

# That's for the Way

By, E. "Ted" Cowen

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12029 N. 107<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Sun City, AZ 85351

623-974-1828  
Email: tedpatcowen@cox.net

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# Introduction

Profound Biblical truths are often found in the simplest experiences of life. Therefore, I have endeavored to apply these to my own personal life. They have been used in sermons, written in newspaper articles and on our website that we operated for eight years.

A teacher friend used to say to her students, “use your think tank”. It reminded me of the portion of Scripture found in 1 Timothy 4:15, “Think on these things”. Another translation puts it, “Meditate on these things”. Slow down to check on what you’ve missed in your “haste”; chew it over and apply it to everyday living.

Scripture is “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) I believe the Lord wants each of us to practice practical Godly living.

With this in mind, we are hopeful that God will use these illustrative experiences to assist us not only to “consider Him”, but to fix our gaze on Him. (Hebrews 12:2)

## That's for The Way

Poignant, pertinent, pointed, profitable  
Treasured gems from life, formative  
They gel our thinking, establish conclusions  
Tear us from the world of illusions.

Tidbits here and there, advantageous  
Entrenched in our conception, solidified  
They fill our contemplation, our absorption  
Realistically we establish perception.

Thoughts that give insight, retained  
Gems outwardly observable, the soul  
They stay us in the midst of life's fray

These are thoughts, That's For the Way.

*E. “Ted” Cowen*

# Footprints

We walked hand in hand the length of the beach on a beautiful evening. Few people occupied the area at this hour, and those who did were using the moments like us...for relaxation. It was the return walk that brought my mind into gear along the present lines...two sets of footprints, side by side for more than fifty plus years. We look forward to their remaining that way for years to come, God willing. As F.B. Meyer put it..."LOVERS ALWAYS".

I looked at other footprints on the beach—each told a story. The most obvious seemed to be the runner. His shoe markings were distinct, his stride equal, easy to pick out. Footprints leading to a pile of garbage, yet another pile, and still another! What a pleasure to see that unseen individual conscientiously cleaning up the beach. Two feet, obviously men (mud mashers size that just don't belong to women) accompanied by a dog. He had to be a big dog...a quiet one. His position was always the same in respect to theirs. There – a set of footprints that came to an end where the water had already erased some of them...but their destination was clear, perched on a rock was a sandcastle. Those prints would last a little longer, but they would be gone when the tide reached its peak. There were more dogs, but these were active and smaller than the other.

I saw ahead something picturesque. She was not more than two and a half or three... blond hair, pink pajamas rolled up, smile from ear to ear, making her way along the waters edge just behind her parents, enjoying every moment of that evening. But, as fast as a footprint was placed in the sand, it was obliterated. We knew that story only because we were present. The other stories came out of the footprints.

We all pass this way. We leave footprints that tell a story, some more obvious than others. There have been great saints whose footprints I would like to walk in... Peter, Paul, John Huss, Martin Luther, and Jonathon Edwards, to name a few. No, I can never walk in their shoes. My feet are too small, but their footprints would and will be sufficient.

More importantly, I desire to ever walk in the footprints of the One who left the indelible imprint upon the sands of time...Jesus Christ. I trust that I might encourage others (you) to join hands and see what a lasting impression will be left upon your lives for time and for eternity. (Suggested reading: 1 Corinthians 10:23 -11:1)

## Mud Pilots

Being reared at a lighthouse had opportunities unique to the setting. It afforded situations for conversation even to this day.

The yacht we nervously watched was not of the sleek racing class that we frequently observed. This one was black, about 35 to 40 feet in length, and under full sail. What attracted our attention was her location. She was plying the waters of the south shore of Bermuda, dangerously close to southwest breakers. As she continued eastward, a sigh of relief filled my father's mouth. The plan was that she would head for the east-end, locate the channel and come into port.

Suddenly she changed tack, a course that would put her directly into dangerous reefs. Even under motorized conditions this could be perilous--under full sail, more so. No amount of effort could attract the skipper's attention. Somehow, he maneuvered through reefs and disappeared behind a cliff and into an area beyond our visibility.

Three things happened simultaneously: 1) my older brother, knowing approximately where the yacht should be, left to check the outcome. 2) Dad called a fisherman, a cousin, to go to the area and check the situation. "Buster" said: "I am on my way". But, knowing how slow that old fishing boat would travel caused some additional concern. 3) Two men with a much faster boat were contacted. They would also leave immediately. The problem was intensified as darkness engulfed the island.

Both boats traveled from the same area to their destination. The men with the faster boat had to resort to channels, whereas Buster, a "mud pilot", knowing the reefs well, maneuvered through them and arrived prior to the speed "kings". Meanwhile, my brother had arrived on the shoreline, discovered the yacht anchored and tried unsuccessfully to attract the skippers' attention

I was always fascinated with "mud pilots". Though not licensed to guide the great ships into harbor, these men could maneuver through mazes of reefs in the most adverse conditions. They were "untrained" masters of their craft.

In an era of highly sophisticated academics and business-like tactics, it is quite refreshing to meet men called of God, taught at the Master's feet, humble in spirit, using their God-given gifts to rescue others from the perils of destruction. They are aware of the territory that is plied by the Devil and his advocates, but they just humbly go on their way experiencing victory upon victory in His Name!

In Bible times, the twelve disciples were said to "*have turned the world upside down*". (Acts 12:6) **Needed: a few more "mud pilots"**.

## A Drop at a Time

As the QE2 maneuvered through the Panama Canal, we found ourselves fascinated with the facts related to its construction and maintenance. The French were the first to attempt to build it, but finally decided the cost, both monetarily and the loss of human life surpassed anything they had expected. They were forced to abandon the project. Much of the emphasis and early ideas of Americans were to dig a canal that went through from sea level to sea level. However, the final engineers concluded that the locks were to be installed and ships raised and lowered at 30-foot increments. This system would use lake water to accomplish this incredible feat.

As each ship transverses the Canal, approximately 52,000,000 gallons of water is dumped into the ocean. That water comes out of Gatun Lake which is filled with water from the rain forests of that area. Keep in mind that Panama has more than 220 inches of rain yearly. However, what caught my attention was the fact that all of that water must come one drop at a time. (By the way, more than 800,000 ships have utilized the Canal.) Turn that into trillions of gallons and then into drops.

Astounding numbers, yes! Numerous passages of Scripture flood the brain as we think of those drops of water raising and lowering ships. For instance, try to picture the Flood of Noah's day. That, by the way, is the first mention of "rain" in Scripture and it makes the Panama Canal operation look small in comparison.

There's the story of Elijah who prayed that it might not rain and it did not for three years and six months; then he prayed that it would rain and God sent barrels of water. Another interesting verse is the one in Matthew 5:45...*"for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"*. No matter what our attitude is toward God, His attitude toward us is that of grace and mercy. One of those expressions is rain!

May we suggest for your consideration that you appropriately respond in gratitude to the One who daily showers us with His benefits! According to Scripture, it is because of Him that we enjoy the water of life. John 4:14 quotes Jesus saying: *"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life"*...one drop at a time!

## Who Sought Who

Our 55-foot yacht felt like it was drifting. The winds had not been too favorable and anxiety of arriving in Newport, R.I. in time for the return race to Bermuda was playing on our minds. Just then, the owner/captain woke me and asked if I would take the next watch.

It was a pleasure to get out of the damp sleeping bag and take in the beautiful night behind the helm of this craft. It was something I had always wanted to do. I was wide-awake as I climbed on deck in readiness.

A slight rustle in one of the rolled sails caught my attention. It did not move again so I manipulated into a position where I could examine closely what I sensed was present. There it was: a tern, nestled quite comfortably and making no endeavor to move. My next statement was: "See who I found!" As quickly as it came out of my mouth, I corrected it by saying: "See who found us!"

When one considers the Scriptures, he is reminded of the words of Jonah: "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" (Jonah 2:9) Like the most familiar of verses, John 3:16, the origin of salvation is God. "He so loved that He gave His only begotten Son." John Peterson penned it so beautifully: "In my darkness Jesus found me, touched my eyes and made me see..." Why God sought me out is beyond human comprehension... but He did.

That little bird reminded me of a great truth of Scripture. God did the seeking; I did the responding... that because of the gentle prodding by the Holy Spirit of God Himself. It is by the grace of God alone that man experiences Salvation. (Ephesians 2:8, 9) It is said that D.L. Moody declared that when he reached Heaven's gates, he will probably find a sign that will read: "*Whosoever will, may come!*" Whereas, on the inside it will read: "*Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.*" (Ephesians. 1:4)

On the sea of life there is a haven of rest for the weary... His name is Jesus.

## Donkey Work

We had decided to visit Oatman, just a short distance from Lake Havasu City. It was not our first trip there; it is located on Route 66 which we had traveled before RT I-40 had been opened. The ride was without event as we twisted and turned up the road that would lead us to this once prosperous mining town.

After passing a few buildings that were obviously in disrepair, we arrived at the end of Oatman. We parked the car and began our walk through a few of the stores, studied some of the vintage buildings and their contents, and gradually meandered to the opposite end of town.

During this process, we were constantly aware of the burros that roamed the streets. You could buy a bag of carrots for a dollar if you wished to feed them. We were told that the Bureau of Land Management estimates there are approximately 600 burros that roam the area. Others estimate there are 1700. Those that seem to wander into Oatman daily are named by the residents. We noticed that they responded to their names.

These burros are the offspring of a bygone era. When the town closed up its last mine, many of the miners left the area, not bothering to take their burros with them; thus the reason for so many in a limited area. The Bureau of Land Management endeavors to control the numbers by adopting out many of them.

As we maneuvered along, they were also maneuvering. At one point, Patsy was endeavoring to get past an old washing machine and a talkative individual when the burro decided to “nudge” her with his nose. She somehow managed to avoid falling.

In the midst of this, I found myself recalling a donkey conversing with Balaam in Numbers 22:28. The donkey saw what Balaam failed to see and, after being struck three times for responding to what and who he saw, he had to speak to Balaam to get his attention. Some of us are as hard-headed and ignorant as Balaam was at that moment. We fail to hear what God is communicating with us.

A second thought leaped into my brain. Jesus needed a donkey for His trip to Jerusalem on what we regard Palm Sunday. He sent His disciples to gather one. He rode it triumphantly into Jerusalem that day. It was one “whereon never man sat”. (Read Luke 19) I keep thinking, “If Jesus could use a donkey, He can use people as stubborn as us.”

It was not the size of these little animals that made them so usable to the miners, it was their quality, their versatility, and their adaptability. God wants men and women willing to do His will with like qualities; this is what being a servant is about.

For study, read Romans 1:1; 1 Timothy 4:6; 1 Samuel 3:9; 2 Corinthians 11:23.

## The Voice I Know

A dozen or more years had passed since we could visit one of our previous parishioners. Patsy and I decided to go out to the farm to visit with Glenn and Mildred. Knowing that he had lost his sight and she had lost her hearing since we were last there made our arrival somewhat arresting.

The radio was booming on the back porch and our knocks on the door were unanswered. About then, Patsy said: "Glenn must have the radio on loudly so he can find his way home again". Agreeing with her, I went on a search that lasted only a few minutes. I spotted blind Glenn chopping wood by the woodpile.

As I shouted above the radio sounds, his reply was classic: "I cannot see you, but the voice I hear is one I know. It is the voice of my leader. Come, take my hand and lead me up to the house."

My mind went back to John's Gospel, chapter 10: "*His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. They will never follow a stranger...*" (V's. 4 & 5). In the din of this old world with its myriads of sounds, the voice of the Savior can be heard, saying "Come! Follow Me." "*Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture...I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...I am the Good Shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me.*" (V7-14)

We sat in the living room and enjoyed conversing at length...a leader and follower. That's the way it is when people follow the Lord Jesus. They read His Word and listen to what He says. They learn to communicate through and by prayer. They speak face to face. Ever so importantly, they know each other's voice.

## Choppin' Wood

The crack was so loud that I sat upright in bed and began to try to gather myself and try to figure out what had taken place. If your dreams are anything like mine, they are very realistic and vivid. At this moment, I abandoned the thought of the dream and maneuvered through the house to find out what the noise was all about, knowing full well that I would not go back to sleep until I discovered what it was. The futility of my efforts left me sitting back on the edge of the bed.

I decided to focus on the dream for it was the splitting of the wood in the dream that woke me. My dear friend of fifty years was splitting wood with an axe and putting it neatly in a pile. I watched and then asked: "Uncle Frankie, what in the world are you doing?" He split another log, placed it on the pile and then replied: "I'm just choppin' wood!" Then, carefully climbing the pile, he lay prostrate and said: "I want to be a living sacrifice."

My mind was in gear for we had been discussing two verses of Scripture within the last few days...Romans 12:1, 2 and Galatians 2:20. *"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* (Romans 12:1, 2) *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."* (Galatians 2:20)

This friend, now in his 80's, is still, "Just choppin' wood!" My earliest recollection of him was bringing cakes and pastries for refreshments for those who finished digging out the church basement each night. He would haul us around to Youth for Christ meetings, so exhausted from work that he could hardly keep his eyes open, and then, back to work at 2:00 a.m. "Just choppin' wood!" He was Sunday school Superintendent. He seldom arrived on time, but he always had a carload of young people. He helped in every camp program possible, even giving ten weeks to Word of Life Camp for their teen program when his own business was so hard pressed, it barely survived. "Just choppin' wood!"

The years have passed but he remains unchanged with every opportunity to chop wood. He will help fix breakfast each Thursday morning when the men gather for prayer at the church; he will assist the seniors by driving them to special outings, and he will probably be back at camp this summer. "Just choppin' wood!"

He is not alone in my memories, there are others that I should mention by name, and I will save them for later thoughts. For me, I had a dream that shook me from a deep sleep and gave a fresh appreciation for Romans 12:1, 2 and Galatians 2:20.

Here is hoping that this will offer a fresh challenge to all of us to present ourselves as living sacrifices for Jesus Christ. May our minds and hearts get into the habit of “Just Choppin’ Wood!”.

## **Am I in the Arms of Jesus?**

When a ninety-six-year-old woman is taken with convulsions, you are prepared for her usherance into the life beyond. You brace yourself immediately, hoping against hope that something will cause a reversal of that situation. When my great-aunt went through this experience, her daughter, endeavoring to comfort her, encountered something unique. While holding her mother in her arms as the system came back into balance, her mother asked, “Am I in the arms of Jesus?”

The question was both consoling and complimentary. To think that just once in my lifetime I might be mistaken for the Lord Jesus by some action of dedication to Him would be the most complimentary thing possible. I want more and more each day to exemplify Him in my life, but being as fleshly as I am, I falter all too frequently.

Concerning that consoling aspect of what was said, one is reminded of the sweetness or what she whispered in my ear as we concluded praying and repeating the twenty-third Psalm together: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”* (Psalm 23:4)

Remember the words of the hymn writer who penned “Safe in the arms of Jesus”. She knows the reality of her anticipation... to “be absent from the body and present with the Lord”. John said, quoting our Lord, *“I go to prepare a place for you... I will... receive you unto myself”*.

Death only need be dreaded if one does not know the Lord Jesus in a very personal way. Otherwise death is to be desired “In the arms of Jesus”.

## More American

On September 11th, Patsy and I were outside of the country. Within minutes of the disastrous events of that morning, we were alerted to what had happened. Like many of you, we went to the television to see exactly what was transpiring.

It was not until the following Sunday that we arrived back on American soil. What immediately caught our eye were the many flags flying that were not present when we left. “United We Stand” and “God Bless America” were everywhere. People desired for everyone to know that they were dedicated Americans.

We all noticed that there was a difference in how the Star Spangled Banner was sung at ball games. People sought to convey a message more than trying to impress the listeners with the often, obnoxious renditions of our National Anthem. Nothing sounded more beautiful than the young lady who, singing at a Diamondbacks ball game, caught in the emotion of that moment, gulped and kept on singing. We could not have enough color guards or singing of “God Bless America”.

When flags are on sale, I usually buy two or three to last me until the next sale. I needed one for someone else but found that during the time I was out of the country, every one had been bought.

Quite suddenly I found myself asking, “Have we become more American as a result of these tragedies?” It was obvious that thievery dropped overnight and only began to climb upward later that week, or maybe even into the next week. Some folks, so desperate to display their Americanism, stole four flags from the Boulevard of the Flags in Sun City West.

While these acts of terrorism have caused outward displays of our love for our Country, each person is basically as much American as he was before this all took place. These things have signaled within us the need to display our Patriotism. We do not want people to guess for a moment as to which side we might be on. It is imperative, in our thinking, that everyone knows our identity.

Christianity is on much the same level. It is going to take a mighty shaking of Christendom, perhaps a great persecution, to have us take a stand that identifies us as Servants of the Most High God, Christians. One of the great historians of yesteryear said: “The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.” Has our complacency caused people to wonder if we are not Christian enough? Is it time to wear our colors more boldly? While our relationship to Christ may be secure, our flag needs unfurling. *“Holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”* (Philippians 2:16 NASB)

## **Bridging the Gulf**

On a recent trip to San Diego we decided to include time in Coronado. It is a wonderful place for doing as little as possible. The beach area does not have the pink or coral sand of the Caribbean, but it has its own appeal to anyone desirous of being on a beach.

As we returned to San Diego on the Coronado Bridge, my brain began that normal process of reflection. This bridge is built on a curve out of necessity. The U.S. Naval base located there is in a position that necessitates its ships go under the Coronado Bridge. To get the bridge high enough so that aircraft carriers could get under it, and maintaining a normal grade in that short a distance between San Diego and Coronado, they built the bridge on a curve. I am told that when the carriers pass under that bridge, there is a mere six feet of clearance.

The smallest drawbridge in the world is the Somerset Bridge in Bermuda. I do not believe it is more than two-feet wide. It allows a sailboat to get its spar through that space. I doubt that it ever gets opened anymore. A sailor would tie his boat, climb up the bank to the top of the bridge and open it, blocking traffic. He would go back down, maneuver his boat through the space provided and tie up on the other side. Then he would proceed back up and close the bridge for traffic to resume. You can be assured that there would be some temper tantrums if such took place these days.

As my mind went back and forth, I started to think about a picture that our grandson had made for us. The teacher had challenged the class to create a picture on the computer of a simple sentence. Jared chose the statement: "Faith builds a bridge from this world to the next." He drew two cliffs with a space between and fire at the bottom of that space. The one cliff he labeled, "this world" and the other, "the next". Then he bridged the span with a cross and printed upon it, FAITH. He did an excellent job with a profound truth.

That picture is portrayed for us in the Book of Romans. Man is sinful and can only cross the gulf that separates him from God by crossing on the bridge of Calvary. The songwriter put it so beautifully: "I must needs go home by the way of the cross, There's no other way but this; I shall ne'er get sight of the Gates of Light, If the way of the cross I miss. I must needs go on in the blood-sprinkled way, the path that the Savior trod, if I ever climb to the heights sublime, where the soul is at home with God. Then I bid fare-well to the way of the world, to walk in it never more; For my Lord says "Come," and I seek my home, Where He waits at the open door. The way of the cross leads home, The way of the cross leads home; It is sweet to know, as I onward go, The way of the cross leads

home.” (Jessie Brown Pounds)

Don't be tricked by Satan into believing there are many roads, but they all lead to the same place. Jesus said there is *only one way*... He was and is that way. (John 14:6) He bridged the gulf and all that you need to do, in fact, all that you can do, is place your faith and trust in HIM... *“The just shall live by FAITH.”* (Romans 1:17)

The next time you cross a bridge, remember the one provided by God for you to escape the pits of Hell.

## Mercurial

When I read a recent newspaper article about the theft of mercury and its resultant effects on those who had been exposed to the fumes, my mind went back to my childhood and the lighthouse in which my father was employed. Twelve hundred pounds of mercury lay in a trough on which a ton and a half lens floated, facilitating the possibility for a person to move the lens with one finger.

On occasion, the lighthouse would sway seven inches or more during high winds. When this happened, the mercury would slush over the sides of the trough and land on the keeper on duty at that hour. Usually his watch and the money in his pocket took on a new look.

Following that somewhat “shaky” episode, the process of cleaning up the area took on another challenge. Usually, a dustpan and broom achieved the desired goal of collecting the mercury. After wiping the dirt from the surface, it would be re-introduced to the trough. As a child, I was fascinated with the discovery that, although scattered in thousands of liquid balls, the mercury would always reunite as one.

The entire Book of Ephesians speaks of oneness made possible through the blood of Jesus Christ...Jew and Gentile, stranger and fellow-citizen, sinner and saint, etc. Chapter 4, 4-6 emphasizes *the “seven twisted cords of Christian unity”*...one body and one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. While we may cherish our denominational distinctive for worship purposes, the ultimate is whether we are “in” Christ Jesus who is *“the Way, the Truth and the Life”*. (John 14:6) He alone is the provider of access to God and Heaven.

The beloved disciple, John, said that when we love God, we keep His commandments and the declarations of Scripture. The Bible becomes our guideline of living 24 hours each day. Jesus Christ is our oneness. Though forces split us momentarily, the uniqueness of our oneness in Christ forever seals our relationship with Him. *“Nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:39)

## Desert Flowers

Once again, the sides of the roads, deserts, hillsides, and mountains are beginning to fill with a kaleidoscope of desert wild flowers, reserved by the hand of the Lord for this particular season. How beautiful they are!

Overnight they come out of hiding and bring with them the luster of an artist's canvas or a photographer's classic filled with colors that even Kodak appears to be unable to capture. We can smell their fragrance and, at the same time, feel a guarded jealousy for the bees that hover to gather nectar from such an aroma. We want to absorb it because we know that, ever so shortly, they will disappear. But it is that disappearance that is the guarantee of reappearance each spring.

Each year the desert blossoms appear to be more beautiful than the year before. Obviously, my observations are not thorough or my memory does not serve me well. It is not something that has happened just at this stage of my life, but, rather, the frailties and human limitations are somewhat dominant.

It is somewhat condescending to realize that I am not superman and that this body of clay falls short of perfection. At the same time, there is a holy anticipation that motivates my mind to contemplate when this "imperfection" will put on "perfection". (1 Corinthians 15:12-58) In this entire portion of Scripture is related the wonderful truth of the resurrected body. The grave, the apparent victor here on this earth, entombs us and appears to hold the upper edge; but, (and it is an important "but"), it will be ordered to release us from its maximum effect, a "sting", and the beauty of "life" will encompass us in resurrected glory. It will hold that dead carcass no longer but will be subjected to--just like the desert flowers--a resurrection of life "in its time".

Another magnificent truth is that the earthly experience gives way to the spiritual. The earth demands *death*, whereas, the spiritual demands *life*. While I understand both in a limited sense, the spiritual body will not know decay or cessation, which is beyond my comprehension. So, like the injunction that came from Jesus, I "*consider the flowers of the fields*" (Matthew 6:28), and become ever more excited about what I will be leaving behind and embracing for eternity.

Life, as we know it today, is but an interlude in eternity. Death, as we know it today, is but an interlude in time. Resurrection is the guarantee that both life and death are limited and must eventually be subject to eternity.

## Thanksgiving... Another Slant!

In the process of considering Thanksgiving, I was also teaching the Book of James. One of the commentaries I was reading was that of Dr. Louis Evans. I found it stimulating because it is so easy to be thankful for Cadillac's, good health, family, friends, even a glass of water. However, learning to be thankful for "trials" is not always as easy. I am taking the liberty of quoting extensively from Dr. Evans' book: *MAKE YOUR FAITH WORK*.

The Letter of James starts out with this counsel: *"Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."* (James 1:2-3)

Count it all joy! Be happy about everything that happens to you! It is startling, and it is also an outstanding characteristic of the Christian faith, which dares to make such breathtaking, outlandish suggestions about our attitudes toward life's trials and suffering.

Even without God and Christ we may be joyful about some things -- about good health, wealth, friendship, success, praise and security, for instance. That's easy. It takes no strong personality or great faith to feel joyful about the brighter aspects of life. But to be joyous, or thankful, about everything, to take that admonition and make it cover every tear, every fear, all fullness and emptiness, all disease and good health, all heartache and failure, all treasons, forsakings, disappointments and sorrows -- that faith is faith in long trousers. All else is faith in knickerbockers.

Note that it is not just endurance of trial and tribulation of which James speaks. Many do that bravely, almost instinctively. James says that the endurance of trials and tribulation should be accompanied by happiness and rejoicing. *"In everything, give thanks."* *"Rejoice, and again say, rejoice."* *"Blessed (to be congratulated) are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad,"* said Jesus. It was Paul who said, *"I glory in mine infirmities,"* and Peter who held that *"... suffering is more precious than fine gold,"* and James is echoing all of them when he bids us to *"Count it all joy... when you meet various trials..."*

So -- at least to the founding fathers of Christianity -- their religion equipped them with a joyous acceptance of affliction. It should do that for us, and it can, if we follow their thought."

James is addressing the "dispersed" Christians, those who are "scattered", and those who have known the heartache of homesickness, the pains of starvation, the indignity of being conquered. We cannot

help but hear the words of Psalm 137:2: *“they hanged their harps on the willows”*. They had lost the ability to sing, to *“make a joyful noise unto the Lord”*. (Psalm 100) To them he says: *“Count it all joy.”*

It is THANKSGIVING... it is time to rise above the mediocrity of thanking God for the blessings, although we should do this constantly, let us thank Him for the buffetings. Pain and tribulation are part of the refining process for the present, as well as the future. God desires to conform us to the image of His Son, Jesus. (Romans 8:29)

In the past week I visited a number of homes, two of those stand out in my mind. One lady, confined to a bed, verbalized her bitterness constantly. The other, in excruciating pain every minute of every day with a degenerative bone disease, asked simply: *“Why should I complain?”* She lifted my spirits, even though they were not down.

We thank God for the blessing and buffetings of this past year, and years. Some have come as the “lot” would fall -- as a result of our surroundings, as James indicates, or some of our own initiative; however, all have come under the hand of His divine guidance and are preparatory to the “perfection” He desires for us.

## Easter Echoes

The choir was singing, "I walked today where Jesus walked, and felt His presence there". It was rehearsal time and my wife was somewhat surprised to see one of the tenors with tears streaming down his face and unable to sing. As director and pianist and conducting one of her recent arrangements, she felt compelled to discover the problem. Using as much finesse as possible, she asked him if there a problem? He replied, "No, I just returned from the Holy Land".

The depth of that moment would not be realized until a year later. We were among a church group going to the Holy Land ourselves. Much ground had been covered by the time we visited the garden tomb. All of the Bible stories took on new meaning as we traveled from place to place recalling the Scripture relating to it. Our only frustration was that we did not have adequate time to digest all that we found so fascinating. But now, twenty-four of us were seated in a circle. We had just emerged from the tomb that appeared to have met all the Biblical criteria concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Arrangements had been made for us to celebrate the Lord's Supper. It was virtually impossible to do anything but sob in humble gratitude.

Someone said: "The Resurrection---science can't explain it, reason can't disprove it, history can't reproduce it, time can't forget it, but I believe it." To that, I add a hearty Amen!

"Christ is alive! He is the great "I AM" and not the great "I was"".

(Dr. Robert W. Dale) Andrew Blackwood said: "There is not a single pessimistic note anywhere in the New Testament after the resurrection."

We remember Christ's death and celebrate His resurrection each Lord's Day. He's not just a dead Jew, but a resurrected Christ who was the only One to leave a tomb and ascend to the right hand of God. He is desirous and most worthy of our worship.

We found deep meaning in walking in the land where Jesus walked. We find a deeper and more meaningful experience in endeavoring to walk each day with the risen, resurrected, returning, reigning and ruling King of Kings and Lord of Lords. No one *has ever* nor *will ever* change the course of history like Jesus.

*"He is not here, but He has risen!"* (Luke 24:6)

# Survivor!

At a celebration for my Mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, the family asked me to speak on their behalf. I remind you that they quickly injected, "no sermons". That is like telling a dog not to bark or a man not to breathe. I agreed that I would endeavor to abide by their wishes.

The more I thought about what to say, the more my mind went to one word, SURVIVOR! That was a long time before the TV show, "Survivor", was aired. It was certainly in effect in Mom's life as far back as I can remember. Thus, I launched into some of the episodes in her life that displayed her ability to survive.

Like so many other families during the 1930's, we did not have financial status. Mom sewed, knitted, and worked in and out of the home with the stamina that only true motherhood produces. As I look back, I often wonder how she did it.

With the determination of a pit bull, Mom survived many hard times and she and Dad celebrated 50 years of marriage. Sheer determination was to be a landmark never to be forgotten. My, how I admire that lady!

As I thought of the many methods employed by Mom, her love of walking played a major role in her survival. She loved to walk and, obviously, she left a little of her frustrations with every footstep. Amazingly, when others would parade their suggested solutions, Mom just kept walking.

She owned several pairs of Espadrilles shoes that disclosed the amount of wear and tear to which they were driven. Since two of her toes lapped over each other, she acknowledged their need with a couple of holes. Though we often admonish her, and offered to buy new ones, she simply said: "They're paid for!"

On one of my trips back to Bermuda, she suggested we visit my Dad's grave. She agreed to ride the bus up there but thought that maybe we could walk back.

As we walked and talked, I kept injecting, "Should we wait for the bus? How about me getting us a taxi?" Stories flowed about the area and her growing up days at Sea Ridge, the old school house, episodes at each of the beaches along the way, the old farm that she lived at, the early years of marriage at Glenrose, and a host of other things. Some things obviously were left out, but many were included that I had not known. When we finally arrived home, my feet and legs were aching, but she said: "Wasn't that fun! We used to do that every Sunday afternoon, both ways, to go to the evening service at church."

The night of my Father's funeral, she sat on the floor beside me about 2.00 a.m. and said simply: "Ted! I want that assurance of Heaven that

you spoke of today at your Dad's funeral." We prayed together and she solidified her faith in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. I admit, I was hoping she would not say: "Let's go for a walk!" In asking Jesus to be her Savior and Lord, she readied herself for that walk in Feb. 2000 into Heaven and on streets of gold. I doubt that she will wear her Espedrills, but if that is what will make her happier, an angel probably rescued them from the garbage in Bermuda.

Walking is so wonderful. Adam walked with God! Enoch walked with God. Noah walked with God. Spiritually, we can also walk with God. We usually walk with someone we know. That is **essential!** *Know Him*, the Lord of all glory; *know Jesus Christ*, the Way, the Truth, and the Life; *know the Holy Spirit*, the One who is the great Comforter. Walk with this great Three in One, the Triune God. He is the key to survival.

I honor Mom at this time because she deserves it. I honor her because God says to honor her. I honor her because in doing so, I find great blessing for my own soul.

*"For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' "(Matthew 15:4)*

## Precious

A middle-aged man approached my wife as she stood next to her Dad's casket. He introduced himself and said, "You would not know me, but, for a period of time about 50 years ago, your Dad took me to our mutual workplace each day. As a young man starting out, I was often late getting to him. Your father never lost his patience with me, although I deserved it often. I must tell you that he left an indelible impression on me. That is why, when I saw in the Newspaper that he had passed on, I had to come and share that with you."

Pop, at 93 years of age, deserved praise lavished on him, yet, he would be the first to pass it off. He had only an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education but had more wisdom than most PhD's. As a welder, he was the best in his trade.

I remember shaking his strong hand for the first time back in 1955; I can still feel that grip. I soon discovered that his heart was equal to his hand. I came to love a man who knew the Scriptures and loved to share them with everyone. His delight was to discuss the Rapture of the Church, anticipating that, at any moment, he would be caught up to meet the Lord. He daily whistled: "Jesus may come Today" as he moved around the house or performed a chore. If there was any disappointment in life, it was that he was not living here for the Rapture.

As I prepared what I would say at his "graduation" service a few weeks ago, I remembered afresh that I had probably learned more from him than all of my theological professors combined. He had epitomized what a father should be in the context of a Christian.

My mind went to Psalm 116:15-19: "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones. O Lord, surely I am thy servant, I am thy servant, the son of thy handmaid, and Thou hast loosed my bonds. To Thee I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the Lord. I shall pay my vows to the Lord; oh may it be in the presence of all His people. In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!*" That word *precious* is used as *honorable* in Isaiah 43:4; as *highly esteemed* in 1 Samuel 18:30; as *dear* in Jeremiah 31:20.

This HONORABLE, HIGHLY ESTEEMED, and DEAR saint of God is experiencing rest--at "Home" with his Savior. As a young man, he had experienced the loosing of the bonds of sin that had enslaved Him. Now, he is loosed from this life to enjoy Eternity. He leaves a legacy of challenge to follow.

# Mirrors

Sometime ago, I decided to make a hand mirror for each of the females in our family. I anticipated having them done by Christmas so that Patsy and each girl would receive one as a gift that was handmade by dear old Dad or Grandpa. The mission was accomplished!

As I started the project, I ran into the first obstacle...finding enough cedar in the dimensions preferred. Several phone calls and about fifty miles of driving resolved that problem. I purchased one mirror, fully expecting to pick up the remaining ones as I neared completion of the job. Because some were to be mailed to Pennsylvania, they had to be done prior to the others; I would deliver to ones close by personally. Wouldn't you know it? The store ran out of mirrors. More phone calls and more driving helped us secure them.

Finally, all of them were presented to the ladies of the family. As each one opened hers, I said "Keep looking into this until you see Jesus!" Naturally, I was reminding each person that the goal of every believer's life is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Looking into that mirror will do little to make one Christ-like, but it is a constant reminder to look into the mirror of God's Word and, as a result, to be challenged to be "conformed" to the image of God's Son, Jesus. (Romans 8:29)

As I made the mirrors, I kept asking myself what I might spot in my life that needed rectifying in order that I might appear more intimately related to Jesus Christ than I have ever previously appeared. I then realized that thought was secondary. What I really needed was to keep focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. *"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him..."* (Hebrews 12:2, 3)

I recalled something that my dear wife had related to me a long time ago: "Look at older married couples and, amazingly, they seem to resemble each other more as the years go by." God's Word is a mirror that places demands upon those of us who explore its contents: *"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, he will be blessed in what he does."* (James 1: 23-25) We will look like Him if we look at Him with sufficient commitment. Read God's Word daily.

## Dreaming of Treasures

I had just turned thirteen when I met Teddy. He frequently came to the carpenter shop where I worked after school each day and on holidays. He would sit down on the woodpile, sometimes talking, but other times saying little or nothing. I thought to myself, "Does this guy ever intend to do anything with his life?"

One day, I learned that, upon the closure of the British dockyard in Bermuda, Teddy had purchased an old boat with a lot of diving equipment. However, Teddy never said much about the purchase, only that he was making a few pounds (sterling currency) here and there doing some diving.

On a twenty-eight day cruise to the West Indies with our family, I met Teddy's mother and father. Though I probably bugged them, I wanted to learn much more about Teddy and his diving. More confusing was the fact that my father, a lighthouse keeper, often said: "I cannot figure out what Teddy is doing. I watch his boat maneuvering through the reefs and sometimes stay in the same spot for hours at a time."

Teddy, a dreamer in the minds of some, used the old equipment to move sand from around ships that had been wrecked on the reefs of Bermuda long ago. When he finally went public with his discoveries, it came as a total surprise to the majority of Bermudans. Today, many of those treasures can be viewed in the Bermuda Museums, referred to by most folks as the Teddy Tucker Treasures.

I was glad to know that this quiet guy who said so little, but visualized a potential, set out with old equipment and did a job that others would have thought impossible. I thought he was suffering from "lazy-itis", but in reality, he was methodically plodding a course. The days he sat on that woodpile were probably the times that the weather was not conducive to diving.

If we once catch a vision of the treasures in the Gospel and its proclamation, nothing will stop us from plodding forward faithfully in its distribution and its circulation. We will fall in love with its Author and Finisher, Jesus Christ. Though some may have misjudgments about us, it will not change our determination to fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith. (2 Timothy 4:1 -8) The fact that little time is left and that a crown of righteousness awaits us will be all the motivation that we need.

Concerning these treasures, the apostle also said: *"Let us lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Heb. 12:1 -2)

Lord, give us a vision of the resurrected and returning Christ, resplendent in all His glory.

## A Darkened Mirror

I would dare to say that many of you have experienced that while traveling across country in our United States and visiting rest stops, you've discovered that vandalism has taken its toll on some of the facilities. In one such area we encountered an armed guard. It is a sad commentary upon the depths to which the depraved mind of an individual can sink.

Frequently, I have noted that they have replaced mirrors with high polished metal. Naturally, the vandals have marked it, but replacement has not been necessary. I also discovered that, when looking into that piece of mirrored metal, it is not the best reflected image that appears. I keep hoping that I do not look quite like that which I am beholding. While this is a far cry from a modern day mirror, it suffices.

The Apostle Paul had a general idea of that to which I refer because that was the type of mirrors that they utilized until we obtained our modern mirrors. It was out of that idea that he wrote 1 Corinthians 13:12... *“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”*

The excellence of love has been presented throughout this 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of 1st Corinthians. Love should always respond to love. Jesus Christ is love and, therefore, I am to love. Other things, like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will be done away, whereas love will endure. Remember, those things will pass away while love shall remain.

While there will be a passing of the partials, the person of Christ, the essence of love, will remain. That which is perfect will come into prominence and other things will cease. There may be differing opinions of interpretation on “that which is perfect”, such as whether it is the written Word of God, or eternity future; what we *do know* is that everything down here is imperfect and eternity future in Heaven is perfect. The distinct marks of imperfection blight every aspect of our living; only eternity future holds for us perfection.

As I view the mirror of God, I see “*dimly*” a picture of eternity future. I see myself and I, likewise, see what will happen as we enter the presence of our wonderful Lord-- we shall become like HIM. As beautiful as this old globe shall be, nothing can compare with that moment when we “*shall be known fully just as we are fully known.*” (1 Corinthians 13:12 NASB)

There is nothing transitory about love... it is the anchor of the believers hope. All of our hopes and aspirations are focused in Jesus.

## A Web Site

Through the kindness and generosity of dear friends, we were given a trip to the United Kingdom in September. Things were so different from what we envisioned that the time spent there became a classroom. On top of that, although we all spoke English, at times we felt as though we spoke another language.

Adequate words are tough to find to describe the kindnesses and alertness to our every need and desire that our host and hostess incorporated into our time with them. They live in an area called Woodman Cote, Cheltenham. It is situated in the Cotswolds and idyllic would suffice for a description. The weather was perfect; only one day of rain during that period pleased us and obviously surprised the locals.

One morning, while drinking tea on the patio, I noticed that a spider had been spinning a web on one of the hanging plants. The sun caused it to glisten; an artist would find it hard to reproduce that masterpiece. I watched it for some time, captivated with its beauty.

All too quickly, I had to leave that scene, but not before I realized afresh that this production was a deadly entrapment for insects. The spider did not die of malnutrition but the web showed deterioration in places where bugs had been snared. His efforts were not in vain. The web had been meticulously spun and was the result of dutiful labor, all with the anticipated prospect of the spider's survival.

One cannot help but hear the words of Hebrews 11:25... *“choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin;”* Sin is pleasurable, but it is temporary. The devil is intent on encapsulating his victims with snares as attractive as a spider's web. He does not let up in his continuing effort to dissuade people from following the Lord, be they Christians or non-Christians.

One can expect the pressures to be exerted from the most susceptible area of our lives...intellect, will or emotions. Further, having the con-artist of all cons attacking us, he uses the world, the flesh, or personal effort directly to assure that we follow him. Sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit, obedience to the Word of God, and flight from temptation is mandatory to victory over the beguiling one.

Keep alert lest the devil's "web" should ensnare you.

## L.E.D.

As I walk through my house during the night, they are everywhere! The TV, the clocks, the computers, the toothbrushes, the printers, the toaster, the cell phones, the coffeepot, the DVD, the light switches, and the smoke alarms all reveal their locations. I have it “made” just following the L.E.D’S from room to room. It is like the Boy Scout getting his bearings from the city lights. On occasion, I feel like telling the person seated next to me in church, “You have an incoming call”. I spotted his L.E.D.

Although I know little about L.E.D’S, I do know that they are Light Emitting Diodes. I know that they are convenient, but sometimes it seems they are too abundant in rooms where we would desire darkness. Sometimes we wish they did not exist; at other times, we are grateful for being able to find something we could not otherwise spot.

I jotted down a note some months ago, confident that sooner or later I would be able to make a little sense out of such “night tours” of our home. The majority of our L.E.D’S. are there for the purpose of identifying something else. They tell us that the above items listed exist and that they are located in that particular spot. They show us that a source of power exists for something else to operate. When they are on, we know that another item is operational.

I often refer to the passage of Scripture in Matthew 5:14: “*You are the light of the world*”. Jesus said also: “*I am the light of the world*”. (John 8:12) How does one reconcile those statements? Just look at the context, for therein we find the answer. While Christ, Himself, is the “light” and the source of all light, because of our relationship to Him and being in Him, we become “light reflectors”. We should manifest the source of our light and, in the process, make people aware of His availability to change and transform their lives as He has and continues to do in ours.

The person who follows Jesus “shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12) The person who follows Jesus will have an effect on others. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2 that we who know the Lord are a restraining force on the decadent society in which we live.

“*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16) Be an L.E.D. for Jesus!

## Casting Your Nets

It is quite visible in my mind; my uncle making fishing nets. In those days his family of six children demanded that he make a few extra “shillings”. His job at the lighthouse could be quite boring at times and so, frequently, you would find him repairing shoes or making fishing nets – some of them a hundred feet long.

There was something fascinating about watching this man quite deftly turning these balls of line into nets. Today it would be impossible to make a buck doing a chore like this for extra money. Buying the line or string would cost more than it would cost to buy a commercially produced net.

These thoughts surround my thinking as I contemplate the New Year. God has laid on my heart the passage in John 21 where Jesus manifested Himself to His disciples for the third time following His resurrection. People often ask: “When are you going to retire?” Looking at the situation in John 21, I guess that, in a way, that was what Peter and his cohorts had intended to do. In their thinking, this thing of discipleship under a crucified Teacher meant “hanging it up” and heading back to what they were most accustomed... fishing.

Knowing their frustrations, Jesus made an appearance to them. They were doing no better at fishing on the Sea of Tiberias than fishing spiritually for men and women to be disciples of this crucified Teacher. Thank the Lord that when we reach the doldrums of pity, the resurrected Christ will manifest Himself in freshness and awaken or reassure us of the direction we need to follow. *“Children, you do not have any fish, do you?”* (John 21:5) We all need a little chiding once in a while. When we are not where He wants us, the Sea becomes a pond... a dirty one at that. However, the proximity of a good “catch” is just on the other side of the boat. Relocation is not necessary or advisable, just an about face. That was certainly the instruction to five of the seven churches of Revelation.

Obedience on the part of these men brought prolific response... the net was full. While I might wonder if my uncle’s net would “hold together” in such a situation, and try to imagine the activity of the fishermen in such a circumstance, what becomes even more of a blessing is what is taking place in the midst of all of the activity. Jesus was preparing something for them to eat. He did not need all those fish; He had some specifically placed on the fire to care for their needs. When are we going to learn that being in the place of greatest blessing does not necessarily hinge on numbers?

People are easily impressed with numbers and the miracle of unbroken nets while failing to catch a fresh picture of Christ intimately concerned about them and their future... *“Come and have breakfast.”* (John 21:12)

The world of that day was “turned upside down” a short time later by a few men who had “breakfast” with the Savior! Dropping the net on “the other side” might seem like the most important thing, or being able to report a great “catch” would seem to verify the authenticity of their endeavor, but don’t ever forget the fish on the charcoal.

For a fresh approach to the New Year, meet with the Savior in the morning and enjoy His presence. Read and digest a portion of His Word; talk to Him; mediate on Him; He has something on the charcoal fire just for you.

## **A Life for a Life**

The spawning of salmon is a study in itself. To realize that a fish hatches in the headwaters of the Alaska rivers, travels 200 miles downstream into the Pacific Ocean, roams for three years around the ocean, and then returns to the identical spot from which it began, its journey is beyond my comprehension. Yet it happens year after year.

Having observed this fish cycle for nine years, one is drawn to the realization of the God-given instinct that captivates its life from the moment of hatching. For, not only does it return, but it does this in order to lay eggs that would hatch and keep the cycle moving at the expense of its own life.

Watching salmon begin their way up the rivers, we see fine quality fish. The further inland they go, a deteriorating process begins to go into effect. Finally, we see them in little shallow pools of water, literally disintegrating before our eyes. Their eggs having been laid, they linger in these spots to die and rot. The beautiful colors fade and finally there is nothing but white meat washing away in the streams and creeks.

A principle exemplified in this process is worth considering... a life for a life! These fish head upstream from an inner drive that compels them to be willing to give up their own lives for the production of life.

Jesus declared: *“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father.”* (John 10:11-18)

Jesus willingly gave His LIFE that we might have LIFE!

# Star of Bethlehem

In the process of cutting out from cedar 'Star of Bethlehem' decorations, I reflected on what I knew on the subject. I was sorry that I did not know more; however, I was reminded that much of what has been accepted as fact is indeed related back to the mystic mind of man.

"There are a number of direct references to the celestial bodies in the Old Testament. Job heard God speak of the morning stars singing together (Job 38:7). Moses knew that God was the Creator who spoke the heavenly lights into existence (Genesis 1:16). The Psalmist considered the stars to be fashioned by the "fingers" of God (Psalm 8:3), and he also understood that it was Jehovah who gave the stars their names (Psalm 147:4). Of course the very fact that many of the constellations bear the very same names, in different languages throughout the world, verifies the fact that there was originally one source for them all. Several constellations are mentioned in Scripture. There is Arcturus (the Great Bear), and Orion and the Pleiades (sometimes called "the seven stars"). (Cf. Job 9:9; 38:31f; and Amos 5:8) There are, of course, many other allusions to the testimony of stars to the glory of the Creator." (D. E. Spencer)

While there is speculation and information in the stars for all of us, we are warned not to be involved in their worship. Israel struggled like a yo-yo concerning this practice. Admittedly there has been a constant struggle for all of us not to worship a more tangible God; faith as the element of our relationship seems "too easy". It is God's way... the only way. (Deuteronomy 4:19; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; 23:5; Jeremiah 19:13; Amos 5:26; Zepheniah 1:5; Acts 7:42, 43 and Romans 1:18-32)

Of all the conjecture, Johannes Kepler's logical explanation would appear the most plausible; however, that too has problems that cannot be explained with the Scriptural account. He surmised, from the writings of Abarbanel, that a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation Pisces would indicate the coming of the Messiah. Initially that created a problem that was resolved only when it was discovered that our modern calendar was off by seven years. Thus Kepler's projections were confirmed and the idea of Jupiter being the planetary sign of royalty, and Saturn the "protecting power of Israel" in Pisces, and Palestine, in the very year and days as calculated, gave credence to that combination creating the appearance observed by the wise men and shepherds.

The story in Matthew 2 of the Birth of Christ said that the "*star went before them to Bethlehem*". It also says that it "*stood over where the young child was*". Both of these were impossible feats in a conjunction of planets.

An artist's concept is intriguing. We visualize a star, the cross is central, and eight points could possibly allude to the resurrection on the eighth day, or in reality to the first day of the week. Further we see the long tail of a comet-like figure and we realize that some concepts and conjectures influenced the drawing.

I had drawn my conclusions about what the shepherds and wise men had seen years ago but I thought I would test my opinions. I asked our 6-year-old granddaughter, "What do you think the star was that hovered over Jesus at His birth?" Without hesitation she replied: "It was the angels."

The "sign of the Son of Man" and His coming to earth was probably a congregation of angels that gathered for the occasion. That was the sign that accompanied the Israelites as they journeyed from Egypt. It was the sign that hovered over the Mercy Seat. It was the sign at the burning bush. It bespoke the presence of God. It was the sign that accompanied His ascension and the sign that shall accompany His return. (Matthew 24:30)

Hebrews 1 has much to say about the angel's excitement concerning the incarnation. Do read it! The "clouds" of I Thessalonians 4:13-18 probably includes the unrestrained host of heaven, the Shekinah Glory. These angels were ever in the company of God and bespeak His presence. Cami caught it; I hope that you also catch its magnificence.

## Thou, Bethlehem

Our bus pulled into the town of Bethlehem; my mind played games between the carol: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” and Micah 5:2: *“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of Eternity.”* Endeavoring to reconcile all of those thoughts regarding what we were seeing and the problems of which we were aware was not easy.

As we moved from one place to another, and the supposed birthplace of the Savior, I found myself asking: “And why has not the 5th verse of Micah 5 shown itself in this community? Where is the evidence of the One who would be “our peace”? What we observed were people ready to fight for a prejudice instead of fighting for a principle.

Naturally, there were hucksters everywhere. Like any place we go in the world today, there are those willing to “make a deal”. I endeavored to match their tactics, but I have to admit that, as we boarded the bus later, I realized I had been no match for these professionals. Though warned in advance, we found ourselves asking: “Is this the Bethlehem of peace?”

“The House of Bread” was the birthplace of the One who called Himself the “Bread of Life”... *“For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world... Jesus said: ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.’”* (John 6:33, 35 NASB) There was much more in Bethlehem than what I observed that day.

I doubt that the activities of that day were much different from the day that the Savior of mankind was born some two thousand years ago. It was business as usual then, and today was no different. Yet, as we stood in Bethlehem, an aura that swept across us. We felt the presence of that young couple, Mary and Joseph; we envisioned the shepherds and their arrival at the manger; we gazed into the sky, fully expecting to see the star; our ears are attuned, anticipating the voice of angels. We wanted to stand there, breathlessly, taking it all in. We felt the tug of an unseen force that made us desire to bow our knees and heart... this was indeed the place where Jesus took on Himself a body of flesh. He was called Emmanuel — God with us!

Visit Bethlehem this Christmas! If you cannot go there literally, do so spiritually. Kneel before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Shout with the heralding angels: “Glory to God on High.” Let Bethlehem take on new significance as we together worship the New Born King.

A Blessed Christmas and bountiful blessings be to you and yours throughout the coming New Year.

## Hardly Forgotten

Each Christmas holds something significant that causes us to remember it and endear it to our hearts. While it is possible to bore you with some of those recollections, I am selecting just one for today.

From 1961 to 1970, Patsy and I lived in the interior of Alaska. Christmas was usually in the minus 40-degree range. Life went on as usual, with the exception that we did not make any long trips into the city unless absolutely necessary. Much of our shopping was from the “wish book”--- Sears Catalog. I might say that the service they provided out of Seattle was excellent and we found it unusual when merchandise was delayed.

This year we ordered the children’s Christmas presents in ample time to arrive before Christmas. However, as Christmas closed in on us, and the merchandise had not arrived, we began the countdown... 5,4,3,2,1. Christmas Eve we checked the Post Office for the final round, hoping that an extra truckload of mail might have arrived. It had not.

Two frustrated parents set about putting together a meager Christmas gift selection. We explained the predicament to the children and shared that it would be an opportune time to really focus on the true meaning of Christmas. They agreed that it would be a good learning experience. However, we all know the picture a child develops about Christmas.

We woke on Christmas morning, shared our Sticky Buns and Coffee Ring breakfast and very limited gifts. It was accepted by all as a good time to focus on Christ, the One who in love gave of Himself, became a man, died as our redeemer, and rose victoriously over death.

It was mid-morning when the phone rang. The post-mistress was calling to tell us a package had arrived and she was opening the post office for people like ourselves to come and get their packages. Words cannot express the appreciation we have felt over the years for that gesture. She made Christmas what children expect it to be, for ours, and numerous others. Those presents were never wrapped, except with our love and that of the post-mistress.

I often think of the unexpected, the unexplained, and the undeserved gifts that God gives us. He *“sends rain on the just and the unjust”*. (Matthew 5:45) He not only meets our *“need”* (Philippians 4:19), but there is always *“abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think.”* (Ephesians 3:20)

Revel in the Redeemer this Christmas. He has shown His unrestrained, undeserved, unappreciated love to us. “Joy to the World, The Lord is come!”

# Easter Lilies

As I recall, I was quite young, maybe five or six, when I first saw my father remove the Easter Lilies from the ground, place them in white sand and put them away for several months each year. It was a painstaking task that he undertook, but his goal was simply to raise more Easter Lilies the next year.

Most of us are familiar with the process. Each bulb can be broken and the leaf-like bottom can be made to multiply itself and establish new lilies the next year. During the autumn these bulbs and the portions removed from another bulb are planted. Full bulbs produce a larger lily than those parts that are planted but the following year a much larger lily is grown.

Year by year the field of lilies increased in front of our home. The fragrance would be overwhelming in the evenings because of the heavy dew that descended on them. I will never forget the year that we had a patch almost 100 feet square of Easter lilies. Dad just gave them away to everyone who would enjoy them.

There used to be an Easter Parade in Bermuda. The floats were bedecked with Easter Lilies. Literally millions of lilies could be seen on those floats. The Perfume Factory produced Easter lily perfume. We shipped thousands of flowers overseas each year. In my mind I guess I thought that no one in the world had Easter lilies but Bermuda.

Today, Easter Lilies are found in abundance because of the painstaking efforts of a few. Most interestingly is how this flower must die in order to reproduce. However, the life in each petal can reproduce another lily. The dormancy ends and new life sprouts forth each Easter time.

Christ went to the cross, the grave, and after three days He was resurrected. The life He imparted produces life after its kind. Like the petal on the lily bulb, planted it will produce after its kind. Though dormant on occasion, the bulb that holds life will ultimately reproduce.

When Christ, the Life, was placed in a grave, it could not hold him. Life reproduced and He was resurrected. His Life was given to the Church, who in a consistent manner reproduced. It cannot be stopped. He is ALIVE. We are ALIVE.

Take a fresh look at the lilies and rejoice in the reminder of His resurrection.

## The Water of Life

I barely arrived in the U.S. when, the following morning, we were heading for Niagara Falls. That afternoon I did not get to see the falls, but all afternoon and evening I listened to the mighty roar. The following day I watched with disbelief as the water poured over them. We rode the Maid of the Mist below them until the pressure prohibited us from getting any closer. I have returned numerous times, still feeling the inability to converse because of the magnanimousness of the moment.

We have stood on the shoreline of our great country, East and West Coasts. We have watched the waves from Alaska to Mexico and Rhode Island to Florida. We traveled the Panama Canal. We rode the rapids of Ausable Chasm in New York and looked at the glaciers of the Inland Passage. We have sailed on lakes and oceans in storms; without fail, the tempestuousness surrounding us has always left us with a fresh appreciation for water.

Interestingly, some of our most exciting moments on the water came when we sat and looked into a placid pool. Little equals that moment of stillness, ripple-less water. Remember the “still waters” of Psalm 23?

We are reminded of how often we pass great holding tanks that provide for the necessities of whole communities and never even notice them. Let the waitress forget to give you a glass of water with your meal and it is more noticeable than Niagara.

Living in the desert, I am keenly aware of the importance of water. Jesus was living in similar surroundings when He said to the woman of Samaria (John 4) *“Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”* (V13,14)

You cannot help but notice that it says *“the woman left her waterpot”* (V28)...she had drunk from the “water of life” (Jesus) and became so satisfied with the spiritual enrichment obtained that the waterpot became secondary. So it is with anyone who says with this woman: *“Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.”*

She got more than she asked for; so, too, will your thirst be quenched spiritually when you ask Jesus to give you a drink of the Water of Life. After all, He is the well of Life and to drink of Him will bring into fulfillment His promise: *“You shall never thirst again.”*

## Reflected Light

The hunt had been successful; five out of nine people had secured moose as their meat supply for the coming year. The following day, two more would be added to finalize the hunt.

Upon squeezing the trigger in mid morning, I began the task of gutting, quartering and packing. A twelve to fourteen hundred pound moose can challenge anyone's stamina, but the realization of sufficient meat kept the adrenalin running.

Starting back to the highway and our camper, I discovered that one of our crew, who had an injured leg, had not been able to get the moose in position for the gutting process. I volunteered. He was extremely helpful, endeavoring to keep the blades on our hunting knives sharp enough to deal with that tough moose hide. The afternoon light was starting to darken by the time we had finished that chore.

Then a teenager in our group had managed to bring down a moose but he had no idea of what to do next. As we worked on the third moose, total darkness set in. Fortunately, we had a flashlight to assist with the task before us but, unfortunately, by the time we finished, the flashlight quit too.

We were located in the middle of the McClaren River drainage; getting back to our camper was going to be a chore. The sound of the generator at the Lodge, the moon on the mountains, and a passing vehicle on the Denali Highway gave us some sense of direction.

The trek would be wearisome. The noises in the brush around us caused speculation...bear, moose? The smell of blood on our attire loaned itself to unwelcomed visitors.

Suddenly, we spotted a light in the general direction in which we were headed. Where might it have come from? We knew that many of our crew had left the area. We decided that someone must have left on a light; thus, we kept plodding. Sometimes in water and sometimes scraping by the brush can be discouraging, yet we were determined. Whenever we dropped into a gully and rose, there was the light. It took a long time to travel the nearly one mile distance, but, as we came out of the brush, we did so exactly in front of our camper.

Other hunters, realizing that we had not returned to camp, had taken took an old bean can and split it down the side and bent it open. In it they had put a candle and then placed it on top of our camper. One candle, reflecting its light in an old bean can, brought us safely home.

I marvel at the references that Jesus made to Light in the Gospels. (Matthew 5, Luke 8) A candle was not to be put in an obscure location; it was to be placed on a candlestick for all to see. I am certain that we

would not have seen that candle by itself. What we saw was reflected light. In John 8, Jesus said He was the *“light of the world”*. He also said that we as Christians are to *“let our light shine”*...reflected light! In obedience to His command, someone will be led home.... Saved, secured, and sanctified.

Look to the Light of the World. The darkness all around will be obliterated with His presence.

## Scars

Grandchildren have a way of asking questions that warrant an explanation that should be weighed carefully before answering. It is not that you consider hiding the truth, but rather just how detailed your answer should be. Our grand-daughter, sitting on my knee one day and looking at my sun-tanned arms, asked: “Poppy, what are those marks?” “Burn scars”, I replied. The next question was inevitable. “How did you get them?” And so the saga continued.

I tried to skip school one day when I was a child. Feigning sickness acquired the natural sympathetic response from my Mother; she decided that I needed a nice cup of hot chocolate. In manipulating the cup from the stand to the bed, I spilled it over my arm. The ensuing result justified my skipping school for that day all right, but it was accompanied with much pain and discomfort as the skin literally peeled off of my arm. To make matters worse, my classmates were quite angry with me when I returned to school. We were entered in an inter-school competition and I was on a relay team. We lost the race by split seconds when a replacement runner took my place. In addition, we lost several soccer matches because our “arm-in-sling goalkeeper” could not perform.

That little bit of dishonesty left scars that have remained as constant reminders over the years of the price of sin. Not only does *“your sin find you out”* (Numbers 32:23) but the after-effects and scars linger for observation by you and sometimes by others. Many are the areas listed in God’s Word that define sin. God does not categorize sin. All will eventually give account to God. In the interim, unlimited suffering can result. Gratefully, God forgives when confession is made, but the scars and skeletons accompany us to the grave.

## Drifting

They keep telling me that some things are indicative of “old age”; the things that send you back to your childhood are indicative that you are part of the “over the hill” gang. Maybe they are right!

I have a sailboat in our back yard that I plan to take sailing some time soon. It has been there for two years and I have not made time for it just yet. The launching day is not too far off. Things that I felt deserved more of my time keep crowding up my agenda and so sailing drops in priority. However, that boat has taken me sailing numerous times without going into the water.

I was thinking about my sailing experiences as a child and then about teaching sailing to a group of young men in the Police Boys Club out in Hewlett, Long Island. The fun part is when the wind is kicking up a nice stiff breeze; the tough part is when you sit drifting and wondering to yourself if you will ever get back to port. Some years ago, it was my pleasure to sail on a 52-foot yacht from the Island of Bermuda to Newport, Rhode Island. The monotony of two plus days of drifting in the middle of nowhere was frustrating, yet it afforded opportunity for all of us to share the Scriptures and sing the Praises of God. Please do not ask about the quality of that singing. Eventually, we took off with a very strong wind.

Recently, while on a cruise that took us into Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, the all familiar episode of those waiting until the last minute to get back on board the liner, gave opportunity to notice something that at first appeared unusual yet it was not completely out of character. We were watching the “Los Arcos” or the arches standing majestically in the Pacific Ocean meet the Sea of Cortez when we noticed that they were getting farther from us. It dawned on us that the ship had already pulled anchor and was drifting toward the beaches and tenders were still making their way toward us with people still embarking. I thought: “This is controlled drifting. We are readying to head into the ocean, but we are still tying up the last minute necessities.”

Perhaps you fall into the category of those trying to “get on board” at the last minute, not knowing when that minute will be. You could be one of those left behind! You could be in the drifting mode, never having anchored to the Rock, Jesus Christ. You are thinking that you are in control and forgetting that God has appointed the moment of your cessation of life on this planet. In the process, you have maintained a “lukewarm” attitude toward the Person of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 3:14-22)

In 2 Corinthians 6:2, we read, *“For He said, ‘at the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of Salvation I helped you’; behold, now is*

*'the acceptable time', behold, now is 'the day of Salvation'.*" Secure your anchor to the Rock, Christ Jesus, and keep shortening the rope, growing in the grace and knowledge of Him.

## **Barnacle Bottles**

Perhaps you are one who has walked on the beach picking up barnacle encrusted bottles, wondering, if perhaps, this is the one that will contain a very special message. Oh, no! Not the type of cartoon oriented message from a person stranded on an island sending out an SOS for rescue, but maybe a letter from an inquisitive individual about the direction of sea currents, or the possibility of an explanation concerning the disappearance of a yacht that had never been sought by a search and rescue operation.

One wonders just how many bottles were thrown to the seas never to be seen again by man...messages that have been lost and will remain forever lost. The uniqueness of the message and the method of discovery is arresting.

Over the years, we have presented the Bible as God's message to us. We have felt entirely comfortable doing so because of the content and method of preservation. To study afresh how God has protected the contents in such hostile environments, to see verification of existing documents through writings in jars (such as the Dead Sea Scrolls), and to observe transformed lives as a result of studying and appropriating its contents all lead to the ultimate conclusion that its claims are legitimate. *"Forever, O Lord, thy Word is settled in Heaven."* (Psalm 119:89) Jesus declared, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Words shall not pass away."* (Matthew 24:35)

On the storm-tossed ocean of life, God has cast a preserved message for our attention. It is unaltered by time and unaffected by the hostility of the environment. Paraphrased, it says: As a sinner, you are separated from Me. In your lost condition, you have no ability to save yourself. I love you. I desire to save you. I have sent my Son to represent you on Calvary. Accept Him as your substitute from sin and experience Salvation today. Signed, God. (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; John 1:12)

## The Red Thread

A short time ago, my wife decided that I needed a new suit. I felt that my present suits were not worn out but were a bit out of style. Living in the desert of AZ, one seldom wears a suit. After counter-attacking my arguments, the matter was settled. I had bought several sport jackets during the years but I had survived the “suit” business. This time the pressure increased as the children and grandchildren sided with her.

We had been out for dinner and I was set on buying something for her, thus our visit to the Mall. The Men’s Department of one of the Department Stores was closing in 15 minutes, but she suggested that we look at suits; I felt that would be tolerable. Fifteen minutes later, I left with my new suit and a happy wife. It is not that I do not like suits; it is just that I prefer dressing in a more casual manner. I spent a little more time reviewing my purchase later at home and thought to myself, “that little red stripe in the dark suit does make a significant difference”.

As a child, my parents insisted that I attend Sunday school. For several years I had perfect attendance and even received a Bible as a reward. There was Scripture memorization and reading; yet, it always seemed to be “boring”. Then came attendance at a private business school. There, a Godly teacher made us read the Bible daily, pray, and memorize Scripture. None of this affected me personally.

Shortly after I became a Christian, someone pointed out to me that there was a “red thread” that ran through the pages of Holy Writ; it was the story of the shed blood of Jesus for the sins of the world. The first mention of the blood sacrifice is a picture portrayal of man who chose to cover himself with fig leaves, but God provided “*garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.*” (Genesis 3:22) The story unfolds in Book after Book until we see “*the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the World.*” (John 1:29)

The Bible took on new meaning as I saw Christ in every chapter and every page. John 3:16 became alive. God loved me; Christ died for me; Heaven awaited me. My sins, washed in the blood of Christ, were forever forgiven. Christ was crucified; God was satisfied; I have been justified; the promises concerning the Blood have been verified; Jehovah is glorified!

Because I spotted that “red thread” in my suit, it gave new meaning to an old truth.

## **J.D. at Masthead**

It took place in 1950 at about 6.30 a.m. My father, who was Head Signalman at Gibbs Hill Lighthouse in Bermuda, called in urgent voice: "Come here, quickly!"

A ship had entered a stretch of water along the south shore that had brought her inside some of the reefs. She was in danger of running aground. The question now was "Can she be stopped?" My father's instructions were clear. "Hoist the letters J.D. in that order to masthead." With all the other flags having been removed from the flagpole, we snapped the flags together, hoisted them to masthead, then waited and watched through the glasses. We saw the ship come to a halt. It positioned itself to carry out a series of signals and responses between us. It then reversed its course and maneuvered through the reefs to safety. Though it was a moment I would never forget, this dilemma was repeated on several occasions for other ships.

Little did I realize the significance of all of this until years later when I became a minister of the Gospel. I was constantly reminded of that flagpole and the letters J.D. fluttering the message "You are standing in danger". You see, Jesus said: "*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.*" (John 3:14, 15)

Jesus' death on Calvary has beckoned a world "standing in danger" warning that if Jesus be lifted up He would draw all men to Himself. Through believing in Him, man would find a reversal of his fortunes... from death to life. There is deliverance from impending disaster and destruction as one recognizes that Jesus alone delivers from sin and its penalty.

The Captain of that ship had to believe our warning and follow our instruction. Jesus, at masthead, heralded out a message of warning and invitation. It is yours to respond and avoid impending disaster, or it is yours to reject that message: J.D...JESUS DELIVERS.

## **A Blind Man in Westminster Abbey**

The day had been a busy one. We had driven to Westminster Abbey with our dear friends, Ron and Pam, experienced the normal parking problems, bucked the rain and wind (I must add that this was the only rainy day in a two week vacation in England). We ate lunch in a crooked restaurant (literally), and spent hours touring this magnificent attraction. We were coming to the end of the tour when I suddenly noticed a blind man standing, quietly taking in all that was going on around him.

It was time for this old brain to do some thinking. How in the world could this man grasp what I had been visually observing? There was no one next to him at that moment explaining what was taking place. I tried to picture myself trying to envision that which surrounded us; I struggled in vain. It was easy for me to recall the struggles of at least four of my relatives who were blind. I once heard my great aunt saying to my grandfather: "Charlie! You should have seen it! And his prompt reply: "Violet, you did not see a thing; you are as blind as me." However, I recall my cousin reading ever so swiftly her Braille Bible and monthly Reader's Digest.

We have all watched blind people listening intently as others described the surroundings. We have watched them utilize their abilities, even while experiencing this limitation. If you are like me, you marvel at such ability.

In Luke 18, a blind man sat by the wayside, begging; this was his only recourse for obtaining a living. He heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing and so he beckoned the Savior: "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*" (verse 38) Jesus beckoned the man be brought to him and then asked: "*What do you want me to do for you?*" He did not beat around the bush, he said: "*Lord, I want to see.*" (verse 41) Jesus healed him. As a result, this man was healed and when all the people saw it: "*they also praised God*".

Blindness is a significant handicap for anyone; spiritual blindness is worse. In Isaiah 6 we read of people who would not be able to see spiritually. There are other portions of Scripture that tell the same message. It is a message that is discernable only through the ministering work of the Holy Spirit of God who desires to "open the eyes of the blind".

I am still trying to imagine what must be traversing the mind of that man at Westminster Abbey. How did he envision the things that we were able to see? While I am aware of the sensitivities of blind people, I ponder the value of his visit. In reality, he probably retained more of what he "saw" than I.

Pointedly, may I ask your position spiritually? Have you ever had

your spiritual sight restored by the “Master ophthalmologist”? The blind man in Luke 18 knew enough to ask directly of the only One who can restore sight: “*Lord, I want to regain my sight!*” Jesus responded: “*Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.*” He knew what to ask and of whom he should ask it. His faith was solidified. So it will be with spiritual sight of the one who requests it of the Savior in faith.

“Open my eyes that I may see, Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me; Place in my hands the wonderful key, that shall un-clasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see; Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine! (Clara Scott)

## **Know the Psalm or Know the Shepherd**

While a friend of ours was visiting with us, my mind kept going back to some very vivid encounters some years ago. Though I had known Lenny most of my life, there had not been a lot of direct contact with him. Suddenly our paths became intricately woven.

Our daughter had been dating his nephew and it was during this period that Lenny’s wife, Thelma, was discovered to be filled with cancer. Inasmuch as she had begun attending our church shortly before this, naturally I was quick to be at the hospital when the confirmation came concerning her cancer. After months of efforts and no inroads against this “dreaded monster”, it was obvious that she was going Home to be with the Lord. There was little but triumph on her lips during that period of time.

One evening at the hospital, the maximum allowed to visit were gathered around her bedside. I began to pray as we held hands. Unbeknown to me, things were taking place in the quietness of that sacred moment. I finished my prayer by repeating the 23rd Psalm. As I looked up, I discovered the circle now contained four additional people... nurses. There was not a dry eye in the room. One of the nurses, looking directly at me said: “I have never heard the 23rd Psalm quoted just like that. I sensed it to be different than I have ever heard.” At that moment I remembered something I had read years before: “Some folks know the Psalm. Others know the Shepherd.” It was a joy to share the fact that those gathered in that circle knew the Shepherd... and more importantly, He knew them.

In John chapter 10 Jesus said, “*My sheep know my voice... I know my sheep*”. If you have never entered into a personal relationship with the Shepherd, do so today. Acknowledge who He is... God incarnate. Commit yourself to Him. Follow Him each step of the way. He is deserving of your devotion.

## Captivity / Sanctuary

As I sat watching the fish in our fish tank, which is one of the most relaxing experiences a man can enjoy, I was impressed with their different characteristics. They moved around the tank with different speeds and, when pausing from their activity, they seemed to have particular locations to which they settled.

While I make it a point to keep the tank clean and an abundant supply of food at their disposal, I began wondering just how they might be interpreting the scene. Do they see the tank as a place in which they reside in captivity or do they see it as a sanctuary? Unable to project myself into their realm, I must leave that question unanswered.

Let us consider how we see ourselves in our own little “fish tank”. There are all types of fish out there and we do not look, think, or act alike. However, we are alike in that we were born in sin. We are captives of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need to be freed from such enslavement. That is accomplished through the redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus. God’s sin-bearer, Jesus, went to the cross of Calvary to pay the price of God’s demands for sin. God demanded that sin would be paid for by a blood offering, a perfect sacrifice: “...without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22 NASB) Other verses in that same chapter conclude: “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14)

Most interestingly, when one is freed from enslavement referred to earlier, he enters into a sanctuary; a place where he experiences the joy of a “bond-slave” relationship to Jesus Christ. Realizing what it has cost God to free him, appreciating all that he now possesses in his son-ship, and finding delight in submitting himself to God, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit... the great Three in One.

The words of Paul to the Church at Corinth need to be emphasized: “*You are bought with a price... For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*” (1 Corinthians 7:23; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15 NASB) While I am rescued, I find delight and joy in placing myself in servitude to Christ.

In this new-found position, we find the sanctuary that we need for life and death. God has promised His abiding presence for now and for the future. Acknowledge yourself a sinner; acknowledge Christ as your Savior for God has promised to acknowledge you as His child. (John 1:12, 13)

## Lessons – Way Back When

This marvelous piece of technology, the computer, amazes and amuses me more each day. I discover its possibilities constantly exploding and wonder about the guys and gals involved in making it perform these feats.

When I started at The Bermuda Commercial School some years ago, immediately following 9th grade, things were a little different. You worked on thirty-two vocabulary words each day, structured grammar and even had to memorize Scripture. As we would say in Bermuda, “O, Vell.”

Recalling my adventures in typewriting is not hard at all. There was the Royal and Underwood typewriters, perhaps the originals. The challenge was to be able to type forty words per minute for fifteen minutes with a maximum of five mistakes that you were allowed to correct in that given time. It took me a little longer to achieve that goal when I broke a knuckle in a fight and broke it again later in a motorbike accident.

One of the earliest lessons in typewriting was: “Whenever you make a mistake, immediately write that word correctly five times or you will continue to write it incorrectly every time.” Ms. Williams was right. That initial penetration of the brain imbeds itself and refuses to leave. Later in a manuscript the same error is reproduced unless corrected immediately.

Oh, the joy of this computer. I make a mistake and the green line says it is grammatically incorrect and the red line says it is a misspelled word. I click on “Tools”, and select the “Spelling and Grammar” checker. If a change is needed, it takes care of itself... or does it? Without stopping to zero in on what was involved in the change process and new word, I will probably continue to misspell that word for an extended period of my life. I manage to get through the article, impress the people at the other end, but inwardly my problem continues.

The advice that comes down from the Scriptures says basically that we must deal with the problems of life as we confront them, confess them, correct them, and conclude them. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9) Having dealt with them, leave them behind. The stains and corrections may be obvious and then again, they may be unseen. In Christ, they are forgiven, never to be recalled! Hallelujah!

## Virus Alert

A few weeks ago the computers used in the process of maintaining our website were invaded. For approximately a week we were unable to get things back into first-class condition. (It takes a little longer when a team of volunteers is doing everything, after a normal day's work).

I thought my question was quite simple when I asked about the virus. I did not imagine that I would be smothered with eight pages of information about "Viruses, Trojan horses, Worms and Macros", but that is what happened. We have all of the Anti-Virus Programs that protects against thousands of these infectious "devils"; but somehow, something managed to elude the safeguards.

I thought I must have been reading a medical report from my doctor when I reached "Blended Threat". It said that it "causes harm... propagates by multiple methods... attacks from multiple points... spreads without human intervention... exploits vulnerabilities". As if that was not sufficient, it went on to "Bug". The next thing I knew was that I felt like it was the fall of the year and I needed to rush up and get a flu shot. The side effects of this invader "causes system instability, compromises security settings, damages, degrades performance, deletes files, distributes itself, exploits, etc."

A computer technician or medical doctor I am not, but I can tell you that there was this virus out there with all of the side effects and it did a job on our system. I also am aware that it took more than two aspirin, lots of liquids and three days of rest to restore it.

Yep! I got to thinking once again. In 1 John 4:1 we read: "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*" Like the wildfires that have been leaping across our State and others of recent, "false prophets" are a dime a dozen during these days. Privileged thinking that rises above or beyond the Word of God abounds. It arrives on our doorsteps in the morning paper; it flashes on our TV screens and knocks at our front doors.

Another form is spoken of in Jude verse 4... "*For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*" These are they who infiltrate our churches and use their subtleties to steal the sheep. Their worming ways are not always readily discernible, but given time, they will surface. Either we deal with them or they will deal us a vicious and vital blow.

Whether they have "gone out" or "crept in", they are disruptive and destructive. In the contexts of the verses quoted we cannot help but notice that the criteria for identifying such people hinges on their

perception of the person of Jesus Christ. He is God! He is man! He is the second person of the Trinity! He is the Savior, the only sufficient sacrifice for the sin of mankind. He is: *“the Way, and the Truth, and the Life: no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”* (John 14:6 NASB)

## Memories

With my recent return to Bermuda for my Mother’s funeral, opportunity afforded itself for an early morning walk on the beach. This is where Mom took us as youngsters. Although Church Bay was never known to be one of Bermuda’s best beaches, it is a perfect place for snorkeling. This is where I learned to swim and at one point, my cousin plucked me from the water as she observed my effort to swallow the Atlantic Ocean.

The weather was a bit stormy for a few days tossing seaweed onto the beach. As a result, I began to recall wonderful memories; Uncle Joe with his horse and box cart hauling seaweed for his gardens; puddles with “cowpollies” (Sergeant majors); Church Rock where we fished many a night trying to bring home a tad for a meal; sea-swept bottles, some with barnacles and some fresh. There were ropes, nets, an anchor, a buoy and a pot. The shells were small but beautiful as always.

I climbed the cliffs for awhile. A marker indicated that someone had cut the date 1620 into this spot. The actual rock was at the local museum and this was a replica. Ah ha! This was the spot where the U.S. Army kept a large search light during World War II. I looked heavenward and, to my delight, more than a dozen Longtails soared against the backdrop of the horizon. They had returned to give birth to their young. Their nests were probably in the cliffs beneath my feet. My brain was indulging in reflection. My Mother’s presence was gone but the experiences to which she had introduced me were everywhere. Was there something special in all of this that God could use to touch my heart and life? Naturally!

The Apostle Peter said in the first chapter of his epistle, “I shall always be ready to remind you... I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, that after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind.” (2 Peter 1:12-15) Among the many things to which he reminded us were who Jesus is, and what God has done for us based on the authority of Scripture. While here on earth, one of the final things Jesus said was that the celebration around the Lord’s table was to continue until His return. (1 Corinthians 11:25-26) It is a time of reflection and remembrance.

I left the beach and surrounding area with a fresh appreciation for Mom. I never leave the Scriptures and the story of Jesus and His love without a fresh appreciation of Him. How about you?

## Our Aged Community

While Youngtown, next door, is known as the first retirement community, Sun City has the identification of First Active Retirement Community. We have 9 golf courses, 2 bowling alleys, 7 recreation centers, 6 swimming pools, miniature golf courses, lawn bowling, bowling alleys, tennis courts, lakes for fishing, and clubs for almost every activity you can think of: Lapidary, computers, woodwork, silversmith, sewing, and art, to name just a few.

If you want to know how busy we are, just pick up a phone and try to make an appointment with one of us. After all, in addition to all of those possibilities above mentioned, one has to work between Doctor's appointments. I have no way of determining the average number of appointments on a given day, but there are Doctor's offices everywhere you turn.

Naturally, we have our own Boswell Hospital. It is even rated as one of the top one hundred heart hospitals in the country. Next door is the Research Center; it is focusing on Alzheimer's. I have heard of the expression: "Let me pick your brain", but I would say that this is what is being done. Along with 50th wedding anniversaries and deaths, we probably rate high percentage-wise in the area of Alzheimer's.

Where am I going with all of this? Naturally, I am going back to all of the jokes we make about ourselves. Few are those that allow their problems to stop them from continuing to be active in one way or another. Some of the folk in their 90's are still playing golf, along with the other activities. One of the ladies in her 80's recently shot another hole in one.

When one of the folk began telling me about their current limitations, I decided to have some fun of my own. I walked over to her table, picked up her Bible and turned to Ecclesiastes 12 and began explaining how important it was to *"Remember our Creator in the days of our youth"*, because age has a way of making us say "I have no pleasure in them". Trouble has touched us. Verse 3 talks about our vision: *"Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark"*; and one problem follows the other: *"and the clouds return after the rain;"*

Verse 3 also talks about:

- "the watchmen of the house tremble"... our hands / legs
- "strong men stoop"... our shoulders
- "the grinders cease, they are few"... our teeth
- "the windows become darkened"... our eyes.

Verse 4 continues:

- "the doors to the street are closed"... our ears

- “the sound of grinding fades”... Voices are hard to hear and pitch becomes a problem. Hearing is gone.

Verse 5 adds:

- “men are afraid of heights and dangers on the streets”... fear grips old people’s hearts
- “the almond tree blossoms”... we lose our hair
- “the grasshopper drags himself along”... weakness is tough to accept
- “desire is no longer stirred”... the ulcers abound
- “man goes to his eternal home”... the grave.

Dr. A. T. Pierson notes that the 6th verse indicates:

- “the silver cord is severed”... spinal cord loosed – paralysis
- “the golden bowl breaks”... the skull / brain
- “the pitcher breaks”... the lungs, asphyxia
- “the wheel broken at the well”... heart.

While we can expect these things to be prominent in our community, I also notice the number of churches and services scheduled to accommodate our spiritual needs. Many realize that life is wheeling to an end and they should be preparing themselves for that moment when death shall seize this mortal frame. Being prepared for that moment is what is most important.

Salvation is a gift of God. It is obtained by simple faith and trust in the person of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When one takes that action of inviting Jesus to be his sin-bearer, based upon what God has declared, he becomes a child of God for all eternity.

## Fallow Ground

As the years leap by, most of us continue to have the advantage of recalling things that are now foreign to the younger generation. One such item is that of a field being plowed by a farmer with his horse, and following that, he would harrow that field.

Our uncle was such a farmer. As a child, I found it mystifying to watch him plough the field in perfectly straight furrows. Usually, the reins of the horse hung around his neck because he and his horse had worked together for so many years. At the end of each row, he lifted the plow, kicked the release mechanism, and flipped the plow to the opposite side in preparation for the return furrow. At the end of hours of hard work, the garden was ploughed.

Next came the harrowing. This implement of trade, approximately 4 feet by 6 feet, with spikes in the bottom, would break up the clods of ground that had been ploughed up. When finished, the field would be ever so smooth, ready for planting.

In Bible times, it was normal to use oxen and a wooden plough, later an iron one, to break up the ground that had become hardened between the previous and the present growing season. One has little trouble imagining the hardness of the ground in that part of the world. (1 Samuel 13:20) A wooden stick, a goad, was used to prod the oxen on.

Farming has never been easy; although, today we have air-conditioned tractors. Our friend, Joe, and I were talking on our cell phones while he was haying in Tennessee in his A/C tractor... my heart bled for him! Dependence upon the Lord to provide the proper weather was ever a necessity. While certain areas may have access to water, that was not the case with the average farmer.

Where is all of this leading me? To a portion of Scripture that has been echoing in my brain much of recent. Hosea 10:12... *"Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you."*

The hardened hearts of God's people has become of major concern. It appears that we have become so intent on doing our own thing, in our own way, that lives that should be producing a harvest are as baked as brick. The 13<sup>th</sup> verse of Hosea 10 tells us why: *"You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies, and you have trusted in your numerous warriors." Friends, we are no longer dependent on God!*

We have become big business. There is need for the "latter rains" to fall and our hearts to be tenderized, but, sometimes one feels that, even if

God so desired to do such a working, we would not be ready or willing for such a visitation.

Together, let us “break up the fallow ground”! Let us ask God for a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit. Let us “*awake to righteousness and sin not*”. (1 Corinthians 15:34)

## AM / PM

I was early for church. As I sat waiting for the service to begin, I read from the Scriptures and prayed. No one should waste time in the House of the Lord. We are to learn to “buy up time” as we move from day to day.

Suddenly, I was interrupted. The video and sound people were getting things into final preparation for the service. On the screen flashed this announcement: “New Church Office Hours... 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., July 2 thru September 3”. The “12:00 p.m.” got my attention.

We have all seen pictures of clocks that are moving steadily toward midnight. The small hand is almost on the 12 and the big hand is somewhere between the 55 minute mark and midnight. There is the clear indication that the midnight hour is upon us; there is the subtle inference that the day is about to conclude, that time is running out. This picture is true from the perspective that we should be prepared for that moment when we shall be ushered into eternity; time is of the essence.

I had to do some thinking about that 12:00 midnight not being P.M., but A.M. Actually, this picture introduces the fact that when that moment arrives, the P.M. will have concluded and the A.M. has begun. It is more than just an end; it is a beginning. The rapture of the church will have just taken place and believers will now be in the presence of Jesus Christ. On the earth, judgment will begin as the tribulation, followed by the Great Tribulation as it begins to assert itself in ever increasing fury. (I Thessalonians 4 & 5) After 7 years, judgment will assert itself from Heaven followed by 1,000 years of peace upon this old planet. While we usually think of midnight as a conclusion, we realize it to be a beginning. For those refusing to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, it is the beginning of judgment. For those of us embracing Him as Lord and Savior, it is the beginning of the greatest blessings ever!

In reading Mark’s Gospel this week, I noted again the word “*WATCH*” as it appeared in one translation and in another: “*Be on the alert*”. (Mark 13:35, 37)

“Time is swiftly passing by, death in earnest drawing nigh”! That little announcement, though unrelated to all that I have just shared, became a blessing to me. I trust it will do the same for you.

## Oil Drums / Steel Pans

From my youth I was fascinated with the “steel drums”, as I referred to them, that I would hear on occasion. I was not a musician at heart and so I never pursued playing them. I simply enjoyed listening and was fascinated to watch others display their art.

While visiting Trinidad on one of our trips, my wife and I decided that we would like to hear these musicians practice. I recall the first question I was asked: “Are you willing to stay up until the early hours of the morning?” I found out that these were not “steel drums”, they were “pans”; we would be going to the “pan yard” and things would not be in gear until about 11:00 p.m.

If you know something about the “pans”, you recognize that the people of the Islands have rhythm pouring from every pore in their bodies. They can play a “tune” on anything that makes a sound. Somewhere along the way, they discovered that if they pounded on the bottom of discarded 55-gallon oil drums and raised a bubble, different sizes and locations could produce different notes. Before long the “pan” became a musical instrument. The simple tunes lost their challenge and Beethoven and other composers of like category joined their repertoire.

In their poverty and creativity, the “pan” was born. What was once an old 55-gallon drum became an object of acclaim. People travel far and wide to hear the music and rhythm of the Islanders.

I have often been amazed to see what God has done on this pitiable lump of clay and changed it to something useful for his glory. I was *“brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me”*. (Psalm 51:5 NASB) We read Romans 1 and discover the depths to which man has chosen to go. We read Romans 2 and see ourselves condemned before the Almighty. We are not alone... the world stands with us in sin and unrighteousness. We reach Romans 4 and see the remedy for this: *“... our faith is reckoned as righteousness.”* (Romans 4:5) When we reach Romans 5 and read of the results of justification by faith, we realize from whence we have come... and all, by the Grace of God.

One has to ask, “do I want to remain an old 55-gallon drum or do I want to become an instrument of beauty in the masters hand?” I marvel at what the “panners” can do and the sounds they can produce. Likewise, I marvel at what God can do with a hell-bound sinner by transforming him or her into a saint and using him or her for His glory.

## Salted Beef

When my wife became ill with the Flu, I received the assignment of doing a little grocery shopping. It is one of those chores that I find little pleasure in performing, but necessity over-rode my objections and the responsibility was performed. As I walked past the meats, I saw a package of “salted beef”. Immediately, my mind was back to when I was child. I was visiting my great aunt Annie. Her husband and children were fishermen by trade. Everything around the home was salty. It was something I have always appreciated... the smell of the ocean.

This particular day, Aunt Annie went over to a corner of her kitchen, lifted a lid on the barrel, stuck in a fork and picked out a piece of salted beef. I can smell that brine to this day. That was the way we did things when there was not the availability of freezers. Thus began the process of removing that salt from the beef so that it became edible. Salt is what protected it and made it available at a convenient time.

To this day, another favorite of Bermudians is salted cod. We usually soak it overnight to get rid of much of the salt. Then we cook it once or twice, depending on how we are going to fix it...once, if you are going to make cod fish cakes, twice, if you are going to eat it plain with potatoes, carrots and a banana. That's a Sunday morning breakfast at its best.

Because salt is such a good preservative, food can be saved for a later time when immersed in it. However, like most foods, salt can lose its effect if it is left in the open air for any extended period of time. Jesus used a simple illustration on this thought in Matthew 5:13. When salt loses its ability to function properly, it is good for nothing. In fact, it is relegated to uselessness and worthy only of being trodden under foot.

Salt is great for healing. It took a long time for the medical profession to arrive at something that we have known since childhood. Only now are they using “saline solution” on most of our cuts and surgical wounds. When we were kids with a “boo-boo”, we simply swam in the ocean.

Salt also serves to improve the taste of food. It makes it more enjoyable and palatable. In fact, we are told to have salt in ourselves. (Mark 9:50) Another appropriate scripture for every believer to embrace is Colossians 4:6; there we are told to “*season our speech with salt*”. Christianity should become more palatable to the unsaved world when we demonstrate the fact that we are “salted” believers.

Therefore, let us consider afresh the idea of salt losing its savor and becoming useless. As children of the King, we want to remain appealing and not appalling. We should desire to be positively effective to a world of lost sinners. Let us let them see the quality of the Christ that we love and adore.

## Replaced With Acrylic

Having grown up at the Gibbs Hill Lighthouse in Bermuda, we take every opportunity to visit other lighthouses. We were visiting the lighthouse at Point Loma across the bay from San Diego. These facts and factors I found most interesting. After all of the work of building the lighthouse at 462 feet above sea level, it was determined that there were too many “foggy days” for the lighthouse to be visible to the mariners. As a result, they built another light at a much lower level. The old light at Point Loma served only 36 years before the replacement took over.

The lens of the light is always described as the “heart” of a lighthouse. The one at Point Loma is a fixed (non-rotating) lens. This lens would use a 168 candlepower light and increase its power to 19,000 candlepower. Each portion of the lens reflects the light back to the center where it is projected out toward the horizon twenty miles away. The lens is a masterpiece to behold. As I studied it, my attention was directed to a small acrylic piece in front of me. I read the facts and realized that a two-foot lens has replaced the five-foot high, three foot wide lens. I doubt that it is 10 inches in diameter. I looked in disbelief, all the while knowing it to be a fact.

Christians are to be a light reflector of Jesus Christ who is the “Light of the World”. We are reflectors of who and what He is. In the process of projecting Him to the horizon, always warning the “ships” that traverse life’s ocean, there are perilous situations surrounding us. (Luke 8:16; Luke 11: 33cf; Matthew 5) One cannot help but notice a decided difference since the days of the book of Acts to the present. House-churches and riverbank gatherings gave way to a more sophisticated church structure that is undergoing change even today. I have to wonder if we have not become acrylic through and through. Like the light at Point Loma and most of our sophisticated warning beacons, we have replaced the originals with substitutes. While we may have the appearance of a more modern church and juggle our numbers through entertainment and professionalism, might it be acrylic?

I have to believe that we are in desperate need of a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit. All types of substitutes are impressive, but close examination gives one the impression that we are operating on a respirator or pacemaker. We have professing Christians defending abortion, the gay movement, divorce, and the list is endless. This way of life cannot be defended from the Holy Scriptures. The church is constantly splitting and forming new groups, not because there is interest in increasing outreach, but because of dissension within the body and sin that has not been dealt with.

We can be grateful for the light being projected, in spite of what is taking place amongst Christians, but we need to pray for the fires of revival to touch the hearts and lives of individual believers. Lord! Light that fire in my soul!

## London Bridge

It is a modern marvel...London Bridge in Arizona!

When the Parker Dam was built on the Colorado River, the water back-up created Lake Havasu. Robert McCullough, of chain-saw fame, saw an opportunity to build a city on the lake and so Lake Havasu City became a reality.

In London, England, they had decided that the London Bridge was too small and needed to be replaced. Sentimentally such a parting would be devastating unless they could relocate it. It was put up for sale. Mr. McCullough decided that it was an opportunity to put Lake Havasu City on the map. He bid close to three million dollars and secured the bridge. Millions more was spent on dismantling, transporting, and rebuilding. Today it is a transportation access and a tourist attraction.

We have observed this bridge numerous times from land and water. The chips (supposedly from German aircraft guns in World War II), the swallows, the English Village shops, the canal with its array of watercraft, all make for excellent reflection. The problem is that the London Bridge does not lead to London.

We have been to London and seen the second London Bridge. Dear friends made it possible for us a few years back. It was an occasion we shall never forget. It was at the same time an illusionist was hanging in a glass box at that location. London Bridge was in London.

I recall Dr. Charles Woodbridge sharing with a group of young people some thoughts on the Book of Romans. **Two major facts are taught** – (3:21) – God’s Righteousness (1:17) and man’s sinfulness (3:9, 23). **That which separates them is** – Sin (3:23); Guilt (3:19); Judgment (2:2); Wrath (1:18); Condemnation (8:1); Death (6:23). **A bridge has been built** – The Architect is Christ (3:24; 8:33); The Anchor (3:24b); The Guarantee (4:25); The Approach (3:25, 26, 28); Companions on the Bridge (Patriots); View from the Bridge (5:1 & 11); Assurance (8:1).

Everything having to do with this bridge revolves around the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was He who said, *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”* (John 14:6).

You may never visit London Bridge, but you can cross the bridge that spans the gulf of separation between God and man. Place your faith in the Person of Jesus as your Lord and Savior...He is the ONLY Bridge.

# STOP!

Do you have a lot of four way stop signs in your city? We do in Sun City! Topping that, we have many medians that intensify the problem. Just to add a little fun to that, we have roads wide enough to handle two cars abreast; in some places the lanes are marked while in others they are unmarked.

As we approach a stop sign, we recall in our mind that this is an “active retirement community” -- the first of its kind in the United States. Just because we are supposed to be “retired” does not mean we are not in a hurry. We have appointments with every kind of specialist possible. We know what time our golf outing, lawn bowling, card game, swim session, table tennis, miniature golf, dance troupe, silver-smith, leather-craft, wood-work, organ club, sewing club, model trains, exercise class, or a couple dozen other organizations, are meeting. All of that means that we are a people in motion, and sadly, in a hurry.

While stop signs abound, stopping does not mean that the other guy is going to stop. It means only that he has a stop sign at his part of the intersection and that everyone should be rotating through the intersection in accordance with the basic idea -- I was first, second, third, or fourth -- and will move in that order. Defensive driving means -- don't count on it!

My neighbor, proceeding through the stop sign down the street, did so in a “California Stop” manner, and then told off the patrolman because he was being issued a ticket. I have never seen him so upset; especially when I laughed at him and said: “But you did not STOP!”

Like Ed, we all have our reasons for flaunting God's laws. Most of those are excuses that we use to justify our actions, i.e. “That patrolman should be out stopping speeders. He should be here when that motorcycle races up the street at 6:55 each morning!” One thing noticeably absent from our vocabulary is: “I was wrong! I had no business doing that.”

How about reading Colossians the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter and getting a fresh glimpse of the things that are to be put off and the things to be put on. These are not statements that waver about what we should or should not do. They are firm, staunch, positive and identifying qualities that accompany our newfound faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Let's forget about “sliding” through the STOP signs. Let us not think that we can do so without endangering others. Let us not think that people should “understand” why we are doing this. Let us remember that God had a purpose in erecting His STOP signs.

## A Diary / A Journal

She has always wanted a diary, or perhaps a journal would be best she had thought aloud so often. With Christmas came her gift and a “happy camper” was all smiles, ear to ear.

As they prepared to leave for home the other evening, diary in tow, I grabbed at the keys. “Why do you want those?” she asked. Naturally I reminded her that it would enable me to explore what she wrote without her approval. You can well imagine the response to that by a fourteen-year old girl.

Try to use your imagination and picture what you might find on those blank pages a year from now. Without the details we naturally envision the joys, frustrations, challenges, hurts, victories, and dreams that she will experience between now and then. There will be blank pages because of busyness. Interrupted and some key experiences will go unrecorded. We all know that does not mean the events did not happen, but just pushed into the background of forgetfulness and obscured because of busyness.

Like Cris and her diary, before us lie 365 blank pages. Each page will be filled in each day, much determined by the choices we see fit to make. Some things will be an uncontrolled result, but not so with the majority. How they unfold can be best determined when we set guidelines that bring guaranteed blessing and direction from the Lord.

Let me suggest that we be overcomers. The coming year promises to be one doused with opposition and difficulty. The horizon is not filled with obvious clear sailing in any of the “Seven Seas”. The crested waves in all the arenas of life appear to offer challenge. Determine to rise above the circumstances. Remember the words of Ephesians 6 as it relates to the conflicts we face... *“When we have fought to a standstill, keep fighting”*.

Be Zealous! Refuse to just “exist”; LIVE! The grave could not hold Jesus and the opposition could not hold back the zealotry of the first group of believers. Their words and their works were permeated with the empowering of the Holy Spirit of God. People knew that “they had been with Jesus”. Most of the people with whom we come in contact need what we have... His Name is Jesus!

Be Separate. Paul challenged us with that thought in the opening words of Romans... *“He was separated unto the gospel of God”*. Let us refuse to see how close to the world we can live without being called “worldly”; let us see how close to the Lord we can live DAILY. Such practice in our daily living will result in our discovering that instead of being accused of being negative, we will be seen as being the most positive people in the world. Our interests are to be HIS INTERESTS.

Refuse to Compromise. Present yourself afresh to God, Romans 12:1, 2, and refuse to retreat from that commitment.

Let's fill those pages with "what God hath wrought"!

## Recapitulation

More popular than ever is the credit card. We utilize it for every conceivable purpose under the sun. We constantly are flooded with new opportunities to secure one or two during the course of a week.

As I reviewed my credit card statement recently, I was made aware of my activity during the previous month. I recalled where I had been and what I had been doing, and was sorting through to separate business, home and other expenses. I could not help but notice how neatly it was all listed. While trying to verify the charges, a number of things went through my head... specifically, "*their works do follow them*". (Revelation 14:13) Each transaction had a story of what, when, where, and how.

When reflecting on Revelation 14:13, we are reminded that in eternity future, accountability will face us. It will be on an individualized basis. "*For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.*" Why? The purpose is further defined "*that every man may give account for the works done in his body: whether they be in the flesh or not.*" (1 Corinthians 4)

The Judgment Seat of Christ is for believers. They, alone, will give account for their works. There is no general judgment of piling up the good on one side and the bad on the other to see which one outweighs the other in order to determine where we will spend eternity. This type of judgment is reserved for the works of believers and the rewards that they will receive for eternity.

The Great White Throne of Judgment is for unbelievers. There, every man must give account for what he has done with the Person of Jesus Christ. Has he accepted Him as the substitute for his sin? (Revelation 20:11cf) If yes, then no sin to his account. If not, then eternal separation from God awaits him. He will be penalized for failing to accept Christ's death in his place.

Just as the credit card has a convenience attached to it, just as it recaps for us our necessities and enjoyments, and just as it demands an accounting, so God reminds us that we must ultimately give account to Him. It cannot be escaped.

## Down A New Road

Recently, the road in front of our home was torn up. Then there was the process of refinishing it. Naturally, it took much longer than we had hoped and the community was starting to get a little edgy while waiting for the completion of this project. As sidewalk superintendents, we could have done a much faster and more efficient job than the construction company responsible. However, it is finally completed and the frayed nerves have settled into appreciation.

With this project completed, I could give them a list of other streets that need attention in our area. Also, I could probably make suggestions on how to undertake the next project with more efficiency, even though I know nothing about road construction. Sad to say, all too many of us are in this category.

I have thought much about the Road of Life that stretches before us. There are many types of roads over which we must pass and, most interestingly, we traverse them at different stages of our lives. I wish that some of the ones I traveled when I was younger had come when I was a little more mature. I am glad that some of them came when I was young and was more excited about their challenges. There are some I wish I could travel again and correct the manner in which they were handled. Since that is not possible, I must learn to accept the ups and downs, the ruts and rocks, the smooth and graceful highways that came our direction and the way we handled them under those circumstances and at that level of maturity.

However, there is daily before us a New Road. We have gained from past experiences and it is time to apply those experiences toward a more profitable journey, beginning immediately. Remembering the words of the Apostle: *“but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3:13, 14 NASB) That word “forgetting” is used only in this verse in the Scriptures. It means to “lose out of mind”. It is fitting for the Christian to make sure that he puts out of his mind the things that surface there from the lust of the flesh, the world or the devil. We need to fill the mind with the things of Christ constantly or the old devil will see to it that it is filled with the things that allure us from our old nature.

Romans 6 is mandatory reading for every believer as he traverses the Road of Life. There is a struggle between the forces of that old nature and our new nature. We must remember that, as newborn children of God, we are to *“consider ourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 6:11)

May your Road of Life be paved with VICTORY!

## Storm on the Horizon

From the arid 108-degree temperatures of Phoenix, we arrived in Bermuda to a muggy 90 plus degrees. We know what to expect whenever we make the trip.

“You have arrived just in time for Fabian”, we are informed. This was the hurricane that moved at a 20 mile per hour rate and possessed winds in excess of 180 MPH. We arrived on Tuesday and Fabian was scheduled for Friday. Because I was born and reared on this Island, hurricanes were not new to us and there is no cause for alarm.

We were able to visit friends and family on Wednesday but, by Thursday, we could not help but notice the difference in the weather. The South Shore breakers were picking up their familiar rumble. Several people were pulled from undertow at the beaches; sky colors changed dramatically and the normal purchases prior to a storm had emptied the shelves at the grocery stores. Hustle was the word.

Thursday afternoon, we began to pick up a little “hustle” ourselves. Our friends have a beautiful home that has been our haven of relaxation for many years. We pitched in by moving outside chairs and tables inside. Other items were tied down, others weighted. The windows were boarded up. Darkness was beginning to arrive when we covered the pool and we used lights to finish the job. When completed, we felt the eeriness begin to prevail.

The forecast had narrowed the arrival time of Fabian to Friday afternoon or early evening. We joined the hundreds of Bermudians to visit the South Shore to observe the ever-increasing indications that Fabian would hit the Island almost directly. The sand and spray whipped around, the breakers roared, the tide was higher than normal, and foliage was already taking a beating. Little was left to do but “wait it out”.

Knowing that we are in God’s hands, my mind rehearsed the array of Scriptures that speak of the signs that will precede the return of Christ Jesus. Though many and varied, I thought of Luke recounting some of the things that preclude the storm and some that will lead directly into it. *“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake....And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectations of the things which are coming upon the world; for the*

*powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things BEGIN to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* (Luke 21:1-28)

He continued by saying, “*Be on guard*”, “*keep on the alert*”. (Vs 34, 36) We did not panic, we prepared. And that is the instruction to one and all in the days in which we live.

That evening, as the storm raged, we knew we were in the Lord’s hands. With confidence, we played table games by candlelight and an oil lamp. It is a reminder to one and all that, when you are prepared to meet God, you can rest in confidence, knowing full well He is in control. While others are in “dismay, perplexity and fainting”, the believer in a Sovereign God, a Sin-bearing Savior, and the Holy Spirit interceding, knows the peace that prevails before and through the storms of life.

## The Hard Drive Cleaned

Recently, I read how that at a particular “dump”, items are set aside for people to pick up and re-cycle, or, in the event that a person arrives and spots something about to be disposed of, he has the option of retrieving it. It may not be proper or even legal, but it is being exercised constantly.

Some of the bigger companies dispense of computers with little thought. Because they constantly upgrade, rather than install new parts, they merely purchase new computers and “dump” those that previously carried the flow of their business. Of major concern is the amount of information that is stored on such hard drives.

Discussing this with a friend recently, he shared how easy it is to retrieve material that was supposedly erased. He demonstrated this on our computer on which I was positive we had erased all semblance of previous junk material. He then shared how he clears government computer hard-drives through seven erasures to guarantee nothing is preserved. They are then drilled and finally bent repeatedly. With this process, it is virtually impossible to retrieve material. Another individual told me how he cares for this matter with a hammer.

This information led me to the portion of Scripture found in Jeremiah 31, verses 27-34. There we read that God will make a new covenant with Israel. In spite of their obnoxious rebellion toward Him, He will sow them with a new seed. At that juncture, He declares: *“I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more.’* (V’s 33,34)

Surely, every person has something recorded on the “hard drive” of his life that he or she would love to be erased and remembered no more. It is nice to remember that our sin is removed, “as far as the east is from the west”, but this business of remembering it “no more” is truly awesome. Only an omnipotent God has that ability.

In His perfection, He set into motion a process that guaranteed, in eternity past, that the “hard drive” could be erased. It was redemption resulting in forgiveness, affected through the application of the blood of Jesus to sin that we have committed. So thorough is it in its efficaciousness that God finds it impossible to remember our sin. Retrieval is impossible. Realizing our inadequacies, He left us with nothing to do but “believe”. *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* (Acts 16:31)

Humans have the ability and the recurring unforgiving spirit to remember what we do to God and to men. However, our wonderful God, the Lord of all Glory, erases the “hard drive” and has no book of remembrance. Praise Him for that!

## **Shorelines or Shadows**

The weather had not been the most favorable for this cruise; however, the door that opened to our private deck permitted us to be choosy about the times we spent inside or out. Sometimes it was minutes and at other times it became hours.

Standing by the railing I watched the horizon intently. The fogginess reduced the distance of visibility and created an aura of mystique. I had hoped to see the shoreline, which we were following on the Mexican Riviera. It was not to be; at least, that was what I thought.

Suddenly, I noticed what appeared to be a little darker cloud on the horizon. The more I studied it I could see that, instead of a cloud, it was the faint outline of the shoreline and the mountains in the background. Obviously, the fogginess was giving way to the sunshine, or we were closer now than previously. Whatever the change, the hidden was being actualized before my eyes.

This was not something new to me, although I must admit that I looked with the same strained eyes of sixty years ago when I had viewed the islands of Nevis and St. Kitts. There was the realization that out beyond my depth of vision there was something for me to behold; it was land; it was terra firma; it was a place that, as yet, remained unseen. However, the place unseen by my eye had been seen by others and the maps confirmed its existence.

As I write this, it is Easter week. I have been looking at the map, the Word of God, and I have been reading about Heaven. I have not been there, but the weight of evidence of its existence, confirmed by the One who spoke of going there and preparing a place for us, (John 14) has risen on the horizon with clearer identity. After all, that same ONE, Jesus, arose from the grave and in the process vindicated His right to make such a promise. Show me another who has broken the bonds of death. Show me one who was resurrected, appeared unto many and ascended into heaven before the eyes of a large company.

My eye is on the horizon; the Son, Himself, will shortly remove the mist and He will return as promised. My hope will be actualized. The map, the Word of God, will be confirmed once again as it has been ever so often. The Scripture says: *“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”* (1 Corinthians 13:12 NASB)

## Holy Mackerel

While reading the Scriptures this morning, my mind flashed back more that sixty-five years ago to a picturesque setting in Boat Bay, Bermuda. My uncle, a fisherman, had just returned from pulling his pots from the area of the Southwest breakers. Today, Boat Bay is home to Sonesta Beach Hotel, shortly to be demolished and replaced with a more modern hotel accommodation.

As Uncle Wyndham guided his fishing boat through the narrow channel to his mooring, he realized that the bay was filled with tons of mackerel... a most uncommon situation. His nets were near at hand and close to the entrance to the bay. He quickly maneuvered his rowboat into position and dropped the nets, blocking the escape of the mackerel. The problem he now faced was a lack of nets to harvest what he had entrapped.

Without modern communication, it meant climbing a steep trail and getting a message to cousin fisherman to bring additional netting so that, together, they might harvest this enormous catch of mackerel. The whole process took hours for Buster to load his nets and then circle a section of the Island and arrive at Boat Bay. My father joined in the effort and I accompanied him.

I watched as they skillfully lowered the nets into place. By now, it was quite dark and the process was being conducted with flashlights and lanterns. The beauty of the night scene, flashlights, slow and methodical maneuvering by the men standing on the back of their boats, many mackerel clearing the surface of the water and glistening in the lights, are forever entrenched in my mind. I fell asleep on the beach before the process was finished, but I do not think my Uncle Wyndham or cousin Buster ever caught such a volume of fish in a netting process.

Now, about that portion of Scripture I was reading this morning... it appears in John 21 where Jesus appears to His disciples on the Sea of Galilee. It follows Calvary and His resurrection.

Somewhat discouraged with the events that had transpired, Peter decided to go fishing and the other disciples joined him. After fishing all night and catching nothing, as the day broke, Jesus stood on the shore, though they did not recognize Him. He asked if they had caught anything. They informed Him of their zero catch. He told them to cast on the right hand side of the boat. In obedience, they cast and caught so many fish that they were unable to haul it in. Peter recognized the Lord, put on his outer garment, threw himself into the sea and headed for the Lord, leaving the others to "drag" in the net.

Numerous thoughts spring from this event and portion of Scripture.

When you get discouraged, lose hope and return to fishing, Jesus is still present. You may find dryness and barrenness, but on the shoreline is One who knows all about your need. Obedience is the first step to blessing... listen to what Jesus says about your situation. You will always have a net filled beyond your need or expectations in the place of obedience. While God reaches us wherever and whatever our condition, He is deserving of our finest attire. You may not recognize Him as quickly as Peter, but recognize Him you will. Drag the net of God's blessings with you. When you get to where He is waiting patiently, you will discover the bread, along with fish on the fire. Jesus did not need the 153 fish to fix breakfast for some hungry men. Jesus ever has breakfast prepared for worn and weary souls. If it takes three appearances to get through your thick skull, He will not give up on you.

Hopefully this reflection will cause us to have the deepest appreciation and love for the resurrected Christ. No one compares to Him! Cry out in agreement with Peter: "*It is the Lord.*" (John 21:7) When you reach that point in your head and heart, you will be like that handful of disciples who turned the world upside down.

## Trying To Understand

She was unreservedly committed to the Lord from as early as I can remember. Not yet in her teens, she knew and everyone else as well knew of a personal faith in Christ that made her stand out in her daily living. It was no surprise when we learned that she was going to Bible College to prepare for a lifetime of service for the Savior; it was expected.

At college she met her future mate. He, too, had his act together and planned to go into the ministry. They married in spite of the hardship that would accompany them continuing in college. She had always been there for others and so this would be pulling together in just a little different way. After all, their goals for life were identical.

Just before Thanksgiving, 1978, Tammy went home to visit her family in Minnesota. They were overjoyed with her visit and the news that they would be grandparents. November 9, she headed back to Lewiston, Montana. Loren picked her up at the airport and they headed for home on a snow stormy night. A cattle truck coming in the opposite direction, with an unlicensed teenage driver, crossed the road and smashed into their car killing both instantly.

Tammy and Loren were just two of the many young people in the prime of life cut off in what seems but a moment. Some would refer to them as “wasted” lives. Yet, all of the parents would agree that these young people accomplished their God-ordained purpose in life. Even now there are others that have been and continue to be affected by their lives. They sense with us that Heaven and Earth are richer as a result of their living. They are aware that life is but an interlude in eternity and that our problem is we can only view the tangible and not the eternal aspects of their brief residence among us. Twenty-one, thirty-three or one hundred sixteen is but a moment on an infinite scale.

The Scriptures indicate clearly in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that: “*Absent from the body and be at home with the Lord*” is a hope to be realized by those who have their faith placed in Jesus Christ as their substitution for sin. (Take time to read the entire chapter.) Our personal friends found great consolation in these truths as parents when God called Home their children and His.

For Patsy and I, we look back with rejoicing at the fact that God allowed our paths to cross. As you can see, their deaths have not been in vain.

## Another Detour

Recently we had to make a trip to Mexico. Having made the trip on numerous occasions, we gave little thought to preparations, except to decide on what time we would leave home. After some discussion, we agreed on the hour and allowed a little extra time for “good measure”. The morning of our departure arrived and we left as planned.

Our first stop was for gasoline. While I filled the car, my beloved went inside to pay for the gas. When she came back, she asked how much we had put into the tank. When I said \$22.95, she said that the cashier was adamant that it was \$50.00. Detour # 1 was underway. It took a few minutes to get things rectified, but eventually we were back on the road to Mexico.

After driving for a while, we stopped to eat. Typically, this short order facility was not as “short” as we had expected. I found myself thinking that we were still in good shape to get to Mexicali as per our plans. Detour # 2 was not going to be too much of a setback.

By the time we got to Yuma I was feeling relieved. Utilizing route 98, a shorter route, I could make up any lost time and we would be in Mexicali as planned. That feeling of confidence eroded as I approached the exit and saw the sign, DETOUR. It meant that we had to go almost 30 miles out of the way in California. Realizing that I could do nothing about the situation, I calmly put it into God’s hands. Parking the car in Calexico, crossing the border and catching a taxi went smoothly. We walked into our appointment two minutes before we were due. It was a relief that turned into laughter when we discovered that we had not been properly informed concerning the time of the appointment. We were now 30 minutes early.

Detours are customary. If you could see the streets in our neighborhood just now... they are being resurfaced... you too would have a hundred questions about detours. However, God knows all about the detours that go on in our lives. He ordains them with a purpose. Some of them are of our own making, some are circumstantial, and some are directly instituted of God. However, all of them are under the hand of the Almighty. Elijah fled before Jezebel. (1 Kings 19) Joseph took Jesus to Egypt. (Matthew 2:13 and what follows.) In Acts 28, Paul got detoured to Malta. In each case we see the hand of the Lord in control. There, Paul had an appointment in Rome and nothing would prevent it. While they waited for another ship, miracles were performed; people were healed! Peter’s detour in denying Jesus resulted in the production of a dynamo turning the world upside down.

Refuse to let the detours that come into our lives frustrate us and

cause us to slip “away” from the place of blessing. Re-establish a right relationship and discover why God allowed it in the first place. The Book of 1 John is excellent reading for those times... How about Hebrews 12:1, 2 where we read, *“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us (see Hebrews 11), let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

## Store String

This morning I ran up to the bakery to pick up a few Hot Cross Buns for breakfast. As the lady passed me my change she said, "One moment, I want to tie that box." She wrapped the string around it and in doing so she sent my mind back sixty years.

There was the old grocery store. I mean to tell you, it was old-fashioned. They cut cheese off of those old blocks, had salt-beef in the barrel, dipped butter into thin wooden trays, hooked and caught the cans as they came from the top shelf, wrapped candy in cone shaped papers that they made on the spot, delivered on bicycle, etc. But, my mind was particularly focused on that red and white string that came off of the big roll above. They tied everything with it and then would snap it off with ease. The baker did the same thing this morning.

Those were the days of borderline poverty, but you did not know it. It was an accepted mode of life and so every piece of string was saved, tied together and reused. In particular, I saved mine for flying kites. It meant of course that one had to keep the kite within a certain size in order for the string not to break. Great care was exerted in making the knots secure and yet quite small. There was a reason.

I delighted in sending messages heavenward on that string once the kite was aloft. I wrote my message, slit a hole in the paper and put it over the string. The wind carried it to the kite. I guess I perceived that God would see them better and hear my pleas. It satisfied my young mind, even though when the kite came down the messages were all piled around the loop.

As the string was removed from the box this morning I cut it and threw it into the trash. I thought to myself, "How wonderful to know that I can send my requests directly to God through Jesus Christ my Savior. They do not come back at the end of the day all piled in a heap because the Holy Spirit presents them to the Father through Jesus and each one has His special attention."

Listen once again to Romans 6:26, 27. *"And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."*

I possess One who is the conveyor of my prayers to the Father; He is the Holy Spirit. He does what the store twine could not do.

## Unpredictable Predictables

The sky began to take on the ominous indications that before long we could expect a little excitement. Wind, dust, rain and lightning surrounded us reminding us again, it is monsoon season. We wait for the monsoon season to start each year, but it is in progress for three days before we know for certain that it has actually started in official capacity.

Every year about this time, sometimes earlier and sometimes later, our valley experiences this monsoon activity. I do believe we all look forward to it, although we shudder to think of the damage that can be inflicted, the people affected, and the inconvenience created. However, it usually means a respite at the end of a hot and muggy day.

Possibility and probability are the words that our forecasters will invariably use with every projection of what we can anticipate. Those percentage figures allow for great flexibility. Let's face it; they need that latitude in trying to predict exactly what will probably be taking place. While weather forecasting is a science, there are aspects of this that place limits and restrictions on exactly what part of the valley will be effected and in what manner.

In Matthew 24, verse 3, the disciples asked: *"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* Jesus' response was initially in general terminology. Some will pretend to be Christ, wars and rumors of wars; nation against nation, famines, and earthquakes can be expected. These are not the end (Matthew 24:6), but only the beginning of the end. (Matthew 24:8)

He continued to answer that question, but note the method employed. He gave a sequence of events listed in verses 36, 37, 40 and verse 42. Then the sequence continues, with verses 15, 20 and verse 29 ending the order of events. He simply answered their question.

It is predictable to say that we live in close proximity to the return of Jesus Christ for His own. It is safe to say that we need to be ready for that moment, but it is equally unpredictable as to when that moment will arrive.

We should live in readiness awaiting the invitation to "Come!" The indications are everywhere present that we are, even now, in the midst of unpredictable predictables.

## Ready to Go

I have experienced “indigestion” for four days. Nothing has worked to relieve it and so I finally give in to my wife’s wishes. We arrive at the Emergency Room, which is filled with people, as usual, and after a quick examination, I end in the waiting line for two hours. I guarantee you, it is not like TV! Finally there is the relief of seeing a doctor who, after three or four questions, is on target with his initial diagnosis and subsequent testing that I have had a heart attack and might still be in the process of having one.

We begin a brief conversation and I assure him that, if for any reason I do not make it through this experience, I am ready to “Go Home” and meet my Lord. His reply was something like: “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder you’ll be there.” The next night sometime, my heart stops but is revived; I know little or just tidbits for the next week, although I was conversant from what they tell me. I do recall telling the cardiologist and the surgeon that I was ready to “Go Home” if it was God’s will, so don’t worry about the outcome. I recall Dr. Florendo saying: “You are not going to die on my operating table.” Nine hours after surgery began, and the heart has stopped four times, the surgery is over and I am moved to intensive care. For days it is nip and tuck as they endeavor to stabilize the heart. Eleven days later, I am back home.

Literally, hundreds of our friends and relatives, churches, all entered into prayer vigils. God saw fit to answer those prayers and I gradually crept back from “Going Home”. Dr. Florendo, standing at the foot of my bed, with his hand on my foot said: “Rev! Four times I gave you up to God and four times He sent you back.”

There was no warning in advance about my near “Home Going” or “Graduation” to Glory. We were all surprised; as well one might be who is keeping an above load on a daily basis. But, that is the way it is with most of life... little warning about the presence of the Grim Reaper; Death. One needs to be prepared when life is interrupted by the unexpected. The Prophet Amos said it so simply in 4:12: “Prepare to meet thy God”. Hebrews 9:27 says: “It is appointed unto men to die once and after this comes judgment”.

The 28th verse of Hebrews tells us more about being prepared: “So *Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time*”. God prepared the way for us! Christ bore our sins in His body on Calvary. Christ is returning some day. For you and me it was done. All we can do is confidently say: Thank you Lord for becoming my substitute. After thanking Him, go on living a life filled with faith in Him. It is the way to be prepared to “Go Home”.

## The Orchestra

Sometime ago my wife and I had the opportunity to visit the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. As we sat, my mind temporarily lapsed back to Anchorage, Alaska when I had first seen and heard the Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Eugene Ormandy. Then I recalled how Patsy had presented concerts here in the Foyer of the Academy when she was six and ten years old. When faced with the choice of career as a teenage, she opted for her life what Joshua had done, *“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”* (Joshua 24:15)

Now my attention was on the orchestra. Beautiful! My body was tense with the excitement stirred by the music. How was it possible that such magnificence could be produced? Just a few minutes prior to the beginning of the concert, I had listened to each of these instruments being tuned and playing various exercises — it sounded like anything but organization or listenable music!

Suddenly the first violinist entered the stage. Within a few seconds, a gradual but noticeable change took place. At once, a hush fell over the orchestra and audience. As Ormandy walked onto the stage, you could feel the air change as expectancy charged and filled everyone. The music came sweeping over us. Not one man was doing “his own thing”, yet, each group of instruments played a different part. When all blended together, the beauty of music swept over each soul. The timpani player did very little in one of the numbers, yet he was right there when the several notes he was responsible for were played. I watched with keen interest as he leaned his ear down to the drum to tune it. He alone could hear as he touched and listened to see if his performance would be exact.

A picture was emerging and 1 Corinthians 12 came into view. Each Christian man and woman possesses a gift to be used only to complement the total body of Christ. So doing, harmony exists and though decidedly different, not one person sticks out like a “sore thumb” or follows his own drumbeat. The Master / Director is in control.

The audience was typical. One fellow must have been paid to clap, or else he possibly lacked the intelligence to quit. A gentleman sitting in front of us surely went home with bruised arms from his wife’s gouging to keep him awake. Some folks were in such a hurry to exit, that they did not even take time to clap for the performance so as to avoid the crowd.

The evening was totally enjoyable but a preacher can find a sermon or illustration almost anywhere he goes. Sometimes it involves those who “pull together” and then again, sometimes it involves those who are off on their own tangent. Some lessons? I hope so!

## Register Your Attendance

Here is another of those eye-catching announcements that are projected on the screens of our churches these days. Granted, the registration cards have other information that can be filled in on them, such as prayer and praise items, along with changes of address and phone numbers. They are essential for the “business type of ministries” that is being conducted and they guarantee, when used properly, to keep abreast of the congregation.

The other day, when this announcement appeared, my mind flashed back to that little book, *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I had read it about 30 years ago. Indelibly impressed upon my mind was something that Anne said whenever she went to prayer: “God! This is Anne.” I thought, “She always registered her attendance.”

Have you ever given much thought to the way you “register your attendance” when you go to prayer? I have to admit that when praying with others, I am prone to listen to the manner in which the Lord is addressed. Please do not interpret this as a matter of criticism; it usually reveals our personalities. I do not think I have ever used Anne’s style and said: “God! This is Ted!” However, I sometimes think that it might add some real depth to my prayer life. I also take note of the manner in which I close my prayers and sometimes have to acknowledge that it sounds like: “Well! That is over with; I will dump it in the Savior’s lap with a ‘in Jesus’ Name’.”

That registration card... I have to admit that I did not fill it out, I never do. If I can be there, I am. However, I picked up the Praise and Prayer item from Wednesday night and began to pray through the list that had been made available. Naturally, this list was compiled out of the Registration Card. I knew how many people had been saying: “God! This is \_\_\_\_\_” (In their own personal style.) There was evidence that a personal and intimate relationship had been established with the Lord and that they knew others would share their burdens and blessings.

Sometimes I feel as though, when we arrive in the Sanctuary, we should sit down and say: “God! This is Ted!” And then we should begin praying for the church and its ministry and especially for that particular Service. We used to do that, but now we spend all too much time fellowshiping instead of preparing our hearts and minds for the worship in which we will be participating shortly.

“God! This is Ted. I am registering in. Before I leave, do something very special in this old life.”

## Reverence / Respect

Over the years preachers acquire a variety of “goodies” that people give to them in appreciation for their service to them. One such gift hangs on our wall, catching the attention of each person entering our home. It is a picture of a man reading the Word of God with the aid of an old oil lamp and a pair of “cheaters”.

Ted Tinquist, an artist, lay preacher, pilot, along with a host of other abilities, painted this picture in 1966. While the more popular picture, “Giving Thanks” was drawn in Bovey, Minnesota, this picture was drawn in Cohasset, a short distance away.

In his travels, Ted had encountered an elderly farmer in the Blackberry area. They had become good friends. Ted discovered that this farmer had a ritual that he had performed for years. At the end of each day’s work, he bathed himself, attired himself in his finest clothing and then sat down to read and study the Word of God. For him, there was no other way to display his love and reverence for the Lord and His Word. He had to render to the Lord what he believed would most display his reverence and respect for THE BOOK.

In this era of “casualness” I fear that we have lost the respect that was once felt by all. Hats stay on in restaurants and recently I noticed that someone had to be told to remove theirs when they entered the church. This casualness has resulted in a carry-over into Christian circles and I observe abuse in the house of the Lord. In particular, there is little respect displayed for the Lord -- especially for the Word of God. Because of the many versions that flood our presses and their availability, in my opinion, God’s Word is not always treated properly.

Perhaps a fresh look at Psalm 119 would be fitting. There we find verse after verse emphasizing the value, the respect, and the reverence that one should develop for God’s Word. A verse like Joshua 1:8 needs re-emphasis: *“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”* Again we need to look at 2 Timothy 2:15: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of Truth.”* (NASB)

For almost 35 years that picture has served to remind me of the preciousness of God’s Word and the keenness with which I should approach it and HIM.

## Searching For Nectar

Some things catch our attention more quickly than others do. This happened as I was cleaning up the back yard of our home. As I checked the pond to see that all was clean, I noticed on a lily pad, a honeybee. He moved around the flower as he would with any other flower seeking to find some nectar. Undeterred by his initial “tour de flower”, he continued to search assured in his thinking that surely there must be something on this flower. Alas, he was in for a shock for although all of the flowers on the ground cover were ideal territory for collecting nectar; he had chosen an artificial pad.

In this era of history, the artificial flowers are made to look so real that you want to touch them for confirmation. It feels dumb to comment about someone’s green thumb and then have him say to you, “I bought it at the store. Isn’t it beautiful for an artificial plant?” I wonder how that honeybee felt. I know he helped himself to some water while there, but there was no question as to what he had hoped to find -- nectar.

So much of life is filled with the artificial today. We have been conned into believing what would be the ideal or the best for us. We buy bigger and better toys. We upgrade our homes only to spend less time in them. The kitchens are ultra-modern, but we go out to eat. We run every hour of the day and collapse at the end of it telling ourselves what a good time we had. After countless activities, it gets hard to go to sleep and hard to get up. It is in conflict with the teaching of the Word of God.

It is time to resort to the gold mine of wisdom for direction in life; I refer naturally to the Word of God. Try reading a chapter of Proverbs each day. Before long you will discover that the “wise man”, Solomon, made more sense than the intellects of this hour. Go to the Gospels and see if the patterns of life set down by Jesus Christ do not exceed any philosophy being espoused by modern wisdom. Examine the difference between the early church and what categorizes itself as the church in this hour; you will find it in Acts. If you need comfort, try the Psalms.

Like that honeybee on the artificial lily pad, you might find a drip of water here and there in reading the array of ideas available from secular sources, but the nectar is in the Holy Bible.

# Prayer

We caught the closing portion of the celebration in Washington D.C. on the evening of July 4th since entertaining a family and friends made it impossible to view the entire program. But relaxing for a few minutes after our guests had left was quite enjoyable. The MC of the program began to express his appreciation for the evening and the participants. Suddenly he paused, looked toward Heaven and said: “And we thank You for holding up the rain.”

I have heard people say: “And we want to thank the Lord for holding up the rain”, but this gentleman looked up and made his address directly to the Lord. It was as refreshing as it would have been after a downpour.

Often people promise to pray for us and we never know if they followed through. I have listened to our news reporters use that type of expression for multiplied reasons, including our servicemen, but often wonder just what type of prayer actually was presented to the Lord.

It is not uncommon to watch athletes bow their knees in humility following an exceptional play on the playing field. We are tempted to challenge the mentality genuineness of these displays: yet, what right do we have to judge the authenticity of motive?

In Mark 6:41, 42, our Lord *“took the five loaves and the two fish, and, looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves. He continued giving the baskets to the disciples to set before the people and He divided up the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied.”* “He looked up” is utilized by many of us to catch the idea of God occupying a place above us. Without getting into a discussion of the location of Heaven, let us be reminded that Jesus was resurrected and then “caught up” to ascension glory. (Acts 1:9-11)

I repeat the phrase to people almost daily – “Keep looking up!” It is a good direction to look figuratively or literally. In particular, there is the aspect of focusing our attention toward the God of Glory, the resurrected Christ, and pray and praise Him for His love and concern toward us.

It is one thing to talk about prayer and express our belief in it, but it is another thing to PRAY! When Jesus looked up and prayed, God showered His blessing and the morsels of food became abundant.

## Gone Fishing!

I am not the greatest fisherman in the world and I am far from addicted to it like some individuals; however, I do enjoy digging out the tackle box on occasion. As a child I spent much time fishing from “de rocks”, (as we would say in Bermuda) and enjoyed that tug on the line from various types of fish. Quite frequently, there was the excitement of sharks giving us a good run.

In the last few years, our granddaughter has taken up the urge to go fishing. Together we have accumulated a variety of fishing gear and have managed to do a bit of fishing here and there. Our prowess has enabled us to catch a few fish, with our biggest catches about the same size. We enjoy catching and releasing, so we take a picture and put it on our cell phones for comparison in the future.

I have expected to hear her say to me sometime: “Pop! Let’s call it quits and go home.” It has not happened yet. She has the marks of an avid fisherman in her future. If I say: “Cami! Maybe we ought to hang it up for the day”, she will usually say: “If you think so, Pop.”

What has amazed me the most about our fishing episodes is her patience. She is not one to run from place to place in her endeavors to catch fish. She is a plodder, trying another lure or switching to live bait. Only once has she come home without having caught something that day. Sometimes I have had to say to our fair skinned teenager: “You know! It is just too hot out here. Those fish are going to be at the bottom of the lake.” I imagine them to be like me when it gets too hot... just supply me with lots of liquids.

This business of fishing is an excellent method to learn how to be patient. We share about the scenery, the fish, the weather, and about the Lord. When we fish from the dock of a friend’s home, you can count that food will become a part of the fishing experience that day. She has to join us and enjoy the time with us.

A challenge to our patience is when we observe fish ignoring our baited hook. We sometimes pull the bait directly in front of them only to have them totally ignore our efforts. They cannot be enticed.

My personality is one of “go, go”. I have a hard time accepting the truth of a verse of Scripture such as: *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* (Psalm 46:10) Nevertheless, our granddaughter’s behavior is having a positive effect on this old man.

James had some instructions to the believers about being patient: *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You, too, be patient; strengthen your hearts,*

*for the coming of the Lord is near.*” (James 5:7, 8 NASB) Peter said: add *“to temperance patience.”* (2 Peter 1:6)

A verse that has long blessed my soul is: *“Now the God of patience and consolation”*. (Romans 15:5) How God has been so patient with humanity over these thousands of years is mystifying. Man has given little attention to his Creator, his Sustainer, his Savior, his Redeemer, his only hope for eternity; yet, God has been patient. What we do not know is when that patience will be exhausted.

The patience of God was exhausted in the days of Noah. Destruction came in the form of the *Flood*. When God’s patience is exhausted in the immediate future, the World will be destroyed by *Fire*. Learn the art of being patient; more importantly, do so in light of the “God of patience” returning shortly.

## Out of Breath

My beloved wife continues to fight that miserable disease for years called COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). She knows the frustration of struggling for breath. Her particular condition requires that she use an inhaler every 4 hours throughout the day, as well as other treatments. It is no easy task to endeavor to get rid of the mucus that builds in her system in spite of the most modern medicines. I must inject that in forty years I have never heard her complain.

Conversing on the subject of COPD, I recall her saying on one occasion that the most agonizing moments in dealing with this disease is when she hears another struggling for breath. It is in that experience that she struggles to breathe. There is much identification with an individual agonizing for a breath of fresh air. Often I watch her go to a window, open it, and stand there taking breaths of fresh air to assist her in acquiring sufficient air and oxygen to help stabilize her situation.

One of the most significant marvels of God's creative work was when He *"breathed into man the breath of life"*. What a wonderful display of His greatness... *"man became a living soul"*.

In John 20:22, we are told that the Lord breathed on His disciples and said: *"Receive ye the Holy Spirit."* At the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit of God **breathes** upon a man **and continues to indwell him**.

Sometimes I am prone to believe that we as Christians have run out of breath. We have programs and we consider them as indicative of a solid ministry, but one has to wonder if we have programs and promotions without indication of the Holy Spirit at work in individual's lives. A man once said: "We are trying to draw out what is not in them. What is down in the well comes up in the bucket — there is no love for Christ, His church, and His work in the hearts of our people. They cannot exhale if they have not already inhaled."

Have we run out of breath? We need a fresh touch of the Breath of Life Himself. We need to fill our lungs instead of being satisfied with gasps here and there. As you fill those lungs with a fresh breath from God, you will find the full benefits of the Holy Spirit's ministry in you and through you.

J. B. Philips said that the church today is "fat and out of breath and so organized it is muscle-bound". His observation was and is justified; purpose that you are not to be included. Breathe deeply!

## God's Waiting Room

In our retirement community, we have our own repertoire of jokes that make the rounds on a consistent basis. Most of them have to do with our age and its accompanying limitations. I often remark to folk that my memory is getting worse, but my exercise program, as a result, is improving dramatically.

When the retired Navy officer told me that he had moved here only to discover that he was in "God's waiting room", it created a little chuckle from me. It has been repeated by many over the years.

Yesterday, my wife was encountering some problems, so off we went to the ER at the hospital. There were the hours of waiting as tests were performed, but it was not without ample entertainment. The array of maladies was without duplication. Some accepted the delays stoic-like; others accepted the ambulance interruptions with quiet decorum; others were disgruntled and were convinced that they were important enough to warrant immediate attention; then there are always the conversationalists which can liven up everyone. As you know, we old timers have a way of speaking our minds and because our hearing is not what it used to be, everybody gets in on the conversation. As one couple was leaving, the 90 year-old gentleman was heard to say, "Enjoy the entertainment!"

Life in this "waiting room" is much the same as what that old seaman described it years ago. Our world, our waiting room, like Israel as described by Isaiah in chapter 1 is: *"a sinful nation... a people of iniquity... an offspring of evildoers... corrupt... the head is sick and the whole heart is faint... sores from head to feet... bruised, welted, wounded..."* Like Israel, we are desperately in need of a spiritual Doctor. We are going to abandon this ship in one fashion or the other. We are going to enter eternity future via the grave or in the rapture. We are going to eternal rewards or eternal condemnation. The determining factor is what have we done with the person of Jesus Christ, the Son, the Savior, the promised Messiah, the Redeemer? He is the spiritual Doctor that alone can care for this sin-sick society.

As much as one might find disagreement with the method that God has chosen to fit us for the Kingdom of Heaven, through faith in His Son Jesus, the Creator of mankind retains the right of the method of our Salvation. He has ordained that:

*"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5) "And there is Salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)*

We go to an ER waiting room because a problem needs treatment. In the process of waiting for the day when we shall be ushered out of this life and into an eternity future for blessing or condemnation, it is advisable to get the proper treatment... *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”* (Acts 16:31)

# Freedom

I had read in the paper that the Viet Nam Wall (Portable Version) was coming to our area and would be at Freedom Plaza for a few days. I knew we were not about to miss the opportunity to visit it.

With mixed emotions, I went to our neighbor, Marty, and said: "If you would like to visit the Nam Wall with Patsy and me, we will plan to go on Saturday afternoon. It will be there until Sunday. Don't give me an answer today."

Marty had served in the Navy in the Korean War then he re-enlisted, this time in the U.S. Army. His tour of service took him to Vietnam where he was taken as a prisoner of war. To this day he suffers with many of the scars of the atrocities experienced as a POW.

It became impossible for me to go on Saturday, so, Sunday afternoon I walked over and said: "Marty! Is it go or stay?" I have been with him in difficult times of flash-backs, etc. so I was not about to push. His response was impulsive. "I am going."

When we arrived, he insisted that he wanted to walk. We knew he needed a wheel-chair and, after some walking, he agreed. People began to thank him for his service to our country. It continued throughout our time there. As we walked the wall, a serviceman asked specifically: "What are you looking for?" "Hamburger Hill" and Marty gave the dates. The man took out a piece of paper and a crayon and rubbed the first name Marty gave him. As we read through the list, I heard him saying: "I knew he was missing in action but I never knew he had died that day." He gave me their "nick" names and I began rubbing names into the paper.

It became one of the most meaningful experiences I have encountered over the years. He was glad he went, even though he struggled with some mental ups and downs in the days that followed.

Reading through John 8, picking up at verse 31, we read that some had believed and followed Jesus. They were assured by Him that, if they continued to follow, they would "*know the truth, and truth would make you free.*" Freedom comes from a willingness to be a disciple. As one follows the Lord, he will have the truth confirmed. He will move from a slave to sin to emancipation. "*If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*" (John 8:36)

We have freedom because the "Marty's" went on our behalf. We have freedom from enslavement to sin because Jesus fought the battle at Calvary and won the victory. He cried: "It is finished!" His resurrection is testimony to God's acceptance of His sacrifice. And what need we do? The key is in the 30th verse of John 8... "*many came to believe in Him.*" The *Truth* and *Freedom* is the greatest experience for a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## The Long Way Home

When someone recently requested a story about sailing, it took only a few seconds to recall and recount the following.

Our family had been vacationing in a cottage on a lake in Minnesota that was offered to us by a friend. It was one of the few vacations we took in those days. A sailboat was available to us and sailing has always been a particular enjoyment.

Two of our children joined me in our adventure as we hoisted sail and headed out on the lake; we were one of probably eight to ten sail boats. A nice breeze kept us tacking quite a distance from home, knowing full well that with the speed we were moving, it would be a reasonably quick trip back.

Without warning, a severe storm swept upon us and our little boat began to do its “thing”. Around us, every sail boat had capsized. A straight run for home, which was the favorable wind direction, was the shortest route. However, this was impractical. The low configuration of the boat and the massive sail was simply pulling us under. Adjustments had to be made.

Meanwhile, my wife and son were watching the episode through binoculars. She said simply... “Dad will bring it home without capsizing.”

Shifting our tactics, we nosed into the wind and away from home; all the while the children were torn between a mixture of fright and excitement. Finally, almost at the other end of the lake we swung “about” and headed for home with our sails slackened and still plowing into the wind. It was not the norm for speed, but it sufficed instead of a capsized sail boat.

In fifty years of ministering God’s Word, our family has often experienced God’s round-about methods of getting us to the place of His choosing. The shortest routes were not always favorable, nor were they practical. We had to be patient and obedient. Sometimes, we had to go places that we would not have chosen from a human standpoint; other times, we were offered multiplied opportunities and had to sort through choices. Now and then circumstances seemed favorable and at other times unfavorable.

We are no different than you. Occasionally, our times can be “long-suffering”, as Peter describes them in his Epistle; at other times they are “immediate”. It is our lot to study the Hand of the Lord in our experiences and to move one step at a time with the confidence that God’s way is perfect. While enroute, the best route may be the long route.

Proverbs 3:5, 6 - *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.”*

## Following with Confidence

I left my wife at the church door and went to park the car. My last statement was: "Take a seat on the right, I will find you."

Several factors make this "ritual" a must in my thinking. First, she is and will always remain a lady and will be treated so. Second, because of her COPD, I try to get her as close to limited walking as possible in weather that is not conducive to her condition. Third, I love her and try to do as much as possible to display that to her at all times.

Having parked the car and entered the sanctuary, I walked toward the area in which I was confident I could find her. Before my focusing process was in high gear, an usher about a third of the way down the aisle waved at me to follow him. I cannot say that I knew him, so I hesitated, and began to look for my wife. Again he indicated that I should go his direction, so half-heartedly I was looking at him and trying to spot my wife. For the third time he beckoned me to follow him. By now I was convinced that everyone was watching the non-verbalized communication between us. I was determined to sit with Patsy and not have to get up and retrace my steps. The thought kept pounding in my brain: "Would you please let me look over this mass of humanity and I will shortly be able to do my thing." He was determined to do his job. Rather than cause a scene, I succumbed and followed. He led me directly to a seat and placed me next to his wife and the most beautiful lady in the sanctuary, my wife.

Later he said: "You did not think I knew you or your wife. I did! I also knew where she was and what you desired. You just had to trust me." And, I added in my think tank, "to walk by faith".

We all struggle to walk by faith. There is that feeling of "I know what I am doing Lord, just leave me alone and I will work it out." Yet, we are constantly reminded how the great heroes of faith walked in holy anticipation dependent only on the promises of God. When reading Hebrews 11 we see a vivid portrayal of a gaze that was entrenched in a fixation on Jesus. Verse 13 sums it up: *"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."*

What type of faith: A faith that sees God and worships Him; a faith that embraces the end of this life as the beginning and walks in light of that reality; a faith that obeys the instructions given for life, whether they are clearly understood or not; a faith that offers oneself up to God in sacrifice, believing that such a sacrifice is the guarantee of "things to come"; a faith that says the "cost" or investment is a profitable one; a faith that sees all current things as but part and parcel to that moment when perfection will prevail.

Lord, I know so little of that FAITH WALK. Help me to learn it, to live it, to long for it.

## Peacefulness and Peace

My initial thought was “Peace!” The early hour allowed for perfect stillness on the water before me; the dawn of morning was arriving and the skies, with their varying colors, were magnificent. Quietness seemed to be the rule of the hour.

The longer I stood looking and listening, it became apparent that in those seemingly perfect moments, other things had been transpiring that I had conveniently blocked mentally. I now began to hear cars and trucks in the distance. There was the roar of a motorcycle, and the sound of a boat a distance up the lake began to penetrate the quietness and stillness. Life was going at a full clip for those in the “neighborhood” while I was seated in a most tranquil setting. I wondered concerning their mental attitudes in comparison to that which I was enjoying. Was it the setting that made the difference?

Frequently over the years, I have experienced the frustrations that accompany just living day by day. They have been physical, mental, spiritual and emotional. Yet, I was able in those situations to experience the peace of God. Sometimes, I took a little longer to commit them to the Lord and rest in His Promises, but always I found that *“peace that passeth understanding”*. (Philippians 4:7) God does not make mistakes and each situation becomes a stepping stone to a deeper walk with Him; I gained confidence in His sovereignty.

It became obvious that I was resting in our wonderful Lord and not the things that surround us. Peacefulness might surround us momentarily, but peace is that restfulness of the soul that comes from knowing that God is in control. Though the tempests of life may rage, God already stands on the next page. It is not like the peace that the world offers; His is a peace that stands in contrast to what the world might desire. It is the type of peace that gives confidence like that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. God can deliver us from every fire, but “if not”, our faith in Him and commitment to Him remains unchanged. (Daniel 3)

As Jesus prepared for His departure from the earth, He promised to give us a peace that was not like that of the world. (John 14) It surpasses peacefulness because it provides for us to rest with the Holy Spirit indwelling us. The whirlwinds, the tornadoes, the hurricanes, the earthquakes or tsunamis of life are not to be compared to His indwelling presence. His promises, found throughout the Holy Scriptures, allow us to enjoy special comfort in the midst of multiplied upheavals. His purpose for our life turns bearable situations into blessing. The *“valley of the shadow”* (Psalm 23) leaves no doubt that we can rise above the circumstances and negative situations. While the setting may enhance that ability, it is the confidence that we find in Jesus that provides peace. He is sufficient for every situation and every occasion. “It is well with my soul”; is it yours?

## Appearances

The traffic was typical of a Sunday afternoon on Route 93 just north of Wickenburg. It was hectic! It was bumper-to-bumper as far as we could see in both directions and all were travelling at 65 M.P.H.

There he stood in the southbound lane with everyone endeavoring to maneuver around him. It appeared that the inevitable would happen sooner or later, with someone either running off the road or running into another vehicle. I made my decision and maneuvered as quickly as possible and then wondered who would bring this ridiculous escapade to an end. Was it defiance or was it fear that kept him positioned to create such havoc? It was impossible to tell what he was thinking, but his appearance made us feel that it was defiance that made it happen. I speak of a large tarantula.

When fixing our attention of those furry creatures, we cannot help but feel that they are just daring us to come close. Tell me why in the world we were all taking unnecessary risks to avoid one quick squash with the tire.

There is something about their appearance that makes you want to avoid any type of confrontation; no matter what the circumstances. Being the nature that I am, I found it undesirable to be the one to “write him off”. Surely, there must be a “springboard” in all of this I thought! There was and there is.

It is uncertain in my thinking how a tarantula could be made to look different and yet have an appealing look to him. However, I know that if I take off, *“immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these”* (Galatians 5:19cf), it will not take long for people to observe the positive action involved and know that a transformation of God’s grace has been enacted. But more takes place under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God. I begin to put on the *“fruit of the Spirit”* mentioned in verse 22 and the verses that follow. Namely, I put on the *“fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”*. My work is cut out for me and the enabling for such action will come only as I invite Jesus Christ to take control of my life and the Spirit of God to help me to that end.

Together, let us put-off things that distract and cause people to wonder from where we are coming. Rather, let us clothe ourselves with Christ-likeness and avoid unnecessary tragedies to others lives.

## Estrango

Adrian, our guide, asked: “Do you see that palm tree in the middle of the other tree? That is what we call an estrango.” I needed a little more explanation than that, for the tree on the outside of the palm was well in excess of 100 feet across and had the appearance of having been there an awfully long time.

“The palm was there first, but over here to the left you will see a tree similar to the one that surrounds the palm. In all probability, the birds must have taken a seed from the one on the left, carried it to the top of the palm and deposited it. It will take as long as seven years for that seed to work its way to the bottom of the palm through the center. Finally it will start to grow. Over the years it will begin to choke the palm until it dies. It strangles it; estrango.”

You guessed it. My mind was in gear thinking of the long-range effects of sin deposited in the hearts of men and women. That little bird carried that seed that lay in the interior of a palm tree for approximately seven years before it hit the soil, and immediately began to grow. That natural outgrowth, protected for years by the palm, began the process of developing into a monstrosity that would bring ultimate doom to the palm; estrango.

That cute little one that has all the appearance of innocence has been born in sin. He or she is hidden in the heart the seed of sin that, given time, will begin to manifest itself... unrestrained, undisciplined, and uncontrolled. If that one invites Jesus into his or her heart and life, all the identities of sin's presence will begin to manifest itself and the process of “estrango” will be obvious. The things of the world, the flesh and the Devil are there; bit by bit they endeavor to solidify themselves, gain ascendancy and so control that once cute and innocent one.

It would be beneficial for us to consider a passage of Scripture like that of Jeremiah 17:9; “*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?*” David said that: “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*” (Psalm 51:5) David pleads in the tenth verse of that same chapter: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*”

The totality of Scripture shows us the manner in which sin chokes us. It also shows us the method by which it can be subdued. The perfect One, Jesus Christ, invited into the individual's life, does more than just clean up the heart. God gives us a heart to know Him. (Jeremiah 24:7) The new birth of John 3:3, 5 puts us into God's family, with a longing of heart to know Him and grow in Him. Never allow “estrango” to take over your life.

# Repentance

My mind was drifting hither and yon as the Pastor was preaching on the subject of “Repentance”. The subject was excellent, inasmuch as we would be celebrating the Lord’s Supper in just a few minutes. There is need for repentance for a man to enter the kingdom of God, (Luke 13:5) but there is also a need for repentance on the part of the people of God. God’s message to the Seven Churches of Revelation 2 and 3 amplify this point. But where was my brain engaged?

I was back to my late childhood, maybe 10 or 11 years of age. World War II was in full swing. Bermuda, because of its strategic location off the coast of the United States, was a fortress. Every branch of Service in the U.S., Canada and England, had bases and camps on this 23 square miles of land. In addition there were the local contingents. Even the children were incorporated into The Bermuda Cadet Corps.

In the Corps we learned the art of defense of our island. We helped to dig trenches next to our school. In the eventuality of an air raid; we learned the necessity of carrying a monstrous 303 and crawling through the fields of carrots, potatoes and onions should the day come that the youngest of us would have to help defend our little island.

Our instructor was a man by the name of Harley Barnes. He was in the Bermuda Volunteer Rifle Corp. By relationship he also happened to be my “cousin”. We would “drill” until it seemed that the entire war depended on us. Up and down the ball field, “left, right, left right”, accompanied by all the other turns.

This past Sunday morning in the middle of the sermon, I heard, loud and clear, Harley Barnes shouting: “Squaaaaaad, HALT!” I smiled! No one else had heard it, of course, but Harley continued: “Abouuuuuut, Face!” It was the idea incorporated in the word “repentance”.

For a man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven there comes a time of necessity when he must HALT, and ABOUT FACE! Except he takes such action, he will continue on the downward trek to Hell; a direction he is already headed. He must embrace the Christ life! Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind, must become his Savior and Lord. He must become the One to whom he turns! His course of direction must be reversed.

Harley said: “Halt! About face!” Jesus said: “*Except you repent you shall perish!*” Those words should be ringing in your ears and in your heart. They should be sufficiently loud to create positive action toward the God of all eternity and toward His Son, Jesus!

## A Thot of Thots

Every person is in need of salvation. That's the reason that Jesus came to this earth. He said: *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10) You will never be saved until you acknowledge that you are lost.

We need salvation because we are sinners. *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."* (Romans 5:12) *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23)

Because we can do nothing to free ourselves from sin, God took upon Himself that responsibility. He sent His Son, Jesus, to be the perfect sacrifice, doing for us what we could not do. *"God demonstrated His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."* (Romans 5:8, 9) *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but the world should be saved through Him."* (John 3:16, 17) *"For there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, The Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all..."* (1 Timothy 2:5, 6)

What then must we do in light of what God has done? *Act in faith upon what He has done. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:12, 13) *"And after He brought them out, he said, 'Sir, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household'."* (Acts 16:30, 31) *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

In prayer thank Him, that while you were lost, He saw your need. Praise Him that He made a way for you to be saved from your sin. Prayerfully invite Him to enter and transform your life as you, in faith, trust Him to be your Savior and Lord.

If you fail to acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are without salvation and hope for eternity. *"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters, and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."* (Revelation 21:8)

Jesus distinguished between these two groups. The choice is yours. *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."* (John 3:36)

## In Sync

Every morning a group of geese leave the lake in Youngtown and head for the various lakes and ponds on our golf courses. I often watch them as they make their flight; however, I don't observe long enough to see the transition of the lead goose dropping to the rear and allowing another to assume the front position. Though I may never have observed this, I know it to be a fact.

As we entered the port of Ixtapao in Mexico, we observed hundreds of pelicans scattered on the shoreline, floating on the water, and even crowding the decks of the boats that were moored in the area. (I can imagine the owners of those boats and their frustration with what was left behind.) In particular, while we studied these birds, we saw a group of six headed toward this birding area. A little later, we saw another six cut across the bow of our cruise liner, intent on joining those hundreds of birds. Each group formed a single line. I thought, these pelicans are much like the geese that fly in formation. I had hardly thought this when the front bird dropped to the back. Was this a fluke or do they do it all the time?

In the work of God there is need for leadership. However, there are times when a true leader has to step aside and let another take the lead. Leadership involves knowing the spiritual gifts of the brethren in the fellowship and seeking their advice; none of us have the ability to be sufficiently diverse to bat a 1000. But God has promised spiritual gifts to the "body" (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4) to adequately prepare us "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12)

I recall so vividly the Elders in a church of which I was the pastor, the under-shepherd of the flock. There was one elder who seldom said anything. We once faced a most important decision and most expressed themselves. Then, one of the brothers called him by name and asked: "What do you think?" When he finished, the brothers unanimously voted to go with him. They knew in their hearts that this brother was indeed a leader and deserved unanimous support. We all felt comfortable and confident of his leadership on this matter. We fell in line!

In our modern mega-church society, our self-appointed prophets, and our entertainment centered services, there is need to visit the Word of God and refresh our thinking concerning the functioning structure of the body. There is benefit in regarding "one another as more important than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3) For special blessing, read that entire chapter. The way up is down.

By the way, you will never fly in formation and sync until Jesus is your Lord and your Savior.