

Monday June 1

“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” Psalm 118:8

The verse at the center of the Bible

Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible. Psalm 119 is the longest. Psalm 118 is at the center of the Bible. There are 594 chapters in the Bible before Psalm 118, and 594 chapters after Psalm 118 – 1,188 chapters. This number can be split 118-8, or Psalm 118:8. Now we know that the chapter divisions in the Bible are not part of original Scripture, but isn't it interesting how this little word-exercise worked out? Or was God in the center of it all? And if He was, shouldn't the central verse of the Bible contain its central theme? It does: “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.”

In Psalm 118 the Psalmist recalls seven reasons why God is worthy to be trusted: (a) “I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place” (v 5). (b) “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” (v 6). (c) “The Lord taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me” (v 7). (d) “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord” (v 17). (e) “The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death” (v 18). (f) “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (v 24). (g) “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (v 29 NKJV).

Tuesday June 2

“It is I; be not afraid.” Mark 6:50

You'll get through this storm

Are you in a storm today? Then read these words: “The boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out...But immediately He talked with them and said to them... ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased” (Mk 6:47-51 NKJV). There are four lessons here for us:

(1) It's when we feel most separated from God, that He's teaching us the most. Dave Dravecky said, “Looking back...I have learned that the wilderness is part of the landscape of faith, and every bit as essential as the mountaintop. On the mountaintop we are overwhelmed by God's presence. In the wilderness we are overwhelmed by His absence. Both places should bring us to our knees; the one, in utter awe; the other, in utter dependence.” (2) God doesn't show up early. Usually He comes in the worst part of the storm when you think you can't take any more – but He will always be on time. (3) God takes us through different storms, revealing more of Himself to us in each one. Otherwise there are aspects of His character, and divine strategies we'd never understand. (4) God's presence alone should be enough for us in any storm. The moment He shows up and says, “It is I,” should calm our every fear.

Wednesday June 3

“The battle is the Lord's.” 1 Samuel 17:47 NKJV

How to defeat your giant

One day a soldier, charged with fleeing from the enemy was brought before Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great asked him, "What's your name?" Dropping his head, he replied, "Alexander." Alexander the Great grabbed him by the shoulders and said, "Soldier, change your conduct or change your name!" You have been called to live a life worthy of the One whose name you carry. Regardless of whether the giant you face is addiction, resentment, fear, lust, pride, envy or anger, you must realize:

(1) You're not unique. Your temptations "are no different from what others experience" (1Co 10:13 NLT). Goliath wasn't always a giant; he was fed and nurtured until he became one. Our giants are usually little sins we overlook and indulge until they assume a life of their own and come back to haunt us. (2) You can't do it alone. Your giant will defeat you anytime you tackle him in your own strength. David told Goliath, "This is the Lord's battle, and he will give you to us" (1Sa 17:47 NLT). You need divine help to overcome old habits and establish new behaviors. So, declare with Paul, "Christ...gives me strength" (Php 4:13 NLT). (3) You must confront your giant head-on. The Bible says: "As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran...to meet him" (1Sa 17:48 NLT). Don't run away, don't try to negotiate, don't compromise and don't excuse. Force your giant out into the light and don't let him back into your life. Establish boundaries and make yourself accountable. Stay out of the wrong company. Above all, don't look at God in the light of your giant, look at your giant in the light of God.

Thursday June 4

"Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad." Proverbs 12:25 NKJV

Wait no longer, speak!

Few things are as powerful as the right words spoken at the right time. By the same token, words withheld when their season of opportunity is gone, are a heavy burden to live with. Looking back, one relationship expert offers these moving words:

"I remember when I took your new car on the road and wrecked it. I thought you'd be livid and come down hard on me, but you didn't. I remember when we went to the beach and you didn't want to go because you said it was going to rain. We went and it rained. I was sure you'd rub it in and say, 'I told you so!' But you didn't. Then there was the time when I spilled blueberry juice down the front of your new white tux. I knew you'd be upset and blame me. But you didn't. And remember that formal evening? I was mistaken and told you it was casual. You wore blue jeans and felt like a fish out of water. I was sure you would storm out in anger and leave me standing there. But you didn't. I wanted to tell you how much I loved you and how much I appreciated you for all those things when you returned from Vietnam. But you didn't."

Solomon said, "There is...a time to speak" (Ecc 3:1&7). But it's a limited time, and when it's over it's gone. Don't spend your future regretting and carrying inside you the unspoken words someone needed to hear. "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Pr 16:24 NIV). Wait no longer, speak!

Friday June 5

"With God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26

Believe God for great things!

The poet wrote, “Beware of those who stand aloof, and greet each venture with reproof. The world would stop if things were run, by those who say, ‘It can’t be done.’” Refuse to let the word “impossible” stop you. Jesus said, “With God all things are possible.” If those who’ve changed the world had left every “impossible” task undone, we’d still be living in the Dark Ages. Here are four examples:

(1) German experts predicted that trains traveling at 25 mph would cause severe nose bleeds and the passengers would suffocate going through tunnels. American experts added that we’d need more mental institutions because people would go mad when they saw the first trains. (2) When the YWCA first announced typing classes for women, there was a furious backlash on the grounds that the “female constitution would deteriorate under such strain.” (3) Experts insisted that iron ships would never float, that the iron would wreak havoc with the compass readings. (4) In 1797 New Jersey farmers denounced the first cast-iron plow, insisting it would poison the land and stimulate weeds. So much for “experts!”

More of us are persuaded into believing for too little than believing for too much. Vision is essential for survival. And a God-given vision is conceived by faith, sustained by prayer and fueled by God’s Word. It’s not about what you can do, but what God can do with your life when it’s fully surrendered to Him. It encompasses things outside the realm of the predictable, the safe, and the expected. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Pr 29:18). If God has given you a vision – pursue it, and believe Him for great things!

Saturday June 6

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.” Psalm 51:17 NIV

Brokenness (1)

A world that celebrates success doesn’t see value in broken things. But God brings beauty out of brokenness. For a plant to rise from the soil the seed must be broken. For a baby chick to experience larger life the shell must be broken. Even a thoroughbred horse must be broken; it must learn to respond to the tug of the rein and the sound of the master’s voice. Getting the idea? After a humbling encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul reevaluates all the religious activity he once boasted about and calls it “dung” (Php 3:8). And you don’t brag about dung, you’re repulsed by it.

Brokenness is the work of God by which He strips us of self-sufficiency so that the character of Christ may shine through us. Now don’t misunderstand; being broken doesn’t necessarily mean experiencing some tragedy. Many people suffer tragedy without drawing closer to God or even acknowledging Him. Indeed, the same sunshine that melts the butter hardens the clay. The issue in brokenness is not so much our circumstances, but our response. What is God trying to teach us? True brokenness is when He strips us of self-sufficiency to the extent that we’ve no strength left to fix ourselves. When God blocks every exit we try to take and we come to see that He alone is our answer, we make a life changing discovery. “And what’s that?” you ask. When God is all you have – God is all you need! Bottom line: God’s power is reserved for those who have given up trying to do it in their own strength or to accomplish it for their own ends!

Sunday June 7

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.” Psalm 51:17 NIV

## Brokenness (2)

Paul writes: “Now may...God...sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord” (1Th 5:23 NAS). This word “sanctify” means to be “set apart,” to be used exclusively for God’s purposes. Paul describes it as “the high calling of God” (Php 3:14). And it happens from the inside out! Notice, our fleshly body comes last in order of transformation for a very simple reason. The problem with a thief isn’t his hands, it’s in his mind or spirit, which tells him stealing is okay. His mind tells his hands what to do. So if you transform his spirit his hands will follow suit. Otherwise you can handcuff him and take him off to jail, but he’s still a thief inside. Too many of us want to get victory over bodily sins without being truly transformed within. But God starts with our spirit because that’s the part of our being that makes us conscious of God; that “connects” with Him. When God sets us free in our spirit, then our emotions and our body begin to fall in line.

If you’re a parent you know how differently your children respond to discipline. One child will collapse in tears, whereas another will stand up and defy you. God will do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to break us of our self-sufficiency so that the life of Jesus can be demonstrated through us. And we determine how long the process takes, by our submission or resistance. Paul prayed, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Ac 9:6 NKJV). Today, make that your prayer!

Monday June 8

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.” Psalm 51:17 NIV

## Brokenness (3)

Sometimes God allows us to hit the bottom in order to discover that He’s the rock at the bottom. Gideon faced an army of 135,000 troops with just 32,000 men. And 22,000 of them left the battlefield and went home when he offered them the chance. Do the math. Gideon’s thinking, “There’s no way we can win!” Then God explains: “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me’” (Jdg 7:2 NAS). There it is again, the age-old battle of ego that we all fight daily. It’s why the Lord’s Prayer ends with: “Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Mt 6:13). Where does our power come from? God! Who should the glory for our accomplishments go to? God! How long does this arrangement last? Forever!

God had to break Jacob of self-sufficiency so the “Israel” within him could come out. Sometimes God has to take you down before He can raise you up. Moses was called the meekest man on earth. But it took forty years of living as a shepherd in the wilderness to detox him of pride and get him submitted to God. Only then was he ready to stand before Pharaoh and perform miracles that demonstrated God’s power – and vindicated Moses!

Brokenness doesn’t mean being a wimp, suffering from an inferiority complex or having a case of low self-esteem. No, brokenness means praying, “Lord, if this job is going to get done, and done right, You’re going to have to do it through me. So my trust is in You.”

Tuesday June 9

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.” Psalm 51:17 NIV

#### Brokenness (4)

We don't always know the reason for our trials, but God revealed to Paul the reason for his "thorn in the flesh." It was to keep him from being "exalted" (See 2Co 12:7). Success can be intoxicating, and intoxicated people aren't known for being too bright or trustworthy!

What happens when you get a thorn in your flesh? It hurts. And you'll let everything else go while you focus on removing it. Three times Paul prayed for God to remove the thorn, but God had another plan. You see, God is at His strongest in us when we are at our weakest. When Paul discovered that God's power in his life was tied to the thorn that afflicted him, he responded, "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities...For whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2Co 12:10 NRS). In other words, "If it's for my good, bring it on, Lord!" If you've a thorny person in your life from whom you've prayed to be delivered and it hasn't happened, maybe God wants you to experience His grace and power through dealing with that person. But you won't experience this until you move from pain to praise. The Bible speaks about "the sacrifice of praise to God" (Heb 13:15). A sacrifice means that something has to die on somebody's altar. So if you want to experience God's grace and power in your life, you must be willing to die to self-interest, ego, and independence. There's nothing wrong with asking God to remove your thorn. But when your prayer for deliverance turns to praise, you're on your way to power, because God is giving you grace.

Wednesday June 10

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak." James 1:19 NIV

Are you a good listener?

Someone quipped, "God gave us two ears and one mouth because we need to listen twice as much as we talk." Learning that means being "quick to listen, slow to speak." Good listening builds relationships. But good listeners aren't born, they're bred! So here are a few suggestions to improve your listening:

(1) Listen without interrupting. Resist the temptation to jump in and finish the sentence, or hijack the floor. Rein yourself in – just listen. (2) Listen to understand. Try to understand their point of view, feelings, thinking and needs. Good listening is hearing what they actually think, mean or feel, not what you imagine they do. Instead of guessing, ask, "Am I understanding you correctly? Do you mean...? Are you feeling...?" In other words, don't assume – verify. (3) Listen without judging. Don't rush to conclusions. If what they say doesn't quite add up, keep listening. "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Pr 18:13 NKJV). When you hear more, it may make sense. (4) Listen without correcting, countering or devaluing. Saying, "That's not the way it was," or, "What did you expect? If you hadn't..." or, "You're just being too sensitive," puts people on guard and stops real communication. (5) Validate the speaker. Accept their perceptions and feelings as valid expressions of a valued person. "If I understand you correctly, you're thinking...feeling...Am I right?" Ask them to help get you on the same page with them. "Given what you've told me, I can see why you'd feel what you feel," is very validating and will increase their confidence and willingness to consider the solutions you may offer.

Thursday June 11

“Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong.” Proverbs 24:3 TLB  
If you want to succeed – prepare well!

What happens when you’re not well-prepared? Things you hope won’t happen, do, and they occur with greater frequency than the things you hope will happen. The dividing line between winning and losing – is preparation! Tennis champion Arthur Ashe said, “The key to winning is self-confidence, and the key to self-confidence is preparation.” Singing, “If you wish upon a star” won’t make your dreams come true; you’ve got to prepare yourself.

Ever wonder what Jesus was doing during those pre-dawn risings and nights of prayer? Preparing! If you plan to keep growing, preparation must become a way of life. You must never stop asking, “Lord, what do You want me to do? What will it cost me in time, effort and resources? What obstacles must I overcome?” If you live with that mindset you’ll be well on your way to fulfilling God’s purpose for your life.

Asked how long it would take to bring his ship to a stop, the Queen Mary’s captain replied, “A little over a mile.” Then he added, “A good captain thinks at least a mile ahead.” Your success in any venture is determined by how important it is to you, and your ability to prepare for it. The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: “Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts.” Alexander Hamilton, a founding father of the United States, said, “Men give me credit for genius, but all the genius I have lies in this: when I have a subject to hand, I study it profoundly.” So, if you want to succeed – prepare well!

Friday June 12

“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad.” Proverbs 12:25 NKJV

Today, encourage somebody (1)

The nineteenth-century writer Walt Whitman struggled for years to get anyone interested in his poetry. In the midst of his discouragement he received a life-changing note from an admirer of his work. The note read, “Dear Sir, I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of Leaves of Grass. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I greet you at the beginning of a great career.” It was signed by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Whitman enjoyed a long career and is now considered one of the giants of American literature. But when times were tough he needed encouragement to keep going. And he’s not alone. When we’re on the brink of failure, the right word at the right time can keep us in the game. When we’re too tired or discouraged to keep going, an act of compassion can give us new strength.

Encouragement is one of the central themes of the Bible: “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (Pr 12:25 NKJV). “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees” (Isa 35:3 NKJV). “For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you’” (Isa 41:13 NKJV). Encouragement doesn’t deny the problem; it enables us to overcome it. It doesn’t validate stubbornness or stupidity; it simply corrects and guides us in the right path. It doesn’t leave us alone to carry the burden, it lets us know that God is present to help and strengthen us. So today, encourage somebody!

Saturday June 13

“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad.” Proverbs 12:25 NKJV

Today, encourage somebody (2)

Henry Ford and Thomas Edison were friends; they met at a convention sponsored by Edison’s company where Ford worked as an engineer. Someone introduced Ford to Edison as “a young man who has made a gas car.” Ford and Edison talked a while about the automobile, then Edison banged his fist on the table with excitement. “You have it! Your car is self-contained and carries its own power plant.” Ford later recalled, “No man up to then had given me any encouragement. I had hoped that I was headed right. Sometimes I knew that I was, sometimes I only wondered, but here, out of a clear sky, the greatest inventive genius in the world had given me complete approval.” Sir Isaac Newton is best known for his Theory of Gravitation and description of the Three Laws of Motion. But Newton might never have published his work had it not been for Edmond Halley. A well-respected scientist in his own right, Halley visited Newton at Cambridge to discuss a problem he was working on, only to discover that Newton had already solved it. Halley encouraged Newton to publish his work, and even offered to do it at his own expense. The result was the publication of *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in 1687, which laid the groundwork for the study of mathematics and changed the way people see the world.

Who can you encourage to do great things? Who has God put into your life to cheer on, raise up, or assist on their journey? When you help others to do the things God created them to do, you share in their achievement.

Sunday June 14

“The wisdom that is from above is...” James 3:17

The ultimate source of wisdom

As you go through life you discover there are many ways to gain wisdom, such as: (1) Writing down and reflecting on what you’ve learned through experience. (2) Gleaning from the collective knowledge of others. “By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom” (Pr 13:10 NKJV). (3) Thinking outside the box. Statements like, “This is the way we do things around here” warrant scrutiny when they’re used to defend ways that no longer work. (4) Not rushing to closure. Growth is always a work-in-progress. Creativity is untidy and unnerving. The ability to stay focused and faith-filled in the midst of change is a hallmark of maturity.

But the ultimate source of wisdom is God! A young executive told his secretary he’d an important meeting and didn’t want to be interrupted. But his boss needed to see him and walked in. When he found the young executive on his knees praying, he withdrew quietly and asked the secretary, “Is this usual?” “Yes,” she replied, “he does it every morning.” “No wonder I come to him for advice!” said his boss. If you need wisdom, talk to God: “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Pr 2:6 NKJV). “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally...and it will be given to him” (Jas 1:5 NKJV). “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (Jas 3:17 NKJV). “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you” (Ps 32:8 NKJV).

Monday June 15

“Take in...the extravagant dimensions of Christ’s love.” Ephesians 3:18 TM

God’s incredible love for us

George Matheson was told by his doctor that he was going blind. Not to be denied, he pursued his studies, graduating from the University of Glasgow in 1861 at the age of nineteen. By the time he finished graduate seminary studies, he’d lost his sight. To make matters worse, his fiancée returned the engagement ring with a note, “I cannot go through life bound by the chains of marriage to a blind man.” Matheson never married, and never fully recovered from his broken heart. He became a powerful and poetic pastor, led a full and inspiring life, yet occasionally the pain of loneliness flared up, as it did later at his sister’s wedding. The ceremony brought back memories of the love he had lost. In response, he turned to the incredible love of God for comfort and penned these words on June 6, 1882: O love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depth its flow may richer, fuller be.

Consider the stubborn love of Hosea for his wife Gomer. Hopping from one lover to another, she ruined his life. Destitute, she was placed for sale in a slave market. Guess who stepped forward to buy her? Hosea, who’d never removed his wedding band. God uses this story to illustrate His steadfast love for us. He told Hosea: “Love her the way I, God, love the Israelite people” (Hos 3:1 TM). God loves you with an incredible love. You can’t win it being winsome, or lose it by being a loser. But you can be blind and resist it. Don’t!

Tuesday June 16

“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.” Daniel 12:4 NKJV

Information overload! (1)

Technology lets us do things we’ve never been able to do, but it can be addictive. You can become tied to it in ways that are exhausting. One expert notes: “There’s a strong tendency for humans to do everything they’re able to. Combine that with constant connectivity, and the workday need never end. It’s easy to contact anyone anytime, and with information always available on line you can keep clicking forever.” Paul writes about “making the most of your time” (Eph 5:16 NAS). We say, “Time is money,” but in actuality time is much more valuable, because it’s a nonrenewable resource. Once spent, it’s gone forever. Managing information overload means reestablishing boundaries that technology has demolished. So:

Recognize the signs: if you communicate with people all day yet you’re still lonely, chances are, technology is dominating your life. Take baby steps: make yourself unavailable for short periods and see what happens. The wheels of industry won’t grind to a halt! Remember you have a choice: people who think they should be available 24/7, exaggerate their own importance or the control others have over them. Establish boundaries: rein in the emails and instant messages. Do you really need all those “FYI’s” about the same thing? Give clear instructions: tell people you answer emails at designated times throughout the day, and let them know who to contact for an immediate response. Make a task list: that way if you’re interrupted you’ll get back on track faster. Stick to a schedule: constantly dipping in and out on the computer is classic self-interruption. Do a

reality check: after a few minutes of surfing the web ask yourself, “Should I be doing this now?”

Wednesday June 17

“The servant is not greater than his lord.” John 13:16

Information overload! (2)

When you’re constantly multi-tasking, important things can fall between the cracks. A lawyer who negotiated an unbelievable deal in favor of his client was asked how he did it. He replied, “I was the only person at the meeting that day who didn’t spend the whole time text messaging!” A respected researcher says we’ve trained our brains “to constantly flit around the universe of messages and information, seeking brief hits of excitement. Grazing ceaselessly, we never dig too deeply before moving on to the next distraction...and it ratchets up our stress levels in ways we’re only starting to understand.” Another expert says: “We get more information in 72 hours than our parents received in a month, and most people don’t have the skills to deal with it. They let new things in, but don’t get rid of old information they wanted to act on.”

When was the last time you enjoyed some relaxed, uninterrupted down time? Can you even remember? We’re so results-oriented that unless we’re doing something that can be quantified, we think it’s a waste of time. The fact is you need time away from the unrelenting onslaught of information to regroup, reflect and recharge. Jesus had a schedule to keep, people to minister to, disciples depending on Him, and a short time to do it all. Nevertheless, “He withdrew...into the wilderness, and prayed” (Lk 5:16). Now, since “the servant is not greater than his lord,” do you think you’re above all that? Are you wiser than He? Or more spiritual? Jesus said, “Come... apart...and rest a while” (Mk 6:31), because when you don’t come apart, you fall apart!

Thursday June 18

“My peace I give you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and...afraid.” John 14:27 NIV  
“It is well with my soul”

The peace Jesus gives brings a sense of assurance that no matter what happens, you know “it is well with my soul.” He says to us: “My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and...afraid.” The peace Jesus gives doesn’t depend on conditions and circumstances. It comes from knowing you’re God’s child and that your Father controls the universe, loves you and always has your best interests at heart. That’s why people who’ve lost everything will often tell you they wouldn’t trade what they’ve learned, even if it meant recouping all their losses. Joni Erikson Tada discovered a supernatural peace when an accident confined her to a wheelchair, and Corrie Ten Boom found it in a Nazi death camp. Missionary Elisabeth Elliot found it ministering to the Indian tribe who massacred her husband. She wrote, “Only in acceptance lies peace...not in resignation.” There’s a big difference! Author Creath Davis points out that: “Resignation is surrender to fate. Acceptance is surrender to God. Resignation lies down quietly in an empty universe. Acceptance rises up to meet the God who fills that universe with purpose and destiny. Resignation says, ‘I can’t.’ Acceptance says, ‘God can.’ Resignation paralyzes the life process. Acceptance releases the process for its greatest creativity. Resignation says, ‘It’s all over for me.’ Acceptance says, ‘Now that I’m here, what’s next, Lord?’ Resignation says, ‘What a waste.’

Acceptance says, 'In what redemptive way will you use this mess, Lord?' Resignation says, 'I'm alone.' Acceptance says, 'I belong to you, Lord.'"

Friday June 19

"Male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27 NIV

Understanding the difference

Is Professor Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* right? Are men by nature more rational and forgiving than women? No, but there's a difference. Let's say a problem arises before work. After work he's forgotten it; he's compartmentalized it to focus on work. For him it's over, but not for her. She's rehearsed, processed and labeled it, while multi-tasking all day. It hasn't disappeared; it's unfinished business. After work he comes home, blissfully unconscious, and, ba-boom, it erupts. He's got that bewildered, "Is there a problem?" look. "Is he playing naïve?" she wonders. "How could he possibly forget?" He's thinking, "What's gotten into her? Not that little incident from this morning? Who harbors something so insignificant that long?"

Since God created male and female differently, He tells us to "Conduct...married life with understanding" (1Pe 3:7 NEB). Understanding brings happiness. His brain functions compartmentally. He moves from family to work to recreation to hobbies, etc., each compartment walled off from the other. When in one he forgets the others. But her compartments are connected, spilling over into each other. She's working and thinking about the kids and planning dinner, etc., simultaneously! No walls. So this morning's incident is still in her mind, though forgotten by him. By understanding these differences she can give him time to get back into "the family compartment" before raising the issue. And he can realize she's not being unreasonable or unforgiving, she's being what God made her. Until the issue is resolved she has no place to hide from it. She needs closure so she can feel good about their relationship again. "Male and female he created them." Only by understanding that can we live in harmony.

Saturday June 20

"They...went through the towns, preaching." Luke 9:6 NKJV

God-encounters

One night a man walking to church saw four boys hanging out on a street corner, so he invited them to go with him. They did, and they went back again the following Sunday. Actually, these four boys became the nucleus of the Sunday school class he began to teach. Years later his friends decided to contact the four boys, see what had happened to them, and invite each to write a special birthday letter to be read at a surprise party for their old teacher. Their letters were real eye openers. One boy had become a missionary to China, one was president of the US Federal Reserve Bank, one was the private secretary to President Herbert Hoover, and the fourth was – President Hoover himself.

Sometimes your small encounters are God-encounters that take place when you're busy with other things or on your way to somewhere else. If you're not prepared you'll miss a real blessing, a chance to grow and an opportunity to put God's interests ahead of your own.

Jesus left the comfort of heaven to walk the road of human need. You'll notice He didn't set up a throne in each town and say, "This is My place, if you want to see Me

come here.” No, He went to the marketplace. He went to the boats of fishermen. He went to the homes of ordinary people. The Bible says that Jesus and His disciples “went through the towns, preaching the gospel.” So the moment your compassion is activated, stop. What seems like a small encounter may be a God-encounter, and produce results you never dreamed possible.

Father’s Day – Sunday June 21

“Tell the next generation.” Psalm 78:4 NIV

It you don’t – who will?

What a father says to his children in the privacy of home isn’t heard by the world, but it’s clearly heard by posterity. A mega-church pastor writes: “Years ago I was invited to the White House to meet the President and a few key religious leaders. It was the first such invitation this country boy ever received. However, when I called home I discovered my son’s basketball game was rescheduled for that weekend, and I’d already missed one. The question became one of simple priority, ‘What’s most important?’ The government had been running without me for years, so I called the White House and said I wouldn’t be coming. (They recovered from the news beautifully!) I went to the game and had the fun of seeing my son shoot the winning basket.” Paul said, “Be...careful...how you live...making the most of every opportunity” (Eph 5:15-16 NIV). How you spend your time reveals your true values and priorities. Dad, are you spending quality time with your children?

Karl Marx said that to conquer a nation you just have to block the transfer of values, morals and beliefs between generations. Solomon said, “The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him” (Pr 20:7 NKJV). Before you know it they’ll be gone, but what legacy will they take with them? Your kids are like mirrors, they reflect what they see. And it’s hard for them to see God as their heavenly Father unless He’s clearly visible in their earthly one. So: “Take them by the hand...lead them in the way of the Master” (Eph 6:4 TM). “Tell the next generation...of...his power, and the wonders he has done.” If you don’t – who will?

Monday June 22

“The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it.” Isaiah 35:2 NKJV

Little cedars

Solomon used the cedars of Lebanon to build the temple. When it was complete, the glory of God filled it. Let’s look at four different types of cedars God still uses to build His church.

Little cedars. They were used to make fence posts for sheep pens. A guide tells of seeing a truckload of little cedars being transported over a road filled with potholes, twists and turns. Even though they weren’t tied on, not one fell off. What a picture of consistency and stick-to-it-iveness! These folks have what it takes to survive the potholes and make it through the twists and turns of life. It’s said that people don’t determine their future, they determine their habits and their habits determine their future. And little cedars have habits like:

(a) Praying. They talk to God – then take time to listen: “Morning by morning, He wakens My ear to hear as the learned” (Isa 50:4 NKJV). (b) Bible reading.

“Ezra...prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it” (Ezr 7:10 NKJV).

Do you approach God's Word with a prepared heart and a willingness to obey? (c) Witnessing. "You are My witnesses" (Isa 43:10 NKJV). The credibility of a witness in court determines which side wins. How credible is your testimony? (d) Tithing. "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing" (Pr 3:9-10 NIV). You say, "But when I've paid my bills I don't have much left over." God wants to be first in your finances, not last. When you put Him first, His blessings will overflow into every area of your life.

Tuesday June 23

"The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it." Isaiah 35:2 NKJV

Fire cedars

Another cedar Solomon used to build the temple was called the fire cedar. It's said that shepherds used it to make fires at night because it was saturated in oil, would ignite easily, and burn a long time. What a picture.

God gathered 120 fire cedars in the upper room, and "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ac 2:2-4 NKJV). That day 3,000 souls were won to Christ! The church was born in the fire and has been sustained by the fire – and we must not let that fire go out! Even in the days of the Old Testament tabernacle, God commanded His people to take the fire that burned on the altar and carry it with them wherever they went. Getting the idea? A lot that passes for "revival" or "renewal" today seems to be nothing more than "waves" that come and go. We are never more vulnerable than when we are spiritually hungry, because at that point we stand on the threshold of two spiritual realms. The way to discern true revival is to ask ourselves four questions: (1) Is it scriptural? (See Isa 8:20). (2) Does it magnify the person of Christ? (See Jn 3:30 NKJV). (3) Does it demonstrate God's love? (See Ac 2:44-45). (4) Does it win souls and turn them into disciples? "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (Jn 15:8 NKJV).

Wednesday June 24

"The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it." Isaiah 35:2 NKJV

Humming cedars

Picture the wind blowing through the cedars of Lebanon and some of them "humming" in response. And the greater the storm, the sweeter their song. These were called humming cedars. And God uses humming cedars to build strong churches. In Acts, a couple of humming cedars were incarcerated in a Philippian dungeon, their hands and feet locked in stocks, their backs flogged, the contempt of society heaped on them. How did they respond? "At midnight Paul and Silas were...singing hymns to God...Suddenly there was a great earthquake...the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed" (Ac 16:25-26 NKJV). One old preacher said: "God got so caught up in their praises that He began to tap His big foot. And when God taps His foot, you get earthquakes."

Praise breaks chains and opens doors; it's the strategy for victory. Satan will try to stop you from praising God because he knows: (a) The importance of praise. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised" (Ps 48:1 NKJV). (b) The healing effects of praise. God's

answer to “the spirit of heaviness” is “the garment of praise” (Isa 61:3). But like any garment, you must put it on. (c) The power of praise in times of crisis. When Israel was outnumbered by the enemy, God told them to put a choir in front of the army and march into battle. And it worked! “When they began...to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the [enemy]” (2Ch 20:22 NKJV). Don’t wait until the battle is over to shout; go to war with the praise of God on your lips and watch Him turn your situation around.

Thursday June 25

“The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it.” Isaiah 35:2 NKJV

Tall cedars

Towering above the other cedars that grew on the mountains of Lebanon was the tall cedar. However, its strength was not in its height but in the depth of its root system. It’s said that the tall cedar could bend almost to the ground without breaking, and come back stronger. Today God uses tall cedars to build great churches.

The new birth is only 5% of the process; the other 95% is growing up into spiritual maturity. “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity” (Heb 5:12-6:1 NIV). Note the words “who by constant use have trained themselves [in the Scriptures].” You can’t be like the old farmer who always testified at the Wednesday night prayer meeting: “I’m not making much progress, but thank God I’m established.” One spring when his tractor was bogged down, its wheels spinning but going nowhere, the pastor happened to drive by. Rolling down his window, the preacher smiled and said: “Think of it this way brother; you may not be making much progress, but thank God you’re established.” No more excuses for immaturity! You must strive to be “mature and full grown in the Lord...becoming more and more in every way like Christ” (See Eph 4:13 NLT).

Friday June 26

“Don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Ephesians 4:26 NLT

Handling your anger the right way

A guy’s car stalled at an intersection causing a chorus of honking horns from behind. He got out, walked calmly to the next car in line and said, “Sorry, I can’t get my car started. If you’d like to give it a shot I’ll sit here and honk your horn!” When you don’t know how to handle your anger properly, two things happen: (1) You stay angry. You walk around with your thermostat at boiling point. Be realistic. More problems in life are forgotten than are ever resolved to our liking. (2) You don’t get angry even when it’s appropriate. Consequently, issues that could build character, end up creating vacillation and indifference. Express your anger the right way! When you lack the courage to confront your boss or an associate at work, you’re more likely to explode at home. Jesus said, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you” (Mt 18:15 NIV). Sometimes we’re supposed to get angry. Paul writes: “When Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed...he would eat with the Gentiles; but when [the Jews] came, he...separated

himself, fearing [them]...the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite...so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy” (Gal 2:11-13 NKJV). It’s wrong to tolerate wrong when you can do something about it. Just do it the scriptural way. Say what you have to in kindness. This is called “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Slamming doors and storming out are un-Christ like and counter-productive. Direct your anger toward the problem, not the person.

Saturday June 27

“He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Hebrews 10:14 NIV  
Stop putting yourself down

When you disregard your positive qualities by telling yourself, “I’m too fat, I’m no good, I never do anything right,” you’ll always find verification of what you’re looking for. Dr. Richard Carlson says: “Putting yourself down reinforces rather than corrects your imperfections by placing unnecessary attention and energy on everything that’s wrong, rather than what’s right with you. Why would you do this knowing the only possible result is a negative outlook, more negative feelings and less appreciation for the gift of life? People who regularly put themselves down are often seen as complainers, not to mention the example they set. Everyone has aspects of themselves they’d like to improve, but this doesn’t mean you should beat yourself up. Here on earth none of us is ever going to be perfect, but putting yourself down isn’t the answer.”

The Bible says God “has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Max Lucado writes: “Underline the word perfect. Note, the word isn’t better. Not improving. Not on the upswing. God doesn’t improve; he perfects. He doesn’t enhance; he completes...I realize there’s a sense in which we’re imperfect. We still err. We still stumble. We still do exactly what we don’t want to do...that part of us is ‘being made holy.’ But when it comes to our position before God, we’re perfect. When he sees each of us, he sees someone who has been made perfect through the One who is perfect – Jesus Christ.” It’s okay to work on improving yourself, but go easy; stop often and remind yourself that you’re “being made new...becoming like the One who made you” (Col 3:10 NCV).

Sunday June 28

“I said, ‘Here am I; send me.’” Isaiah 6:8

Do you have what it takes?

To lead and succeed in any area of life you must have:

(1) Commitment. Real leaders don’t quit; they couldn’t even if they wanted to. One guy said to his pastor, “It must be hard leading an exemplary life, handling all those pressures, people waiting for one sign of weakness so they can jump on you. How do you handle it?” Smiling, he quipped, “I stay home a lot!” Only in God’s strength will you be able to handle the demands of people, pressures and problems that come your way.

(2) Creativity. Homer wrote, “Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant.” Problems unlock your creativity. The story’s told of a chicken farmer whose land kept flooding and killing his chickens. In despair he told his wife, “I’ve had it; I can’t afford to buy another place and I can’t sell this one. What can I do?” Calmly she replied, “Buy ducks!” A wise leader prays, looks for a solution in every problem, then acts on it.

(3) Compassion. Bob Pearce said, “Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.” Matthew records, “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion” (Mt 9:36 NKJV). Pastor, what moves you? Building projects? Budgets? Big crowds? Be careful; it’s possible to love crowds but not love people. People are demanding, they’re difficult, they’re draining. But as Madeline L’Engle said, “If you’re going to care about the fall of the sparrow, you can’t pick and choose who’s going to be the sparrow.” So before you say, “Lord, send me,” ask yourself, “Do I have what it takes?”

Monday June 29

“But even now I know.” John 11:22 NKJV

Lessons from Lazarus (1)

Lesson one: Jesus knows how you feel. At Lazarus’ funeral, “Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’” (Jn 11:35-36 NKJV). This story proves we serve a God who can not only raise the dead, but can “sympathize with us” (See Heb 4:15 NKJV). So if you’re grieving today turn to God and allow Him to comfort you. Lesson two: Jesus can give you back what life’s taken from you. He can “restore to you the years” that life has stolen (See Joel 2:25). Claim that promise; take it to the place where you’ve lost so much, and ask God to replace and renew. Martha said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You” (Jn 11:21-22 NKJV). Instead of saying “if only,” pray “even now I know.” It’s not too late, God can move on your behalf. Lesson three: Jesus can set you free. “He cried... ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes... Jesus said... ‘Loose him, and let him go’” (Jn 11:43-44 NKJV). God’s Word is greater than the thing that has bound, limited or enslaved you. Even though your mind doesn’t fully comprehend it, let your spirit respond to God. Pray with the Psalmist, “Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it” (Ps 119:34-35 NKJV). When you pray such a prayer your faith will grow, and the circumstances that seem impossible will be changed by God.

Tuesday June 30

“That the Son of God may be glorified through it.” John 11:4 NKJV

Lessons from Lazarus (2)

Here are three more lessons from Lazarus:

(1) God has a bigger and better plan in mind. Lazarus was four days dead when Jesus arrived. When the Lord waits, it’s for two reasons: (a) That He may be glorified. The Pharisees believed that your spirit left your corpse on the fourth day after you died. So if Jesus had intervened earlier they’d have said, “He wasn’t really dead.” Hence He told His disciples, “This sickness is ...for the glory of God” (Jn 11:4 NKJV). It’s in looking back that we clearly see God’s hand at work. (b) That our faith may be strengthened. Jesus said, “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe” (Jn 11:15 NKJV). In life, crises come and go. Your next crisis will be different from your last one, but the thing that must remain strong is your faith. (2) God will ask you to remove the hindrances and deal with the stench. “Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha...said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead

four days” (Jn 11:38-39 NKJV). Are you praying for an answer in one area, while God’s telling you to take away the stone and deal with a “stench” buried in another? Surrender, you can’t win! When your heart’s right with God your prayers will be answered. (3) God wants to make you a living testimony. Everywhere Lazarus went, without even speaking a word, his life declared that Jesus is Lord. And the same should be true of you. God has saved and raised you up to be a testimony to His grace and goodness.

Wednesday July 1

“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Colossians 3:17 NIV

Work in Jesus’ name

John Ortberg writes: “We all work. We all create value – that’s what work is. But what would it look like for you to work in Jesus’ name? Well, first, work would become something you do together with Him. You were not meant to work on your own. So, tomorrow, take a moment at the beginning of your workday when you sit down at your desk or your computer or in your home, and invite Jesus to partner with you. Tell Him, ‘Today, I’m not going to work by myself.’ Any time throughout your workday when you have a tough problem, ask Him for help. When you have a difficult decision to make, ask Him for wisdom – then listen and be really open. When you find your energy flagging, ask Him for renewed strength. When you find your attitude turning negative, ask Him to re-orient your heart. Put a symbol on your desk or wall where you can see it to remind you that today you and Jesus are partnering together in your work. Every few hours as you’re working, pause for two or three minutes. Thank Him for His help. Hand Him your worries. Ask for His energy. Every moment is an opportunity to be with Jesus. When you forget – and you will, when you mess up – and you will, remember this really important rule: there’s to be no beating yourself up! Every moment is another chance. God just keeps sending them. That’s grace. Every moment of your workday is a new chance for you to be with Him.”

Thursday July 2

“There met Him ten men who were lepers.” Luke 17:12 NKJV

Are you losing yourself?

Luke records: “There met Him ten...lepers...they lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ ...He said to them, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And...as they went, they were cleansed” (Lk 17:12-14 NKJV). Leprosy was a slow, painful death. First you lost your fingers and couldn’t work, then you lost your toes and couldn’t walk, then it attacked your internal organs. Every day you lost a little more of yourself. Here are five helpful insights from this story:

(1) If you feel like you’re “losing yourself,” turn to Jesus. He can restore what you’ve lost and give you back your peace and joy. (2) “Lift up your voice.” Away with dignity and decorum! Desperate people do desperate things. God promises: “You will...find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer 29:13 NIV). (3) Whatever He tells you – do it. Don’t lay down conditions to God. And don’t seek an identical experience to somebody else. Jesus told the ten lepers, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” Why didn’t He just speak to them or touch them like He did others? Don’t question, obey! Faith doesn’t demand explanations. (4) Take a step of faith. Luke

records, “As they went, they were cleansed.” You’ve got to walk it out; each step brings you one step closer. But nothing happens till you take that first step of faith. (5) Start praising God! Only one of the ten lepers returned to give thanks, and Jesus noticed it. You can go to God with confidence for your next answer, when you know you remembered to give Him thanks for your last one.

Friday July 3

“The fruit of the Spirit is...self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23 NIV

Exercise control, without being controlling

There are two kinds of people: the controller and the self-controlled. Which one are you? Let’s find out: The controller believes that “the Devil does it to them,” or people, or circumstances, so they respond by blaming, resenting, or projecting frustration. They keep trying to manipulate people and circumstances to their advantage. But people and circumstances usually don’t submit to our control, so their attempts only intensify their pain and turn their relationships into power struggles. The more they try to control the worse they feel; the worse they feel the more they try to control. Refuse to live that way. The self-controlled understand that the Devil can do nothing to them without their cooperation, and that they don’t have to give it. They understand that people and circumstances aren’t their problem either – how they deal with them is. So they respond by reminding themselves of three things: (1) The person I need to control is me. (2) Sometimes I must turn the people and circumstances in my life over to God and allow Him to deal with them. (3) I must draw daily on the Holy Spirit’s power in order to control my reactions and follow the “sound mind” principles of Scripture for staying in charge of my life (See 2Ti 1:7). As a result they avoid engaging in blame-games, self-inflicted pain, and turning relationships into war zones. Knowing that “the fruit of the Spirit is...self-control” they understand that the Spirit won’t control them, or help them control others and manipulate circumstances, but He will empower them to control themselves. Spirit-empowered people are freed from being part of the problem, and become part of the solution God is bringing about!

Saturday July 4

“Keep your mind on Jesus [and]...you won’t get discouraged and give up.” Hebrews 12:3 CEV

Staying power!

It’s difficult to endure hardship at the best of times, but when you don’t know why, it can be frustrating. God doesn’t give us lengthy explanations on how He works; He’s used to creating worlds with a single sentence. So when you don’t find an immediate answer in His Word or through prayer or the counsel of others, you’re left wondering. And you wouldn’t be the first. David repeatedly asks why in the Psalms, and God still called him “a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Ac 13:22 NKJV). So don’t get discouraged. Bible commentator William Barclay pointed out that endurance isn’t just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to use it for your growth and God’s glory.

When the answers aren’t forthcoming the question then becomes, “How do I get through this?” And the Bible addresses it by telling us Jesus endured “the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew...later on he would be glad” (Heb 12:2 CEV). Then it

goes on to say: “Keep your mind on Jesus...you won’t get discouraged and give up.” The reason Jesus endured was because He was able to look ahead and envision the joy of pleasing His Father, building the church and saving a lost world. The Psalmist said, “I have set the Lord always before me...he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” [discouraged, or thrown by the situation] (Ps 16:8). Staying-power is not denying reality, or white-knuckling it. It’s keeping your eyes on Jesus and drawing from Him the strength you need to fight your way through to victory!

Sunday July 5

“Those who sow in tears will reap with...joy.” Psalm 126:5 NIV

Weeping and reaping

Friends can hold your hand and cheer you along, but shepherding a God-given dream to fulfillment always involves watering it with your own tears. Neither fellowship nor friendship can lower the price of personal sacrifice required. That’s the not-so-good news. However, the better-than-great news is – there will be a harvest! “Those who sow in tears will reap with...joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with...joy, carrying sheaves with him.” But you must recognize what season you’re in. There’s:

(1) A time for weeping. This is not an excuse for passivity, or a posture of weakness that reduces you to tears because life’s not fair and things are tough. Nehemiah was moved to tears over Jerusalem’s ruins. Then he sought God, developed a plan, put together a team and rebuilt the city. What moves you? What do you feel passionate about? (2) A time for reaping. Everything in life has a season and a reason (See Ecc 3:1-4). Those who understand the reason and maximize the season are “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season” (Ps 1:3 NIV). Note the words, “in season.” Fruit won’t grow before its time. That’s why you must discern your life’s changing seasons and adjust to them. Even restaurant menus remind us that certain dishes are only available in season. You need to know when it’s time to stop weeping and start reaping, otherwise you’ll miss your harvest. Tears are for the sower, joy is for the reaper. So when your season changes, harvest your fields with joy! You’ve paid your dues; now it’s time to enjoy what God has promised you.

Monday July 6

“Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that...you may grow.” 1

Peter 2:2 NAS

Attitude. Appetite. Aim.

When it comes to Bible-reading, Dr. Howard Hendricks points out three things we must constantly be aware of:

(1) Our attitude. Just as a baby grabs for the bottle, we should reach for our Bible. A baby needs milk to sustain its life physically, and we need the Scriptures to sustain us spiritually. (2) Our appetite. We should “long” for God’s Word. This is a cultivated taste. When someone says, “I’m not getting much out of the Bible,” that’s a greater commentary on them, than on the Book! Psalm 19:10 says the Scriptures “are sweeter than honey” (NIV). But judging by some of us you’d never know that. There are three basic kinds of Bible students. There’s the “nasty medicine” type. To them the Word is bitter, but it’s good for what ails them. Then there’s the “shredded wheat” type. To them

the Scripture is nourishing but dry. It's like eating a bale of hay. Then there's the "strawberries-and-cream" type. They just can't get enough of it. How did they acquire such a taste? By feasting on the Word. They cultivated what Peter describes as an insatiable appetite for scriptural truth. Which of the three types are you? (3) Our aim. The aim of Bible reading is "that you may grow." Now you can't grow unless you know, but unfortunately you can know and not grow. The Bible wasn't written to satisfy our curiosity, but to help conform us to Christ's image. Not to make us smarter, but to make us more like the Savior. Not to fill our head with biblical facts, but to transform our lives.

Tuesday July 7

"They were longing for a better country – a heavenly one." Hebrews 11:16 NIV

Longing for heaven (1)

Mel Blanc was the voice behind the Warner Brothers cartoon characters in Looney Tunes. At the end of every movie Porky Pig pops up with the same send-off: "That's all, folks!" Mel Blanc died a few years ago. Know what his family put on his tombstone? "That's all, folks!" But it's not, and deep down we know it. The Bible says God "set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecc 3:11 NIV). It's a longing that won't go away. It's why the Egyptians built the Pyramids and the Greeks put a gold coin under the tongue of the departed so they could pay the ferryman to cross over the River Styx.

But our longing is not just for a longer life, particularly if longer just means more of the same. A Christian college once sent students door to door to talk to people about spiritual issues. Two of them knocked on one door to find a frenzied mother of three with a vacuum in one hand and a screaming baby in the other, food burning on the stove and a living room so messy it would have qualified as a Federal disaster area. "Are you interested in eternal life?" they asked. "Frankly, I don't think I could stand it," said the mom. We don't want more of just more of the same. We want what's wrong to be put right. We want suffering to stop. We want clean air, meaningful work, honest politicians, clear consciences, ceaseless beauty, and the end of loneliness and war. In other words, we want Heaven. And the good news is, when Christ is your Savior that's where you go when you die!

Wednesday July 8

"They were longing for a better country – a heavenly one." Hebrews 11:16 NIV

Longing for heaven (2)

A Christian art form that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries featured paintings of common objects of beauty – a vase of flowers, a mandolin, a sideboard with fruit. Tucked somewhere in the paintings would be the two reminders of the passing nature of human existence: a skull and an hourglass. These paintings were called vanitas art. This word "vanitas" comes from the passage in Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity...One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh" (Ecc 1:2-4). Now the symbols of the skull and the hourglass weren't intended to foster gloom; they were just a reminder that every possession and achievement we have is temporal, therefore not worthy of our heart's devotion. They were to prepare us for that moment when we meet God, the meaning and value of our lives weighed, and our eternal rewards given.

The Apostle Paul wasn't afraid to speak about death, specifically his own: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Php 1:21 NIV). The seventeenth-century bishop Jeremy Taylor wrote, "Since we stay not here, being people but of a day's abode, we must look somewhere else for an abiding city, a place in another country to fix our house in, whose walls and foundations are God, where we must find rest, or else be restless forever." Not only did Paul long for heaven, but the patriarchs and heroes of the Old Testament did too: "All these people were still living by faith when they died...they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth...they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one" (Heb 11:13-16 NIV). What a wonderful prospect!

Thursday July 9

"The tongue of the wise brings healing." Proverbs 12:18 NIV

Be careful what you say

Careless words can hurt people. Not only can they influence a person's self-worth, they can actually shape that person's destiny. If you doubt that, consider these two stories: (1) One day in a small country church an altar boy accidentally dropped the communion wine. The officiating priest slapped him and shouted, "Leave, and don't come back!" That boy became General Tito, the brutal communist dictator who ruled the people of Yugoslavia for years. (2) In a big city cathedral another altar boy dropped the communion wine. His bishop turned to him and whispered reassuringly, "It's okay, some day you'll be a great priest." That boy became Archbishop Fulton Sheen, whose sermons touched the hearts of millions on national television. Your words either build people up or tear them down. Solomon said, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Here's a truth we don't like to acknowledge; what comes out of our lips reveals what's in our heart, and all our "I didn't mean it's" don't change that or undo the damage. Eugene Petersen writes: "Every day I put love on the line. There's nothing I am less good at. I am far better in competition than love; far better at responding to my instincts to get ahead, than at figuring out how to love another. I'm schooled and trained in getting my own way. And yet I decide every day to set aside what I do best, and attempt to do what I do very clumsily – open myself to the frustrations and failures of loving, daring to believe that failing in love is better than succeeding in pride."

Friday July 10

"He gives His beloved sleep." Psalm 127:2 NKJV

Get more sleep

Illness, stress, family problems, job demands, etc., rob us of sleep. And when we constantly run on low battery power it shows up in our attitudes, our relationships and our performance. The Bible says: (1) "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep." (2) "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Ps 4:8 NKJV). (3) "When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet" (Pr 3:24 NKJV).

Sleep is an act of trust: when you go to sleep the world is in God's hands, not yours. And it will get along very well, even if you're not awake to control things. When you awaken tomorrow morning, just like God giving Israel fresh manna, He will give you

the grace needed. Jeremiah said, “After this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep was sweet to me” (Jer 31:26 NKJV).

Ever tried to pray when you were suffering from sleep deficit? It’s hard to do. Before Elijah was able to spend prolonged time in prayer the angel of the Lord made him take not one, but two long naps. Contrast that with the disciples in Gethsemane who couldn’t pray because they kept falling asleep. Know what? It’s hard to think, feel and act like Jesus when you lack sleep. That’s why “He gives His beloved sleep.” Maybe the most spiritual thing you could do is get to bed earlier and wake up refreshed so you’re ready to fulfill God’s purposes for your day.

Saturday July 11

“You have left your first love.” Revelation 2:4 NKJV

What to do when the sizzle fizzles (1)

Nobody plans it, it just seems to happen. Romance runs headlong into reality, something gives, and it’s usually romance. At first it’s just two love-birds with no higher earthly priority than each other’s happiness. Then comes the patter of tiny feet, and our well-ordered world gets turned upside down. Children don’t fit neatly into our schedules and agendas. They can’t and won’t wait. Three kids, two jobs, one mortgage later, and romance seems to be a distant memory. Two overworked people wonder where they lost that romantic feeling and whether it will ever return. Some settle for marriage without the sizzle; some stay till the kids are older, then look for greener, more romantic pastures. But God offers a third, more exciting alternative: God’s alternative – do what it takes to restore your “first love.” (This Scripture was written to the church at Ephesus, but the principle also applies to building a good marriage.) So:

(1) Reexamine your perceptions. We think our current sizzle-free status is proof that romantic love is dead and the dream forever lost. That’s because we confuse romance with love. Romance brings people together, but love keeps them together. People who love each other can make romance live again – at any age or stage. (2) Realize that the sizzle wasn’t lost, it was “left.” “You have left [behind] your first love.” It didn’t leave you. It didn’t die. A new partner is not the solution. (3) Retrace your steps. You’ll find romance where you left it: undernourished, crowded out, overlooked and seriously oxygen-deprived, but not dead. God created marriage. Talk to Him. Follow His instructions and your romance can live again.

Sunday July 12

“You have left your first love.” Revelation 2:4 NKJV

What to do when the sizzle fizzles (2)

Here are three “R’s” that work in our walk with God – and in our marriage. First: Remember. “Remember the height from which you have fallen!” (NIV). Not the depth, but the height. Not how bad it’s become, but how great it once was. Not the worst of times, but the best. Recall when just being together was the highlight of your whole day? What were you doing then that you’re not doing now? Do you remember when you phoned just to hear his voice? The gifts you couldn’t afford, but bought her? The love notes you slipped into his lunch? Remember opening doors for her, pulling out chairs, walking to the outside of the curb, cooking his favorite dish although you were exhausted from working late, reading “1001 Ways to be Romantic,” and trying them all twice?

Remember quiet candlelit dinners when you shaved again and wore her favorite cologne, the one you hated? When intimacy wasn't all about me? "Our special" places, times, smells, looks, songs, poems? A rose on her tray with breakfast in bed because she had cried when she heard the song, "You don't bring me flowers anymore," and you vowed you'd never forget the flowers?

"Remember!" Remember what you did for love. The magic may seem to have appeared by accident, but it actually grew by action! You were the magic. What you did fueled the romance, then you stopped doing it and the flame subsided. But the pilot light still burns, and remembering "the heights" releases positive, faith-inspiring chemistry that can move you to actions that will fan the flame into a fire again!

Monday July 13

"You have left your first love." Revelation 2:4 NKJV

What to do when the sizzle fizzles (3)

The second "R" for renewing your first love is repent; change your mind, direction, and actions. You can't solve a problem with the same thinking and behaviors that created it; new thinking and actions are required. If your relationship once sizzled, you still have what's needed to make it sizzle again. You've been remembering what you were doing at "the height" of the relationship. You've acknowledged that those actions made the relationship exciting and fulfilling, that you stopped doing them, and that you "left [behind] your first love." Now you're ready to repent (which means to turn around) and go back to where you were when the flame of love burned brightly.

The third "R" of renewal is reenact; "Do the things you did at first" (Rev 2:5 NIV). List the things you used to do when the relationship was great. Each of you should prayerfully and privately commit to doing a couple of the listed items, without telling your partner which ones you chose. Try to "catch" your partner reenacting "the things you did at first" and let them know how much it means to you that they cared enough to do it. You'll get more of what you reinforce by gratitude. But a word to the wise: at first it may feel strange, even unreal, when you begin to reenact those early behaviors. Be patient, that will change. Just keep doing it. And don't wait till you feel like it. You can act your way into new ways of feeling, even when you can't feel your way into new ways of acting. Do it till you feel it, till the joy of your first love reignites!

Tuesday July 14

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels." 2 Corinthians 4:7

Honored, but not exalted!

When God calls you to do something, it means you're called to a higher level of accountability. Jesus said, "Unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required" (See Lk 12:48). But this is where we get it wrong. We think those who are called, are not cut from the same bolt of cloth as others. Wrong! Just because someone prays powerfully and delivers God's Word skillfully, doesn't mean they don't struggle in certain areas. Their struggles may be unseen, but they're still real. We must be careful to make the distinction between the treasure and the vessel. If you're a leader, never allow anyone to expect you to be the treasure. Keep your ego in check. Paul says: "We have this treasure," he didn't say we are the treasure!

Let's face it, God uses people we wouldn't use, like Rahab, working the red light district of Jericho. But when she placed her faith in God He used her to win the battle of Jericho, then included her in the family of Christ. Or how about Jephthah who was born to an unwed mother, rejected by his family, and lived in a cave with his own gang of private mercenaries? God used him to deliver Israel and become the nation's youngest judge. Isn't grace amazing?

God specializes in restoring broken vessels. He takes things that aren't productive – marriages that don't work, people with "issues" – and teaches them how to be victorious and fruitful in His service. Knowing this gives us the strength and tenacity to face whatever comes, because we know that when God places His treasure within us, He prizes, protects and prospers it.

Wednesday July 15

"Taking the shield of faith." Ephesians 6:16 NKJV

Build up your faith!

A Roman soldier's shield protected him from head to toe. It was made of iron, upholstered in thick layers of fabric, and saturated in water when going to battle. Consequently the flaming arrows of the enemy fizzled on contact. Getting the idea? Paul writes, "Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (NIV). Satan can't penetrate a heart that's pure, saturated in Scripture and fortified by faith. That's why Jesus told Peter, "I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail" (Lk 22:32 NKJV). It's your faith that's under attack; it's your faith that needs to be fed and nurtured; it's your faith that sustains you in life's battles! Jesus said, "Have faith in God" (Mk 11:22). Note, He didn't just say, "Have faith in something bigger than yourself." No, He said, "Have faith in God."

If you're under attack today claim this promise: "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa 40:29-31 NKJV). God gives each of us a "measure of faith" (Ro 12:3 NKJV). But Jude says you must develop it by "building yourselves up on your most holy faith" (Jude 20 NIV). Faith under attack is faith under construction. It's in the battles of life that you discover whether you have nurtured faith or neglected faith!

Thursday July 16

"Count it all joy." James 1:2 NKJV

Thumps

Max Lucado writes: "When a potter bakes a pot he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the [furnace] and thumping it. If it 'sings,' it's ready. If it 'thuds,' it's put back in. Character is also checked by thumping...Late night phone calls...grouchy teachers...burnt meals...flat tires...you've-got-to-be-kidding deadlines. Thumps trigger the worst in us...They aren't big enough to be a crisis, but if you get enough of them, watch out. Traffic jams...long lines...empty mailboxes...dirty clothes on the floor...Thump. Thump. Thump. How do you respond? Do you sing or do you thud? Jesus said, 'People speak the things that are in their hearts' (Lk 6:45 NCV), and there's nothing

like a good thump to reveal the true nature of a heart...it's not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living. If you've a tendency to 'thud' more than you 'sing,' take heart. There's hope for us 'thudders.' Begin by thanking God ...not a half-hearted thank-you...but a rejoicing, jumping-for-joy, thank-you from the bottom of your heart. James says: 'Count it all joy when you fall into various trials...the testing of your faith produces patience.' God's doing the thumping...for your own good... You're going to be tested...you might as well learn from the thumps. See it as an opportunity to develop patience and persistence. Each thump helps or hurts you, depending on how you use it. Be aware of 'thump-slumps' ...For all of us there are times during the week when we can anticipate an unusual amount of thumping. Handle them head on...bolster yourself with extra prayer... don't give up...and remember no thump is disastrous. All thumps work together for good when you love and obey God."

Friday July 17

"You are like whitewashed tombs." Matthew 23:27 NKJV

Being real!

Marybeth Whalen writes: "The painters painted the wall leading downstairs...A week later I discovered while the wall had been repainted, the habits hadn't changed. The kids were still ...dragging their dirty hands behind them, making what was white and clean, gray and dirty... Like that wall, if I'm not careful I can cover up what's there...wear the Christian tee shirt, carry my Bible, smile like everything's great, and talk a good game about my walk with the Lord. But deep inside the ugly old habits are...waiting to be revealed the moment life gets messy...I can become a modern-day Pharisee who focuses on the whitewash...and ignores the dirty stuff underneath."

In Bible times tombs were whitewashed on the outside to disguise the death and decay inside. Jesus told the Pharisees: "People look at you and think you're saints, but underneath ...you're total frauds" (TM). Acting like a Pharisee saying, "I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else" (Lk 18:11 NLT), precludes grace, mercy and compassion. We live in an appearance-driven society and Jesus understood the danger that comes from focusing on looks instead of your spiritual condition. So, how do you stop it from happening?

(a) Follow Jesus' example. He specialized in ministering to the broken, the forgotten, the lost and the lonely. (b) Never forget that while you may be a Christian, you'll still struggle in certain areas. (c) Ask God to reveal behavior patterns that are appearance-oriented instead of heart-oriented. (d) Surround yourself with transparent people who lift you when you fall and encourage you to be real.

Saturday July 18

"Parents are the pride of their children." Proverbs 17:6 NIV

Make your children proud of you (1)

The famous biographer Boswell tells of a day when his busy father took him fishing. Later when he read what his dad wrote in his journal, he was devastated: "Went fishing with my son; a day wasted!" If you want your children to be proud of you:

(1) Protect them. Guard them physically when they're young, and emotionally as they mature. Teach your son to respect girls, and interview the guys who date your daughter. Be sure to check out what they (and you) watch on TV, and especially the

increasingly dangerous influences of the internet. (2) Listen to them. Don't be like the kid who told his mom, "I'm gonna be just like dad when I grow up. My eyebrows are already growing together, and when people talk to me I don't listen." Listening builds a lifetime bridge to your child's heart. (3) Be affectionate with them. Nothing builds security and self-worth in your kids like holding them. If you grew up without expressions of affection, make sure they don't. (4) Discipline them. But go one step further, model self-discipline in your own life. Don't just preach, live it! (5) Be fun to be around. Show your children your lighter side. Don't be so preoccupied with work or church that you're a bore. "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance" (Pr 15:13). (6) "Walk the walk." Former atheist Lee Strobel says: "When I became a Christian my five-year-old daughter said, 'Mommy, I want God to do for me what He's done for daddy,'" and she gave her life to Jesus. Make Christ attractive to your children, and they will be drawn to Him.

Sunday July 19

"Parents are the pride of their children." Proverbs 17:6 NIV

Make your children proud of you (2)

Parent, your integrity, or the lack of it, will have consequences not only in your own life but also in the lives of your children.

Years ago a young Jewish boy grew up in Germany. He had great admiration for his father who made sure their family life revolved around their religion. Every week he took them to the synagogue. In the boy's teen years the family was forced to move to another town with no synagogue, only a Lutheran church. All the best people belonged to it. Suddenly his father announced they were all going to become Lutherans, saying it would be "good for business." Bewildered and angry, the boy left Germany and went to England to study. Each day found him at the British Museum formulating his ideas and composing a book. In that book he introduced a new world-view and conceived a movement that was destined to bring misery to the lives of countless millions. His ideas became the "norm" for the governments of almost half the world. The boy's name was Karl Marx, the father of Communism. History was forever altered by a father who sold out principle for profit.

Mom, Dad, live with integrity before your family and you'll have nothing to fear. Make your life an open book. Establish a system of values against which all of life is judged. Yes, you're human, and you'll struggle with situations which demand that you choose between what you want to do and what you ought to do. Walk with God and maintain your integrity, and you'll be able to make the right choice every time.

Monday July 20

"Don't be greedy, for...the things of this world." Colossians 3:5 NLT

"I want it now!"

A big credit card company has a TV commercial with the slogan, "You can have it all now!" Sound familiar? Not much has changed. Satan said to Adam and Eve, "If you want that apple, take it." Leave payday till "some day." Go ahead; put it on your credit card. Better yet, get this new, low-interest card and pay nothing for one year. That's right, folks, no interest and no payments for one full year." If you're the typical overextended family carrying a per capita credit card debt of \$10,000 to \$20,000, don't take the bait.

It's time for getting out of debt, not deeper into it. If you want help, try using these four Bible principles:

(1) "Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry" (See Col 3:5 NIV). Stop craving things you don't need. Instead, try enjoying what you've got. (2) If you're not tithing, start now! You'll be switching from the world's faltering economy to God's fail-safe economy. When you tithe He promises to protect your interests and send blessings "there shall not be room enough to receive" (See Mal 3:8-12). (3) "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Ps 24:1 NIV) and He guarantees to "supply all your need" (Php 4:19). So before you go shopping, try praying! Ask God for what you need, then wait for Him to respond. (4) Begin giving away some of what you've got. "It is possible to give away and become richer...[and] to hold on too tightly and lose everything...the liberal man shall be rich" (Pr 11:24-25 TLB). Go ahead, do it! Obey God, be patient, and watch what happens.

Tuesday July 21

"Contend earnestly for the faith." Jude 3 NKJV

Let's keep the faith (1)

Before leaving the leaders of the church in Ephesus for the last time, Paul said, "After my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Ac 20:29-32 NKJV). Was Paul being an alarmist? No, fast forward. Years later, speaking to the same church in Ephesus, God says: "You have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place...He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:1-7 NKJV). Note the words "do the first works." We must constantly reaffirm our scriptural foundations, and make sure we pass them on to our children. What are these foundational truths on which the church is built? The infallibility of Scripture, the virgin birth, the sinless life, the atoning death, the bodily resurrection and the mediatorial work of our Lord Jesus Christ, our need to be saved, baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit, and to carry the Gospel to the four corners of the earth, announcing the soon return of Jesus Christ to rule and reign. These are the bedrock nonnegotiables "which [were] once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3 NKJV). So, let's keep the faith!

Wednesday July 22

"Contend earnestly for the faith." Jude 3 NKJV

Let's keep the faith (2)

The Bible says: "We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away" (Heb 2:1 NKJV). The word "drift" should set off alarm bells. Jesus pointed out that while the harvesters slept an enemy sowed weeds among the wheat. When they finally wakened they said, "An enemy has done this" (Mt 13:28 NKJV). Cancer begins with one unidentified, unchecked cell, and if left un-dealt with it can destroy your whole body. Hence Jude writes: "Contend earnestly for the faith which was

once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4 NKJV). Note the words “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Our methods may change, but our message never changes. Paul writes: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2Ti 4:3 NKJV). Study the progression in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abraham’s blessings came through a personal relationship with God. Isaac inherited his father’s blessings. Not until the Philistines attacked him, did he go back and dig again the wells of his father Abraham and build an altar to the Lord. Finally Jacob, the third generation, came along and tried schemes and shortcuts to obtain God’s blessing. Only when he had a life-changing encounter with God at Peniel, did he reestablish his life on the foundations laid by Abraham and Isaac. Let’s keep the faith; let’s give our children “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

Thursday July 23

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” Philippians 1:3

Find a way to say “thank you”

Author Barbara Glanz tells about a successful business man who remembered his 8th grade literature teacher. He wrote to her and received this reply: “You’ll never know how much your letter meant. I’m 83 and living alone. My friends and family are all gone. I taught school for fifty years and yours is the first thank-you I’ve ever gotten from a student. Sometimes I wonder what I did with my life. I will read, and reread your letter until the day I die.” Ironically, she was the teacher students talked most about at class reunions, but nobody ever told her.

Paul was uncompromising on the truth, but his sensitive side also shows up in his writings. Knowing our need for appreciation he opens his Epistles with words like: “I make mention of you always in my prayers” (Ro 1:9 NKJV). “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you” (Eph 1:15-16 NKJV). “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Php 1:3-6 NKJV). “We...boast of you among the churches of God for your patience...in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure” (2Th 1:3-4 NKJV).

In our busy, self-centered world, we need to remember those who have made a difference in our lives, and when they come to mind, pray for them, and find a way to say “thank you.”

Friday July 24

“Good works...God prepared in advance for us.” Ephesians 2:10 NIV

Doing God’s work God’s way

Any time you ask, “What on earth am I here for?” the Bible answers “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God created you for a prearranged mission. You’re a conscript, not a volunteer. You don’t get to decide your calling. And it’s a mistake to try and duplicate somebody else’s calling. Remember Moses? God calls him to deliver Israel from Egypt but he tries doing it his own way. Killing an enemy to

save an ally's life, he winds up a forty year fugitive. After living in the wilderness and learning his lesson he returns to do God's will – God's way. All of us, not just ordained ministers, are called to do God's work God's way. "But how do I know what my calling is?" you ask.

(1) Work with your spiritual gifts. We all receive gifts from God, who "gives them to each one, just as he determines" (1Co 12:11 NIV). Let God show you through your deepest desires and core competencies where you're best suited to serve. (2) Submit to godly leadership. Your pastor can help equip and guide you. God "gave...pastors...to prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph 4:11-12 NIV). We all need help; we can't get there by ourselves. (3) Commit your abilities and resources to building up your local church. God designed our gifts and callings "so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12 NIV). (4) Develop a servant spirit. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others" (1Pe 4:10 NIV). Don't know your gifts? Start serving, and God will reveal them to you.

Saturday July 25

"Let him...take up his cross daily." Luke 9:23 NKJV

Take up your cross (1)

We tend to equate our cross with things like a difficult mate, a headstrong teen, a bedridden loved one, or too much month left at the end of the money. One author writes: "We think God passes out crosses like a warden handing shovels to a chain gang. No one wants one. Each one gets one...[But] the cross means much more. It's God's tool of redemption...proof of his love. To take up the cross...is to take up Christ's burden for...people." Jesus said, "The load I give you to carry is light" (Mt 11:30 NCV). The cross you're called to bear won't break your back, it will awaken and develop in you areas of strength which are lying dormant or being used for less worthy purposes. When you recognize this you'll stop praying for a lighter cross and ask God for a stronger back. When Paul began praying this way, God said, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2Co 12:9 NKJV).

When a badly burned infant dressed in funeral clothes was left to die in a field, attorney John Bentley and his wife nursed him back to health and adopted him. Today the Bentleys oversee an orphanage. Instead of walking away, they're shouldering the cross for China's children. Michael Landon, Jr. was nineteen when he accepted Christ and started impacting Hollywood by making redemptive films instead of the usual garbage. The son of an acting legend, Landon is uniquely qualified to carry the cross for the entertainment industry. But remember, the cross calls for dying to self-interest and crucifying the desires of your flesh so that the life of Christ can be seen in you.

Sunday July 26

"Let him...take up his cross daily." Luke 9:23 NKJV

Take up your cross (2)

Here are three questions that will help you to identify your cross:

(1) What direction is God leading me? If you think your background doesn't matter, think again. It can be a roadmap to your future. Consider the experiences and the kind of lifestyle you've been exposed to. Growing up in Egypt prepared Moses to stand before Pharaoh. David's years leading sheep, groomed him to lead a nation. Paul's

distinction as a Hebrew scholar and Roman citizen qualified him uniquely to minister to both religious and nonreligious people. (2) What burdens has God laid on my heart? Paul says: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Ro 10:1 NKJV). Paul was driven by a passion to see his people saved. What drives and inspires you? Building shelters for the homeless? Standing against abuse and neglect? Try visiting a nursing home and see if you don't leave feeling uplifted. Or spend time with a group of special-needs kids; they'll teach you more than you teach them! Fulfillment comes from the desires of your heart, not just the ideas in your head. (3) What areas utilize my talent? The Bible says God "has given each one of us a special gift" (Eph 4:7 NLT) and although He "works through different [people] in different ways...the same God...achieves his purposes through them all" (1Co 12:6-7 PHPS). How can you tell the difference between a self-generated and a God-generated idea? Solomon said, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but...the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Pr 19:21 NIV). Man-made ideas have a short shelf-life, divine direction persists; it has longevity.

Monday July 27

"These are the Scriptures that testify about me." John 5:39 NIV

Frequent encounters with God!

Here are two compelling reasons for saturating your mind in the Scriptures:

(1) To know who God is. One day in school, a little girl was asked by her art teacher what she was drawing. "A picture of God," she replied. The teacher said, "But nobody's ever seen Him." Confidently the little girl replied, "They will when I'm finished!" Till Jesus came, all we had were glimpses of God. Then Jesus announced, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). If you want to know who God is, what He thinks and how He acts, start spending more time with Jesus. (2) To know who you are. When God called Moses to deliver Israel, Moses told God two things: (a) "When I...say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say?' ...God said to Moses... 'say...I AM has sent me to you'" (Ex 3:13-14 NKJV). In order to know who you are you must know who God is; then you'll have credibility, confidence, direction and purpose. (b) "'But suppose they will not believe me' ... So the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A rod.' And He said, 'Cast it on the ground.' So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent" (Ex 4:1-3 NKJV). Moses already had what he needed, he just didn't recognize it or know how to use it until God showed him. Getting the idea? In order to know who you are and who God is, you must have frequent encounters with Him.

Tuesday July 28

"Let us...go on to maturity." Hebrews 6:1 NIV

You're growing up spiritually when...

When Jamie's 13-year-old brother died in a skating accident, his mother locked herself in her bedroom for days on end. That's when 6-year-old Jamie decided he'd have to replace his brother, and the threads of an intricate fantasy were woven. He became obsessed with imitating his brother's personal characteristics; he wore the same clothes and learned to whistle like him. He became his mother's constant companion, deciding that to stay a child meant freedom from sorrow and responsibility. Jamie continued to resist adulthood, and it was as if his physical body joined in the resistance. At age

seventeen he was barely five feet tall, and in later years children were among his closest friends. And no wonder – since age six he'd idealized childhood, rejecting maturity. In fact, the boy who sought eternal youth as a defense against tragedy never did grow up entirely. Instead he became famous for creating Never-Never Land, that ageless island of dreams where little boys never grow up. That's because Jamie eventually became Sir James Barrie – author of the children's book Peter Pan.

What's the lesson here? You're growing up spiritually when: (1) You have the ability and discipline to feed yourself spiritually. (2) You know you were not born to be served, and that only in serving others do you serve the Lord. (3) You understand that your feelings are fickle, so you walk by faith and stand on God's Word. (4) You realize you'll be tested, so you commit yourself to living by scriptural principles and not human impulses. (5) You know that true satisfaction comes only from discovering and doing God's will.

Wednesday July 29

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.” Psalm 32:8 NKJV

Tough love (1)

Jon Walker writes: “What about forgiving within a...relationship...that's toxic and dysfunctional? Should you [stay]...when the person keeps doing the same thing?...Loving your enemy doesn't mean excusing his behavior...In any toxic relationship we strive to resist the abuse with a peace-filled, godly response. This includes establishing healthy boundaries where you're less vulnerable to abuse and, if God directs, it may mean ending the relationship (easier said than done when the abuser is a parent, a spouse, or a child). The act of forgiveness doesn't require you to keep taking the abuse, and it doesn't mean you must stay in an abusive situation. Jesus showed that forgiveness can be immediate by forgiving those who were crucifying him: ‘Father, forgive them...they do not know what they are doing.’ As we mature...God will teach us to forgive constantly, even instantly. But it's a learning process, so don't take on a guilt trip if you can't do it now. Fall on God's grace and let him move you closer toward forgiveness. It may – probably will – take time to fully receive his grace to forgive. God can work with that. The first step may be to let Him soften your heart. Our hearts have a tendency to become hardened in difficult relationships. Again, let me stress, the softening of your heart...is not the same as saying it's okay to keep taking the abuse, or that you should stay in a situation where you're being or may be abused. Forgiveness isn't the same as agreeing with an abuser's behavior.” So, seek counsel, and talk to God. His promise is, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.”

Thursday July 30

“Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34 NIV

Tough love (2)

One author points out that Satan is the enemy, not the person you're dealing with! The real battle is against the forces of wickedness (See Eph 6:12). Satan wants you to think it's your battle alone, and act like you're separate from God. No, “The battle is the Lord's” (1Sa 17:47). He's in it with you. So, what should you do? (1) Pray for the abuser. People who continually hurt others are in bondage to their own sin. And while that in no way excuses them, it gives you insight into how to pray for them. God intended these

relationships for good, but they're undermined by alcohol, anger, and other counterfeits Satan uses to destroy fellowship and family. Pray for the abuser to become the person God intended. (2) Take a firm stand. You may need group support and a mediator present for an intervention. God's light can penetrate the deepest darkness with hope, restoration, and reconciliation, and when that happens it's a quicker path to healing. Nevertheless you need to take a firm stand, and if need be, get others to help you. (3) Ask God, "Should I stay or go?" It would be naïve to suggest that an intervention, sprinkled with prayer, will suddenly change everything. Some people respond to confrontation; some are melted by God's love. But many remain toxic and abusive, even when confronted in love, forgiven, and drenched in grace. You may need to end the relationship, as difficult as that may be. Remember, it's not your job to change the person, and it's not a failure on your part if they don't change, even when they're confronted with God's love and truth.

Friday July 31

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be." Matthew 6:21 NIV

"Where's my heart?"

William Randolph Hearst lived in Hearst Castle. It was 90,000 square feet sitting on 265,000 acres. At one time he owned 50 miles of California coastline. And he collected stuff for 88 years. He had 3500-year-old Egyptian statues, medieval Flemish tapestries, centuries-old hand-carved ceilings, and some of the greatest works of art of all time. After eight decades of collecting stuff William Hearst died. Now people go through his house by the thousands and they all say the same thing: "Wow, he sure had a lot of stuff."

We go through life, get stuff, then die, leaving all our stuff behind. And what happens to it? Our kids argue over it. Our kids, who haven't died yet, go through our stuff. Like vultures, they decide which stuff they want to take to their houses. They say to themselves, "Now this is my stuff," then they die and new vultures come to get it. Nations go to war over stuff, families are split apart over stuff. Husbands and wives argue more about stuff than any other single issue. Prisons are full of street thugs and CEO's who committed crimes to acquire it. Why? It's only stuff. This is what Jesus was addressing when He said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:19-21 NIV). Now, having read those words, ask yourself the question, "Where's my heart?"

Saturday August 1

"He has made everything appropriate in its time." Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAS

The roller-coaster ride of life (1)

One preacher said, "Friends, if I were God your body would always be 18, you could eat anything and maintain perfect weight; your middle-aged wife would have the face and figure of an angel; your mid-life husband, thick hair and washboard abs; your youngsters as intelligent as Einstein; your teens cooperative, logical and consistent. Temperatures would be 72 always; snow would be warm, melting overnight; and there'd be no nasty people. Alas, I'm not God!" So we age, gain weight, struggle raising kids, shiver in winter, sweat in summer, and put up with difficult people. Welcome to the

roller-coaster ride of life! It's neither punishment nor proof you're fatally flawed; nor is it heaven or hell selecting you for "special" persecution, nor evidence you aren't truly saved. No, it's just life in the real world! Jesus said, "On earth you will have many trials" (Jn 16:33 NLT). As in the physical universe, there's an underlying "law of wave mechanics." In accord with it, our energy, emotions and creativity ebb and flow consistently. Sometimes we're on top of the mountain, other times the mountain is on top of us. But whether at peak or trough, God's law of wave mechanics functions – for our benefit. "There is...a time to weep (trough), and a time to laugh (peak); a time to mourn (trough), and a time to dance (peak)" (Ecc 3:1&4). While it's more fun to laugh than weep, "He has made everything appropriate in its time." Relax. God, who is Alpha and Omega, determines the seasons of your life. Whichever one you're in, the Word for you today is: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2Co 12:9 NKJV).

### Sunday August 2

"He has made everything appropriate in its time." Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAS

The roller-coaster ride of life (2)

The song says: "I beg your pardon; I never promised you a rose garden." Neither did God, so beware of "rose garden" theology. The Christian life is not an either/or experience, where either you're a believer and life is problem-free, or an unbeliever and life is tough. It's a both/and experience, bringing times you'll enjoy and times you'll endure. The Bible's heroes experienced both the thrill of victory and the sting of defeat, some, like Elijah, even wishing to die.

Consider the paradoxes of God's Word. Jesus was a "man of sorrows" (Isa 53:3). Yet He was also "anointed...with the oil of gladness above (His) fellows" (Heb 1:9). Paul said he was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing...poor, yet making many rich...having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2Co 6:10 NKJV). These were his thoughts when he said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Php 4:13 NIV). In Proverbs 17:22 (NKJV) Solomon says, "A merry heart does good, like medicine." In Ecclesiastes 7:3 he says, "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by sadness...the heart is made better." In Ecclesiastes 7:14 (NAS) he writes, "In...prosperity be happy...in...adversity consider – God has made the one as well as the other." Rejoice! In your both/and world, God is still on the throne. He's controlling the mix of joy to sorrow, peace to conflict, loss to gain, want to satisfaction, tragedy to triumph, with your best interests always foremost in His mind.

### Monday August 3

"He has made everything appropriate in its time." Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAS

The roller-coaster ride of life (3)

Life on the peaks is a picnic, but what about life in the pits? In times of turmoil, struggle, heaviness, doubt, loneliness and failure, where do we go? In his classic, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis's senior devil talks to his nephew Wormwood about their mutual enemy, the Lord. "Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never in greater danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending to do our Enemy's will, looks around upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys!" When our pit is deep and God seems to be nowhere around; when our prayers rebound like empty echoes, what then? "No longer

desiring” – all positive emotions are shut down. “But still intending” – nothing’s left except the sheerest of gutsy faith we can muster just to stay afloat. When it doesn’t even feel real anymore, we trust, and by faith and nothing else, “still obey.”

Our senses get distorted, even numbed, in life’s pits. We begin doubting the reality of God’s Word and our standing with Christ, believing our emotional pain is evidence that we’re lost and things are hopeless. These desert seasons leave us feeling distant, alienated from God. Such sensations appear credible to pit-dwellers, while thinking and speaking faith sounds and feels unconvincing. But the enemy knows his cause is never in greater danger than when a child of God “looks around upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys!”

Tuesday August 4

“He has made everything appropriate in its time.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAS

The roller-coaster ride of life (4)

The roller coaster of life runs both day and night. Some trips take place in the dark, where things are difficult to distinguish. “Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God” (Isa 50:10 NAS). Yes, even the godly who “fear the Lord” and who “obey the voice of His servant,” will at times walk where there seems to be no light to guide their footsteps and no warm glow to comfort their troubled senses. These are not times of punishment, retribution, or abandonment. No, they’re times when God is working out the next important stages of your development, aligning you for greater advancement in His kingdom!

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, men who feared the Lord and obeyed His Word, were ordered to be burned alive for refusing to worship the king’s golden image (See Da 3). Listen to their faith confession: (1) “Our God...is able to deliver us” (v 17). They never doubted God’s ability. (2) “And he will deliver us.” They never doubted God’s intention. (3) “But if not...we will not... worship the golden image” (v 18). They never considered an alternative of faithfulness to God. They had to go through to get through, and they did! You will too. Stay on the roller coaster. “Trust in the name of the Lord and rely on (your) God.” He has the last word, not the Devil, circumstances or people. Like the three Hebrews, you will come out refined as gold tried in the fire.

Wednesday August 5

“He has made everything appropriate in its time.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAS

The roller-coaster ride of life (5)

Giving up in mid-ride isn’t an option – it’s foolish! A depressed church member told his pastor, “I’m tired of trying. I’ve been down so long, I can’t muster up the faith to believe God for deliverance anymore.” The pastor said, “First, you can never justify quitting, because you have the Lord on your side. He won’t quit on you, He promised He’ll ‘never leave you nor forsake you [so]...do not be discouraged’ (Dt 31:8 NIV). Second, His Word says, ‘If we believe not, he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself’ (2Ti 2:13). It’s not just a matter of your faith, it’s a matter of His faithfulness. When you can’t seem to believe, instead of focusing on your faith in Him (or the lack of it), begin to focus on His faithfulness to you!” What great counsel for the roller-coaster ride of life. Now, let’s add some more encouraging observations. Third, God doesn’t owe us an

explanation so we shouldn't look for one, but He promises us an exit. He "will with the [testing]...make a way to escape, that ye [might] be able to bear it" (1Co 10:13). Until He gets you out of it, He'll get you through it. Your part is to stay on the roller coaster. Fourth, He's producing good in all your circumstances. "And we know that all things work together for good to them...who are the called" (Ro 8:28). God puts pits and peaks together, and out comes your good. Fifth, while He does so, the Son and Spirit intercede with the Father for you, daily (See Ro 8:26-32 and 34-39). With all that going for you, how can you fail to make it?

Thursday August 6

"A champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath." 1 Samuel 17:4 NKJV

When it comes to giant-problems

When it comes to giant-problems:

(1) Their size can intimidate you. And it doesn't help when everybody around you, including your leader, is running for cover. This is when you need to recall the victories of your past: Red Sea-sized ones, Jericho Wall-sized ones. How big is your God?

(2) Their words can cause you to doubt. "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were...greatly afraid" (1Sa 17:11 NKJV). Words like, "The tumor's malignant, the company's down-sizing, I don't love you any more, our child is hooked on drugs, the bank is foreclosing." How do you handle such words? By turning to the living, life-changing Word of God which transcends all circumstances and trumps all opinions. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa 40:8 NKJV).

(3) There is an "opening," look for it. It was said Goliath could throw his spear half the length of a football field, so that's probably how far David was from him. Furthermore, Goliath had body armor protecting him from head to toe, except for a small opening between his eyes and his forehead. That's what David aimed for. There's a lesson here. When you ask God for a solution, it may come as a small opening rather than the size of half a football field! When He shows it to you, trust Him to get you through it. God's response to you is not designed to increase your sense of comfort, but to build your confidence in Him. That way you'll not only be able to handle this giant, but the ones waiting for you in the future.

Friday August 7

"She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head." Mark 14:3 NIV

Don't keep your love in a box!

Luke records: "A woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume...She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold...and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly. 'Leave her alone,' said Jesus... 'She has done a beautiful thing ...The poor you will always have with you...But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you... wherever the

gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mk 14:3-9 NIV).

Joseph of Arimathea brought a hundred pounds of ointment to embalm Jesus after He was dead, and not a word of praise is spoken about it in Scripture. This woman brought one pound of ointment and poured it on Him while He was still living, and Jesus pointed out two things: (a) “She did what she could.” Acts of kindness are usually not about doing great things, but about doing small things with great love. (b) “What she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” What will you be remembered for, a life of service or self-centeredness?

If you think good things about someone, tell them. Go out of your way to fill their lives with joy while there’s still time. Those expressions of appreciation, those words of forgiveness, that special gift you’ve had in mind, give it while you can. Don’t keep your love in a box!

Saturday August 8

“Pray for them which despitefully use you.” Luke 6:28

Always take the high road

Don Shula, head coach of the Miami Dolphins football team, always held his players to “the 24-hour rule.” He gave them 24 hours to celebrate victory or sulk over defeat, then put it behind them. What a great rule to live by!

When you’re criticized it’s human to want to retaliate, but when you take the time to try and understand people it’s easier to forgive them. Many of the negative people in our lives just lack intimate relationships, so they keep others at arm’s length, rarely share their feelings and are uncomfortable with those who do. It’s easier for them to condemn than accept. Their hard and fast views make them inflexible. Often these people can’t handle freedom; they need rules that limit their choices, and only feel secure within their own boundaries. Abraham Lincoln said, “If I tried to answer all the attacks made against me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the best I know how. If the end brings me out right, then what is said won’t matter. If the end brings me out wrong, then ten angels declaring I was right would make no difference.”

In dealing with others, always take the high road laid out by Jesus: “Pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either...just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” (Lk 6:28-31 NKJV). Is that always easy to do? No, but it always pays off!

Sunday August 9

“Live a life of love.” Ephesians 5:2 NIV

The call to love (1)

When we take stock of our day-to-day actions there’s often a big gap between what we say we value, and how we spend our time, money and energy. Couples spend four times as much time watching television as they do talking to each other. Parents spend an average of four hours a day watching TV, one hour shopping, and six minutes playing with their children. And with each day lost, the gap widens.

In the movie *City Slickers*, actor and comedian Billy Crystal stands before the children in his son’s school class and decides to teach them a lesson they are perhaps not

ready to learn: “Value this time in your life, kids, because this is the time in your life when you still have choices, and it goes by so quickly. When you’re a teenager you think you can do everything, and you do. Your twenties are a blur, your thirties – you raise your family, you make a little money, you think to yourself, ‘What happened to my twenties?’ Your forties – you grow a little potbelly, you grow another chin, the music starts to get too loud, and one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother. In your seventies you spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate in soft yogurt and muttering, ‘How come the kids don’t call?’ ... Any questions?” If you sense a growing gap between what you say matters most to you and what you are actually doing with your life, take action. Get radical if you have to, but seize this moment while you still have it. The call to love rarely comes with urgency.

Monday August 10

“Live a life of love.” Ephesians 5:2 NIV

The call to love (2)

There’s a condition called “Active Inertia.” It happens when we stick to old commitments that no longer make sense. In some cases, they are actually detrimental to our health, our family and our spiritual well-being. This goes on until we hit a crisis. For example:

A busy father whose neglected daughter runs away from home and gets sucked into a life of addiction suddenly finds the time to scour the country looking for her, and then spend weeks looking for treatment clinics. A couple who were too busy for each other suddenly find massive amounts of time for counseling and lawyers and legal bills and apartment searches as their marriage falls apart. A workaholic suddenly finds time to ask what life really means when a lab report comes back from the doctor’s office marked “Malignant.”

Dr. Timothy Johnson writes: “Part of the pleasure of reading a novel lies in not knowing how it will turn out until we get to the last page – and then thinking back on how the characters might have lived differently had they known what the end would be like. But real life has an urgency so different from fiction; at the end, it cannot be changed. The meaning of life is that it stops. We will never figure out how we should live our life unless we understand the significance of the fact that it will end. And then what?” So, pause and ask yourself what you’re doing (or not doing) with your life right now that will lead to regret later. Life is always played in a forward direction; it never goes backward. Paul’s advice on this subject is, “Live a life of love.”

Tuesday August 11

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 29:18

What’s your vision?

When problems arise, our vision is often the first thing to hit the chopping block. That’s because we don’t see life the way it is, we see life the way we are. The Bible says: “Where there is no vision the people perish” [live unharnessed and undirected]. When God gives you a vision for your life, you begin to see things as He sees them. Moses “saw” the Promised Land when everybody around him saw only wilderness, wanted to give up and return to Egypt (See Heb 11:27). And He understood that he’d get there on

God's schedule, according to God's plan, one step at a time. Many tasks seem overwhelming when you look only at their size. But when you break them down into small steps and visualize yourself taking the first step, you're amazed at your progress. You can do something for a day you wouldn't commit to doing for a month; ask any recovering addict!

One Christian leader says: "Vision, like courage and discipline, is a trait that can be developed by anyone willing to work hard at making it part of their every day life." The poet wrote: "Two men looked through prison bars, one saw mud, the other stars." What do you "see" in your future? Do you think God's just going to drop success into your lap? No, you must energize your vision through faith and give it momentum through hard work! The Scripture, "We have the mind of Christ" (1Co 2:16), suggests that God thinks His thoughts through us. What an advantage! Jesus told His disciples, "Launch out into the deep" (Lk 5:4); as God's child, the world's limitations don't control your supply! So, what's your vision?

Wednesday August 12

"Do not be anxious about anything." Philippians 4:6 NIV

When you feel anxious (1)

Anxiety starts as a trickle, then creates a channel in our mind through which all our thoughts begin to flow. Most of our anxieties fall into three categories:

(1) Anxiety about things we all face: like aging, disability, retirement, loneliness, financial uncertainty, accidents, illness, losing a loved one, and death. (2) Anxiety about things we all must do: like making decisions, starting and ending relationships, losing weight, changing careers, making a mistake. (3) Anxiety reflecting our inner state of mind: These anxieties reveal how we feel about our ability to handle things. For example, fear of rejection can affect every relationship in your life. In order to avoid being hurt you shut others out, your world grows smaller and your opportunities for personal growth are more limited.

Many of our anxieties can be reduced to one question, "What if I can't handle it?" Your mind is the battlefield where victory is won or lost. So ask yourself, "Would I still be anxious if I knew for certain I could handle anything that came up?" The answer is no. Anxiety can't immobilize you and steal your joy when you know you can handle whatever happens. You say, "That sounds too simple." Not when you bring God into the picture! Here are two great anxiety eliminating Scriptures you can stand on when times are tough: (1) "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Php 4:13 NKJV). (2) "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds" (Php 4:6-7 NIV).

Thursday August 13

"Do not be anxious about anything." Philippians 4:6 NIV

When you feel anxious (2)

We all face times when we must choose between faith and anxiety. A woman trapped in an abusive relationship must choose between getting help, getting out or staying stuck. A young person being pressured to do drugs can choose to give in, or say,

“no” and walk away. A person anxious about death can read God’s Word, talk to a friend or counselor, or continue to be anxious.

The Bible says: “The righteous are bold as a lion” (Pr 28:1). You say, “Right now I don’t feel too bold.” Courage doesn’t eliminate anxiety, it rises above it! David said, “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart” (Ps 27:14). When your cause is right and you’re committed to God, He gives you the courage needed to act. But you must learn to face the thing you fear. This can mean standing up for what you believe, making a phone call you’ve been putting off, expressing your opinion, acknowledging some character flaw and asking God to help you change. What you must remember is, doing always comes before the feeling of increased confidence. Each time you confront your anxieties you take a step forward. But when you allow anxiety to control you, you retreat into your “safe zone” and start seeing yourself as somebody who can’t handle life. Here’s some great advice for living: analyze the situation fearlessly, figure out the worst that can happen. Once you’ve accepted that, you experience a release of energy and you can begin doing something about it, even if all you can do is – leave it in the capable and loving hands of God.

Friday August 14

“Do not be anxious about anything.” Philippians 4:6 NIV

When you feel anxious (3)

John writes: “I pray that...you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers” (3Jn 2 NAS). Why would he say that? Because your physical body thrives in relationship to how well you’re doing spiritually. Doctors say anxiety suppresses your immune system, elevates your blood pressure and creates cholesterol that blocks your arteries. It creates the very condition you dread! Did you know that a percentage of all first year medical students assume the very symptoms of whatever disease they’re studying? Some even faint when first exposed to them. Job said, “The thing which I greatly fear comes upon me” (Job 3:25 AMP). Anxiety is one of Satan’s most effective weapons. Your ignorance of his anxiety-inducing schemes is what enables him to gain a foothold in your thinking and rob you of the blessings that are rightfully yours, including your health.

Are you anxious about your health? Write these Scriptures down on a 3 x 5 card and carry it with you: (1) “Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you...I will give you a full life span” (Ex 23:25-26 NIV). (2) “I will restore you to health and heal your wounds, declares the Lord” (Jer 30:17 NIV). (3) “Listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body” (Pr 4:20-22 NIV). “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mk 11:24 NIV).

Saturday August 15

“Do not be anxious about anything.” Philippians 4:6 NIV

When you feel anxious (4)

Are you feeling anxious today? Program your mind with these promises. Better yet, carry them with you and read them regularly: (1) Be strong and courageous. Be not afraid or dismayed ...for there is...with us...our God to help us” (2Ch 32:7-8 AMP). (2)

“I will rescue you... declares the Lord; you will not be handed over to those you fear” (Jer 39:17 NIV). (3) “Fear not ...When you pass through the waters...they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned” (Isa 43:1-2 NKJV). (4) “Be not afraid or dismayed...for the battle is not yours, but God’s” (2Ch 20:15 AMP). (5) “In the world you have...distress and frustration; but...[take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]...I have...[deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you]” (Jn 16:33 AMP). (6) “I will lie down in peace and sleep, for though I am alone...Lord, you will keep me safe” (Ps 4:8 TLB). (7) “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles” (Ps 34:17 NIV). (8) “You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and...rest in safety” (Job 11:18 NIV). (9) “They will fight against you, but...not prevail...for I am with you to save...and deliver you” (Jer 15:20 NKJV). (10) “Our fears for today...worries about tomorrow...even the powers of hell...nothing in all creation will...separate us from the love of God” (Ro 8:38-39 NLT). (11) “Those who know your name will trust in you, for you...have never forsaken those who seek you” (Ps 9:10 NIV). (12) “The Lord...watches over you...stands beside you...keeps you from all harm...watches over your life...keeps watch...as you come and go” (Ps 121:5-8 NLT).

Sunday August 16

“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God.” Philippians 3:14 NKJV  
Are you striving for excellence?

You’re not making the most of your potential when the standards set for you by others are higher than the ones you set for yourself. Former basketball star Bill Bradley attended a summer basketball camp when he was fifteen. While there, basketball star “Easy” Ed Macauley told him, “If you’re not working at your game to the utmost of your ability, there’ll be someone out there with equal ability who will be working to the utmost of his ability, and one day when you play each other he’ll have the advantage.” Neither your critics nor your competitors should determine the standards you set for yourself. Psychology professor Jon Johnston points out the difference between mere success and excellence: “Success bases our worth on a comparison with others, excellence measures us against our own potential. Success grants its rewards to the few but is the dream of the multitudes. Excellence is available to all living beings, but is accepted only by the few.”

There’s an embarrassing moment in the life of Christ: “The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine” (Jn 18:19 NKJV). Of His doctrine Jesus could say, “Ask those who have heard Me” (Jn 18:21 NKJV), but concerning His disciples He said nothing, because they’d all forsaken Him. When asked about our doctrine we say, “Ask those who have heard me.” But when asked about our discipleship, can we say, “Ask those who know me?” Are you known for your lukewarm, low-impact living, or can you say like Paul, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God?”  
Are you striving for excellence?

Monday August 17

“Is there not a cause.” 1 Samuel 17:29  
Having a cause greater than yourself

How could David stand up to a giant everybody else was running from? Because God’s people were being threatened, and everybody around him was afraid to tackle the

problem. When you're confronted with a situation that needs to be changed, what is it that makes you rise up and say, "I'm going to do something about this"? Having a cause greater than yourself! Refusing to live trapped in fear or the small dimensions of a self-centered world!

A survey was conducted among people who lived to be over 100. Now you'd expect to read about health diets, miracle drugs and strenuous exercise. But the thing all these centenarians had in common was – purpose. They had a compelling reason to get out of bed in the morning. Paul writes: "For to me to live is Christ" (Php 1:21). For Paul, that was it! To exalt His name and promote His kingdom. Too many of us are like the guy who said, "No matter what I'm working on, I'd rather be doing something else." Are you like that? Or do you have a cause great enough to focus your energies and strong enough to keep you going when the odds are stacked against you?

God made you for a mission. Have you discovered it yet? At age twelve Jesus said, "I must be about my Father's business" (Lk 2:49). Twenty-one years later, dying on the cross, He announced, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). These two statements frame a totally fulfilled, God-glorifying life. So ask God to reveal to you His purpose for your life. Until you find it you haven't lived, and until you fulfill it you're not ready to die.

Tuesday August 18

"If you...believe in your heart...you will be saved." Romans 10:9 NIV

When your faith feels shaky (1)

A new Christian writes, "I've accepted Jesus as my Savior. But then I slip, and end up wondering if my faith is strong enough. If I'm really saved why doesn't God talk to me like He talks to other people?" You'd be surprised how many of us walk around harboring doubts that steal our peace and assurance.

The Bible says: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Are you trusting in Christ? Have you confessed Him as your Savior? Then you're saved! Jesus said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (Jn 6:47 NKJV). Doubts always arise when you go by your feelings instead of God's Word. Your emotions will change like the weather. The enemy will use them to tell you that salvation's fine for other people but not for you. Paul said, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him" (2Ti 1:12 NKJV). The One you've committed your eternal well-being to, is committed to saving – and keeping you. Hannah Whitall Smith said, "Faith is the simplest, plainest thing in the world...it's simply believing God."

When your faith feels shaky, pray, "Lord Jesus, I've placed my trust in You. Your Word says I can know I have eternal life (See 1Jn 5:13 NKJV). It's not a matter of feeling, thinking or wishing; it's a matter of believing and knowing that You keep Your word. So I choose to doubt my doubts, and believe You!"

Wednesday August 19

"Reach out...Stop doubting and believe." John 20:25-27 NIV

When your faith feels shaky (2)

New Christians aren't the only ones who struggle with doubt; sometimes seasoned believers do too. One Christian author calls them "doubt-storms...turbulent days when the enemy's too big, the task too great, the future too bleak...and the answers

too few. Thomas said, ‘Unless I... put my finger where the nails were...I will not believe...’ [Jesus] said... ‘Reach out your hand ...Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas asks the question we all ask when we’re struggling, ‘If God is so good, why do I feel so bad? If His message is so clear, why am I confused? If He’s in control, why do good people wrestle with gut-wrenching problems?’ ... You’d rather be a cynic than a hypocrite, so you...pray with one eye open and wonder...about starving children...the power of prayer...the depth of grace...Christians in cancer wards...and who you are to ask such questions anyway.”

Elisabeth Elliot said, “True faith only goes into operation when there are no answers.” God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Isa 55:8 NKJV). The truth is, God doesn’t think like us. He sees the big picture and works toward a specific end. In a conversation with His disciples Jesus said, “I have many more things to say...but they are too much for you now” (Jn 16:12 NCV). When you find yourself doubting and questioning God, pray: “Lord, believing isn’t easy when I’m hurt and confused, and You are silent. Like Thomas, I want proof that You love me. Help me see beyond my desire for peace and comfort, beyond my doubts and unanswered questions, and grasp the truth of Your unfailing love and grace.”

Thursday August 20

“Put off falsehood and speak truthfully.” Ephesians 4:25 NIV

Tell the truth

Jude Werra documents résumé fraud for a living. His “Liar’s Index” just hit a 5-year high. It includes the dean of a prestigious college who failed to graduate from any of the three institutions where she claimed to have earned degrees. Solomon said, “Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel” (Pr 20:17 NKJV). Paul warns about people who’ve “lied so well and for so long...they’ve lost their capacity for truth” (1Ti 4:2 TM). Dr. Harold Sala writes: “Some people are so good at distorting the truth that they convince themselves...The chronic liar has made lying so much a lifestyle, she has a hard time perceiving reality...Not only does God disdain it, but the liar is destroying her own credibility... To turn a lifestyle of dishonesty around you must recognize you have a problem: not an incurable one but a persistent one, and acknowledge it, even if it means going public.” If you have a problem telling the truth you must take these four steps: (1) Repent. “If we confess our sins, he...will forgive us” (1Jn 1:9 NIV). And with God’s forgiveness comes His help. (2) Become accountable. Find somebody who’s not afraid to ask you tough questions. Remember, the truth usually makes you miserable before it sets you free. (3) Drop the attitude. It’s not okay to lie because God will forgive you. That cheapens His grace. “Shall we go on sinning...that grace may increase? By no means!” (Ro 6:1-2 NIV). (4) Keep short accounts with God. When you blow it (and we all do) “fess up” and make it right with God and the people you’ve misled.

Friday August 21

“We are hard pressed.” 2 Corinthians 4:8 NIV

Resilient people (1)

When a back injury paralyzed Angela Madsen from the waist down, she vowed to do whatever it took to get back up. As a result she started training to be the first woman

with a disability to row across the Atlantic. Journalist Denise Foley writes: “Madsen is what researchers call ‘resilient – able to rebound from whatever life brings. She’s one of those people who make us wonder how we’d fare if our mettle were tested. Would we bounce back?” Paul writes, “We are hard pressed...but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

Resilient people: (1) Take control of their lives: Drs. Steven & Sybil Wolin write, “It’s easy to blame others for your problems and wait till they fix them. But then you never get to rise to the occasion...When you see yourself as a problem-solver life goes very differently. Identify your strengths. Recall those moments when you triumphed over adversity. Focus on what you can influence instead of what you can’t.” (2) Surround themselves with the right people: The Psalmist said, “They...treated me badly all my life, but they have not defeated me” (Ps 129:2 NCV). Ned Hallowell grew up with a bipolar father, an abusive stepfather, an alcoholic mother, and two learning disabilities – a history that’s often a precursor to jail or a mental institution. Today he’s a prominent psychiatrist, a happily-married father and a successful author. It happened largely because at boarding school he attached himself to teachers who cared about him and took him under their wing. So in tough times, lean on God, take control of your life, and surround yourself with the right people.

Saturday August 22

“We are hard pressed.” 2 Corinthians 4:8 NIV

Resilient people (2)

Two other traits resilient people share are: (1) They allow pain to spur growth: At the peak of her career when photographer Linda Joy Montgomery learned she was going blind, an inner voice said, “This isn’t the end; it’s the beginning.” She began writing poetry, discovered her calling as a motivational speaker and created the True Vision Institute, teaching kids to tap into their inner resources. The Bible says: “Though good people may be bothered by trouble...they are never defeated” (Pr 24:16 NCV). Finding purpose in your pain isn’t a new idea. Survivors of life-threatening illnesses, natural disasters and the Holocaust, and parents of chronically ill children continually demonstrate how overcomers find the proverbial silver lining by reinventing themselves. Paul talks about being “battered by troubles, but...not demoralized...thrown down, but [not] broken” (2Co 4:8 TM). Meeting challenges helps develop confidence and a can-do attitude that says: “I’ve been there, done that, and I’ll survive.” Michael Jordan once said, “I’ve missed over 9,000 shots in my career...lost over 300 games...26 times I’ve been trusted to make the game-winning shot, and missed. I’ve tried and failed over and over again. That’s why I succeed.”

(2) They insist on changing what they can: Paul says: “Whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord” (Eph 6:8 NKJV). Workers digging through the rubble to help rescue survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing, though understandably distressed, showed fewer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder later on. In concentration camps POW’s who routinely gave away their last morsel, proved that you can choose your attitude in any given set of circumstances. How? By drawing strength from God and learning to control the one thing you can control – yourself.

Sunday August 23

“Now we are children of God, and we have not yet been shown what we will be in the future.” 1 John 3:2 NCV

You're a W.I.P.

The surest way to get discouraged is to compare yourself with others. The Bible says, “Don't compare yourself” (Gal 6:4 CEV), because some people will look like they're doing a better job and you'll get disheartened, while others won't be as effective and you'll become proud. “Concentrate on doing your best” (2Ti 2:15 TM). That way, “You will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and...won't need to compare yourself” (Gal 6:4 NLT). All the apples on a tree don't ripen at the same time. Paul says, “knowledge and understanding” take time (See Php 1:9-10). One successful author says, “When I began writing, I found myself fumbling with that part of myself. ‘I want to be a writer,’ I'd think, ‘but I have to get this number of books published and this number of good reviews first.’ It can take years and many successes in any new area...before we can confidently say to ourselves and others, ‘I am’...what has God called you to do? Don't wait until you're successful ...Start now by saying you are what you want to become...Yes, you've much to learn...and you may not be an expert...but you don't have to be, to say those two little words I am.” John writes: “Now we are children of God, and we have not yet been shown what we will be in the future.” God uses crooked sticks to draw straight lines and imperfect people to do His perfect will. So, push ahead, cut yourself some slack, and remember you're a W.I.P. – a work-in-progress!

Monday August 24

“This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.” 1 John 5:4 NKJV

You'll win if you don't quit!

The Bible is a “David and Goliath” book. It's filled with stories of ordinary people whose faith overcame great obstacles and impacted the world around them. That's why John the Apostle writes: “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.”

If you haven't heard of Irwin Rosenberg, here's his inspiring story. As a junior officer he was discharged from the Navy when he was diagnosed with cancer. That was the standard military procedure at the time. But he was determined to get back both his health and his job. At one point he was given only two weeks to live. But through faith and dogged determination his cancer was eventually brought under control. Irwin then focused his attention on becoming a naval officer again. But he discovered that navy regulations forbade reinstatement of a person discharged with cancer. Everyone around him said, “Give up. It can't be done. It would take an Act of Congress to get you reinstated.” Their advice gave him an idea – he'd pursue an Act of Congress. After years of waiting, petitioning, cutting through red tape and battling bureaucracy, President Truman eventually signed into law a special bill that allowed Irwin Rosenberg to reenlist in the Navy – and go on to become a Rear Admiral in the United States Seventh Fleet!

The poet writes: “You can never tell how close you are, it may be near when it seems afar; so stick to the fight when you're hardest hit – it's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit!”

Tuesday August 25

“Another Jesus...a different spirit...a different gospel.” 2 Corinthians 11:4 NKJV

What “sells”

In an old Peanuts cartoon strip, on the first day of the new school year students are told to write an essay about returning to class. Lucy wrote, “Vacations are nice, but it’s good to get back to school. There’s nothing more satisfying or challenging than education, and I look forward to a year of expanding knowledge.” The teacher was pleased and complimented Lucy on her essay. In the final frame of the cartoon Lucy leans over and whispers to Charlie Brown, “After a while, you learn what sells.” The temptation to preach “what sells” is always with us. Paul warns the Corinthian church to be on guard against anyone who preaches “another Jesus...a different spirit...or a different gospel.”

Like Jonah, we are called to preach to people who’d rather hear something different. But running away didn’t work for Jonah, and it won’t work for us. “The Lord sent out a great wind on the sea...so that the ship was...broken up” (Jnh 1:4 NKJV). If He has to, God will shipwreck our plans in order to get us to go where we need to go, and to say what He’s called us to say. One pastor recently acknowledged that his message was attracting big crowds but not turning people into disciples, so he changed direction. The first thing God told Jonah to say when he reached Nineveh was, “Repent.” The Gospel does two things: It comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. The truth that sets us free will make us feel bad before it makes us feel good. God’s goal is not our comfort; it’s producing in us the character of Christ so the world will be drawn to Him.

Wednesday August 26

“The integrity of the upright will guide them.” Proverbs 11:3 NKJV

Integrity (1)

Psychologists speak of an integrity blind spot in each of us which is called “the self-serving bias.” Here are some examples of it: 800,000 high school students were asked whether they were above or below average. Now if they were accurate they’d have split 50-50. Guess what percentage rated themselves below average? Zero! 20% rated themselves in the top 1%! This self-serving bias extends to every area. The majority of people in the hospital suffering from crashes that they themselves caused, rated themselves as above-average drivers. You might think that education would make us more honest and self-aware, but no. 88% of college professors rated themselves above average; 25% rated themselves as truly exceptional. Another survey of 200 sociologists found that half of them believed they would become one of the top ten sociologists in the world. No wonder there are such conflicts around tenure and promotion. And the church is not exempt. George Barna did a survey of pastors – people who are paid to teach on texts such as: “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (Ro 12:3 NIV). “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1Pe 5:6 NIV). Guess what? Ninety percent of all the pastors in the survey considered themselves “above average” preachers. Perhaps most ironic of all: when people have the concept of the self-serving bias carefully explained to them, the majority rate themselves as “well above average” in their ability to handle the self-serving bias. Wow! Our problem is not just our lack of integrity, but that we can’t see how badly we lack it.

Thursday August 27

“The integrity of the upright will guide them.” Proverbs 11:3 NKJV

Integrity (2)

We all suffer from something psychologists call “fundamental attribution error.” It works like this: if something good happens in my life I tend to explain it by taking credit for it. But if I fail, I explain it by blaming my circumstances. If I do well on a test I think it’s because I’m smart; if I do poorly, it’s because I was distracted. If people like my sermon it’s because I’m a good preacher; if they don’t, it’s because they’re too shallow. What makes the fundamental attribution error even worse is the way we explain the behavior of other people, while explaining our own bad behavior in terms of mitigating circumstances. We say other people’s bad behavior is because of that would exhaust the patience of Job. If you yell at your child, it’s obvious that you need to see an anger management counselor. If I get a speeding ticket, it’s because the police needed to fill their quota so they set up a trap when they should have been out catching criminals. If you get a speeding ticket, it shows you’re not qualified to be behind the wheel.

What’s the solution to the fundamental attribution error? The way of grace and repentance. We need God’s help to see the truth about ourselves. And He gives it to us in three ways: (a) Through prayer. (b) Through reading and applying His Word. (c) Through people who love and know us well; people who don’t tell us what we want to hear but what we need to hear.

Friday August 28

“The beauty of old men [and women] is...[wisdom and experience].” Proverbs 20:29

AMP

Words to live by

The Bible says: “The beauty of old men [and women] is...wisdom and experience,” so listen up! An elderly man gives us words to live by: “Time has a way of catching you unawares. It seems like yesterday I was young, just married and embarking on my new life. Where did the years go? I know I’ve lived them all, and I get ‘glimpses’ of how it was back then...my hopes and dreams. But here it is...the winter of my life...How did I get here so fast? I remember seeing older people and thinking winter was so far off I couldn’t fathom or imagine it. But here it is... my friends are retired and getting gray...they move slower...I see great changes. I remember when they were young and vibrant, now we’re the ‘old folks’ we never thought we’d become. Each day I find that taking a shower is a real target, and taking a nap isn’t a treat anymore, it’s mandatory, otherwise I fall asleep where I’m sitting! I’m unprepared for the aches, pains, and the loss of strength and ability to do the things I wish I’d done and didn’t. Winter’s here and I’m not sure how long it will last. If you’re not there yet, let me remind you it’ll be here faster than you think. Whatever you’d like to accomplish in your life...do it today. Don’t put it off, because you can never be sure if this is your winter. There’s no guarantee you’ll see every season of life, so say all the things you want your loved ones to remember. Your life is a gift from God, how you live it is your gift to Him and ensuing generations.”

Saturday August 29

“Oh, that they were wise...that they would consider their latter end!” Deuteronomy 32:29

NKJV

Be wise – prioritize (1)

The Bible says: “Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” One of life’s greatest challenges is thinking and doing the things that ultimately matter and bring success. A life in which anything goes, is a life in which nothing goes. Wisdom means having the discipline to prioritize and the ability to work toward a stated goal. The question is not, “Will my calendar be full,” but “Who will fill it,” and “What will it be filled with?” To know your life’s priorities you must frequently pause and ask: (1) “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Ac 9:6 NKJV). (2) What is required of me that nobody else can do? (3) What will bring the greatest return? God doesn’t reward wasted effort, He rewards wisdom.

The story’s told of a lighthouse keeper on a rocky stretch of coastline who received a new supply of oil each month to keep the light burning. Being close to the shore he had lots of guests. A woman from the village needed some oil to keep her family warm; a farmer requested some for his tractor; a mechanic wanted some to lubricate a wheel. All the requests seemed legitimate so the lighthouse keeper tried to please everybody. Before the month was over his oil was gone and the beacon went out. As a result several ships were wrecked and lives were lost. When the authorities investigated, the man was very repentant. But to his excuses and pleading their reply was, “You were given oil for one purpose – to keep the light burning.” Be wise – prioritize!

Sunday August 30

“Oh, that they were wise...that they would consider their latter end!” Deuteronomy 32:29 NKJV

Be wise – prioritize (2)

In a survey, people over ninety were asked, “If you had your life to live over what would you do differently?” Three answers constantly reemerged: (a) I’d spend more time with my family and friends. (b) I’d take more risks. (c) I’d do things that would live on after I’m gone. Wisdom is the art of knowing what to overlook. Petty things steal too much of our time and we finish up living for the wrong reasons. When an Olympic gold medalist was asked the secret of his success he replied, “Planned neglect – until my training period is completed, I deliberately neglect everything else.” If you react to every situation and say, “yes” to every request, you’ll never succeed in what you’re called to do. Several years ago 300 whales died mysteriously. Why? Because they pursued a school of sardines and ended up marooned in a bay. The little ones lured the big ones to their deaths. By chasing small ends they wasted their vast powers and got insignificant results. Paul had it figured out: “The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me” (Ac 20:24 NCV). What’s your “most important thing?” One of the most interesting stories to come from the Titanic disaster was of a wealthy woman who had a place in one of the lifeboats. Asking if she could return to her stateroom for something, she was given three minutes. Stepping over money and precious gems littering her cabin floor, she grabbed three oranges and returned to the lifeboat. Circumstances transformed her values; tragedy clarified her priorities. Learn from her; be wise – prioritize!

Monday August 31

“Tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” Joshua 3:5 NAS

Don't discard your tomorrows!

Your yesterdays have made you what you are today, but your tomorrows can make you what God always intended you to become. Joshua was talking to a nation whose yesterdays were a long list of repeated failures and rebellion against God. They had been convicted, judged, punished and reinstated frequently by the God they'd flagrantly sinned against. Surely, they ought to have been cut off from Him, stripped of any future blessing. But "Joshua said to the people, 'consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.'" Consecrate yourself, realign yourself with God's plans and watch Him begin to work in your life. Just when the enemy has you convinced that with your past God couldn't possibly have a future for you, He calls you to prepare yourself so He can bless you. God is fully aware of your yesterdays, but He's much more focused on your tomorrows. Why do we discard our tomorrows when we so desperately need them? When Jesus cried, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30), His disciples misunderstood and concluded it was all over. So they slipped away to contemplate the tomorrow they thought would never be. But with God, every ending is a new beginning, and three mornings later the angel announced the resurrection and the new tomorrow that would guarantee the future for all believers. "It (your yesterday) is finished!" Don't give up your tomorrows by building monuments to your past failures. Acknowledge, confess and release your yesterdays to the crucified Christ. "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."