

In My Time of Devotion
By
Terry Dashner

1. A Change for Better...

It is said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, each time expecting a different outcome. You and I know that reality says otherwise. If you expect a different result, you must change your current actions. Change is necessary. It is human; however, it's not always easy.

Here are the basics: in order to change one's behavior, one must change one's thinking. And to change one's thinking, one must change one's input. You know—garbage in, garbage out. Or in this case, a man's reality is measured in terms of what he perceives. In other words, think on good things and your behavior will follow. This is certainly a principle in Scripture.

Think on these things...

In the fifth chapter of John, Jesus speaks to a paralytic of 38 years and says, “Do you want to get well?” The paralytic answers the question curiously. He says that he has no one to help him into the healing waters. Evidently he wanted healing, but his perception of how to get healed lacked a certain reality. Seems he was repeating the same actions over and over again, each time hoping something different would happen. Did it? No.

Change of outcome came when he responded to three things. These three things can change anyone.

For one, he heard the command of Jesus to walk. He acted on the authority of His command and walked. This is important for change. One must hear the Word of God and act on it to change for the better. Hearing and merely hoping for the better won't do it. One must hear God speak and then immediately respond to it. This is referred to in Bible teaching as “hearing and receiving the word.”

Secondly, he stayed the course. This is vital to victory. Hold the line. Remain steadfast. Don't give up. Jesus saw the man later and told him to refrain from going backwards. He told him to sin no more or a worse condition might come on him. The most powerful thing a man or woman can do is stay the course in life. Stay connected with God. Don't get blessed and then turn away from God's blessings. Keep up the good fight of faith until the last breath. Again, perseverance is the most powerful force, in line with godliness.

And then last, tell somebody what God has done for you. As soon as the man knew who healed him, he began to publish it abroad. He began to tell people what Jesus had done for him. This, too, is powerful. That's right. A man's testimony regarding the grace of God not only overcomes the devil, but it renews the man and saves the one who hears and receives it.

How can we change our results? We change our actions. The action is hearing and receiving the commands of God. The action is staying the course with God. The action is telling everyone who is capable of changing—Jesus is the master potter.

He and He alone can change the clay into pottery of beauty.

2. A crisis in identity...

If I have a unique watch—no other one like it in the entire world—and it fails, to repair it would require, at minimum, a schematic drawing from the watch maker who built it; however, to have the original watch maker repair it would be ideal.

The Bible says that we are uniquely made by God. If you believe this you can rest assuredly that when things go askew in your life, God alone is the one who can get you back on track. As Professor Kreeft says in his book, *Your Questions God's Answers* (Ignatius Press, 1994), “Only our Author knows us completely. In God’s mind, and there alone, can we find the secret of our identity. God alone knows all things, our past, our present, and our future.

“Therefore, only by finding God can I find my true self. That’s where the secret of my identity *is*. To try to find out who I am by ignoring my Creator is like trying to find out who a character is by ignoring the character’s author.

“But how can *I* know *God*? I’m only a human being, and not the most brilliant human being in the world, by any means. How could little me possibly figure out the mind of the great God?

“No way. But I *can* know God on one condition: if God takes the initiative and tells me about himself and about myself, if God teaches me, if God ‘reveals’ himself (Jn 6:44-45).”

This is where a schematic comes in very handy. The schematic I’m referring to is God’s Word, the Bible. The Book was compiled over a period of 1400 years with many authors. The Book is God’s revelation of who He is and what He wants from us. The Book is not like any other book ever written by man.

Holy men of God wrote down His words as God moved upon them. Did He possess their minds and control their hands in writing? No, God used men from various backgrounds, according to their unique personalities to record His Word to mankind.

Just as Jesus had two natures—human and divine—so the Bible has duality. It is both human and divine. It is of the earth to relate to the earthy creatures of this world. But, it is also the very breath of God to restore life to His errant and sinful man.

In the Bible we discover who God is, what He is like, what He wants from us, and what He can give to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. He gives us eternal life. He gives us purpose in living. He gives us blessings daily, which is our daily bread. He gives us

everything that pertains to living and godliness. He gives. He gives. He gives. And I get to receive. Believe me, I get the better end of the deal.

3. A little Salt and a little Light

The Bible says that you are the light and the salt of the world. I find it interesting that it uses these two metaphors. Why do I say that? For one, just a pinch of salt goes a long way. It takes just a little to enhance the taste of food. Without it, food is too bland. With too much, it ruins the taste. A little salt is just right. Stop and think about this. You are one person against the world. By your own strength and might the world can be overwhelming to you. But with the strength of Christ in you, you become like salt to the world. You and your faith in Christ are just enough to change the world for the better. The Bible says that faith as small as a mustard seed is all you need to move aside the mountains in your life.

In regards to light, consider this. An aged and prosperous businessman worried about who would carry on after his death. His only relatives were three young nephews. So he called them in and said that one of them would be his successor. "I have a problem. And the one who solves it shall inherit my business," he said. "I have here a large room, which I want to fill as soon as possible. Here is a small coin for each of you. Go now, but return at sunset, and see what you can buy with this coin to fill the room."

Hurriedly they went their way to the market, and as twilight fell, they returned. The first youth was dragging a bale of straw. When loosened, it made a pile so great that it filled half the room. He was complimented by the other two as they helped him clear it away.

The second youth brought in two bags of thistle-down which, when released, filled two thirds of the room.

Now it was time for the third nephew, who was standing still and forlorn. "And what have you?" asked his rich uncle. "I gave my coin to a mission," he replied, "leaving only one farthing. With it I bought a flint and this small candle." Using the flint, the third boy made a spark and lit the candle, which filled every corner of the room with light.

Light and salt fill emptiness. If you are living your faith as the salt and light of the earth, then you are filling the emptiness in this world with the life of Christ. If you are living your testimony of faith in Christ, you are driving out darkness everywhere you go. This world needs substance. The world needs your witness. Keep your light shining brightly, and keep your life salty.

Stay the course.....

4. Bridging Cultures

Not all cultures think alike. Not all nations speak the same language. But all kindred, tribes, and nations can know the message of Jesus Christ.

Think about the difficulty of taking a religion (Christianity) birthed in Judea which expressed itself in Jewish concepts, Jewish language, Jewish culture—expressly stated in the Torah—and carrying that message to pagans, Greeks, Romans, and barbarians who had no understanding of Jewish laws. In order for the message to thrive, it had to be conveyed in the conceptual languages and cultures of the non middle-easterners. And this was no small task.

For example, the ecumenical council at Chalcedon in 451 AD which addressed the divinity of Jesus—two natures in one person—also dealt with the difficulties of a new conceptual language for Greek and Latin alike.

Mark A. Noll (*Turning Points*, Baker Book House Co. 2000, p.73), writes the following. “Where the Roman, Western mind-set was concrete, practical, and legal, the Eastern mind-set gravitated toward abstraction, passion, and speculation. The Roman world used Latin, the East used Greek. Tertullian, in the West had not thought it worthwhile to consider what Jerusalem (the Christian faith) had to do with Athens (the traditions of speculative philosophy). By contrast, his Eastern contemporary Clement of Alexandria had promoted the Christian study of Greek speculative thought as a useful exercise for the church. These differences were more tendencies of intellectual disposition than out-and-out conflicts of doctrine, but they had continued to develop from the time of Tertullian and Clement.”

Chalcedon in 451 AD, to some degree, settled the doctrinal issues of the nature of Jesus Christ, but it was not able to bridge the growing divide between East and West. Eventually, as you know from church history, the Catholic Church was never able to reconcile the differences between the Church at Rome and the Church at Constantinople. Thus, there is to this day a rift between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox. Nevertheless, the message of Jesus Christ as the only Begotten Son of God who “took upon him flesh,” dying for the sin of the entire world and being raised from the dead to be raised to the right hand of God is believed and preached by both. (Consider the Nicene Creed of the fourth century and the Chalcedon Creed or the fifth century—the content of both creeds are essentially the same.)

The ecumenical council at Chalcedon in 451 AD marked an especially critical turning point in the history of Christian conveyance of ideas from one culture to another. Again Mark A. Noll writes, “Although it telescopes much history to put it this way, Chalcedon may be said to have marked the successful translation of the Christian faith out of its Semitic milieu (where words and concepts were shaped primarily by the revelation of the Old Testament) into the Hellenistic milieu (where words and concepts were shaped primarily by the traditions of Greek thought and Roman might).

“Part of the great series of convulsions that stretched from before Arius’s heresy through the time of Chalcedon was a problem of translation in the narrow sense. How could the church find ways of translating words from the Bible (written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and simplified Koine Greek heavily under Semitic influence) into Latin and more formal Greek? Immense confusion, for example, reigned for nearly a century over the question of whether the Greek terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* should be used for the essential ‘God-

ness' shared by the Father and the Son, or whether they should refer to the particular 'God-ness' embodied in Father, Son, and Spirit more distinctly.”

Finally, a standard grid of translation was finally agreed upon in 362 at a council in Alexandria, so that the Greek *ousia* would equal the Latin *substantia* (the generic God-ness), and the Greek *hypostasis* would equal the Latin *persona* (the specific manifestation of God-ness). Only with that clarification having been made could the Nicene formula be finalized. And that finalization set the stage for the road to Chalcedon (Ibid., p.79).

As you can see by reading this document, transferring and translating ideas and concepts from one culture to the next is difficult but it is, nonetheless, possible. When you consider a lonely Jewish male of 33 years-of-age dying over two thousand years ago on a criminal's cross in a land that is nothing more than a speck on the world map, it boggles the mind to think how his life's story could have spread across the earth—transforming lives and changing whole Continents—for the Glory of God.

It blows my mind to think how this could happen because he died alone, leaving his legacy of Life to be spread by a handful of fearful, distraught, and thick-headed disciples. This fact alone tells me that Jesus was not just another prophet, counselor, or wise teacher of the age. He is God's only Begotten Son, Messiah. That fact prompts me to rejoice in knowing what God can do with the Gospel (Good News) message being declared in faith by anyone of any culture to everyone of every culture in the whole-wide-world. It's the same message in all languages—Jesus saves!

Keep the faith. Stay the course. Jesus is alive and coming again.

5. Am I Where God Is?

I have something to share with you that has been on my heart for a long time. I believe the time to share it with you is now. These are the scriptures on which I state my case: Hebrews 12:27 “...those things that can not be shaken may remain.” and Psalms 50:3 “Our God shall come and shall not keep silence. A fire shall devour before Him and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him.”

This did not come to me by vision or angels. I was born with this inside me. That's the only way I know to explain how this came to me. Before I get into what I'm about to share, let me state this: The true children of God will be supernaturally protected through these times. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem so is our God round about His people. That is what the Psalmist has said, and I believe it.

Although we will experience what's coming, it will not hurt us because God knows how to rescue His own. That's what the Bible says. Paul said that we are not appointed to wrath (God's beginning judgments that are coming upon the face of the earth). So as you read this message, keep this in mind. If you know Christ as your Lord, you are covered under the shadow of His wings, always and forever. Glory to God!

This world will change drastically in our lifetime. This very well could be the last generation of the Church (in this age in mortal bodies). I don't know the minute or the specific time when this is coming, but I do know the season is here, now. This is a time to get right before God and a time to stay right.

I believe that everything that has not been founded in Christ Jesus is getting ready to be shaken by the turbulence that's coming. If you are born again, you will be anchored and come through the fires without a burn. This is God's grace to you. If you are living without Jesus, you will be blown away by the WINDS that are coming. The earth is getting ready to rip open all along its Tectonic plates. Land that once inhabited cities will be washed away into the seas. Although the earth has known this kind of calamity throughout its history, the destruction and loss of life will be greater today because of the current population masses that inhabit the earth.

Asteroids will strike the earth, soon (they create nuclear explosions by their impact). Nuclear weapons of destruction will be unleashed because of the gross darkness in the Middle East and central Asia. Those nations that have built their faith on pagan gods and the worship of ancestors will have no hedge to protect their nations, and they will experience the worst of the destruction and carnage. I sense great destructive winds are coming—literally.

The only thing that will help America or any nation is God's hedge and protection. This can only be built up by enlisting national and state leaders to call upon God for help. Any nation that ignores God is left alone to help themselves.

While this happens before our very eyes, there will be a great sound like an explosion that comes from the myriads of peoples crying out to God for mercy. Arrogance and selfish pride will melt away in seconds. And God will be exalted as Lord over all. Mercy will come down like honey from the skies. A revival that has never been experienced before in the history of man will explode on the scene of nations. Are you ready to direct them to Jesus?

I'm not a prophet. I'm not trying to get attention to gain something. While journaling the other night I sensed God releasing this to begin and continue for a "time." I sensed a release to be more expressive than ever before in sharing this. Please judge this with your heart. I just want you to be ready. God forever reigns. The rapture of the church is nigh! (Journal entry January 2005).

6. The challenge of ambiguities...

There is much wisdom in the axiom that says: we may speak with confidence that which is clearly written in scripture but remain reticent where it is silent. In other words if the Bible declares it, then we should speak it; however if the Bible is silent on a certain topic, we should hold our peace.

Protestants, especially, abide by this rule. Why is that? It is because we believe the Bible is the final authority (*sola scriptura*—scripture alone). Whereas our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters might opt for the authority of the Roman Catholic Church or church

tradition, Protestants accept the authority of the Bible (alone) over the Church, tradition, or ecclesiastical rule.

As a Protestant of the Reformed tradition *sola scriptura* is fine with me, except that the Bible is not always clear on certain topics. As a matter of fact, the Bible in many places is ambiguous because it is not written as a theological text. Quite the contrary, for instance, Paul's writings to the early churches which are written for specific occasions with his thoughts running beyond his secretary's ability to write them down—is an amalgamation of thought and word for the moment. His letters are, for the most part, not theological treatises but inspired words for the occasion, filled with emotion.

Let me give you one example of the Bible's ambiguity. Take, for instance, the topic of females in ministry. Have you ever wondered why there aren't more women pastors? Although the Bible is clear on women functioning in service for the Lord as well as or better than their male counterparts, the role of females in leadership such as pastors of a local church is not clearly articulated. According to Paul's letters to the Corinthians and his letters to Timothy, they seem to suggest that women in the New Testament church should remain silent and not usurp authority over a man.

And so the saga continues. You may join the *egalitarian* camp and gather scholars around you who say that Paul is speaking about women of his day and not sharing a universal principle against women of all time, or you may call yourself a *traditionalist* and gather scholars around you who say that women can be anything in ministry except senior pastors in the local church. So what are you?

That might be difficult to answer without comment? It is for me. Although I lean toward the *egalitarian* camp, I'm not going to part ways with you because you are a *traditionalist*. (I'm sure you're relieved.) Sometimes I think—in certain cases where the Bible is not clear—it's best to look beyond the ambiguity and look at what God is doing currently. When I look at female pastors in the Reformed tradition, I see God blessing them and their parishioners just like He blesses me and my parishioners.

After all, God can use any willing vessel for His sake. I figure if He can get a donkey to speak to reprove an errant prophet of the Old Testament, He can certainly use males or females to pastor His flock.

7. Amen!

Listen to this, “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me” (Isaiah 46:9). Do you hear what God is saying? He wants us to remember what He has done in the past. Why does He want us to live in the past? He doesn't want us to *live* in the past. He wants us to *reflect* on the past to be encouraged today. In other words if God was faithful yesterday, He is trustworthy today and will be trustworthy tomorrow.

Now let's take this a step or two further. Paul said in Titus 2:11, “The grace of God has appeared.” In John's Gospel we read that Jesus was “full of grace and truth.” The grace

that God promised in the past has come in the person of Jesus Christ. John Piper, in his book *Future Grace* (Multnomah Publishers, Inc. and Inter-Varsity Press) says this, “Christ came to guarantee that the promises of the Old Testament would indeed come true. He came for the sake of future grace. From the time of Christ onwards, every look back should include a look to Jesus. Without him there would be no future grace.”

Is it all about Jesus? Yes, it is. Allow me to continue please. Paul writing a letter of reconciliation to the saints in Corinth says this, “As many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes” (II Corinthians 1:20). Again Piper says (in regards to what Paul is saying in the text), “Have you said yes to all the future grace of God’s Yes to you in Christ? Is there any of God’s Yes to which you are saying, ‘No,’ or ‘Maybe,’ or, ‘Not now’? This text begs for immediate and radical response. It calls us to cry out to God, ‘I consecrate myself to forsake the ‘No’ and the ‘Maybe’ and the ‘Not Now’ of my unbelief. And I say ‘Yes’ to every future grace of every promise in Yes to me.’”

Every one without Christ as Savior comes to God through Christ. The sinner brings all his or her needs and finds God the Father coming to him or her in Christ Jesus with all His goodness promised to His children. Jesus is the mediator between God and man. In Christ I lay down my needs. And in Christ I pick up my blessings that God has for me, that God wants me to have. Everything that God has promised you and me for today and tomorrow is found in Christ, God’s revealed Grace and Glory to us.

Now in light of this information, consider the power of “AMEN!” To say “Amen” at the promises of God is to affirm them. It is to say, “Yes! And so let it be.” So the promises of God are in Christ “Yes and Amen,” right? That’s what the Bible says, and it doesn’t lie. When we go to praying in the name of Jesus, we go to where the “Yes” is. God says, in effect, “Yes, I will answer you. Call on me. Prove me faithful. Watch me bless you.” When we conclude our pray with “Amen!” we are affirming God’s Glory. We are affirming by oath, as it were, “God you will do this for your Glory’s sake. God you will glorify the name of Jesus. God you want to manifest your Glory through us by blessing us...” We are going to God through Jesus empty, devoid of resources, without strength, weak and frail but, nevertheless, trusting that God will fill us with His Holy Spirit, grant us His everlasting resources, strengthen our hearts, and give us grace, more grace and all grace sufficient to lift us up. Glory to God! (I wish I could attach the shout of praise).

Let me conclude with these final words from Pastor Piper: “When we pray, we say Amen to God through Christ, because God has said Amen to all his promises in Christ. Prayer is the confident plea for God to make good on his promises of future grace for Christ’s sake. Prayer links our faith in future grace with the foundation of it all, Jesus Christ.” So, it really is all about Jesus. Isn’t it?

8. Attack, attack!

General Ulysses S. Grant was badly beaten in the battle of Shiloh, Tennessee. General James McPherson, his aide, reported the loss of half of the Union artillery and almost one-third of the troops during the bloody conflict.

Retreat was Grant's only option, or so it seemed. Against all odds Grant ordered, "Reform the lines and we will attack at dawn. We will take them by surprise." By nine o'clock the next morning the South's troops were being routed by the surprise attack from the weary Union troops. It seems that the confederates had felt so secure in the previous day's victory that they failed to stay **alert**, thus giving up their blood-soaked and hallowed ground.

Someone once said that Christians are most vulnerable to the enemy's attack after a great victory. Why is this? It is because there is a real tendency among victors to rest on their laurels after victory, instead of securing their lines in vigilance. *Complacency kills.*

There is a real danger in the body of Christ to become complacent after battles have been fought and won. And this should not be. May I ask you a question? Are you alert to the enemy's schemes against you? Or does complacency define your disposition?

I want to share with you three reasons why complacency makes the child of God vulnerable to the enemy's attacks. Knowing why complacency happens can help us safeguard ourselves against it. At all costs Christians should remain vigilant throughout their spiritual journey.

There are several reasons for complacency after a spiritual victory. For one, complacency happens when the one in charge *fails to recognize his or her advantage*. The one in charge must see the benefit in regrouping and attacking until the enemy is utterly destroyed. Once you win a spiritual battle don't fold-up shop and retire. Attack! Okay so you've won a battle, pursue the enemy until you've won the war. In spiritual warfare there are no retreats or awards banquets, only attack. Don't wait for the enemy to hit you, press into the kingdom of darkness and fight with the Light!

In 1863 President Lincoln was downcast beyond words when General Lee retreated from Gettysburg. In deep despair he penned these words to General George G. Meade of the Union Army: "...my dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely." The letter was never sent.

General George G. Meade **failed**, in the words of Lincoln, to "appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape." Because Meade let Lee cross the Potomac, between July 4 to July 15, 1863, Lee accomplished the impossible and was able to fight again, prolonging the war. During this short time, Lee established field hospitals to care for the 8500 sick and wounded evacuees he brought back with him, many of whom would heal and return to service. He salvaged most of his artillery, returning 6000 wagons and between 30,000 and 40,000 horses and mules. He also brought back 30,000 cattle and 25,000 sheep and thousands of hogs. Whereas this army had been on the verge of starvation two months before Gettysburg, he had succeeded in getting supplies enough for the war to go on many more months, despite manpower losses. Had Meade crushed Lee's army in the Potomac (flood stage delayed the crossing), the war would have ended earlier. As it turns out, the war continued for another two years with thousands, upon thousands of war casualties.

Remember this point to safe-guard yourself against complacency: After your spar with the enemies of darkness, keep attacking until the Lord directs you to a new campaign. Never retreat and never allow complacency to enter your relationship with the Lord. Press the point. Follow through. Take it all the way!

Secondly, complacency comes when we elect to build a *port folio*, instead of sounding a bugle's charge. Many in the body of Christ are content to relive their past events of victory, instead of "forgetting those things which are behind" and pressing ahead. If you find your conversations about God in the past tense, you need to repent of complacency and get in the fight of faith.

May I share with you a secret to success for your spiritual progress? It is this: keep moving. Progress along. Don't stop, and certainly don't retreat.

Forward movement for the believer is permanent. The story is told about the great Reformer, Martin Luther. One day his son came home from school skipping and singing. "Why are you so happy?" Luther asked him. "Today we finished the catechism," answered his son. "My, but you are far ahead of me," said Luther. "I've been studying the catechism all my life, and I haven't finished it yet."

Forward movement for the believer is perseverance. When Daniel Webster was a young lawyer he took a case for a fee of \$20.00. It was a difficult case and in preparing for it he had to make a trip to Boston, which in itself cost more than he was getting as a fee. He was determined to do a thorough job on the case and win it, which he did. Many years later a big company wanted him at short notice to undertake a case for what was in those days a fabulous fee. Webster looked over the case and found it was almost identical with the one he had researched and won 20 years before! Although it took 20 years to turn profit, his perseverance paid off.

Remember this point to safe-guard yourself against complacency: Resist the temptation to rest on your laurels and live in the past. Keep yourself moving forward in the Kingdom of God. Steadfastness has its rewards in time.

Thirdly, complacency comes when we lose focus. The object of our faith is Christ alone. Christ is our focus. There are two ways to see something. I can see an object with my eyes. But, I can also see an object with the eyes of my spirit. One of the greatest gifts God has given man is to visualize something internally. I can't see Jesus with my physical eyes. But, I can see the Bible. I can read the Bible. And as I read the Bible, I begin to visualize internally what Jesus is like. In fact, the Holy Spirit is sent for this very purpose—to help us maintain our focus on Christ. As our focus is maintained, we become changed in to His likeness.

Many people today fall to complacency because they take their eyes off the Word of God. They simply lose focus. They place their focus on other "things." Before long they become transformed by the "things of this world." The "things of this world" become their focus and then their god.

With your eyes on Jesus, you avoid misdirection in life. The best way to hit a bull's-eye every time you throw a dart is to throw your dart at a blank target. Wherever the dart strikes, select that spot as the bull's-eye and draw concentric circles around it.

Crazy, you say? No more absurd than an aimless person who stumbles into one day after another, setting today's goal on the basis of yesterday's deed. Wouldn't you agree? A steadfast gaze upon the Master will direct you on a straight pathway.

With your eyes on Jesus, you can see what He's up to. Isa. 45:11 tells us to ask God about the things to come. I can tell you this. Jesus is up to something big! In fact it wouldn't surprise me if He's no longer seated, but standing before the Father and ready to carry out this order, "My Son, it's time. Go and gather up your bride. I'm calling them home."

Remember this point to safe-guard yourself against complacency: Stay focused on the Word. Stay in fellowship with your Christian brothers and sisters. Keep communicating with the Lord—pray without ceasing!

Concluding remarks: I have shared with you the danger of complacency. Be very cautious after great victories. To let down your guard and revel in the victory is to invite disaster. Stay alerted to the advantage you have when the enemy is on the run. Pursue the darkness, and crush it with the light of Jesus! Resist the temptation to live in your past accomplishments. Keep moving forward. And above all, keep your eyes on Jesus. Stay alerted to what the Spirit of Grace is doing around you. Don't miss the move of God in this latter day.

What about you? Has complacency slipped into your relationship with God? Are you distant and needing a change? May I re-introduce you to the solution? His name is Jesus. The Bible says that there is "no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." The name Jesus is greater than the name, complacency. Just as light overcomes darkness by driving it away, so does the name Jesus when spoken with meaning from the heart, overcomes and drives away all the uncertainty about your eternal future.

You see God has provided you an eternal home in Heaven, but you must ask Him for it. And when you call upon God's Son to save you, the Bible says that He will save you to the uttermost. He will name you as one of His own. He will nurture you and care for you in your relationship with Him. And then one day, He will call for you and carry you home. I must say though, Heaven is not a place for the complacent. It is not a place for the "lovers of this world." Heaven is home to those only who love God, who want to serve God, and who can stand in His courts of praise forever and ever, rejoicing with the saints.

Only Jesus makes this happen.

9. The Right Words

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) is undoubtedly the most widely read and best known Christian author of the Twentieth Century. Several years ago a movie entitled, *Shadowlands*, starring Anthony Hopkins was produced about the life of Lewis. It's now on video and well worth the time for viewing. One thing remarkable about Lewis' writing ability was his range. He could write books to stump the most hardened agnostic, but he could also write children's books (*Chronicles of Narnia*) that still circulate in the market places.

When I was a young student at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, OK many years ago, I took a course in Lewis' theology. It was at that time my taste for Lewis' material developed. One of my favorite books is *Mere Christianity*. I want to highlight some lines in this book that are widely read by theology students everywhere. Lewis states, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (*Mere Christianity* New York: Touchstone, 1996. p. 56)

While I'm on the topic, what do you say about Jesus? Who was He? Some say that He was a myth, perpetuated through history by shallow minds. Some say that He was only a historical person. He did some great things for His fellowman, but that's it. Some say that He was then, and His teachings are now, offensive. (No one likes being called a worthless sinner.) But, then again, many say that He is Jesus Christ the only Begotten Son of God—Savior and Lord; and He is worthy of praise. The Bible says that Jesus was God's glory revealed physically. Men and women in the time of Jesus saw with their own eyes the very glory of God the Father standing before them—Wow!

Today we can't see Jesus physically, but we can see Him with the eyes of our heart. We have two sets of eyes—one set is physical, and the other set is spiritual. The spiritual eyes of our heart are very, very important to spiritual survival. Why? Sometimes our physical eyes focus on the "created thing" and fails to tell the spiritual eyes to investigate further for possible deception. For example, many times in the Old Testament the people of Israel would turn away from the invisible God of Heaven and focus their physical eyes on man-made idols of wood or stone and call that thing their god. We must have our spiritual eyes open always to the one and true God of Heaven, resisting the temptation to make gods out of "things" and even ourselves (Humanism). Yes, the Bible says that we are to walk by faith and not by (physical) sight. Hear me please. Faith is not blind. We don't blindly leap into a realm that is suspicious and unreasonable. We see the Word of God before us, and our eyes of faith stay focused on the promises until they become reality.

What about savoring Jesus? Do you? Pastor John Piper says that when you see something as true and beautiful and valuable, you savor it. That is, you treasure it. You cherish and admire and prize it. Spiritual seeing and spiritual savoring are so closely connected that it would be fair to say: If you don't savor Christ, you haven't seen Christ for who He is. If you don't prize him above all things, you haven't apprehended his true worth.¹

10. These things are possible through God only...

Have you ever stopped and wondered why your behavior sometimes falls short of what the Bible requires? I have. Yes, even ministers of the Gospel fall short. Trying as I may to serve God with all my heart still, at times, I find myself wrecked and distraught from having been caught off guard and slammed by a side of me that's certainly not godly. Further I must admit that, afterwards, I am puzzled at how such a base nature could still possibly reside inside me—a man “sold out to God.” Some time ago I began looking at this reality and decided it was time to analyze it to get victory over it. There were several things I discovered during this search that I want to share with you.

First, I rediscovered that all life forms grow or die based upon their food and water source. Knowing that the Bible declares a believer reborn by conversion, I began to meditate upon scriptures that dealt with feeding and nurturing my “rebirth” in Jesus Christ. The New Testament is filled with scriptures that speak about the “born again” spirit of man. When I called upon the name of Jesus many years ago, the Holy Spirit birthed me into the Body of Christ. God did a supernatural work inside me that was unseen to my physical eyes, but very evident to my new “spiritual eyes” that He gave me. As a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit recreated my spirit that had been inoperative from my birth because of my sin.

As a Christian I'm not only physical and needing to make contact with my physical environment, but now I am also spiritual and needing to fellowship with God to stay spiritually alive. Whereas before conversion I was preoccupied solely with my physical needs, now I must nurture my spiritual desires in Jesus too. If I neglect either one, I pay the price. For example, if I neglect my spiritual need which is basically my time alone with Jesus, I suffer spiritual defeat. On the other hand, if I feed my spirit at least as often as I feed my physical body, I suffer fewer humiliating defeats at the hands of the enemy.

Secondly, I discovered that the base nature in me still tried to oppose my desire to live in victory. The Bible talks about the “old man” of sin still being present within man when he becomes a believer. The reality is such that every time I advance forward in victory over sin, at any moment I can forfeit my advance by giving in to petty cries from my old nature. Some days I find myself doing nothing but wasting time and pampering my woes. For example, if I don't bring my thoughts into focus, they will soon become completely self-centered and brazen. The best remedy I've found to reclaim my thoughts and place them into proper focus is to begin a blatant, unexpected boasting of who God is and how He loves people through me. I immediately get my thoughts off myself and onto God where they need to be. If I find myself down-in-the-dumps because of some negative circumstance, I try to find somebody to lift up with a word of praise or appreciation.

¹ John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004) 10.

These simple things are like miracle cures. I have found that all my problems and successes begin with my attitude of mind. Knowing this, I make a habit daily of feeding my mind with power scriptures. With these scriptures, I think on them. I pray them out loud throughout the day (I feed my body at least three times a day so I try to feed my spirit at least that many times for equal attention). I memorize them. I write them as topics for devotional studies. I teach them and I believe them. Thinking on the Word of God, all these years, has NEVER failed me.

Thirdly, I discovered that my strength to put down the old nature when it pops up is relative to the strength of Jesus Christ in me. The Bible tells me that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Yet I can't do "all things." I can't write speeches like Winston Churchill or Abraham Lincoln. I can't write plays like William Shakespeare. There are many things I can't do because I don't have the ability or the intellectual capacity or even the desire. So, what does it mean for me to do all things through Christ Jesus? It means that I am able to do everything and anything in spite of my human limitations when God calls me to do it because He will do it through me. God gave me a purpose and a plan for my life. I can say one of two things about my calling before the Lord. I can say, "God, what you want me to do is impossible." Or I can say, "God, what you want done is impossible in my own strength and power, but I know that in you I can do it. And I can do it well!"

At that time I surrender my willpower to God and ask Him for His will power to complete the task. Immediately, a burden of defeat lifts from my shoulders. My mind becomes peaceful. My heart fills with God-like faith. God begins to bring people across my path to help me. He gives me new insights, new ways of looking at old problems. And somehow God gets it done through me. That's key. The strength to do it is not my own, and my arm extended in action is not mine--but HIS! For example, I might have a difficult time being friendly and caring to some knucklehead that just gets on my nerves. Try as hard as I might, I find myself powerless in resisting the urge to punch him in the belly. If I feed on that thought, BAPD may soon be arresting me for assault and battery. For a minister of the Gospel, that's a bad position to be in. Therefore, instead of feeding my mind with the norm, I ask God to love the difficult person through me. I begin to think upon the scriptures in Genesis that talk about all people being created in God's likeness. I think about the Bible scripture that tells how Jesus loved all of us, even the knuckleheads of the world. Over time, I begin to notice a real difference in how I view that person. Here again, these simple and little things work wonders for me and bring me the victory.

And now that I have shared these tips, why don't you try these simple things the next time you get slammed? If you will consistently feed your spirit as actively as you feed your body, you will begin to take on a new attitude about life. If you will not drop out of the race because you think something is wrong with you because you can't seem to "live" the Christian life but instead consider yourself normal and simply under attack by the old nature, you will have more success putting down the old nature than giving in to it. I can speak affirmatively in this regard.

Learn to let God work not only in you, but through you. Surrender yourself completely to the Holy Spirit by saying often, “Holy Spirit I surrender my will to your leadership for my life. You know what’s best for me. Work through me now.” You see, we can’t love like we should because human love is self-centered. We can’t do caring things for others like we should because we mostly care about ourselves. We can’t do the impossible that God calls us to do for His glory because we are too limited by our humanness. This is our dilemma. Thank God though that we don’t have to admit defeat in Him. As we live in Him, He loves with His perfect love, loving through us (Romans5:5). He rescues the unlovable through us. We provide the willingness; He gets the job done by His own power. Really, all we have to do as Christians is to provide the work space for Jesus and allow Him to live and rule in us. He works through us to get the job done. He gets the glory, and we get the joy.

11. Apologize for What

Why should we apologize for being America?

Capitol Reader Political Book Summaries writes in review of T.R. Reid’s book entitled, ***The United States of Europe: The New Superpower and the End of American Supremacy***. “The rise of a united Europe is one of the great geopolitical events of our time. The nations of this diverse and once fractious continent are pulling together to create a common economic system, currency and social identity. The European Union now eclipses the United States in terms of population, economic output and it is the largest consumer market in the world. In short, the European Union is fast becoming a superpower capable of rivaling the United States on every measure, except militarily.

“The emergence of the European Union as a major global force has gone largely unnoticed by the American public. Most Americans do not realize, for instance, the sheer number of products and services they purchase which are made or controlled by European concerns. With America’s huge account and trade deficits, Europe is essentially lending America money to buy European products. This arrangement offers something for both sides, but America’s lack of fiscal responsibility is reflected in the rise of the euro versus the dollar. The euro is poised to replace the dollar as the world’s currency of choice. A unified Europe is becoming an economic powerhouse that is increasingly setting the rules of global commerce. The sooner America wakes up to this fact, the better for all concerned.”

America isn’t sleeping, she’s at war with the extremists that the European Union, save Britain and a few others, has refused to act against militarily. America could set back and count her money too if somebody else fought her battles and funded militaries. Pardon me for being pro America—of course that’s what Europeans detest about me to begin with—but I must demur. America is not the bad guy, nor the school-yard bully. America is ordained and carrying out her world calling. Let me explain.

America was founded on the principle of freedom. Her early settlers were religious refugees seeking freedom from religious tyranny. They were willing to die for the liberties they were denied in Europe. Many of the brave and bold men, women and

children died from exposure, disease, starvation, and even the hostile actions by the indigenous peoples. This desire for liberty, freedom, and non-governmental sponsorship of one religion over another is still in our blood. And America, as she has proven in the past and demonstrates today, will go to war anywhere in the world to uphold these precious principles. Without apologies I might add.

If the European Union thinks she can lecture America for being jingoistic or gun totting cowboys then she is guilty of the very patronizing she is using to shame us. The European Union can not denounce America for being war dogs and then itself refuse to acknowledge the immorality in her camp. The European Union has failed to denounce terrorist's organizations in Lebanon. The European Union has refused to acknowledge that the United States—Bush administration particularly—has had some good successes in Afghanistan and Iraq (free elections). The European Union has failed to act jointly against Iran's nuclear threat. The European Union might have its euro and trade power, but it isn't perfect either.

As a matter of fact let me predict where this is going. The European Union wants nothing more than what China or Russia want—to be the leading world power. To do that, she must eclipse the United States in the world spot light. Will this happen? Eventually the European Union will eclipse all nations. There is coming a restoration, a revival of the Roman Empire. In the last days in which we live currently, the nations of the world will move into positions to dominate the world in trade, prestige, religious and military might. The only missing link for this to happen in the European Union is a human leader that consolidates its power and leads it forward to world domination.

There is coming soon a world leader who will fill this tall order for the European Union. He will capitalize on Europe's secular platform—no resemblances of God. He will unify trade, secularism, and militaries. He is called the Anti-Christ in the book of Revelation.

You might keep this in mind as the world continues to throw mud in the eyes of America. But America is not going away, nor will she cower under the pressures of her oppressors. Currently America is experiencing spiritual revival. God is revisiting His covenant which He made with her early fore-fathers of faith. He is blessing America one more time because she is humbling herself before God and calling out to Him. God said, "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray..." (II Chron. 7:14). America wants more than what money and prestige alone can give. America wants God's blessing on her. As long as she wants this and cries out for it, she will have it.

The European Union is playing into the hands of God whether she cares to admit this or not. She will serve God's purpose either willingly or by His Sovereignty. And for that matter, every nation in the world belongs to Him and is created for His glory (Isa. 43:7). God watches over His footstool which according to the Psalmist is the world. If the nations of this world humble themselves before God, they will prosper. If the nations defy Him—well stick around and watch what happens. God will have the last word!

12. Justice will prevail
Consider this...

When I applied for law enforcement many years ago I was tested, evaluated, questioned, and grilled regarding whether or not I could use lethal force against another human being. I find it curious that it was assumed, without question, when I entered the service at the age of 18 that I would have no problem whatsoever using lethal force against an enemy of the state. Not one official asked me whether or not I objected to carrying a .45 pistol or an M-16 Rifle, not to mention using one or the other against another human being. It was assumed I could do so because it was my duty as an American citizen.

Is there a double standard in this country?

We condemn a murderer to the death chamber, only to have him stay on death roll for years while waiting for his appeals to run out, all at the tax payer's expense. If that's not crazy enough, we are constantly harassed by human rights groups telling us how evil we Americans are for administering capital punishment. I don't get it. We have no problem asking 19 year olds to lay down their lives for their country. But we protect the rights of the convicted. For example, how many names of young Americans who have died in Iraq can you name? Probably not many, right? But Scott Peterson you know because of the media love affair with his trial. Something is wrong.

May I ask you a question?

Would the death of Jesus have purchased our redemption if He had chosen life in prison over capital punishment? This begs the question: Can honor be associated with death? I believe it can. Jesus said that there was no greater love than this that a man would lay down his life for a friend. Yes, it is tragic to hear of young soldiers dying, but they die with honor for a great nation—America. The tragedy of death is not that a young person dies. Young people die every day in America just like older people. The *tragedy is that many people die without honor.* Gangsters die for turf. Addicts die for one more high. But soldiers die for you and me.

What I believe.

I believe in God, country, and family. Each is sacred. Each must be preserved at all costs. To announce that God is dead is to kill the soul. To say that our country is misguided is to cop out. To destroy the family through same sex marriage is to weaken society beyond repair. I believe in God the Father, Jesus Christ His only begotten Son, and His Holy Spirit. I believe that America will live or die by its relationship to the Father in Heaven above. Spiritual awakening is imperative. I believe the restoration of the family unit through faith in Jesus Christ can change every institution in this great land—the first being the local church body of Jesus Christ.

I believe in law and God's order...The condemned must accept their fate and lay down their life for their victim's sake. Young or old, men and women must continue to lay down their lives for the good of community (law enforcement, fire fighters, first responders, etc.), state (National Guard), and nation (military and public service). This is the way of civilization. This is the American way—to seek out honor at all costs, even if it cost my life.

Justice will prevail!

13. The Chances are...

If there is no Creator, then we have some problems. If there is no “first cause” as Saint Thomas Aquinas stated, then our theory of beginnings has problems. If physical laws of

thermodynamics are constant and irrefutable throughout the universe, then our theory of evolution has some real problems. I think it takes more faith to believe that the universe and humanity evolved from nothing and no Creator than it does to believe this, “In the beginning, **God** created the heavens and the earth...”

Robert J. Hastings gives a good illustration to support this. Hastings says, “Some say that creation was the result of chance. Others say it was God. Those who rely on chance have some big explaining to do. Here is one simple illustration of the improbability of man just ‘happening.’

“Take ten pennies and mark them 1 to 10. Put them in your pocket and give them a good shake. Now try to draw them out of your pocket in order, from 1 to 10, returning each coin to your pocket after each try.

“Your chance of drawing number 1 on the first try is 1 in 10. Your chance of drawing 1 and 2 in succession would be 1 in 100. On drawing 1, 2, and 3 in succession, one in a thousand. Your chance of drawing 1, 2, 3, and 4 in succession would be one in 10,000, and so on.

“Now listen to this. Your chance of drawing the pennies in perfect succession, 1 to 10, would be one chance in ten billion!

“And yet there are some who say that all the complex and essential conditions for life on our earth as we know it could have occurred in the proper sequence just by ‘chance.’

“Leslie Weatherhead said, ‘It demands more of credulity to imagine that the universe was all a huge accident than to believe in the operation of a mind. How very strange that a ball of matter accidentally happening, and accidentally moving round the sun, should accidentally and purposelessly produce a man who purposefully seeks truth and purposefully asks how such an accident could happen, thus exhibiting a more profound degree of intelligence than that which accidentally produced this amazing universe.’”

As a life-long student of science, history, philosophy, and theology, I’ve come to refute the notion that scientists cannot be devoted theists. Every discipline has its absolutes, even science. For example, science is governed by certain physical laws. It is an absolute fact that oil and water cannot mix. World history records historical fact, as opposed to legends, fables, mythology, and the revisionists. Philosophy is logical because truth is logical and universal (it is nonsense to contradict truth whether one is an American or a citizen of any other country in the world). And theology has its absolutes. As a theist, I believe this absolute truth: God exists.

As a life-long student of life in general, I find it curious that many famous scientists of history were devout Christians. Their faith didn’t interfere with their vocations. Their vocations were enhanced by their faith. Here are just a few Christian scientists of history: Carl Friedrich Gauss, Blaise Pascal, Georg Cantor, and Sir Isaac Newton. Carl Friedrich Gauss said this, “There are problems to whose solution I would attach an infinitely greater importance than to those of mathematics, for example touching ethics, or our

relation to God, or concerning our destiny and our future; but their solution lies wholly beyond us..." God is above all and the Creator of all things.

14. Charge the lines...

**"He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms"
(Psalms 18:34).**

You remember the name Florence Nightingale, don't you? The year was 1854 and the war was the Crimean War. The players? For one, Russia wanted control of the Dardanelles. Secondly, Turkey resisted with France and Britain joining her. Britain would allow no one to threaten her sea trade, especially through the Dardanelles. There was war for two years, and Florence led the charge with nurses, tending the wounded and dying.

There was another charge too. Alfred Lord Tennyson was his name. A modern war correspondent of sorts Tennyson writes these opening lines, "Half a league, half a league, Half a league onward, All in the valley of Death Rode the six hundred. Forward, the Light Brigade! Charge for the guns!" he said: Into the valley of Death Rode the six hundred." Yes, these are the opening lines to the famed, "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

I awoke this morning to the cadence of this poem... "Forward, the Light Brigade!" And then out of my inner being I begin to hear the words from Psalms 18:34, "He teacheth my hands to war," More on this in just a minute, but first—listen to these words: "O Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done; The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won; The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting, While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring: But O heart! Heart! Heart! Heart! O the bleeding drops of red, Where on the deck my Captain lies, Fallen cold and dead."

Do you remember the lyrical words? You should. They are the words of Walt Whitman. He penned these words, being moved by the death of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was truly a Captain par excellence. There seemed to be a lot of senseless death in the mid 1800s in America's war of brother against brother and in Russia's Ukraine.

Tennyson penned his immortal lines, being moved by little more than 600 light cavalry men who moved across an open terrain to a suicidal fate. The canons belched flack and tainted the air overhead with black-powder smoke, but the light brigade kept moving forward... "Half a league, half a league, Half a league onward, All in the valley of Death Rode the six hundred." What would cause brave boys—barely men—to keep moving forward without breaking ranks in the face of gruesome death? Would it be discipline? Would it be for the glory of battle? What could it be?

Lord, teach my hands to war! No, not conventional warfare. I hate killing. Lord, teach me how to overcome the enemies of the Cross. Yes, teach me to stand with bravery, with boldness, with intestinal fortitude, with discipline, with HONOR against the forces of evil this day.

Lord teach my hands to war. Lord when my hands are slack due to weariness—teach them to war, lifted up. Lord when my hands refrain from helping the widows and orphans—teach my hands to touch them again with your touch. Lord when my hands lie dormant from prayer less hours—teach me to fold them in prayer.

Rejoice, O my soul! The light brigade is the hand lifted up to praise you and to help my fellowman. The light brigade is the trained hand, the prayer hands, for Calvary's sake. Teach me Lord to charge the lines of darkness with the power of light. Teach me to stand against the wrongs and injustice of evil for the good of my neighbor. Teach me Lord through poets of old to take heart and hold the line like the soldiers and Captains before me.

“My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead. *Walt Whitman*

15. What's in a voice?

Checkmate:

1. To attack (a chess opponent's king) in such a manner that no escape or defense is possible, thus ending the game.
2. To defeat completely.

Enemy's strategy laid out

Jacob and his sons are sons of promise. In Genesis chapters 39-44, the sons of promise find themselves in a dilemma. In this dilemma, I'm sure the devil thought he had God in a fix. I'm sure the devil thought he had a winning strategy, whereby he tightens a noose around God's fledging seeds of promise to destroy them for good. It certainly looks that way to the natural eye. And why do I say this, you might ask? I say this because Jacob and his sons are at a critical point of no return. Destruction is quickly closing in on them.

Here's the problem

Jacob was a non-influential father and, thus, not respected by his older sons. Also he favored Joseph over the other 11, and they resented it deeply. Jacob's older sons were terrible to young Joseph. They hated him. They were jealous of him. They would have murdered him, but instead they hatched an evil plan to sell him into slavery. The whole family was dysfunctional and out of fellowship with God, all but one—Joseph. Because the hearts of the others were tainted with sin, God could not use them. Only Joseph displays the fruit of a pure heart, and God uses him to preserve his family—God's chosen seeds of promise.

I'm sure the devil thought he had a winning strategy when he had Joseph, the only God fearing one, sold into slavery and had the others bound in hate and discontent. I'm sure he relished the thought of his soon-coming victory over the heirs of promise as famine spreads across Canaan. With Joseph out of the picture, and with Jacob and sons trapped in famine, the Abraham covenant would be broken and, hopefully done away with.

God's checkmate

God's *checkmate* destroyed the devil's scheme. By one sure and bold move, God destroyed the devil's strategy, while circumventing all his evil by turning it around for good. In one 24 hour period, God moved and Joseph was promoted from prisoner to second-in-command of all of Egypt. Is that possible?

All things are possible to him who believes!

II Kings speaks about another checkmate that also occurred in a 24 hour period. While under siege by the Assyrians, the citizens of Samaria were starving. Any commodity that could have been used as food escalated in price. The prophet Elisha told the king's right-hand-man that in one day the tide would be turned and food would be plentiful. The king's captain didn't believe him, but it happened just like it was told by Elisha. And it all happened over the course of 24 hours (II Kings 7).

Only a 24 hour period separates you

You might be distraught and destitute today, but within 24 hours God could visit your situation, changing it for good. As a matter of fact the only thing that separates you from victory over your dire circumstances is a 24 hours period. You may go to bed tonight destroyed and awaken tomorrow to a new day, your day of reward, your day of victory. God does work that way. If God only needed a day to put the earth in orbit, he can certainly change your situation in a day. After all, is anything too difficult for God?

16. What's in the words of Joseph?

The voice of Joseph through trial

Joseph *voiced* his dreams before his father and brothers and his brothers envied him all the more, selling him into slavery. Joseph *voiced* his repugnance against the sexual advances of his master's wife, and she accused him of rape. Joseph *voiced* his concern for a fellow prisoner and gave him the interpretation to his dream; however, the prisoner forgot about him.

It seems the more Joseph tried to do right, the more wrong was handed to him. It seems that Joseph was a pawn in the hands of adverse circumstances, but in reality he was God's king being groomed for greatness. Why was he destined for greatness? He gained success because his heart was right and his voice of reply was right; thus, he received

God's favor in the midst of persecution and in spite of persecution. God is greater than persecution. Period!

Joseph came out of the trial

After two years of being forgotten by Pharaoh's servant, one night Pharaoh had a troubling dream and the servant tells Pharaoh about Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Pharaoh doesn't delay. He calls Joseph from the prison house to the king's house. Joseph stands before Pharaoh telling him that God can interpret his dream. Standing before Pharaoh, God gives Joseph a word of knowledge (I Corinthians 12) that explains the coming of bounty and famine following. But not only does God give him a word of knowledge about Pharaoh's dream, God gives him a word of wisdom (also one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in I Corinthians 12). The word of wisdom gives Joseph the understanding of what to do during the seven years of bounty to prepare for the following seven years of famine. In one 24 hour period, Joseph went from the prison house to the courtyard of Pharaoh. In that period of time he lost his prisoner status and won a second-in-command status.

What does this story tell us?

Nothing is too difficult for God. God uses adverse circumstance to your ultimate good. He can not be out-planned, out-smarted, or out-gunned by the devil. The devil seeks your demise by trying to crush you with overwhelming problems in life. God is not asleep while this is happening to you. God is ultimately turning every bad situation around for your benefit if you keep the *voice of Joseph* through the trial. The voice of Joseph is the voice of faith in Jesus Christ. It is the voice of God within you that wants to answer your problems if you will let it. The voice of Joseph is a word of deliverance. Stand up for God when every other thing around you is falling down. If you will just keep on keeping on, if you will just stay the course, Jesus will come for you. Jesus will one day deliver you and reward you (Hebrews 11:6). Prove him.

Clothed in Majesty

Have you contemplated the beauty of God's majesty lately?

Did you know that God has several blankets with which He cloaks Himself? His coverings are expansive, vast, and immeasurable. His majesty is beautiful and certainly beyond mortal words of explanation. So, it's best to just stand in awe while we consider Him.

The Lord God covers Himself in three majestic hues—black, gray, and blue. He chooses His wardrobe of blue by day. He desires black by night, and woolen gray during the stormy days. He is majestic in His appearance with His wardrobe of many colors.

In Psalms 93:1 it says, "The lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved." (NASB)

In Psalms 97:2 it says, “Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.” (NASB)

Why do we consider His majestic covering? His majestic covering accentuates His Glory. To be heard, a voice must be amplified. To make a statement with art, an artist must use the bold strokes of a brush. To be seen in the midst of gross darkness, light must be greater still. God’s majesty intensifies His glory. Intensity defines our God!

His name in the Old Testament is *Elohim*. Consider this. The verb in the name construction is singular, but the noun is plural. How can that be? Our God is one God. He stands alone, and no other god stands above Him; however, He is many—not many in number. He is “many.” He is much in intensity. His majesty is like the sound of many voices upon the skip of the waters. Can you hear this? He is abounding, excessive, exceedingly, and more than enough in His manifested majesty.

If we consider God in our prayer closets only, we might fail to grasp His glorious majesty. That’s why He created and uses the heavens to declare or speak on His behalf. To consider the intensity of His glory, go outdoors and peer into the heavens. Go to the Grand Canyon and send your voice echoing across the expanse of His beauty. Can you hear this?

Why do we consider His majestic covering? His majestic covering accentuates His extravagance. Jesus attended a wedding celebration in Cana of Galilee and performed His first miracle there. He turned water into wine. That is awe inspiring, to say the least, but that’s not all there is. The miracle is intensified when we consider His extravagance. He didn’t just give them wine for a refill. He gave them more wine than they could drink in one sitting. God is intense. He always goes the second mile and beyond with His people. Yes. What you ask for in prayer, you will receive in extravagance!

Can you hear this message? God reigns. His majesty is His covering of sky, starlight night, and even the gray clouds of rainy days. He is forever to be praised and magnified for His glory’s sake. See Him. Feel Him. Be consumed in His fire. You and I belong in His consuming fire. He’s speaking today from the voice of His creation. Wow! What a beautiful sound. Can you hear Him?

17. Collapsing

Capitol Reader Political Book Summaries writes, “In Collapse, Jared Diamond argues that present global resource consumption trends are not sustainable. Throughout history, civilizations have collapsed or declined, in no small measure, because their populations have undermined the ecological niches upon which their existence depends. Diamond believes that a complex set of factors, such as environmental resilience (or fragility), social flexibility, larger global trends and even pure luck, combine in unpredictable ways to influence whether societies fail or succeed.”

I have a point of contention with the stated summary. But first, let me tell you something about Jared Diamond. Diamond is brilliant and tends to see the greater picture of things by studying the significance of the small things. His book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* was a very rich read. It's amazing how unseen germs, industrialized steel, and other small things shaped world history.

Diamond teaches geography at the University of California and is the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. (It seems that others thought the book was good also.) He is one of the most distinguished experts in the field of evolutionary biology. He has written more than 200 articles for magazines such as *Discover*, *Nature* and *Geo*, and his work has proven highly influential in informing public discourse on a range of environmental and social issues. He is a smart, very smart guy.

Now back to my point of contention. Let me start by stating a disclaimer. I'm far from qualified to match wits or backgrounds with Diamond. I resist the temptation to flatter myself in thinking that I could add or take away anything Professor Diamond states in his well written book. Nevertheless, I would be remiss to neglect in telling you something that Diamond and other highly educated men and women oftentimes overlook when it comes to telling a story on how things came to be. I refuse to believe that "pure luck" is equal to science and technology in either augmenting or withering civilizations. I refuse to accept this.

Why am I being pig headed, you may ask? Granted, my background pre-disposes me to "pig headedness." I grew up in a minister's home. I attended school in a small town and left home at 18 to serve in the United States military. The year was 1973. I returned to marry my high school sweetheart with whom I've enjoyed her love and acceptance for the past 27 years. I've reared three children, all grown. I served my community as a police officer through the years and now enjoy retirement. In retirement I've chosen to pastor a small church that my father founded.

I tell you my background of the past 50 years to set the stage for what I'm about to write. When it comes to human history "luck" may seem the order of the day, but it isn't. "...pure luck..." should be changed to "God's Providence and over riding hand in the affairs of men." Yes the longer I live, the more I study history (my life's passion), the more I see the movement and aligning of nations—either past or present—the more I am convinced that "luck" in world affairs has little to do with the way things are. It is God who holds the course of human history in the palms of His Hands.

So, when you are tempted to scratch your head and think—Wow—what luck! Try this. God doesn't rule His world and universe by luck. He rules by His Sovereignty and favors those who will serve Him willingly. No my friend, it isn't luck that's covering history. It's the goodness and favor of God who is The Almighty history maker.

18. The Limits of Common Sense...

I was taught to value common sense. My roots are small town, lower middle-class American from the heart of America—Oklahoma. My dad was a WWII veteran who had seen action in the South Pacific and claimed he made it through the war by the grace of

God and his ability to use his natural wits. My Mother was from a family of nine brothers and sisters, who grew up in a country home without electricity and without indoor facilities. They had a path-and-a-half that led to an outhouse, a good distance from the house.

Pragmatism was honorable and the way to “make it” in the rough-and-tumble world outside. Pragmatism was known by many names in the Dashner home—good-old-common-horse-sense, good-sense, level-headedness, and common-smarts, to name some of the more commonly used. And much pride went into addressing the pundit’s paradoxes, the intellectual’s conundrums, and academia’s curricula with a home-spun wisdom that kept life simple. After all, isn’t life supposed to be simple?

Through the years my pragmatism has rescued me, on more than one occasion, while serving in the military and municipal law enforcement. I’m glad for my contributions to country and community by way of the common man’s wit. But to be perfectly honest, I must admit that there is more to living than just being practical. Listen please.

I agree with Socrates. Our most practical need in life is to be more than a pragmatist. I believe the words of Jesus who said that man shall not live by bread alone. Yes, there is more to living than bread. As a matter of fact, Jesus also said that it would profit man very little to gain the whole world—all it offers—and lose his own soul. Or in other words, man was created for a higher purpose. Man should not live by his natural wits alone, while ignoring the deeper issues of life beyond this life.

One of my favorite authors is Peter Kreeft. The professor says, “A standard joke-shop item is the little black box: when you move the lever from ‘off’ to ‘on’, it whirrs, blinks a red light, and opens a trap door in its top, allowing a hand to come out and shut its lever off, then drop back into the box. Every part of the box is practical—it has a purpose beyond itself—the battery sends energy along the wire; the wire takes it to a gear; the gear turns; it opens the top; and so on—but there is absolutely no reason or purpose to the box as a whole. That is why it is so funny.

“But a life like that, a life composed only of practical things that serve some other end but with nothing in it worth having for its own sake—the true, the good, the beautiful—such a life is not funny but pitiful.”

That truth smacks some of us between the eyes. We are going about life, minding our own business, paying our dues, and priding ourselves as to our pragmatism. But there is nothing more to us. We aren’t reaching beyond ourselves into thoughts of eternity. We don’t deal with that because it’s complicated and stresses our comfort zones of practicality. To really know yourself, you must seek wisdom. And wisdom is beyond you. It is in God alone.

If we do not look beyond appearance and seek out the true reality, we are cowards and living only for today. “If we are satisfied with only what makes us happy, we will never know whether we are being deceived about who we are and what level of our being is being satisfied,” states Kreeft. It’s something to think about.

19. Days ahead...

A hunting accident in 1858 blinded a young Englishman, leaving him depressed and despondent. Letters from friends did not help much, for they mostly urged him to be resigned to the will of Providence. But one letter was different. It came from a former tutor of the 25-year-old man and said, “It will be your own fault if this trouble does not

bring with it some alleviation. The evil that has fallen on you will lose half its terrors if regarded steadfastly in the face with determination to subdue it as far as may be possible.”

The letter continued with practical suggestions for study and plans for the future. It was the right challenge. Called on to accept his misfortune and make the best of it, Henry Fawcett became a professor at Cambridge University and later England’s postmaster general.

Our world is changing before our very eyes. Some of the changes are good—liberating Iraq from the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein, the world communities coming together to aid the victims of natural disasters worldwide, continuing advancements in science and medicine for the good of mankind, and many more. On the other hand, some of the changes are sobering, to say the least.

Current reports coming out of Asia are that China is getting ready to move against the United States for Taiwan. Nuclear strikes are probable in the noted scenario. Iran is about five years away from nuclear weapons. The Middle East is in turmoil. Israel is giving up occupied land in the Gaza. The Palestinians are claiming victory over Israel through years of jihad by suicide bombings and are steps closer to a Palestinian state. Weather patterns continue to alarm scientists worldwide and populated areas are being destroyed with its people displaced abroad. Truly these are trying times.

As Christians how should we interpret the signs of the times? Although we are Christian, that does not mean we are exempt from alarm and despair; nevertheless, we need not submit to the calamity and despair. Jesus told us over 2000 years ago (Matthew 24; Mark 13; and etc.) that troubling times would come worldwide. He told us that although the earth will shake and the heavens would fall, we are not to fear but rejoice because His coming is nigh. When calamity comes, we can do one of two things. We can fear and surrender to the disaster around us. Or, we can trust God all the more and do the Father’s business of serving our fellowman.

These days the Christian should stand head and shoulders above by stooping to serve everyone in need. This should be our “finest hour.” In the midst of darkness all around us, we should shine all the brighter because the light of Jesus Christ shines through us.

20. Which language does God understand?

Dialogue is essential to a relationship. Dialogue means that someone is communicating with someone else. It is true. In order to communicate effectively, both parties must hear the other, process the information, and then speak to confirm the dialogue. So dialogue is not just speaking one’s mind, but it is hearing the feedback of others.

A tired conversation, thus a taxed relationship is one where only one person gets to speak. If I enter into dialogue with another human being, I should not only speak but listen to the other person speak also. Why am I belaboring the point? For this reason: Communication is not just speaking in the known vernacular.

I may communicate by body language. Body language is not articulated in speech; nevertheless, it speaks loudly. As a matter of fact, it will belie spoken words. I may say one thing with my lips, but be understood by my facial expressions. I may communicate by space. This is called the law of proximity. It speaks about the distance closed, or surrendered between two people. If I close into your personal space and you don't know me, you will move backwards. To be standoffish or to be too pushy (in proximity to where you stand), communicates volumes. So there are more ways to communicate in dialogue with another human being than merely speaking words. Yes there are, which brings me to the reason for writing this document.

Do I communicate with God by speaking my primary language only? I speak English (twang with a Southwestern dialect) and I pray mostly in English; therefore, I communicate my thoughts to God in the English language. But, this begs the question. Am I communicating with God ONLY when I speak English? What if I choose to groan in emotional pain? What if I say nothing in English but lift my hands and look up to heaven? What if I sit in solitude with only my thoughts directed to God? Am I communicating with God? Yes.

In John's Gospel chapter 11, Jesus communicated his deep emotions to Lazarus's family by groaning in the spirit, and weeping. He didn't speak His grief because Lazarus was dead, He groaned in the spirit, and He wept. That's powerful communication. Why do I say this? Jesus groaned in the spirit, wept and then communicated His power over death by calling Lazarus out of the grave. Jesus communicated His power over sin, disease, and death by sometimes speaking to the problem. He sometimes touched the problem with His hands. He sometimes wrote words in the sand, but every time He did one or the other, He communicated.

The next time you hear believers communicate with God, take note how they do it. They may stand in silence before God. They may bow down and kiss the earth. They may scream at the top of their lungs. They may wave their hands in the air. They may speak inarticulate syllables (unknown tongues). But, take note. God is hearing and responding to their heart, not so much what's in their head. And sometimes the expressions of the heart can only be communicated by animated movement, groans, sobs, shouts, or silent awe. Thank God that He understands languages besides English. I thank God that He has been hearing me for decades even when I refrain from English and begin praying in the Holy Spirit. The bottom line is communication and dialogue because my relationship with God is essential.

21. Beware of the Debtor's Ethic

“Good deeds do not pay back grace; they borrow more grace.” John Piper

Can a bad motive spoil a good deed? Should we, the Body of Christ, be concerned regarding the motives in which we conduct ministry? Let me give you something to think about. I'll refrain from offering my opinion so you won't be influenced by my thoughts.

How do we reconcile the ostensible contradiction of Paul's words in Philippians 1:14-19 and his words in first Corinthians 13:3?

Listen to Paul's words written in a Roman prison, addressed to the church at Philippi. "It's true that some here preach Christ because with me out of the way, they think they'll step right into the spotlight. But the others do it with the best heart in the world. One group is motivated by pure love, knowing that I am here defending the Message, wanting to help. The others, now that I'm out of the picture, are merely greedy, hoping to get something out of it for themselves. Their motives are bad. They see me as their competition, and so the worse it goes for me, the better—they think—for them. So how am I to respond? I've decided that I really don't care about their motives, whether mixed, bad, or indifferent. Every time one of them opens his mouth, Christ is proclaimed so I just cheer them on!" (*The Message* New Testament, Philippians 1:14-19)

Now listen to Paul's words written from Ephesus and sent to the Corinthians as a letter. "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (I Corinthians 13:3). Paul says here that any religious work done without a true motive of love is like doing nothing. How do we reconcile these two writings?

Since I brought up the subject of motives, I'm going to relate it to another topic that I call the "debtor's ethic." First, let me define the term, "debtor's ethic." The debtor's ethic has a deadly appeal to immature Christians. It comes packaged as a gratitude ethic and says things like: "God has done so much for you; now what will you do for Him? The Christian life is pictured as an effort to pay back the debt we owe to God. The admission is made that we will never fully pay it off, but the debtor's ethic demands that we work at it. Good deeds and religious acts are the installment payments we make on the unending debt we owe God."²

God takes pains to motivate us by reminding us that He is now and always will be working for those who follow Him in the obedience of faith. We can not work for God. God would never, ever allow someone to be in His debt. The amazing thing about His saving grace is that it is freely given. We can't buy it, earn it, or pay it off by placing ourselves in His debt of Love. Don't even try. Just accept His grace and move forward. God never stops and waits for us to work for Him "out of gratitude." He guards us from the mindset of a debtor by reminding us that all our Christian labor for Him is a gift from Him (Romans 11:35-36; 15:18) and therefore cannot be conceived as payment of a debt. In fact the astonishing thing is that every good deed we do in dependence on Him to "pay Him back" does just the opposite; it puts us ever deeper in debt to His grace. "I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (I Corinthians 15:10 NASB).

God wants us to be grateful to Him for what He has done, but He doesn't want us to thank Him by thinking it is our duty to try and work for Him, paying Him back. Our gratitude should work like this. We are so thankful for what God has done; we overflow naturally in praise and thanksgiving to Him. That's the difference. When I find a good restaurant, I don't consider it my duty to go out and tell people about it. No, but I do tell others about it out of pure delight. The restaurant so impressed me with its service,

² John Piper, *Brothers, We are not Professionals*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 34.

friendliness, and good food that I wanted to tell someone. It gave me great delight in telling others about its benefits. Likewise, when I praise God it's not out of a sense of duty, but I praise Him because I'm so impressed by His goodness that I can't help myself. I must praise Him. My delight for God is incomplete until I express it in word, song, testimony, or deed.

I won't let my gratitude become a debtor's ethic, trying to payback God's grace. I just keep on trusting God for more and more grace to thank Him more often. There is no limit to God's grace. Keep on asking God for more grace. May I say that one more time? This is the crux of this topic. If it were not for God's enabling grace, I'd be unable to do anything at all. So Father in Heaven, give us more grace to praise you louder and more often. I know you want to give us more reasons to praise and thank you because it brings glory to you. Lord, show us your Glory!

22. Downturn Seasons

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:” Ecclesiastes 3:1 (KJV). God gives us natural laws to convey spiritual principles. For example, there is a natural law of seed sowing and harvest. If I plant a seed in the ground during the right season, I will reap a harvest in due season. This natural principle illustrates a greater spiritual truth: If good is sown, in due season it will produce a good return.

The properties that apply to natural laws may foreshadow spiritual truths also. Again I illustrate. The properties of farming are known by every good farmer. For example, an experienced farmer knows that there are only four seasons in the year. Only certain things can be done during a particular season. In winter season, the farmer can't plant seed. The land is fallow. During spring the farmer doesn't go to the field, expecting harvest. During spring season the ground is turned over and made ready for planting. The farmer has seasons to work in, and they continue throughout his life.

This brings me to the crux of this writing. The people of God go through seasons throughout their lives. This is normal, and it is God ordained; however, many become discouraged in their walk with God because they do not understand this truth. If one does not understand the seasons of faith, discouragement, even shipwreck, is a real possibility. Let me explain.

If you read the life of a Biblical Patriarch, you are inclined to think that his life is marked by a thrill a minute. This is not true. For every Patriarch of the Old Testament, as well as every Apostle of the New Testament, there are many seasons marked by downturns. For example, the Genesis account of Abraham. The Bible says that he was 75 years old when he traveled to the land of Palestine. Between his 75th and centennial year, there is a lot of downtime. There are only five to six significant events, worthy of Biblical record in these 25 years; however, when one reads the accounts of Abraham's life and because they follow in tandem, it appears that Abraham is experiencing spiritual apparitions daily.

That's not the case. Again, Abraham had seasons of boredom, frustration, carnality, disbelief, and etc.

Now how does this story of Abraham relate to us and our downturn seasons? The people of God must learn that there are seasons of rejoicing in the Lord, and there are seasons of sheer boredom. As a minister of the church of Jesus Christ, it is important that I advise you of this. Why? So you won't come into a season of "downturn" and think that you are out of fellowship with God. Even in an intimate relationship with another human being, there are times of miscommunication, silence, rebuilding the relationship, disagreements, duties, responsibilities, and etc. Not every experience in the intimacy is intimate. The bedroom experience is not the norm, but the highlight.

So what does the child of God do during the downturn of seasons? He or she does not allow discouragement to wreck his or her relationship with God. One must maintain, continue, and persevere. It sounds mundane, but it is true. There are seasons of downturn in one's relationship with God through Jesus Christ His Son. Remember this. God does not forsake you through the downturn seasons. In fact, He allows the downturn.

The downturn does several things. For one, it denotes a changing of one season to the next. In the downturn stay steadfast before God, and rejoice in faith that a new season is on the horizon. Secondly, it tests your faith. Can you trust God—pray to Him, serve Him, attend church or mass—even during the difficult days? Or does the downturn show you something displeasing about yourself—you serve Him only when you are happy? Thirdly, the downturn gives you the opportunity to reconnect with your humanity. Even Jesus needed time alone from the crowds. Even Jesus needed rest and proper nutrition. No matter the experience of spirituality in this life, downturns are inevitable and necessary. Do not fight against the downturns of life. Recognize them for what they are and go with the flow.

23. Draw a Line

Toward the end of Joshua's life he made this statement as recorded in Joshua 24:15, "...choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: ...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua is telling the people of Israel to draw a line in the sand, so to speak. He is telling them to choose one side of the line and make their stand. To stand on the side of their forefathers will cause them defeat and ultimate destruction, but to stand on the side of the Lord will bring them prosperity and success (Joshua 1:8-9).

May I ask you something? On which side of the line do you stand? Are you standing on the Lord's side or are you standing on the side of rebellion. I'm sorry. There is no third choice. There is no such thing as a neutral Christian. A tree either grows or it dies. A believer either moves forward in Christ or he slips backwards into backsliding and darkness. (Yes, some believers are even now in darkness because they refuse to grow up in Jesus.)

How can you know if you are a victim of darkness? If you are a believer in Jesus Christ and you can no longer be moved to action by the hearing of His Word (setting in a church service Sunday after Sunday, never lifting your heart and hand to do what the Word says), then you are slipping into darkness, gross darkness. Again, it's either or. There is no third choice.

Today I'm starting a series entitled, "Draw a Line." If you are drawing a line and standing with Jesus—through it all—then you are actively doing several things. For one, *you are offering yourself first to God as a living sacrifice* (Romans 12:1-2) before you are offering anything else—good works, good looks, good money. And secondly, you are taking hold of your responsibilities before God. You are not letting someone else pull your load. You are chipping in and doing your part (Galatians 6:5).

Let me begin by looking at the term, "sacrifice."

The Bible has a lot to say about offerings and sacrifices. The Old Testament regulations for offerings and sacrifices are renowned for their many and complicated details, and the overall sacrificial system is quite foreign to our Western culture...Even before the revelation to Moses at Sinai, offerings and sacrifices were a key part of the practice of relationship with God from Cain and Abel, to Noah, to the Patriarchs, to Jethro the priest of Median, to the ratification of the Mosaic covenant by sacrifice before the tabernacle was built.³

The sacrifice was central to the ritual systems of the tabernacle and the first and second temples and, therefore, to the Old Testament theology of God's 'presence' and His relationship to ancient Israel as His 'kingdom of priests.' When God became present with us by means of the incarnation of Jesus Christ the Old Testament offerings and sacrifices continued to yield much in terms of Jesus as our sacrifice, Jesus as our High Priest, and our Christian commitment and ministry as a sacrifice to God of ourselves and our kingdom labors.⁴

In other words when Jesus lived upon the face of this earth, He carried out the offerings and sacrifices as required by the Old Testament law. He was careful to uphold every dotted "i" and every crossed "t" of the Mosaic Law. Even the Apostle Paul offered offerings and sacrifices in the temple until he was martyred in *circa* A.D. 65 at the hands of Nero. The temple sacrifices ceased in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans. Many Bible scholars believe that the offerings and sacrifices of the Old Testament will start again when the third temple is built in Jerusalem, either right before or immediately after Christ returns.

Sacrifices and offerings are important, even outside the sanctuary. According to the earthen altar law in Exodus 20:24-26 and the many references to such altars in the early history of Israel as a nation in the land of Canaan, the Lord clearly intended that the Israelites perpetuate the practice of building solitary altars and worshipping at them even after the tabernacle altar existed. These altars and the practice of worship at them were

³ Elwell, Walter A. Editor, *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI 1996) p.574.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.574.

relatively simple compared to that called for in the ‘sanctuary’ (i.e., the tabernacle and later the temple). The sanctuary included a corresponding burnt offering altar but it was also an actual residence of God. The sanctuary system of offerings and sacrifices included the major features of the previously existing external system (i.e., the burnt, grain, drink, and peace offerings at the solitary altars), but the solitary altar system did not include sin and guilt offerings.⁵

If the offerings and sacrifices were important in the Old Testament and in the days of Jesus, how important are they to the modern Christian? According to Paul’s writings, they are very relevant, metaphorically speaking. In view of the multitude of mercies that God has shown to us, the apostle Paul urges Christians to ‘present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship’ (Romans 12:1, NASB). To live as a sacrifice involves several things. For Paul it meant that he was willing to be ‘poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service’ of those whom he led to the Lord (Phil.2:17). Sometimes this required suffering. Paul was no stranger to it and the apostle Peter used the example of Jesus as the suffering servant to encourage Christians to be willing to suffer patiently for Christ (I Peter 2:18-25).⁶

For the modern Christian our life before God and fellow man is to be lived out as one continual sacrifice unto God. We are to offer ourselves to God first, before offering anything else to Him, so that we might be consumed in His fire (Hebrews 12:29). As we burn in Him, a fragrance is given off. The fragrance to the world is putrid, but the fragrance of us burning in God’s consuming fire is sweet to Him. It is this sweet fragrance of His people burning in His consuming fire that causes him to give them the desires of their hearts. In the Old Testament when God smelled the fragrance of a burnt offering, He was moved to action. For example, when He smelled the fragrance of Noah’s sacrifice after the flood, He said that He would never again destroy the earth by flood of water.

If we are to draw a line in the sand and stand on God’s side, then that means we are constantly being “counted as sheep for the slaughter.” Standing with God means that we will offer ourselves first to God. And in offering our lives as a “living and holy sacrifice” we will burn in His fire of passion and service. As we burn we will give off a fragrance that gets God’s attention. He will answer the prayers of His people who burn in Him (I John 5:15-16). Glory to God!

24. Enjoy Life

The big conflict between the theory of evolution and the Genesis creation account is this: The Biblical account speaks of a Creator who created man in His image and likeness. The theory of evolution requires no creator, only a “big bang” and lots of time. Of course the theory of evolution bothers most believers because it attempts to explain how everything came to be over time without God. The Biblical account says that God, from the very beginning, has been working along side His sixth-day creation—man.

⁵ Ibid., pp.574-575.

⁶ Ibid., p.580.

Humanity is unique to God. Man is the only one of creation that has a spirit and soul. With his spirit, he becomes God conscience. With his soul, he becomes self-conscience. These unique dynamics of man give him meaning and purpose in living. Life is physical. Life is spiritual. Life is emotional. Life is for man.

Let me illustrate, please.

Without proper punctuation, words can be meaningless. Take these fourteen words as an example: *That that is is that that is not is not that it it is*. Now punctuate them, and they read: That that is, is that that is not. Is not that it? It is. The significance of the fourteen unpunctuated words is not what they say, but what they don't say. They say nothing because they are not punctuated. Life is that way. Unpunctuated, it is monotonous and meaningless. It takes the exclamation points, questions marks, periods, and the dashes to make life rich and relevant. Life without punctuation is like a piano with only one note, a phone book with only one number, a thermostat with only one degree, or a highway with only one sign. The question marks of life might perplex us. The commas might try our patience, and the periods might stop us against our desires. But without the punctuation marks, life for man would be nothing more than a monotonous succession of unbroken days.

Rejoice and be glad! God has given us life—abundant life—through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus cared so much for us that he laid down His life for us. But before He died for us, He showed us how to live our lives. Life is caring for the other guy. Jesus cared for others. Life is participating. Jesus participated in joyful occasions like wedding feasts. He healed others by His touch, with His words, and by His love.

Jesus was at times angry with hypocrites, and He expressed His anger openly. He was at times tired, and would remove Himself from the crowds. Most of the time Jesus was met by the rejection of men. And the rejection was most often from the very people He was helping. There was a time that He even wept. Jesus punctuated life with His very soul and spirit. He was emotionally involved with life. How about you? Are you involved in life? Are you making your mark in the world? If not, let me encourage you to start living with meaning and purpose. Punctuate your life with Christ Jesus.

25. Are you...existential?

Are you an existentialist? Yes, it's possible to be one and not even know it. But more than likely if you are one, you know the philosophy well. Here's what you know.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement stressing individual existence and holding that human beings are totally free and responsible for their acts—according to *Webster's New World Dictionary* (Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2003). But for those who are unfamiliar with the movement, have I given you sufficient information? If not, listen up.

I picked up again an old text book that was assigned to me in graduate school many years ago. I blew the dust off the covers and read parts of it again. Why? I did so because, in my opinion, there is too much bad philosophy attaching itself to modern day Christianity. For example, recently my son came home from Oklahoma State University where he is a freshman, studying business. One of his courses is philosophy, and he is studying Friedrich Nietzsche. You may recall that Nietzsche told us in the late 1800's that God is dead and that we killed Him. This is bad philosophy. I ache that a philosophy class focuses a major part of its course studies on Nietzsche's failed teachings. History proved him wrong—Communism, Nazism, and the Jewish Holocaust—are all products of Nietzsche's philosophy (might is right).

I went back to my old philosophy books to read again some of the terrible philosophies of Nietzsche. Believe it or not, some of his bad philosophies are still circulating today and being touted as good Christian doctrine. I want to advise you regarding some of the subtle teachings of Existentialism and let you decide whether or not it is good doctrine for the Church.

The book I'm borrowing from is entitled, *Existentialism and Christian Belief—A Frank Appraisal of a Modern-Day Philosophy*, by Milton D. Hunnex (Moody Press 1969). I want to quote from his first chapter entitled, "A New Reformation or a New Religion?" In this chapter he critiques Bishop John A. T. Robinson's book, *Honest to God*, a 1963 book that led a revolt against traditional Christianity. Robinson compares the movement of Existentialism to the powerful forces triggered by Martin Luther during the Reformation.

Robinson advocates that the new movement will replace traditional Christianity in a matter of time. Hunnex responds, "What is developing before our eyes today could be finally more significant than the revolt in the sixteenth century. That revolt sought to restore New Testament Christianity on its own terms. The revolt today seeks instead to restate Christianity in nonsupernatural, secular terms. It is a revolt against the God of authority and the Bible, against the God of traditional Christianity. 'That God must die,' Robinson writes, 'If man is to live.' He is 'intellectually superfluous, emotionally dispensable, and morally intolerable.' The new Christian looks to a post-Christian faith for the future based on existentialism and universalism as the basic philosophical moods. Christian belief has no part of it. Christian belief is an anachronism. It must be abandoned together with the rest of the past, Robinson contends."

Hunnex continues, "Historically theologians have almost always borrowed the methods and models of philosophy to help them in their work. While this is to a certain extent necessary, it has also subjected Christian faith to the influence and fate of the philosophy. When the philosophy in question is abandoned, the theology that leaned on it is threatened if not abandoned too. Platonism in its many forms was the first philosophy of the Christian theologians, but its dualism and otherworldliness gave way to the more monistic and naturalistic philosophy of Aristotle in the thirteenth century. It was partly the distortions of biblical Christianity introduced by Aristotelian philosophy that prompted the Reformers to revolt in the sixteenth century.

“Unable to assimilate either the naturalism or Aristotle or that of the scientific revolution, Protestant theology eventually turned to idealism as the modern philosophy best adapted to Christian belief. Modern liberalism made its home among the idealists during the nineteenth century. After World War I it became apparent that idealism was ill suited to the twentieth century, and theologians as well as philosophers abandoned it. They turned instead to existentialism as the kind of philosophy that did appear to fit the mood and needs of the twentieth century. Existentialism seemed to be the best philosophy for getting at the problems of men caught up in swift-moving change.”

I could continue but I'll suffice in saying this: Harry Emerson Fosdick once noted that it was not a question of a new or an old theology but a question of a new theology or none at all.

26. Parental government...

Pope Leo XIII said, “The family was ordained of God that children might be trained up for himself; it was before the church, or rather the first form of the church on earth.”

I agree wholly. The Bible has a lot to say about the family unit. The Bible declares that husbands and wives are to be the heads-of-state in their homes. Parents are given a lot of latitude in regards to ruling over the affairs of the social, economic, and paternal home. And the parents model stability, learning, and spirituality on a very basic and visual level.

It is true. The family is one government among many.

God has placed every believer in the body of Christ—strategically. We are called, appointed, and enabled by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Father's purpose for our lives. What He has reserved for Himself to do, we can not do. On the other hand what He has told us to do, He will not do by Himself. We are to work hand-in-hand with God, but we are not to usurp authority by going at it alone. For example, God called me from an early age to preach the Gospel. I'm positive that He could do a much better job than I; however, He refuses to do it Himself or even send an angel in my place. He has called me. I must go, and He has been with me every step of the way.

In light of what is said, think about this. If there are many kinds of God-ordained governments, which there are—civil, state, county, municipality, school, church, and family—then each has its own responsibilities and can not be substituted in the place of another. For example, a family government can not usurp the authority of a national government and a national government should not “butt in” the affairs of the family government. Now obviously the family unit can not run national affairs, collect taxes, maintain a world-ready army, and etc. But on the other hand, the national government should not usurp the authority of the family and try and educate its children, train them morally, or make them good citizens by forcing the will of the state on them.

It is the parents' right and duty before God to “train up a child in the way he should go.” That duty, as burdensome as it is at times, should not fall on the civil government's

shoulders. Only a family unit can instill lasting character, virtues, and godliness in its children. And the parents do it by a living example.

Maybe Americans have problems delineating the differences between church and state because we've forced each one into roles that neither one was designed to function in. A particular church "sect" or denomination should not govern in the role of civil government. But on the other hand, the civil government should not exterminate the role of the church or what the Judeo-Christian ethic has built in this nation—laws and public institutions which shall always be subject to God's Law.

We should never elevate the state over God's way of doing things. Consider this. We have dropped the ball in rearing our children according to the Bible way. We have freed ourselves from our family responsibilities by giving our children to the state to raise, educate, and care for. The state was not ordained by God to usurp the authority and responsibilities of family government. Because we have substituted roles and usurped authority, we've taxed and burdened our civil government to the breaking point.

But not only has the family unit failed in its responsibility to its children, the church has often failed too. Why? Because God has commissioned it to assist the widows and orphans, but we have said no repeatedly by passing that responsibility to the state. Shame on us! The church, the family, and the state must get back to what they were designed to do. When that happens, there will be *synchronization* between church and state and not abandonment by one for the other.

27. To feel God...

"...true religion, in great part, consists in the affections." Jonathan Edwards

Here's a controversial statement made by pastor and author John Piper: "Throughout Scripture we are commanded to feel, not just to think or decide. We are commanded to experience dozens of emotions, not just to perform acts of willpower." Piper goes on to say, "God commands us to bear no grudge (Leviticus 19:18). The positive side of not bearing a grudge is forgiving 'from the heart.' This is what Jesus commands us to do in Matthew 18:35: 'Forgive [your] brother from your heart.' The Bible does not say, make a mere decision to drop the grievance. It says, Experience a change in the heart. The Bible goes even further and commands certain intensity. For example, I Peter 1:22 commands 'Love one another earnestly from the heart' (RSV). And Romans 12:10 commands 'Love one another with brotherly affection' (RSV)."⁷

At Faith Fellowship Church we strive to worship the Lord with all our might. What that means is this: We not only worship God with all of our mind, but with all our heart and soul as well. To worship God with "heart and soul" elicits an emotional response. The Bible says that we are to "shout unto the Lord with the voice of triumph." At FFC we are so grateful to God for the victory He has won for us that sometimes, during songs of praise, we stop and begin to shout! Yes, it can be disconcerting to some, but very pleasing to God. That's all that matters. The Bible also says that we are to "clap your

⁷ John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers 2001), 19.

hands all ye people.” This act, of course, is done as “unto the Lord.” When an entire congregation claps their hands, to me it sounds like the roar of the ocean. I believe that clapping the hands by many becomes the sound of one voice of praise to God. And, I believe it is a “joyful noise” unto God. The Bible says to “let everything that hath breath, praise the Lord.” I breathe God’s air, and I also praise Him with my “whole heart.” The musical instruments in our church produce sounds by vibrations which are carried across the room by the air. When the vibrating sounds strike my ear drums, they start vibrating also to give meaning to the sounds. I not only hear the sounds, but I can feel the sounds throughout my body. I share this by way of example, not because you need a scientific explanation of sound, but because you may want to know how it is possible for everything that draws air to praise God.

When I’ve spent 20 or 30 minutes in a church service of praise and worship, I not only have an intellectual experience (calling to mind various scriptures, creeds, statements of faith, etc.), but I also experience or feel a sincere “affection” for the Lord. King David danced before the Lord. Jeremiah the prophet cried many tears over his beloved Judah. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul displayed a righteous anger on several occasions for backsliding believers in the early church. He even wrote to the Christians in Galatia, calling them “foolish” (the word may also be translated as “stupid”). It’s impossible to live this life without expressing emotions, likewise, it’s impossible to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” without being emotional from time to time. Remember, pleasure is pleasing to God. When we, the children of God, experience pleasure in our praises to the Father, our Father in heaven is glorified. We are created to glorify our Creator. Our Creator is God. Because I glean satisfaction and pleasure from the worship, I enjoy—even look forward to— Sunday morning worship service. May I ask you something personal? When was the last time you experienced pleasant feelings when you thought about attending church? It is possible to feel good about your faith.

28. Disproves God...

Can scientific discovery disprove God? If that question seems awkward, let me state it like this: Does science prove God’s existence? If science can, then scientific discovery is higher, superior to God. Or in the words of the 19th century philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, “God is dead...” and since He is dead, live like it. Everything goes.

Before I get carried away in thought, let me make this thesis statement. The purpose of scientific discovery is not to prove or disprove God, but to expand knowledge. St Thomas Aquinas, the most brilliant man to live between the time of Aristotle and Descartes, talked about reason and faith. One does not contradict the other because both are from God. Not only is Christ the beginning and the end of our faith, but the Bible declares that “every good and perfect gift” comes from God. Knowledge is good; therefore it comes from God. Human reason can lead us far in this life, and well it should. Then again, faith can take us above all earthly knowledge into the courtyards of God. When my understanding breaks down, I can always advance forward by my faith in God.

Are you hearing me? One of my favorite authors, and I have many, is Peter Kreeft. He is an intelligent philosopher who teaches philosophy at Boston College, I believe. He writes wonderful books about philosophy and faith and I buy everyone of them. (Some of them I read often.) Peter, in his book entitled, *Your Questions God's Answers*, writes the following words of interest. "But do not let yourself be intimidated by atheists who claim that science disproves God. That is like claiming that studying Shakespeare's plays disproves Shakespeare. If there were no God, there would be no science, because there would be no world for science to know.

"Likewise, belief in science does not contradict belief in miracles. Science studies the way things usually work in the world, and it formulates laws to express these ways. Miracles are exceptions to these laws, but miracles presuppose these laws. If there were no scientific laws, there would be no sense in calling anything a miracle.

"Exceptions to a law do not disprove the law. Suppose the President pardons a criminal. The laws of the court still hold, but the President adds something else from outside. The laws of the court are like the laws of science, and the Presidential pardon is like a miracle.

"Suppose your employer gives you extra money for Christmas, over and above your paycheck. That does not disprove your contract, which tells you how much you usually get in your paycheck; it just adds to it. That is what a miracle does.

"If there is a God, there can be miracles. If there is no God, there can be no miracles, because there is no one who has the supernatural power to do them.

"God created the world by intelligent design. That is why science is possible. It is no accident that science arose in the West, which believed in the doctrine of the Creation, not in the Orient, which did not. Most of the great scientists in history have been Jews, Christians and Muslims, because these three religions believe that the world is created, therefore intelligently designed, ordered. Science and religions are allies, not enemies."

My friends, I can't say it any better than that. That's why I quoted Professor Kreeft heavily, word for word. Keep the faith. Stay the course. Jesus is coming soon. All the signs of creation point to this fact.

29. May I count on you?

Semper fidelis is a fabulous Latin motto meaning that in centuries of Roman might, the soldier swore that he would fight for Caesar, never questioning his safety. The Latin motto means "always faithful." The motto is the official pledge of the United States Marine Corps. It signifies the dedication that individual Marines are expected to have to "The Corps" and to their fellow fighting men and women for the rest of their days and beyond. Being a former Navy Corpsman, I'm very familiar with the term, even its shorter form: "Semper Fi."

May I ask you a question? Have you ever been a part of an organization that required your utmost dedication? Probably so, right? And not only did it require your dedication, but it required steadfastness. You were not only required to show up but to participate, even when others were discouraged and falling away. What caused you to last while others left?

Remember this historical event—the pass of Thermopylae? In the pass of Thermopylae, in the country of Greece, there stands a monument, world renowned, erected to Leonidas and his valiant three hundred. It bears the inscription: “Go, stranger, and tell at Sparta that we died here fighting to the last in obedience to our laws,” and it commemorates that thrilling event when Leonidas with his three hundred successfully held the pass of Thermopylae against tremendous odds until betrayed into the hands of the enemy. Thus this monument bears magnificent witness to the qualities of loyalty and steadfastness.

Three hundred men fought off the mammoth army and navy of the Persians, against impossible odds, and did it successfully until one of their own told the Persian army how to go around the pass. A loose lip and unfaithful heart was all it took to wipe out an indigenous people of Greece. And so it is true in any church, organization, club, military or even a family unit that the weakest link is the untrue heart.

One thing I’ve learned through the years of service in military, law enforcement, and church is that loyalty and steadfastness are two attributes that stand head and shoulders above eloquence, talent, and prestige. I’d rather serve with a loyal and steadfast servant than anyone of super talent, super speech, or super charisma. Maybe you agree. I think that’s why the Bible is full of scriptures like Revelation 2:10: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life” (KJV).

30. What’s in your voice?

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal...”

These are the opening lines to one of the greatest speeches of all time. These words spoken by Abraham Lincoln at the dedication of the military cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania are some of the finest words recorded in all of literary history; however, at the time they were spoken they were thought to be a disappointment.

Let me give the historical background leading up to the delivery of the Gettysburg Address.

In June 1863 Confederate forces under Robert E. Lee moved north in an effort to win a dramatic victory that would reverse the South's declining fortunes. On July 1-3, Lee's forces fought the Union army under the command of George C. Meade, and before the fighting ended, the two sides suffered more than 45,000 casualties. Lee, having lost more than a third of his men, retreated, and the Battle of Gettysburg is considered a turning point in the American Civil War.

The dedication of the battlefield and cemetery thus provided Lincoln with an opportunity for a major address, but he disappointed many of his supporters when he gave this short

talk. In fact, many of the spectators did not even know the president had started speaking when he finished. But in this talk Lincoln managed, as the great orator Edward Everett (the main speaker at the dedication) understood, to combine all the elements of the battle and the dedication into a unified whole.

These men fought, and died, for the Union. Now their work was done; they had made the supreme sacrifice, and it was up to those living to carry on the task. But Lincoln's rhetoric, as subsequent generations discovered, did far more than memorialize the dead; it transformed the meaning of the Constitution for those still alive. Lincoln read into the Constitution a promise of equality, the 'proposition that all men are created equal.' That, of course, had been a premise of the Declaration of Independence, but everyone understood that the drafters of that document had not intended to include slaves and other 'inferior' peoples in their definition.

Now the country had fought a great war to test that notion, and the lives of the men who died at Gettysburg could be hallowed only one way -- if the nation, finally, lived up to the proposition that all of its people, regardless of race, were in fact equal. (For further reading see James M. McPherson's *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution 1991*; Philip B. Kunhardt's, *A New Birth of Freedom: Lincoln at Gettysburg 1983*).

If I were to write the opening lines of Edward Everett's speech that was given that day at Gettysburg, you probably wouldn't recognize them. You might not know it, but Everett was the key note speaker for the day and spoke for two hours before Lincoln stood to deliver his two minute address. The next day, the newspapers carried Everett's speech on their front page, while Lincoln's speech was relegated to the last page; nevertheless, Lincoln's words grew with time to become some of the most powerful ever spoken, still echoing today everywhere democracy and liberty reign. Everett's speech is, for the most part, forgotten.

While thinking about this anomaly, a question came to my mind. What's in a voice? In other words, what makes some statements grow to greatness over time while other statements—just as great by their own right when first delivered—fade into the faint whispers of history?

31. The Wisdom in Foolishness...

On August 7, 1961, twenty-six year old Major Gherman Titov became the second Soviet cosmonaut to orbit the earth and return safely, climaxing a monumental feat for mankind. Some time later, speaking at the World's Fair and savoring his moment in glory, he recounted this experience, vouchsafed to a privileged few. In a rather pretextual pronouncement, on a triumphant note, he let it be known that, on his excursion into space, he hadn't seen God. Upon hearing of this exuberant argument from silence, someone quipped, "Had he stepped out of his space-suit he would have" (Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage The Real Face of Atheism*, Baker Books 1990, p.11).

If there is any wisdom in this story, it is certainly in the reply. In other words, how can you or I—minds with limited knowledge—make broad-brush calculations that the evidence of the universe has been reviewed and the conclusion is that God does not exist? It doesn't make sense. How can I know the *unknown* well enough to rule out God who is infallible, almighty, and everlasting? It might seem foolish to some to believe in what

can't be seen with the physical eye, but according to the bible, what is foolish to some is the wisdom of God to others.

The story is told of a cynic, sitting under a nut tree, carrying on a rather jesting and gibing monologue with God. His grounds for complaint lay in what he considered to be an obvious failure on the part of God to go by the book on structural design. "Lord," he said, "how is it that you made such a large and sturdy tree to hold such tiny, almost weightless nuts? And yet, you made small, tender plants to hold such large and weighty watermelons!"

As he chuckled away at the folly of such disproportion in God's mindless universe, a nut suddenly fell on his head. After a pause he muttered, "Thank god that wasn't a watermelon!" (Ibid.,p.29).

Here again the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man. I think I'll remain foolish in the eyes of the world to continue in the wisdom of God. God the Father does know best.

32. For this purpose...

In Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002), he opens with these words regarding life's purpose, "It's not about you.

"The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose."

Christianity is a relationship. It is a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ God's only "begotten Son." You and I were created to fellowship with God forever. You and I have no other reason for being here but to enjoy God.

You are not some mass of atomic particles suspended in space and time. You are not here by accident. You and I did not evolve from some lower state of matter, but were created in the likeness and the image of God "*by* his purpose and *for* his purpose." God is a purposeful God who created the universe on purpose. You and I are a part of His creative purpose.

When you understand that God created you for a purpose, you will submit to his ways. God's ways may seem odd at times, especially in the way he shows his love to you. Sometimes God's ways are hard and restrictive and they may cause you to think that he is mad or upset with you; however, just because God deals with you through a hardship, that doesn't mean he doesn't love you still or that you have fallen out of his perfect will. God's will for you, and his way with you are sometimes different experiences.

Nevertheless, everything that God brings into your life has an ultimate purpose because "you were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose."

The title of this message is “For this purpose...” Since you and I were created by a purpose driven God, he has given us purpose for living. Have you discovered your purpose in life? Aside from the fact that your ultimate purpose is to worship God, you have been given specific purpose. You have been called unto salvation and placed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. You have also been given a “commission,” a ministry so to speak. I want to share three things regarding your placement in the body of Christ: Everyone who receives Christ as Savior is placed in his body and given a special function. Everyone who receives Christ is given a commission to go and minister in the name of Jesus.

Everyone’s experiences whether positive or negative are ultimately for a purpose

First, if you have received Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you are a part of his body and have been given a specific task.

At a meeting of the American Psychological Association, Jack Lipton, a psychologist at Union College, and R. Scott Builione, a graduate student at Columbia University, presented their findings on how members of the various sections of 11 major symphony orchestras perceived each other. The percussionists were viewed as insensitive, unintelligent, and hard-of-hearing, yet fun-loving. String players were seen as arrogant, stuffy, and non-athletic. The orchestra members overwhelmingly chose "loud" as the primary adjective to describe the brass players. Woodwind players seemed to be held in the highest esteem described as quiet and meticulous, though a bit egotistical. Interesting findings, to say the least! With such widely divergent personalities and perceptions, how could an orchestra ever come together to make such wonderful music? The answer is simple: regardless of how those musicians view each other, they subordinate their feelings and biases to the leadership of the conductor. Under his guidance, they play beautiful music. (*Today in the Word*, June 22, 1992.)

In Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, he uses an analogy of the human body to illustrate believers in the body of Christ. He tells about each member of the human body having significance, although one organ like the brain might seem more important than an insignificant organ like a little finger; nevertheless, each organ in the human body is there by design and purpose with a special function. In like manner, every believer has significance in the body of Christ whether or not the member preaches or sings beautiful songs from a pulpit. What is important is the head of the body. Christ Jesus is the head of his body, the church, and he directs the body in unity.

In March of 1981, President Reagan was shot by John Hinckley, Jr., and was hospitalized for several weeks. Although Reagan was the nation's chief executive, his hospitalization had little impact on the nation's activity. Government continued on. On the other hand, suppose the garbage collectors in this country went on strike, as they did not long ago in Philadelphia. That city was not only in a literal mess, the pile of decaying trash quickly became a health hazard. A three-week nationwide strike would paralyze the country. Who is more important--the President or a garbage collector? In the body of Christ, seemingly insignificant ones are urgently needed. As Paul reminds us, "The head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (I Cor. 12:21-22). (David Parsons.)

Second, everyone who receives Jesus Christ is commissioned to minister in the authority of the name of Jesus.

A one-legged school teacher from Scotland came to J. Hudson Taylor to offer himself for service in China. "With only one leg, why do you think of going as a missionary?" Asked Taylor.

"I do not see those with two legs going," replied George Scott. He was accepted. (*Pillar of Fire*, January First, 1983.)

Jesus told his disciples to go and carry the Good News to all parts of the world. Jesus is still commissioning disciples to go and do likewise. It seems many disciples think that the great commission to go is for the preachers and missionaries only. Jesus saved us to be a light unto the world. You might not be called to go across the oceans to minister the Gospel, but you are called to share the light where you are.

A missionary in Africa was once asked if he really liked what he was doing. His response was shocking. "Do I like this work?" he said. "No. My wife and I do not like dirt. We have reasonably refined sensibilities. We do not like crawling into vile huts through goat refuse...But is a man to do nothing for Christ he does not like? God pity him, if not. Liking or disliking has nothing to do with it. We have orders to 'Go,' and we go. Love constrains us." (Source is unknown.)

Third, even the experiences of life that come your way are designed with a purpose in mind.

James tells us to rejoice when we find ourselves in trials. How can this be? Why would we rejoice, counting it all joy, because we are suffering under duress for the Gospel's sake?

The Greek word for "trial" (RSV) means **trial or testing directed towards an end**. And the end is that he who is tested should emerge stronger and purer from the testing. If you understand why trials are brought into your life, you can make sense out of scriptures like Romans 8:28, "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." (NIV) Everything that God allows you to experience is given to you on purpose and is ultimately for your good.

Therefore, God brings things into your life for a purpose because He is a purposeful God who has a purpose for your life. Again, "you were born *by* His purpose and *for* His purpose." As a believer you are placed into the body of Christ supernaturally by His Holy Spirit—"for by His Spirit are we all baptized into one body." Because you are in His body you are given significance and a ministry. You might not be called a preacher or a missionary, but you are commissioned to shine your light where you are. And as you grow in Christ, you will experience persecutions and grave trials, but be of good cheer. All the trials are designed for you to stretch you and promote you to greater challenges in life. You are a child of God. And like God, you are purpose driven in Him.

33. Essence of Worship

Is there a difference in the form of worship and the essence? Yes, as a matter of fact, many churches today are struggling with the proper form of worship. So widespread is this problem that many churches have divided into two services on Sunday mornings. In one service the form of worship is traditional music. Only hymns, piano, and organ are used while in the other service only contemporary music is used. One service is youthful, dressed down, loud, and "rock-and-rollish" music bursts. In the other, well you guessed it. The music is softer, older, and church hymnals are used to reflect on the words while they are being sung.

I want to speak to you today about the essence of worship. The essence of worship is imperative for “true” worship in the church, or any place you worship God. Jesus predicted the demise of worship form when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter four. You may remember the scripture, “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’” (John 4:21; and 23-24 NASB).

The New Testament reveals a stunning silence about the outward forms of corporate worship and a radical intensification of worship as an inner, God ward experience of the heart. The silence about outward forms is obvious in the fact that the gathered life of the church is never called “worship” in the New Testament. Moreover, the main Old Testament word for worship is virtually absent from the New Testament letters. Its usage clusters in the Gospels (26 times) and in the Book of Revelation (21 times). But in the Epistles of Paul it occurs only once, namely, in I Corinthians 14:25 where the unbeliever falls down at the power of prophecy and confesses God is in the assembly. It doesn’t occur at all in the letters of Peter, James, or John.⁸

The Old Testament idea, captured in the Greek word *proskuneo*, implied a physical falling down in reverence before a visible majesty. This happened as people came to the visible, incarnate Christ in the Gospels. And it happened in Revelation as the saints and angels and elders were actually in the presence of the visible, risen Christ. But in the age between the ascension and the second coming Christ is not visibly here to worship. Therefore, worship is radically internalized and delocalized.⁹ In Matthew 15:8-9 Jesus says, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me.” Worship that does not come from the heart is vain, empty. It is not authentic worship.

Consider what Paul does to some of the other words related to Old Testament worship. For example, the next most frequent word for worship in the Old Testament (after *proskuneo*) is the word *latreuo* which is usually translated “serve” as in Exodus 23:24, “You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them” (NASB). When Paul uses this word for Christian worship, he goes out of his way to make sure that we know he means not a localized or outward form for worship practice but a nonlocalized, spiritual experience. In fact, he takes it so far as to treat virtually all of life as worship when lived in the right spirit. Here’s another example, in Romans 1:9 he says, “I serve [or worship] [God] with my spirit in the gospel of his Son.” And in Philippians 3:3, Paul says that true Christians “worship” [God] in the Spirit of God...and put no confidence in the flesh” (NASB). Then again he says in Romans 12:1, for Christians to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Paul sees all of life and ministry as an expression of that inner experience of worship.

34. Worship

⁸ John Piper, *Brothers we are not Professionals*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman), 230.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

The essence of worship is where it's at. I think you will agree with this statement if you read the first part of this document. So let's move on. We've been talking about the localized and institutionalized worship of the Old Testament having been delocalized and deinstitutionalized in the New Testament because the saints worship God in spirit and truth. We see further evidence of this in Paul's ministry. Paul calls his own ministry a "priestly service (of worship)," and he calls the converts themselves an "acceptable offering (in worship)" to God (Romans 15:16; cf. Philippians 2:17). He even calls the money that the churches send him "a fragrant aroma and acceptable sacrifice to God (in worship)" (Philippians 4:18 JP). And his own death for Christ he calls a "drink offering" to God (II Timothy 4:6).¹⁰

This is what it means when we read things like, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). And "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:17 NASB). This is the central New Testament action of worship: to act in a way that reflects the glory of God—to do a thing in the name of Jesus with thanks to God. But the New Testament uses those greatest of all worship sentences without any reference to Sunday worship services. They describe life. Again, the essence of worship is not external, localized acts, but an inner, God ward experience that shows itself externally not primarily in church services. The fundamental reason for this is probably that the Old Testament was mainly a "come see" religion and the New Testament fulfillment is a "go tell" religion.

Now let me address the question: What is the essence of that inner experience which we call worship?¹¹ Worship, whether an inner experience of the heart or an outward act of the body, or of the congregation collectively—is a magnifying of God. That is, it is an act that shows how magnificent He is. It is an act that reveals or expresses how great and glorious He is.

Worship is all about consciously reflecting the worth or value of God. Paul's passion is that what he does with his body, whether in life or death, will always be worship. In life and death his mission is to magnify Christ—to show that Christ is magnificent, to exalt Christ, and demonstrate that He is great. That's plain from verse 20, that Christ shall be "exalted in my body, whether by life or death." Paul knew in his heart that God willed his life to continue after his Roman imprisonment, he would be more determined than ever to minister to the saints. That would be good for all the churches that Paul ministered to. But, on the other hand, if God called him home that would be gain also. Death would take him into a deeper intimacy with the Lord. And that is especially good.

Therefore, the inner essence of worship is cherishing Christ as gain, indeed as more gain than all that life can offer—family, career, retirement, fame, food, and friends. The essence of worship is experiencing Christ as gain. It is savoring Him. It is naming Him as the end of your search. Jesus is the object of your faith. John Piper, whom I quote often, brings this topic together in one sentence. He says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Christ is magnified in my death, when in my death I am

¹⁰ John Piper, *Brothers we are not Professionals*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 232.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

satisfied with Him, when I experience death as gain because I gain Him. Or another way to say it is that the essence of praising Christ is prizing Christ. Christ will be praised in my death, if in my death He is prized above life. The inner essence of worship is prizing Christ.¹² Are you satisfied in Jesus Christ? You can by receiving Him as Savior and Lord and walking with Him daily through prayer and praise. Tell Him often that you are thankful for Him. Tell Him often that you are glad in Him. He's waiting to hear from you. Start talking to Him and enjoy the fellowship of worship.

35. God around us...

Some of the most powerful metaphors in scripture are those which speak of God as a **shield**. God covers us like an impenetrable fortress, and we are safe in Him. Do you agree with this statement?

Consider this.

Kenneth Wuest was one of the greatest scholars of Biblical Greek that ever lived. In his writings entitled, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, he amplifies the commentary of Titus 2:14, based on his knowledge of the Greek New Testament. I want to share his comments with you because they are fascinating.

In the *King James Bible* Titus 2:14 uses the English word “peculiar” to translate a Greek word which literally means to be around something as a circle is around a dot. The Greek word, according to Wuest, describes how we are positioned in God. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are encircled by the very presence of God.

No one is closer to the Father than Jesus Christ the Son. Jesus, the *Corner Stone* of I Peter 2:7, is *precious* to the Father and closely guarded by Him. When Jesus instructed the people of His day about His relationship to His Heavenly Father he said, “I and my Father are one.” He did only what He saw the Father doing and He spoke only what he heard the Father saying.

What does this say to you and me?

The precious place that Jesus holds in the Father is also imputed (added to our account) to us—the Body of Christ. As Christ is in the Bosom of God because He is precious to the Father, so we are in the Bosom of Christ because we are the “sheep of his pasture.” We are entrusted to the care of Jesus and nothing shall “pluck us out of his hand.”

God surrounds us like a circle surrounds a dot on paper. He envelops us. He builds up a hedge around us. He is our shield. Because God surrounds us, nothing can get to us unless God gives it permission. Luke 22:31 tells us that Satan had to ask permission to crush Peter. Job could not be touched by Satan until God lowered His hedge to let the devil strike him. All our trials and negative circumstances that come against us in Christ are outside the circle of God's protection. These trials must come through God's covering around us. Only God can give the devil permission to afflict us.

¹² Ibid., 235.

Why would God allow trials to attack us?

It's very simple really. All our trials in life are **tailored** for us. Why? Because God deals with each one of His children on a personal basis. He designs our trials to strengthen us ultimately. If I want muscle mass, I must resist weight against the earth's gravity. The resistance enhances my strength and body mass. This is a physical principle that has spiritual merit. God is not going to send out a faulty product because He has stamped His name on it. He is going to prove the vessel before He sends it out. You and I are attacked by nothing in life that takes God by surprise.

Ephesians 2:8-10 speaks about our life's work being pre-ordained by God before the beginning of the world. I Corinthians 10:13 speaks about our trials in life being "common" to all mankind but within limits of what we can endure. Even Jonah had his trial pre-prepared for him. The Bible says that there was a "fish prepared" for Jonah. God **tailored** Jonah's trial for him especially. And Jonah survived the trial.

The next time you read about God shielding His people think about it in light of Wuest's comments. God loves us and holds us close, even when we think otherwise. He allows nothing to harm us unless He gives it permission to enter His shield around us. And if the trial of affliction comes, God will give us grace to endure it. God will use the trial for our ultimate good. Romans 8:28-29 says that God has one purpose for us—to conform us to the image of His Son; therefore, all things work together for the **good**...

36. Arguments for and against...

I begin with the ancient Greeks.

Aristotle gave us the most systematic expression of the reasons for believing in God. His philosophy, in turn, influenced the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and its greatest theologian—St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, you might remember, gave us five proofs of God's existence: **Motion**—things grow and develop by a hidden hand in nature (God); **Causation**—one thing causes another until you reach the first cause of all things which is God; **Possibility and necessity**—things exist in a network of relationships. Everything is dependent on something, except God. **Gradation of being**—the universe is a pyramid of beings at different levels of perfection. From worms to man to angels to God there is a continuum of creatures. And number five is **Governance of the world**—design in the universe speaks of a rational, caring, and orderly God.

Thomas' **A Posteriori Proofs** (proving God's existence by external things) stood solid throughout the Middle Ages and into the Reformation, but the 19th century turned things upside down. Philosophers like Hume and Kant tore into the argument of design with a vengeance. Kant affirmed that the most it could prove was that the universe had an architect. To convert the architect into God, a theologian would have to add the ontological argument. Later on scientists began attacking it. Scientists claimed that the design in the universe is appearance but not reality and make their appeal to Darwin or

evolution. They concede that the hands and eyes of man are engineering marvels but emphatically claim that they are the products of millions of years of evolution.

But Darwinism isn't every scientist's rave. Evolution is refuted by the biologists who say that there isn't enough time for evolution to take place by purely natural or chance factors within the two billion years that life is supposed to have existed on the earth. It takes greater faith than the theologian's to believe that a bucket of dirt can evolve into a horse in a matter of ages. Then again the evolutions counter: The giraffe must grow a long neck to reach the leaves he feeds on; the deer must develop long slender legs for running faster than his predator. These intra related connections speak of survival and adaptation of the fittest. But on the other hand, in cosmic teleology no such connections exist. Evolution fails again. There is no necessary connection between the distance of the earth from the sun and the amount of nitrogen on the surface of the earth. Again, to resort to probability or chance variation to produce these conditions calls for a greater miracle and a greater act of faith than believing in God (Bernard L. Ramm, *A Christian Appeal to Reason*, World Books Publishers 1972).

And then there is the *A Priori Proofs* (proving God's existence by internal things—innate knowing that God exists). Some have said that God's existence is an innate idea. Augustine and Calvin taught this. Augustine said that God is continuously putting pressure on man. Man's sense of finitude is a way in which God impresses Himself upon man. But then again, the British philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), vigorously attacked the notion of man having any kind or innate, a priori knowledge (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690). Time does not afford me the opportunity to list the other internal proofs of God's existence. But take my word for it. For every one stated positively, there is also a thunderous refutation.

Now let me tell you what I think about this. I think we are missing the boat when we focus on proving the existence of God by human intellect alone. I think the argument should change directions. I think Professor Ramm states it well. He writes, "The whole weight of the Biblical view of God is in another direction. Scripture is not a record of how man finds God but how God finds man. The point of departure in Scripture is not how man infers or proves that God exists by either a logically organized proof or an unusual experience but that it is God who breaks into man and lets Himself be known" (Bernard L. Ramm, page 101). Hence, the key expression in Holy Scripture would not be proof of the existence of God but the true knowledge of God or the reality of God. The Bible doesn't waste time trying to prove God's existence through logic but declares His existence in the opening verse—"In the Beginning God..." From that point on the Scriptures demonstrate the Living God who invades human history and reveals Himself to man. God comes looking for man and not the other way around.

I don't have to wrestle with proving God's existence. I don't understand many of the existential arguments anyway. Most of them give me a headache, trying to follow along. But here is the good news. God doesn't expect me with my finite brain to understand His infinite ways. He comes searching for me. He gives me His own Spirit with which to hear His voice and respond by faith. God comes looking for me. God reveals Himself in the way He wants to be discovered. He initiates the process. I get to enjoy the relationship through Jesus Christ His Son.

It's simply faith—that's what God wants from me. He lives. His Life makes the difference. I don't need a "philosophy" of religion when I can have a relationship in Jesus, the True Vine. How about you? Are you relating and abiding in the Vine?

37. God is not in my debt...

Someone once said that there are no atheists in fox holes. Good point. Many people when in danger have tried to bargain with God. What about you? Have you ever said this? "Lord if you'll just get me through this mess, I'll serve you for the rest of my life." And are you?

Why can't we bargain with God? After all, doesn't the Bible say that God enters into contracts with His people? Well let's look at this closely. God does contract or covenant with His people, but we can not initiate the covenant on our own merit because we can't guarantee the covenant, nor its outcome. Only God can, because He alone is Sovereign.

If this is true, and it is, why do we try to bargain with God? Actually, what we are doing by bargaining with Him is trying to place Him in our debt. "God you do something for me, then I will do something for you. Okay?" We argue. But He answers, "No, it's not okay." Why? Because God owes us nothing. God is self-contained. God is self-existing. He lacks nothing. He needs nothing. He's perfectly contented with and in Himself.

The primary reason you and I are in the picture is because God expends Himself throughout the universe. He wants to expend Himself through us, transforming us into His Son's image so that we reflect God's Glory and walk in His abounding joy. Isaiah 43:7 says that God created us for His Glory.

Now if we think we can help God do this, we are mistaken. All we can do is submit to Him passively, and receive His grace by faith. Oh! By the way—while He's giving us grace, He's also giving us faith to trust Him (Ephesians 2:8-10). Look again at Job 41:11 when you get time. God owes nobody! And nobody can borrow anything from Him. So quit trying to place God in your debt. God doesn't owe you anything. He will never place Himself in debt to you. I hope the point is made because I'm resting my case.

Nevertheless, remember this important theological point. God gives us everything. He gives us a body, soul, and spirit. He gives us a relationship with Him through faith (that He gives us) in Jesus Christ His only begotten Son. He abides with us by His Holy Spirit. He gives us love—perfect love in the sense that we freely choose Him or reject Him. He doesn't want puppets on strings. He created us in His image and likeness—free moral agents, just like Him. He gives us enabling grace to live daily in victory over the kingdom of darkness. He gives us joy. He gives us eternal life. He gives. He gives. He gives. All we can do is receive by faith and thank Him. This keeps us in awe as to His Glory.

Let me wrap up this point. God gives us everything that pertains to life and godliness. We can not work for it. We can not work for more of it. We can only rest in His finished and completed work of redemption. Glory to God for His awesome Glory to behold! Go ahead and just thank Him. I am not worthy of His grace. He knows that. He still wants

me to have it—without any debt or strings attached. Now that’s grace. Freely given, freely received.

38. God’s Glory

I Corinthians 10:31 states, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (NASB). Why are we to conduct our lives to the glory of God? Pastor Piper, who seems to have a solid grasp on this says, “...God’s first commitment is to His own glory...” I’ve been in ministry for many years and have never heard it put that way, but it is true. God does everything for His glory. As His people we, too, should do everything that we do in our life for God’s glory. It’s all about God’s glory!

Here’s another way to see this. God is God-centered. Everything God does is for His glory. God is all about establishing His glory through His creation. Many people think God is only Love. That’s true, but misleading. God is first Sovereign, and His attributes (Holiness) like Faithfulness, Justice, Righteousness, Truth, Immutability, Omniscience, Omnipresence, and even Love are guarded over by His Sovereignty. You see if God was only Love and not Sovereign, He would not have the universal authority to Love everybody. But, because God is Almighty, He does whatever He wants to do, but without compromising His Holiness. If He chooses to love the whole world (and He does), then who in this universe is going to tell Him that He can’t? No one is. But He will not overlook His Holiness to Love the world. His Holiness must be satisfied before He can love sinful man. Is this possible?

It is. He does this by assigning some of His attributes as gate keepers over the others. For example, God is Holy (free of blame) and has nothing to do with sin. Herein is the problem. We are sinful, perverted creatures and undeserving of love (who could love evil?). God’s Holiness is opposed to our sin. His Holiness demands Justice, not compromise. Evil must be punished. His Holiness condemns sin and consigns it to hell, the place God made for Lucifer (later becoming Satan) who rebelled against God and was cast out of Heaven. Before God can Love us as we are, sinners, His Holiness must be satisfied. God’s Justice must serve His Holiness. That’s only right. God never does wrong because He is Righteous. Therefore, just as His Justice guards over His Holiness, His Holiness guards over His love. We can not receive God’s “righteous” Love until His Justice has served His Holiness.

This is why we need a mediator in Jesus Christ. God put the sin of the world on Jesus. Jesus became the sacrificial lamb. Jesus, by His death on the Cross, paid the price (ransom) that God the Father demanded for Holiness. The price was death. Jesus had to give up His life to give us life. He took our death penalty. He was the innocent one that was murdered by the guilty ones. How could Jesus, a man, die for sinful man? Not only was He a man, feeling what we feel as humans, but He was Conceived by the Holy Spirit. His Father was God. Therefore, because He was the only begotten Son of God, He was Holy and could save the world from its sin. Is there proof that He was equal to God to act as His legal agent in this world? The proof is that He was raised from the dead (historical fact)! There have been many religious pundits throughout history, but not one of them

was ever raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God in Heaven. Jesus stands alone. He and His Holy Spirit alone are equal to the Father.

God gives us salvation as a gift. He justifies the people called by His name in order that He might be glorified. Why did God predestine us in Love to be His sons? He did it that the glory of His grace might be praised (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). Why did God create a people for Himself? "I created [them] for my glory" (Isaiah 43:7). Why did He make from one lump vessels of honor and dishonor? That He might show His wrath and make known His power and reveal the riches of His glory for the vessels of mercy (Romans 9:22-23). Why did God raise up Pharaoh and harden his heart and deliver Israel with a mighty arm? He did this so that His wonders might be multiplied over Pharaoh (Exodus 14:4) and that His name might be declared in all the earth (Exodus 9: 16).

39. Over Supplied...

Psalm 100:5 (NIV) "For the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations."

Have you ever wondered just how much of the light produced by the sun reaches, or is reflected off of, our earth? The answer will probably surprise you!

Light pours forth from the sun in all directions. Without thinking, we might consider it a flat surface directing its rays solely at the earth. But that is not so. Light streams from the giant ball of fire which we call our sun in all directions. The result is that less than one part in half a billion parts of the sun's radiant energy reaches our earth! For every one ray of sunlight that dances on a June meadow, half a billion rays are dancing somewhere else! Here, then, is an almost inexhaustible source of heat, energy, and light. At the best, we tap an infinitesimal fraction of its potential.

Can we make a similar comparison with God's grace, love, and wisdom? Who can explore it? Who can dare claim he has exhausted God's resources?

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

The Bible also says that God owns cattle on a thousand hills. All the gold and silver belong to Him as well. In one Biblical text, God boasts that no one has ever held counsel with Him. There is no one in the universe wise enough to give God counsel. He does just fine on His own. What is your need this morning? God can and will meet your need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. You may think that your need is too great for God to meet. You may think that God isn't concerned about your petty problems. You may think that God is far removed from the daily affairs of man and is not interested in you. According to the Bible, God is very interested in you. He loved you before you knew Him. He cares for you now. If you will pray this simple prayer and mean every word of it with your heart, God will respond.

Can you say this prayer?

Father, I come to You just as I am. I have nothing to offer You but this heart felt prayer. Please hear my plea and help me, especially in this time of need. I need Your help in this way: _____.

Thank You for answering my prayer. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

When your answer comes, please drop me a line and tell me about it. I'm still overwhelmed by God's goodness to His people. I believe He is waiting, tapping His foot while His arms are crossed, more than ready to answer the pleas of His people. You and I are the ones who qualify for His mercies that are new every morning and last throughout all generations.

40. The Serpent's fire

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; (15) so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life” (John 3:14-15 NASB). *God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world (C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain).*

Dr. Paul W. Brand, the noted leprosy expert who was chief of the rehabilitation branch of the Leprosarium in Carville, Louisiana, had a frightening experience one night when he thought he had contracted leprosy. Dr. Brand arrived in London one night after an exhausting transatlantic ocean trip and long train ride from the English coast. He was getting ready for bed, had taken off his shoes, and as he pulled off a sock, discovered there was no feeling in his heel. To most anyone else this discovery would have meant very little, a momentary numbness. But Dr. Brand was world famous for his restorative surgery on lepers in India. He had convinced himself and his staff at the leprosarium that there was no danger of infection from leprosy after it reached a certain stage. The numbness in his heel terrified him.

In her biography of Dr. Brand, Dorothy Wilson says, "He rose mechanically, found a pin, sat down again, and pricked the small area below his ankle. He felt no pain. He thrust the pin deeper, until a speck of blood showed. Still he felt nothing. All that night the great orthopedic surgeon tried to imagine his new life as a leper, an outcast, and his medical staff's confidence in their immunity shattered by his disaster. As night receded, he yielded to hope and in the morning, with clinical objectivity, "he bared the skin below his ankle, jabbed in the point--and yelled."

Blessed was the sensation of pain! He realized that during the long train ride, sitting immobile, he had numbed a nerve. From then on, whenever Dr. Brand cut his finger, turned an ankle, even when he suffered from "mushroom poisoning, he was to respond with fervent gratitude, "Thank God for pain!" (Dorothy Clarke Wilson, Ten Fingers for God, pp. 142-145.)

Jesus likened to a serpent...

In the Bible the serpent is always the symbol of sin and evil. Yet Jesus told Nicodemus that the Son of Man would be lifted up like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Jesus is seen as the Lamb of God. He is call the Good Shepherd, the Rose of Sharon, and many other favorable names; but here, in John 3:14, Jesus likens himself to the serpent in the wilderness. This seems rather odd. Why would Jesus

liken his death to a serpent?

Text —Numbers 21:5-9

I want to note three things about this incident.

1. The people despised the grace of God and suffered the consequences.
2. The fiery serpents' venom was like a fire that could not be quenched.
3. The bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole for the people to observe.

Background of the text

VERSE 4 - The people of Israel had left Egypt and because of their disobedience and disbelief in God they had been condemned to wander for a generation in the wilderness. But God did not abandon them – He provided manna and quail for their daily bread and He protected and guided them throughout the wilderness experience.

The king of Edom refused them permission to pass through the land of Edom. So they traveled a long trek around Edom in order to get to the Promised Land. They headed South and East when they really wanted to go North and West. The people grew impatient with God and with Moses and they begin to grumble and complain.

This seems to be a recurring complaint with the people of Israel. Life was better in Egypt, so they thought. Why did you bring us out into the desert to die? They had uttered the exact same words on many occasions before and would again in the future. The people of Israel were quick to disparage their deliverance from the bondage of slavery. They had quickly forgotten the oppression under which they had toiled for many years. The people of Israel wanted to go back to Egypt because of the difficulties of life in the desert. They had failed to learn their lesson – *it was their own sin that had brought them into this desert in the first place, and they had forgotten the bitterness of bondage.*

I. The people despise the grace of God.

There is no bread, only this miserable manna they said. This is their most vocal attack on God. They had spurned the very bread of Heaven (Psalm 78:23-24, “Yet He commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of Heaven; 24. He rained down manna upon them to eat and gave them food from Heaven” NASB). In disparaging the provision of God they were denying, decrying, and denigrating His grace and favor towards them. What they were actually saying was something like this—Your gifts are no gifts at all. Your grace is no grace at all. You do not care. You do not provide us with blessings but curses. But how could they be so ungrateful? Had they so quickly forgotten their deliverance?

Are we any different?

John 1:11 says that Jesus came to his own people, and they failed to recognize him—the Son of God, Savior! So, they rejected him. They were rejecting God's gift to them. In John 6:31-35 the people ask for bread from Heaven like their fathers had eaten in the wilderness. They request Jesus to perform a similar miracle to prove that he truly is the Son of God. Jesus told them that God had given their fathers manna in the wilderness, not Moses. Jesus said that he is the bread which comes down from heaven. Only by feasting on him can a man live forever.

Are you despising the grace of God? Jesus is the bread of God given to the world as a gift. Those who welcome Him and feast on Him are nourished. The people who reject the gift may say—it's a foolish thing! I Corinthians 1:18 “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...The people who reject the gift may say—give me a sign! I Corinthians 1: 22 “For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for

wisdom...But God will give no other wisdom, no other sign, no other grace but only the Son. Make sure you aren't rejecting the grace of God and complaining when you should be praising and thanking Him.

Chuck Swindoll in his book *The Grace Awakening* states it like this:

If our greatest need had been information,

God would have sent us an educator.

If our greatest need had been technology,

God would have sent us a scientist.

If our greatest need had been money,

God would have sent us an economist.

If our greatest need had been pleasure,

God would have sent us an entertainer.

But our greatest need was forgiveness,

So God sent us a Savior!

II. The serpents' venom was like fire that could not be extinguished.

The *snake* was not the problem. The *bite of the snake* was not the problem. However, the *venom* from the serpent was a problem. It burned like fire inside their bodies, and they writhed and withered in pain. The venom burned and the people could do nothing to relieve the burning sensation.

The venom was painful but the venom was good. This is the paradox of Christianity. What is meant for bad can be turned for good (Romans 8:28). The venom made the people rail but while railing against Moses they cried out for help. Whatever circumstance you find yourself in today should lead you to do one thing---cry out to God. If your circumstances are good, you should cry out to God in thanksgiving. If your circumstances are dire, you should cry out to God for deliverance. God wants you crying out to him.

Sin is not your problem. Sin is everywhere and will remain everywhere present until the Kingdom of God comes fully upon earth. The problem is you. Your old nature that stays with you throughout your Christian walk on this earth is the problem. It remains a problem until you determine yourself dead to it and alive unto God.

The pain of living is not your problem. There is a solution to the problems of life. Jesus is the bread from Heaven sent to resolve your problems. Here again, this is important: the snake was not the problem, nor is the devil the problem. The bite of the snake was not the problem. The venom was the problem. Your sin nature is like the venom from the snake bite. It stays with you and burns with lust, with hate, with the sins of the flesh that cripple Christians. The sin nature resists God's grace. The sin nature keeps you bound unless you turn your eyes on Jesus. Jesus, by His Spirit can break the hold of sin in your life.

III. The bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole for the people to observe.

God provided the solution without removing the problem. When the people hungered for bread, God eliminated their hunger by providing free bread. When the people thirsted for water, the Lord eliminated their thirst by providing water from a rock. God always eliminated their problems until this incident. In this incident God did not eliminate the snakes, but He provided a way for them to live in spite of the snake bites.

When you are born again, God doesn't remove sin from your presence. He gives you the power to resist it. When you are born again, God doesn't remove all your problems; He gives you help to work through them. If God removed all the bad from your path, you'd still complain about something.

No, God leaves us in this sin-filled world until we die so that we will face our sins, our problems and turn them over to Him. We will confront our sin nature throughout this life and until we receive our glorified body in the next life. In confronting or coming face to face with our needs, we turn to God. In turning to God we see the Son of God upon the cross—as our sin (Romans 5:21). In seeing Jesus cursed (Galatians 3:13), we see the seriousness of our sins. But in looking upon the cursed one, we can become His righteousness. By faith we may receive His imputed righteousness. We may receive His remedy for our sin. We may receive His salvation.

Take a jump with me to the Gospel of John, to the passage that reads, “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life” (KJV).

This strange story is from the book of Numbers and is tied to the saving work of Jesus Christ. John compares the snake on a pole to Jesus on the Cross. To enter the Kingdom of God, we must face the crucifixion. We must look to Christ on the Cross. This is the same message as the bronze serpent. For us to be healed, we have to be willing to remember both our sin and God’s mercy. The Cross, like the bronze snake, is a symbol of both. Israel looked at the bronze snake and remembered what they had done to provoke God, the death that they deserved as a result, and the way God had made for them to live.

The Cross does the same for us--not the empty Cross. The empty Cross symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus and therefore our own resurrection. But the Passion or death, the Cross with Jesus dying on it, is the one that John says we must look to. That’s what will remind us of our sin.

The Cross, like the bronze serpent, not only reminds us of our sin, it also reminds us of God’s forgiveness and mercy. At the same time that we are reminded of our sin and its penalty, we are reminded that God has provided a way out, a way for us to live.

I am told that the two parts of the bronze snake—the *snake* and the *pole* were actually symbols used in Egypt. In Egyptian hieroglyphics the serpent meant ‘eternity.’ And the pole meant ‘life.’ When we combine the two we get ‘eternal life.’ Maybe the Lord used Egyptian hieroglyphics to remind them that ‘eternal life’ was to be found in Him alone. They were not to treat the serpent as a magical thing but to look behind it to the One it pointed to – God. They were to know that in Him alone is eternal life.

Look upon Jesus!

Just as Israel in the wilderness had to turn in faith and look upon the bronze serpent in order to be healed, so we too must turn from our sin (repentance), and look up to the means of salvation – the Cross of Christ.

Romans 8:3 “...God sending His own Son in the LIKENESS of sinful flesh, ...”

2 Cor. 5:21 “For He MADE Him to be sin for us...”

Phil. 2:7-8 Jesus was made into the “LIKENESS of men: and being found in the fashion of as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Gal. 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being MADE a curse for us...”

I’m sure that many laughed when they heard Moses say that the cure was to look at this serpent on a pole! How ridiculous, they thought! Serpents are the problem, how can they be the cure?”

Suppose Moses had said, “The people will not understand. I’ll need to explain it first before I lift it up. Or maybe the crowd will not appreciate this so I’ll need to dress it up some—put some tapestry on it maybe some garland, more gold so it won’t look so plain. And so we ministers try to dress up the cross- the message, so people will receive the cure. But we must remember it’s not in the delivery. And it’s not in the messenger; it’s the plain, simple message of the gospel. Only the plain truth of Jesus can save a man from his sins. And that message is bloody, messy, and violent...but the Bible says that the violent take it by force...

41. He saw through their duplicity...

In Luke’s gospel, chapter 20 and beginning with verse 20, there is an interesting story recorded.

The NIV Bible reads, “*Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”*

“He saw through their duplicity and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription is on it?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied. He said to them, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

The key to understanding this story is stated in the following verse. “*They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.*” (Verse 26, NIV)

Although this story has been used by some to support the notion that religion and civil government should be separate, I don’t think the spies who were sent to trap Jesus were interested in “separation of church and state.” As a matter of fact to the Jew of the first century, the thought of the Jewish civil government separating from the Law of Moses was anathema.

The spies wanted to trick Jesus into saying something by which they could condemn Him publicly. The joke was on them, however. Jesus’ answer astonished them and moved them to silence.

When I here statements by groups such as the ACLU wanting to separate religion from the civil government, I’m suspicious. I think, based upon their history, they aren’t really concerned for the good of our Constitution and civil government. I think they have a hidden agenda. My prayer is that other Americans will see through their duplicity.

I think their real intentions are to elevate the civil government of municipalities, counties, states, and the nation above the Judeo-Christian heritage of this nation. I don’t think they

want separation, I think they want to abolish religion period. Although the First Amendment clearly says that the government shall not abolish the free exercise of religion, they still try desperately to purge American civil government from any semblance of the Judeo-Christian religion.

The nineteenth century philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel once said, “History teaches us that man learns nothing from history.” Have we forgotten our world history? Each civilization that chose to forget God came to its end abruptly. What about America’s history? Noah Webster said, “The moral principles and precepts contained in the scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws. All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible.”

Again, Joseph Story (1779-1845), Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court said, “The real object of the First Amendment was not to countenance, much less to advance, Mohammedanism, [sic] or Judaism, or infidelity, by prostrating Christianity; but to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects, and to prevent any national ecclesiastical establishment which should give to a hierarchy the exclusive patronage of the national government. It thus cut off the means of religious persecution (the vice and pest of former ages), and of the subversion of the rights of conscience in matters of religion which had been trampled upon almost from the days of the Apostles to the present age...”

The argument by Thomas Jefferson who coined the phrase “separation of church and state,” was not meant to separate civil government from the Christian philosophy but to keep the national government from endorsing one “sect” or one Christian denomination over another. That would have established a state sponsored church such as England had and would have created rebellion in the young nation; therefore, Jefferson—and rightly so—concerned himself with the power of one influential denomination overshadowing the civic affairs of the nation and not with separating American civic government from Biblical standards of righteousness. Why would anyone be against righteousness and justice?

42. The Bible declares the Highest Law

Some of the greatest discoveries in archeology have been ancient civilizations’ codes of law. For example Hammurabi, the sixth king of the Amorites, compiled and simplified a code of laws for his people about 1700 years before the birth of Christ. This code of laws is known as the *Code of Hammurabi*. The Mosaic Law of Israel, which came later, is not unlike the *Code of Hammurabi*. Both systems of law provide moral, civil, and criminal codes for each respective civilization. There is, however, a significant difference between the *Code of Hammurabi* and the Mosaic Law. The difference makes the Mosaic Law unique from all other codes of law. The Mosaic Law is monotheistic (one God) and given to Israel by God Himself. Because of this truth, the Mosaic Law has been revered throughout Israel’s history as sacred and has helped sustain Israel as a Hebrew people to this very day. This feat alone is supernatural, considering Israel’s long history. (Scattered

for 2000 years throughout all nations of the earth, they returned to their nation in 1948 and remain there to this day.)

I believe that every ancient civilization that has ever existed on the face of the earth has either pledged to, or rejected some system of law. Why do I make this blanket statement? The Bible says that every man who has ever lived on the earth has witnessed the reality of God by seeing Him revealed in His orderly expanse. Every man born is born with a conscience that should guide him to God (Romans chapter one). I believe that law is good and ordained of God to protect, preserve, and propel civilizations forward. After all, history teaches us that great civilizations flourish when law, government, and enterprise are upheld.

What does the Bible say about law and order? It says much. I want to share some scriptures with you that underscore the necessity of the rule of law in society. In Exodus 19:5 we read, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, (6) you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” Here the Lord tells Israel that they will be unique from all other nations if they revere Him. What I glean from this scripture is that any nation is unique to God if it willingly honors God. God is not a “respector of persons.” He does not prefer one nation to another nation, either. What He does for one, He will do for anyone who meets His conditions.

Throughout Israel’s early history all crimes were crimes against God. Why was this true? It was true because God wanted to be Israel’s King forever and fight her battles for her (1 Samuel 12:9-10). The day that Israel refused God as her King, because she wanted to be like the other nations, is the day she began to stumble, eventually falling into Gentile captivity. God expected His people to follow His Law or suffer the consequences. The consequences could be severe. God never overlooked wrongdoing because of His love for His people, but in love He punished the “wrongdoer.” There is nothing wrong with “aversive conditioning” which is known in psychology as “classical conditioning”, the use of punishment to deter bad behavior. Once again, upholding right and wrong by the threat of punishment or the promise of reward is not a bad thing. It sets guidelines; defines boundaries; it maintains order. The Bible says that God is not the author of confusion. He is the God of order. God is for law and order.

Also, the Mosaic Law regarded all life as sacred, unlike other nations’ codes of law. The Bible declares that man is made in the image and likeness of God. Man is the highest rank of all God’s creation. The Bible says that Christians are ranked above angels in the created order. Man is given a privileged position in creation’s rank and file; therefore, human life is especially precious to God. It should be special to man. Time does not allow me to cover everything the Bible states regarding the rule of law; however, I would like to conclude this study with some scriptures that speak to moral and civil laws. God’s moral laws are universal. It’s just as wrong to murder in America as it is to murder someone in England, France, Australia or anywhere else on this planet. It is never right.

God will judge all men of all ages in eternity if they refuse to accept His standard that can be met only in Jesus Christ, God’s perfect sacrifice.

The Bible also lays down strict laws regarding property losses due to crime. The guilty party is to recompense the victim. Romans chapter 13 teaches that Christians are to obey the law of the land, resisting only when the national law is opposed to God's law. The chapter also talks about capital punishment. The state is the one entity sanctioned by God to "bear the sword..." The Mosaic Covenant established the right of capital punishment. If a man takes the life of another human being by murder, his life is required for that life. (I've never understood the logic behind drafting a teenager to fight and die in a war, and then arguing that it's wrong to execute a convicted killer. Maybe we should draft the convicted killer to fight and die in our wars and let the teenagers go on with their lives.)

We live in an imperfect society. Man's justice can fail. Innocent people can get hurt. That's why it is important to adhere to God's order of society, laid out in His Word. God with His guidance can be our safeguard against injustices. Nevertheless, just because our justice system in America is flawed by imperfect men does not give us the right to rebel against the law of the land by refusing to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. God has ordained human government. Law and order is good, and God sanctions it for the good of all.

If you would, please indulge me in a few personal comments somewhat related to today's topic.

American patriots were willing to declare war against England for their National Independence. Do you remember why? It involved more than just a complaint about "taxation without representation." The American patriots were not lawless men. There had to be a greater cause to rebel rather than unfair trade laws. What was it? As far back in world history as the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin who was one of the greatest thinkers and Biblical scholars of all times began to write and publish his views regarding Biblical societies (what they were and how they operate). He believed that societies could function for the good of the believer and glorify God. He believed, among other things, that law and order had to be upheld in society to suppress the debased nature of man that could be ruthless. His ideas were put into practice and worked well. His teaching influenced many great minds of the day. Together with Calvin, these men and their ideas revolutionized church and state governments. Over time, the teachings evolved and influenced European groups like the Puritans of England. This led to the expansion of Calvin's ideas of law and order being implemented in the "New England" America. So the philosophy regarding representative rule in government, and the sacredness of human life were sown during the Reformation; they were later carried across the Atlantic by the Pilgrims and Puritans to build the "New Jerusalem", in the new world.

By the 18th century the enlightenment age was producing authors that began to expand on the idea of man's inalienable rights. These writers agreed that man had God given rights that only God could give or take away. These enlightened writers expressed this in literature that the European intellectuals and the American patriots were reading. The thought that men had rights that no government could infringe upon was fanning the flames of Revolution in America. Over time these American Revolutionaries began to embrace these ideas and promote them openly as America's right to national independence. With this philosophy in hand, the patriots felt they had a divine right to

wage war against England. When they drafted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, they defended their right for Independence against tyranny by underscoring man's divine rights: no human government had the right to supersede the Highest Law in the universe. God's Law is the highest law.

And now here we are over 200 years later in America again divided on whether or not the U. S. Constitution is the highest law. If it is, then every state and federal law is subject to it, and the U.S. Supreme Court's interpretation of the U. S. Constitution. I'm calling for a revolution, not with sword or rifle. I'm calling for Christians in America to stand up and be counted. I'm calling for Christians to honor God's Law, His way of doing things. A nation that denounces God's Law is bound to fail. That is, my friend, the lesson of history.

43. Evolution of Inalienable Rights

The Bible declares that man is created in the image and likeness of God. The Bible says that God used His own hands to form man out of clay; therefore, man is inexorably connected to the earth. Maybe that's why man is at his best when he's outdoors, close to the soil. Man is just more in tune with himself and the scheme of things when his hands are in dirt. Man can listen to God. Man can hear God speak because God gave him a spirit with ears to hear. Man can see God's beauty. Man sees God's hand revealed in His creation; and looking at the great expanse, man cries out to God because he needs, he's made for God's fellowship. Man is unique in the created rank and file. He's made to reflect God's image.

Man is made like God so that he might care for his own. Man is caretaker to his wife and children because God is eternal caretaker. Man esteems, he honors his wife and children. And they respect him. God honors those who honor Him. Man seeks fulfillment and peace because God is the Prince of Peace. Man is created in God's image to be like Him, to find his peace in Him, to worship Him. Man is a special being in the created order.

If this is true, then why is man so prone to evil? Man is a "fallen" creature. He has stooped to sin and unless he turns to his God for rescue, he plays the opposite to a good and merciful Creator. Because man is made like God, he has the potential to do "good" or with his free will (God is a free moral agent) choose to do evil. And it can be a destructive evil—killing, maiming, slandering, deceiving, hurting, fracturing, splintering, dividing, and conducting terrorism in the name of a god.

Nonetheless, man and woman are God's highest created beings, just under God. The Bible says, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [Or than God] and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:4-5). Because humanity is so loved by God, He has gone to extremes to win humanity's love. The greatest feat that God performed for man, in reason to rescue him, was allowing Jesus to redeem (purchase, ransom paid in full) man from sin. That's what Calvary was all about. God is

still rescuing men and women through the Cross. Any one who cries out to Jesus for rescue, according to scripture, will be eternally saved.

Where it all started

I've chosen this reminder about the uniqueness of humanity for one reason. I plan to write about the lifting of human life to its rightful place of sanctity by outlining its history from the Roman Empire (the sanctity of life was at its lowest ebb) to the present day. I will endeavor to disclose the sanctity of human life as it has progressed from its worst regard of infanticide in Rome, to its lifting by "inalienable rights" in the Enlightenment, to its abortion by choice in present day America. As it has been said so it is true. When good men do nothing, evil men play havoc. Let's begin.

Life was considered sacred to the Jew. God instructed Israel to celebrate life, to protect it, to care for it. This does not seem to be the case with a casual reading of the Old Testament. It appears quite the opposite. Israel is led in one brutal war after another. Carnage is everywhere present. But why did Israel fight? The Bible is clear on this point. God wanted a race of people, a nation to be His instrument of righteousness to the world. He wanted a nation that was unique, unlike the polytheistic and devil worshipping nations around them. It was imperative that Israel remained a nation of right standing with God and His law and order. God would one day bring His Son into the world through the Jewish race. Israel was groomed by God, at times severely (dispersion, Gentile rule, and etc.), in order to accomplish His purpose of delivering the world through Israel's Messiah. Jesus Christ lived in Israel during the time of Roman occupation---Gentile rule. Because of His humble roots, not all Jews believed He was their Messiah. He didn't fit the part. The Jews were looking for a political ruler that would lead them against the Romans and establish God's Kingdom, once and for all, on the face of the earth. When Jesus died on the cross the Jews were justified in their belief. Jesus was no Messiah, or so they thought. Seventy years later, Israel was crushed under the foot of Rome and the Jews were scattered through out the world once again (Jesus had predicted this). The Jews would not reclaim Palestine, their ancient lands, until 1948.

When Christianity was in its infancy, it was considered just another sect of the Hebrew religion. It carried out the same philosophies as the Jews, preached from the same scriptures (Old Testament) as the Jews, and centered in the same capital as the Jews—Jerusalem. It wasn't until Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD that Christianity stood as a separate and distinct religion from Jews in the eyes of Rome. Also, at this time the church, still relatively small, was persecuted relentlessly by Rome as an unlawful religious sect. Notwithstanding the plight of the Christians by Rome, Christians continued to elevate human life as sacred, just as the Jews had done before them. That was not the case for the pagan Romans.

Rome cheapened life. Rome began its decline morally during the last days of the Republic and continued the decline throughout the Pax Romana. Contentment was replaced by greed. People looked to the government to supply free grain and public amusements. Family life disintegrated, divorce and immorality abounded, and superstition increased. Once the backbone of Rome, a hard-working patriotic citizen was now hard to find. The Roman father had the right to accept or reject the birth of his

children. The life of a divorced woman was terrible. She ranked with the cattle of the field. Infanticide was rampant. By the third century, mighty Rome was over run with barbarians. The Roman Empire was no longer. Christianity was lifted to prominence with the Edict of Constantine. It became the official religion of the Roman Empire when the capital of Rome was moved from the west to the east. Christianity did much to restore morality and lift the sanctity of human life to a higher place in the state. Unfortunately, the church went through a decline during the years that followed and was sometimes the culprit in lowering the sanctity of life immorality of the priesthood, the dark ages, the misappropriation of scriptural truths, and the Crusades.

44. Supreme Law

The debate today among those who determine the constitutionality of our laws is this: Is the Constitution of the United States the highest law in the land or is God's law supreme. If God's law is Sovereign over the entire universe, then abortion is wrong because it terminates life that only God can give or take away. If God's law is above all creation, then neither men nor governments may deny another man his "inalienable" rights to live with freedom and liberty. If God's law is Chief, then no one may deny anyone the right to praise, honor, and worship God. We are commanded by scripture (it isn't optional) to "declare the glory" of our God.

On the other hand, if the U.S. Constitution is the highest law, then government—executive, legislative, or judicial—may deny or redefine life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as they please. If the people of America decide to redefine life, they may do so by vote. If the Supreme Court of the United States rules that prayer in schools or the Ten Commandments is to be banned from all government facilities, then so be it. If the U. S. Constitution is above God's law, then voting Americans may rule for or nullify God's law, with impunity.

You may be like me and see the difficulty of choosing man's law above God's law. You may read this and disagree with me. That's your right to do so. But who gives you and me the right to disagree? Is it the state or God? I want to ask you something. Which was first: law or man? You may be thinking what a silly question that is. You answer that man was first and then came law to govern man and protect him in his home and community. The question is answered, you may think.

I demur. I think that law was first, and then came man. Why do I say this? I say this because I believe that God is the first cause in the universe (philosophical concept—will explain it another day). He was in the beginning before man was. God was the Law unto Himself. By His Law He has the right to exist because He is the self-existing one. Nothing, no power, no authority in the entire universe can deny Him this. He has the right to speak because He spoke the universe into existence (that includes creating man). He has the right to create life because He made man from the "dust of the earth"; God "breathed into man's nostrils and man became" an animated being. God created man in His image; therefore, man is given God rights. God's Law is innate and universal. Man is endowed by His Creator to live, to speak, to create, and no man may take that right away.

45. The Dawning of a New Day

History is divided into three parts: ancient history, the Middle Ages, and the current Modern era. The greatest turn in history was the Reformation in the modern era of history. The Reformation birthed and nurtured science, art, and religion like no other period of history before it. I'm going to continue my topic on the sacredness of human life as it evolved from the heights of the Reformation to its fall in present day America. Once again, I begin with the teachings of John Calvin in the late 16th century.

On July 10, 1509, John Calvin, destined to become one of the most influential Protestant leaders of all time, was born in Noyon (nwa-yon), France. After studying law and the liberal arts and mastering the ancient classical books, Calvin became associated with a group of Renaissance French scholars who were very critical of Romanism. Sometime before 1534, Calvin later described, God “subdued... [his] heart to docility [obedience] by sudden conversion,” and Calvin was henceforth committed to the Protestant faith. Calvin had the opportunity to put many of his ideas into practice in the city of Geneva, Switzerland. Exiled Protestants from all over Europe found refuge in Calvin's Geneva. Future leaders of the Reformation in other lands received training in the basics of faith and practice, and Geneva became known as the “Protestant Rome.” John Knox the Scottish Reformation leader, who spent several years in exile in Geneva, called the city “the most perfect school of Christ.”

At the heart of Calvin's system of theology is his strong belief in the sovereignty of God. Calvin believed that God “predestines” all things according to His own will. Everything God does is for His glory, although finite man does not understand God's ways. Calvin applied his teaching concerning the sovereignty of God to everyday life in Geneva. He sought to build a Christian community based upon the Word of God. Taking the Bible, especially the Old Testament, as his law book, Calvin made sure that the city statutes conformed to scriptural teaching. He stressed the independence of church and state, but he believed that both were subject to the rule of God. He asserted that the duty of the state was to promote piety, punish evildoers, and assist the church by providing an atmosphere that would encourage godliness in the lives of church members. The Geneva city council adopted his teaching issued orders forbidding dancing, drunkenness, and gambling, and requiring everyone to attend church services.

The Separatists of England adopted Calvin's emphasis on the rule of law. The Separatists of England became the Pilgrims who journeyed to the “New World.” The Mayflower Compact that was drafted in the Boston Harbor by the Pilgrims was a model of government rooted in the ideas of Calvinism. Calvin's rule of law was rooted in the Old Testament of the Bible. From the Pilgrim's Compact came the foundation of America's Constitution and the Bill of Rights. There were other ideas that would seed the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution, which came from the Age of Reason (18th century). For example, political reform was one of the chief concerns of the 18th century *philosophes* (social reformers of the Enlightenment). John Lock, who certainly was not a friend to religion, advanced the idea that men possess certain natural and inalienable rights—rights that can not be transferred or surrendered. Also, Montesquieu believed in political reform. He believed that government should be

separated into three powers: the executive, the legislative, and judicial. Time and space does not allow me to mention others like Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, and their works of literature that were spawning new forms of government throughout the world, namely England (Glorious Revolution), America (American Revolution), and France (Revolution).

In America throughout the 18th and 19th centuries the concept of faith, instead of reason, was taking a beating. The Enlightened authors of the 18th century questioned all things that could not be proven by either inductive or deductive reasoning. When Darwin published his works in the 19th century, it only added fuel to the fires of the enlightened class of intellectuals who believed that organized religion was doing more harm to societies than good. Along with Darwin's ideas arose other thinkers, and traditional thoughts of theology went into a steep decline. Some Bible scholars and philosophers began to argue that God was dead (Nietzsche—"God is dead and we have killed Him") and nihilism (reject all established authority), and Utilitarianism (too weird for me to explain). This decline in traditional beliefs of theology that had held constant since the Apostles was affecting the social fabric of America. Schools, especially higher institutions of learning, were embracing a new theology called modernism. The rebellion against traditional faith came to a crescendo in the 1960s. America's Supreme Court judges began propounding philosophical law that supported modernism—prayer in school was banned. In the 1970s abortion rights activists were successful in the ruling of Roe-v-Wade. Today after 30 years of modernism influencing our courts, now we've come to the post-modern era. Things are getting wackier. For example, who in their right mind would have suggested thirty years ago that same sex couples would one day wed legally? Things are spinning out of control.

We need a Revival in the land. We need to stand up and preach the Gospel without compromise. We need to combat our federal judges that rule against the will of the people on issues like the banning of partial birth abortions and same sex marriage. America needs a spiritual boost to say the least. We, the church, must teach the dangers of post modernism. Post modernism is nothing more than the "wiles of the devil" creeping into American society "unawares" because Satan has caught Christians asleep at their posts. We must awaken to righteousness and speak truth. We've got to stand up and be counted. Here are some ways we can be counted: (1) Pray for America (2) Witness our faith without compromise (3) tell our Representatives how we believe (4) Register and vote in elections. (5) Join active ministries that keep us informed about the work of the evil one—the devil—in the governments of men as well as the "world." Stay encouraged! Jesus has given us all authority to advance His kingdom among men.

46. Hodgepodge Truth

Does Absolute Truth Exist?

All men want to find truth, or so thought Aristotle. He said that philosophy begins with the desire to know truth. I agree that men want to find truth; however, not all men agree on what truth is. To one truth is relative, existing in one's own mind only. To another truth is elusive and can't really be understood, except in a metaphysical sense.

(Metaphysical is a fancy word used by philosophers and theologians. It is concerned with issues such as the existence and nature of God. That's heavy. But let me get back to truth.)

Someone once said that a straight steel rod immersed in a glass of water may look as though it's bent, but it isn't. So appearances can be deceiving, can't they? Keep that illustration in mind while reading this paper for this reason: If it's easy to misinterpret the true nature of physical things, then it can be easy to misinterpret metaphysical things. Now I'm going to drop another "heavy" on you. *To deny the existence of truth is to affirm its existence—truth is inescapable! Therefore, the affirmation that true statements can be made about reality is a rationally justifiable one.*¹³ For example if I say that truth does not exist, I'm purporting my belief to be true. And if I believe that my statement is true—truth does not exist—I'm banking on it being true. Using this logic my argument goes no place. I've just canceled out my statement by asserting what I believe to be true; nothing is true. (Keep scratching your head. This gets clearer as it goes along. I hope.)

I want to write a little bit about relativism. A relative view of truth has been deeply ingrained into the minds and hearts of contemporary people, especially in academic circles. Relativistic thinking has influenced us so much that it is now considered anti-intellectual to believe in absolute truth. The majority of educators and students regard truth to be obsolete, not absolute. Of course you know, as a Christian, that relativism has no place in the church house. A Christian's belief in God is not based on relative truths. God's truth, the Word, is absolute truth.

Now being the tolerant and wise person that you are, you may be thinking this: In light of tolerance what value is there in believing in absolutes? There is much value. Think about this: You may tolerate different tastes, but you can't tolerate relative truth as a child of God. Does that make sense? As a firm believer in Jesus Christ, you may and you should tolerate different cultures, different ideas, different philosophies about religion, different political parties, different races of people, but you can not compromise the fact that Jesus, Himself, said that *He is the ONLY way, truth, and life.*

You may remember the story about the six blind men who felt different parts of an elephant. In describing the elephant, each told about his part of the elephant. Each was telling the truth, but each description alone did not paint the entire picture. They each had a part of the whole, and the part did not adequately explain the whole. Granted, Christians do not all agree on every stated topic in the Bible; however, Christians do have a consensus on Jesus. He is what He said He is—the only begotten Son of God. The Bible says that believers see through a "glass darkly." That means that the understanding we now have can only be fully understood in the life that is to come. So, Christians should not boast arrogantly that they know everything there is to know about Christianity or the Bible. It just isn't true. Christians should stand humbly in the truth that has been revealed to them by the Spirit of God, and win others to the absolute truth about Jesus: He is the way, the truth, and the life. This must be done with a loving heart for all mankind.

If there are no absolutes in this world then $2+2=12$ or 6 or 8 or whatever it wants to equal—this is a child's dream. If mathematics is relative, then a math student may use

¹³ Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations*, (Bethany House) pp. 32-33.

any answer he or she pleases. If there are no absolutes in this world, then why do we hold criminals accountable for wrongdoing? Why do we tell our children not to lie to us? How will they know what is a lie, and what is truth? There has to be absolute standards because there are absolute truths. God's laws are absolute and universal. Honest—they are. I certainly wouldn't lie to you about that!

47. How confident are you...

How confident are you with your knowledge of the world beyond? Are you positive and therefore confident that the natural world, the here and now, is all that there is or ever will be? If you have no concern for a Supreme Being are you satisfied with your mortal knowledge that leads you to believe so?

Many years ago there lived a French mathematician. He is credited with inventing the first calculator and coming up with the primary calculations for the modern day computer. He did this over 300 years ago. His name is Pascal. Pascal was also a devout Christian. His views and philosophies regarding the supernatural have come down to us as "Pascal's Wager."

The wager says this essentially. If I wager that there is nothing beyond this life and make no preparations for the afterlife, I may or may not meet judgment; however if there is a God who will judge all men according to their works and I have not made preparations to appease His demands, I lose everything. On the other hand if I receive God's righteous covering through His Son Jesus and live my life according to His plan then when I die and awake (or remain asleep) to nothing, I've gained and lost nothing.

Wouldn't it behoove us because of our limited knowledge of what lies beyond the natural realm to cover ourselves with eternal assurance? I know I sound rather "preachy" by suggesting this proposition but, then again, I'm trying to appeal to the agnostic's sense of reasoning—there might be a Supernatural Being that exists. We just can't know for sure.

Christianity has been tested against some of the greatest thinkers of all time for over 2000 years and has passed the "reasonable" tests. It has stood the test not because it was chiefly intellectual, but because it recognizes that man's ultimate knowledge can never be more than what is mortal, thus leaving large gaps in knowing what is beyond this mortal life. If, however, man's knowledge is equal to a Supreme Being's knowledge, he can accurately know with all confidence what lies ahead. I, for one, can not make that assumption. I am content to admit my limitations of knowledge and therefore ask for God's grace to ready me for the world to come. God is all knowing. I am not.

48. How Strong is your Salvation?

It has been said that when the Nazis came to power in Germany the church was silent because the church opposed the same groups that the Nazis opposed. The Nazis came against the communist party and the church said nothing because they hated socialism as well. Next the Nazi party came against the Jews, and still the church did little to oppose

the genocide. Then the Nazis turned against the church, but it was too late for the church to do anything.

This begs the question. If the church is concerned only with *individual* salvations and “disciplining” the inner struggles of the converted individual, what happens to the rest of the world? (Is the opposing world worth my efforts to help?) Or, should I ask, is my salvation strong enough to not only change my heart but change the society in which I live also?

My concern is always and at all times—do I have merely salvation with an “escapist’s attitude”—to hell with the rest of the world, at least I’ve got my “fire insurance”—or do I have the supernatural power of God working through me to exchange *lust* for respect for the opposite sex, to exchange *racism* for the love of all men, to exchange my *weak theology*—get saved and just wait around for Jesus to come—for a theology that gets people saved and spiritually equipped to change the society in which they live? In other words, is the salvation I claim powerful enough to reach the disenfranchised of this world, the dispossessed, and the marginalized of society with not only a ticket to heaven but the power of God to change their world for the better?

I’m not advocating a social gospel. I’m advocating the Gospel of Jesus Christ that sets a man’s heart free as well as his bondage to apathy, laziness, idleness, and pride. Or, as I understand the words of Paul to the young churches in Macedonia—stop meddling in the affairs of others, and get back to work so you can support your own families. That’s still a good word, but not always welcomed advice today. Nevertheless it is true. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is strong enough to save the spirit, soul, and body of man—and even beyond that.

Just a few words for thought—my bottom line is this. Salvation is important not only for the future but for the present as well. Keep the faith. Stay the course. And work the fields. Jesus told us to “occupy” until He comes again.

49. Honor to whom?

The fifth commandment reads, “Honor your father and your mother.”

This cleavage between the generations is no new thing. It seems to have been part and parcel of life all through history. Here is a well known quotation: ‘The world is passing through troublous times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unwomanly in speech, behaviour and dress.’ That might have been written yesterday. In point of fact, it is an extract from a sermon preached by Peter the Hermit in 1274 (William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments*, Westminster John Knox Press 1998, p.50).

The sternest penalties were threatened against the person who broke the fifth commandment. Everyone who curses his father or his mother shall be put to death

(Leviticus 20:9; Exodus 21:17). Two most significant things are to be noted. The commandment to honour father and mother comes directly after the commandment which lay down our duty to God, and the penalty for breaking the commandment is the same as the penalty for blasphemy against God (Leviticus 24:15) (Ibid.,p.39).

When Jesus came to Palestine, the Jews of His day were seeking loop holes in the Mosaic Law regarding the support of parents. Human nature has its low side. To avoid having to help their parents, there were those who said that all their goods were Korban, which is, formally dedicated to God. Then when an aged parent asked for help, they would reply, 'We cannot help you. All our goods are dedicated to God.' But it was in fact all a clever trick to avoid giving the help (Ibid., p.41).

Obviously there is extended commentary to the fifth commandment. The New Testament tells us that there is a promise of longevity for the child who honors his parents. The New Testament also elaborates on the family's responsibility to each other. The father is the head of the home as Christ is the head of the Church. The wife is one with the husband in marriage, and their children are to obey them—not the other way around. Fathers are not to exasperate their children but encourage them while loving them. The commentary is pretty sensible, but today's society has redefined the role of parents and children. And, I'm afraid, not for the better. (Who can improve on the Bible's instructions)?

What does it mean for an adult to honor his father and mother? It means that the parent should be helped as long he or she is alive. They should be looked after, and provisions made for their care, i.e., assisted living quarters, nursing home care, or etc. We, as children, have a responsibility to honor our parents as long as they live on the face of the earth. Blessings will follow you all the days of your life.

50. If you bow down...

We in the west pride ourselves on being free. But are we free? We might be free from the threat of tyrants, dictators, and anarchists, but are we free from things that enslave our passions and desires? For example, it has been said that anything we bow to becomes our ruler—our god. Some are so passionate about traveling that they bow to the god of recreation. Others lust and bow to pornography. Whatever makes us bow down becomes our ruler—our god.

Consider this. In the Philippines, monkeys are caught by hollowing out coconuts and inserting sticky, aromatic candy to attract the monkeys, who put in their hands to grab the candy and can't get their fist out. They won't let go, even when their captors approach, and they end up as monkey stew (Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, Ignatius 1992, p.106).

Now you might be thinking, silly primates. But humans fair no better on the sucker list. The first skeleton archeologists uncovered from the volcanic ruins of ancient Pompeii was grasping silver coins in its outstretched skeletal hand. The coins rolled away as the skeleton was uncovered, with a mocking clink (Ibid. p.112). I think you get the point. No one is exempt from the possibility of being enslaved by vice.

Jesus wants to rule over our hearts, however, His rule does not enslave but emancipates. Jesus said that we could know the truth and the truth would set us free. Jesus said, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Remember, the Kingdom of God is upside down to the world’s system and way of doing things. If Jesus becomes your Lord and Master, He doesn’t enslave you like a world’s tyrant. He liberates you from your sins and frees you to pursue life, liberty, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

