guards, all to protect ownership.

There is nothing inherently wrong with ownership; nevertheless, as Solomon discovered, along with ownership comes headache and worry: "As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?" (Ecclesiastes 5:11 NIV) Solomon discovered not only that "you can not take wealth with you" in death, but that riches bring very little satisfaction in present life.

Jesus expressed the same truth: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15 NIV) In spite of this, mankind still has an obsession with possession. People under stress should take a moment periodically and assess how much personal worry is directly related to ownership.

For the Christian, God has a better way! Those who have put their faith in Christ as personal Saviour are privileged to become part of God's own family: "to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12 NIV). As such, the believer enters into a living

relationship with a heavenly Father who is owner of all- "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it" (Psalms 24:1 NIV), and has the privilege of drawing upon the promises of God to be delivered from the worry of possessions. That deliverance is found in an appreciation of God's ownership of self, making each believer a steward of gifts rather than an attainer of possessions.

When an individual believer, by praying in faith, yields "ownership of self" to the Lord God, a change of attitude transpires; all that was previously viewed as personal possessions is acknowledged as belonging to God. To such an individual there is a change of focus in life from the immediate to the eternal, from self to God. As a result of that change of focus, peace is found: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You: because he trusts in You." (Isaiah 26:3).

In this new frame of mind, and fresh focus of heart, life is approached as a faithful steward serving a gracious and patient Father with unlimited resources, rather than a desperate achiever struggling to gain and maintain in order to survive. Here God's truth becomes living experience: "There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing, and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches" (Proverbs 13:7).

Personal Notes:

July 11

Psalm 95:1-6

O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.

For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

Evolution's Contamination

A family in Ontario was interviewed on the news. They opened their home to a young girl from a part of Europe that was contaminated by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Allowing the child to spend time in Canada is helping overcome the potential cancer problems resulting from exposure to radiation.

According to the 1991 Winter issue of the University of Pacific Review, this disaster began when two electrical engineers decided to perform an unauthorized experiment "to see how long a turbine would free wheel when they took power off it." In order to complete the experiment the engineers had to override the built in computer warning system developed by the original designers. Six times the computers indicated "Stop! Dangerous! Go no further!", and six times the engineers ignored the warnings. The result was disastrous!

Though we may chide such apparent disregard to warnings, our society goes about doing the same every day by not taking heed to the warnings of our Creator. "Educated" man has gone so far as to say the Creator does not exist, replacing Him with evolutionary theory, based upon the false premise of uniformitarianism.

God spoke of such falsehood 2000 years ago, warning man of its consequences: "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this `coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of

water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:3-7 NIV).

Glenn Kailer in "Creation's Design & Purpose" expresses the logical conclusion of ignoring the Creator. "From the beginning of creation to the consummation of the will and purpose of God, his role as Creator is the basis for his entire relationship to his creation. If the absolute truth of creation by God is in any way compromised, no benefit we hope to derive from him is certain. No work of man has any foundation. We cannot know what is right, good, proper or meaningful in any absolute way. Our lives have no hope, meaning or purpose."

The lie of evolution, adopted by most scientific institutions and propagated by most school systems is a disaster of greater proportions than Chernobyl. It misrepresents the facts of scientific investigation, undermines the creative design of man and ignores the warnings of the Creator. The resultant cancer of godlessness is evident in every facet of our society.

The Creator warns: "Why do you disobey the LORD's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you." (2 Chronicles 24:20 NIV) Will this to go unheeded?

Personal Notes:

July 12

Deuteronomy 18:9-14

"When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.

"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, "or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. "For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. "For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.

Too Close to The Fence!

Growing up in the farm country of Southern Ontario presented its own forms of entertainment and challenges unique to the region. One such "challenge" involved taking a stalk of green grain, stretching it across the cow (electric) fence, and pushing it closer and closer to see who could take the biggest jolt for the longest time.

Such behaviour is akin to the Christian who tries to live as close to the pattern of the ungodly world as possible; it will not destroy but it will damage. The apostle Paul indicates that there are two places in which a believer can choose to live- in Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live [is] Christ, and to die [is] gain.", or in Philippians 2:21: "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

Philippians 1:21 requires denial, discipline and dependence on the Lord. Paul gives the believer the secret of its attainment- "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. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12 NIV)

John shares the disappointment of living in Philippians 2:21. He says "... everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever" (1 John 2 NIV)

David shared the blessings of seeking the way of God: "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).

Solomon shared the result of pursuing the way of the world: "I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me... So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 2:9, 17 NIV).

Although the "cow-fence dare" was not life-threatening (the fence used a transformer to deliver voltage but little current), it certainly slowed you down for a while. (Please note that this kind of fence is not to be mistaken for the high voltage security fences and should not be tried in any case!) Similarly, a Christian who lives for self still lives, yet the best blessings of life are missed and the potential for fullness is at best delayed.

Christian friend, I dare you to "Live for Christ!"

Personal Notes:

July 13

Romans 8:14-21

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The Great Source

There is an old legend that goes like this: "When Joseph was Prime Minister to Pharaoh (see Genesis 41), during the period of the famine, he emptied the chaff of his granaries into the river Nile. It floated on the moving current, and the people down river saw it. It was only chaff, but it meant that there was corn in plenty elsewhere. They were sure that if their strength held out, and they could reach that source, they would have plenty to nourish their lives."

Similarly, the promises and principles of God's care evident in the scripture offer hope to every believer: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4 NIV)

However, as much as Bible Truth provides the very evidence of God's resources, their reality is not just "chaff" on a river. No, the care and promises of God are, by faith, a matter of present possession. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). This is so because God himself takes possession of each believer. The Lord himself says to his own, "I will never leave you or forsake you.", "you are

the sheep of my pasture ...the apple of my eye". He calls believers His children, His flock, His family, even His bride.

Salvation is not just the future privilege of heaven, it is the "making alive unto God" of man. New birth is a new beginning, a new start in which body (the physical element of man), soul (the intellectual, emotional and volitional element of man) and spirit (the immaterial element of man) are brought into fellowship with the living God, whereby all His care and promises become an ever present hope reassured by His ever abiding Holy Spirit. As Paul states: "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8 NIV)

In our world of spiritual draught and relationship famine, the evidence of the Great Source of nourishment cries out from the pages of the Bible: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." (Psalms 36:9 NIV) The invitation of the Lord Jesus still stands "whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:14 NIV)

Finding the Great Source is not a matter of our strength holding out, it is a matter of taking, by faith, the hand of God that is already reaching out to every soul. "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).

Personal Notes:

July 14

Mark 1:33-39

At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon–possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him. Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth." And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.

Time Out!

Morrow Lindberg once commented that to set aside time for business, shopping or social engagement is acceptable but if one says, "I cannot come because this is my time to be alone," one is considered rude, egotistical, or strange. What a commentary on our civilization when being alone is considered suspect! Yet for the Christian, time spent alone is essential for spiritual growth and sensitivity, especially when spent in prayer.

Even the Son of God, although He ministered to countless numbers of people, sought solitude. "After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray." (Mark 6:46 NIV) He also encouraged His disciples to get away for a while with Him. "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31 NIV)

The solitude of prayer is one of the greatest avenues for finding restored strength and peace of heart and mind: As the apostle Paul states: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV) "Prayer" says E.M. Bounds, "is the contact of a living soul with God. In prayer, God stoops to kiss man,

to bless man, and to aid in everything that God can devise or man can need."

For those who cannot "find the time" for prayer, Dick Eastman, in his book *The Hour That Changes the World* tells this story: "Carefully mark this in your mind: It is possible to make time for prayer! Consider Susanna Wesley. With nineteen active children, including John and Charles, Susanna Wesley still found time to pray daily. This godly saint seldom gave less than a full hour each day for prayer...at her chosen time for spiritual exercise she would take her apron and pull it over her face. Her children were instructed never to disturb "mother" when she was praying."

I wonder how many children in "Christian" homes today have ever seen their parents in prayerful solitude? It is true, when trouble comes Believers quickly remember the invitation, "call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me." (Psalms 50:15 NIV) But how many have realized the passion of God to commune with His children, to fellowship with his family individually in quiet interaction?

Christian friend, how do you respond to Christ's challenge, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?"... "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Matthew 26 NIV)

Make prayer a daily priority; it will change your life!

Personal Notes:

July 15

Numbers 20:5-12

"And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink." So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Lord Give Me Patience!

There is a poster hanging in my office, given to me by the one person on this earth that knows me better than any other - my wife. The poster is a prayer that states: "Lord, please give me patience... and I want it NOW!" This poster typifies in a humorous way the not so humorous attitude of the impatient, and is a constant reminder that patience is not one of my personal strengths.

If "loose lips can sink ships", then impatience can foul the whole fleet! It is not with pride that anyone joins the ranks of the impatient. Consider where the impatience of Abraham led, a man who took God's plan onto his own hands because "he couldn't wait for the promised child". The result was a divided household in which there would be no harmonious coexistence: "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman" (Galatians 4:23). Consider Moses. He lost patience on several occasions. This resulted in losing the privilege of entering the land that God led the nation to possess.

Fortunately for those of us who are a part of that sad troop of the impatient, God is not only faithful to forgive as John reminds us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our

sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 NIV), but is producing in the believer His own character to combat our weakness- "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness," (Galatians 5:22 NIV). For this reason, the Lord can adequately lead those who have trusted in Him to a better way: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:" (Romans 15:5)

As T.T. Carter wrote: "Only as we know what it is to cherish love when sore at some unkindness, to overmaster ourselves when under provocation, to preserve gentleness during trial and unmerited wrong, -only then can we know in any degree the "manner of spirit" that was in Christ."

The Christian need not ask for patience; through the indwelling Holy Spirit, every believer has the guarantee of it. The exercise of patience involves a continual practice of the presence of God. Like all His promises, each believer must accept the truth of the promise and turn to God for the claim of it in time of need. While the world would seek to "count to ten", the believer has the great privilege of an ever present help to act in the newness of their life in Christ. As scripture states: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (Psalms 46:1 NIV)

Patience for the believer is not a matter of personality, but of admitted weakness and choosing to rely on God. May all who are prone to impatience find salvation through Christ and learn to practice God's presence.

Personal Notes:

July 16

Psalm 19:1-6

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,

Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

What The Fool Says

"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them," (Exodus 20:11 NIV) "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (Psalms 19:1 NIV) These Bible statements, educated man (for the most part) has chosen to disbelieve!

Dr. D. Herbert makes this interesting observation in the *Creation Science Newsletter* (Summer 1996 issue): "With almost predictable regularity, television specials or articles in the widely-circulated magazines focus on the question of origins. The recent probe sent to Mars has only heightened interest as it has been reported that such investigations might finally reveal the elusive answers to the question: Where did we come from?"

"Since the actual moment that the universe, or life itself, came into existence is a completed act in the past and can never be duplicated, nor tested empirically; this act, as important as it is, lies outside the realm of science. The investigation of origins is a religious endeavour which can be examined under two systems: supernaturalism (creation) or naturalism (evolution). In other words, was God involved - hence, a supernatural act, or was there some impersonal force directing nature - hence, a naturalistic act?"

"Does our educational system recognise that both creationism and evolutionism are religious? The answer is an emphatic no. Since 1984, the Ministry of Education has mandated

that the teaching of evolutionism should become compulsory core units in OAC history and biology courses."

"It is unfortunate that the Ministry (of Education) does not see that both creationism and evolution are based on definable sets of assumptions and that everyone is committed by faith to one or the other. The traditional evidences for evolution used exclusively in all textbooks, such as the fossil record, vestigial organs and homology, can be explained equally well within the creation model."

"The difference lies, not in the data, but in the fact that an individual of creationist persuasion uses a different set of assumptions to interpret the data."

Education and faith cannot be separated, nor do they have to be viewed as incompatible. Dr. Herbert goes on to suggest that "By examining the assumption bases of both creationism and evolutionism" students could be trained to think more critically, especially when the understanding of theories and their influence on society are examined.

The Bible states: "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalms 14:1 NIV) Our country cannot afford (ethically, morally, or spiritually) to circumvent the evidence of a personal creator through interpretive bias, for in doing so we only make fools of ourselves!

Personal Notes:

July 17

2 Peter 3:14-18

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Instant Christianity?

In this day of instant coffee, instant breakfast, instant information and instant communication, there has grown among the church a dangerous notion of "instant Christianity". Although salvation is a point of decision based on faith and focused on Christ which Jesus described as being "born again" (see John's Gospel chapter 3), this in no way defines an end!

As with A.W. Tozer, by "instant Christianity" I mean the spreading misunderstanding "which is born of a notion that we may discharge our total obligation to our own souls by one act of faith, or at most by two, and be relieved thereafter of all anxiety about our spiritual condition and are permitted to infer from this that there is no reason to seek to be saints by character. An automatic, once-for-all quality is present here that is completely out of mode with the faith of the New Testament."

This misunderstanding is centred in a faith focused on an experience rather than a faith founded in God. As Tozer says in *That Incredible Christian*, "By trying to pack all of salvation into one experience, or two, the advocates of instant Christianity flaunt the law of development which runs through all nature. They ignore the sanctifying effects of suffering, cross carrying and practical obedience. They pass by the need for spiritual training, the necessity

of forming right religious habits and the need to wrestle against the world, the devil, the flesh"

Instant Christianity dismisses the very core of the great commission as stated in Matthew 28. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything i have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Emphasis is added to indicate my point; believers not only have responsibility to "go" (the usual emphasis of this passage), but to "know and grow!"

May these words from Paul remove all doubt about the fallacy of "instant Christianity"- "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained" (Philippians 3 NIV).

Personal Notes:

July 18

Hebrews 2:1-4

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

So Great a Salvation

"Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave, Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen, Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save." This great hymn, written by Fanny Crosby is viewed by many today as antiquated, out of touch, and not "politically correct"; consequently it has been removed from many of the newer hymnals. Nevertheless, the hymn presents truth as old as Adam, yet as relevant as "good health" and straight from the pages of scripture - that every human being has a need to be saved!

The terms 'saved' and 'salvation' occur 268 times in scripture. 'yaw-shah, the Hebrew word for salvation in the Old Testament, and its New Testament Greek synonym *soteria* can best be defined by the word 'deliverance'. It cannot be ignored nor cast aside as too much out of touch, that man stands separated from Holy God because of sin, that sin holds man in bondage in this life, and that all mankind stands condemned to suffering because of sin for eternity to come.

Although it may go against the grain of our pride and self sufficiency, scripture presents a clear and logical answer for our helplessness. This is called salvation: First, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23 NIV). Second, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23 NIV) Third, "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) Fourth, "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)

The great preacher Charles H. Spurgeon made this plea for salvation: "Can you think what must have been the greatness of the atonement which was the substitution for all this agony which God would have cast upon us, if He had not poured it upon Christ?"

"And can you grasp the thought of the greatness of your Saviour's mediation when 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. Christ did pay at all, so that man is set free from all punishment, through what Jesus hath done. Think, then, how great His atonement if He has done all this."

Here also is the Bible plea: "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 2:3 NIV) As Fanny Crosby's hymn states: "Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save."

Personal Notes:

July 19

Hebrews 4:11-16

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Solace in Solitude

Although loneliness is not a part of God's plan for man, solitude is a divinely ordained cross for the Christian. Christ experienced this cross in numerous ways. He bore the solitude of rejection- "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10-11). He bore the solitude of labour- "Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Jesus was burdened with the solitude of devotion- "And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13). Christ also bore the solitude of circumstances - the cross of Calvary- "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). Is it any wonder that after such experiences of solitude, our Lord sought the solitude of prayer? "So much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he (often) withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (Luke 5). There, Jesus renewed his strength.

Christians too, are called to bear these same burdens, to experience this same solitude. Jesus said as much to his disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24), "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (Matthew 20:23).

However, for the believer, solitude is more a privilege than a burden. This is so because of the wonderful invitation Jesus extends to each child of God: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). The word picture here is that of a double harness oxen yoke. Christ invites each believer to join in this yoke WITH HIM, believing that He will bear all the labour AS THE STRONG ONE, if we but join at his side, as the weak but willing.

As the one who is strong (He is Lord God Almighty), and experienced (he has travelled the road of solitude before), He is sympathetic to our fears, our worries and our weariness as one "touched with the feelings of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15). The point He makes is clear, we are never alone in bearing the crosses of solitude. Whether by rejection, labour, devotion or circumstance, the resulting solitude opens a door of opportunity to really get to know the strength of the Lord. Here too, the Christian must "often go to a solitary place and pray", and find "grace to help in a time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Personal Notes:

July 20

Ephesians 4:29-5:2

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Those Little Foxes

A hospital patient accidentally spilled a glass of water on the floor. Fearing that someone would slip on the water, the patient called for a nurse's assistant. However, because hospital policy called for housekeeping to clean up large spills, the nurse's aid called that department. Upon arrival, housekeeping determined that in deed the spill was small and asked nurse's aid to do the clean up. Soon an argument ensued - "It's a small spill", "No, it's a large spill". The wise patient, still fearing that someone might slip, decided to settle the argument by pouring the whole pitcher of water on the floor! This story, told by Bermard Brown of the Kennestone Regional Health Care System in Georgia, illustrates the truth that it is the small foxes that spoil the crop! People often handle the big crisis with grace and strength; however, it's the small, insignificant disputes that seem to tear relationships apart.

Take for instance the couple who were happily married except for one small thing: SHE grew up in a home where Dad showed his love by doing the dishes, HE was raised in a home where dishes were household work belonging to the wife and Dads brought home the bacon. After "the honeymoon" was over, the wife began to doubt her husband's love; after all, he never offered to do the dishes. When she finally suggested that he so help, he began to think that she disrespected him, after all she did not appreciate his hard work in supplying the families needs! This little hurt festered

into an open, infected wound and almost destroyed the home. (The gift of a dishwasher seemed to remedy the situation!)

How much nicer life would be if two Bible principles were conscientiously kept: the principle of charity, and the principle of communication. In 1 Corinthians, an epistle dealing with divisions and personal preferences, God gives this advice: "Charity (love)... Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things... charity never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:7-8). The principle is clear, where preference has been expressed or hurts have been experienced, the choice of love is to give the benefit of the doubt, determining not to let differences divide.

In Ephesians, while dealing with the need for, provision for, and danger to unity, God gives this advice: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). The principle of communication is: when disharmony is evident, rather than falling into talk that tears down, determination to be involved only in talk that builds up is made.

These two principles touch the heart, and the tongue. They do not eliminate differences of personality or conviction, but do, when followed, allow for differences to be expressed within an environment of godliness. This ensures the individuality, uniqueness and respect of everyone and focuses on care for all (result: the danger of slipping takes first priority).

Personal Notes:

July 21

Psalm 145:1-12

I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendour of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, And I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom.

The Greatness of God

"We are so little that if God should manifest his greatness without condescension, we should be trampled under his feet; but God, who must stoop to view the skies, and bow to see what angels do, turns his eye yet lower, and looks to the lowly and contrite, and makes them great" (Charles Spurgeon) .

King David recognized the wonder of man's attention by God in these words of Holy Scripture: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalms 8:3-5).

Compared to the greatness of God and the grandeur of His creation, man seems insignificantly small, yet scripture records that the very focal point of God's work of creation was mankind: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of

the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

Sin, having entered the world through the disobedience of Adam, turned man's paradise into a prison of chaos, bondage and death. But God's purposes are never thwarted; He "visited" man by the sending of His own Son to suffer death and overcome sin's plague in place of man. In so doing, God extends to anyone who will repent and believe, not only a promised eternity with God after this life, but a new existence during this life- "Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, he is a new creature (new creation): old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

God, so great and so glorious that He stoops to view the universe He created, in sending His Son to become man, humbled Himself to become part of that universe. "Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2).

And how does God make great contrite and lowly people? He makes them great by granting them the status of "His children" through faith in "His Son": "But as many as received him (Jesus), to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). True greatness is found in this paradox: greatness comes to those who in repentant humility, accept Christ as Saviour, and become the Children of God. Dear reader, are you made great in God?

Personal Notes:

July 22

1 Peter 2:1-10

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

On Being an Odd Number

A.W. Tozer made this unique statement that I have copied to put on my office wall: "A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One he has never seen, talks familiarly every day to someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another; he empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong in order to be right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to hav,; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passeth knowledge."

Peter describes believers in these words: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past

were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Although an "odd number" in the world's eye, when one considers the great privileges afforded to those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, privileges such as sonship, eternal life, prayer, guidance, comfort and joy in any circumstance, it would seem illogical that any Christian would deny His Lord, or denounce his birthright; nevertheless, many do! Too many Christians, like Esau, sell their birthright for the pleasures of the immediate. Like Esau, the bowl of porridge seems more certain than the promises of inheritance. Consequently, a love for this world's goods replaces a love for Christ and the pursuit of the temporal replaces the desire to live with eternity in mind.

John gave this sobering warning: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2). James reminds the believer of the danger of pursuing desire: "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren" (James 1).

Oh, that God would raise up believers who would hold to the integrity of Moses! Of him it is said, "when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Hebrews 11:24-26). Christian friend, are you as "odd" as you ought to be?

Personal Notes:

July 23

Proverbs 1:8-19

My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, And whole, like those who go down to the Pit; We shall find all kinds of precious possessions, We shall fill our houses with spoil; Cast in your lot among us, Let us all have one purse". My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path; For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood. Surely, in vain the net is spread In the sight of any bird; But they lie in wait for their own blood, They lurk secretly for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.

Growing Up Responsibly

Gordon MacDonald, in *The Effective Father* writes, "Among the legends is the tale of a medieval sidewalk superintendent who asked three stone masons on a construction project what they were doing. The first replied that he was laying bricks. The second described his work as that of building a wall. But it was the third labourer who demonstrated genuine esteem for his work when he said, "I am raising a great cathedral."

The wise parent understands that child rearing is more than a pastime, it is a monumental task. The necessary environment for the task of successful parenting is modelled by God in His provision for the original home. Here, God provided an environment of refreshment with the garden of Eden, as well as an environment of responsibility." And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15).

Adam was to "dress" or tend the garden. Although there were no weeds like thorns and thistles competing for nourishment (such came later as a result of man's sin - Genesis 3:17-18), the ground was so fertile that growth needed to be channelled and controlled. Adam was given clear responsibility; he was to maintain the original sense of beauty and order that God created.

Like Adam in the garden of Eden, each family member, when age permits, needs an environment of responsibility where a sense of stewardship, self-discipline and accomplishment can be developed under the supervision of God-modelled unconditional love. Here accountability and diligence are developed and patterns of laziness are avoided. A home that ignores the importance of an environment of responsibility will produce irresponsible children.

Here is how to develop an irresponsible child: 1. Provide him with plenty of free spending money. 2. Permit him to choose his own companions without restraint or direction. 3. Give him a latchkey and allow him to return home at any hour of the night. 4. Make no inquiry as to where and with whom he spends his leisure hours. 5. Give him to understand that manners make a good substitute for morals. 6. Let him expect pay for every act of helpfulness. 7. Let him spend his church-time hours on the street instead of in church. 8. Be careful never to let him hear you pray.

Here is how to develop a responsible child: 1. Make home the brightest and most attractive place on earth. 2. Make him responsible for the performance of a limited number of daily duties. 3. Never punish him in anger. 4. Do not ridicule his conceits, but rather talk frankly on matters in which he is interested. 5. Let him invite his friends to your home and table. 6. Be careful to impress upon his mind that making character is more important than making money. 7. Live uprightly before him at all times; then you will be able to talk to him with power. 8. Be much in prayer for his spiritual salvation and growth, pray with him daily as well as praying for him in private.

Personal Notes:

July 24

Proverbs 24:1-12

Do not be envious of evil men, Nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, And their lips talk of troublemaking. Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong, Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength; for by wise counsel you will wage your own war, And in a multitude of counsellors there is safety. Wisdom is too lofty for a fool; He does not open his mouth in the gate. He who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men. If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small. Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

A Sense of Security

The blanket that Linus clings to in the cartoon strip "Peanuts" is a symbol of what children are truly looking for - a sense of security! The Lord furnished the original family with just such a similar sense of security by creating an environment of clear boundaries. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2).

Here is a model for parents in establishing an environment of restriction for children. Unlike many child psychologists who frown upon any restrictions (I wonder if these doctors have ever had any children themselves), God directs parents to ensure that boundaries are in place according to His example. He stated the boundaries in both a positive and negative way. There was a measure of freedom (every tree is good), there was a measure of restriction (except one tree). The Lord made the blessing clear (pleasant to the eyes and good for food), and the consequences of disobedience clear (in the day you eat - you die).

There is much more here than an example of restriction, the whole relationship of man to God was at stake; nevertheless, for the purposes of viewing the original home as a model environment that parents should follow, the importance of an environment of restriction cannot be overlooked if our children are to find the boundaries for their childhood sense of security. Dr. James Dobson reaffirms the importance of this: "When a child behaves in ways that are disrespectful or harmful to himself or others, it is often to verify the stability of parental boundaries.

"Without a doubt, children are aware of the contest of wills between generations, and that is precisely why the parental response is important. This testing has much the same function as a policeman who turns the doorknobs at places of business after dark. Though he tries to open the doors, he hopes they are locked and secure."

"Likewise, a child who assaults the loving authority of his parents is greatly assured when their leadership holds firm and confident. He finds his greatest security in a structured environment where his rights and those of other people are protected by definite boundaries."

Such an environment of restriction develops a sense of respect for authority, a sense of right and wrong, a sense of dependence upon God's Word (provided that the boundaries are Biblically founded), and a sense of justice when proper discipline is exercised in the "breaking" of the boundaries, as well as an avenue for repentance and forgiveness, which are essential for understanding the gospel. As God says, "Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3-4).

Personal Notes:

July 25

Psalm 42:1-8

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

O my God, my soul is cast down within me; Therefore, I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, And from the heights of Hermon, From the Hill Mizar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me. The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—A prayer to the God of my life.

The Vice

There is much fascination in watching the great iron vices crush used automobiles. I venture to guess that wrecking yards could charge admission for this spectacle and sustain a consistent audience. Perhaps the fascination lies in the power of reducing an automobile to a "lunch box"! Or perhaps the fascination lies in seeing something tangible that represents how most people feel in real life - crushed from every side!

To many people, life is one huge vice, pressing in on every side with its schedules, its unfinished tasks, its unreasonable expectations, its demands to prepare, perform, perfect. To some life presses until the heart cries out for deliverance- deliverance from sickness, deliverance from sorrow, deliverance from unbearable circumstances. Yet when a new day dawns, the vice still presses.

If this describes your life, take heart - you are not alone, nor are you without help. David, King of Israel often felt this way. On several occasions he wrote songs about this very dilemma. One such song has this repeated refrain: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" (Psalms 42:5, 12, 43:5).

Yet in each restrain, David acknowledged the source of His help: "hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him [who is] the help of my countenance and my God" (Psalms 42:5).

To find the help he needed, David expressed his agony of heart to God: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" (Psalms 42:2-3). David refused to allow the ridicule of others to dissuade him from faith in the living God; he therefore took time to dwell on the goodness of God: "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar" (Psalms 42:6). This remembrance of God brought David back to the reality of God's faithfulness to him in times past. As a result, David was assured of God's continued help: "Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me and my prayer unto the God of my life" (Psalms 42:8).

David's avenue of deliverance from crushing despair are captured in the old hymn line: "When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed, when you are discourage thinking all is lost, count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done".

David found deliverance from life's pressing vices because he had a living relationship with the true and compassionate God, who assured him of continued help, strength and joy. This same path of deliverance can be found by all who would first come to Christ for salvation: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13, see John 3). Don't let life crush you, accept Christ!

Personal Notes:

July 26

Genesis 3:1-8

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; "but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. 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.

War and Peace

It has been reported that in the over 3100 years of recorded world history, the world has only been at peace 8% of the time or a total of 286 years and 8000 treaties have been made and broken. The Bible speaks of spiritual warfare that has seen no peace since creation, in which mankind is broken: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Those who know Christ as personal saviour understand this warfare. Believers in particular face the onslaught of satanic attack and demonic oppression. For this cause Peter gives this warning: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). A brief look at Satan's original attack upon man reveals the common tactics of this very real enemy of believers. This encounter is found in Genesis 3 where Satan presents himself in "disguise" by

possessing a beautiful animal called a serpent. As Eve was undoubtedly captivated by the outward appearance of the serpent, Satan took the opportunity to attack the Word of God. In contradiction of God's message to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17, Satan first cast "doubt" upon God's word ("...hath God said", verse 2), next Satan "distorted" the truth ("Ye shall not eat of every tree", verse 2). Finally this enemy of God "denied" God's warning ("You shall not surely die", verse 4).

Herein is a clear lesson for every Christian; whenever something attractive comes along (even in the name of Christianity itself) that challenges the clarity, integrity or authority of the Word of God - beware, Satan is on the prowl! Paul gave such a warning: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). As did Peter, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

James simplified the point of victory over Satan's tactics. He stated: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Christ demonstrated this when he was tempted (see Matthew 4). Had Adam and Eve succeeded in submitting to God and in simple obedience, refrained from the forbidden fruit, Satan would not have gained the day.

The beauty of the Christian life is twofold. First, even when believer's fail, there is forgiveness and an opportunity for a new start, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Second, even when battles are lost, the final victory has already been won: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Christian friend, how goes the battle?

Personal Notes:

July 27

Psalm 85:8-13

I will hear what God the LORD will speak, For He will speak peace To His people and to His saints; But let them not turn back to folly. Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yes, the LORD will give what is good; And our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before Him, And shall make His footsteps our pathway.

Life's Peace Bridge

There is a bridge at Niagara Falls adjoining our country to the United States that is appropriately called "The Peace Bridge." The name symbolizes the free access and good relations between these countries. Tourists from other lands describe this border as unique; they say "there's nothing like it in the world." Yet God's grace has provided just such a bridge between God and man!

Paul's emphasis on grace as the foundation of salvation cannot be missed in the Epistle to the Romans. Paul goes straight to the heart of the matter- "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24). Justification guarantees the believer an undeserved yet very real relationship with the living God as William Evens explains, "Justification is more than pardon and forgiveness. It involves both these elements, but is more than these. It is that act of God by which a sinner, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, is reckoned or counted righteous in God's sight, and treated as though he has never sinned."

Although not deserving access and not contributing to the salvation that provides access, as grace implies, a believer has the blessed assurance that no condemnation stands between him/her and God. Justification, founded on grace, in turn secures a believer's peace with God: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Such peace results from God the Father seeing the walk of Christ, in His perfect life, as acceptable, and seeing the work of Christ in His

substitutional death, as thoroughly satisfying all wrath toward sin, thus putting an end to the strife between Holy God and a sinner. Because the grace of God provides a salvation whereby no condemnation regarding holy law, and no enmity regarding holy wrath, stand between the believer and the Father, unlimited access and continued favour are the result: "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2).

The blessing of grace, as a means of salvation, has moment by moment implications in that the believer has the privilege of God's ever available attention. His saving grace assures that there is nothing too small or trivial to take to Him, that He never tires of hearing the believer's voice, that He is never too occupied to concern Himself with the Christian's hurts, fears, decisions or confusion. Therefore, by the grace of salvation, the believer has access to God's perfect understanding and counsel.

The moment by moment blessing of grace as a means of salvation is the guarantee of the believer's right to a "Peace Bridge" without tax, without toll, without border guard, that leads directly to the residence of God.

Friend, have you crossed over that bridge?

Personal Notes:

July 28

Proverbs 3:13-20

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her. The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens; by His knowledge the depths were broken up, And clouds drop down the dew.

Illusive Contentment

The story is told that once, when Diogenes was sunning himself, Alexander the Great visited him and said, "Ask any favour you wish from me." Diogenes responded, "Please move out of the sunlight." To which Alexander said, "If I could not be Alexander, I would be Diogenes." It would seem that Diogenes had found contentment.

Contentment is a rare commodity, illusive for some to the point of denying its existence! Sidney Harris once wrote, "The most miserable people I have known have not been those who suffered from catastrophes - which they could blame on fate or accident -- but those who had everything they wanted, except the power to enjoy it." God speaks much about contentment in the Scriptures. Solomon pointed out that contentment promotes peace: "Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife" (Proverbs 17:1). Jesus said that contentment is not based on possessions- "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Paul reminded Timothy that the prerequisite for contentment is godliness: "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

The key to contentment is escaping the world's materialistic attitude by seeing the true riches of knowing God's provision. It is to choose to rejoice in His promised care: "...be content with what you

have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5 NIV)

Habakkuk demonstrated contentment with God's care. He trusted Him even when things looked bad- "Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD... The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights" (Habakkuk 3:17-19 NIV).

This contentment is the privilege of those who have first accepted God's provision of salvation through Christ: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1), and have sought to daily lay their lives before God: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Scripture states: "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15). Who could speak more realistically about contentment in God than Alexander Solzhenitsyn? In *The Prison Chronicle* he says, "Don't be afraid of misfortune and do not yearn after happiness. It is, after all, all the same. The bitter doesn't last forever, and the sweet never fills the cup to overflowing. It is enough if you don't freeze in the cold, and if hunger and thirst don't claw at your sides.... Our envy of others devours us most of all. Rub your eyes and purify your heart and prize above all else in the world those who love you and wish you well."

Personal Notes:

July 29

Psalm 71:5-14

For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You. I have become as a wonder to many, but You are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise And with Your glory all the day. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails. For my enemies speak against me; And those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together, saying, "God has forsaken him; Pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him." O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! Let them be confounded and consumed Who are adversaries of my life; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonour Who seek my hurt. But I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more.

Song of Hope

When Richard the Lion-hearted laid in prison in a foreign land, his favourite minstrel travelled all over the country looking for his master, and everywhere he sang the king's favourite song, knowing that if the king heard it he would respond. At length the minstrel came to the castle where the king was imprisoned, and sang there. The king heard the song, and took up the melody, and the minstrel knew that his master was there. He carried a message in song.

Dr. Joseph Aldrich *Life-Style Evangelism* compares the Christian call to evangelism as a life song of verbal message (gospel) and beautiful music (godly character). "The Bible blends both together. For example, Peter says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer (words) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope (music) that you have" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

Hope in the face of struggle, dire straights, or even death, is beautiful music to those without Christ because it demonstrates that life with Christ can face any "seeming unknown" with the certainty of divine care and purpose. It is that "seeming unknown" that brings so much fear into the heart of man.

In an Easter message, Pastor Don McCullough related this story of the fear of the unknown: "An Arab chief tells a story of a spy who was captured and then sentenced to death by a general in the Persian army. This general had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals a choice between the firing squad and the big, black door. As the moment for execution drew near, the spy was brought to the Persian general, who asked the question, "What will it be: the firing squad or the big, black door?"

The spy hesitated for a long time. It was a difficult decision. He chose the firing squad. Moments later shots rang out confirming his execution. The general turned to his aide and said, "They always prefer the known way to the unknown. It is characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet, we gave him a choice."

The aide said, "What lies beyond the big door?"

"Freedom," replied the general. "I've known only a few brave enough to take it."

Peter's "music" of hope defines the life of a Christian in the context of great persecution and hardship. Paul gives similar testimony to the "song-making" work of the Lord in a believer's life. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body... inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10, 16-17 NIV).

Christian friend, how hopeful is your life-song?

Personal Notes:

July 30

Romans 7: 14-25

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Dead Weight

It was the custom of ancient conquerors to prevent the escape of their prisoners by tying a dead body to their backs. With such gruesome burdens, these poor wretches could not run away. Paul may have had this in mind in reference to sin: "I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7 NIV)

Sin, according to Colin Brown's *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, "embraces the gamut of human failure from the transgression of a single commandment to the ruin of one's whole existence." The New Testament makes use of two distinct words to define sin, "adikeo"- meaning injustice or unrighteousness, and "hamartia"- meaning to miss the mark, to fail to reach the target. The Bible declares the universality of sin: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Regardless of the degree, sin always has an effect - separation. Sin separates the individual from God. This separation from God is death. Adam was told that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would die (Genesis 2). Adam ate of the tree and immediately died spiritually (Genesis 3 - Adam's soul was separated from God), and he began to die physically. This entrance of sin into the human race brought with it death (both spiritual and physical, (Romans 5:12, 6:23).

Sin's penalty of death can be remedied by life - union with God. This is called re-birth and is granted by belief in Jesus, who died to pay the penalty of death as man's substitute (2 Corinthians 5:21). For the individual who believes in Jesus, the penalty of sin is broken. Although physical death may come (unless the individual is alive when the Lord calls His children to Himself at His coming - 1 Thess. 4:13-18), yet no spiritual separation will ever be experienced by the believer. Fellowship with God is the believer's privilege and physical death is the doorway to entering into the very presence of the Lord forever (Romans 5:1-2).

It was to this end that Jesus urged Nicodemus to believe: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up (referring to the cross of Calvary), that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:14-18 NIV).

Friend, have you escaped from the dead weight of sin?

Personal Notes:

July 31

Philippians 3:7-14

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Diversion or Discipline?

A man bought a hunting dog. The dog quickly picked up the trail of a bear. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed the ground, and headed in a new direction. He had caught the scent of a deer. A few moments later he halted again, this time smelling a rabbit that had crossed the path of the deer. And so, on and on it went until finally the breathless hunter caught up with his dog, only to find him barking triumphantly down the hole of a field mouse.

Sometimes Christians are like that. Although starting out with high resolve to keep Christ first in life, often attention is diverted to things of lesser importance until the believer is completely off track. To such Peter brings this fresh reminder: "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; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter 1:13-15). Here God's Word points to the necessity of discipline to maintain a true course of godliness. Richard Taylor

in *The Disciplined Life* offers a sound explanation. "*Gird up your mind*," is the Biblical injunction. Gather up your mind, organize the loose ends, draw into service your wandering thoughts, just as an Oriental of Peter's day would quickly gather up his loose robes with a girdle when in a hurry or starting on a journey... For concentration to God carries with it the obligation to excel, not in competition with others, but in competition with oneself. God's work demands trained minds."

Where Peter challenges the believer to a disciplined mind, Paul calls for the disciplined body- "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 NIV).

Whether it be laziness, gluttony or sexual immorality, Scripture calls the believer to honour the Lord in the body as well as the spirit: "glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The beauty of the true Christian life is that the very discipline required in mind, body and spirit is produced by the indwelling Spirit of God: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22 NIV)

The disciplined life is not found in determination nor deprivation, but in dependence upon a Spirit-disciplined life. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Personal Notes:

Aug 1

John 11:21-27

Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

"And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Precious Life

Can you answer this riddle? What is worth more than all the wealth of this world, yet is free? What is deserved by no one, yet offered to everyone? What cannot be bought or earned, yet has already been purchased? The answer is found in this verse of scripture: "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."

There is nothing more precious than eternal life, the privilege of being made spiritually alive to the true God of creation and enjoying His fellowship forever. So precious was this to the apostle Paul that he declared all his "religious attainment" worthless in comparison. "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord," (Philippians 3:4-8 NIV).

The Bible teaches that this eternal life cannot be purchased by personal sacrifice, or earned by doing good. God declares that "All have sinned and fall short of His glory." As a result of sin, man has no spiritual buying power whatsoever. God states "The wages

of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." This gift, though free, cost God dearly. In love, Christ voluntarily left His home in heaven to become the sinless God-man that He might pay the penalty of sin by dying on the cross. To God, the cross cost the personal agony of separation of Father and Son, to Christ the cross cost the personal suffering of shame and death as "He became sin for us". Nevertheless the great price was paid and the proof of this payment was Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Now, to each person, Christ is saying "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

Won't you, in the sorrow and regret of your sins, ask Christ to be your personal Saviour today and receive eternal life, the priceless yet free, the undeserved yet offered, the "unbuyable" yet completely paid for, Gift of God.

Personal Notes:

Aug 2

Rom 10:12-17

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Beautiful Feet

We are told that the average pair of feet take 7,000 to 8,000 steps a day. That's 2 million steps a year, a distance of about one hundred and fifteen thousand miles in a lifetime for the average person. God puts a special value on feet because of their potential for usefulness. God states "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace." (Romans 10:15) God desires the feet of His children to carry them into opportunities of sharing the gospel of His saving grace. Peter states that these opportunities arise when others see the sparkle of God's hope in a believer- "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. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

It is important however, to recognize that usefulness in this task requires those same feet to conform to the principles of God's Word. Psalms states: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105). Before Christians can have beautiful feet, they must have broken feet, broken from the paths of sin and condemning habits. Otherwise the message that is shared has no credibility. The truth that actions (where we go and what we do) speak louder than our words was cited by God long ago: "a worthless person ... winks with his eyes, speaks with his feet and points with his finger" (Proverbs 6:13). Joseph Aldrich in *Life-Style Evangelism* suggests that the message of the gospel, as a song, must

be carried by every Christian on the music of their life, a life in harmony with God. Therefore, every child of God must ponder carefully the path of their feet, taking only the firm ground of God's direction.

Ask yourself, "Would Jesus be comfortable walking in my foot steps?" To have an effective testimony, believers must confess with David "I thought on my way and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Christians must declare with David "I have refrained my feet from evil ways, that I might keep thy Word."

Christian friend, are your feet fit to be called beautiful? If they are not, confess your sin now. If they are, make some of those miles count for God ... commit to sharing God's grace today.

Personal Notes:

Aug 3

Psalm 92:1-5

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness every night, On an instrument of ten strings, On the lute, And on the harp, With harmonious sound. For You, LORD, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands. O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep.

Psalm 100:1-5

A Psalm of Thanksgiving: Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.

Forgotten Thanksgiving

A man, while travelling in his car, was listening to a taped sermon about the God's path of obedience. So intent was he to follow that path that when the speaker asked everyone to bow in prayer, this driver momentarily forgot where he was and closed his eyes. Imagine the embarrassment of explaining that to an officer if an accident had occurred. It is a very easy thing to be so intensely involved in pursuit of something important that we forget the manner in which we arrive.

Often believers are so wrapped up in the pursuing the meaningful activities of serving Christ that they themselves forget "How they arrived where they are"! Scripture states that "it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." Thankfulness should not only be on the hearts of God's people during the weekend set aside as "Thanksgiving" but every day of the year. Paul reminded the Thessalonians of God's will for every Christian: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

The months of summer are particularly busy with activity-holiday travels, family get-togethers, weddings, and sports events, not to mention the busy church schedule of vacation Bible school, backyard Bible clubs, special socials, day outings and short term mission trips. In all this activity, be sure that as a Child of God by new birth in Christ, you are practicing the priority of praising God with a grateful heart each day. Why not take a moment now and compose a prayer of thanksgiving to God, then offer it up to Him as a sacrifice of praise?

Personal Notes:

Aug 4

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.

Zeal: Monster or Manner

As a young lad Teddy Roosevelt for a time became terrified of the Madison Square Church. When his mother inquired about this sudden fear, all Teddy could say was he didn't want the zeal to get him like it said in the Bible. Further inquiry led Mrs. Roosevelt to the passage recently quoted by the pastor "make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (John 2:16-17). Poor Teddy thought that under some pew or behind some desk the man-eating "zeal monster" was ready to grab its next victim.

Although a humorous story, this does demonstrate the importance of ensuring that our children receive God's truth on their own level of understanding. As parents we must not assume that our children understand, nor can we take the casual attitude that "when they are old enough they will be able to understand and choose for themselves". We no longer live in an environment which affords the luxury of waiting until a convenient time to teach our children the values, ethics and importance of true Christian faith. Our society is 'an anti-God, anti-Truth, anti-moral absolutes world' which is being promoted and propagated by every media conceivable. The children of today are being eaten up with the zeal of having, achieving, partying, a monster with no end to its appetite.

The Bible calls this monster the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (1 John 2). Christ urged His disciples to "suffer the little ones to come unto me". Seeing in the gospels the compelling way Jesus taught the multitudes with parables, stories and down to earth lessons, parents are left not only with God's

command to "train your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord", but are given a wonderful example of how. As Jesus taught with committed time, personal understanding and imaginative illustration, so parents must teach the life satisfying truths of God's Word. With all the "how- to" books available from Christian publishers, parents have more help to meet this urgent need than ever before. May I suggest that each reader visit your local Christian book store and ask for information on available resources for teaching God's truth in the home. Let all Christian parents show the real meaning of "the zeal of the Lord" in our daily lives as well as in our Bible lessons.

Personal Notes:

Aug 5

Malaki 3:6-12

"For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?' "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts; "And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts.

Firstfruit Faith

In days gone by a child's first words were expected to be "Momma" or "Dadda"; today I'm inclined to think that the first words spoken will be "MINE!". It would seem that getting past the me-first mindset is an obstacle right from birth. Perhaps that is why God has set forth the "Principle of Firstfruits" as a basic life pattern for His people of all ages. This principle calls the people of God to "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."(Deuteronomy 6:5-6 NIV), and to do so in the most practical of ways, giving to Him before we take for ourselves!

Although this approach to finances may at first appear risky, in reality, such living by faith secures the promise of God's provision for personal and family needs. This promise is given in the Old Testament and repeated in the New Testament, "Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." (Proverbs 3:9-10 NIV) "But seek first his

kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33 NIV)

The Christian who trusts in the provision of God is free to return to the Lord the very first of income. In so doing, that act of faith is rewarded not only with the security of God's promised care, but with two added blessings. First, true social security is found because God obligates himself to meet the needs of those who live by the principle of firstfruits (provided that sound stewardship is also practiced). This is a social security that will not run out when the government accounts are empty. Second, there is the blessing of turning temporal wealth into eternal value. As one pastor said, the returns are out of this world!

Living by this principle of firstfruits must begin with giving our love first to God. Many Christians have turned from God-first to me-first because they have followed the poor example of the church of Ephesus- "You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." (Revelation 2 NIV) To such the Lord sends this message: "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the first works" (Revelation 2:5 NIV).

Personal Notes:

Aug 6

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.

Blessed Sacrifice

In our "take what you can get" society, it was refreshing to hear of the Ontario community that recently gave away their extra fire engine in response to a need in the Maritimes. God sets a high priority on giving, defining it as a characteristic of true Christianity. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death... If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 John 3:14, 17 NIV). Indeed, salvation itself is founded in God's unconditional love expressed in giving of Himself. "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)

With so much of God's heart wrapped in giving, it is no wonder that the Lord places special blessings upon the principles of giving as defined in scripture. The greatest of these blessings is a sense of security found in trusting God rather than personal strength for provision. This was the privilege of the church at Philippi, they heard of a Paul's desperate need and, in giving, were blessed with this promise: "even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need... I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an

acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:16, 18-19 NIV)

The principle here blessed by God is defined as the "Principle of Sacrifice". Solomon cites this principle in a unique way: "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." (Ecclesiastes 11:1) In the culture of that day, casting the bread upon the water referred to the sowing of grain upon the fields flooded by artesian wells. The grain was referred to as bread because it was drawn from the previous harvest reserves which would normally be ground into flour for bread, the staple diet of the day. In reality, this principle paralleled daily life in that sacrifice was called for - the sacrifice of family provision (grain), and faith was expressed - sowing would produce more grain.

Those who live according to the principle of sacrifice receive a double return, they find the joy of giving: "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35), and the joy of pleasing God: "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16 NIV).

Personal Notes:

Aug 7

1 Samuel 2:27-33

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 honour 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.

The Cost of Complacency

"Do you think ignorance and apathy are the root of society's problems?" asked the reporter in a street interview. "I don't know and I don't care," was the reply! There are times when, even in an attempt to be concealed, we become conspicuously revealed. This is never truer than when applied to our children, who will follow in our footsteps.

The prophet Jeremiah tried to help Israel see this truth and count the cost of sinful indulgences, a price that their children would be sure to bear: "What man is wise enough to understand this? Who has been instructed by the LORD and can explain it? Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no-one can cross? The LORD said, "It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law.

Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them." Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "See, I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water."
(Jeremiah 9:12-15 NIV)

Have you counted the cost of complacency toward sin? Eli did not, and his family suffered great loss (see 1 Samuel 1-4). As high priest in Israel, Eli grew fat and lazy on the proceeds of the position and was lulled into a state of complacency. He overlooked his own poor example and he virtually ignored the reports of his son's wickedness. As a result, contempt toward God grew within his household as a cancerous growth. "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD." (1 Samuel 2:17) So great was Eli's complacency that he even ignored the warning of God: "For I told him that I would judge his family for ever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them." (1 Samuel 3:13 NIV)

Complacency bred contempt. The resulting judgement of God was costly to Eli's family and to the nation. "So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died." (1 Samuel 4:10-11 NIV)

Our children will follow in our footsteps! Where we drift, our children will be directed, where we take liberty, our children will take licence. Complacency will breed contempt and the Lord will judge accordingly. "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just" (John 5:30 NIV). Have you counted the cost?

Personal Notes:

Aug 8

Proverbs on Pride

Pr 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.

Pr 11:2 When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.

Pr 13:10 By pride comes nothing but strife, But with the well-advised is wisdom.

Pr 14:3 In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, But the lips of the wise will preserve them.

Pr 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pr 29:23 A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honour.

The Fall of Pride

I have grown accustomed to the fact that according to my two daughters, I do not know how to dress. It would seem that my favourite green tie just doesn't look as good with my brown suit as it does with my teal! As a rule, my girls are reluctant to be seen in public with me unless I present myself for final approval. Although I do love the attention, there are certain colours and clothes that are not compatible. As a matter of fact, life is full of things that "don't fit together". To go through life without sorting out and accepting the incompatibilities can produce great misery, especially in the realm of Christian life.

The apostle Paul, after presenting the basic tenants of salvation: "the receiving of the gift of God's righteousness by faith" as recorded in Romans 3:21-26, shares those things that do not fit together with true salvation. He declares that "PRIDE" is completely incompatible- "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." (Romans 3:27-28 NIV)

Here Paul shares three reasons for pride's incompatibility with salvation. The first is salvation's privilege: "by faith alone". This privilege of the gospel, "saved by faith alone" is the very heartbeat of the epistle to the Romans: "If, in fact, Abraham was

justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:2-3 NIV)

The second reason for pride's incompatibility is salvation's pronouncement: "a man is justified". This is a term that identifies the believer as one who is declared to be righteous before God's Holy standard in the eyes of the Father. This is so because the Christian stands in the righteousness of Jesus, having the guilt and punishment for personal sin borne by the Son of God on the cross of Calvary. Jesus cried out in His agony "it is finished", indication that the debt of sin was fully paid.

Finally, Pride is incompatible with the Christian life because of salvation's preclusion: "apart from the deeds of the law". The great Reformation movement began as a return to this Bible truth: "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:5 NIV). No amount of good deeds will ever restore a man or woman to God.

Pride is incompatible because salvation is the great humiliater. The believer initially comes to Christ in the humility of sin and repentance of heart, and the believer continues to grow spiritually with Christ in that same character of humility. To take up pride again is to reduce the Christian to an incompatible servant of God. That's like a green tie with the brown suit.

Personal Notes:

Aug 9

Colossians 3:8-15

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, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

The Passing of Prejudice

In a day when racial violence throws whole countries into butchery while the rest of the world turns its back, and when world organizations meet to discuss equal rights in a country that by law will cause the abortion of a percentage of female unborn, it is good to be reminded that God is no respecter of persons. In other words, God is not prejudiced, nor does He sanction discrimination on the basis of sex, creed, colour, intelligence, or race.

As a matter of fact, as God looks upon mankind prior to personal salvation, He sees them all alike: "There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. (Romans 3:10-11 NIV). Without apology the scriptures declare man incapable of finding approval before God by birth or by deeds: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23 NIV)

What's more important is that upon salvation (new life in Christ by faith - see John 3), any manner of prejudice is incompatible with the Christian walk. In Romans, Paul not only denounced pride, but also denounced prejudice: "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by

faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith." (Romans 3:29-30 NIV) Here Paul states that racial bias and religious bias are excluded from the gift of salvation; they are incompatible with God's grace.

This scripture teaches that justification (being declared righteous before God by faith) is a great equalizer. In coming to Christ for eternal life, there are no "betters"; in growing in Christ, there are no "betters". In practical terms, Christians should ask of themselves, "Is there any believer that I would not share a meal with? Is there any person that I would not reach out a helping hand to in time of need? Placing people on any scale of response ("too good" or "not good enough") reduces relationships to the philosophy of the cults which teach "progressive steps of perfection." Such a view is incompatible with Christ!

This is not to say that Christians should embrace any and every lifestyle; Paul also said "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people." (Romans 16:17-18 NIV)

Nevertheless, prejudice is always incompatible with God's gift of salvation and must not be a part of the believer's life. "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism" (James 2:1 NIV).

Personal Notes:

Aug 10

Romans 4:1-8

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

The Preclusion of Presumption

Ben Patterson, in *Waiting*, describes his Mount Lyell climbing experience as a class in faith. After starting the adventure with two experienced climbers, he found himself dragging behind. In an effort to catch up he decided to take a short cut. This resulted in his becoming trapped in a cul-de-sac of rock, looking down a sheer slope of ice.

When the other climbers finally found Ben, their instructions to him were a call to faith: "Ben, you must step out from where you are and put your foot where the first foothold is. When your foot touches it, without hesitation swing your other foot across and land it on the next step... as you step across, do not lean into the mountain! If anything, lean out a bit. Otherwise, your feet may fly out from under you". For Ben, that small step across while leaning out, was giant step of faith.

In a similar fashion, the world of mankind seeks to take its own shortcut to God. By means of obedience to rules, conformity to tradition, or even self denial, mankind believes that God's favour can be won. Paul, in his summary of the essence of salvation, denounces any manner or measure of presumptuous approach to God: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Old Testament Commandments to Israel)" (Romans 3:28 NIV).

This by no means denies the place of the law as Paul goes on to say: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we establish the law." (Romans 3:31). As God's expression of His Holy standard, the law convinces mankind of sins presence and power. All of man's best efforts will not succeed in keeping the standard of the law. Christ put the law into perspective: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (Matthew 5 NIV)

As much as the law reveals the inability of man to match God's holy standard, the law is established in salvation. It confirms daily the need for God's own provision. The Sacrificial Lamb to take away sin. Salvation is the great vindicator. God's Law reveals sin and man's helplessness, and establishes the sacrifice of God's own son as the only path to God for man. The Law affirms Christ's sacrifice as sufficient by virtue of His resurrection and points to the potential of new life in the Living Saviour: "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 Corinthians 15:55-57 NIV) Through the gift of salvation, the law cries out to man "saved by grace and kept by grace". Presumption is incompatible with salvation.

Personal Notes:

Aug 11

Psalm 55:16-22

As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many against me. God will hear, and afflict them, Even He who abides from of old. Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God. He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; He has broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

Our Spiritual Fuse

"We never have more than we can bear. The present hour we are always able to endure. As our day, so is our strength. If the trails of many years were gathered into one, they would overwhelm us; therefore, in pity to our little strength, He (God) sends first one, and then another, then removes both, and lays on a third, heavier, perhaps, than either; but all is so wisely measured to our strength that the bruised reed is never broken. We do not enough look at our trials i n this continuous and successive view. Each one is sent to teach us something, and altogether they have a lesson which is beyond the power of any to teach alone" (H.E.Manning).

Such is the promise of God to His own. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV). Like a spiritual fuse, the faithfulness of God toward His children guarantees that nothing need overcome! In sorrow, in sickness, in poverty, in pain, -God is faithful. As a perfect steward of the lives of His children, the Master Planner holds back the forces of wickedness, restricts the power of evil, and sets a boundary on the dilemma of circumstance, and in doing so makes yet another great promise of His faithfulness: "And we know 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).

When God formed and filled creation with each of the six day's purpose, He repeatedly declared that "It was good." Indeed, as Milton expressed, before sin entered, it was paradise. By this same description, the ways of God among His people, fulfilling each moment's purpose, work together as "good". With such guarantees from the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, Almighty God, who would not want to trust the affairs of this life as well as the next to Him? In such a context of committed care, these words of Jesus find their greatest appeal. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:25-26 NIV)

Consequently, Paul can be very forward in his appeal. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV).

Personal Notes:

Aug 12

Psalm 46:1-11

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Streams from God

One of the greatest mysteries of salvation is the truth of God's presence within the believer. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God," (1 Cor. 6:19). A popular chorus states that the God who is big enough to make the universe is small enough to live within our heart, how true!

David knew this truth as a source of comfort, expressed in Psalm 46, where God is likened to a river and His people the city of His dwelling: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy [place] of the tabernacles of the most High" (Psalms 46:4).

Consider for a moment the streams which flow from the living God to make His people glad. There is the "cleansing stream" which flowed from Calvary, the stream of the blood of Christ to cleanse the repentant believer from sin. To those who have turned to Christ for forgiveness and eternal life, this stream gladdens the heart with the promise. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to

forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Another stream that flows from God is the "sustaining stream" of His grace. Paul discovered this in a troubled time of life when sickness threatened his ministry. After pleading for healing, the Lord reminded Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." (2 Corinthians 12:9). God's sufficient grace is a source of joy to God's children who, having faced the trials of life have experienced the help of God so clearly promised in His word. "Fear thou not; for I [am] with thee: be not dismayed; for I [am] thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

There are many other streams that time and space prevent being mentioned; however, one that cannot be overlooked is the "surpassing stream" of His love. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:35, 37).

Of this river, Spurgeon has written: "Divine grace like a smoothly flowing, fertilizing, full, and never-failing river, yields refreshment and consolation to believers. This is the river of the water of life... It is no boisterous ocean, but a placid stream, it is not stayed in its course by earthquakes or crumbling mountains, it follows its serene course without disturbance. Happy are they who know from their own experience that there is such a river of God."

Are you thirsty for the waters of this stream? Christ invites all to partake: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).

Personal Notes:

Aug 13

Colossians 2: 4-12

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Stop and Think

The title of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's acceptance speech when presented the Nobel Prize was "Men Have Forgotten God". David Noebel, in his book *Understanding the Times* suggests that Solzhenitsyn's title is "the cry from Eastern Europe." Might we also say that this should be the cry of America, and probably would be, if men and women would shake loose from the cords of cultural stereotype and thought.

The cry in North America appears to be "adhere to the fashionable, stick to the acceptable, live beyond the affordable, and by no means think about the inevitable!" Yet our society is hardly unique, as a matter of fact, when evaluated from the standpoint of "religion", it compares remarkably parallel to that of Rome around the time of the apostle Paul.

In Paul's day there were two popular world views evident, each had little more desire than to "philosophize". While in Rome, Paul sought an audience- "A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him... All the Athenians and the

foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas." (Acts 17:18, 21 NIV).

Paul's opening address cuts to the very heart of that society and ours- "Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious... I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown, I am going to proclaim to you." (Acts 17:22-23 NIV). North America now, as Rome then, is filled with religious people to whom God is yet unknown.

Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6). People without Christ (Salvation - see John 14:7) cannot know God. People without Christ's Truth (Scripture - see Matthew 4:4) do not have a workable world view, as Charles Baker discovered: "Idealistic philosophy denies the existence of matter, holding that only the mind is reality. Materialism holds just the opposite extreme view... Pantheism denies the transcendence of God and the deist denies His immanence... Secularism places all the emphasis on the present life; fanaticism ignores the present and concerns itself only with the life to come. Buddhism would suppress all human desire; Hedonism would do nothing but fulfil human desire. Manicheanism held that the human body is evil; Hinduism teaches caste; Confucianism ignores God and the future. The Bible on the other hand, brings all these extremes into sharp focus and presents a well-rounded, common-sense world view."

Solzhenitsyn testified as to the results of godless philosophy, confirming the old Bible truth: "For as a man thinketh in his heart, so [is] he" (Proverbs 23:7). The book *Children at Risk* (Dobson & Bauer) suggests that a Civil War of Values is raging today in North America, a war for the hearts and minds of people. How we think is of critical concern, life is at stake! So dear reader, how do you think?

Personal Notes:

Aug 14

Philippians 4:8-14

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

Life's Transitions

One of the most exciting transitional times of life occurs when young people separate from parents (some for the first time) to pursue college or university education. Although this time is important, it can also be stressful due to the uncertainty of change. The question arises, "What is the best way to face life's great transitions?"

The apostles faced a stressful transitional time when Jesus announced that He would be leaving them. In their concern, the Lord gave great advice for facing life's transitions: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me (John 14:1 NIV). The first thing Jesus said was to trust in Him. As Creator and Lord of the universe, and as the Son of God who loved mankind enough to die on the cross in our place, He promises to care for all who will put their trust in Him. Therefore, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5: 7) Facing life's transitions is best done by knowing God personally by placing our faith in Him. In life's transitions, people should also know God dependently. Jesus went on to say: "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). To know God dependently means to rely on His Word for all of life's matters, it is to be dependant on the wisdom of God as revealed in the Bible for life's values and choices big or small. God's Word is the only trustworthy guide to life! Those who put their trust in God, can find direction- "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV).

For this reason, knowing God personally, and knowing God dependently must be followed by knowing God intellectually. Jesus said: "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:25-26 NIV). While facing the stress of imminent separation, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead to indwell each believer. The Holy Spirit's primary ministry among believers is to bring understanding of the Word: "the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him" (1 John 2:27 NIV). To know God intellectually is to do our part and study the Bible, trusting in God to do His part and teach.

Whether going to school, changing jobs or facing medical reality, transitions are often tough. The best way to face them is with God. Do you know Him personally, dependently, and intellectually?

Personal Notes:

Aug 15

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.

On Being a Rich Kid

Nathan Rothschild was supposedly the richest financier in London in the early nineteenth century. Once, it is told, he paid his cabby fare and left a modest tip, upon which the driver thanked him but said: "You know, Mr. Rothschild, your daughter gives me a much larger tip than that." "That's all right for her", responded Mr. Rothschild, "She has a rich father!"

If generosity is based upon the wealth of a father, then Christians should be the most generous people in the world, because their "Father in Heaven" owns all, as the chorus states: "He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine, He owns the rivers and the rocks and rills, the sun and stars that shine; Wonderful riches more than tongue can tell, He is my father so there mine as well! He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, I know that HE will care for me!"

This chorus expresses the secret to why Christians can be generous, not just because the Father in heaven owns all, but because the believer has the privilege of the promise of God's own care. This is a care that has no limit in time nor resources. God's promised care is not an insurance policy that expires with time, nor is there any danger of its bankruptcy. As Jeremiah discovered, "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).

James stated this in more general terms: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). David too, after a long life, acknowledged the extent of God's care- "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalms 37:25).

Lest the Christian should become callously expectant or carelessly indifferent to God's care, it should be noted that there is a condition involved in its guarantee: Christ said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things (the necessities of life) shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). The Christian cannot claim the promise of provision unless the righteousness of God takes first place in life. Without this, there is no assurance of God's provision, and no sense of God's care. Perhaps this is why so many believers are tight fisted with their wealth?

In any event, those who truly look to God as provider, being aware of His bountiful care and provision, have the privilege of yet another blessing: "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Does your generosity reveal the wealth of your father?

Personal Notes:

Aug 16

Joshua 1:3-9

"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. "From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Reading the Bible

There is probably much room for argument regarding which text of Scripture is most obviously forgotten among the people of God today, but my choice would be Matthew 4:4: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). I say this because Christians, for the most part, have forsaken the reading of scripture as a past time.

Two generations ago, (before the sweeping intrusion of television and computers), even though the work week was sixty hours long instead of the current forty, more time was spent in reading God's Word. A recent survey conducted at Christian colleges across the United States indicated that the average Christian family spends three to four hours a week in "God time". This includes prayer, church services and personal study of the Bible. Most spend that each evening watching television.

Today, believers have to be reminded of Christ's exhortation to "Search the Scriptures" (John 5:39). C. H. Spurgeon elaborates on this: "The Greek word here rendered "search" signifies a strict, close, diligent search, such as men make when they are seeking gold, or hunters when they are in earnest after game. We must not rest content with having given a superficial reading to a chapter or two, but with the candle of the Spirit we must deliberately seek out the hidden meaning of the word. Holy Scripture requires searching - - much of it can only be learned by careful study. No man who merely skims the book of God can profit thereby; we must dig and mine until we obtain the hid treasure."

Reading the Bible is vital for every Christian. How can we learn about God or grow spiritually if we do not spend time studying the Book in which He has made Himself known to us? Taking a few minutes each day to read a chapter is a good way to start. But we should also block out extended periods of time for exploring God's Word and reflecting on what He is saying to us. The importance of taking time to appreciate beauty is illustrated by a quote from the National Geographic magazine about Carl Sharsmith, an 81 year-old guide in Yosemite National Park: "Carl was back at his tent quarters after a long afternoon with tourists... A lady tourist had hit him with a question where it hurt. "I've only got an hour to spend at Yosemite," she declared. "What should I do? Where should I go?" The old naturalist-interpreter-ranger finally found voice to reply. "Ah, lady, only an hour." He repeated it slowly. "I suppose that if I had only an hour to spend at Yosemite, I'd just walk over there by the river and sit down and cry." A whole lifetime is not long enough to appreciate fully the beauty and learning and value of the Bible. That's why we must take time to study its truths and make them real in our lives.

Personal Notes:

Aug 17

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, Even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, The excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, The excellency of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, There shall be grass with reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Dispelling Fear

Michael Pritchard once stated, "Fear is a little darkroom where negatives are developed." In our world of ever growing uncertainty, many find that little dark room taking over their lives. Fear of want, fear of abandonment, fear of failure, fear of emptiness, fear of loneliness, fear of future, fear of the past, fear of strangers, fear of neighbours, all manner of fears hold a tight grip on the hearts of Canadians.

A survey among teens reports the following fears according to percentages: nuclear war - 57%, parents dying - 54%, failing in school - 44%, dying - 43%, having a car accident - 34%, loneliness - 33%, not having a boyfriend/girlfriend - 30%, being beaten/injured - 29%, disease - 28%, rejection - 28%. Fear predominates!

In May 1995, Randy Reid was welding on top of a nearly completed water tower outside Chicago. Reid unhooked his safety

gear to reach for some pipes when a metal cage slipped and bumped the scaffolding he stood on. The scaffolding tipped, and Reid lost his balance. He fell 110 feet, landing face down on a pile of dirt, just missing rocks and construction debris.

A fellow worker called 911. When paramedics arrived, they found Reid conscious, moving, and complaining of a sore back. Apparently, the fall didn't cost Reid his sense of humor. As paramedics carried him on a backboard to the ambulance, Reid had one request: "Don't drop me." (Doctors later said Reid came away from the accident with just a bruised lung.)

Sometimes Christians resemble Randy. God protects us from harm in a 110-foot fall, but we're still fearful about three-foot heights. (Greg Asimakoupoulos, Naperville, Illinois). This should not be the case! Christians need only to look at the context of Isaiah 12:2 to realize that God is their security in fear: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2). By resting completely upon Him and taking His promises at face value, we can drive out the paralyzing fear that hinders our effectiveness. The biblical antidote always works: "I will trust, and not be afraid."

Emerson said, "Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain." You defeat worry and fear by filling your mind with the certain faith that you can do it. That is the best way to get rid of the worry and fear about those many things that are bothering you. Get out of yourself and do something about it, realizing that your Heavenly Father says to you, "For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'"

When the darkroom of fear threatens, a reminder of God's special promise to His children is in order. "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). When my children occasionally came to me with their fears, I reminded them of this simple verse- "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalms 56:3). Faith in God is the answer to fear.

Personal Notes:

Aug 18

Romans 5:1-10

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.

In the Nick of Time

The news reported an accident involving a Brinks truck and a van of firemen. The van with emergency lights flashing and sirens wailing, struck the Brinks truck, the driver of which was unaware of the oncoming emergency vehicle. The van flipped over and caught fire. A pedestrian pulled one fireman out of the van who, along with the pedestrian rescued the remaining fireman from the burning vehicle in the nick of time, arriving at the curb as the van exploded in flames.

As the radio reported the accident with vivid detail, I was captivated by that phrase "in the nick of time". It reminded me of another rescue attempt for all of mankind: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Ro. 5:6).

Every human being stands perpetually on the brink of disaster. As a consequence of personal sin, all people stand justifiably, on the threshold of an eternity without the presence and goodness of God. Christ described that existence as a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, a place of eternal death (eternal separation from God).

Jonathan Edwards in his great sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" stated that precarious position with these words: "Consider the fearful danger you are in! It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath that you are held over in the hand of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against the many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder".

There are many who would deny that this is a true presentation of man's future or of God's character, but to do so is to deny Scripture itself: "For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire" (Isaiah 66:15).

It is with this picture of God's consuming wrath in mind, that our text expresses its greatest wonder- "in due time Christ died for (in the place of) the ungodly". To this end Paul reminds us of the great love of God: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). On the cross of Calvary, Jesus, the Holy Son of God, suffered the wrath of the Holy Father in our place. The fierce anger of God's Holy character toward sin was poured out upon the Son. Because He took our place, He alone offers forgiveness and eternal life to those who will believe: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).

Will you allow Him to save you now, "in the nick of time"?

Personal Notes:

Aug 19

Numbers 14:27-35

"How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. "Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: 'The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. 'Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. 'But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. 'But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. 'And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. 'According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. 'I the LORD have spoken this; I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.'"

Murmuring Hearts

Comedienne Elayne Booster made this comment: "My ancestors wandered lost in the wilderness for 40 years because even in biblical times, men would not stop to ask directions." As much as this statement represents the humorous reluctance of people to seek direction, that was not Israel's problem. Direction, Israel had; joyful obedience is what they lacked. As a matter of fact, the real reason for the 40-year wanderings has a more common parallel today. Israel was judged to wander aimlessly because they perpetually murmured against God.

As anyone who works in the service industries will tell you, murmuring is at an all-time high. We are told by social analysts that people are frustrated by crowded schedules, pressing deadlines, unfulfilled expectations and the ongoing pace of life. Frustration is followed by impatience (city traffic will vouch for that), impatience breeds rudeness, and rudeness cultivates murmuring.

As with Israel, God offers mankind at large an answer to this dilemma in human relationships. His answer is not to remove people from pressing circumstances, but to promise provision, strength and peace in all trials. This answer is found by following God's clear directions for life.

This means first establishing a relationship with Him through Jesus: "But as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). It means secondly, making His purposes the focus of daily living: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Thirdly, replace worry with prayer by committing the uncertainties and stress to God, thanking Him for His control: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). Fourthly, this means trusting in God's promised provision: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). And finally, this means choosing to be contented with the path God chooses for us to serve Him in. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

The person who looks outside of circumstances - to God, for life's needs, will have no difficulty rising above life's difficulties, with God's strength, in response to life's relationships. Rather than murmur, the child of God can "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" and "let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 10:25, 13:1).

Israel murmured about missing their spice of life (the leeks and garlic of Egypt), while God was promising them the sustenance of life itself (the milk and honey of Canaan). Dear reader, don't make that same mistake!

Personal Notes:

Aug 20

John 6:4-13

Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

Life's Song of Blessing

Ruth Stafford Peale submitted this story to *Leadership Magazine* about Paderewski, the great Polish pianist: "It seems a mother took her young son, eight or nine years old, to a concert by Paderewski. They sat close to the stage, where the curtain was up, revealing the grand piano. Paderewski was in the wings; it wasn't quite time to start.

The mother turned to speak to an acquaintance behind her. As she did, the little boy wriggled out of his seat, ran up the steps to the stage, sat down and began to play "Chopsticks" with all his might. The mother was appalled. The audience gasped as Paderewski himself strode onto the stage.

The maestro smiled, sat down on the piano bench with the little boy, whispered to him to continue and then, putting both arms around the little figure began to improvise a soft but brilliant accompaniment to the childish music. He kept it up until the audience, charmed and fascinated, burst into applause."

This story reminds me of another lad that did what he could before "The Master". "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"

And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would." (John 6:11). With the willingness of one lad, Christ fed a multitude of people.

God desires to make the lives of every Christian a song of beauty and purpose. Like the lad who gave his lunch over to "The Master", his sacrifice was multiplied into a feast. What Paderewski illustrates and Christ demonstrates is the spiritual principle of surrender. As believers surrender their possessions, their plans, yes, even their lives to God's complete use, God adds his own resources and multiplies the blessing.

The Christian may only be able to offer "Chopsticks", but the Maestro can turn it into a beautiful expression of loving care and rich blessing. Church history is filled with true stories of such surrender and multiplied blessing, whether it be the passion of adventure surrendered to God as the case of Livingston, or the ability to captivate an audience with oral mastery, surrendered to God as with Spurgeon, God takes the surrendered life and multiplies the blessing.

It matters not what talent or gift, what possessions or plans, God is interested in availability, not ability. For the Christian who desires life to be made into a song of blessing there is only one path to take- the path of surrender! As Avis Christiansen wrote: "Only one life to offer, Jesus my Lord and King; Only one tongue to praise Thee, and of thy mercy sing; Only one heart's devotion - Saviour O may it be, Consecrated alone to Thy matchless glory, Yielded fully to Thee." Will you let Christ turn your life into a song?

Personal Notes:

Aug 21

Romans 8:10-18

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

A Sense of Belonging

The news coverage of a hospital child swap, confirmed years later by DNA testing, will undoubtedly result in a rush of inquiries from fearful parents as well as insecure adults who "have always wondered" why they are different! It would appear that to have life is not enough, people must know they belong.

The beauty of the Christian life is that the need to know "I belong" is an ever-present blessing of God's work of grace. This assurance is an upholding strength, found in the affirmation of the indwelling Spirit, confirming that believers are indeed the children of God: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:15-16).

The apostle relates this affirmation directly to the ability to approach present suffering with a focus on the hope of glory. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). This assurance of belonging is truly a blessing of grace. It is

a tangible hope that transports the believer beyond emotional and physical trauma.

Whether through troubles or in difficulties, when feelings become man's focus, and the danger of allowing feelings alone to lead is apparent, God's grace intervenes. It is the privilege of believers, through the ministry of the indwelling Spirit, to have feelings of fear replaced with a sense of belonging which brings joy and hope. Martin Lloyd Jones suggests: "...the highest assurance of all results from "the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God". When that happens you will be overwhelmed by your feelings, you will be lost in the most glorious experience that you have ever had. This is essentially experimental, and so to tell people that they can take this, of all blessings, by faith and not to worry about their feelings, is sheer confusion of thought and a denial of the teaching of the Scriptures about the highest and the greatest experience possible to a human being."

It is only as feelings are rooted in, and directed by, God's truth as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, that the believer can be freed to be again led by God's word. When the assurance of belonging to the sovereign God of the universe becomes the living reality of a person, peace prevails and a deepened desire to draw close to God overcomes the human tendency to panic.

As George Robertson wrote in his well-known hymn, the sense of belonging is a sustaining assurance to the believer. "Loved with everlasting love, Led by grace that love to know, Gracious Spirit from above, Thou hast taught me it is so! O, this full and perfect peace, O this transport all divine! in a love that cannot cease, I am His , and He is mine."

Personal Notes:

Aug 22

Solomon on Anger

Pr 14:17 A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of wicked intentions is hated.

Pr 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Pr 15:18 A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention.

Pr 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Pr 19:11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory is to overlook a transgression.

Pr 20:2 The wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion; Whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own life.

Pr 21:14 A gift in secret pacifies anger, And a bribe behind the back, strong wrath.

Pr 21:19 Better to dwell in the wilderness, Than with a contentious and angry woman.

Pr 22:8 He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow, And the rod of his anger will fail.

Pr 22:24 Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go,

Pr 25:23 The north wind brings forth rain, And a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.

Pr 27:4 Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, But who is able to stand before jealousy?

Pr 29:22 An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.

Conquering Anger

The fact that ours is a society plagued with anger is evident in the violence in the home, on the highway and even in the air with recent "air rage" incidents among airline companies. Anger has become epidemic! Erwin Lutzer, in *Managing Your Emotions* writes, "We all know that Alexander the Great conquered the world. But what few people know is that this mighty general could not conquer himself. Cletus, a dear friend of Alexander's and a general in his army, became intoxicated and ridiculed the emperor in front of his men. Blinded by anger, quick as lightning, Alexander snatched a spear from the hand of a soldier and hurled it at Cletus. Though he had only intended to scare the drunken general, his aim was true and the spear took the life of his childhood friend."

God says much about anger. Scripture indicates that anger toward sin is appropriate; God is angry with the wicked (Psalm 7:11), and Jesus was angry with the Pharisees (Mark 3:5). But misplaced anger is sin: "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:19-20 NIV).

Man's first bout with misplaced anger saw Cain murder his brother (Genesis 4:3-8). This passage demonstrates that misplaced anger is an expression of man's sinful nature. Paul elaborates, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; HATRED, DISCORD, JEALOUSY, FITS OF RAGE..." (Galatians 5:19-20 NIV).

As such, victory over "fits of rage" is found in the conquering of the sinful nature. This is only possible by first having faith in Jesus who "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 5 NIV). This is possible by secondly living in close fellowship and obedience to God through the study of His Word and the leading of His Spirit: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16), "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

Psychiatrist Richard Walters writes: "People will be murdered today because of someone's anger. Others will die from physical ailments resulting from or aggravated by their angry feelings. Many people die in anger-related auto accidents, while others carry out the angriest act of all, suicide. Countless relationships die little by little as resentment gnaws away at the foundations of love and trust. Anger is a devastating force, and its consequences should sicken us."

The fires of anger that rage in the human heart can be quenched by a ministry of God's grace so that Paul's exhortation is achievable: "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26 NIV). Friend, conquer anger before it conquers you.

Personal Notes:

Aug 23

Micah 6:6-8

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Turning Duty into Desire

I read about a little girl who experienced a major breakthrough in her life when she learned to tie her own shoes. Instead of excitement, she was overcome by tears.

Her father asked, "Why are you crying?"

"I have to tie my shoes," she said.

"You just learned how. It isn't that hard, is it?"

"I know," she wailed, "but I'm going to have to do it for the rest of my life."

Christian responsibility is often looked upon with the same attitude- "O what a burden!" Now it is true that Jesus set a high standard of responsibility among His followers. "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

Jesus called His disciples (those who would believe in Him, learn of Him and follow Him) to three specific responsibilities. They were challenged to self-denial which, in itself, is perceived as a great burden. They were challenged to make a choice - to "take up" the cross. This was the choice of involvement, a personal decision to become active in the cause of Christ. The cross was their own, a personal responsibility. Paul addressed this personal work: "For we [each individual believer] are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10 NIV). There is no such thing as a Christian without a personal "cross" to bear.

Finally, Jesus challenged His disciples to the exercise of surrender, "follow me" He said. The emphasis of the language means to continue in following and suggests an attitude of perpetual surrender to the Lordship of Jesus: "No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62 NIV).

With these challenges before the believer, why then is it wrong to view them as an unwanted burden? Why is it inappropriate to mourn "O what a burden?" The answer lies in two realities. There is the invitation of Christ to let Him carry the burden and do this work in us: "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 11:29 NIV). For those who accept the invitation there is the joy of God's power operating in the human life, bringing change, developing discipline, incorporating ability. In essence, Jesus does in us what he asks of us: ".he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6 NIV).

There is also the love of Christ "shed abroad" in the believer's heart, turning duty into beauty as Phillips Brooks has said: "Duty makes us do things well; but love makes us do them beautifully." It is here that the burden of duty is transformed into the passion of pleasing the Lord.

Personal Notes:

Aug 24

Psalm 10:12-18

Arise, O LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble. Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, "You will not require an account." But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, To repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man; Seek out his wickedness until You find none. The LORD is King forever and ever; The nations have perished out of His land. LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear, To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, That the man of the earth may oppress no more.

Weighing a Prayer!

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). This promise of God's provision was never more evident than in the following true story from *The Lifeline*. "The only man who ever tried to weigh a prayer was the owner of a grocery store. It was the week before Christmas after the war. A tired looking woman came into the store and asked him for enough food to make up a Christmas dinner for her children. He asked her how much she could afford to spend.

She answered, "My husband was killed in the war; I have nothing to offer but a little prayer."

A grocery store could not be run like a bread line. So he said, "Write it on paper," and turned about his business. To his surprise, the woman plucked a piece of paper out of her bosom and handed it to him saying, "I did that during the night."

What would he do with it, what could he say? Then an idea came to him. He placed the paper, without even reading it, on the weight scale and said, "We shall see how much food this is worth."

To his astonishment the scale would not go down when he put a loaf of bread on the other side. To his confusion it would not go down though he kept on adding food. His face got red and he became flustered. So finally he said, "Well, that's all the scales will hold. Here's a bag. You'll have to pack it yourself. I'm busy."

With a little sob, she took the bag and started packing in the food, wiping her eyes on her sleeves every time her arm was free to do so. He tried not to look, but he could not help seeing that he had given her a pretty big bag and that it was not quite full. So he tossed a large cheese down the counter, but he did not say anything; nor did he see the timid smile of grateful understanding which glistened in her moist eyes at this final betrayal of the grocer's crusty exterior.

When the woman had gone, he went to look at the scales, scratching his head and shaking it in puzzlement. Then he found the solution. The scales were broken. The grocer is an old man now. His hair is white. But he still scratches it in the same place and shakes it slowly back and forth with the same puzzled expression. He never saw the woman again. And, come to think of it, he had never seen her before either. Yet for the rest of his life he remembered her better than any other woman in the world and thought of her more often. He knew it had not been just his imagination, for he still had the slip of paper upon which the woman's prayer had been written. "Please. Lord, give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11).

Have you room in your heart to share with a needy family?
You may be God's answer to a weighty prayer!

Personal Notes:

Aug 25

Mark 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. "And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. "But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. "The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' "So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' "And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. "So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 'Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Joyful Forgiveness

Before coming to power, Louis XII of France had been cast into prison. When he became king, he was urged to seek revenge. Instead, he prepared a scroll on which he listed all who had perpetrated crimes against him. Behind every man's name he placed a cross in red ink. Then the king explained, "The cross which I drew beside each name was not a sign of punishment, but a pledge of forgiveness extended for the sake of the crucified Saviour, who upon His cross forgave His enemies and prayed for them."

One of the greatest privileges of knowing Christ as personal Saviour, after the joy of knowing the forgiveness of God, is enjoying the God-given ability to truly forgive and be forgiven by others. How many marriages could be saved, how many jobs could be kept,

how many relationships could be maintained, how many friends could be spared, if only man could learn the genuineness of these simple words: "I am sorry" and "You are forgiven."!

Everyone has a regrettable past. Lord Byron, the English poet, once wrote, "No hand can make the clock strike for me the hours that are past." Marjorie Holmes once stated, "Oh, to have an eraser that would wipe out painful memories. Not so much of the times when we've been hurt, but those stabbing memories of the times when we've hurt others."

Yet in Christ there is a way to restored relationships, it is the path of forgiveness. "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:21-22 NIV), "So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4 NIV).

The spirit of forgiveness is extended in the same fashion that God extends His forgiveness to us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness must address the deeper matters of feelings: "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 NIV).

Charles Wolfe has said, "Those who would avoid the despair of their sinfulness by staying far from God find they have also missed the forgiving grace of God." That grace of God not only secures a relationship with God as His child for eternity (John 1:12), but transforms a heart, equipping it to resolve the most painful relationship struggles with fellow man. To this end God exhorts the believer to "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Ephesians 5 NIV).

Personal Notes:

Aug 26

Luke 12:15-21

And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The "I" Problem

It has been said that the smallest package in the world is a person all wrapped up in themselves. Considering the media commercial focus on self, it would appear that our society enjoys small packages. How big is your 'I'? I don't mean the eye of your vision, I mean the 'I' of your conversation. Christ spoke of a rich man who said "I am rich, I will store my wealth and I will take it easy." God called this man a fool. He was so wrapped up in himself that he took no thought of God. His 'I' problem resulted in eternal death. The rich man demonstrates what Matthew 12:34 says "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh." In other words "That which captivates the heart controls the speech."

John the Baptist, unlike the rich man, was captivated by Christ. Looking upon the Lord he declared "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." He accepted Christ as the Son of God who came to bear the sins of man. Not only did he place his faith in Christ as His Saviour, He also spent his life proclaiming Christ. Yes, John experienced what Christ spoke of when he said "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly."

John spoke from the abundance of his heart when he said "Christ must increase but I must decrease." Friend, don't let an 'I' problem result in your spiritual death. "Set your mind on the things

above, not on the things that are on the earth." Accept Christ as Saviour and let your whole conversation, your life and your lips, proclaim His love. Let us rise up with the Psalmist and shout:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

His love endures for ever.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures for ever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures for ever.

To him who alone does great wonders,

His love endures for ever (Psalms 136:1-4 NIV).

Personal Notes:

Aug 27

Ephesians 4:17-24

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The War of the Mind

The average brain, weighing about 3 pounds, contains 12 billion cells, each of which is connected to 10,000 other brain cells, totalling 120 trillion brain connections, supervises everything you do, from the involuntary beat of the heart to the conscious decisions of life. Most scientists agree that although we cannot consciously control all the functions of our brain, most people could regulate far more of them than they realize. One thing is certain: What you see, what you hear, and the way you think (your philosophy of life) are the most significant influences on your life. (Tim LaHaye in *The Battle for the Mind*).

God has said that as a man thinks in his heart, so he is! (Proverbs 23:7). Indeed, a man is literally what he thinks, his character being the sum total of all his thoughts. As James Allen states: "Act is the blossom of thought, and joy and suffering are the fruits, thus does a man garner in the sweet and bitter fruitage of his own husbandry." So critical to man's character, activity, and actions is his thought-life, that the apostle Paul purposed to submit his thoughts to the authority of Christ: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV).

Our thought life is a spiritual battle ground. When Peter tried to dissuade the Lord from the cross, Jesus reprimanded Him with these severe words: "Get thee behind me Satan." Peter rejected the thought of Christ dying, and immediately became an agent of Satan. The rich young ruler could not entertain the thought of giving up his wealth and left Christ sad and eternally separated from God. The successful farmer thought life was a breeze, he had full barns and a comfortable life, his thoughts never turned to eternity. As a consequence, God called him a fool! With the lack of moral integrity of television programs, movies, and magazines, and with the ease of access to internet pornography, the Christian today must follow with great care, Paul's example and comply with God's standard of purity of mind- "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things" (Philippians 4:8 NIV).

"Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armoury of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself; he also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace. By the right choice and true application of thought, man ascends to the Divine Perfection; by the abuse and wrong application of thought, he descends below the level of the beast. Between these two extremes are all the grades of character, and man is their maker and master" (James Allen in *As A Man Thinketh*).

Christian friend, watch over those 12 billion cells with care, they can be a vast ally or a formidable enemy.

Personal Notes:

Aug 28

Psalm 119:9-16

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You! Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes! With my lips I have declared All the judgments of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.

I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

Christian Meditation

The staple beverage of North America has been for many years milk. My parents often repeated: "Drink your milk, it will strengthen your bones." The benefits of that glass of milk each day seemed endless. When one considers the constant labour of "chewing the cud" undertaken by a cow to produce that milk, it's no wonder that great benefit was promised!

Picture that cow working on that "cud," repeatedly chewing, swallowing, regurgitating and chewing it over again. Although it's almost enough to turn a person off milk, it is a picture of what the scripture urges a believer to do mentally, with the Word of God. This process of mentally "chewing the cud" of scripture is called meditation. "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Joshua 1:8 NIV).

Using Proverbs 5:5-6: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Charles Swindoll in *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*, offers five practical steps to follow in the development of true Christian meditation:

1. Emphasize different words and phrases - Think about trusting and consider the vastness of that word all... imagine the many ways you work thinks out for yourself.

2. Paraphrase the verse. Make it personal. Rethink and restate the verse using your own words. For example: "Lord, you are

commanding me to turn my life over to you completely - to stop my habit of worrying and working things out my way, like I frequently do."

3. Compare the verse with other scripture. Reflect on this in relation to two or three other passages. Weave them into your thoughts. How about Psalm 37:4-5 or Philippians 4:6-7.

4. Relate the verse to your own circumstance. Let's suppose you are worried, you are restless and ill-at-ease within. You know it's wrong but you can't seem to stop. You come across Proverbs 3:5-6, and decide to meditate on it. As you do, keep your problems in mind. Ask for insight from the Lord. List your worries one by one. Identify them. Look them over in light of that passage... Admit your weaknesses before God.

5. Use prayer as a follow-up. Never fail to conclude with prayer, Ask Him to transfer your thoughts into your life. Thank Him in advance for the change He will bring."

It's true that soft drinks have taken the place of milk in many homes, much to the detriment of good health. In the same way, the "fast fixes" of medication, and quick consultation have replaced the benefits of meditating on the Word of God. The result is poor spiritual health! Why not take a few minutes today and practice the fine art of meditation, review Proverbs 3:5-6, or choose another passage of scripture, and drink deep of the benefits "chewing the cud of God's Word"?

Personal Notes:

Aug 29

Matthew 7:24-29

"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." And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Solid Foundations

Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities* begins with those thought provoking words "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Such a description of the times men live in could be written across most of history, nevertheless, certain characteristics have marker eras of history. Often such descriptions relate to the economic trends such as the "great depression" or "the industrial revolution. The Bible on the other hand, reflects a historical panorama of spiritual conditions. One of the clearest descriptions of societies spiritual condition in "the last days" is found in 2 Timothy 3: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (verses 2-4).

The "signs of the times" as described here involves a society disobedience to parents, despising good, with devotion to pleasure and a denial of godliness. Such a description can be applied to most of the recent "box office hits" on the big screen, as well as the popular television shows! The recent tragedies of child acts of violence in schools suggests just such a society. One young offender, after shooting several fellow students stated "It is easier to hate than love," affirming the brutal nature of his outlook on life.

The sad reality of our own society is that the foundation of God's Truth, The Bible, has been torn away, leaving a world without knowledge of absolutes, without understanding of consequences of actions, without the reality check of eventual accountability to Almighty God.

"A tree" says A. W. Tozer, "can weather almost any storm if its root is sound, but when the fig tree which our Lord cursed "dried up from the roots" it immediately withered away." Such a tree cannot be restored but by the injection of new life, nor can a rootless society. This is exactly what Christ offers to do to all who would turn to Him in faith: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Taking Tozer's thought and applying them to society, we discover that "The whole Bible and all the great saints of the past join to tell us the same thing. Take nothing for granted, go back to the grass roots. Open our hearts and search the Scriptures... pay no heed to the passing [present] vogue. The masses are always wrong. In every generation the number of the righteous is small. Be sure you are among them."

God's Word will reign triumphant: "A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved." Is your life marked by the signs of the times or rooted in God's foundational Truth?

Personal Notes:

Aug 30

Galatians 5:1-13

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off! 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.

Christian Liberty

The continual reference over the past years concerning freedom and liberty has caused these terms to lose much of their original meaning, especially as they relate to Christianity. The common definition of liberty, the freedom to do what one wants to please yourself, may fit into the attitudes of today's society; however, this concept has no place among those who have personally accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord.

To the believer, God cries "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Through Christ's death and resurrection, the believer is potentially freed from the power of sin. The Bible says "Our old self was crucified with Him that our body of sin might be made powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." (Romans 6:6). We are told "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." (Romans 8:11) Upon receiving Christ as Saviour, each believer

has the Spirit of God within Him and by the Holy Spirit's power, he has the freedom to do what he should do to please God. This true Christian liberty is expressed in practical Godliness and Christian love.

It is sad to see so many Christians return to bondage by turning liberty into legalism by trying to become 'spiritual' through fulfilling certain rules, or worse yet, by turning their liberty into license and pursuing ungodly pleasures. Dear Christian friend, don't be persuaded by the world's idea of liberty. "Walk by the Spirit and you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16).

God intends for the expression of liberty among His own to be the showing of love which always puts the other person's best interests first. To this cause Paul challenged the believers in Rome with these words: "But if thy brother be grieved with [thy] meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died...[It is] good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor [any thing] whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Romans 14:15,21).

Amy Carmichael in *If* captures the sense of Christian liberty with these thoughts "If I hold on to choices of any kind, just because they are my choices; if I give any room to my private likes and dislikes ... if I put my own happiness before the well-being of the work entrusted to me, I know nothing of Calvary love." Imagine the impact the Christians of Muskoka would have if each lived this truly liberated way!

Personal Notes:

Aug 31

1 John 5: 1-5

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Victory after Defeat

One of the most crushing experiences a Christian faces is falling into sin and so disappointing the Lord who died for those very sins. Michel Quoist stated “It is not only temptation that tries the generous Christian, but at times sin also; he may have a heavy fall, one that he had thought impossible, so deep and strong had seemed his love for the Lord. And having fallen, he is likely to become discouraged. Never before has he understood to such an extent the ugliness of sin—because he has now a greater understanding of the love of God. All is grace. This fall will make him realize that he cannot rely on himself at all. It will put him in his place at the bottom. But with this mistrust of himself must go a greater confidence in God, the Father.” Often that restored confidence is delayed by a sense of defeat, even after forgiveness is sought and fellowship is restored. In such situations the believer is urged to focus on the restorative ministry of God.

After the defeat of Ai because of the sin of Achan, the nation Israel regained victory. The story in Joshua 8 outlines the restorative ministry of God and the believer’s needed focus for finding victory after defeat. Hear the encouragement from God: -v.1, Claim the promises from God – v.1, Follow the direction from God – v.2, Rise to the challenge from God to be committed (join the battle), to be vulnerable (flee before them), to be patient (wait in ambush). The result is sharing the blessing from God in gaining the victory and enjoying the spoil.

Phillip Brooks said, “We never become truly spiritual by sitting down and wishing to become so. You must undertake some-

thing so great that you cannot accomplish it unaided.” Stepping back into the arena of ministry after defeat is just such an undertaking.

The following Principles of Restoring Victory are evident in this text. These aid the Christian in regaining confidence: 1. Dealing with sin God’s way restores full relationship with its promises and responsibilities, 2. Victory must be claimed in battle not assumed from the sidelines, 3. Faith will always be the steps to restored victory, 4. The faith of restored victory is a call to courage, obedience, vulnerability, and patience, 5. God rewards faith with blessings.

“It is not the critic who counts, not the person who points out where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the devotions, and spends himself or herself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and at the worst, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his or her place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.” (Theodore Roosevelt).

Christian friend, are you claiming the victory?

Personal Notes:

September 1

Psalm 89:5-14

And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints. For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all those around Him. O LORD God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the raging of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them. You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain; You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm. The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all its fullness, You have founded them. The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name. You have a mighty arm; Strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.

Ignoring Danger

A friend had some anxious moments on the way to work one winter's morning when he saw several teens crossing the Bracebridge Bay close to the falls where the ice was very thin. Although his screams to get off the ice found success, he believes those teens did not appreciate his interference.

We may be tempted to ask how anyone could know the apparent danger and so boldly ignore it. However I'm reminded daily of the inclination of man to know, yet ignore danger. The church is no exception! Even among those who have personally acknowledged Jesus Christ as Saviour, there is a tendency to "walk on thin ice". God calls this an absence of "the fear of the Lord before the eyes of His people". The scriptures certainly declare the foolishness of belonging to God and ignoring His warnings. "For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:30-31 NIV)

Christians need to be reminded of A.W Tozer's remark that God is good, but He is not safe. Believers might be wise to think

about the following people of God: The unnamed prophet of 1 Kings was told to challenge an evil king then return straight home by another route; instead he stopped to party, ignoring God's warning. As a result he was killed by a lion sent from God. Achan was warned along with all Israel to dedicate the whole spoil of the victory of Jericho to God; instead he stole some wealth and was rewarded by death (Joshua 7). In the New Testament we read of Ananias and Sapphira lying about their gift to the church and dying as a consequence (Acts 5).

These examples are not given to Christians in order to present God as a mean ogre who will always have His way; on the contrary, these are given to demonstrate the loving care of God. "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" (Hebrews 12:4-7 NIV)

The "Fear of the Lord" which keeps the people of God on the path of obedience is not a dread of the Lord as a mean ogre, but the respect of the Lord as a loving Father. Those that will be led by that fear will find great reward: "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. (Ps. 34:8-9 NIV).

Personal Notes:

September 2

Philippians 3:8-14

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit of Discovery

The idea of penetrating uncharted areas and discovering unknown treasures holds the attention of most people. For the adventurers of our society the stories of early explorers hold a unique fascination. However, when the claims to fame of these explorers are peeled away and the motive for their searching spirit examined, great contrasts are found to exist. Take for instance the contrast between the underlying motive of David Livingstone who opened up the interior of Africa and Ponce de Leon who is credited with discovering Florida.

As most are aware, Ponce de Leon was motivated to explore because of a deep desire to find the "fountain of youth". Although the world benefitted by the results of his search, Ponce de Leon never found his fountain.

On the other hand, David Livingstone had discovered the fountain of youth and was motivated to explore in order to share it with the native people of Africa. Recognizing that few history books ever described Livingstone's motive as such, I base this statement on David Livingstone's own diary: "January 14, 1856. Evening. Felt much turmoil of spirit in the prospect of having all my plans for the

welfare of this great region knocked on the head by savages tomorrow. But Jesus said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, ... and lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.'

What David Livingstone had discovered personally was what Ponce de Leon search in vain for, eternal life. Before leaving England as a medical missionary, Livingstone had trusted in the death of Christ to pay for the guilt of sin and by faith he received the gift of God, eternal life through Christ (see Romans 6:23).

Livingstone knew first-hand the truth of these words of scripture:

"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 36:7-9 NIV). So realized were these truths in Livingstone's life that he confidently declared "I had rather be in the heart of Africa in the will of God than on the throne of England out of the will of God"

The spirit of discovery is a God-created part of mankind. Part of that quest involves a desire deep within the heart of each person for eternity. In the years of Ponce de Leon's search there was quite likely a Bible within his own reach that could have directed him to the only true fountain of youth, Jesus Christ. What path will your quest take, that of David Livingstone's or Ponce de Leon? History texts may not indicate much difference but eternity will.

Personal Notes:

September 3

3 John

THE ELDER, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true. I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

Weight of Concern

During one summer's holidays, our family remained in Muskoka and not only enjoyed the best of "vacation country", but had the privilege of gathering to worship among some of the churches in the area. These occasions were times of real blessing. The common thread woven through each service was a deep burden within the heart of each Pastor for the state of spiritual integrity and commitment of confessing Christians. This is not unlike the concern cited by Charles Colson, in his book *The Body*. He shares the following information from George Barna's research study: "when researchers asked pastors how they believed Christ would rate their church ... 53 percent said Christ would rate the church as having little positive impact on souls and society" (*The Body*, page 31). Apart from the obvious concern this should raise among Christians,

there is also cause for pondering the souls deep weight upon church leaders.

This weight is comparable to that expressed by Paul when he declared: "Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:28 NIV). To such people of God, who genuinely sense great concern for the present state of Christianity (and rightly so), the Lord gives special words of encouragement. Paul, himself burdened, shared this truth: "it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2 NIV). Paul was reminded that God calls his servants to faithfulness, not success. Scripture affirms that as long as each leader is actively and with spiritual integrity, being faithful to God, peace can be found in the understanding of a job well done before Him. A dear pastor friend stated this truth in these words: "preach, pray and plug away! - let God deal with results."

To Elijah during his discouragement, God said, "I reserve seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal" (1 Kings 19:18 NIV). The Lord reminded the prophet of the many faithful people that his servant had overlooked. Elijah was to rejoice over the committed, rather than be dismayed by the uncommitted. This truth has been captured in the familiar chorus: "Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

When a busy church leader, who felt the weight of spiritual "shepherding" thousands, was asked this question: "If you had your life to live again what would you do differently?" he replied, "I would eat more ice cream!" He had grasped an important lesson: Be faithful to God and enjoy each day that He is pleased to give. This is an appropriate summary of the above texts. Although the burden of concern is legitimate, few today will carry as heavy a weight of responsibility as the apostle Paul did, yet he boldly declared "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Should the concerned believers of today do any less?

Personal Notes:

September 4

Genesis 13:7-13

And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.

The Cost of Compromise

One scoop of chocolate and one of vanilla may be a good compromise for an ice cream cone; however, the news regularly reports the dangers of bad compromise: parking buildings collapsing because of a compromised mix of cement, bridges tumbling because of a compromised steel girder construction, deaths in hotel fires due to compromised fire safety standards. There are times when compromise ends in disaster. Such is the case when God's moral standards are compromised. The sad story of Lot's moral compromise evidences how tragic the disaster can be.

Lot was a righteous man (a believer in God who accepted the Lord's provision for personal sin). He and his relative Abram were blessed by God in personal wealth to such an extent that they could no longer graze their herds together. As a result Lot chose to relocate in the plain of Jordan. Had Lot stayed in the plain, he would have avoided the disaster that befell his family; however, he risked compromising God's moral standards by drawing near to Sodom. "Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the men of

Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD." (Genesis 13:12-13 NIV)

The Lord provided Lot with a unique warning when He allowed Lot to be carried off by an attacking army. Unfortunately, although Abram came to the rescue and delivered Lot (and all the captives), Lot continued among this wicked people. From being separated (living in the valley), Lot joined the people by sitting at the gate of the city as an elder-judge (Genesis 19:1). This complete immersion in a morally bankrupt society constituted a compromise in God's moral standard for His people who are not to pattern their lives after mankind's wickedness. "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 Peter 1:14-15 NIV).

Lot's compromise led to disaster: first, to the corruption of his own spiritual discernment (Genesis 19:8); second, to the corruption of his wife's values which caused her death (Genesis 19:25-26); and last, to the corruption of his daughter's moral purity which led to incest (Genesis 19:35-36).

Scripture's final assessment of this righteous man is a sobering reminder of the cost of compromise and the end of the wicked, yet it offers hope to fallen believers as well: "For if God ... delivered Lot, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard), then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." (2 Peter 2:7-9). Christian friend, have you counted the cost of compromise?

Personal Notes:

September 5

James 1:13-18

When tempted, no-one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

A Bout with Ease

It must be somewhat frustrating to road engineers who carefully design road systems to cope with rainfall only to find that the excess water took a different route of escape causing severe eroding. The problem lies not in poor design as much as point of weakness. If the shoulder grade has a soft spot, the water will take the path of least resistance moving through the softer soil, and gradually erode the entire shoulder if left unattended.

People are very much like water, learning quickly in life that it is easier to take the path of least resistance. English-speaking society has come to call this 'convenience'. We have convenience shopping, convenience service, even convenience banking. However, convenience is not always best, especially when it produces undirected leisure.

King David turned from his responsibilities one day to the path of convenience. "It came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth [to battle], that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem." (2 Samuel 11:1) The result was disastrous (see 2 Samuel 11).

The convenience of staying home afforded David undirected leisure. With time on his hands, his eyes wandered toward the beautiful Bathsheba and resulted in a lust for her. Convenience led to craving, taking the easiest path left David subject to the power of the flesh. His forfeit of the discipline of responsibility led to the

forfeit of the discipline of personal holiness. David's lust drove him to adultery (2 Samuel 11:4), adultery led him to deceit (2 Samuel 11:5-11), deceit led David to murder (2 Samuel 11:14-17).

Inappropriate convenience - the path of least resistance - easy street, once pursued, takes hold of a life and consequently a family with the determined yet destructive grip of craving. As a result, generations are affected. David's household became plagued by the continued consequences of David's "bout with ease". His son Amon lusted for Tamar, pursued deception and then raped her. David's son Absalom lusted for power, pursued deception and took the throne.

Within the heart of every Christian a warning bell should ring each time the path of least resistance comes into view. It may be convenient to forfeit devotions, skip worship, abandon Christian service, postpone giving, and a host of other "convenient" things, but it will be an open invitation for the crave-monster to take hold of your life and family. James reminds us of where that will lead: "but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:14-15 NIV).

Like water running off the highway taking the path of least resistance, inappropriate convenience erodes and ultimately destroys if left unattended. Dear Christian friend, have you counted the cost of convenience?

Personal Notes:

September 6

Isaiah 1:2-9

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me; The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider." Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment. Your country is desolate, Your cities are burned with fire; Strangers devour your land in your presence; And it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, As a hut in a garden of cucumbers, As a besieged city. Unless the LORD of hosts Had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah.

Missing Gratitude

Over one-hundred years ago Charles Spurgeon wrote: "The ancients had many rare stories of the gratitude of wild beasts. You remember that of Androcles and the lion. The man was condemned to be torn to pieces by the wild beasts; but a lion, to which he was cast, instead of devouring him, licked his feet, because at some former time Androcles had extracted a thorn from the grateful creature's foot. We have heard of an eagle who so loved a boy with whom he played, that, when the child was sick, the eagle was sickened too; and when the child slept this strange bird slept; and when the child awoke, the eagle awoke. When the child died, the bird died too. There is gratitude amongst the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air. And surely if we receive favours from God, and do not feel love to Him in return, we are worse than the brute beasts." Spurgeon was addressing a people blessed of God but indifferent to Him in devotion and service.

Israel was guilty of this same sin of ingratitude. The Lord, after blessing His chosen nation richly, made a similar plea to Israel thousands of years ago. "The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." (Isaiah 1:3 NIV) It would seem apparent that mankind has perpetually ignored the Lord God his benefactor, especially in times of blessing and prosperity.

It is no coincidence that both ancient Israel and modern nations, having ignored pleas to give homage to the Lord God "from whom all blessings flow", fell upon hard times of war and poverty. Should not those who have come to know the blessings of God through the miracle of new birth (John 3), learn the lesson from these examples? The gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is the beginning of a life not only dependent upon God, but grateful to God. Nevertheless, Christians in North America seem for the most part, indifferent to God in willingness to get involved in His purposes, His mission or His church.

Should not the people of Canada learn the lesson? There are those in our land who would reduce Canada's woes to a matter of insurmountable human differences; to a dual culture that cannot find harmonious existence. They fail to see that Canada, richly blessed, has forgotten it's benefactor, and forsaken gratitude to God.

Gratitude to God, whether found in the hearts of the people of a church, a community, or a nation, is the great antidote for ignored human needs and insurmountable human differences. What "lack" would be made up if, at the very least, all God's children were moved as the apostle Paul, who practiced what he declared: "Christ's love compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV).

Personal Notes:

September 7

Psalm 19:7-13

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

The Fundamental Questions

Sir Percival Lowell, renowned astronomer at the turn of the century, spent many years squinting into the eyepiece of his telescope, seeking to find the answers to the universe. Lowell's observations of the canals on Mars gained wide acceptance and confirmed for some the reality of intelligent life on other planets. It was discovered later that there were no canals, what Lowell saw were the blood vessels of his own eyes, enlarged due to a rare disease, reflecting back at him.

Man, being an imperfect observer, blinded by presuppositions, and prone to error, cannot find the answers to the universe through natural science alone. All the great minds of the world, with their combined speculation and proposed postulations, are still in the dark when it comes to putting the pieces of the puzzle together. Science, although bringing mankind many wonderful things, falls short in this most important area- finding an answer for why we are here and where we are going.

To find these answers man must turn from the lenses of microscopes and telescopes (a source of subjective truth) to the lens of scripture (the source of objective truth). J.I. Packer focuses on this in his book *God Has Spoken*. "God has revealed Himself to be

the *source, stay and end* of all creation, and of mankind in particular. "Of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Paul develops these foundation-truths of theism in his sermon to the Athenians idolaters about the "unknown God" (Acts 17:22ff). First, he speaks of God as our *source*, the One who brought us into existence. "The God that made the world and all things therein" (verse 24) "created every race of men of one stock, to inhabit the whole earth's surface" (verse 26, N.E.B.). Then Paul speaks of God as our *stay*, the One who "giveth to all life, and breath, and all things", so that "in him we live, and move, and have our being" (verse 25,28). We depend upon God every moment for our existence; creatures only remain in being through the constant exercise of His upholding power (cf. Heb. 1:3). He, God transcendent, above and beyond and apart from His world, and entirely independent of it (cf. Acts 17:24f), is also God imminent, in the world as the One who is over it, permeating and upholding it as the One who orders its goings and controls its course. Lastly, Paul speaks of God as our *end*. God made men, he says, "that they should seek God" (verse 27)."

Science may have given man an answer for heartburn, but only scripture has an answer for the final fire: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36). Where are you looking for the answers to life's most important questions?

Personal Notes:

September 8

Matthew 11:25-30

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."

Rest

Rest for most people comes in bits and pieces, if indeed it comes at all. We search for it in the quietness of the evenings, we long for it during those vacation times, we even demand it in the process of job negotiations. For the Christian there is a deep and abiding rest that comes in three forms. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7 the Bible says "And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels". There is a rest for the believer when the Lord returns. This is the deliverance from tension between a world that ignores God and a Christian that loves God, the word indicating a release comparable to the letting down the tension on a stringed instrument. Paul longed for that release from tension, even referring to it as the believer's state when absent from the body and present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Jesus spoke of another rest: "Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...learn of me...and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28). Here, rest is the cessation of labour in which an individual recognizes in Christ a satisfaction that previously was not experienced. In coming to Christ, the believer recognizes that labour spent on that which doesn't satisfy, (whether for salvation, or satisfaction) is meaningless. The relationship with Christ has brought both through what God did for us (salvation). This rest from labour is

summarized by that repeated phrase in scripture. "The just shall live by faith".

The Epistle of Hebrews indicates another form of rest. "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God, for he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:9). This rest speaks of the continuation of the seventh day in which God, having created the world, rested, because all was completed. Here, the rest which brings to the Christian an awareness of the beauty of completion is understood. The Christian understands that God's work in us (making us like His Son) are as assured of completion as to be stated as already finished. Paul referred to this when he said "He that hath begun a good work in you will complete until the day of Christ." (Philippians 1:6)

These three rests are the deep and satisfying rests offered to every believer as a source of wellbeing. As both promise and hope, the believer's rest is a source of reprieve in an otherwise all too frantic world. Christian friend, enjoy your rest!

Personal Notes:

September 9

Philippians 1:3-11

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Christian Sincerity

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 question- "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" (2 Corinthians 1:12). 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 mouths 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 Corinthians 6:19-20). Be truly sincere, be true to your God.

Personal Notes:

September 10

Matthew 5: 9-16

Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Unholy Undertow

Some time ago the Toronto, Ontario area was shattered with the news that two teens, although reasonably good swimmers, had been carried away in a strong undertow and drowned. There seems to be a sad increase in water tragedies every year. That strong current which carried those teens to their deaths has its spiritual parallel. There is a strong current within society that is pulling people away from God, and Christians are being caught up in this undertow at alarming rates. Paul, in addressing the concerns of the church at Thessalonica prophesied of just such a tide. Many in this church feared that believers who had died would miss out on the "rapture." Paul had referred to this in his first letter, explaining God's promise to supernaturally remove His church before the Day of the Lord's judgement. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever". (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

Time had passed, persecution had intensified and the Christians thought that God's Day of judgement had come. In reply

to their concern Paul made this statement in his second letter: "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, *for that day will not come until the rebellion* (falling away) occurs..." (2 Thess. 2:1-3 NIV).

It is evident that "*a falling away*" will mark the last days of the church on earth. Could this falling away be the result of Christians getting caught up in the very things that the Scriptures warn against? God has said, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- come not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:15-16 NIV)

The choice of what captivates our lives is still ours. Dear Christian, do John's remarks fit your life? "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love" (Revelation 2:4 NIV). The attractions of the world with all its "fun and profit" have undermined the focus of many believers. The result is that there is no evident distinction between the lifestyle of Christians and general society in many countries throughout the planet. There is little evident preserving salt and shining light to a decaying and darkened world. Don't be swept away from God through the unholy undertow of worldly attractions when the work of the Lord is at a critical period. Hold fast your calling until He summons His children to Himself. Time to shine is short!

Personal Notes:

September 12

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:5

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

In A Moment

The daily news reflects how "in a moment" so much can happen: an entire subdivision can go up in smoke "in a moment", an entire family can be killed in traffic "in a moment", nations can be at war "in a moment". Tragedies of past summers have brought a sober reminder of how, "in a moment", things can change forever: a family anticipating the birth of their child lose the child in the moment of complication, a teen at play is paralysed in the moment of a dive, a family member suffers a severe heart attack in a moment of rest.

Upon reflection of such events, I'm reminded of this scripture: "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (James 4:14 NIV) How true are the words of Christ as well: "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry

about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:34 NIV)

A person could get somewhat pessimistic about life when contemplating the reality of its uncertainty. However, for the Christian there is knowledge that no uncertainty lies in the promises of God! As a matter of fact, there is one "moment" in which the Christian puts confident hope. This is the moment referred to in hymns as "the crowning day". God gave the certain promise of this "moment" through the apostle Paul: "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

Christians look with anticipation to this great moment when, whether alive or in death they will be transformed and translated, and be forever with God. This promise is as certain as the resurrection of Christ, as sure as God's Word which stands forever.

Therefore, Christian reader, despite tragedy, despite the seeming uncertainty of history, despite all that can transpire "in a moment", remember The Moment that shall come at any time. Because of that great coming moment, follow Paul's advice- "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV)

Almeda Pearce said it this way: "When he shall come resplendent in His glory, to take His own from out this vale of night, O may I know the joy at His appearing - only at morn to walk with Him in white." (See Revelation 3:4). Take heart fellow Christian, our moment comes!

Personal Notes:

September 13

Psalm 119:98-106

You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed That I will keep Your righteous judgments.

Life's Compass

In a past Maclean's newsmagazine cover article entitled "Educational Revolution", author Barlow is quoted as saying "we are a society drowned in information and starved for purpose." Most of society would probably agree with Barlow; however, assuming that there is a relationship between increased information and increased knowledge, very few think about the consequences of knowledge without direction. It is in such an environment that mankind seeks to achieve its own solutions, believing that knowledge equips for any circumstance.

This may sound like an advantageous position and noble goal, but it is not. God specifically warns man against trusting in his own knowledge and ignoring God's purposes. Consider these statements from God's Word: "There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof [are] the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12), "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:4-6).

At a time when Israel ignored God's purposes and sought to run their affairs with human wisdom, the prophet Jeremiah challenged them with similar words: "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," (Jeremiah 9:23-24 NIV). Jeremiah followed the message with this sobering prayer "O LORD, I know that the way of man [is] not in himself: [it is] not in man that walks to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

God has purposed to bring people unto Himself through the great sacrifice of His Son. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Hebrews 2 NIV).

Knowledge without purpose is like a compass without the magnetic needle; interesting information but useless when lost. When society, by confidence in self-determination, accumulated knowledge, and "at your fingers" information, determines to place itself outside God's purposes, then it becomes a candidate for self-destruction. The people of such society embrace a lostness that continues through eternity. "Where [there is] no vision (divine leading), the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). For this reason Christ said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Is your life compass intact?

Personal Notes:

September 14

1 Timothy 6: 6-16

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen.

Riches: A Trivial Pursuit

The popularity of Ontario's gambling casinos reminds me of the old news story from *The Pure Globe* about the sheriff who confiscated a group of slot machines on the basis of a law banning the use of steel traps for catching dumb animals. Even so, if police applied such a law, the lust for money and entertainment would only drive some folks to other forms of "traps". The sad truth is that such traps carry a greater impact than to individual victims as Solomon explained many years ago: "I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him."(Ecclesiastes 5:13-14)

In his book *Living on the Ragged Edge*, Charles Swindoll summarizes this truth in these concise words: "Those who have clutched can quickly crash." and reminds the reader, "Naked a man

comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs" (Ecclesiastes 5:15 NIV).

Although man cannot take his wealth to the grave with him, he can be responsible for those that God has put under his care by ensuring their welfare. Yet, all too often, as Solomon states, individuals fall into the misfortune of gambling and squander the very bread off their table on an impulse to get rich quick.

Solomon, after a lifetime of "trivial pursuits," learned that God's plan for man is to earn his own keep by his own toil and be content with knowing the goodness of God which gives the strength to work: "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. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart" (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 NIV).

Ontario may not have a trapping law to prevent gambling, however, this warning sign may save a few wandering souls from pending sorrow: "DO NOT WEAR YOURSELF OUT TO GET RICH; HAVE THE WISDOM TO SHOW RESTRAINT. CAST BUT A GLANCE AT RICHES, AND THEY ARE GONE, FOR THEY WILL SURELY SPROUT WINGS AND FLY OFF TO THE SKY LIKE AN EAGLE" (Proverbs 23:4-5 NIV).

For the Christian, God has a better use of riches: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share" (1 Timothy 6:17-18 NIV).

Personal Notes:

September 15

John 12:1-11

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

A Keen Eye for Priceless Treasure

A keen-eyed gem dealer once purchased a rather dull looking blue-violet stone about the size of a potato for a mere \$10; it was found to be a 1,905 carat star sapphire revalued at \$2.28 million. Imagine how the original owner must have grieved his own low estimation of the stone! How like that unwise man are Christians who view their own Saviour with similar low esteem, taking for granted the salvation He provided, considering "sonship" as a common thing. Paul reminds us of the uniqueness of Christ's ministry of suffering: "In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7 NKJV).

Christ's suffering on the cross continues to sustain the believer as payment for sin. The redemption spoken of refers to "being bought out of, and delivered from" the horror of sin's power and punishment. The privilege afforded through the suffering of

Christ's cross is forgiveness. This refers to a releasing, a sending away of the debt of sin before a Holy God. God removes our sin from us as far as "east is from the west" (the two never meet). And each time a believer, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, confesses sin, there is cleansing. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The price of that cleansing is the blood of God's Son which flowed on Calvary to wash our sins away. My own son's recent head injury, although minor, moved me deeply as I watched the flow of blood. I would rather have bled than watch him do so. How much more agony must God the Father have undergone as He turned His back on the suffering of His Son while Christ "became sin for us"? This payment (redemption), privilege (forgiveness), and price (the Saviour's blood), is ours according to the riches of God's grace. Here is a well that never runs dry! God not only sacrificed His Son as payment for sin, but daily secures His children as they call out to Him.

Each Christian's value of the Son of God is focused on either what Jesus DID or what He DOES. Salvation is appreciated as either a past event and therefore is likely to become "common", or a present experience in which the ministry of Christ's suffering touches us each day in which the Son is kept close to the heart as our most valued treasure. How do you value of the Son of God?

Personal Notes:

September 16

Deuteronomy 32: 8-18

When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.

The Silence of Complacency

On March 29, 1948, the people of Niagara Falls were awakened by an unusual phenomena - shocking silence! The estimated 500,000 tons of water that cascade over the Niagara Falls each minute stopped flowing, the falls was silent. Many panicked, believing the world was coming to an end, others rushed to find an answer for the inconceivable wonder. The cause of the phenomena was a massive ice jam resulting from strong winds which pushed the ice fields of Lake Erie into the entrance of the river. After a short period of time the water pressure shifted the ice returning all to normal.

There is a similar shocking silence in the spiritual realm. The Bible says that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father" (James 1:17). God's grace is much like the flowing waters of Niagara. So expected is His

sustaining grace, seasonal rains, summer sunshine, abundant harvest, and physical strength, these are often taken for granted. To those who know God's saving grace and experience His comfort, guidance, protection and special promises, there is a danger of complacency from similarly taking His grace for granted.

It is in such a state of cold indifference that believers will awaken to seeming spiritual silence, where God's grace seems blocked, and His presence unfelt. This was the experience of Elijah when he ran from Jezebel. "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die" (1 Kings 19:4).

The only way to avoid such a shocking silence is to keep in close fellowship with God. For a believer, regular Bible study and prayer will prevent taking God for granted by keeping the privilege of His grace fresh in our hearts each day. Christians must fight the tendency to be cumbered with much care as Martha was, and choose rather to spend time at the feet of Jesus as Mary did (see Luke 10).

Here is one simple idea for maintaining daily devotion time with the Lord: rise a half hour earlier and go to bed a half hour earlier, spending each thirty minute period reading one chapter of the New Testament in the morning, and one chapter of the Old Testament in the evening. Spend the remainder of each half hour in prayer, thanking God for His grace and seeking His blessings. During lunch break, read the Proverb chapter that corresponds to day of the month (there are 31 chapters in Proverbs).

In maintaining the discipline of devotions like an athlete maintains exercise, God affords this promise- "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" (1 Timothy 4:8). Keeping the living water of God's word flowing in our minds and hearts will prevent the shocking silence of spiritual complacency.

Personal Notes:

September 17

John 11:30-37, 43-44

Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" ...Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Comfort in Grief

Grief, as the whole world constantly experiences, is a hurt touching the deepest recesses of the soul. Whether national or personal, whether collectively expressed or silently experienced, grief touches all mankind. Edgar Jackson describes grief as a young widow trying to raise her three children on her own. Grief is a mother walking to a nearby cemetery on the way to work each day, the helpless wishing that things were as before, knowing they never again will be. Grief is the emptiness when you eat alone, or the silent agony when you speak from habit to the one that is no longer there. Grief is pain!

There is true comfort to be found in human grief from the one who has felt grief more than any other, namely Jesus Christ. Scripture describes Christ as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". This is so because as God Himself, he saw first-hand the principle of sin and death working in all those around him. Christ's grief was for each and every human being destined to death as the

curse of sin. He felt the agony such death brought to family, to friends, to society, and most importantly to the separated soul.

Yet, the love of God constrained him to action on behalf of man. God, who "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32), experienced the profoundest grief imaginable in sacrificing His own Son. Although Christ never sinned and therefore was free from the curse of death, nevertheless, He himself chose the agonizing grief of separation from the Father as a substitute for all mankind. In His resurrection, Christ broke the power of death and severed the ties of grief's bondage.

It is only by faith in this sacrifice for man that deep, personal and lasting comfort in grief is found. Such comfort is afforded by God Himself, as he takes up residence in the life of every believer and consoles with the present assurance of His care, His promises, His abiding peace. It was this living comfort that led Horatio Spafford to write the following words after the death of his daughters in a sea disaster: "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."

With faith in Christ, the pain of grief is still experienced, but that pain is wrapped in the arms of an ever loving Saviour who turns hopelessness into living promise, overcomes loneliness by affirmed presence, and answers the agonizing silence with the still small voice of His Word. As David discovered, "The righteous cry, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saves such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psalms 34:17-18). The day is coming when "God shall wipe away all tears" (Revelation 21:4).

Personal Notes:

September 18

1 Corinthians 4: 9-16

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonoured! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

Loyalty

Loyalty, according to an English dictionary, means to be constant and faithful in any relation or obligation and implies trust. Although the word "loyal" is not found in the King James Bible, the call to faithfulness is clear: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:1-3).

An interesting story is shared in First Samuel 30, concerning faithfulness. King David and his men were away at battle and while away their foes came in and laid the city of Ziklag in ashes, carrying away the wives and sons and daughters of the absent soldiers. When the men returned they were overwhelmed with grief. The scripture says they "lifted up their voices and wept until they had no more power to weep." They began to blame David. Then David selected 600 men and set out to rescue the captives. When they came to the brook Besor, 200 were so faint they could not cross over the brook. "Very well," said David. "You two hundred stay here and mind the baggage and the others of us who are stronger will go on."

They went on, made a great recovery, and returned with the spoil. When they returned to the brook Besor a protest arose on the part of those who went to battle. They did not want to share the spoil. Then it was that David made a great statement about faithfulness: "As his part is that goes down to the battle so shall his part be that tarried by the stuff. They shall part alike." What David said was that not are all equally strong yet all can be equally faithful. The 200 that did the best they could were just as worthy of the reward.

W.B. Hinson told the story of a faithful cobbler. One day the minister of the shoemaker's church made his first call at the shoe shop. As the pastor shared, the cobbler replied with understanding and deep spiritual insight. "You should not be cobbling shoes," said the preacher. "A man with such thoughts and excellent expression should not be doing secular work."

"Sir, you are mistaken!" declared the shoemaker, "Do you see that pair of shoes? They belong to widow Smith's son. She is supported by her boy, who keeps a roof over their heads by working outdoors every day. Bad weather is coming. The Lord said to me, 'Will you cobble widow Smith's boy's shoes so he won't catch cold and come down sick this winter?' And I said, 'Yes Lord, I will'. You preach sermons under God's direction, I cobble shoes under God's direction. When the rewards are finally given out, He will say to you and me the same sentence, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'"

Christian loyalty is the measure of faithfulness to God in any circumstance, at any task. Christian friend, are you loyal?

Personal Notes:

September 19

Psalm 42:1-11

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, While they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, And from the heights of Hermon, From the Hill Mizar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me. The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, And in the night His song shall be with me—A prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Loosening the Grip of Depression

In 1973, *Newsweek Magazine* reported that depression was a leading medical illness that had reached epidemic proportions. The Physician's Handbook on Depression states that one American in twenty is medically diagnosed as suffering from depression. It is no surprise that the search for a Bible passage relating to depression is found in the Books of the Psalms. Here the inspired writers express the emotions of the heart to a degree found nowhere else in the Bible.

In Psalm 55:4 there is a phrase that expresses the experience of those suffering from modern day clinical depression. The statement was made by David, as God led him to express the anxiety and pain that consumed his very being to the point of inability to continue to function. David cried, "My heart is sore pained within me." The term translated heart refers to "the centre of conscious thought" and would relate to the English term "mind". David is struggling from great mental stress. The Hebrew term for pain

denotes travail and anguish, and is used in the Old Testament to define mental anguish particularly.

Six common symptoms of clinical depression can be identified. First, David expresses overwhelming fear: "the terrors of death are fallen upon me." Secondly, David is overcome with physical trembling: "fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me". The third symptom of depression evident in this text is the sense of descending darkness conveyed in the phrase "horrors hath overwhelmed." Fourthly, this mental and emotional trauma caused David to desire to flee the circumstances rather than face the pain: "And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." In this overpowering state of cowardice, David was consumed with escapism: "for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness." David's final expression is one of contemplated suicide: "I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."

In the context of David's mental anguish a Biblical approach to overcoming depression is discovered. David's path to recovery began with his admission in prayer before God of the condition of his heart followed by a fixed faith. He believed God alone could and would save him. This confident trust he expressed in his prayer. David is simply turning from his pain and consequent suicidal thoughts to faith in the living God. He is turning from his own weakness to depend upon the strength of God.

David's deliverance came through a surrender of his anguish to the will and purpose of God. David's resolve was clear: "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalms 55:22). Depression, like the pain of cancer or the pain of grief, is to be committed in faith to a loving God who is "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Even depression can be beaten.

(For an in-depth Biblical study on depression see www.AWordInSeonMinistries.com).

Personal Notes:

September 20

Genesis 21:14-21

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Guaranteed for Good

An automobile accident left a friend at the bottom of a ravine, unable to move, and wondering if anyone would ever notice!

That feeling of being all alone and in trouble is common the experience of most people at some point in life. Although the circumstances may not be that of physical separation from apparent help, the sense of aloneness often weakens the heart, even in a crowd! During such times, the inability to think through difficulties, to solve problems, to choose direction, can bind a soul to immobility.

In such times the Christian has a guaranteed resource to draw upon. Because of God's all sufficient grace, the indwelling Spirit of God is never out of reach, nor silent to the human cry: "the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all

things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:26-28).

Here the linkage to the God's gift of the Spirit is a two-fold "knowing". The Father knows the mind of the Spirit; therefore, the Spirit intercedes in prayer for the believer (v.26). The Spirit affirms to the believer the assurance of God's favour and their well-being in keeping with His intercession prayer "according to the will of God."

By God's gift of the Spirit, every believer walking by the Spirit is privileged with the sustaining testimony that whatever circumstances befall them, intercession continues on their behalf by God himself, and all sovereignly works together for good. As John Murray suggests, "Many of the things [all things] comprised are evil in themselves and it is the marvel of God's wisdom and grace that they, when taken in concert with the whole, are made to work for good. Not one detail works ultimately for evil to the people of God; in the end only good will be their lot."

This is no mere mind over matter discipline, but a real, tangible ministry of grace that holds up a believer in trial. This ministry of grace among the people of God is so great that Israel sang of it: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah" (Psalms 46:1-3).

By placing personal faith in Christ as man's substitute for sin's condemnation and conqueror of death as resurrected Lord, the grace of God can become the solid ground of guaranteed good that overcomes that terrible sense of being all alone in trouble.

Personal Notes:

September 21

2 Corinthians 4:8-18

We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

The Anchor in the Storm

There is a Christian song that asks this very sobering question. "Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?" The Christian should be able to answer the question with a resounding yes, because of "access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Romans 5:2). For the past few weeks, this devotional has focused on the solid ground of God's grace as expressed in the Epistle to the Romans. Here is one last look.

By God's grace, believers are afforded a confirmation of the sustaining love of God, "shed abroad in their hearts" (5:5), confirmed by the Spirit through the Word. This love is proved to be ever-present, ever-true, and ever-overcoming. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted

as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

As R. C. Lenski suggests, Paul is not writing sympathetically for others, he is writing by God's leading, out of his own experiences. In response to his own trials, when the question arises "can anything separate the believer from God's love?" Paul resoundingly answers "I am persuaded that... nothing ... shall separate us!" This persuasion was the work of the Spirit in affirming that love. Indeed Paul learned that "God's grace is sufficient" (2 Cor. 12:8), indeed his experience by God's grace was that "we are more than conquerors"; this God has expounded in the Epistle to the Romans.

Grace, as elaborated in Romans, is more than a theory defining some attribute of a transcendent god. For the unbeliever, it is the very hand of God offering life. For the believer, grace is a principle factor in life that has meaningful, moment by moment application. As Paul discovered the blessings of grace to be sufficient, so can any believer. To all believers in suffering, there is very specific and concrete help to be found in God's all sufficient grace. It is the privilege and responsibility of the believer to exercise the ready access to God through prayer. Strength for the common dilemma of suffering can be readily found by turning to God, and experiencing His moment by moment sufficiency.

Perhaps John Newton said it best: "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see... Through many dangers toils and snares, I have already come, 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Is God's grace your anchor?

Personal Notes:

September 22

John 17:11-26

"...Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. "O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Our Greatest Labour

There has been an interesting development in modern medicine. Many spokesperson within the medical profession are now acknowledging the value of prayer. Prayer is considered to be a good therapeutic exercise for troubled minds. Prayer is considered a "bonding" exercise when shared in a group. Prayer is considered to be an avenue for positive thinking.

While all these comments may be true about prayer, they sadly lack the most important factor. The scriptures refer to prayer as far more than a mental or emotional exercise; the Bible declares that prayer, when entered into in right relation to God and man, moves the

very hand of God. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

Throughout scripture the evidence of effectual prayer is found. Tracing the results of prayer as recorded in scripture is an enriching study in itself! Hagar prayed to the Lord for help and God spared her life and her sons (Genesis 21). Moses cried unto the Lord and the Israelites were miraculously delivered from the hand of Egypt (Exodus 14). Hannah cried unto the Lord and God gave her a son to lead His people. Elijah and Elisha prayed and God restored life to the dead. David prayed and was granted victories, Daniel prayed and was given wisdom to interpret dreams, Nehemiah prayed and God provided a means and a way to complete the wall of Jerusalem. The apostles and early Christians prayed and God raised the dead, delivered from jail, gave boldness to witness, brought provision for the widowed and persecuted.

If Christians should learn anything about prayer from the Bible, it is that it is vital to spiritual growth, and dear to the heart of God. Mission leader J. Oswald Sanders said, "If prayer is meagre it is because we consider it supplemental and not fundamental." Samuel Chadwick wrote, "Satan dreads nothing but prayer... He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion... but trembles when we pray."

Prayer is essential! It is man's avenue of faith to receive God's Gift of salvation- "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:11-13). Prayer is the believer's avenue for accomplishing the purposes of God and securing the provision of God- "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14).

Is it any wonder that Paul urged believers to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? Prayer is the Christians greatest labour!

Personal Notes:

September 23

Acts 9:19-28

Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

A Word of Encouragement

The Sequoia trees of California tower as much as 300 feet above the ground. Strangely, these giants have unusually shallow root systems that reach out in all directions to capture the greatest amount of surface moisture. Seldom will you see a redwood standing alone because high winds would quickly uproot it. That's why they grow in clusters. Their intertwining roots provide support for one another against the storms.

In a similar fashion, Christians are called upon to "cluster together" for mutual support. That "clustering" is called the local church, and one of its responsibilities is encouragement. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Joses, of the church of Jerusalem, was a man who took the task of "exhorting one another" with so much gusto that the apostles

renamed him. "And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (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" (Acts 4:36-37).

The story of Barnabas is one of continued encouragement. He not only forsook a wealthy piece of real estate, he was also the first to trust Saul (Paul), winning the confidence of the apostles for him (Acts 9). Later, with Paul, Barnabas ministered among the "Pagan Gentiles," overlooking the cultural stigma of an Israelite socializing with a Gentile (Acts 11).

True Christian encouragement, as Lawrence Crabb suggests, is maintaining "a conscious commitment to promote other people's welfare" amid the routine of life. Joses was renamed "Son of Encouragement" because, in keeping with the meaning of encouragement (to come along side with comfort and refreshment), he truly put the welfare of others first, speaking words which built up others, making decisions which strengthened others, all within the purpose of advancing the cause of Christ.

Bruce Larson, in his book, *Wind and Fire*, points out some interesting facts about sandhill cranes: "These large birds, who fly great distances across continents, have three remarkable qualities. First, they rotate leadership. No one bird stays out in front all the time. Second, they choose leaders who can handle turbulence. And then, all during the time one bird is leading, the rest are honking their affirmation."

What a different environment most churches would be if there was a collective effort from all believers, in the love of Christ, to "honk encouragement." Here are some words of wisdom that should stir up each believer to practice the fine art of honking encouragement: "Heaviness in the heart of man makes it stoop: but a good word makes it glad" (Proverbs 12:25), "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24), "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

Personal Notes:

September 24

Hebrews 9: 11-22

Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Salvation: Free but not Cheap

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). After hearing the gospel explained, people often say, "You mean there's nothing I can do to deserve it? That's too easy." It seems natural for people to object to the idea that God's unmerited favour can be given so freely to unworthy sinners. Many find it difficult to trust a God who offers salvation as a free gift.

Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan told of a coal miner who came to him and said, "I would give anything to believe that God would forgive my sins, but I cannot believe that He will forgive

them if I just ask Him. It is too cheap." Morgan said, "My dear friend, have you been working today?" "Yes, I was down in the mine." "How did you get out of the pit? Did you pay?" "Of course not. I just got into to cage and was pulled to the top." "Were you not afraid to entrust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?" Morgan asked. "Oh, no!" said the miner, "it was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink the shaft." Suddenly the truth struck him. What had not cost him anything -- salvation -- had not come cheap to God. This miner had never thought of the great price God paid to send His Son so He could rescue fallen humanity. Now he realized that all anyone had to do was to "get into the cage" by faith.

Salvation is free to man, but cost God much. His own Son actually became man's substitute. Where man is unable to change his standing before God through any self-effort, Christ died in his place. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). It is man's responsibility to believe, repent and receive the free gift of life. "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).

The language of Scriptures knows nothing about a "cross of example", or a "cross of martyrdom for the cause". Although Calvary was a cross of grace, a cross of goodness, a cross of courage, a cross of suffering and a cross of perseverance, it was foremost a cross of substitution. "For he (God) hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for (in the place of) us, who (Jesus) knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Dear reader, salvation is free, but not cheap, and it is yours for the asking in faith: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

Personal Notes:

September 25

Nehemiah 8:14-18

And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

Welcome Correction

Pastor Timothy was urged to "correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV). Here is a good word on correction, adopted from A. W. Tozer's thoughts *On Receiving Admonition*: "An odd little passage in the Book of Ecclesiastes speaks of "an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished." It is not hard to understand why an old *foolish* king would feel that he was beyond admonition. After years of giving orders, he simply might not be able to entertain the notion that he should take advice from others. To him right had become synonymous with his will and wrong, anything contrary. The idea that there was anyone to reprove him would not enter his mind.

Regardless of the moral process by which he arrived at his hardened state, the bell had already tolled for him, he was a lost man. God had left him to his fatal conceit. And soon he would die physically, yet as a fool dies. When Christ came to the Jews He found them chuck full of that arrogant self-confidence that would

not accept reproof as well. "We be Abraham's seed," they said coldly when He talked to them about their sins and their need of salvation. The common people heard Him and repented, but the Jewish priests had ruled the roost too long to be willing to surrender their privileged position. Like the old king, they had gotten accustomed to rule. They were beyond reproof."

Churches and Christian organizations have a tendency to fall into the same error: inability to receive admonition. After a time of growth and successful labour comes the deadly psychology of self-congratulation. The leaders come to accept themselves as special objects of the divine favour; their success is proof enough that this is so. They must, therefore, be right, and anyone who tries to call them to account is instantly written off as an unauthorized meddler.

Those who have already entered the state where they can no longer receive admonition are not likely to profit by this warning. But we can place markers along the way to prevent the next traveller from going over. Here are a few:

1. Don't defend your church or organization against criticism. If the criticism is false it can do no harm. If it is true you need to hear it and do something about it.
2. Be concerned not with what you have accomplished but over what you might have accomplished if you had followed the Lord completely. It is better to say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."
3. When reproved, pay no attention to the source. An enemy is often of greater value to you than a friend because he is not influenced by sympathy.
4. Keep your heart open to the correction of the Lord regardless of who holds the whip. The great saints all learned to take a licking gracefully-and that may be why they were great saints.

Personal Notes:

September 26

Romans 3:21-26

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Great and Terrible Days to Come

All have been stunned at the devastation caused by the earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis throughout the world. It's difficult to imagine the pain and suffering, the loss and deprivation that the complete annihilation of towns and cities brings. As the world aids in picking up the pieces, I can't help but imagine the greater destruction that is coming to this world as prophetically outlined in Scripture.

The Bible pointedly declares that God will judge mankind for its blasphemies and unrepentedness. "And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great" (Revelation 16:18). These prophecies are as sure as sunrise, whether believed or not.

To this end God's servants have pleaded for men and women to "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40 NIV). Deliverance is found in Christ alone: "Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NIV). This salvation comes through simple faith in accepting Christ's death, burial and resurrection as God's loving, substitutional sacrifice for sin.

For the believer in Christ, Scripture points to a different destiny than judgement. "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for

us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:9-11). The Christian awaits a special call into the presence of God: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4).

To this end believers are urged to live with clear purpose. In expectation of that "imminent call," they are to live in purity. "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled" (1 Thess. 5:6). Christians are to be equipped with God's spiritual armour for daily victory over temptation and meaningful ministry. "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet" (1 Thess. 5:8). And finally, in light of the world's overwhelming disregard and disrespect for God, believers are to be encouragers of one another. "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

There are two great days coming: the great day of gathering when God's own children, saved by grace, are called into His presence forever, and the great day of the Lord in which the world will be judged in the fierceness of God's wrath. To which day is your life oriented?

Personal Notes:

September 27

Exodus 23:1-9

"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. "You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute. "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. "You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. "Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. "And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

On Being Different

Of the Christian, Scripture states: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV). A. W. Tozer shares the paradox of the Christian life: "At the heart of the Christian system lies the cross of Christ with its divine paradox. The cross stands in bold opposition to the natural man... To try to find a common ground between the message of the cross and man's fallen reason is to try the impossible, and if persisted in must result in an impaired reason, a meaningless cross and a powerless Christianity.

But let us bring the whole matter down from the uplands of theory and simply observe the true Christian as he puts into practice the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Note the contradictions: The Christian believes that in Christ he has died, yet he is more alive than before and he fully expects to live forever. He walks on earth while seated in heaven and though born on earth he finds that after his conversion he is not at home here. Like the nighthawk, which in the air is the essence of grace and beauty but on the ground is awkward and ugly, so the Christian appears at his best in the

heavenly places but does not fit well into the ways of the very society into which he was born.

The Christian soon learns that if he would be victorious as a son of heaven among men on earth he must not follow the common pattern of mankind, but rather the contrary. That he may be safe he puts himself in jeopardy; he loses his life to save it and is in danger of losing it if he attempts to preserve it. He goes down to get up. If he refuses to go down he is already down, but when he starts down he is on his way up.

He is strongest when he is weakest and weakest when he is strong. Though poor he has the power to make others rich, but when he becomes rich his ability to enrich others vanishes. He has most after he has given most away and has least when he possesses most. He may be and often is highest when he feels lowest and most sinless when he is most conscious of sin. He is wisest when he knows that he knows not and knows least when he has acquired the greatest amount of knowledge."

In a world that judges such paradox as "a crutch", fanaticism, strange and abnormal, it's good to be reminded of the believer's privilege: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God... Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-2). What joy!

Personal Notes:

September 28

John 4:7-14

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? "Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" 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."

Deep Waters

During the Arab-Israeli war 1967 an American reporter was flying over the Sinai desert with an Israeli officer, and they spotted some fifty thousand stranded Egyptian soldiers who obviously were dying of thirst. When the situation was reported in the newspapers, a number of world leaders and organizations tried to do something to help. But every time a plan was suggested, some military, diplomatic, or bureaucratic obstacle prevented its being carried out. By the time help came, thousands of the soldiers had died.

Water is one of the fundamental needs of man, both physically and spiritually. As water is to the body so God is to the soul; He is the giver and sustainer of all life. Nevertheless, like Israel of old, mankind has sought to quench its spiritual thirst outside of God: "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). This text indicates that along with abandoning God who alone can quench the thirsty soul, mankind fashions his own means of quenching spiritual thirst. The result is fruitless; "broken cisterns"

of man-made religions, self-gratifying philosophies, and humanistic reason that denies even the existence of God, hold no water.

Charles Spurgeon reminds us, "On the last day, that great day of the feast Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink!" No other distinction is made but that of thirst. No waiting or preparation is so much as hinted at. Drinking represents a reception for which no fitness is required. Sinful lips may touch the stream of divine love, they cannot pollute it, but shall themselves be purified. Jesus is the fount of hope. Dear reader, hear the dear Redeemer's loving voice as he cries to each of us, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

The good news of the gospel message is the invitation to find forgiveness and new life by faith in Christ. He died as a substitutional sacrifice for sin and rose to offer all who would believe, eternal life. "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).

How tragic it is for people, whether in churches or organizations, to spin their wheels in programs and committees designed in some way to meet the spiritual thirst of man, yet without the gospel of grace that the God of living waters offers. While thousands around are desperately in need of the spiritual water of the Word, good intentioned folks are too often reaching out with nothing more than a cup of sawdust while thousands still die without Christ. The only true thirst quencher is Christ, the deep water for the soul!

Personal Notes:

September 29

Isaiah 55:1-8

"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, A leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, And nations who do not know you shall run to you, Because of the LORD your God, And the Holy One of Israel; For He has glorified you."

Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.

Looking for Full Life

The pursuit of happiness is the favourite pastime of most North Americans. There is no limit to the expenses to which some go in order to find that all-illusory "full life." Vacation resorts promote it, retirement properties promise it. To many, the pursuit of a few weeks of "full life" is only a quick fix for an altogether intolerable existence where the human race is reduced to the rat race! The end result is emptiness and nothing to show for a life of effort; nothing to pass on but headaches and heartache.

In stark contrast to the norm, Patrick Henry said, "My most cherished possession I wish I could leave you is my faith in Jesus Christ, for with him and nothing else you can be happy, but without him and with all else you'll never be happy."

This truth was discovered by Charlie "Tremendous" Jones, a very successful business man and motivational speaker. He describes coming to faith in Christ in his book *Life is Tremendous*: "I knew I didn't need God to be successful. I didn't need God to be an American. I didn't need God to get a wife. I didn't need God to have children. But I did need something."

“As I look back now, I realize I never knew what it was to be loved in the true sense of the word. I had never felt love penetrate beyond the barriers that we all set up in our hearts. I didn’t know that such love existed.”

“So I drove the streets that day in Lancaster and pondered. I remember another startling thing my friend had said: “Charlie, there is nothing you can do for God; God wants to do it all for you.”

“That was a new approach. People used to come to me and say, “God could use a guy like you.” My answer was: “If God needs me to help him out, he’s in too much trouble already.”

After much thinking, I stopped my car and bowed my head and said, “Now, God, I don’t understand all this, but somehow for the first time I believe the Bible is true and I’m a sinner. I want you to forgive me and come into my heart and make me whatever a Christian is, in Christ’s name, Amen.”

“... I quit being proud of being against God and made a decision to ask him into my life. God said he would come in, I believe it, and that settled it.”

Too many believe that the blessings of faith in Christ are only for the next life; for the soul and heaven. Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.” He was not promising riches or fame, but he was promising a rich, full, meaningful life here and now!

Where do you look for “full life”? Is it in a quick fix to an intolerable life or can you say “In Christ I have found life tremendous!”

Personal Notes:

September 30

Matthew 19:16-22

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Money Obstacles

The ship "Marine Electric" sank off the coast of Virginia early in 1983, costing the lives of thirty-one sailors. The ship's eight-ton anchor came loose and battered the hull of the ship until the ship went down. The vessel was destroyed by its own anchor. Although an anchor is supposed to provide safety and security, it sometimes destroys. This is particularly true in life when finances are viewed as an anchor.

On the front of the Polish five thousand "zloty bill" is a picture of Frederic Chopin and on the back a few bars of his "Polonaise." You can sit down at the piano and play it! To some, it may seem that all money makes music, the jingle of the cash register. But for many, money has played a very sad song. Some years ago a wealthy automobile dealer in Tampa, Florida, was shot to death by his wife during a domestic argument. When they arrested her, she said, "It's all because of money. I wish there had never been any money at all."

The Scriptures state: "But they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which plunge men into death and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all evils, of which some having lusted after, they were seduced from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Tim. 6:8-10, MKJV).

God gives an entirely different view of money and possessions. Consider these “DIVINE ECONOMICS” presented in a seminar by The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada: “How many of us, do you suppose, begin our day on the job with the objective in mind of working hard in order to make money to give away? “let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth”(Ephesians 4:28). When we are generous with our resources God has promised to enable us to continue to be generous. “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully... And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

God measures not by what is given, but by what is kept. “Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had.” (Mark 12:43-44). When material things comes to hand we ought to ask ourselves, "What might I buy in heaven with this? "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that fail not” (Luke 12:33-34). Friend, even the smallest coin can shut out the light of the brightest star.

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.

