

1

.....

Sing the songs, sit in the pews, have faith-what else is there to do as a Christian? 2 Peter 1:5-7 provides a game plan for what's next. "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith..." Faith placed accurately in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the cornerstone upon which the reality of who we are to be as a Christian is constructed. It provides the foundation upon which the structure is to be built. It is the beginning, not the end. 2 Peter 1:5-7 gives us building materials- "...virtue,...knowledge, ...temperance, ...patience, ...godliness,...brotherly kindness,...charity". Then, in 2 Peter 1:8, a promise is given- "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." If you truly have faith in Christ, then the land is cleared and the foundation is laid. Now it's time to start building the house. It's time to become a "Faith-plus" Christian.

CHALLENGE: Search out the building material listed above. Set your heart on utilizing these materials in your daily life. Seek God's help in doing so.

2

They all heard. God did not leave them without the opportunity to know. 2 Peter 2:5 refers to Noah as a "preacher of righteousness". That means they heard. They heard the warnings of impending judgement. They heard the warnings that their actions were in direct opposition to God. They heard, and they chose not to listen. In Luke 17:26, Jesus is recorded saying "...as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man." People will hear and most will not listen. They didn't listen to Noah. Many rejected Christ's words. But some listened to Him. And we never know when someone will listen to us. For that very reason, we must keep proclaiming the gospel. One of the worst things we could do is stop. You never know when that seed that you offer will hit fertile ground.

3

.....

After 100 meters of independent running, the time had to come to pass the baton. No longer enough to just make sure the baton was secure in his hand, the contestant must now make sure that it was passed carefully to the next teammate. With focus, the two come near each other and perform a flawless exchange. The baton is now in the hand of the next member and they are off to run their 100m. When done correctly, the baton switch can seem effortless, but it is not achieved that way. Months of practice and attention to detail must be followed through with focus and carefulness in order to create a seamless delivery. In 1 Peter 3:11, God's Word tells us that, as children of God, teammates in this race, we are to "...seek peace, and ensue (pursue) it." In Ephesians 4:3, it says again that we should endeavor (meaning to make effort/use speed) to "...keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In Hebrews 12:14, we read that we are to "Follow (pursue) peace with all men...". Sometimes we can make the mistake of thinking peace is something that just happens in the Christian race. But just like the passing of the baton in a relay race, it takes practice, focus, and attention to detail in our personal walk to allow it to occur. Our coach has much He can teach us

concerning a "seamless delivery" between each one of us but we have to listen. We do not have to be the reason the baton falls to the ground. As it says in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

CHALLENGE: In all your interactions, chose peace. Seek God for the skills you may need to focus on to help bring that to pass.

4

.....

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven." The first of the beatitudes, found in Matthew 5. A treasure trove of if/then promises straight from the lips of Jesus. If you do this, then this will happen. It is as if our Savior is handing us key after key and, with each one, telling us exactly which door it will open. In this case, the door opens to the kingdom of heaven, a place we all would like to make our eternal home. That is the reward, so what is the key? "Blessed are the poor in spirit...". Jesus spoke again and again in the gospels as to how he came to help those who realized they needed help. In Revelations 3:16-17, Jesus tells the church at Laodicea that he will "...spue thee out of my mouth..." all because they no longer recognized their need. One of our greatest battles can often be just simply recognizing how much we need Jesus. It seems so absurd but it often is the impediment to a victorious life in Christ. The minute we truly recognize our need and confess it to Jesus, we open the flood gates of heaven to work in our life. As it says in Psalms 72:12, "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth...". How are you approaching the Lord today? Are you coming with your string of successes? Or are you coming confessing your need? Open up the floodgates of Heaven. Humbly acknowledge your need of Christ in every part of your life. Blessings are waiting!

CHALLENGE: Look back over your life. Consider all the times that you have needed Christ. Remember "...the pit whence you are digged."-Isaiah 51:1. Open up to the Lord and tell Him just how much you need Him.

5

.....

J.E. Rankin wrote "Are you weary, are you heavy hearted? Tell it to Jesus! Tell it to Jesus!" Simple advice that yields wonderful blessings...when it is followed. But then you have the words written by Joseph Scriven - "O what peace we often forfeit, o what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer". In this world, it can be so hard to find a listening ear, someone who will hear you out. Not waiting to get the next word, not trying to tell you everything you need to do to fix your problem. Just...listening. Psalms 34:15 tells us that "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry". I Peter 5:7 instructs us to cast all our cares on him because "...he careth for you". What a blessing to know that we have a Lord who will listen. Hebrews 4:15 says "...we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities...". C.W. Naylor and Clara Brooks wrote "Just to know that he knows, that my Lord understands, and his look of compassion to see, soothes the pain in my heart, is a balm for my wounds, bringing comfort and peace unto me". What is it that you haven't told the Lord? What is it that you are just carrying? Oh, maybe you've mentioned it a time or two, but you haven't really just sat (or knelt) down and told him all about it. Why are you waiting? What is the sense of carrying that burden one more day without sharing it with Jesus. He stands

ready and waiting to hear you out. As J.E. Rankin wrote "You've no other such a friend or brother, tell it to Jesus alone!"

CHALLENGE: Consider the things that are on your mind. Are you just mentioning their existence to the Lord? Right now, stop just mentioning it to the Lord. Tell him all about it. Everything. Don't leave anything out. His ears are open to YOUR cry.

6

.....

In the world we live in today, it seems there is almost a prerequisite that we are a fan of something. A sports team, some Hollywood persona, or any of the other numerous options presented in our world today. It seems like such an innocent thing, in part because we have lost the identity of the word "fan". The word "fan" is a modern day shortened version of fanatic. Just identifying fan with its root word already gives a much stronger and less palatable flavor to our senses. Many people who proudly proclaim they are a "fan" of something or someone, would deny being "marked by excessive enthusiasm and often intense, uncritical devotion". However, by definition, that is the meaning of the word fanatic, from which we have the word fan. Looking in the New Testament, we don't have to read far before we come across a fanatic. His name was Peter. From the beginning of his relationship with Jesus, it is evident that Peter was not just going to be a casual observer. He was the one who proudly proclaimed Jesus was "the Christ" when the rest of the general population was saying he was "John the Baptist...Elias...Jeremiah, or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:16). Peter was not just going to stay in the boat when he saw his hero out walking on the water. "Lord, if it be you bid me come to thee" (Matthew 14:28). It was also Peter who took our Lord aside to correct him when he heard Jesus say that soon he would

be suffering under the hand of the elders, chief priests, and scribes (Matthew 16:21-22). Peter couldn't even take his hero himself saying anything bad about his hero. Peter was definitely a passionate fan of Christ, and many times it got him in trouble. Just consider the result of many of his passionate outbursts. Most of the time, it involved the Lord having to correct Peter in some way. But through it all, Jesus molded Peter to a place where Peter was ready to preach the first three messages we have recorded of the new testament church (see the Acts of the Apostles). Don't waste your fanhood on the things of this world. Give it all to Christ and see where he can take you. Great things await in the Lord.

CHALLENGE: Consider what it means to be a fan in this world. Consider the amount of money, time, and passion a fan expends on the object of his affection. Consider how much a fan of this world talks about their team, star, or mogul. Be a fan of Christ.

7

.....

In the year of 1000 AD, it is estimated that 310 million people were alive in the world. While we don't know much about the citizens of this world at that time, there is one thing we know is true of every single one of them. They all lived. They all died. Not too much different from what is going on in our world today. Many more people live in the world today compared to the year 1000, but still that one truth remains. We ALL live. We ALL die. None of us stay here forever. We are each only given a certain amount of days to be on this earth. The question is, how are we using them? Are we spending our days trying to stay alive? Or are we spending our days living? In John 10:10, Jesus said that He came to give us life more abundant. Matthew 16:25 quotes Jesus saying "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." Do you seem to be having trouble finding life more abundant? Maybe you are trying too hard to preserve ... your life. In the 25th chapter of Matthew, Jesus tells us the story of the man who gave three of his servants each a varying amount of talents. The first two put the talents to work and had something to show when the master returned. "Well done!" the master said and he gave them even more. The third servant buried his talent out of fear. Let's just say that was a bad decision. His master was wroth and sent him away empty handed, removing even the one talent

the servant had buried, trying to preserve, giving it instead to the one that seemed to have so much already. Are you burying your talent, just trying to stay alive? Or are you living each day to serve your master, ready to do his bidding, reveling in life more abundant? Consider the words of a fellow sojourner, a precious child of God who, in his suffering, said "He has given me my first breath, I will give Him my last".

CHALLENGE: Don't live today worrying about the 'what ifs'. Give those to the Lord. Seek His will for this day. Throw yourself whole hearted into it. "This is the day that the Lord has made... Rejoice, and be glad in it!!!!" (Psalms 118:24) Live the life more abundant!!

"What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, SINCE Jesus came into my heart! And I'm happy, so happy as onward I go, SINCE Jesus came into my heart!" -R.H. McDaniel.

"Oh, what a wonderful, wonderful day! A day I shall NEVER forget! After I wondered in darkness away, JESUS, my SAVIOUR, I met!...Shadows dispelling, with JOY I am telling HE made ALL the darkness depart!"-J.W. Peterson.

Paul, inspired by God, wrote to the church at Ephesus (Ephesians 2:1-7) telling them that previously they were children of darkness, lost in their sins, doomed to face the wrath of God with no hope. Then he says, "But God...". What a wonderful change happens in the next three verses. The poor, hopeless ones have now been transformed by the power of His grace and mercy to new life, raised up to sit in heavenly places IN Christ Jesus. No longer doomed to face the wrath of God, they now live daily to see "the exceeding riches of his GRACE in his KINDNESS towards us through Christ Jesus". I.D. Ogden wrote "If I could only tell him as I know him, My Redeemer who has brightened all my way. If I could tell how precious is his presence, I am sure that you would make Him yours today"

Thank the Lord! He IS the game changer! Do you know Him? Let Him be the "Gamechanger" in your life. He has not come that we should stumble in darkness, but that we may have new life in Him. Let Him show you daily the difference He can make in your life.

CHALLENGE: Remember the moment your life was changed. Remember the difference it made when He came into your heart. Remember he has raised you up to to show you "His GREAT riches" -Eph. 2:7. Follow Him today and let Him be the "Gamechanger" in your life.

9

.....

Is there a busier job than being a waiter? Constantly on their feet, moving back and forth, attending to the desires of that one upon whom they are waiting. It is easy to read verses such as Psalms 27:14 and then have the impression that God is calling his people to inaction. However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, our times of greatest waiting should be the times that, just like the good waiter, we are more focused than ever on attending to the desires of our King. Many times, that is his purpose in telling us to wait, that we renew our attention on those things that matter most. Can you imagine a waiter who was outside his place of employment checking out traffic flow? Or maybe one who was spending his time watching the cook? There would be a need for someone to redirect his attention to where it should be. Psalms 37:7 says to "...wait patiently for him (the Lord)" and not to be distracted by things going on around us. Later in that same Psalm, the writer says "Wait on the Lord, and keep his way..." (34th verse). It appears the Lord has a purpose in telling us to wait, and the purpose is not inaction. Rather his purpose is to redirect our attention to the appropriate focus of our actions...Him. Remember where he spoke to the church

in Revelations 2:4 saying "...I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love". They were busy with things that appeared important, but they had lost their focus. Lord help us to attend to that which matters most. Lord help us to be "A Good Waiter."

CHALLENGE: Isaiah 40:31 says "... they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint". Renew your strength today. Wait ... upon the Lord. Let Him be the focus of your day.

10

"Let not your heart be troubled..." John 14:1. Consider the situation of the disciples when Jesus spoke these words to them. The one who had "kept them in [God's] name" (John 17:12) was about to leave them. Consider all the miracles they had witnessed him perform. He even raised people from the dead. They must have felt invincible with Him. How would it be when He was gone? Besides that, He was their friend and their hearts were sad (John 16:6). And now Jesus is telling them to not let it trouble their hearts. How were they supposed to accomplish that? The Greek word that is translated as troubled in this passage is defined as "to stir or agitate, i.e. roil (churn up) water". How were they to keep their hearts still when the waters of the world around them were becoming more and more tempestuous, with waves that were only growing in depth and magnitude? With all that in mind, it is of great note the words that Jesus speaks next. "In my Father's house are MANY mansions...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2-3). One might wonder if these words brought back to mind a time when the disciples were

returning to Jesus, on the top of the world, rejoicing that "even the devils are subject to us through thy name!". Jesus acknowledged the joy of the moment then told them to save their greatest rejoicing for the knowledge that "...your names are written in heaven."(Luke 10:17-20). It appears that in times of peace and victory, or when the waves of this world rage, the message from Jesus is the same. Keep your eyes on the prize, those mansions in heaven He has gone to prepare for all those that follow Him.

CHALLENGE: Read the words of this poem by John R. Clements "No Night There". Let them remind you of the home you have in heaven. In good times, and bad, let these thoughts still your heart.

"In the land of fadeless day
Lies the city foursquare;
It shall never pass away,
And there is no night there.

God shall wipe away all tears,
There's no death, no pain, nor
fears,
And they count not time by
years,
For there is no night there.

All the gates of pearl are made,
In the city foursquare;

All the streets with gold are
laid,
And there is no night there.

All the gates shall never close
To the city foursquare;
There life's crystal river flows,
And there is no night there.

There they need no sunshine
bright,
In that city foursquare;
For the Lamb is all the light,
And there is no night there.

11

.....

"Wondrous grace! Pure gift from Heaven! Grace to set the captive free! Grace of God so kindly given, from the savior unto me!" -Clara Brooks. In late winter to early spring, the gardener puts many plain, small, and unnoticeable forms into the ground. In a few weeks, little shoots of green begin to poke up through the soil. Tender and easily crushed, the gardener takes special care to make sure they are identified and protected. As the early spring storms come, it seems impossible that this tiny, tender plant would be able to stand the powerful, drenching rain. However, not only does it stand, but, through the rain, it grows taller and stronger. In 2 Corinthians 7-10, Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh", a "messenger of Satan". He says that he asked the Lord three times to take that thorn away. The Lord responded, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my **STRENGTH** is made perfect in weakness." Paul's reaction is not unlike Peter at the foot washing. "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities [feebleness, moral frailness] that the **POWER** of Christ may rest in me." It is often the case that people fail of the grace of God simply because they lack the understanding of the true meaning of grace. In many cases it appears that grace has simply

been assigned the definition of the word "mercy". Often, even in the dictionary, it is simply "unmerited favor". That may be true of our dictionaries today, but if we look back to the Bible, we will find that it meant something much more than just "unmerited favor". The word "grace" appears 131 times in the New Testament. With the exception of one verse (James 1:11) it is translated from the Greek "charis" meaning "the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life". Just as an unseen strength enables the small tender plant to not only maintain its form amidst the powerful thunderstorm , but, at the same time, grow into a beautiful, fruit producing plant because of it, grace enables the Christian to grow amidst the storms of life that would be too powerful for them without that grace. Don't settle for a powerless version of grace. Avail yourself of the true grace of God that you might stand amidst tempests too great for you and grow into that beautiful child of God you are intended to be. "All His grace is free as the air we breath, we may each have a full supply! If we will obey and His Word believe He'll prepare us to dwell on high!"
-B.E. Warren

CHALLENGE: In the storms of life today, don't just look for mercy, but seek grace that you can have the strength that is made perfect in weakness. By doing this, you will not only find grace to stand but also grace to grow beautiful in His eyes.

12

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God"-C.B. McAfee.

Elijah was running for his life. The angel of the Lord found him and sent him on a 40 day and 40 night journey to Mount Horeb. It was there that Elijah heard the still, small voice of God. In that voice, Elijah heard direction and found the courage he needed. The Elijah that made that return trip was no longer running in fear, but walking in determination, for he had found his refuge near to the heart of God (I Kings 19). Psalms 46:1 says "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Imagine walking through life with no respite, no opportunity to rest when we become weary. There are times when we just have to put our feet up for a minute and get recharged, renewed. We seem to be able to recognize the needs of our physical bodies fairly easily, but what about our souls? God did not design our spirit to be able to carry burden after burden, day after day. In fact, the scriptures tell us something quite different. Psalms 55:22 says "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee...". In Matthew 11:28, Jesus himself tells us "Come unto me...and I will give you rest." The Psalmist says of the Lord , "...he giveth his beloved sleep."

-Psalms 127:2. Oh weary soul, the Lord waits for you, just as He did for Elijah. Today, look for that place of rest, near to his heart. Listen for his still, small voice inviting you to come and find relief. Take advantage of the opportunity to experience the refreshing presence of the Lord. Hear Him say, "...my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." -Matthew 11:30. "Alone with God, the world forbidden, alone with God, oh blest retreat! Alone with God and in Him hidden, to hold with Him communion sweet!"-J. Oatman, Jr.

CHALLENGE: As you fulfill the duties of your day, take advantage of the moments you have to commune quietly with God. Don't allow the devil to steal them from you. Let your mind focus on the Lord and share with Him the burdens you are carrying, "...and you shall find rest unto your souls"- Matthew 11:29.

"Humility, thou secret vale, unknown to proud at heart; where showers of blessing never fail and glories ne'er depart!" -Wm. G. Schell.

"If thou wouldst have the dear Savior from Heaven walk by thy side from the dawn til the even, there is a rule that each day you must follow-Humble thyself to walk with God." -J. Oatman, Jr.

Humility is not the denying or avoidance of success in life, but the acknowledgement of a complete dependence upon God for the very existence of that life and whatever success it holds. "... If he (God) gather unto himself his spirit and breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust." -Job 34:14-15. In I Samuel 15, we find the story where Saul had finally gone too far. Once chosen by God to wear the crown, the Lord now "...repented that he had made Saul king over all Israel." He sent Samuel to tell Saul that God was rejecting him from being king and was giving the kingdom to someone else. There is a poignant statement in this whole discourse concerning why this was happening. I Samuel 15:17 says, "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel...?". Somewhere along the way, Saul forgot from where the source of life

and everything in it comes. He forgot his place in the whole scheme of things. God did not desire for Saul to fail but, as it says in Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Habakkuk 2:4 says, "Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by faith." Today, opportunities will come for you to be successful in the Lord. The Lord wants you to take those opportunities to do his work and be successful in his plan for you today. But remember, life and the success we find in the Lord is all because of Him. If we want to continue on successful, we must remember Micah 6:8 -"He hath shewed thee what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk HUMBLY with thy God?" In steps of grace, we will find our place, IF we walk humbly with our God.

CHALLENGE: "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly..."Psalms 138:6. Our God is a great and high God. The greatest and the highest. Don't spend your day trying to manage without Him. Humble yourself before him and confess your need of Him... in ALL your ways. In your humility, find the power that enables us to " ...do all things through Christ which strengtheneth (us)." -Phillipians 4:13

14

"But as many as received him, ..." -John 1:13.

Have you ever considered how much information passes by us daily in this world? It would truly be amazing if a person was capable of simply absorbing any and all knowledge that ever came near them. Quite literally, it is more than our minds can take in. Instead, we have to make a choice about what knowledge we pursue. How many times has a person laid aside one set of information, in order to make room for another set they deemed more valuable? It is a most important decision we make daily: what to take hold of and what to let go. It has a very direct effect on the path our existence here takes. John 1:13 says, " But as many as received (took hold of) him gave he power to become the sons of God...". One of the dangers of the information world we live in today is overcrowding. If someone throws you a glass pitcher when your hands are full, you are going to have to make a quick decision on what to put down or that glass pitcher is about to be in pieces on the floor. The same is true for our brains. We can not just freely load up on the knowledge and information of this world and expect there is going to be room left to "receive " Jesus. We have to make a conscious decision to reserve room for

him. And then we have to take hold on him when he comes by. He is not just a paperback book to be cast aside until the next time we find space for him. He is the main attraction. He is the "only begotten Son (of God)" -John 1:18, and he carries with him the power for us to become heirs of glory with him. All it takes is being willing to receive him. Not like the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees, who viewed him as just another misled source of information. Instead, we need to take hold of him, receive him like Peter who said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."-John 6:68. How crowded is the information portal in your brain? Is it loaded down with the "media" of this world? Have you reserved room to receive the knowledge of Christ? What are you holding onto that is more important than knowing Him, the one and only begotten Son of God. Let it go and take hold of eternal life instead. You will never regret it.

CHALLENGE: Make space for Jesus today. Make sure that you shut off any and all sources that are crowding Him out. Don't allow the devil to overload you with the knowledge of this world. Is there really anything more important than knowing Christ?

15

"Be not rash with thy mouth..." -Ecclesiastes 5:2

A promise made is a promise kept. Jephthah was evidently a man who lived by this rule. When his brothers came asking him to help rescue them from the children of Ammon, Jephthah agreed to go speak with their king. And he did. When he and the king of Ammon could not come to terms, he did not shrink from battle. God blessed him and he returned victorious. It should have been a time for great joy. Instead, the latter part of this story finds Jephthah standing in the road outside of his home, his clothes rent as a sign of great sorrow. Jephthah, in his rashness before the battle, had made a promise. If he were victorious, he would dedicate to the Lord the first thing that he saw upon his return from battle. Not just temporarily, but forever. And Jephthah was a man of his word. So when the first thing he saw come out of his house was his one and only child, his daughter, Jephthah suddenly realized his error. But it was too late. The promise had been made, and now it was time to keep that promise. No more would he look forward to the day when his daughter's children would carry on his lineage in Israel, for now she would never marry. His rash promise had cost not only him, but his beloved daughter

as well. Judges 11:1-40. In James 1:19, the word of God says "...let every man be ... slow to speak." Think back over your life. Consider how things might have been different if you had always paused for just a minute before saying that thing you just had to say. Maybe some of those things you would have still said. But maybe some of them you wouldn't have. Isn't it worth just a little extra thought before letting those thoughts escape your mouth in the form of words? Once they are out, you can never erase them. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God , and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools..."-Ecclesiastes 5:1. The good news of Jesus is made to be spread. We just need to take a minute before we speak and make sure that is what we are spreading.

CHALLENGE: Take a minute and think about what you are about to say. Is it in line with the word of God? Is it spreading the good news, lightening someone else's load, pointing people to Christ? If what you are saying is contrary to the spirit of those ideas, then maybe it can wait. Or better yet, maybe it can just disappear all together. Remember, sometimes the hardest thing to say is nothing. But, sometimes, it is also the best.

16

.....

As we read across the gospels, we find numerous instances where it appeared our Lord was heading one direction, in a manner of speaking, only to alter his course based on someone else's need. There was his first miracle at the wedding (John 2:1-11), the father's cry of "Help thou mine unbelief!" (Mark 9:14-27), Zaccheus up in the tree (Luke 19:1-9), the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:28-29). All examples of our Lord working in people's lives because they asked him, sometimes with words, sometimes with action. In Mark 7:24-30, we find a like story in Jesus' interaction with a desperate and determined mother. Her daughter had a need, and she knew Jesus could help. Even when he spoke words that seemed full of rejection, she simply accepted his words and used them in her plea for help. She would not turn away from the only one who could meet her need. "Yes Lord," she said, "Yet (even) the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." Finally, the Lord was moved. "For this saying...", her daughter was healed.

How serious are you about receiving the blessing you need? Is it just a casual thing to you? Or, are you like Jacob, not willing to let Him go until He blesses you (Genesis 32:26)? In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus tells the story of

the unjust judge. This guy really didn't care what anybody thought, certainly not some little widow. However, after several times of her asking him, he realized he was either going to have to help this lady, or hear about it everyday until he did. She just wasn't going to leave it alone until she received the help she so desperately needed. Jesus said "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect?...I tell you He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

How many times have you asked for the Lord to answer your need? Are you willing to ask...one more time? The most important thing is not whether He answers or not, but whether or not you have the faith to ask, one more time.

"Because you've prayed all night! Because you've held on with all your might! Child your cries have awoken the master!" -M.

Bowling, K.Bowling

*CHALLENGE: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." -Colossians 4:2.
Child of God, don't stop asking. In due time, He will answer.*

17

.....

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is safe." -Proverbs 18:10

M.E. Servoss wrote "When the storms of life are raging, tempests wild on sea and land. I will seek a place of refuge in the shadow of God's hand...". When dangers appear, it seems to be the general human nature to seek some place to hide. People train themselves at times to stand tall in the face of danger, but it is not generally our instinct in our younger years. How many times have we observed a young toddler playing happily, suddenly run to hide behind his parents when something he deems unsafe appears, such as a stranger or maybe a barking dog? The toddler runs to his parent, not just because they are present, but because he believes that parent can protect him. Is that not how we are to be with God? Psalms 82:6 mentions "...children of the most High". Several times, Jesus instructed his disciples that in order to receive the blessing of heaven, they would need to become as a little child (Mark 10:15). Some of what He is meaning by that is that we no longer train ourselves to stand in our own power against the dangers of this world, but that we learn how to flee...to Him. "I have a sure and safe retreat to which I always flee from every storm of life

I meet- 'tis Christ, the Rock for me!" -B.E. Warren. How silly would it be for a little child to pretend that he was big enough to handle the situation, when everyone, especially his adversary, knows that he is not? Or what if he simply hid his face in his hands, like he did when playing hide and seek, believing that if he can not see the danger, the danger can not see him? Neither would work half as well as just simply safely retreating into the presence of his mom or dad. And nothing works as well for the Christian as learning to take advantage of the safe retreat we all have into the presence of the Lord. When the pressures and dangers of this life arise, don't just try to stand there and take them on yourself. Flee into the arms of your Lord. He is that safe retreat.

CHALLENGE: How are you facing the dangers of this life? Do you realize that you have a place a safety with the Lord? Have you tried running to Jesus? Don't shut your eyes to pray just to try to ignore the problem. Let your prayers be a running to Jesus to see what he will do about that of which you are fearful.

18

"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Words of Jesus -Matthew 7:21

In Matthew 21, Jesus tells the story of two sons and a father. The father spoke to them and gave them both a job to complete. The first son agreed immediately to do what the father had said. What a delight to the father! Except, as time went by, the job the son so quickly agreed to do was left undone. The second son was far less agreeable. "I will not do that" or words of the same meaning, were what spewed forth out of his mouth. Rebellious and disagreeable, no doubt it hurt the father to have this response from one he loved so much. However, after awhile, the father looked and realized the job the second son had so adamantly refused to do was already completed. No doubt, this was a head scratcher. One son agreed so quickly, but never completed the task. The other son refused, but the next time the father looked, it was done. Truly, a combination of the responses is what the father would like to have but, in the end, the important question was, "is the job completed"? We can be the most agreeable people, but if we don't follow through on what we say, does it mean

what it should? In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks the question "...why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?". A reasonable question. Then Jesus goes on to tell the parable of two men. One of the men built his house on sinking sand, and suffered the obvious consequences when the storm came. The other man dug deep and anchored on the rock. When the wind blew hard, his house stood. The difference between the two? They both heard the will of God, i.e. the words of Jesus. But only one actually followed through and did those things he heard.

Which one of these examples are you? The will of God is not hard to find. It is written down for you in the word of God. Its presence is acknowledged by the soul within you, created by God to do his will. Are you listening? Are you following through? Build something that will last. In all your actions today, chose to do the will of God.

CHALLENGE: No call so precious and sweet as to do the will of God with heart complete. Follow through on what you know He has instructed you to do this day.

19

The little boy had been warned. The grasses grew out over the water's edge, giving the appearance that the bank stretched out farther than it did. But the little boy was so excited. He was sure he was just about to catch a fish. So he stepped out just a little bit more and promptly ended up underwater, looking the fishes in the eye, not sure what to do next. Suddenly, a strong hand took hold of him, lifting him up and setting him back safely on the bank. His daddy's hands had saved the day.

James Rowe wrote, "I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore, very deeply stained within sinking to rise no more. But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry, from the waters lifted me now safe am I!". This world is a maze of muck and deep waters that can seem too great for us... and they are! But, they are not too great for the Lord! Isaiah 59:1 says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save..." How deep are the waters that you find yourself in this day? Can you see the top? Or have you sunk so deep that you are not really sure which way is up. No matter how far down you find yourself, the Father's hand can still reach to where you are. His hand can reach through the waters of doubt. His hand can reach through the waters of despair. His

hand can even reach through the waters of rebellion and hypocrisy. There is no water too deep for God. All it takes is you being willing to let Him deliver you. The waters ARE too great for you. But there is one who is able, and He has some pretty deep waters of His own. B.E. Warren wrote "Mighty to save and mighty to keep! Grace like an ocean boundless and deep! Will you believe it? Will you receive it? Life everlasting reap?" Let Him reach down and rescue you today.

CHALLENGE: If you find yourself in deep waters today, whether they be of sin or of discouragement, cry out to your Father in heaven. He is able to reach to where you are. You may not know which way is up, but He does. Let Him rescue you today.

20

In 2 Chronicles 25:5-13, King Amaziah had determined it was time to go to battle. Edom (the children of Seir) must be defeated. So he gathered together out of Judah and Benjamin "three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield." A fine fighting force, but Amaziah wanted to make sure so he decided to hire "an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver." This was, by all accounts, an exorbitant amount of money for even a king of Judah. But King Amaziah wanted to make sure of victory therefore, the price was worth it. So the money was given and the men of Israel joined up with the army of Judah to march against Edom.. However, before they started on their journey, a prophet of the Lord came to King Amaziah and said, "O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit (specifically) with all the children of Ephraim." God's adjustment. The prophet was telling King Amaziah to send a quarter of his army back home before he even started on the path to battle. Not only that, but King Amaziah couldn't exactly ask for a refund. King Amaziah asked the man of God, "But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given the army of Israel?" The man of God's answer is profoundly simple. "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." King Amaziah decided to listen to the man of God,

removing the men of Israel from his army. And though it cost him, he returned victorious from battle.

How do we handle God's adjustments to our plans? Do we view His suggestions as the ultimate route to success? Or must they be weighed against the cost? If the cost had been what mattered most to King Amaziah, he most certainly would have returned from battle defeated. Or, worse yet, he may not have returned at all. As the man of God told him, "God hath power to help, and to cast down." Thank the Lord for the mercy he has in extending his adjustments to us before time, instead of allowing us to go on to defeat. Lord help us to accept the adjustments and march on to victory in Him.

CHALLENGE: Consider these stories in bible of people who listened to the adjustments of God; Joshua at the Battle of Ai (the second battle of Ai), Gideon before his great battle with the Midianites, Peter as the temple guard was taking Jesus away. Consider the victories they won as they listened to, and accepted, the Lord's adjustments. Set your heart to listen and follow whatever adjustments He sends your way and march on to victory in Him.

21

.....

“Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” -Psalms 55:22

There are two operative words in this verse. The first is “cast”. This word is translated from a Hebrew word meaning “to throw out, down, or away.” In other words, to get rid of it. This part of the verse is our responsibility. We are not instructed to demonstrate our burden to the Lord, we are instructed to unload it on Him. Think of a giant dump truck, filled to the brim with rocks and dirt, so weighed down that it can hardly get going. All of that rock and dirt came from somewhere, and there is somewhere it should go. Dump trucks weren’t made to pick up a load and carry it around for twenty years. Dump trucks were made to be emptied...as soon as possible. And so are we. Life brings us all kind of rocks and dirt. If you don’t cast them on the Lord, you are not going to have any room for the diamonds He wants you to carry. So cast them upon the Lord. That is our job.

The second operative word in this verse is “sustain”. Webster gives the definition “to support in any condition by aid; to assist or relieve”. This is the responsibility God has reserved for himself. As it says in Isaiah 41:10 “Fear

thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” There are many ways a person can try to sustain themselves, but none of them can ever match the promise of the Lord. Find your quiet place in Him today and unload. He has plenty of room for your burden.

CHALLENGE: 1 Peter 5:7 says “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” Back your load up to Him today and empty it out. Don’t leave your knees until you have given it all to Him.

22

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee...” Isaiah 26:3.

”Perfect peace...”. That is quite a statement. A literal translation would be ”peace peace”. Adam Clarke describes it as peace upon peace. Think of something of which you are especially fond. Maybe it’s a walk in the park. Maybe it’s a camping trip. Maybe it’s a chocolate milkshake. Now imagine that as soon as you finish it, you immediately get to start another one. As wonderful as it might seem, all of those things would quickly go out of style if we never had a break from them. Not so with God’s peace. It never goes out of style. Isn’t it worth the effort? The effort it takes to simply keep our minds stayed on Him? The phrase “stayed on thee” implies propping or leaning on the Lord. In other words, the Lord is promising that if we, instead of sorting through and attempting to handle our lives in our own mind, will just learn to prop or lean our minds on Him, then His peace can be a reality that never ends in our lives. Peace upon peace upon peace. Let Him take over today. It’s the best trade you will ever make.

CHALLENGE: “Though I walk in ways unknown, I am never left alone for the Lord will not forsake me while I do His will. Whatever may betide He is walking by my side. And by this I know He loves me still”- C. W. Naylor. Many thoughts may plague your mind on this journey of life. Learn to lean or prop your mind on the One who walks beside you.

23

.....

“In the shadow of the cross safe retreat, ever sitting lowly at Jesus feet; While His presence is so near, I shall never, never fear; In the shadow of the cross safe retreat!” -W. J. Henry and C.M.B

On the cross, Jesus hung, crucified by man. In the eyes of the world, helpless, defenseless, and certainly not able to provide any type of protection to those who might be found grieving below. “He saved others, himself he cannot save” -Matthew 27:42. And yet the Christian knows that in the moment that Christ said, “It is finished”, he purchased an eternity of pardon and peace for all who would come. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God...”-John 1:12. In Hebrews 10:14 the word of God says, “For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” Perfected here indicates that these people have been made complete. Who are these people? They are those who are sanctified, meaning set apart from this world for Christ. In other words, they are those people who, while the rest of the world mocks the image of a crucified Christ, are found resting at the foot of the cross.

“Oh the cross! The precious cross! To me this world is not but dross! Far richer treasures now I own, while up the shining way I

run; When in that heavenly land I'll see, the one who bore the cross for me!" -Lucy M. Lewis.

Where will you be found?

CHALLENGE: Rest at the foot of the cross. While the world scoffs at the man who hung there, own Him as your Savior. There is no safer retreat.

24

.....

“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee...” -Act 3:6

“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” -1 John 3:17. She wasn't wealthy. She had no doubt heard the sounds of more coins than she could ever hope to have being thrown into the treasury box just ahead of her. But she would not turn away. She had two mites, and they were going to the Lord, whether anyone noticed or not. But someone did notice. His name was Jesus and He put more value on her contribution than all of those who had come before her in the line. "...They did cast in of their abundance," He told his disciples, "but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all of her living." She did not hold back because of what she could not give. She took what she did have, and gave it to the Lord. Read her story in Mark 12:41-44. How easy it is to hold back because of what we do not have. How many times have we heard, or said ourselves, "If I only had this, then I could give that!". Those are the words of someone who is missing out on untold blessings. It was not until the widow put her two mites in the box that Jesus took note

of her. Do you think she went hungry because of it? Something makes a person think that Jesus probably made sure that did not happen. Ecclesiastes 11:1 says, "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." At what point do you think you will be able to out give God? Maybe this is the "that" that you are waiting on. The point where you feel there is no need for Him to give you anything back. Of course then, what you are really doing, is, in a small way, eliminating your dependence on God. Instead, why not take the "such as you have" and give it away today. God has promised there will be a return on your investment. Do not miss your reward.

"The little I have is only enough if I give it away" -Anonymous

CHALLENGE: "Little is much if God is in it, Labor not for wealth and fame! There's a crown and you may win it! If you'll go in Jesus name!" Kreiger, Kreiger, and Suffield." Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth" -Colossians 3:2. Do you have money? Time? Resources? Wealth? All of those things are of this world. Trade them in today for eternal blessings. See 1 Timothy 6:17-19

25

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” -John 3:30

From the time she was a little girl, she had heard many great and wonderful things from the word of God. In worship at home or at church, verse after verse was shared and expounded in her ears, but the words most often seemed just a little out of reach. Big, beautiful words that seemed difficult for her to completely understand. Then, one day, she heard a verse that she could hardly believe was in the Bible. “He must increase, but I must decrease.” A message so deep and profound, but yet so simple and easy to be understood. No longer I but He. Little “i”, big ”HIM”. The “iHIM” verse. Jesus wanted to be in her life, to love her, care for her, and bless her. He could only do that if she was willing to become small, to lay aside who she was in favor of becoming like Him.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul speaks of “...the simplicity that is in Christ”. It seems there is a tendency in mankind to leave behind simple things as he gains more and more knowledge. The truth in Christ is that, in order to continue to grow in Him, we must never forget this

simple thought. For “Him” to get bigger, “i” must shrink. The “iHIM”, always the “iHIM”.

CHALLENGE: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...” Galatians 2:20. Whose life are you living?

Yours? Or Christ? In order for Him to be in control, we must choose not to be. Learn to let go and let Him take over. “...Not my will but thine be done.” -Luke 22:42

26

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me...”-Psalms 23:4

The shadows. Often, as a child, it was a fearful time of day. That time when dusk is setting in and the shadows begin to lengthen fast. You can see, but not well. The shadows not only hide things, they create new things of which to be afraid. How many times has a child cried out for their mother or their father because of what they imagined was in a shadowed corner of their room? That same corner where they often had been playing with delight a short time earlier. Many times that child will plead with their parent to leave on their bedroom light. Why? Because light eliminates the shadows.

In Hebrews 2:15, it is written of Jesus that he came to “...deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Prior to Jesus, there was a huge shadow that hung over the world. The image of death presented a large shadow where many things were unclear and “... that grim monster...” knew no defeat. But then, “...The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of

death light is sprung up.“ (Matthew 4:16).As it says in 1 Corinthians 15:55, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?“. As a Christian, we no longer have to fear the shadows. Jesus has purchased us a home in heaven. The light of His presence can dispel the fear of the unknown, the fear of death.

CHALLENGE: When we see the shadow of death, when the fear comes, call on Jesus. Ask Him to shine His light on that shadow. Let it permeate every part of your heart and mind. Chose to “...be not faithless, but believing.” (John 20:27). And if you realize a struggle inside to believe in that home He has gone to prepare for you, then cry out to Jesus, “...with tears, Lord, I believe! Help thou mine unbelief!” Mark 9:24. There is no reason why the Christian must live in bondage to the fear of death.

27

.....

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. The fastest way to get from one place to another is to not stop. Sometimes the rain comes and we are forced to slow down. Sometimes the road is filled with curves and hills. Sometimes the pavement plays out and we find ourselves on a dirt or gravel road. Whatever the case, we will get there the most efficient way if we just stay “steady as we go”

There was once a child of God who loved God and His people very much. He spent much of his life showing God’s word and God’s love to everyone with whom he had the chance. Numerous things he shared, but one phrase stands out to all who knew him. “Steady as you go”. The nature of this world and what sin has done to it often leaves us in a void, unsure of what’s next. Satan often tries to get us off track in these moments worrying about what’s coming, or what we need to be doing. In these times, it is good to remember- don’t stop, stay the course, ”steady as you go.” Paul spoke of this in Galatians 6:9 when he wrote “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” In

Matthew 10:22, Jesus told His disciples, "...he that endureth to the end shall be saved." The question is not how fast can we go, or how tight we can take a curve. The question is, can we take another step? One more foot in front of the other, taking the next step on the path that lies in front of us. All the way until we reach the day when God calls us home. "Steady as we go".

CHALLENGE: Do the next right thing. Don't worry about what comes after that step. Let God take care of that. Just stay "steady as you go".

.....

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? “- Mark 8:36

The story is found in Luke 10:38-42. The crowd had gathered. Many people were present to listen to the Master. At some point, they were going to need to eat. Who was going to take care of that? Martha decided it would be her..., and Mary. Except Mary wasn't helping. She was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His every word. Martha protested, “Lord, dost thou not care ...” . Don't you see what I am doing is more important than taking time to listen to you? Isn't that the question we pose to the Lord often when we are overtaken with the cares of this life. Not word for word, but, in effect, we say the same thing. “I'm too busy” or “This really needs to be done”. Not a whole lot unlike Martha. Poor Martha. It was hard for her to just let go and listen. ”Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things...” (Luke 10:41). This was the man who multiple times fed thousands with a handful of food, giving more back than He had taken once He finished feeding all who were present. He could have taken up her slack. But, she couldn't let go, not even for the one thing we all truly need everyday. Time with Jesus. “One thing is needful;

and Mary hath chosen that good part...” (Luke 10:42). God’s word instructs us that we should be diligent in the cares of this life but never overtaken by them. Life will always present one more thing to be done. And, as long as we have taken care of that one true necessity, we should be diligent in those things. But never forget the one true necessity. That is, spending time with Jesus.

CHALLENGE: Look at all the things that need to be done concerning the cares of life. Lay them all at the feet of Jesus until you finish spending your time with Him. Then pick them up again do what can be done. If you’re putting Him first, Christ will fill in the gaps. He will take up your slack.

29

.....

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”- John 16:7

*Comfort- to strengthen; to invigorate; to cheer or enliven
(Webster’s v. 1828)*

”Dark the night, and lonely the path walked without companion. The trees seem always to stretch out their hands, spreading tentacles of fear as they intercept the moon’s display. Haunting sounds rattle the heart and spread tension throughout the body. How quickly they all flee, when the sun comes up in the morning. Such is the comfort of a friend.”-Selected

In II Corinthians 1:3, Paul speaks of the God of all comfort. One who “... comforteth us in all our tribulation...” (2 Cor. 1:4). How much just a little bit of comfort can change our entire outlook. So quickly, the sun coming up in the morning can change our perception of our environment, even though we may have no change in location. The same phenomenon occurs when someone reaches out a hand to comfort us in life. Even though there may be no change to our tribulation, a little bit of comfort can have an enormous effect on our ability

to endure. And whose hand of comfort is bigger or better than God's? No one's. And He extends that hand of comfort to us in the form of His precious Holy Spirit. In John 14:16-18, Jesus was speaking some of His last words to His disciples. He said "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come unto you." And He also said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." How can we ever let Satan fool us into thinking that any of God's children walk alone in this life? He is with us always, in the form of His precious Holy Spirit. As wonderful as Jesus was, He had to go away so that the Holy Spirit, that spirit of all comfort, could be with each one who is called by His name. "His presence around me, His love leads me on. He's always beside me, I'm never alone." -Lister.

CHALLENGE: If you walk with the Lord, you will never walk alone. Choose His way, and trust in Him for the comfort you need in this life.

30

.....

“He spoke to the waters, and they were still” (Mark 4:39).

When Jesus spoke, things happened. In the John the first chapter it says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (v 1-3). Then, in verse 14, John writes “...the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...”. That Word made flesh was Jesus. No wonder things happened when He spoke. He was the very Word that spoke them into existence. Not only that, but Hebrews 1:3 speaks of Jesus “...upholding ALL things by the word of His power...”. Not only did they come to be by His word, but they are sustained in their present form BECAUSE of His word only. As B.E. Warren wrote,

”Oh look at the universe that He has made see the twinkling stars on high! Alone on His fiat (word) are these mighty planets stayed then we know He can never lie!”

How is your faith? Do you know that His word is the final authority? As it says in Romans 3:4, “...let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightiest...overcome...”. If God says it, you can count on it happening, no matter what anyone or everyone else

says. His word is all powerful. Consider all this, then consider the words of this song by Will M. Ramsey.

“Sometimes when misgivings darken the day, and faith’s light I can-not see; I ask my dear Lord to brighten the way, He whispers sweet peace to me!”

We are such helpless vessels, unable to stand in peace amid all the storms of this world. But, we have a Lord whose word is all powerful, who is willing to speak peace over our lives just like He spoke it over the waves of that sea. Cry out to Him and trust Him. If you will put your faith in Him, He will whisper His peace over your life in just the right moment. The disciples fought the sea for awhile, but then Jesus spoke. Lazarus lay in a tomb for several days, but then Jesus spoke. “In the beginning... the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep...”. But then the Word was spoken and there was light, soon to followed by a world created. (Genesis 1). Trust Him for the peace you need. When He speaks it, it will happen.

CHALLENGE: Do not spend your day trying to manage your own peace. Cry out to Jesus. Ask Him to speak peace over your life. Have a heart to do whatever His word tells you. Remember, “There is no peace...to the wicked.” (Isaiah 57:21). Yield yourself to Him. You will never regret it.

31

In Alabama, we are blessed with a green vine called kudzu. As one drives along, he might first think it a nice green back drop. But it does not take too many miles of driving by the leafy green plant to realize that there is an issue. Tree after tree is obscure by mountains and valleys of this invasive plant. It takes a determined and devoted defender to control its spread, much less eradicate it. One of the main reasons for its persistence is a tap root that can grow up to 12 feet deep and weigh several hundred pounds. It's a true story of success, for the kudzu plant, that is.

So how can we have that same kind of success, spiritually? As with so many things in life, it all starts with what kind roots we are putting down. Psalms 1 tells us that "Blessed is the man ... (whose) delight is in the law of the Lord...". The Word says, "...he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water...his leaf shall not wither; and whatsoever he doth shall prosper." A good root system in the right location will stand the test of time. Colossians 2:6-7 says "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him...abounding therein...". If you want your tree to grow, fertilize its roots. If want it to produce healthy and

huge fruit, fertilize its roots. The deeper the roots go, the healthier and more stable the tree will be. If you want to grow and be strong spiritually, fertilize your roots. You know, those things no one else can see. That quiet commitment to do what it takes, even if no one else ever notices. Matthew 13:5-6 speaks of the seed that fell on stony ground. It sprung right up, a full fledged plant, looking like it had managed to succeed passing up the arduous work of putting down roots. But then, the sun came out. What had looked so successful before now withered up quickly in the heat of the moment. Only, this was not a story about a plant, it was a story about a person. A person who heard the Word of God and received it with joy. But no care was taken to put down roots and when the hard times came, they went...away from God. It has been said that in life there are two kinds of people. Those who do and those who don't. When it comes to putting roots in Jesus, be one who does. Let your roots go deep into who He is, into His Word and His love.

CHALLENGE: In John 15:5 Jesus says "... without me, ye can do nothing." Take root in Him today. Anchor in His Word. Let His Spirit fertilize your life. Watch the tree of your life grow stronger and healthier because of it everyday.

.....

"O taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him." -Psalms 34:8

There was once a young man who was somewhat opinionated concerning his taste buds, although he probably would not have admitted such a thing. He did not like coconut. He did not like nuts. And he certainly did not like carrots, or so he thought. Then one day, a young lady whom he incessantly adored, worked tirelessly to surprise him with a special cake. The cake's ingredients included: Carrots. Nuts. Coconut. Now, under any other circumstance, the young man would have not given a second thought to taking a bite of this cake. However, if this young lady said jump, he probably would have leapt as high in the air as he could. So, when she presented him with his first slice of carrot cake, he took up his fork and began to eat it like nobody's business. And the most amazing thing began to happen. With each bite, he began to become more and more astonished at how delicious it was, and how much he could not wait for the next bite. When the last bite disappeared, he pushed back from the table and declared, with astonishment, "I do not like carrots. I do not like nuts. I do not like coconut. But that was DELICIOUS!" Quietly, in his mind, he had groaned when he first saw what the object of his affection had done for him. However, after just one taste, he realized he had been wrong. The cake was delicious.

How many people are refusing the Lord because they just do not realize how good He really is? In their minds they have

become convinced that they do not like Him or any of the ingredients that make up who He is. How many of those who now serve Him as His children remember a day when they felt the same way? And then, they took a bite. Whether it was by coercion, curiosity, or just a desire for something different, they took that first taste. And, as G.T. Speer wrote, "O the glory did roll!". Just one taste, and they began to see all they had been missing. And, just as that young man, over twenty years later, still loves a piece of carrot cake, the Lord's flavor in our life never gets old. As G. Smith wrote "His love is richer, deeper, fuller, sweeter...sweeter as the days go by."

*"His pow'r can make you what you ought to be,
His blood can cleanse your heart and make you free,
His love can fill your soul, and you will see,
Twas best to let Him have His way with thee!" -Cyrus S. Nusbaum*

What is the Lord putting on your plate today? Though the ingredients may look like things that you may not enjoy, trust Him. If we saw everything that went into our favorite meals at our favorite restaurants, we might not think we would like what was being cooked. But, after the chef mixes them all together in the perfect portions, we have a scrumptious dish that we know as our favorite. Trust the Lord. When you see unwanted ingredients in life that He is allowing to come to your table, let Him have His way. He is the master chef. No one knows like Him how to mix life all together in the perfect portions so that the bitter is muted by the sweet. In the end we will see -"Twas best to let Him have His way with thee!"

CHALLENGE: Take that bite. Whether it is your first, or your thousandth meal from the Lord's table, take the bite. No one can sweeten life like the Lord, no matter what the situation may be.

33

.....

"My sheep hear my voice...and follow me." -Words of Jesus found in John 10:27

"Upon the troubled, restless wave, His fearful trembling ones to save, The Master walked and calmed the sea, The wildly tossing Galilee. By faith again I hear His voice, In tones which make my heart rejoice, When fears my soul with terror thrill, He gently whispers, "Peace, be still." -Clara M. Brooks

"Mid the busy cares of life, In the battle's raging strife, When around my soul are gathered all the hosts of ill, Then a voice so sweet and clear whispers words of love and cheer, And I know that He is with me still" -C.W. Naylor

"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it..." -Isaiah 30:21

What matters more in life? To have AN answer to all your problems, or to have the One who has THE answer to all your problems? The correct answer, that is. Most people have had the opportunity to take quizzes and exams in the course of schooling. Most people have found themselves with answers to the questions that were found on those quizzes and exams. Most people would have to admit that their answers were not always correct. Imagine the difference in the scores that would have occurred if the one who had created the test was standing close during the exam, whispering the correct

answers in your ear. One would venture to believe that there would have been a vast improvement in the results.

Paul was speaking of the Creator of this life to the Athenians when he said that we, "...should seek the Lord...though He be not far from everyone of us." (Acts 17:27). The One who created this test called life is standing near, ready to whisper the answers you need, the correct ones, into your ear. Are you willing to settle for AN answer? Or do you want THE answer. The correct one. The one that can calm your storm inside, no matter what the situation outside may be. He stands ready. His word is clear. God is not a distracted observer but an invested Creator. One who wants to see all succeed in this test of life. As it says in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is...not willing that any should perish...". And again in John 3:17, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." His purpose is not to fail you. He is heavily invested in your success. Trust Him. Listen to Him. Follow Him. He is the only one with the correct answers. All other roads lead to destruction. But the road that He will guide you in will lead to life everlasting. The ultimate 100% A+!

CHALLENGE: Today, stop wrestling with life and all of its many questions. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him..." Psalms 37:7. Remember, you do not have to have any of the answers. You just have to have the Lord. And He will NEVER fail you, if you listen to Him.

34

.....

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever." 1 Chronicles 16:34

The definition of mercy is treating someone better than they deserve. As Christians, it is easy to grasp that God certainly fulfilled that definition when He roamed the dark hills where we lived in our sin before we found Christ. It is also easy to see how God fulfills this idea of mercy when He calls us back from our error or maybe even backsliding. But what about when we finish a successful day in Him? A day when we listened to His voice. A day when we heard His beckoning call... and followed. On those days, do we see how He is still treating us better than we deserve?

In Luke 17:10, Jesus tells us, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." It is a blessed thing to be successful in the Lord. Nothing will warm the heart of man more than to know that his Lord and master is pleased with the results of his day. But, even then, what have we gained for the Lord that He didn't already own? What is that we have brought to Him that supplies a lack

in His closet of wealth? What have we done that is an equal trade for all the benefits He bestows on us, negating the need for His mercy? The answer is... nothing.

A.M. Toplady wrote , "In my hands no price I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling." The cross. The ultimate symbol of God's mercy. Enduring. Never changing. What was done there was done "...once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). For all people. For all situations. For all time. God's mercy is never ending. He does not extend His mercy temporarily. The only condition is that we be willing to accept it, and follow the one who gives it so willingly. Don't despise His mercy. Don't take it for granted. As it says in Luke 9:23, let us deny ourselves, our flesh, take up that symbol of mercy, and follow the one who so willingly gave His only Son that we might be saved (John 3:17). Unequaled mercy, that endures forever.

CHALLENGE: Don't buy the lie that there is no responsibility associated with accepting God's mercy. Remember Hebrews 10:29. Accept God's mercy. Let it warm your heart to serve Him even more. We will never outdo God. For the rest of our lives, we will depend on His mercy. And what a great place be, seeing as His mercy never ends.

35

.....

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

Acknowledge - "To own, avow, or admit to be true..." -Webster's Dictionary 1828

Stop ahead. Curve Ahead 15 mph. Wrong Way. One Way. All messages we may see as we drive from one place to another. All designed to help us safely navigate the road we must take to get to where we are headed. Completely useless to us unless we not only see that they exist, but also acknowledge them for what they are. True messengers of the road ahead. How many times have we been warned of some particular consequence to a certain action, but failed to own it to be true? Because of that, we followed through with the action, and discovered that the warning was actually correct. How much better would we have been to simply accept the warning as accurate from the beginning? In this way, we would have never suffered the consequence.

There are those people who do not believe there is a God. A very difficult place to be but, for now, let us lay this group of people aside. Now we are left with those

who do believe there is a Supreme Being. Among this group of people, how many actually acknowledge Him? Not just believe that He exists, but avow Him to be true. If I believe the sign that says "Dangerous Curve Ahead" to be true, I will make adjustments in accordance with the message. If we acknowledge God to be who He is, then we understand the need to adjust our lives to the message He is sending to us through His word.

In 1917, Thomas O. Chisholm wrote,

"Living for Jesus, a life that is true,

Striving to please Him, In all that I do;

Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,

This is the pathway of blessing for me."

Is this the song of your heart today? In all your ways are you acknowledging or owning Him to be true?

Remember, "...the devils believe, and tremble..." (James 2:19). "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelations 22:14).

CHALLENGE: Consider the difference between seeing and doing. Do not just rest in knowing that there is a Supreme God. Acknowledge, that is own, Him as such today.

36

.....

Hebrews 11:15-16

II Corinthians 5:1

"I know this earthly house shall fall, but on that golden strand. I have a bright and blissful home, a house not made with hands."

-Ulysses Phillips

"Are we there yet?" comes the voice from the back seat. Around forty five miles of a five hundred mile trip have been covered and already there is an anticipation in the minds of the children that the goal should have been reached. Ignore the question, and you'll probably hear it again, most likely with its companion phrase, "How much longer?". The one thing almost never heard is "Can we just go back?". There is something for us to learn from the phrases we have all no doubt heard and probably said at one time or another. Notice the anticipation, regardless of the discomfort endured during the travels. The desire is not to turn around, but to arrive at the chosen destination. Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you..." John 14:2. How much longer, we do not know. What we do know is the destination is more wonderful than we can imagine. The Word of God, the One who was there at the initiation of this world, is preparing a place for us. If He has the creative genius to come up with zebras, platypuses, and blue whales,

imagine what He has in store for us. "...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him..." 1 Corinthians 2:9. How's your heavenly vision? Is it getting obscured by the things you see in this life? Has your impatience with the journey caused you to become indifferent to the prize that awaits? Have detours and distractions caused you to forget where you are going? Worse yet, have you turned your car around and headed back? Each one of the situations is different but the opportunity is the same. As Helen H. Lemmel wrote,

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."

Let Jesus remind you today of the prize that awaits those who follow Him. Set your sights on that heavenly country. Let the anticipation of glory return to your heart, awaking the child within to say, "Are we almost there?". Hear the words of Jesus, "...if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." John 14:3.

"Hold on my child, joy comes in the morning..." -William Gaither

CHALLENGE: J.R Baxter and William Hunter wrote " My heavenly home is bright and fair, I feel like traveling on...". Let this be the song in your heart today, no matter how long the journey may seem.

37

.....

"The love of God is greater far than any tongue or pen can tell, It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell..."

-Frederick M. Lehman

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." -Jeremiah 31:3

There is a saying first printed in 1744 in Poor Richard's Almanack by Benjamin Franklin. It says, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar". The point of the saying was to encourage people in politeness, versus being rude in nature. That saying can be applied to the way that God calls our hearts. If God called our hearts with only justice, none of us could stand. But, as it says in James 3:17, "...the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy...". It brings to mind the story of the prodigal son. Luke 15:20 says, "...But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him". The facts were the prodigal son had left the father and separated himself from him. The facts were the father gave him his freedom to make that choice and did not go with him in that separation he was choosing. But the facts also were that the minute the father saw him, he ran to him and welcomed him back with all the love he could show him.

*"How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure,
that He would give His only Son, to make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss- the Father turns His face
away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory."
-Stuart Townsend*

What more can He do than He has done? God searched His heaven for His most precious possession and sent Him to earth for one purpose. To draw us to Him.

"If that isn't love, the ocean is dry, there's no stars in the sky, and the sparrow can't fly..." -Dottie R

What more can He do to show you how much you are worth to Him? What more can He do to draw your heart into Him? To show you that He loves you, no matter where you've been or where you are, and wants nothing more than to have you and keep you close to Him?

Let His love bind you to Him, and keep you there. There is no more precious or wonderful place than to be in His love.

CHALLENGE: Believe His love. Don't listen to the lies of Satan that tell you that the Lord has nothing to offer. Understand and know that your true and full value can only be known in Christ.

.....

"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel,...but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light."- Luke 8:16

"Don't pull that candy out unless you have enough to share!" The little child slowly releases his grip to allow his packet of candy to rest again at the bottom of his pocket. He hardly felt like he had enough for himself, much less sharing with a whole classroom of first graders. The candy would have to wait for a more convenient time to be eaten.

Imagine if that packet of candy was instead a pocketful of the gospel. Do we have enough to share? Will the portion we have disappear if we try to share with those who live around us? Those we consider our peers, our classmates in this school of life? The gospel is the sweet treat of this life. If we pull it out correctly, every soul is going to crave a bite. And the Teacher says, "Don't pull it out without being willing to share it".

"...Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you..."-1 Peter 3:15. Peter was admonishing the saints of God not just to joy in hope, but to be ready to share with all men the reason for that hope. This is the basic premise of sharing the gospel. It may lead you anywhere from a foreign land to your own backyard, but it should always come from a new life inside. Psalms 1:2-3

speaks of this when it says "...his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night. He shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season...". To spread the gospel, we must first partake of the gospel, and not just for a moment of time. The scripture says "...in His law doth he meditate day and night..." If the gospel is not THE light of my life, how can I expect there to be enough in my pocket for me, much less sharing with anyone else?

"If we shall scatter tares in the fallow, How shall we hope that they shall not grow?"

"We cannot gather wheat for the garner, if only useless weeds we shall sow." -C.W. Naylor

CHALLENGE: Jesus said, "...Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). There are hungry souls everywhere. We just need to make sure what we have in our pocket is the real thing and then share it. The Gospel is the sweet treat of life, the only one there is.

"Go you into all the world and preach the gospel"-Mark 16:15

.....

Jeremiah 18:3-4

Jeremiah 18:6

Imagine a lump of clay, formless and useless for any kind of service, placed on a spinning wheel...and just left there to spin. When the spinning stops, the lump of clay remains as useless as before it was placed on the wheel. The difference is not found in the clay or the wheel, but in the touch of the potter's hand. Molding, forming, reducing, flaring out, whatever the need is, the hand of the potter is the touch that makes it happen. The wheel is life, we are the lump of clay. We can not expect to become what we are meant to be in life unless we are willing to yield to the Master's hand. God has created us with great potential. He says in one place, "...I know the thoughts that I think toward you...to give you an expected end." -Jeremiah 29:11. He has no intention to just leave us as a lump of clay. He desires to form us into a beautiful vessel, with great purpose in His kingdom. The problem arises when we do not allow His hands to form us the way we need to be formed. Imagine that you are at the potter's house, waiting and watching him form a very special vessel. Then imagine someone stepping from the crowd, pushing the potter out of the way, and taking over

at the wheel. Within seconds, it is evident that this individual has no experience. Clay is falling off the wheel on all sides. The lump is changing, but not into a useful vessel. Although it did not seem possible, the lump of clay is more undefinable. Not only that, now it is broken in pieces, some of which flew off the wheel in such a manner it seems hopeless to ever get them all back together again. This is a picture of us resisting the hand of God in our life. Things never work out for the better. No matter what, the answer is to step back, and let the Potter, that is the Master, take over. Whether your lump of clay is fresh and new, or lying in pieces on the ground. Only He can make something beautiful out of who we are.

"Something beautiful, something good. All of my confusion, He understood. All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife, But He made something beautiful of my life." -Gloria and William J. Gaither

CHALLENGE: Trust the Lord today. Step back and let Him take over. Do the things that He has shown you to do. Leave the rest in His hands. Don't try to be the Potter, just rejoice in being the clay. He will work all things for good, if we give Him free rein in our lives.

40

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth...”
Phillipians 2:10

Different people carry different amounts of authority in different places. A 5 star general may be chief authority in the battle planning room, but in a five star kitchen, it is the chef who calls the shots. In the cockpit of a 747 jet airplane, the head pilot will be giving the orders. But that head pilot will be taking a backseat in Mrs. Harbour’s 1st grade classroom.

As humans, we can set our minds to excel in a certain area and it is likely, to some degree, that we will succeed. But very few of us indeed will become highest authority in one, much less multiple sectors of life. However, the word of God says that, at the name, I.e. authority, of Christ, “every knee shall bow...”. To put it another way, Colossians 1:18 speaks of Christ saying, “...that in all things He might have the preeminence.” Preeminence means to be first in rank or influence.

Concerning us, there is a very small portion of us who might be preeminent in one certain field. But Paul states that Christ is preeminent in all things. Isn't the name (authority) of Jesus wonderful? There is nothing to which He bows. Instead all things bow to Him. And this is the One in whom we have put our faith. Thank God for giving us a strong and mighty deliverer.

CHALLENGE: Have faith in Christ's ultimate authority. Understand that all trials and foes must bow to His authority. Whatever you are going through, hang on to Him. Hang on to victory.

41

.....

*"... our Lord Jesus Christ, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope...to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, **reserved in heaven for you...**" -1 Peter 1:3-4*

How much time do you spend thinking about heaven? Here on earth, those who love their parents, grandparents, or anyone else from whom they may inherit, do not often spend much time thinking about the possible inheritance because with it is the knowledge that for them to receive the inheritance, the giver of the inheritance must pass away from this life. There is not much in the way of this world's goods that can replace a loving and kind parent, grandparent, or benefactor. In other words, we do not really want to spend time thinking about it because the trade off is not worth it. That is the way with inheritances of this world. However, when we turn our thoughts towards our heavenly inheritance, things should be different. No longer is the inheritance unable to replace what we are giving up in order to receive it. The reality is what we are turning in is a moth ridden, thievery susceptible, sorrow of heart and tear filled, sinful and defiled world that is headed for destruction. What we are receiving is a place where the God of Heaven will personally wipe away all our tears,

and there will be no more pain or sorrow of heart. All things that break through and steal no longer exist in that place. All the imperfections of this world are forever more gone. There will be no more sin. Therefore, there will be no dreaded effects of sin and the constant sorrow that it brings into our life. There will be no more struggles with the forces of Satan, no more struggles to know what is the right decision, and then struggles to follow through with that decision. No more peer pressure, no more sickness, no more sufferings. Everything will be made brand new. And, as E.M. Bartlett wrote, "Everybody will be happy over there!"

Isn't that worth thinking about just a little?

CHALLENGE: Think about this:

*"There's a happy land of promise over in the great beyond,
where the saved of earth shall soon the glory share; where the
souls of men shall enter and live on forevermore, Everybody will
be happy over there!*

*Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers will be singing 'round the
throne in that land where no one ever knows a care; And the
Christians of all ages will join in the triumph song, Everybody
will be happy over there!*

*We will hear nobody praying, and no mourning in that land,
for no burdens there will be for us to bear; all the people will be
singing 'Glory, glory to the Lamb,' Everybody will be happy over
there!*

*There we'll meet the One who saved us and who kept us by His
Grace, and who brought us to that land so bright and fair; We
will praise His name forever as we look upon His face,
Everybody will be happy over there!" -E.M. Bartlett*

42

"For now the Lord hath made room for us..." Genesis 26:22

Twice the well had been dug. Twice men came and claimed the water as their own, even though Isaac and his servants had done all the work to dig it out. Nevertheless, once again, Isaac simply removed himself and all his belongings to another place...and dug another well. This time, nobody came to claim the well. Rehoboth, it was named by Isaac, for now the Lord had made room for them to dwell in peace.

One might consider that it was very possible that Rehoboth was not really the spot Isaac had picked out. It actually appears it was his third choice. And maybe it wasn't even his third choice. Maybe he just was so tired of moving that he decided he would just dig a well and see what happened. Maybe he even picked out a spot that he thought was less desirable, hoping that no one would come trying to claim it. Whatever the case may be, Rehoboth was where the Lord made room and Isaac decided they would stay there and "be fruitful in the land".

How willing are you to submit to the Lord's will. When met with resistance, do you consider your ways before the

Lord? Or, are you determined to always "fight for what is rightfully yours"? There are times when we must stand against the forces of evil, but it is never to preserve what is rightfully ours. Thank the Lord, what is rightfully ours was eliminated by the precious blood of Jesus. And now we stay or go based on His will, not ours.

Is this not at least part of the principle behind Matthew 5:39-41? Sometimes being fruitful in the Lord means giving up what seems to be rightfully ours. And yet, we can become so incensed that someone would dare to do such a thing. We might even say, "They're just not treating me right!" And maybe they aren't, but then, if that's the case, it looks like we are in the same boat with Jesus. And what better place could we be?

"For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Hebrews 12:3. When life somehow comes and takes what seems to be rightfully yours, just remember Isaac. And dig another well

CHALLENGE: Consider all that was rightfully His, and how He gave it up, just so we could be saved.

43

.....

"Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." -Jeremiah 29:13

Paul on Mars' Hill said that God had created man "...that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, thought He be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). One of the surest ways, as a parent, to find a lost toy seems to be walking barefoot in a dark room. Without a doubt, you will not need any explanation when you find the item that was lost. The realization will be exceptionally clear. Not unlike us and God. It is not a question of whether or not He can be found. It is simply a question of whether or not we are seeking, with our whole heart. If we are doing that, then we can rest assured that we will find Him, and it will be exceptionally clear when we do. Hosea 6:3 says, "...then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord...". The problem with us is that sometimes we are not really trying to find God, we are trying to find how to fit Him into the box in which we want Him to fit. Just a little bit earlier in Paul's discourse to the Athenians on Mars' hill he said that God "...dwelleth not in temples made with hands..." (Acts 17:24). In Isaiah 66:1, God says, "...heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the

house that ye build unto me...". If we really want to find God, we have to stop trying to show Him who He is. Instead, we need to put our whole heart into letting Him do the showing. And what a show. As Christ told Peter in Matthew 16:17, "...Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Paul Joseph Baloche wrote, "Open the eyes of my heart Lord, I want to see you." Ask yourself that question. How much do you really want to see God? David gave us a idea of what that means when he wrote, "Search me, O God, and know my heart...see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:23-24). Nothing held back. No longer me trying to fit God into the box I have created for Him. But me opening to God and allowing Him to show me who He is. Now I can have that, or rather those, moments of realization, clear as stepping on a toy barefooted in a dark room, but with much more pleasant results although not always any less painful. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous:nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit..." Hebrews 12:11. It's time to let go, and let God.

CHALLENGE: Open up to God today. Allow Him into your heart. Let Him search all the corners. Stop trying to tell Him who He is. Open up and find out.

"Great is thy faithfulness O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee, Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not. As Thou hast been, Thou forever shall be." - T.O. Chisholm

This morning I awoke, rested and breathing in air I do not own with lungs I did not create. The same thing that has happened every morning since the day I was born into this world. This world, which for ages has safely rotated on an axis I cannot see while orbiting around an infinitely hot ball of fire at a perfect distance on tracks that no man can discover. Once again, because of the perfect nature of the orbit of the earth, we have had all four seasons in the span of 365 days. "Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, sun, moon, and stars in their courses above join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love..." (Chisholm)

In great despair, the lamenting prophet was reminded, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: GREAT is thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23) As humans, we often find ourselves lost in the trouble that threatens to consume us, rather than seeing

the Lord who sustains us through the midst of the struggle. "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men (troubles) rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick...then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul..." (Psalms 124:1-4)

There is a singular word that perfectly describes the work the Lord is doing in our lives. That word is "Victory". "The mountain will tell you, that you can't make it over. It will try to convince you that it's way too high! Though you feel defeated **KNOW** that God keeps His promise! So you tell that mountain just how **BIG** your God is!"- (Smith, West, and Black)

CHALLENGE: Turn your eyes from the trouble and see the God who is faithful to deliver. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" -Psalms 34:7

45

.....
"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." -2 Corinthians 5:17

*"What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"
-R. Lowry*

The gospel of John tells of an instance when Jesus was speaking to a group of Jews who had chosen to believe on Him, but were still unaware of the great need they had. "We be Abraham's seed", they said, "and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" They could not see the great freedom that was not only being offered to them, but that they needed so badly. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin," Jesus said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed". (John 8:33-36)

It is a wonderful thing to grow up being instructed in the ways of the Lord. To have the lines fall to us in pleasant places, as David writes about in Psalms 16:6, is a blessing, one for which we should be eternally grateful.

However, if we do not see the need for anything beyond just following what our heritage has taught us, then we are walking past a gold mine to pick up a penny.

Towards the end of the 7th chapter of Romans, Paul begins to lament as he recalls the struggle of a life still bound in sin. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:25). In the very next verse, he gives the answer. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord..."

One of the greatest joys of being a Christian is that we no longer have to be bound in hopelessness, destined to go on through life spiritually living in the same old dirtiness. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature...". Old things truly are passed away and "behold" all things are made new. Not just a clean creature, but also a NEW one. "Oh praise the Lord for victory! From death to life He lifted me! By His great love and pow'r divine eternal life is truly mine!" (U. Phillips)

*CHALLENGE: Whatever your battle,
whatever your struggle, Jesus came to give you
victory! "His pow'r CAN make you what you ought
to be! His blood CAN cleanse your heart and make
you free!" (Nusbaum)*

Blessed Peace of God

46

"Blessed quietness, holy quietness, blest assurance in my soul! On the stormy sea, Jesus speaks to me, and the billows cease to roll!" -M. P. Ferguson

Which was louder? The storm with its wind, thunder, and crashing waves? Or was it their fearful cries? No matter, when the Master spoke, both became silent and all was well. (Mark 4:38) "And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and... cried with a loud voice..." (Mark 5:5-7). Jesus spoke with him and the next time the town saw him he was at the feet of Jesus, "...sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind..." (Mark 5:15)

"At the feet of Jesus, I will lay my burdens down, I will lay my heavy burdens down. In the stillness I can hear my Savior calling out, come to me and lay your burdens down...In the arms of Jesus, I will find my peace and rest, I hear Him calling come to me and rest. Carried by my Shepherd cradled tightly to His chest, There and there alone my soul finds rest. So I will rest in the shelter of my Savior's embrace, hidden safely in the refuge of His mercy and His grace, and I will sing Hallelujah to the One who sets me free! And you will find me at the feet of Jesus." -S. C. Chapman.

There was a precious child of God who came to a point where he realized death would come before long. There was a singular message and prayer that one would hear from him if

they visited during that time. It was not a request for recognition, or even for someone to come and visit him. His request was strictly, "(Lord) Give me peace in my soul." And the Lord honored that request. An interesting observation is that we, as Christians, do not seem to struggle with the peace of God. It is the other things that we try to handle ourselves. Those things that we try to wrap our hands and minds around and manage. Those things that the Lord tells us in His word to cast upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). Today, we will rise up and put our hands to the task before us, whatever it may be. As Christians, we are called to be faithful in that manner. But nowhere in the Word of God does it ever say that we are called to worry or be fearful over the uncertainty or hardships related to those tasks. In fact, the Word tells us quite the opposite in many places. One of those can be found in Isaiah 41:10 where the Lord says, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yes, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27. A peace given, not depending on the removal your struggles, but depending on your willingness to cry out to Him AND to lay the worry, doubt, and fear down at His feet. Today, as you faithfully endure whatever task is before you, make the trade. Your worry, doubt, and fear for His peace.

*CHALLENGE: Faithfully endure (Your Task).
Consistently release (Satan's Worry). Always
accept (God's Peace).*

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." 1 Peter 5:6

"If a man think himself to be something , when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." Galatians 6:3

Man climbed to the top of the highest mountain in the world and shouted, "I am something!! I have climbed to the highest peak, no one on earth is higher than me!!" One can imagine that God just smiled at the ignorance of man, as He considered that the entire space that man's feet covered was less than .000001% of the land surface of the earth that His Word had created and holds in place.

The preacher said, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement" (Ecclesiastes 11:9). Hebrews 10:31 says " It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

As we strive to do well at whatever it is that we do in this life, we must not allow ourselves to forget that there is a God "with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). Isaiah records God saying, "...as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my

ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). 1 Corinthians 1:25 tells us that, "...the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

None of this is recorded to demean or belittle us. It is written so that we can understand our true worth. No, we are not the biggest and most amazing thing there is. That would be a position reserved for God. Understanding this should humble us... and make us feel overwhelmed that this biggest and most amazing God, holds us nearest and dearest to His heart.

As He says in Jeremiah 31:3, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Knowing this, we should find it easy to set our hearts to fulfill the final portion of His simple request in Micah 6:8 "...and walk humbly with (our) God".

*CHALLENGE: Never too big not to need his hand,
never too small that He can't understand. Never
too far that He can not reach, never too proud that
He can not teach.*

48

.....

"Behold, He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber (become drowsy) nor sleep." - Psalms 121:4

He does not even get drowsy...

Anyone who has been a parent knows what it is like to be awoken when you were not really ready to be so. A small child has a knack sometimes for knowing just when mom or dad are in the deepest recesses of sleep from which it is hard to come fully awake. One might even wonder if they plan it that way, just for the show. Whatever the case may be, many a parent has been called to action by their children at times when they were functioning at less than top notch. Why this deficiency in their capability? Because they were sleepy, also known as drowsy.

The average family world wide has approximately 2-3 children. The advantages of raising children are many, but the effort required is great to make a successful attempt. Some opportunities are no doubt missed because, in our humanity, we are just too tired to get everything done that could be. We have to pick our battles, focus on what is most important, and sometimes let some things go just because we do require at least a little sleep. Just like our children can tell when we are not there, they can also tell when maybe we ought not be. Those times when maybe it would be better if we just went and took a nap. As a human parent, drowsy can move to cranky sometimes if we are not careful.

Are we not thankful to have a Heavenly Father who not only never sleeps, He never even gets drowsy? Crankiness is something for which He never has to apologize, because it never happens. He is always there, bright eyed and ready to listen to whatever your need is, be it morning, noon, or night. He long since passed the average number of children (Abel took him past that) but still He manages to find time for every single one of them. Right now, I have the option of crying out to Him...and you do as well. As He listens to my cry, He is also able to wrap His ever loving arms around you, while He sends His presence to fill another with peace. Another who may be on the other side of the world, but still in His hands.

What a wonderful Father He is! Should I not love Him? Should I not cast all of my cares upon Him? Should I not remember when I am awake at night with some trouble that will not let me sleep, My Father in Heaven is awake right beside me? And He waits, just for me to tell Him of my need.

CHALLENGE: Sleep in peace, knowing that your Heavenly Father is always awake, watching and caring for you.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye..." 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

"Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." -Matthew 24:44

In the 24th chapter of Matthew, Jesus is recorded telling the story of two different types of servants. One was the "faithful and wise servant" who diligently followed after His lord's direction each day. The other was described as an evil servant who said, "My lord delayeth his coming." Not out loud, but in his heart (that place where the issues of life come from - Proverbs 4:23) This servant began to live contrary to his lord's ways and began to treat his fellow servants with contempt and imbibe in things that were contrary to his lord's desires. In both cases, the lord showed up when neither was expecting. Both men received their rewards in a moment.

Many, no doubt, have, at some point in their life, experienced having their mom or dad show up at a time they were not expecting, when the job was not yet done. "But mom and dad, two hours was not enough time to finish cleaning a whole room. Especially when I had to read that book and play with each toy first." In other words, we really do not have an excuse. We were given the opportunity and we failed to do what was put in front of us to do. Not a pleasant situation.

When considering life in the light of eternity, it is not what you are going to do tomorrow that matters, but what you are doing today. In the Lord, we always have another chance. However, we must realize that other chance is now. Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Now is the time to be faithful to Him. Now is the time to love Jesus and set our hearts to please him. And, if in any way we are not where we need to be, doing what we need to be doing, now is the time to do something about it. Now is the day of salvation. Now is your moment, before the last moment comes.

CHALLENGE: "Tomorrow, who promised you tomorrow? Better chose the Lord today. For tomorrow very well may be (too late)" -Winans and Winans.

Be ye angry and sin not..." - Ephesians 4:26

"...the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." James 1:20

"I am so mad I can't see straight!". Have you ever heard this phrase? Maybe you have actually uttered it yourself. Anger is not a passive emotion. If it is allowed the space, it grows and begins to control our thoughts, emotions, and actions. While it may not actually affect our physical sight, it definitely blurs our vision in just about every other way, especially spiritually.

Maybe that is why Paul follows up his advice in Ephesians 4:26 with a simple statement, "Neither give place to the devil." Unaddressed anger is like a giant excavator that removes good earth, grass and trees in our life, and leave a hole, a place for the devil to work. And oh how he, the devil, loves those spaces. As the saying goes, give him an inch, and he will end up taking a mile.

In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus is dealing with the subject of anger between people. Jesus equated unaddressed anger, i.e. "anger without a cause" as a force capable of leading people into a place that in their minds was reserved for murder. In other words, as long as they could say, "Well, at least I did not kill anybody", then they were clear before God. Jesus' words

taught them something different. "...Whosoever is angry with his brother without cause (idly, uncontrolled) shall be in danger of the judgment."

Would Cain have not ended up in a much better place if he would have addressed his anger in the correct way, rather than to let it bubble up in him until one day, it led him to do something he could never undo? God warned him, "...sin lieth at the door..." (Genesis 4:7). But Cain would not listen. He allowed Satan place in his life through the anger that he allowed to fester inside of him until one day, it took the life of his brother. What is so sad about unaddressed anger is it never has a solution. It only creates more problems. "My punishment is greater than I can bear..." (Genesis 4:13) said Cain in the end.

Remember today, anger does not yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In fact, it yields something quite the opposite. There is no reason why we have to allow Satan the room to work in our life. Whatever the situation is, remember Matthew 5:23-24. In making the daily offering of your life to the Lord, if you realize that your brother has ought against you (or you against him) go and make it right. Do not allow the sun to go down upon your wrath (Ephesians 4:26).

CHALLENGE: Living joyful and full of peace, Keeps a soul out of much danger. But can not ever truly be, in a heart that stores up anger.

51

.....

The apples were small, hard, green, and bitter. Not really the kind good for picking and eating. And for what else could you use a green apple? Of course, a green apple fight! Ammunition was gathered and the two cousins took their places. One inside the barn and one on the outside. A signal was given and the battle began. And what a glorious battle it was! Apples flew like small cannon balls, shot from arms being slung with as much force as two teenage boys could muster. There was rushing up and down stairs, crashing through doors, and at least one death-defying jump from the second story loft window. And then, the younger saw his chance. The 'enemy' was racing around the outside of the barn to the area that lay just beyond the walk-through door. He raced downstairs to the door and flung it open just in time to see his target sling his non-throwing arm toward the door as he jumped backwards over the fence...and then the world went black. The younger cousin awoke to see his now worried cohort rushing in to see what had happened. The word was that the injured party had let out a yell that would convince anyone that someone or something was definitely headed for glory. Not far behind came the older cousin's dad who had been inside studying, enjoying the peaceful day, unaware of the many near death experiences that were occurring just outside his backyard. And, although there probably should not have been, considering previous experiences of these two cousins, there was a look of somewhat amazement on his face. Nevertheless, he gathered himself, and, seeing that the boys were both going to live (albeit with a busted lip, bloody nose, and black eye), he looked at them very calmly and delivered sage wisdom that was never to be forgotten. "Boys," he said, "this is why we don't have green apple fights."

Results matter. There is a reason they occur. Put your finger in a light socket, and you are liable to feel a strong tingle. Play with fire, and you are liable to get burned. Go around a curve too fast, and you are liable to wreck. How many people try the same thing day after day, expecting different results? Isaiah wrote, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21). Pharaoh was a good example of someone who would have been far better off to recognize the need to make a change. If the water turning into blood was not enough, surely the frogs should have been. If the hail was not enough, surely the locusts should have been. But he just kept on his way, refusing to recognize the truth that was right in front of him. Things were not really working out so good the way he was going. How about us? Do we listen to the Lord? Do we learn from our failures and mistakes? Or do we just keep on, thinking this time I will somehow manage to make it end differently? Those two young men made their fair share of mistakes in the rest of their lives, but having another green apple fight was not one of them. Today, in your life, "consider the lilies how they grow" (Luke 12:27). What are the results you are getting? Are the actions in your life yielding the "peaceable fruit of righteousness?" (Hebrews 12:11). If not, maybe it is time to do a thorough self assessment before the Lord. As it says in Phillipians 2:12 "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling". Maybe it is time to stop doing what hurts, and start living "life more abundant and free".

CHALLENGE:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face! And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace!"-

Helen Howarth Lemmel

"...though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." -2 Corinthians

4:16

Results worth making a change!

52

.....

"Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay..." -Adelaide A. Pollard

"For I came down from Heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." -words of Jesus, found in the gospel of John, 6:38.

It is a sign of maturity as a child of God, when we encounter circumstances adverse to our wishes in life and choose to submit our will in reaction to the situation God has allowed to occur. This involves a reactive submission, and is an extremely important portion of the Christian character. Hebrews 5:8 speaks of Jesus saying, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." However, if all we have is a reactive submission to the Lord, we are likely going to suffer a great deal of hardships that could have been avoided, as well as miss out on many blessings that could have been enjoyed.

The verse in John 6:38 tells us that Jesus came down from Heaven with an anticipatory submission. Life was not just His to experience, there was a purpose, a grand purpose. A purpose that originated from the heart of the very Ruler and Creator of Heaven, Earth, and all that is therein. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..." (John 3:16).

Proactive submission is not a quality innate to the human nature. It is something in which we must invest time, prayer,

and careful consideration, otherwise known as blood, sweat, and tears, in order to see it occur in our lives. Consider Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke 22:44 says, "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." This was Jesus, earnest in prayer to submit His will, not in reaction to an occurrence in His life, but proactively, before it happened.

Jesus had some knowledge of the events that were to befall Him in life from the moment that He came down from Heaven. One might think that an easier way to submit but is it? What if you could see everything that would happen in your life that would be contrary to your will? How would you react? Considering that, one might thank God that He does not drop all of that on us at one time. Whatever the case may be, just because we can not see what is to come does not mean we can not be ready for whatever the future may hold. One of the greatest contributors to peace as a Christian is that we do not have to know what is ahead in order to be ready. We must simply learn to live in submission to the One who does.

CHALLENGE: In Psalms 32:8-9, God speaks through the Psalmist, saying, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near thee." Seek the Lord today for proactive submission, submission when there seems to be nothing about which to submit.

53

.....

"...seek, and ye shall find..." -Luke 11:9

"...you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart..." -Jeremiah 29:13

Who ever won a game of hide and seek by sitting still in a chair? Remember being the child that was counting? As soon as you said the last number, the hunt was on! Every nook and cranny, all the favorite hiding places, until everyone was flushed out and on the run. And then there was often the professional. The player that seemed to find new hiding spots no one had thought of before that time. Finding that person always took a little longer and a little more determination. But, if you looked long enough, most often, you could expect to be successful.

Oh, that we had the determination of a child at hide and seek when it comes to the scriptures. Jesus told us, "Seek and you will find". But so many times it seems we live as though we expect him just to come over to our spiritual easy chair and drop it in our laps. In Ephesians 3:8, Paul speaks of the "unsearchable riches" of Christ. The Psalmist writes, " How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the

sand..." (Psalms 139:17-18). There is no end to the wealth of knowledge, i.e. spiritual nourishment, to be found in Christ!

How is it possible then to be spiritually weak? That is, lacking energy to perform as Christ would have us to perform in this life? Many times it comes from this misunderstanding that if God wants us to know something, He will waylay us with it, drop it in our lap, or chase us down several streets in order to give it to us. That is not consistent with the scriptures. Hosea 6:3 says, " Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord...". Jesus was speaking to a group of new converts in John 8:31-32 when He said, " If ye continue in my word...ye shall know the truth...". There is so much to be found, but it takes a heart willing to seek.

How is your hunger for the wisdom, the deep things of God? Are you ready to seek for them as silver and as for hid treasures (Proverbs 2:4)? The Lord promises if we do, that we will find them. It is just a matter of being willing to seek.

CHALLENGE: Search out the deep things of God today. Allow the word of God to come alive in your life. If you have a question, seek God for an answer, an answer based in His Holy Word.

54

"That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ." Ephesians 1:12

"Trust ye not in lying words, saying (chanting), The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these." Jeremiah 7:4

"But when you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking." Matthew 6:7

It has become common practice in places of worship to utilize a phrase in repetition in order achieve a state of praise. While this definitely works up an emotional state, it does not constitute praise of the Lord. Praise of Lord must start long before the music, in a heart that has made a decision. A decision to trust God. Without this, no matter how good the song is, it is strictly a state of emotion, not praise.

Trusting God is not just something that can show up on Sunday. In fact, though many times it shows up in a moment, It builds day by day. Its growth occurs as a soul learns to commit their ways unto the Lord, long before the direction of those ways shows up. When Peter

shouted out for the Lord as he sank into the sea, it was not because he necessarily had an epiphany in a moment that Jesus was Lord of all. He had been through some places with the Lord and seen what He had done. He might not have known how the Lord would save Him, but he knew Jesus was the best option available.

When we recognize that Jesus is the best option available to save us from the troubles around us, it is a natural thing for true praise to flow forth from our heart through our mouths. We do not need an emotional state to feel as though we have praised God. We have an assurance in the depths of our hearts, down there where we decided to commit our ways unto Him.

CHALLENGE: Today, as you praise God, do it because of what you know about Him. If you do not know anything about Him, then start putting Him to the test. Really, there is no other way to praise Him.

55

.....

"...let us consider one another provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..." -Hebrews 10:24-25

In the world we live in, so many things are becoming virtual. It is easy to begin to believe that somehow we are satisfying the assembling of ourselves together through taking part in online meetings or prerecorded activities. While these opportunities can be blessings in our lives, they are not the fulfillment of this verse. "Assembling of ourselves together" specifically means "a complete collection; specifically a Christian meeting (for worship)" [Strong's G1997]. This is not just about what we hear, i.e. singing and preaching, but it is more so about gathering in each other's presence to invite His presence to come amongst us. As it says in Matthew 18:20, "...where there are two or more gathered together in (His) name...", he promises to be in our midst. Not just in in each one of us individually, but in the midst of us as a group, as a body. This is the sacrifice we make when we are unable to be in worship service with others and have to utilize other options. This is why we can never let the blessing of other options replace actually being together in the name of the Lord. Those other options are not the

same, although they can do much to sustain us through difficult times. They can never replace being together as a body in the presence of the Lord.

George Askins wrote, "Brethren we have met to worship, and adore the Lord our God. Will you pray with all your power while we try to preach the Word? All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Brethren pray and holy manna will be showered all around." There is an element of this that can only happen when we gather as a group to worship Him. If you are in a situation where you can not be in service, God have mercy and sustain you. A sorrow should be in our hearts for those who are missing out on the blessing of being in worship service together. If you are willfully neglecting the opportunities you have to be in service, may God open your eyes to the blessing you are missing. There was a reason David said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" Psalms 122:1.

CHALLENGE: Go to church...whenever you can. There is a special blessing when you are with the children of God worshipping our Creator and Savior.

56

"Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith..."
-Hebrews 12:2

Peter, James, and John went up on a mountain with the Lord. One might imagine that they were just expecting more of the same. Jesus had been up on the mountain before this time. Sometimes people followed and He taught them. Sometimes, He shared quiet time with His disciples. Sometimes they just rested. Odds were, one of those things was about to happen again. And then Moses and Elijah showed up. Not only that, Jesus' clothes were shining so bright they could hardly stand to look upon Him. In amazement, Peter stepped up with the idea to honor all three men. Suddenly, there was a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him." All three disciples fell on their faces in fear and did not look up until they heard Jesus saying it was okay. When they looked up, Matthew writes that "they saw no man, save Jesus only." (Matthew 17:1-8)

Is it not interesting that the voice from heaven, i.e. God, did not say, "Build Him a tabernacle"? So much is held in that simple phrase, "...hear ye Him". How easy it is to build a shrine to Jesus, to put time and effort into

displaying an Image of Christ, and fail to actually keep our eyes and ears on Him. He speaks to us daily, but are we listening, are we paying attention? When I kneel in prayer, do I simply have a monologue? In other words, am I, like Peter, just telling the Lord all my good ideas?

Or do I give Jesus time to inspire my heart, to speak to me through His word? Do I give Him time to provide me with an honest assessment of my ideas? When I read His word, is it just a race to the finish? Or am I giving Him time to apply His Word to my thoughts? Are my eyes and ears really on Him? Or am I just maintaining an image?

"O to be like thee, O to be like thee! Precious Redeemer, pure as Thou art! Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness! Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart!" -Thomas O. Chisholm.

CHALLENGE: Jesus is not a part of something, He is everything. Let it be that way in your life today.

57

.....

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive a crown of life..." -James 1:12

"Yes, I will wear a crown over there, over there! Yes, I will wear a crown over there! When my toiling is o'er I shall rest evermore, in that home He has gone to prepare!" -B.E.Warren

The toil of the moment is forgotten when the reward is commiserate. Most of the time, the final decision about the worth of the effort relies almost entirely in the worthiness of the reward. When considerable effort is given, at least considerable reward is expected, even if it is just a heart felt thank you. Heaven will surely be worth it all.

"Earth holds no treasure but perish with using, however precious they be. But there's a country to which I am going. Heaven holds all to me." -Tillit S. Teddlie. Teddlie goes on to write, "...Brighter its glories will be! Joy without measure will be my treasure! Heaven holds all for me!"

"The Ills of life that hover o'er our sunniest path, are felt no more; The cares of earth, a dismal train, that follow every step we take, will there the happy soul forsake, and not molest her peace again."
-Daniel C. Colesworthy's Heaven.

If we could live each day here on earth always more conscious of the reward than the trial, the hardships we face would not seem so unbearable. Not because the trial is any different in intensity, but because we, like Moses, have "...respect unto the recompense of the reward."

-Hebrews 11:26. The honest truth is as a Christian, the surest way to be despondent in life, is to forget that there is a prize waiting all those who endure. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19). There is no trial in life, than can with it's bad, outdo the good of Heaven. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, IS working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

"When Jesus steps out on a cloud to call His children, the dead in Christ shall rise to meet Him in the air! Then those that remain shall be quickly changed! At the midnight cry, we'll be going home!" -Day and Day. Lift your head, weary pilgrim, homeland is just around the bend. Your prize awaits you. "Behold, we count them happy which endure..." (James 5:11)

CHALLENGE: " My heavenly home is bright and fair I feel like traveling on! Nor pain, nor death can enter there, I feel like traveling on!" -William Hunter. Let this be the song of your heart today as you think about perseverance's crown.

58

The little boy sat with his mom, staring out at the great waves crashing into shore, one after another. The sun was slowly setting, casting a mixture of beautiful color across the sky. There was hardly another person around, and those who could be seen were quietly enjoying the same sight the little boy and his mom were soaking up. The sand felt great and life seemed just about perfect. It was then, in a moment of deep reflection for a two year old, the little boy turned to his mom and said, "God did good on this beach, didn't he?"

In the first chapter of Genesis we read the account of the creation. For as much detail as is presented there, it only scratches the surface of all the creativity and imagination of our God. Consider that when He made the land animals, He not only made animals, but He made different kinds of animals. And when He made different animals, He not only made lizards, He made Komodo dragons, leaf-tailed geckos, and salamanders. When He made trees, He did not just make a generic stick with leaves. He made pine trees, walnut trees, oak trees, redbuds, aspen, mustard, and redwoods, just to name a few. And when God was done with all His creation, He looked it all over and said, "...indeed, it was very good".

How ready are you to realize the goodness of God that is all around you? We live in a world that is depraved by sin. We see the effects of that all around us. But there are still Komodo dragons, pine trees, and a beach where the ocean waves crash into an uncountable mass of sand. A beach where a little boy once said, "God did good, didn't He?" What is our response to the little boy's question. Do we see what God has done? Or are our eyes trapped on the dirty and filthiness of sinful man. Let us be like the little boy and see that "God did good!"

*CHALLENGE: Practice seeing what God has done in each situation . Sing this chorus until it's place is cemented in your mind: "God is so good! God is so good!! God is so good!! He's so good to me!!" -P
Makai*

"But my God shall supply all your NEED according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." -Phillipians 4:19

The little boy prayed night by night with his family for the little sister God had promised them through adoption. Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. And, months turned into years. Still, the little sister of promise did not come. One day, he spoke with resolution to his mother. "Mommy," he said, "God is NOT helping us." One can only imagine the thoughts that went through his mother's head at hearing these words. Four years old seemed too young to already be having battles with faith. As thoughts whirled in her mind, the little boy finished his determined thought. "I'm going to pray for (a little brother)!"

The end of this story is that the little sister and the little brother both came, boy first then girl. A family who expected to be blessed once was blessed twice. A little boy had HIS prayer answered and a set of parents learned something about real faith. If God does not seem to be helping you, rather than giving up in despair, the answer is simply to ask for more.

How could that translate to our lives? Take Paul, for example. Thrice, he besought the Lord for help that the Lord did not give. God's answer? "My grace is sufficient for thee:for my strength is made perfect in weakness..." (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul had been praying for God to remove a thorn in his flesh. God not removing the thorn could seem very much like He wasn't helping Paul out. But actually, the real reason was that He had MORE to give.

Whatever is happening in your life, if you love Jesus and are seeking to please Him, then you have given Him the keys to work in your life. Trust Him. He may allow things to happen that seem like He is not helping you very much. In those times, remember that He is only trying to give you more. Instead of throwing up your hands in despair, why not go ahead and pray for that something more in your life. You never know what might happen.

CHALLENGE: Understand that God is always a helpful God, even when it seems like He isn't .

60

.....

*"I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might ransomed be,
And raised up from the dead..." - Havergal and Bliss*

*"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life
for his friends" -John 15:13*

*"Beloved, If God (and Jesus) so loved us, we ought also to love one
another"- 1 John 4:11*

*"I can see Your heart 8 billion different ways,/Every precious one a
child You died to save,/If You gave your life to love them so will I"
-Houston, Hastings, Fatkin*

How many eyes did you look into in the last twenty four hours? Your spouse, your parents, your children, coworkers, strangers, enemies, friends, and those to whom you are simply indifferent. What did you think about when your eyes met theirs? Unless you have made it a point to the contrary, the majority of your thoughts did not delve very deep into the substance of who that person was. At most, we might have had a thought concerning the state of their hair or the clothes that they wore. It is a rare thing for us humans to go much deeper than that in our daily interactions. We have too much happening to make space for anything more. But yet, that is what Jesus did. He made space for something more. Consider His interaction with Nicodemus

in the 3rd chapter of John. Nicodemus came with a question, but Jesus took the time to look deeper. That took something more than just attention to self. Jesus had to take time to consider, not just what Nicodemus was saying, but also, what was the state of his heart. What were his greater needs?

Now, obviously none of us have the perception of Jesus, but we do have His example that we can follow. "If you gave Your life to love them, so will I." Jesus took time to consider with Nicodemus. That I can do. My ability to perceive the ultimate need of an individual I have contact with during the day may or may not be a success. But I can give space to consider. I can lend a listening ear and a caring heart when the opportunity allows. And I can pray. I may not know their need, but God does.

So try it in your next 86,400 seconds. See what you can do to care about the people you pass in a day. Lend a hand, lend an ear, say a prayer. Remember, that is not just another human that you are passing. That is the pearl of great price to the Lord. That individual is one of the reasons Jesus left His home in Heaven. "If He gave his life to love them, So will I"

CHALLENGE: "We are the reason that He gave His life, We are the reason that He suffered and died, To a world that was lost He gave all He could give, to show us a reason to live!" -D. Meece. This is a love that was greater. Practice greater love in your life today. Notice the people around you and give space for the Lord to let His love flow through you.

61

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 16:25

The two friends packed their bags and threw them in the truck together. They were taking a short, less than 4 hour trip to meet up with friends for a Saturday filled with fun activities. They had taken this route many times before this and had no concern about following the correct path. They could do it in their sleep, or so they may have thought. And maybe they should have tried it that way because it sure didn't work out well with them being awake. There were two highways they took on the various trips north out of their metro area, literally named Highway 1 and Highway 3. On this trip, they should have been taking Highway 3. However, that was not the path they were on as they drove out of town, laughing and talking with each other. At one point, they crossed an east/west interstate that would have led them straight to where they were supposed to be headed. One of the young men even pointed at the interstate and said, in effect, "We could go that way." Then both boys just laughed out loud. And kept driving...further and further away from where they were supposed to be going. Around an hour later, the two friends realized their mistake. They had driven many miles in the wrong direction. Getting back to where they were

supposed to be took some time and they missed many of the fun activities that had been planned for that day.

Jeremiah 10:23 says, "...it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." These two young men learned a valuable lesson that day. When you think you know the way by heart, that is one of the best times to check with the map. These two friends suffered the loss of what was supposed to be a fun Saturday, but they were able to complete their journey without serious incident. The path we take in life has far more serious outcomes. As Solomon recorded in Proverbs chapters 14 and 16, there is a way that seems right to man, but the end is death. We can never be too sure not to check with the instructions one more time. Not just for a happier life here, but also for the promise of life eternal.

In John 14, Jesus told His disciples they knew the way. This was not a call to take off on their own. It was a call to follow more closely to Him. "...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

E.E. Hewitt wrote of "Pressing more closely to Him that is leading, when we are tempted to turn from the way." There is no telling how many turns our lives may take. One thing is for certain, though. If we are not bothering to check in with Jesus, they are not likely to be the correct ones.

CHALLENGE: Check in with Jesus today. Adjust your route in whatever way necessary to line up with what His word, the road map, is telling you.

"...because of the blindness of their heart." -Ephesians 4:18

"Had I the choosing of my pathway, in blindness I (would) go astray. And wander far away in darkness, nor reach that land of endless day." -C.W. Naylor

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried: And in hell he lift up his eyes..." (Luke 16:19-23). If you read on in the story, you will see that the rich man did not go to hell because he was rich. He made a choice. A choice to go after the rich things of this world. In doing so, he blinded his heart to his greatest need. Like the rich man in Luke 12:18, his time came and his soul was not prepared.

Christ spoke of the church of the Laodiceans "...being increased with goods" and how it had blinded them to the true need of their heart. He counseled them to "...buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich..." and to

"...anoint thy eyes with eye salve that thou mayest see." (Revelations 3:18). Humans seem to believe so easily that the wealthier they are in the things of this world (fame, money, power), the more clearly they will see the reality of their situation. It is a lie that Satan has sold time and again to the soul that took his eyes off the Lord and attached them to those things this world has to offer. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:3, "...if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not...". They were not blinded because they exist and so does Satan. They were blinded because of their choice to take their eyes off of Jesus and to turn them on the god of this world.

"But ye brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:4). Good news! We are not sealed to our fate. Blindness is only inevitable if we chose it. "God is not willing that any should perish..." (2 Peter 3:9). "You may have salvation if you will! You may have salvation if you will! If you'll turn from sin give your heart to Him, you may have salvation if you will!" B.E. Warren. Today, do not let Satan turn your eyes away from Jesus and onto this world. Blindness, death, and destruction is all that the Devil has to offer you. Keep your eyes on Jesus! Life more abundant can be yours!

CHALLENGE: Every time Satan presents you with a temptation today, see it for what it is. Poison to your eyes and your soul. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Ask Him to help you see clearly the reality of life and the choices that are presented to you.

"Daddy, I can't do it," whimpered the little boy. He had pushed on the bolt with all his might and it did not seem like it had loosened one bit. "Keep at it," said his dad, " You'll get it." With a doubtful look, and a few more complaints concerning the degree of difficulty, the little boy kept at it. After what seemed no doubt a long time to the little boy, the bolt began to move. Soon, it lay loose on the ground, all resistance to the mission of the little boy had been conquered. It took giving it his all, but the little boy succeeded where, just a few minutes earlier, he had been ready to throw his hands up in despair.

Do you remember ever being in the same scenario as this little boy Struggling with something that seemed too much for you, just about ready to throw your hands up in defeat. Then someone tells you, "Keep going, don't quit now! Give it your all!" Many times, that determination to give it your all is what carries you through to success. There is a element of this that is true concerning our walk with the Lord. No, we can not conquer Satan and his obstacles simply because we will ourselves to do so. But there are many defeats that happen, just because someone gave up when the bolt would not turn the first time. Just think about these verses. "...he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

"...endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3). "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation" (James 1:12)

There is an old gospel song that says "I'll keep hold, holding on to Jesus, for I know He's holding onto me!" (author unknown). Whenever the bolt does not turn today, or maybe the strength seems not to be there for the task that lies before you, keep holding on to Jesus. Give Him your all. Remember, if you are holding onto Him, then He is holding onto you. Even if your strength fails, His will not.

CHALLENGE: Give the old bolt of life one more turn in Jesus name. And if it still seems stuck, give it one more. Do not ever let it be the last turn until God calls you home to Him. Until then, keep plugging away in Jesus name!

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him..." Revelation 3:20 (Words of Jesus)

There is a story in 1 Kings the 17th chapter of a widow lady who was commanded of God to make room for his prophet Elijah, whom God was hiding from King Ahab. One might wonder why God waited until she had almost nothing left to share before He sent Elijah to her. The Bible tells us that God sent the ravens to feed Elijah until the brook he was beside dried up. Then he sent Elijah to the widow. Whatever the case, although maybe she had more at one time, she only had enough for one more meager meal. Then she and her son would have nothing more to do than die. Maybe at one time, she would have felt she had the means to follow the Lord's command and take in the prophet, but that was no longer the case. "Fear not," said Elijah, " go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first...". A little knock at the door. A little request for room to be made. The choice was the widow's. No one was going to force her to do this. She had to decide to trust and make room. The Bible tells that "...she went and did according to the saying of Elijah; and she, and he, and her house did eat many days." The barrel of meal and the cruse of oil lasted. What a incredible blessing! What a

change in her situation! No doubt as she sat and looked at her son, she thanked God over and over, rejoicing that she had been willing to make room for God. But even greater things were in store. In the 17th verse of this chapter, we learn that the widow's son became sick and died. What sorrow filled her heart. After coming so low and then being rescued by God, she now watched what was no doubt her most precious possession pass away right before her eyes. "Give me your son," said Elijah. Once again, the widow lady had to chose to make room for God. Elijah took the child up to his room and prayed to God. Soon, he was walking back down the stairs, with a healthy child. Once again, the widow made room, and once again, God came through. Only this time, it went deeper. Verse 24 says "And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

How is your faith today? Are you struggling to believe that God will carry you through? Why not step back and make room and see what He will do. There may be some struggles along the way but the end result is, you will see something deeper. You will see more of the truth of who God is and the power of His truth. And Jesus said in John 8:32, "...ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It does not take your power, wealth, or intelligence. It just takes your submission to Him, your willingness to open up and let Him have His way.

CHALLENGE: Make room for God today. Open when He knocks. Let Him in. Great things are in store.

65

"Oh how sublime is the life of the Christian! Filled with the glory of Jesus divine!" -D.S. Warner

"Whereunto (God) called you...to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." -2 Thessalonians 2:14

Glory is defined as "brightness, splendor, magnificence". Sublime is defined as "high in place, excellence, or style; elevated by joy". D.S. Warner wrote "Is thy life bereft of comfort? And thy heart a cheerless spot? Say not Christ is in thy desert, for we can believe it not!". The Christian experiences sadness, grief, and, in general, hard times. The plane a follower of Christ walks on is not elevated in the sense of being oblivious to this world's stresses. There is little glory in that. But to be able to walk through this world's issues, and still keep a deep seated joy, this is the sublime life.

Christ prayed for us saying "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Paul wrote of the child of God saying, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life (glory) also of Jesus might be made manifest IN OUR BODY" 2 Corinthians 4:10. "Oh glory to Jesus! So sweet in me!" -D.S. Warner. Here, in this life, filled with the life and joy of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of all your trials today, do not allow the devil to steal your joy. As Nehemiah told the people, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" Nehemiah 8:10. A life that is not oblivious to the suffering of life, neither is it drug down into the ever present despondency of this world. But a life that is lived in "...heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). This is the life, the sublime life of the one who follows Christ.

CHALLENGE: Whatever your situation is today, choose to follow Him. "All His grace is free as the air we breath, we may each have a full supply, If we will obey and His Word believe, He'll prepare us to dwell on high!" -B.E. Warren

"To err is human, to forgive is divine" -A. Pope

"And when ye stand praying, forgive..." -Mark 11:25

Maybe the young man was naive and spoke freely of secret things that God had shown him. Possibly, he might have been a little proud, and a little favored. But none of that justified getting sold by his brothers to a caravan of traders heading for a far land. Joseph had much about which to be bitter. And it did not get any better once he arrived in Egypt. No matter how hard he worked, some injustice always seemed to come along and cause his situation to take a spin, and not for the better. Until, finally one day he stood before Pharaoh and told him the dream no one else could explain. Suddenly, Joseph was second in command, in charge of gathering and distributing what would become one of the few sources of grain in the surrounding world. In the midst of passing out supplies to needy countrymen and foreigners alike, suddenly Joseph found himself standing directly in front of the men who had sold him long ago. One can only imagine the feelings of vengeance that could have so easily dominated Joseph's heart. Now was his chance to redeem all those lost years of suffering that he had endured. But something had happened in Joseph's heart. something called forgiveness. Not only did Joseph not seek any retribution, he told them, "... fear

ye not: I will nourish you and your little ones." Genesis 50:21. That same verse goes on to tell us that "...he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."

"It's the hardest thing to give away, the last thing on your mind today. It always goes to those who don't deserve. It's the opposite of how you feel when the pain they caused is just too real. It takes everything you have to say the word...Forgiveness" (M. West). One might venture to say that it often takes more than everything you have. Forgiveness often takes divine grace in our lives to turn away from the hurt and bitterness and offer love and mercy. But it is a requirement from the Lord. Mark 11:26 tells us that if we do not forgive others, then neither will our Father in heaven forgive us. And yet, it is not just for others that we forgive. "It'll clear the bitterness away. It can even set a prisoner free. There is no end to what it's power can do. So let it go and be amazed by what you see through eyes of grace, the prisoner that it really frees is you...Forgiveness" (M. West).

Are you free today? Is there something that you are harboring deep in your heart? Something that you have pushed down and squished down but never let go? Today is the day. Make the phone call, write that letter, visit that person. Whatever it is you need to do, do it. Don't allow unforgiveness to weigh you down one more day. Do not allow it to obscure your vision one more step. Do not let it threaten your heavenly reward one more moment. Be like Joseph and Jesus. Forgive.

CHALLENGE: Forgive...that's all. Just forgive.

67

.....

"...Hezekiah received the letter...and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord." -2 Kings 19:14

"Leave it there! Leave it there! Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there! If you trust and never doubt, He will surely bring you out! Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there!" -A. Tindley

Many good changes had been happening in the kingdom of Judah since Hezekiah had come to the throne. So much of the evil had been cleaned up and the worship of the true God was coming back to preeminence in Judah. And then comes Sennacherib and his letter. What could Hezekiah do? He knew that he did not have the ability in himself to stand before the Babylonian king. He knew the kingdom was not ready. So, instead of making a decision based on the reality of his condition, he took his problem to the One who is able to change reality. The next morning, Sennacherib awakened to 185,000 of his men lying dead. Sennacherib left immediately and never made it back to Judah (2 Kings 19).

What is the reality of your situation today? Are the walls closing in on you? Walls of grief? Walls of fear? Walls of hopelessness? These walls can easily seem like they are too big for you to climb, and maybe they are. But they are not too big

that God can not do something about them. You might even try writing a letter. Be honest. Tell the Lord the truth. Include all your doubts, fears, heartaches, and struggles. Then, like Hezekiah, spread it out before the Lord. Just watch what He can do. If your reality needs to change, it will. And if it does not, expect to receive the grace you need to endure it.

"Oh, what peace we often forfeit! Oh, what NEEDLESS pain we bear! ALL because we do not carry everything to God in prayer" (J.M. Scriven)

CHALLENGE: *Write the letter. Lay it out before the Lord. Let Him take control.*

.....

"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it..." -Isaiah 30:21

"... and after the fire a still small voice." -1 Kings 19:12

"...when I am cast down spirit and soul, He whispers sweet peace to me." -W.M. Ramsey

How does He do it? "Peace! Be still!" says Jesus, and the waves cease. When God spoke and created the world, one generally gets the idea of a magnificently powerful voice saying, "Let there be light!!". And maybe it was like that, but it might not have been. The power in God's voice is not determined by how loud He can be (some have even said it sounds like thunder). The power in God's voice is there because it is He that speaks. Whether He does so with much volume or soft as a whisper, whatever He speaks will come to pass.

Think about when Jesus spoke. In some places it mentions that He cried out, meaning there was more volume behind His speech. But in other places, it is evident that He just spoke simply and somewhat quietly. Either way, when Jesus spoke, it came to pass. Ask any one of the ten lepers. Ask the blind man. Ask the mom whose son Jesus raised just as they were

carrying him to burial. Ask any of the many people whose lives were completely altered for the better just because Jesus spoke.

So for what are you looking today? Some mighty emotional high? Or for the Lord to simply speak over your life? The results come not because of some magnificent demonstration. The results come when He simply speaks His will.

CHALLENGE: Don't look for the fire. Or the earthquake. Or the wind. Just look for God to speak over your life. Quiet down your will, determination, and decisions, and listen so that you can hear it when He speaks.

.....

"...Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." -John 12:24

"You can't have your cake and eat it too." -Everybody's Parent (since the invention of cake)'

In order to make money, you have to be willing to spend money sometimes.

It is better to spend a penny wisely, than to pinch it tightly.

To have the bread, you must be willing to give up the flour.

Jesus told a story of three stewards. They were all given a certain measure of money which they were expected to invest. When the master of the house returned, he sought account of what each steward had done with the talent(s) they had received. The first two stewards came and showed the master what they had earned by being willing to part with the talents the master had given them. The master commended these two servants. Then came the third steward, the foolish one. He only had one talent, so he reasoned that the most important thing to his master would be that he hold onto the one that he had. He couldn't have been further from the truth. "Thou wicked and slothful servant," the master said. "...cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness" (Parable of the Talents -Matthew 25:14-30).

"Every day is a bank account, and time is our currency. No one's rich, nobody's poor, we get twenty-four hours each. So how are you gonna spend? Will you invest or squander? Try to get ahead or help someone who's under?" (C. Rice).

Some of our Lord's last words to us before he departed into the heavens was to "...go ye into all the world and preach the gospel..." (Mark 16:15). "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God..." (1 Corinthians 6:20). Jesus made an investment in us. Now he is looking for a return on that investment. In order for that to happen, we have to be willing to spend some of our time on somebody besides ourselves. Maybe it's a neighbor, or a stranger. Maybe it's your child, or parent. Maybe it is your spouse. Jesus did not give us this great salvation, just for us to hunker down in a hole and wait until He returns. He is expecting a profit. And for that to happen, we have to learn to make some investments of our own. If we are not willing to reach outside of our personal bubble, that is going to be hard to accomplish. But if we are willing to spend some time sharing with, caring for, and encouraging others, God can make us fruitful and pleasing in His sight.

CHALLENGE: How much of this day will be spent on you? How much will be spent on reaching people with the gospel? How much will be spent spreading God's love? What are you investing? What will your return be?

*"Under His wings, under His wings! Who from His love can sever?
Under His wings my soul shall abide, safely abide forever!" - W.O.
Cushing*

*"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide
under the shadow of the Almighty." -Psalms 91:1*

The little child was only a few months old but already she knew the sound of her mother's heart. She would not be content to fall asleep unless she was right up close where she could hear every beat. Her mother would slowly slide her down when she thought the child was enough asleep that she would not notice. But, nearly every time, the child would let out a cry when she realized she could no longer hear that safe, familiar sound. She wanted to be close to the one who was her security.

"I'm in the Lord's sacred pavilion, thus sheltered securely from harm,..." -B.E. Warren. Do you know where you are safe? Much of this world's action revolves around creating a safe place in which to dwell. People have tried many different techniques to attempt to create a place where they feel at peace, a place where nothing can harm them. The irony of it all is that the only truly safe space in all the world can never be found in any of man's imaginations or devices. It was

created the day that Jesus hung on the cross, in the moment that he said, "It is finished..." and then gave up the ghost (John 19:30). All that is left for us to do is to take advantage of the safe place he has for us.

"...how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). Jesus spoke these words as he looked over Jerusalem. Generation after generation had passed through her walls and, though there was a time here or there that they turned to the Lord, in the end they never would take advantage of the great benefit offered to them. The offer to just be held by the Savior.

How about you today? Are you willing to just be held? It is not always as easy as it sounds but there is no place of greater safety and peace than to be found held tightly, leaning close to the Savior's chest.

CHALLENGE: Let go today and just be held. Stop trying to create your own place of safety. Leave that in the Lord's hands.

71

.....

“Sin will take you farther than you want to go...” -unknown author

That day, as she headed out to walk through the orchard, there is no indication that Eve had any intention of directly disobeying God. Maybe she was gathering fruit. Maybe she was checking the trees to see how full they were. Whatever the case may be, it only took a few well placed lines and the serpent had her taking action that would forever change the plight of mankind.

When he took the job of treasurer, Judas most likely had no awareness that he would one day be leading the arresting group of soldiers to the quiet garden to identify Jesus. He was just taking care of the money. But, a penny here, a penny there, and suddenly he was betraying the Savior of the world.

Sin does not come in waving a banner saying, “You’re not going to be happy with the results!”. Quite the opposite, actually. James 1:14 says, “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts (longing)...”. If you continue to read that passage you will see an end result quite opposite than what was seen in the beginning. In the beginning, one is simply fulfilling their longing. In the end, they are experiencing spiritual death thus separation from all that is good. Twice in Proverbs we read that there is a way that

seems right to a man, but, in the end, it leads to death (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25). This is not saying that God is going to let us be lost when we were sincerely trying to do the right thing as we understand it. This verse is dealing with the tendency we have as humans to justify most anything if we want to do so.

Jesus said that Satan was the "Father of Lies" (John 8:44). His offerings to us are not going to come in a clear wrapper, where we can decipher exactly what he is offering us and decide whether we want any part of it or not. He always presents it as the best option, the thing you would be a fool not to enjoy. He has no intention of being open and honest about the end result. We have to be wise to his ways and not fall for the trap that he has set for us. That can only come through learning the Word of God and setting our hearts to follow it in every way. As the Light of God shines brighter in our lives, we will see more clearly the darkness and deceitfulness of sin and sin's taskmaster, Satan.

CHALLENGE: Do not let the line of right and wrong be decided by your opinion. Base that line upon on the word of God. And stay as far away as you can from anything on the wrong side.

"It is I, be not afraid..." -John 6:20

"I'll not be afraid, I'll not be afraid! Where He leadeth I safely can go!" -W. J. Henry

"Lord, is this really you?". The question just seemed to roll over and over in her mind, even as preparations were being made to start the journey. She, her husband, and their two little boys had been praying for some time. But now that the answer was here, it was coming in like a flood. Waves of doubt and fear were crashing high. Like the waves on that sea where the disciples long before had been in a ship, not knowing if they were going to make land again. "Lord, is this really you?". The question came again. This time, she looked into the Bible and the first words she saw were "It is I, be not afraid...". Just like the disciples in that story willing took Jesus into their boat (John 6:16-21), she willingly opened her heart to the Lord when she heard those words. And, just like the disciples, the destination was shortly at hand, occurring in a way that was nothing short of extraordinary. Now, years later, she has experienced wonderful highs and some very intense lows. Through it all, she has been brought back time and again to that verse. "It is I, be not afraid."

What sea is it on which you are tossing high and sinking low? If the waves aren't crashing over you, then they are throwing you around like a little piece of bark on a great stormy ocean. Clara M. Brooks wrote, "My Heavenly Father is caring for me! My bark He is guiding o'er life raging sea. Though storms overshadow and billows are wild, they can not o'erwhelm me! For I am His child!". Are you ready to hear, "It is I, be not afraid!"? So often, we prefer to hear, "I am over here, my child". We do not want to think that Jesus is WITH us in our storm. We want to think that He is off somewhere to the side, just waiting to pull us OUT of the place where we are struggling. But take heart, Jesus WITH you is the real answer, regardless of where that "with you" happens to be.

Hear the words written by J.R. Baxter and R.J. Weaver. "On and on we walk together! Christ is ever by my side! And I fear no stormy weather! He's a faithful guide! You can never find another that the waves obey His will! And He speaks to you my brother! Hear His peace, be still!". There has never been a time that any element of this world has been able to refuse His command. Do not look at the storm, or all the possibilities of destruction. Just look to the Master and hear Him.

CHALLENGE: Take His hand. Let Him in the boat. Getting out of the storm is not where peace is. Real peace comes from simply having Him in your boat.

"...and His greatness is unsearchable." -Psalms 145:3

"O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made..." -C. Boberg

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou are mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalms 8:3-4).

"And when I think that God his Son not sparing sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in. That on a cross my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin! Then sings my soul my Savior God to Thee! How great Thou art! How great Thou art!! Then sings my soul my Savior God to Thee! How great Thou art! How great Thou art! (C. Boberg)

How great the world He made. How incredible the world that spins on an axis that we can not see, that orbits on a track that we can not discover. All because He created and sustains it in that exact manner. How much greater, that this mighty Creator of the universe we know, and all those we do not, would send His one and only Son to be humiliated and hung on a tree so that the perpetrators of his punishment could be redeemed. It is said in life that the truly great ones are willing to go unnoticed, if the greater good can be accomplished. How much more to

suffer ridicule and spite, that eternal salvation could be purchased. O God, how truly great You are!!

The athlete who breaks all the records will be remembered. The government leader who steadies his country in times of turmoil will be remembered. The multimillionaire who donates much of his wealth to charitable causes will be remembered. But there is only One who has really changed the course of history. He's the same One who created history in the beginning. He is also the One who will determine when history is over. Oh God, how truly great You are!!

A mother's love is priceless. A dad's love is too. A brother or sister who are true to you can be counted a wonderful blessing. A friend who stands beside you when times are not so good is a great thing. But, the friend that sticketh closer than a brother, He is not to be compared. He gave His life for you when you least deserved it. He continued to intercede for you when you ignored Him. And He welcomed you in when you finally received Him!! Oh Lord, how truly GREAT you are!!

Lord, may we just praise you? Can we not just adore you? Would you permit us just to extol your greatness as best we can? We know we are not even worthy to speak of your goodness but would you permit us, just for a moment, to try?

"Lord I want to love you more! Than I ever have before, You're so easy to adore, Lord I want to Love you more!!!" (unknown)

CHALLENGE: The greatness of God is unsearchable. Give yourself some time to consider it today. There truly is no end to His greatness so if you run out of things to consider, ask Him to open your eyes to His greatness.

.....

"...Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Luke 5:10

"We will abandon it all for the sake of the call. No other reason at all, just the sake of the call. Holy, devoted to live and to die for the sake of the call."- S.C.Chapman

If Jesus called you right now to carry the gospel to the world, how much would it take? What would you have to lay down in order to field the call? Luke 5:11 says, "And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him." That evening had started with Jesus telling them to cast out into the deep for a little more fishing. Before it was over, they had an epiphany concerning the importance of God's mission versus their livelihood. The evening ended with empty ships in the harbor. The Bible does not actually tell us what they did with the fishes but the words "forsook all" imply that the ships at the very least, no longer stood as a blockade to the will of God in their lives.

How many "good things" stand between us and the work that God is calling us to do? In the 9th chapter of Luke, Jesus called a man to follow after him. The man was agreeable to it in word, but had one thing that he felt he needed to do first. Nothing sinful, just a duty that he felt he should take care of a certain way before answering the call. He wanted to go and participate in the burying of his father. Seems like a sensible responsibility to put ahead of the work of the Lord. But Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-60).

After the crucifixion , even after they had seen Jesus alive in the upper room, there came a point where Peter decided, "I go a fishing...". And he did, immediately. After a full night of fishing, nothing had been caught. As the morning sun began to rise, he and the other six disciples who had come along with him saw someone standing on the shore. The person cried out to them, asking if they had caught any fishes. When they replied that they had not, the man told them to cast the net on the right side of the ship and they would find fish. They did and suddenly they were overloaded, to the point they could not draw it out of the sea. That is when they realized, it was Jesus on the shoreline. Later, Jesus spoke with Peter directly. Three times Jesus asked Peter, "do you love me more than these?" When Peter declared that he did, Jesus told him to feed His sheep (John 21:1-17).

What is it that is more important than answering the call God has for us in our life? The mission God has for you may not look just like someone else's, but that does not change the importance of accomplishing what God has set up for you to do. Let us lay aside the interference, and take up our role in sharing the gospel.

CHALLENGE: For what are you fishing in life? What happens if you catch it? More importantly, how much room is it leaving for the gospel in your life. Is it more important that your financial future is a little secure, or that the children's home has a pizza party? Is it more important that you get that one more thing finished, or that the nursing home gets visited? Is more important that you spend a little more time on your job, or a little more time spreading the love of God through a phone call, a text, or letter? What is that one more good thing that stands between you and fulfilling the call of God on your life?

75

.....

"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches..."
-Phillipians 4:19

Peter had talked himself into a corner. They had just come to town and the tribute gatherers for the temple had asked a simple question. "Does your master pay tribute?". Peter had given them a simple answer. "Yes." The only problem with that was, he had not really checked in with Jesus on that answer. When Peter returned to the house, Jesus asked him a few simple questions that made it clear this was not a tax that people should be paying. But now Peter had an issue. People were expecting a tribute payment and Peter obviously had nothing to give. Thankfully, the Lord came through for Him, but in an unusual way. Jesus told Peter to go down to the sea and fish. He was to open the mouth of the first fish that came up. There He would find a coin to take and pay the tribute. (Matthew 17:24-27)

Do you ever get the idea that Jesus enjoys seeing how many different ways He can solve the problem? A coin out of a fish's mouth, mud on a blind man's eye, walking on the stormy waves, making wine out of water, the list is endless. His resources are limitless. He has the whole world in His hands and can use whatever He wishes of it, or none of it, to answer whatever need presents itself. When the scripture says, "My

God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"(Phillipians 4:19), it is not overreach. God has an "able" for every problem that you face in life. If you are willing to allow Him to work, He can meet your need. Every time. The only question that really exists is "How is He going to come through this time?".

"My Jesus knows just what I need! Oh yes, He knows just what I need! He satisfies every need supplies! Yes, He knows just what I need!" (P. Walker). Walking with Jesus is just like a mathematical equation. Plug in all the variables, life, along side the constant, Jesus, and you will get the right answer every time. The result may look a little different from situation to situation, but one thing, it will always be is correct.

CHALLENGE: Trust Jesus. Learn to let Him supply your need. It may take being willing to be without for a little while but it will be worth it. Without Him in the equation, things just do not add up.

76

"My heavenly home is bright and fair I feel like traveling on!" -J.R. Baxter, W. Hunter

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." -John 14:2-3

As soon as we build a house here, it begins to decay. Maintenance must be performed on a regular basis. Pest and rodents must be prevented or eliminated. Roots have to be cleared out of lines. Holes have to be repaired. Light bulbs have to be changed. The list goes on and on and literally is unending. And yet we find much joy in our homes. How much more should we expect to find joy in the home that has been prepared for each one of us for ages on end. The home awaiting us in heaven. That place where "...neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:20).

The Word of God tells us that in that city there is a "...innumerable company of angels" (Hebrews 12:22) and that "...there shall be no night there" (Revelations 21:25). In Revelations 21:21, Johns writes that "...the. twelve gates were twelve pearls...and the street of the city was pure gold...". This

is the city where our forever home is found. This is the place that the Creator of the universe has planned for us and chosen us for "...before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). This is the place that we are longing to go.

In Revelations, John writes multiple times of the "book of life". In Revelations 3:5, John records Jesus as saying, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment: and I will not blot his name out of the book of life...". In Revelations 20:12, John writes of it as the other book that was opened, besides those books that had recorded all our deeds. Revelations 20:15 and 21:27 tell us that our name being in the book of life is what makes all the difference in eternity. In whether we move on to dwell in the mansion that he has prepared for us, or depart forever into a lake of fire. Is there really anything worth being on the wrong side of that decision?

CHALLENGE: There is a home waiting for you. Do not let it be in vain. Consider these words written by D.O. Teasley and make your calling and election sure. Your mansion in heaven will surely be worth it all.

"I stood at the time-beaten portals, where many a pilgrim had passed, out into the infinite future to be with the pure and the blest. And musing in silent devotion, Eternity seemed to draw near, and strains from the choir of the faithful, I seemed in my fancy to hear; Time speeds onward to eternity. Soon we'll all be in eternity. Hear the footsteps, hear the solemn footsteps, hear the footsteps of eternity!" - D.O. Teasley

77

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

-Romans 8:31

"Victory shall be the chorus! Victory our watch word and song! Jesus is marching before us, leading His army along!" -H.R. Jeffrey

Another evening and another game of wiffle ball in the backyard. Everyone is excited until some of the family begins to learn that they are not on the family all-star's team. Each child was talented in their own right, but there was one who stood out from all the rest as the premier choice to have if you desired to be victorious in anything related to the game of baseball. Sad declarations of hopelessness were made by the youngest members of the family as they lamented their inability to win with big brother playing on the opposite side.

In the much bigger game of life, some of us do seem to be more talented than others at times, but it really just comes down to who is on your side. You have a choice. You can run with the devil, and face certain defeat. Or, you can make your choice for Jesus, and watch the victories come raining down. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

This section of verse goes on to say, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

Sometimes the victory is as simple as being able to raise your head one more morning and thank God for life. Sometimes, they go much deeper. Whatever the challenge, God is more than up for the task.

In the game of wiffle ball, the one brother's significant edge in baseball skills deemed him the player of choice with whom to be associated. In the game of life, no one matches the skill set and natural ability of God. And He offers His resources freely to all those who will take advantage of the opportunity He provides. The slots on His team never fill up. There is always room for one more. And life is full of plays to be made. Just when we think we can sit back and rest a little while, another play comes along and we have to decide to commit one more time, one way or another. Commit to God, one more time, and watch Him bring yet another victory for the team, for you.

CHALLENGE: Choose God one more day, one more time. And when you make it through this one, remember to choose Him again for the next challenge. Choose His side, and victory is the only option available.

78

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." -John 11:25

He was all she had left, and now he was gone. Who knows what the thoughts were going through the widowed mother's mind? They may have been thoughts of hopelessness, fear, anger, we have no way of knowing for sure. What we do know is that they were hemmed in with much sorrow. So much, in fact, that a stranger just entering the town noticed. Any other stranger, helpless to do anything more, may have just stood there and shown respect to her grief as she walked by their place. This stranger was different. Moved with compassion, He drew close to the funeral procession and with words of tenderness to the grieving mother, he touched the casket where the son lay. Those carrying the casket stopped, no doubt wondering what this stranger had in mind. What happened next was almost assuredly beyond their wildest imagination. "...Young man, I say unto thee, arise!" And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak" (Luke 7:14-15).

Mary and Martha both wondered why Jesus had tarried so long before coming. They had seen him heal the sick and no doubt had heard even more stories about the miracles that He had been working. They knew Jesus loved their brother, but then, why did He let him die? "...Lord, if thou hadst been here, my

brother had not died" (John 11:21 and 11:32), they both said to Him in turn. Upon hearing this for the second time, and seeing all the weeping of the mourners, Jesus groaned in the spirit.

"Where have ye laid him?", Jesus asked. Just a short time later Jesus stood in front of the tomb, proclaiming, "Lazarus, come forth!". And just like that, Lazarus was alive.

In John 5:28-29, Jesus said, "...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Oh, the power that is in the name of Jesus! Of all the problems, troubles and issues we face in life, which one is greater than death? None. Death supersedes and finishes them all, ... until Christ. Hebrews 2:14-15 speaks of Christ saying that He became human, just like us, that "...He might...deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." And Paul writes of Christ saying, "...who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light..." (2 Timothy 1:10). No one who goes to the grave will stay there. All will come back out in the Day of Judgement. May God help us to choose life eternal, for there is only one other option.

CHALLENGE: Understand that this life is not about this life, it is about the eternity to come. Choose life eternal.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

"For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself..." -Hebrews 12:3

"...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." -Romans 5:8

*"...it was my sin that held Him there, until it was accomplished..."
-S. Townend*

What did I ever do to you? It is a question that many of us, no doubt, have quietly thought in our mind when someone seems to have performed some measure of injustice to our person.

Maybe they cut us off, or put us down, or any number of other things that left us upset, but pretty much otherwise uninjured physically. That doesn't matter though. They should not have done it. And now, quite frankly, we are handicapped for the rest of the day, week, or maybe even lifetime, because they should not have done it. Just imagine, for a moment if you will. What if Jesus had had the same attitude. The definition of sin is to miss the mark. The reality of sin is that it is actually very accurate. Sin is an arrow that pierces His heart each time an individual "misses the mark".

Why did He leave Heaven? Was it because His options were better somehow down here on earth? Was He coming to better His portfolio or His 401K? Was He coming to store up a little more wealth, or experience the finer things in life for a little

while? Not hardly. He was coming to bring hope to a world full of hopeless people. To provide some light at the end of the tunnel that before had only promised an eternity of pain and bitter suffering. And to accomplish it, He would have to endure the very people He was coming to deliver, spitting on Him, cursing Him, beating Him, mocking Him, and deserting Him in the end. This is what the writer of Hebrews is speaking of when he mentions, "...such contradiction of sinners against himself". "He left the splendor of Heaven, knowing His destiny was the lonely hill of Golgotha, there to lay down His life for me!" (D. Rambo). As the song alludes, if that isn't love, there is no such thing.

Considering that, it would be good to look back to our passage from Hebrews 12. It says that we are to consider what He endured, "lest we be weary and faint in your minds (for) ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:3-4). As children of the King, we have a very high standard set for us by the "captain of our salvation". He could have chosen any moment to not put up with it any longer. With an "I didn't ask for this", He could have signaled the Father and returned to heaven, leaving the world in a pit of hopelessness for our few remaining moments. But He didn't. He went to the cross for you and for me. The next time you are tempted to think somebody should not have done something to you, just remember, you should not have either. But you did, and Christ forgave you. His call is for you to go and do the same.

CHALLENGE: "...endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."- 2 Timothy 2:3. Turn the other cheek. "Bless them that curse you...that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven' (Matthew 5:44-45)