

THE PATCHWORK DEVOTIONAL



Wilburn "Dub" Williams

Preface

When the restrictions connected with the Corona Virus began to turn into cabin fever, Deloris and I got in the car and drove 29 miles from our home in Castroville. I stopped when I got to the Alamo. I've always enjoyed history and so when we got back home, I did a study of the events surrounding that site. I noticed some Spiritual parallels and began to put together some thoughts which I posted on Facebook. After getting some positive feedback, I began to post some events, people, places and Biblical truths. It was suggested I put them in book form and make them available to my FB friends and family.

I prayed for direction and was impressed to put together the first fifty and make them available on Email. Much of the material comes from different versions of the Bible, some from places I've been to or read about. Along with experiences I've had and people I've met, it was fairly easy to write about. I can take credit for very little of the results. Thanks to all who have been a part of the stories. I will thank others when I get to heaven.

Every book needs a title. When I saw what a broad variety of subjects covered, I was reminded of my mother's patchwork quilt that I inherited and treasure. She and my aunts, along with my grandmother had a frame hanging from the ceiling on the front porch. When it was quilting time, they would sit around the frame and sew together the scraps of cloth leftover from other projects. When we went to Israel, one of the places we visited was the marketplace in Old Jerusalem. I stopped and was admiring a shofar that had caught my eye. My friend, Ted Dowden, passed by and asked if I could blow it. I raised it to my lips and the sound went around the market. Ted handed the vendor the money and now the shofar leans against the quilt on the cover of this work.

I went on to write two more volumes. I have now combined all three into one. I've edited some material and set it up on a more concise format. I've included fifteen additional posts. For those who choose to save these writings, I trust this work will give you some more space on your hard drive. Thank for your encouraging responses. Be blessed!

1. 1000 years

In my lifetime great strides have been taken to keep humans from doing one of the things they hate most...wait. I remember one little town we worked in near the west coast of Mexico. They had only one phone line in the whole town. I had to go to the tiny phone office and give them the number. In two or three days, they would send a messenger to let us know our call was ready. I venture to say that most of the people there now have cell phones. We use to have to get in line to cash a check, get a roll of film developed or for the clerk to weigh out a pound of 16 penny nails at the hardware store. The word "instant" had not yet entered our vocabulary.

In the Old Testament we read: ***"For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night."*** Psalm 90:4 (KJV)

And in the New Testament: ***"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."*** 2 Peter 3:8. (KJV)

Obviously, God doesn't measure time the same as us. Israel wandered a year for a day in the wilderness. In Acts 2 Peter said, "In the last days," and that was almost 2000 years ago. The light bulb came on, and I put my poor math skills to work (feel free to correct my calculations). I came up with this formula: 1000 years = 1 day, 1 hour = 41 years, 1 minute = 21 months, 1 second = 4 days. Mary and Martha sent an urgent call to Jesus that Lazarus was deathly sick. The Word says He tarried. The Williams' commentary says that the Lord said, "Wait a second." (Note the formula above.) Jesus missed the funeral but got there for the "dead raising." If we want to be strong, we have to learn that ***"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength"*** Isaiah 40:31. (KJV)

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2. Mind of Christ

Yesterday we broke the stir-crazy barrier, rolled up the windows and drove 27.9 miles and ended up at an old Spanish mission in San Antonio called the Alamo. This is the site of a famous battle for Texas independence from Mexico. All the defenders died in the effort. General Santa Anna continued his pursuit of the freedom fighters all the way to the San Jacinto river in south east Texas. He set up camp there and with no opposition leisurely wiled away the time. On April 26, 1836 he woke up to the sound of cannons and rifle fire and the jubilant voices of the Texans shouting, "Remember the Alamo!" Every student in school learns the story of that yell.

In his second epistle Peter, realizing his time was short states the importance of what he has been teaching his churches.

"I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body." II Peter 1:13 (KJV)

Or, if Peter were a Texan, "Remember the Empty Tomb!" According to whatever science book you read the human body has about 100 trillion cells. Unfortunately, there will be 100 trillion cell funerals within a year. Fortunately, 100 trillion bouncing baby cells will be born to replace them. Sadly, of the 100 billion brain cells that pass away, they will not be replaced. This helps explain why I will walk into a room and wonder what I'm doing there.

The word "mind" appears 121 times in scripture and deserves close study. I settled on concluding my thoughts with this:

"But we have the mind of Christ." I Corinthians 2:16 KJV)

3. Ten Cents Worth

When we were called to Latin America, we had to learn to speak Spanish. When some wonderful Cajun friends began to support us, we traveled to Louisiana and learned a new and beautiful way to speak English. When reading scripture, I am inclined to separate the verses into two categories: “Feel good scriptures” and “Feel bad scriptures.” For example:

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ,” II Cor 2:14 KJV and **“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.”** Matthew 5:29 KJV. It’s reasonable to think that those two verses would make me feel two different emotions. Eventually, I discovered verses that combine the two:

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” James 4:10 KJV. I like the “lift you up” part, but the “Humble yourself” part makes me squirm. This was made clear when I was invited to a mission conference in South Louisiana. The missionaries would go up on the platform to be introduced, complemented, and applauded. It was very uplifting. I had written a book a couple of years before and it had been well received by my friends and supporters, but especially my mother. After service we mingled together and fellowshiped in the auditorium. A dear Cajun brother came up to me with a broad smile. “Bru Dub, is dat yu?” he asked with obvious admiration.

“Well yes,” I replied, my hat size increasing by the minute, “dats me.”

“Aaah Bru Dub,” he continued, “I done read yu book, it were good Bru Dub!”

By now I felt like I had drunk a cup of Community dark roast. (I don’t drink coffee, but my friends tell me it will lift you off the ground). “Dee bes ting of all Bru Dub,” (I could hardly wait for him to continue), “ I bought it at a yard sale for 10 cents.” The word “humble” filled all my senses.

4. Depression

A few years after being invited numerous times to join AARP, it became obvious that I was entering a new era in my life. My mind was making commitments that my body couldn't fulfill. Some unwelcome criticism of my ministry surfaced. In Biblical terms, I was going through a trial; several in fact. I could picture Satan smirking and saying in my East Texas vernacular, "You can't cut the mustard any more old man, why don't you just give it up." Sadly, some Christian folks seemed to be saying, "Amen." Instead of quoting the 23rd Psalm, I seemed to cling to Psalm 13:1. ***"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?"*** Not getting the answer I was looking for I diagnosed this situation myself. The conclusion: what I had heard about but largely ignored...depression.

I opened the yellow pages (remember them?) and called the local mental health clinic. The nice lady asked if she could ask some questions to determine my mental state. After I agreed, she came to a part concerning my feelings about death. Well, naturally all those wonderful verses began to flow out: ***"To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" and "Oh death where is thy victory" and "precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints."***

She abruptly stopped me and in shrill voice said, "Mr. Williams you need to come to the clinic immediately, your life is in danger." Well, I thanked her for her advice and hung up. So, as every Christian knows, we go through rough patches but I came across this Psalm: ***"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'" Psalm 92:12-15. (KJV)***

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5. Zionist

The word "Zionist" appears often in the news media, and almost always with a negative connotation. The definition is: "A supporter of Zionism, a person who believes in the development and protection of a Jewish nation which is now in Israel."

Today, I officially proclaim that I am a Zionist. The twelve tribes descended from one man, Jacob, whose name was changed by God to "Israel." His face would probably not have appeared on Time magazine as "Man of the Year." He was a momma's baby and not a shrewd negotiator. He worked for seven years for a wife and had the shock of his life when he lifted the veil to kiss the bride. He didn't get the girl he had been courting, he got her sister. She was good, however, at having babies. This is what Jacob said about the one called Judah:

"Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His."
Genesis 49:8-19.

After the division of the tribes, His people were known mostly by the shortened form of Judah called Jews. We go all the way to the end of scriptures and find a descendent of Judah whose name is John. He is quarantined on the Isle of Patmos. He set an example for us; he was in the Spirit. He gave us words and predictions of events that were to come to pass. The last words in the entire Bible are an anthem to us Zionists around the world: ***"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."*** Revelation 22:20 KJV

6. Jerusalem

The nation of Israel has been on my heart heavily in recent days. This has come about, in part, because I have failed in an area of my prayer life. Daily, we intercede on behalf of needs that we are requested to remember. When we hear the need has been met, we remove it from our list. There are others that are ongoing that we never remove: our family, friends, church, pastor, missionaries, etc. There is one that I have intermittently prayed for until the other day. I read this verse for the first time in a long time:

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Psalm 122:6.

My conviction now is that I put this on my daily list. I have many wonderful memories of going to Israel. I share this one that fits well with my thoughts for today. I was standing in front of the Wailing Wall leaning with my hands pressed against the stones that Solomon’s workers had set in place thousands of years before. There were other Christians and Jews lined up along the wall and, like myself, had rolled up bits of paper with prayer requests written out and placed in the cracks between the stones. One thing has happened since I was there. On the docket through several presidential administrations was legislation to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem. I am grateful that our current president, Donald Trump, was courageous enough to ignore global criticism so that our flag waves proudly today over the city of David. One other event that is yet to happen in that city is proclaimed in Zechariah 14:78 NIV:

“On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, and then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with hm.”

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7. Redfa

A little less than 53 years ago, missionary Johnny Eils and I sat at a table eating breakfast in a restaurant in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas. We had a Spanish newspaper spread out in front of us reading the story that followed the headlines: ISRAEL AT WAR AGAINST THE ARAB WORLD! The nations bordering Israel had combined forces to, once and for all, wipe the Jews off the face of the Earth. A week later, it would be known as the “Six Day War.” Israel had crushed the invading armies and reclaimed land that had been given to them by God through Abraham centuries before. Military experts were scratching their collective heads wondering how this could have happened since the Arabs were superior in every way.

One answer lay in the fact that Israel had launched a preemptive airstrike that destroyed the enemy’s air force. A plan had been in place weeks before the conflict. Israel’s military had one major fear: the finest fighter jet that Russia had ever produced, the MIG 21. The solution lay in the hands of a man most of us have never heard of; Munir Redfa. This is from Wikipedia:

“Redfa defected in 1966 in ‘Operation Diamond,’ flying a MiG-21 of the Iraqi Air Force to Israel. In what is considered as one of the Mossad’s most successful operations, Redfa’s entire extended family was smuggled safely out of Iraq to Israel. The MiG-21 fighter was evaluated by the Israeli Air Force and was later loaned to the United States for testing and intelligence analysis. Knowledge obtained from analysis of the aircraft was instrumental to the successes achieved by the Israeli Air Force in its future encounters with Arab MiG-21s. Redfa was an Assyrian Christian.”

When the dust settled, the Israeli air force had destroyed the entire Arab fleet of MIG 21’s, MIG 19’s and MIG 17’s. And Israel owed their thanks to an Iraqi Christian pilot.

8. Shalom

I would like to introduce you to a man who most of us have never heard of before: Eliezer Ben-yehuda (1858-1920). His lifetime spanned the end of the Ottoman Empire (which controlled Israel) through the takeover by the UK. He devoted his life toward one goal--making Hebrew the language of the people of Israel. As immigrants poured into Israel when the door opened, only a few spoke Hebrew, instead they continued speaking the languages of their host countries. Ben-yehuda was successful to the point that ultimately Hebrew became the official language with English and Aramaic widely spoken.

This was instrumental in turning the tide of a life or death situation in another part of the world years later. On June 27, 1976, terrorists hijacked an Air France A330 Jet carrying 248 passengers and forced the pilots to land at Entebbe, Uganda airport. The 148 non-Israeli passengers were eventually released. This left 94 Israelis and 12 flight crew members held captive. Within a week, 4 C-130 Hercules loaded with Israeli commandos were making a night approach to Entebbe airport. They landed, and the commandos silently approached the hangers where the hostages were held. They burst through the hanger doors yelling, "Israeli commandos, hit the floor!" in Hebrew and English. The Israeli hostages dove for the deck and the terrorists (who didn't understand the command) stood up as the Uzis began to fire. Ninety minutes later the former hostages were preparing to board the C-130s to head home. One Commando was killed, Lt. Col. Yonatan Netanyahu, brother to the current Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu.

I remember watching as those liberated hostages filed off the plane in Jerusalem. Thousands of jubilant Jews were dancing in the streets. They probably didn't realize how great a debt they owed to Eliezer Ben-yehuda who insisted that all Jews learn Hebrew. Years ago, I met a Wonderful Jew who taught me a Hebrew word, and, in fact, He wrote it on my heart; that word is Shalom.

9. Shofar

Recently, while reading through the Psalms, I came to the 98th Psalm. When I got to verse four, I went wild and began to shout! "Praise God! Thank you, Jesus! Hallelujah!" ***Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn — shout for joy before the Lord, the King.*** Psalm 98:4-6

Deloris peeked in the door and, satisfied that I wasn't having a coronary, smiled and patted me on the shoulder. There was only one thing left to do; I reached up on the top shelf of my bookcase and took down my shofar. I don't have the volume that I used to, but I still blew it as long and as loud as I could. After a while, I completed my devotions and began to meditate. What did I just do and was it scriptural? I turned to my Bible program and clicked on the concordance mode. I typed in "shout, shouts and shouted." More than 150 times it appears in Scripture. Most of the references are command forms to God's people to shout to the Lord. This led me to suggest to you who are reading this to include some shouting in your devotions. Just go into your prayer closet and before you close the door ask pride to leave the room.

I made this observation: there's more commands to shout than pay tithes. But how often do we remind our congregations that we need to tithe? Now most of our churches praise the Lord with singing and music but, even if you can't sing a lick, you can shout. Let the Word remind us of what the last two things we will hear on Earth:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." I Thessalonians 4:16-18

10. Fellowship

I've considered the book of Acts as the missionary's handbook. Yesterday, I read 2:42 ***"They PERSEVERED in fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers."*** I put in caps the verb I'm focusing on. Other versions translate the word "continued," "devoted," "kept their attention on." The best definition I've found for fellowship is *"some fellows in a ship."* They have to work together to get to port! Unfortunately, down through the years I've met a few people who didn't want to fellowship with me, who actually didn't even like me. I thought it incredible that someone could not love a warm little fuzz ball like me. My first reaction was to not love them back. However, I figured I should clear this with the Lord. His answer: ***"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"*** Matthew 5:44 (NIV).

Well, I would focus on people I just didn't like. High on the list were Tele-Evangelists who often had sound teaching but always led to asking me to sow a \$1000 dollar seed into to their ministry. If I did, my 2012 Hyundai would turn into a 2020 Cadillac. I joined in with the disciples, ***"Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"*** But He turned and rebuked them, and said:

"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." Luke 9:54-56 (NKJV) Ouch, Lord! Then Paul wades into the fray: ***"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."*** Phil 1:15-18 (NIV). What then is the final word on this "persevering" question? ***"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*** Romans 12:20-21 So, I'm going to focus on "persevering in fellowship" and leave the "hot coals" up to the Lord.

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11. God's Timing

In John 21:18, Jesus is focusing on PETER, since he will assume a position of leadership to carry the infant Church into nation-wide outreach. The Lord reveals that this will be a lifetime ministry, taking him into old age. In Acts 12, it appears that Jesus' prediction will not be fulfilled:

"Now about that time (A.D. 44) Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed JAMES the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover." Acts 12:1-4

James has just been beheaded, and Peter appears to be next. He is in a prison, chained between two guards. An almost certain execution awaits him the next day, but incredibly, he goes to sleep. I'm afraid it would have been a sleepless night for me. What was his secret? Well, he is in his forties and Jesus said he would live to be an old man. No way could Herod and his soldiers kill him.

"No weapon formed against you shall prosper." Isaiah 54:17 NKJV

12. El Quetzal

We are often compared to sheep in scripture. However, if I were teaching about the characteristics of a believer to the Quechua or Maya or one of the many indigenous tribes of Guatemala, I might use the Quetzal since most of them had never seen a sheep. It is considered by many, myself included, as the most beautiful bird in the world (I suggest you Google it). It is the national bird of Guatemala, and its image appears on all their currency. You can't go out and buy one for a pet. Even if you could, it does not, unlike a parrot, survive in captivity. Even some of the largest zoos have failed to keep one alive. They are confined to a certain tropical forest where they nest in a particular kind of tree. Both male and female team together to raise their chicks. I would teach the tribes that as Christians, we can't survive in captivity either and we don't have to since God's Book says this:

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” John 8:36

I would tell them that we can dwell or live in His presence:

***“Then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there;”
Deuteronomy 2:11***

I would teach them that families who follow Jesus should:

“Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:6

I haven't been back to Guatemala in over thirty years. I'm sure technology has reached those tribes by now. I learned this when Jerry Owens invited me to Ecuador about five years ago. One of the churches where I preached was Indian. Wearing their typical dress, the congregation sang in their dialect. It was a very moving experience. I whispered to Jerry to see if he would ask the pastor to let us take their picture. He assured us there would be no problem.

The people all smiled, and as soon as Jerry put his camera down and we stood to be introduced, a room full of Smart phones began to flash all over the building as they took our picture.

13. Glory

“But I will gain GLORY for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” Exodus 14:4. From this very first reference, it is obvious that the Lord wants His GLORY to be revealed. The best definition that I could find for GLORY is *“The Manifested Excellence of God.”* For the purpose of these thoughts, I looked at four references to the Lord **filling** places with His GLORY.

“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the GLORY of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” Exodus 40:35

The Tabernacle was designed to provide a place for worship during the wanderings. Following the conquest, it was time for a permanent structure. This was accomplished by Solomon. ***“And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the GLORY of the Lord filled His Temple.”*** 1 Kings 8:11.

Sadly, after 416 years, Israel rebelled and this temple was destroyed, and the people were taken into captivity in Babylon. Eventually, the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians. The Lord had foretold this but promised His people they would return to their land. Zerubbabel, under Cyrus, emperor of Persia who financed it, and Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the fallen walls and Temple. There is, however, no reference to the GLORY ever filling that Temple.

Four hundred years later, Herod the Great would rebuild that Temple, sparing no expense. The Lord did not fill that Temple with His GLORY. Rather, He clothed Himself in human flesh and entered that Temple in the arms of his mother. She handed Him to an old man named Simeon who said, ***“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for GLORY to your people Israel.”*** Luke 2:29-31 NIV. Seventy years later that Temple was destroyed. Only one Temple is left. ***“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?”*** Lord fill this Temple with Your GLORY! 1 Corinthians 3:16 NIV

14. Anthropomorphism

I came across an interesting term while studying for a message: ***Biblical anthropomorphism***.

Definition: *when human characteristics are projected on God.*

All of our Christian lives we have sang songs about and heard sermons about God's ears, lips, eyes, arms, fingers, feet, and even His hair. But I have never heard a song or a sermon about God's nose. What I discovered is that Scripture always refers to His nostrils. This is what happened when the Red Sea parted:

“By the blast of Your NOSTRILS, the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.” Exodus 15:8 NIV

A large part of Old Testament worship was burnt sacrifices and the burning of incense, the smoke of which would ascend toward heaven and God's nose. How does that relate to us today? There are a number of verses that I pray every day during my devotions. One passage is ***“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*** Romans 12:1-3

This next passage sums it up: ***“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.”*** 2 Corinthians 2:14-15 NKJV This happens every day when we lay down our lives on His altar.

15. Keep Showing Up

Many years ago, we had come to the States to attend a mission conference. This was always an enjoyable time for us to get our batteries charged. We also could get together with our fellow missionaries, many of whom we hadn't seen for quite some time.

The special speaker was James Beale, a pastor from Detroit. He was a good speaker, and I was impressed with his messages. When he was introduced, it was revealed that he had recently celebrated his 25th anniversary as pastor of the church. In fact, the city of Detroit had invited him to city hall for a special achievement award ceremony in recognition of his many programs that, through his church, provided assistance to needy families in the community. Following the ceremonies, a lady TV reporter asked for an interview. He agreed and, with camera rolling and note pad in hand, she asked, “Rev. Beale, to what do you attribute the success of your ministry?”

She stood poised to write down all of the steps he had taken to accomplish all that he had achieved. “Well, that's easy,” he replied, “I just keep showing up.” Paul has a similar word for all who are dedicated to serve others:

“And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” Galatians 6:9 KJV

16. Your First Love

The church of Ephesus was a vibrant, fired-up congregation founded in AD 53. Among the first believers were a group of Spirit filled Baptists (John's disciples). Paul spent much time with this church and taught in what might be called a Bible School for two years. When he departed, he left the work solidly grounded in the Word. Seven years later, he wrote the beloved letter to the Ephesian church that, unlike some of his epistles, contained no correction. We get insight into his concern for the church in that he set in place his most trusted worker, Timothy, as pastor. He would send him two letters of instruction including his final epistle, 2 Timothy.

Fast forward 26 years and the church receives another letter recorded in Revelation 2:1-4 NIV. ***“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: “These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles, but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.”***

I confess that I'm no authority on the book of Revelation, but over the years, however, I have been drawn to this passage because in recent years I was involved in legitimate ministry at the expense of that first love. I returned to the altar a few months ago in my office and, like the first time, it's life changing.

17. Pride

I had been invited to join a ministry team in holding a leadership conference in Guatemala City. I was looking forward to speaking because I prided myself in my preaching ability. I had taken homiletics in Bible college and Spanish Seminary, as well as public speaking in a secular university. I was also very confident of my fluency in Spanish. I had accumulated more than fifty semester hours in college level Spanish. So being aware for some time I was to be speaking, I gave a lot of time to preparing the message. When I was introduced, I confidently stepped up to the pulpit. I had chosen one of my favorite Bible characters for my subject: The Mighty Samson. I was focusing on his heroic slaying of the lion in Judges 14.

“So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion. He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating.

By now I was reading the faces of the congregation and knew they were enjoying this because they were smiling from ear to ear. After service we went to get something to eat. One of the Mexican pastors came and sat across from me. “Good message,” he complimented me. “I have a suggestion however,” he continued. “The next time you preach this, substitute “panal” which is honeycomb, for the word you used “pañal” which is a baby diaper!

18. Covering

On September 29, 1985, a powerful earthquake hit downtown Mexico City. We were at our home base in McAllen, Texas at the time. Right away, I got phone calls from three other missionaries asking if I would join them in flying down to check on the churches that we were connected with. There were many aftershocks and Deloris wanted to know where we could stay that would be safe. I thought for a moment and replied, ***“Under the shadow of the Almighty!”*** She smiled and drove me to the airport.

Answering the call to missions, we learned early of the importance of being under the covering of a local church. Four years ago, we moved here to Castroville, Texas to be near family. We were sent with the blessings of Family Worship Center, our home church in Leesville, Louisiana. It’s great to be under the covering of a pastor like Mike Jackson and that wonderful congregation. The Lord soon led us to Westover Hills Medina Valley Church. We expressed our desire to the leadership to be under their covering and they graciously accepted us.

About six months ago, I, who am an early riser, was preparing to scramble some eggs. I picked up a new product: “aerosol cooking oil” and sprayed the skillet. As I went to put it away, the nozzle came off and oil went everywhere. I took one step and was instantly parallel with the planet. Deloris came hurrying in and asked, “What happened?”

What else could I say but, “I’ve fallen, and I can’t get up!” While I lay there in a puddle of cooking oil (at least it wasn’t blood), she called our covering for help. Within 15 minutes Pastor Matt Gutierrez and two men from the church started to lift me up. (I’m light, I only weigh 140 kilos). They got me to my feet, and I was thinking:

“How great it is to have a covering!”

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19. A Friend

In view of social distancing, we were surprised to hear a knock at the door. Deloris peeked out and then opened the door. I was in another part of the house, assuming it was a family member. In a few minutes she came in chuckling. It was an officer of the Castroville Police Department checking to see if we were alive.

Deloris’ roommate from college, Sarah Blevins, had been calling her to chat. But after six attempts with no response, Sarah, a retired dispatcher for the Logansport, Louisiana Police Department, started to investigate. She contacted our local police and said, “My friend is not answering my calls, someone needs to check on her.”

Well, it turns out that on Sarah’s list of phone numbers ours was off by one digit. Deloris called her and both had a good laugh. I said, “That’s cool you have a friend who lives 450 miles away, and who loves you enough to not give up until she had an answer.”

Paul mentions a friend who did much the same thing.

“The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.” 2 Timothy 1:16-17 KJV

The wisest man who ever lived said this: ***“There is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24 NIV*** We know that Friend!

20. Help Lord

In 1968 Congress passed legislation establishing 911 as a contact number for American citizens needing police, fire, or medical assistance. We Christians often have urgent needs that none of the above services can provide.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Ephesians 6:12 NKJV

When we come under attack against these forces, we need a Spiritual 911 number. This is what I found: ***“Help, Lord.”*** Psalm 2:1. One shade of meaning of the word HELP refers to “the arm.” In Jewish culture the arm extends from the shoulder down to the fingertips.

The Message reads like this: ***“Quick, God, I need your helping hand!”***

So then the Lord has shoulders; ***“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders.”*** Isaiah 9:6. We have a saying that sometimes we need “a shoulder to cry on.” How about His?

“Ah Lord God! see, you have made the heaven and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm, and there is nothing you are not able to do.” Jeremiah 32:17 God has an arm.

David wrote a song that speaks to that feeling: ***“Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.”*** Psalm 63:7-8. God has a Hand. The Lord has a word for us when our enemies come against us: ***“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”*** Luke 11:20. He has a powerful finger.

The second part of our Spiritual 911 is the title: ***“Lord.”*** In the Hebrew it means Jehovah the Eternal One ***“And God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.’”*** The name Jehovah designates His nature as He stands in relation to man. In trouble just say **HELP LORD!**

21. A Call from God

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, CALLED to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.” Romans 1:1. At the time Paul wrote this Epistle he had never been to Rome. The high level of his ministry came through a maturing process. He got off the ground of the Damascus road, went into town and began fasting until the prophet Ananias revealed his CALL. ***“This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”*** Acts 9:15 NIV

His first attempt at fulfilling this CALL was less than successful. ***“At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him.”*** Acts 9:20. ***“When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.”*** Acts 9:26-27.

He was trying to fulfill his CALL and everybody wanted to kill him. ***“When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”*** He was causing so much trouble in the city that the brothers decided to take action. ***“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.”*** Acts 9:30,31.

We hear very little from him for six years. ***“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have CALLED them.”*** Acts 13:2. This same man that had failed in the beginning became the greatest missionary and wrote half of the *New Testament*. Over the years I’ve had new Christians ask if I thought they had a CALL on their lives. The immediate answer is “Yes!” Jesus commanded everyone to pray! “There is no higher CALLING than to be a prayer warrior. Some may move on to other ministries, but none more important. We all have a CALL from God!

22. Delight

In the early years of our missionary ministry we were constantly traveling. I was preaching in churches and teaching in leadership conferences and Bible schools. Deloris was taking care of the business side of the ministry and home schooling our children. One day she told me our open doors were bigger than our bank account. In prayer and the Word, I came across this verse.

“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4 NIV.

This was like a blank check from the Lord inviting me to write in the amounts. All I had to do was delight myself in the Lord. I just wasn't quite sure how to do that. I thought if I danced more, shouted more, sang more, etc. that would do it. Then it came to me (light bulb) to study and meditate in the Word. **“Delight”** is to be soft or pliable.

One summer we went on vacation to the Ozarks. In one small town we went into a pottery shop. Deloris has a small collection of vases, so she planned to buy a piece. The potter was giving a demonstration, and I was fascinated as he threw that ugly, shapeless lump of clay on the wheel. As it rotated, almost magically, his gifted hands pulled up a vase.

“Lord” means Yehovah; (the) self-Existent or Eternal One. **“Give”** has some thirty shades of meaning in Hebrew. Assign, without fail, is the term that best explains “give” in this Psalm. **“Desire”** is a request and petition. **“Heart”** speaks to our will and even the intellect. I now saw this verse as more than a blank check. This is the way I started reading it:

“Be soft and pliable before Jehovah, the self-Existent One and He will assign without fail the requests and petitions of your will and intellect.” And Paul adds this, ***“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*** Philippians 4:19. (NIV).

That was fifty years ago and for every assignment since then, He has provided for every need.

23. God's Tattoo

I was saved 62 years ago in what was known as a "Holiness" church. When I turned fifteen, I became a Pentecostal. A lot of these folks took the "Holiness" position as well. Even though my pastor was more balanced, I stuck to my "legalistic" guns. It mostly affected women: hair and dress length, face paint, and things hanging from their ears.

I preached youth services as a teen-ager and one of my favorite targets was "Rock n Roll Music." I didn't find anything wrong, however, with a duck tail and I had the hair for it. Well, I hit a snag when I turned nineteen and, because I was a Texan, I had to get my parent's permission to get married. Snag number two was that the woman I fell in love with was from a totally different standard. She won most, if not all, the battles over the years and you wouldn't know today that I was once a flaming "Legalist."

There is one area where I wouldn't budge: The Word is plain.

"Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:28 NIV. When they put this old man in that pine box, there won't be a drop of ink on this body! Amen, Bro Dub! However, you can imagine my shock when I found out that God has a tattoo!

"Sing for joy, O heavens! Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on them in their suffering. Yet Jerusalem says, 'The Lord has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us.' Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on the palms of My hands." Isaiah 49:16 NLT

24. Law of Faith

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by THE LAW OF FAITH." Romans 3:27 KJV. He defines it in Hebrews 11:1 KJV. ***"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*** Astronomers who studied the solar system their entire career were perplexed when this occurred. ***"Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon. So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day."*** Joshua 10:13 NIV

Mathematicians, who would swear that $1-1=0$, would be amazed to learn to learn that $1-1= 6,570$.

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug." Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.: The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land." 1 Kings 17:13. The famine lasted 730 days X 3 meals x 3 people =6,570.

"And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, 'See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell. The iron ax head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Alas, master! For it was borrowed." So the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float." 2 Kings 6:1-7 (NKJV). So much for the law of gravity.

"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26 (NIV).

25. Wisdom

In the 1970's at a missions conference, I met a Wycliffe missionary whose ministry was in the jungles of Peru. Founded in 1942, their purpose is to translate the Bible into every language. He told me that the tribes they worked with had no written language. They had to live with the people and learn to speak the language and create an alphabet and dictionary. Then they would translate the Bible into that native tongue. They had been successful and established a strong local church. Their next goal was to build a school and clinic to reach all the villages in the region. They were several days walk from any town big enough to sell supplies. They needed to build an airstrip because a plane could travel the distance in less than an hour.

MAF (Missionary Aviation Fellowship) agreed to provide their planes to transport people and materials. The native pastor put together a crew of members armed with machetes and axes to clear the land. The day came and the plane flew over the strip without landing. The pilot circled around and dropped a note, "need another 200 meters." Some volunteer engineers from the States had come down to survey and lay out the plan.

Work began immediately and went well for about 100 meters, when they encountered a huge "car-sized" boulder. The missionary was trying to convince the engineers to figure out a solution and not to abandon the work. Shaking their heads and saying that without a bulldozer it was hopeless. The native pastor was tugging on the missionary's shirt." What is it pastor, can't you see I'm busy?" "We dig hole," he insisted in his broken Spanish, "same size as boulder and push boulder into hole, cover up." The missionary and engineers stared at each other in amazement. That pastor believed the Word. ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."*** James 1:5 NIV

26. Quarantined

As I write these lines, every American is confined to their homes. They can, by law, only go to work or try to buy some toilet paper and groceries. We have a precedent in Scripture of this same scenario.

"When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him." Acts 28:16

Here was a man, though innocent, under house arrest, was bound in chains. If we are thinking 'poor Paul,' our sympathies are misguided. We should feel sorry for those guards who came in shifts. They were chained to the most powerful, anointed, Pentecostal missionary in the history of the world for hours at a time. He had a captive audience. Tradition tells us that Roman guard after Roman guard came to know Jesus in that room. Paul writes this at the same time:

As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Philippians 1;13 NIV

He was not a prisoner, he had discovered: ***"If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."*** John 8:36

27. The Church

Jesus said, ***“I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*** Matthew 16:18 KJV. At the time of this post, around the world houses of worship are empty but we are still the Church Triumphant. ***“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”*** 2 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV.

“Let the church be the church, let the people rejoice.

Oh, we've settled the question,

We've made our choice.

Let the anthems ring out, songs of victory swell

For the church triumphant is alive and well.”

Gaither Vocal Band

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28. John Wayne

Our favorite genre of movies is the old Westerns. Of course, the King, John Wayne, is our favorite. He made several films in Durango, Mexico. We lived there when he made *Chisum* and drove out to the set one day. There he was, not 20 feet away!

A few days later our dearest missionary friend, Frank Warren, came by. He had been to the dentist that day and when finished, he headed out through the waiting room. There sat Big John! He had some dental work done and was waiting for someone to drive him to the hotel. Frank offered to take John and he accepted. Frank said he talked to him about Jesus all the way.

Only eternity will reveal the result of that encounter. But, John Wayne fans, he heard the Gospel that day, thanks to Frank Warren!

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. Acts 8:35 NIV

29. Help Me

In August of 1972, I had been invited to preach a youth camp in El Fuerte, Sinaloa. I told the missionary that when I flew over the town, they could pick me up at the airport. I came screaming down in my Cessna 182 at over 150 MPH. The people came out of the church and waved (I would be illegally low in the USA). It was so cool, I did it again before landing. As we headed back to town the youth leader asked me a question.

“Hermano Memo (Bro. Dub), (*I figured he wanted know something about the plane*) how much time do you spend in prayer?”

I was stopped in my religious tracks. I was traveling thousands of miles and preaching hundreds of times a year. My prayer life was pretty much, “Now I lay me down to sleep.” In that moment I was gripped with the conviction that my first priority was not to preach but to pray.

I began my pursuit, like most of us, in Matthew 6:9-13. Two words set the course: *pray and daily*. Since that time, over the years, the Holy Spirit has filled in the blanks. I am an old retiree with time on my hands, but what about the single mom who has to work long hours to support herself and her three children. Even she, when the alarm sounds and she drags herself out of bed, can look up into the face of her Heavenly Father and say, “*Help me!*” and know that He hears her. As time goes by, He will fill in the blanks.

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30. Upper Room

One day in 1997 I got a call from Pat Franks. He asked if Deloris and I would be interested in taking an *all-expenses paid trip* to Israel. I said I would have to pray about it. So for the next five seconds, I bombarded Heaven for guidance. “We would love to go!” and started making plans.

One of the sights of great interest was Engedi. It was mostly inhabited by Essenes, a strict sect of Jews who disappeared by the 2nd century. They are not mentioned in Scripture. They practiced a form of baptism and the tanks are still there. They were known for taking care of orphans. Some believe they raised John the Baptist whose parents were old when he was born. Our Jewish guide, Jackie Felman, said that might answer the question of who provided the room for Jesus and the Disciples to celebrate the Passover a day before the rest of Israel which was a custom of the Essenes.

We read, Mark 14:15 NIV “*So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, the Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.*”

Today we celebrate what took place in that room provided by a man whose name we don’t know and whose tribe no longer exists but was willing to give his home to Jesus.

31. Two Baby Boys

Two baby boys had been born in Israel. One's birth had been prophesied for thousands of years. The **date** had been revealed to a captive prophet in Babylon named Daniel. The **place** was revealed to a little known prophet by the name of Micah. It was **witnessed** by a band of shepherds and **declared** by a Heavenly choir. He was **visited** by astrologers who had followed a star a great distance to bring Him expensive gifts. When he was eight days old, he was **held** in the arms of an old man named Simeon who told the parents that He was destined to be *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."* His **mission** was spelled out by Isaiah:

"But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53: 5 NIV

The Romans **nailed** Him to a cross.

Of the other baby, we only know he grew up and lived a life of crime and was also nailed to a cross next to that first Baby. We'll get to know him better when we get to Heaven.

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32. Bud's Baptism

Pastor Carlos Parker, who had married Deloris and me years ago, was wanting to retire, so he asked us to help with the transition. It was not a Cowboy Church but the members were either ranchers or had businesses that served them. It was in this setting that this story occurred to me. The younger generation will not get this at all so find an old timer to explain it.

Billy Bob Carson was a member and lay minister of a Hill Country church pastored by J.D. Johnson. One Saturday night J.D. told Billy Bob that he had to be out of town Sunday, and he wanted him to preach followed by a baptism. Billy Bob agreed and the next day the sermon went well, and the baptismal candidate, Bud Perkins, and Billy Bob stepped into the baptismal tank. Holding Bud's head firmly, down under the water he went. It was then that he panicked because he forgot the formula. He was thinking if he didn't do something this man was going to drown. So he blurted out,

"Lord, for all You do this Bud's for You!"

He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy. Job 8:21 NIV

33. Humberto

In 1970 Jerry and Sandy Owens asked us to help them launch an outreach center in downtown Guatemala City. It was set up for literature distribution and to show Christian films. We had two projectors, so we were able show films at two places at the same time. One evening I was getting ready to close the Center, having shown a film and was leaving to go across the city to another showing. I had given a hasty invitation and started to prepare the projector and screen to load up in my pickup. With screen in one hand and projector in the other, I headed for the front door.

I looked up and a young man stood by the door. Glancing at my watch with slight irritation in my voice, I asked if I could help him.

“I would like to get saved,” he replied.

I came to an abrupt halt. I bowed my head and got right with God and then led Humberto to Christ. He lived in a small town several miles from Guatemala City, but whenever he came to the city, he would stop at the Center to visit. He had found a local church in his town and was very active with the youth. We moved on to another country soon after.

A couple of years later, that little town was destroyed by a volcano eruption and there were no survivors. That night two years before, I was late for my appointment, but on time for God’s appointment.

I look forward to seeing Humberto again!

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34. Worm

Probably any Bible college student who has taken a missiology class would be familiar with the work of Dr. William Carey. Born in England, he lived most of his life as a missionary to India. Highly intelligent, he spoke more than forty languages and dialects though he never graduated from secondary or college. Eleven schools and universities are named after him from Australia to America. He is called the *Father of Modern Missions*. One of his famous quotes is:

“Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.”

Toward the end of his life one of his assistants asked what he would like to be remembered for on his gravestone. Without hesitation, he, known for his humility, said he would like to have carved Psalm 26:2. NKJV

“I am a worm and not a man.”

I thought about this and realized that’s not such a bad thing. After all, worms are of great benefit to farmers by cultivating and enriching the soil. How many of us caught our first fish on a worm? Though my family might not honor my wishes, I would be happy to have engraved on my headstone, HERE LIES A WORM!

35. Winners

Then the Lord God said:

"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." Genesis 2:18 (NLT).

God's plan was to populate this Earth with a people that would worship Him and bear sons and daughters to follow in their steps. God so loves mankind he put it in the heart of husbands and wives to love each other. A part of that relationship is physical love. This draws the couple together intimately and also is the means to conceive children.

Once a month for a 3-4-day time frame, the wife produces a cluster of eggs in her womb. One of the eggs will become receptive to the husband's sperm. When they come together physically, he will release 10,000,000 of these cells into the birth canal. Only one will reach the wife's egg. What that means is that whoever is reading this post won the first race they ever ran. That body has a life expectancy of 70 plus years.

There was a man named Nicodemus. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus.

"Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus replied, "Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life." John 3:1-6 (NLT)

When the seed, which is the Word, was planted in our hearts, once again we were winners for all eternity.

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36. The Gates of Hell

Since we would be visiting sites in both Israel and Jordan in ten days, there were places we would just stop and look through the windows of the bus while the guide described the significance of the site. Such was the case with the ancient city of Paneas. It had long been the center of Idolatry and immorality. Today we would probably call it "Sin City."

In the background was a cave with a seemingly bottomless spring of water that led deep into the Earth. It was called "The Gates of Hell." In the first century the city's name had been changed to Caesarea Philippi. It was the setting for one of the most powerful and far reaching statements that Jesus proclaimed in the Gospels:

"I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mark 16:18

The Lord would soon ascend into Heaven with His commission ringing in the ears of His disciples:

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'" Mark 16:15 NKJV.

He would not leave them alone to complete the task,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8 NIV.

A historical foot note: The fast-flowing river that fed "The Gates of Hell" later experienced an earthquake diverting the mainstream and left it the meandering stream it is today.

37. Hands

I have been going through Psalms for some time and today I read Psalm 142. As I meditated on this beautiful poem, I was drawn to verse two.

“May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.”
(NIV)

Other than maybe our lips, the most active part of our body is our hands. Much of our communication is expressed with our hands. A soldier acknowledges an officer with a salute. A student gets the teacher’s attention with a raised hand.

I saw a news clip recently about some people who make a living by modeling their hands for commercials earning as much as \$1000 a day. I clicked on my Bible concordance and found over 1500 references to hands. Coronavirus has ended the thousands of years’ old practice of shaking hands.

I was reminded of the passage in Luke 24 that refers to the two men who walked with Jesus along the road to Emmaus and they didn’t recognize Him. They invited Him in to break bread and in verse 30 we read:

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.” (NIV)

As He reached for the bread, they saw the nail prints of the most beautiful hands of yesterday, today, and forever!

38. Shoulder to Shoulder

After the death of Solomon, the twelve tribes of Israel divided. The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin retained Jerusalem as their capital. The other ten tribes made Samaria the center of their government and worship. The northern tribes were rebellious and there was never a good king among them. In 722 BC they were taken captive by the Assyrians and lost their collective identity. The southern tribes had some good kings, but others were very wicked. The Lord sent prophets to warn the kings and people that if they did not turn from their wickedness, judgment would fall upon them as it had on the northern kingdom. One of the Godly kings who set out to reform the nation was Josiah. A prophet who ministered to them was Zephaniah. There are only three chapters in this prophecy, but I feel there is a message there that the Lord spoke to me for the time we are in.

With the coming judgment and punishment, and ultimately the Babylonian captivity of the southern tribes, the Lord gives them this promise in Zephaniah 3:8-9 (NIV):

“Therefore, wait for me, declares the Lord, for this day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them —all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.”

I believe that we are seeing a measure of this warning coming to pass here in 2020 AD. But verse 9 is hard to read without shouting (as a matter of fact, I stopped writing to send up a shout). ***“Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder.”*** As God’s people unite in vision, great things are ahead.

39. The road down

The path of Genesis spirals downward. The first four words are, ***“In the beginning God,”*** and the last four are: ***“in a coffin in Egypt.”*** A ray of light shines in the darkness as God speaks to Satan in form of a serpent,

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head and you will strike His heel.” Genesis 3:15(NIV)

A similar scenario unfolds in Luke 10:30,

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.” (NIV)

We are all familiar with this story and know that the ray of light that shines in his circumstances is the same as the one in Genesis. If the man had thought the solution would come through religious leaders passing by, he was completely betrayed. The one who rendered aid was a despised Samaritan to whom he would not have even spoken to before the robbery.

The truth that Jesus was portraying was that whenever we find anyone lying across our path that’s been attacked, we need to pour oil in and bind up the wounds. ***That’s being a neighbor!***

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40. Amazing Grace

Captain John Newton plied the Atlantic in the mid-1700’s with black human captives crowded in the hold of the ship. They were abused, half-starved with as many as one-third of them dying before arriving in the New World. There they would be auctioned off like cattle. Newton had no religious up-bringing, but in 1748 his ship was battered so severely during a storm that he cried out to God.

He was saved by God’s grace but, with no immediate teaching to provide him guidance, he continued in the slave trade until 1754. He then totally abandoned the sea fairing life and began studying Christian Theology and was ordained into the Church of England in 1764. He became the curate (priest) of Olney Buckinghamshire church and began writing hymns and poetry.

On New Year’s Day in 1773, he composed a hymn to illustrate the sermon. Evidently in reflection of his dark past the first verse revealed his remorse.

“Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me,

I once was lost but now I’m found, twas blind but now I see.”

After 247 years, it’s the most well-known hymn ever written. I count myself as one of those wretches saved by grace.

41. Missionary Giant

Every day I'm on the computer, either writing or posting devotionals, doing research, chatting etc. They're amazing machines when they're working. Today as I sat here staring at the screen, I was reminding myself that most of what I do will be forgotten in a few years. Yet there was a man some 1,940 years ago with little more than parchment and a quill, penned half the *New Testament* under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, writings that are as vibrant and powerful now as when the ink was drying on them.

I sit here in my office in my swivel chair with the AC filling the room with cool air. Whereas Paul wrote half of his letters in a prison cell. I was compelled to pull up a passage that describes what was going in in his life besides writing epistles:

“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 (NIV).

I stand in awe of this missionary giant. After reading this passage I stood up shouting and blew my shofar!

42. Dad turned Sixty-five

When my dad turned sixty-five, three life changing events happened. Most importantly, after many years being close to it, he finally accepted the Lord. He joined a local church and he and my mother attended regularly until she passed away. His hearing became so bad that he stayed home and watched TV services. He would turn the volume so loud it could be heard across the street. Fortunately, there were no close neighbors.

Secondly, he retired as head janitor of Buna High School; this gave him free time to hunt and fish.

Thirdly, he was diagnosed with emphysema. He had smoked his first grape vine when he was about ten years old. When he got a job, he started smoking Camels unfiltered cigarettes until the doctor told him the disease was going to kill him if he didn't stop. He loved the Lord but couldn't stop smoking. So, he took up the pipe. A slight improvement, but still the coughing persisted. He finally went to chewing tobacco.

When he turned eighty, he called me one Sunday afternoon on his speaker phone. He said he was watching Jimmy Swaggart, and at the end of his sermon, he prayed for all those who were addicted to tobacco. He said, “Son the Lord delivered me.”

“With God all things are possible.” Mark 10:27 (NIV)

It was *Juicy Fruit* chewing gum from then on. The Lord let me keep him until he was 101 years old. **HAPPY HEAVENLY FATHERS DAY DAD!**

43. Annie' Song

I enjoy folk music and especially John Denver's style. My favorite is the one that he wrote as a love song to his wife called *Annie's Song*. Unfortunately, he later divorced Annie and the song became a faded echo of a failed relationship. I still like to pull it up and listen to it and follow the lyrics.

"You fill up my senses like a night in a forest, like the mountains in springtime,

Like a walk in the rain, like a storm in the desert, like a sleepy blue ocean.

You fill up my senses, come fill me again. Come let me love you, let me give my life to you.

Let me drown in your laughter; let me die in your arms. Let me lay down beside you. Let me always be with you."

Today it's Deloris' song. I'm no singer, but as we celebrate fifty-eight years together today, they express in a small way my feelings for you.

Thank you for saying, "I do," June 22, 1962. ¡Te quiero con todo mi corazón! "***Husbands, love your wives.***" Ephesians 5:25(KJV)

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44. Halal Yaweh

The last five Psalms begin and end with the Hebrew words *Hal-luw Yaah* which are translated *Praise the Lord*. *The New Testament* equivalent is found in Revelation 19:1,3,4 and 6 (NIV) and is pronounced Hallelujah. Great choirs have performed Handel's *Messiah*, and every time I listen to it, I am greatly moved. This is what I read on Bing: History of "**Hallelujah**" Chorus:

Handel composed Messiah without getting much sleep or even eating much food. When his assistants brought him his meals, they were often left uneaten. His servants would often find him in tears as he composed.

In the years we ministered in Mexico, I discovered that unbelievers would call our people "Los Aleluyas." It was not meant as a complement. Our folks decided to get some mileage out of it and composed a little chorus.

¿Donde están los que decían Aleluya y donde están los que decían Gloria a Dios' donde están que los busco y no los hallo? Es que Cristo vino y los levantó.

Translated it means: Where are those that said "Hallelujah," where are those who said, "Glory to God?" I've looked for them, and I cannot find them. The reason is "Jesus came and took them away with Him.

Any Hallelujahs out there?

45. Numbers

When it comes to numbers, I'm not too comfortable. I did, however, enjoy Algebra I so much that I took it over the next year. Thankfully, my degree in Bible College didn't require anything resembling math. However, I have had to recognize that numbers are important in Scripture. The Holy Spirit even named a book of the Bible "Numbers." Fortunately, unlike secular education, there's no rule against using a calculator.

When Jesus ministered deliverance to the Gerasene demoniac, He commanded him to tell Him his name and he responded: "***My name is Legion, he replied, for we are many.***" When Jesus commanded them to leave, they pleaded "***Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.***" ***He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.***" Mark 5:13 (NIV).

Whenever I've taught on this, I referred to it as the first mention of "deviled ham" (rim shot).

In the Roman army a legion represented 6000 foot-soldiers. When they came to arrest Jesus in the Garden he declared, "***Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?***" Matthew 26:54. Then, there's this, "***That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp.***" 2 Kings 19:35 (NIV). My calculator says if one angel took out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, then that means 72,000 angels can defeat 13,320,000,000 enemies. "***The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them.***" Psalm 34:7 (NKJV).

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46. Looking for love

Deloris' family, the Palmers, had a family get together several years ago, when Chad, her six-year old nephew, came strolling through the living room belting out:

I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places, Lookin' for love in too many faces, searchin' their eyes lookin' for traces of what I'm dreaming of, hoping to find a friend and lover, I'll bless the day I discover another heart lookin' for love.

He got an ovation of laughter and applause and looks of "Where did that come from?" We've all learned that our kids may surprise us in many ways. I consciously look for sermon illustrations in everyday events. Chad's song sent me to John 12:20, "***And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, 'Sir, we would see Jesus.'***" (KJV) Those Greeks were not welcome in Jerusalem, nor was any Gentile. And yet something drew them to the Man surrounded by crowds of people.

Paul sheds light on this phenomenon. ***Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you."*** Acts 17:22 (KJV)

The wise men traveled hundreds of miles following a star. ***"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*** Matthew 2:11 KJV.

The world is searching for Jesus; the only way they will find Him is by us sharing Him.

47. The Space in Between

There are two verses that lay out God's plan for victorious living.

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from FAITH to FAITH; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Romans 1:17 (NKJV) ***"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the GLORY of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from GLORY to GLORY, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*** 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NKJV)

All of us are blessed to be able to move forward in our Christian life from FAITH to FAITH and GLORY to GLORY. Equally true is the fact that there is usually a "SPACE" in between. This is clearly seen in Paul's ministry in Acts 16. He was constantly looking for new fields of ministry:

Plan A: Asia, Holy Spirit says, "No."

Plan B: Bithynia, Holy Spirit says "No."

Plan C: ***"Come help us."*** Holy Spirit says "Yes."

So by FAITH they headed to Macedonia and arrived in Philippi.

In Acts 16:14-17 (NIV) the verses we read are all about GLORY; Lydia and her household were saved, a demon possessed girl was delivered. Verses 19-24 reveal the "SPACE" between; they were arrested, beaten and thrown in jail and bound in stocks. In verse 25, we read that by FAITH they began to sing praises.

"The Lord inhabits the praise of His people" Psalm 22:3 (KJV)

That jail was not designed for God's GLORY. It began to shake, and every door flew open and every chain was broken. The jailer was saved along with his family. Can someone shout GLORY?

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48. My Darling, I Love You

The small village church in Sinaloa, Mexico was not my favorite. There was no electricity, so the kerosene lamp added to the heat and provided little light. Like many village churches the members were farmers and worked till sundown. That meant they wouldn't leave home for at least an hour to go to the service. Some would even come later. In the States we have set service times and a five-minute count down flashing on the overhead screen and when it gets to zero, we start. As far as I could tell, there were no clocks in town. I was sitting on the hard bench thinking, why had God given me this assignment? Was He mad at me for something I had done wrong?

Shoulders bent over and palms flat on the rough boards, I really felt somewhat unappreciated. At that moment, a deep voice boomed all over the village, some 700 miles from the States, in perfect English, **"My darling, I love you!"** I almost fell off the bench. I ran to the door found the answer.

Itinerant Gypsies would travel from village to village, set up a large curtain around the village square and hang a canvas screen on one end and fire up their generator and charge the villagers admission to watch a movie. They were usually English speaking with Spanish captions. The first words to this movie were... (**see above**). The movie was over by the time the church people arrived and they probably wondered why I seemed so happy. They didn't know I had just heard a voice from Heaven. ***"Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning;"*** Lamentations 3c:22-23 (NIV)

49. Mothers' Day

Paul never married but he was a father to countless men and women during his lifetime. One in particular, Timothy, he called his son. He was so proud of and loved this young man that he set him in as pastor of *the Crown Jewel Church* of the New Testament, Ephesus. He has this to say about Timothy and two other people in his life:

“I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” 2 Timothy 1:3 (NIV)

I am reminded of a woman of faith that I knew. In her later years, she fell down a flight of steps and broke her neck. The doctors were amazed that she was still alive or at least not paralyzed from the neck down. They were even more amazed when a little later she walked out of that hospital and kept walking for many years until she finally walked off the planet.

Today she is walking on “Streets of Gold.” Her name is Stella. She raised six wonderful children to serve the Lord. One of those children, a daughter, means more to me than anyone in the universe other than the Lord Jesus. Her name is Deloris. Besides her own two children, she has been a mother to countless young men and women. I love her with all my heart and wish her the happiest Mother's Day!

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50. Blessing

I first met Emily Greer in the hospital when she was about one hour old. A few months back she contacted me with the good news that she was soon to be married. She asked if I would make a recording of a blessing to be played at her wedding. It was a great honor, and soon it was on the way. I found the written copy in my files today and thought maybe someone else might like a blessing. Consider this one yours.

In God's word, in Genesis 5:2 (NIV) we read about the first married couple. ***“He created both male and female and blessed them.”*** As they grew into a nation, He increased the blessing. We read in Deuteronomy 28:1-6 (NIV):

“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out.”

Though the language is ancient, it still applies to God's people today. BE BLESSED!

51. Hope

I hope it doesn't rain today we've planned to _____. I hope it rains today my _____ needs water. These sentences are repeated countless times every day for as many reasons as there are blanks. "Hope" as we use it in everyday language, amounts to little more than wishful thinking.

The Bible has a lot to say about HOPE. It appears in Scripture more than 160 times. The Hebrew and Greek shades of meaning can be reduced to two words: CONFIDANT EXPECTATION. So, when we read the following passage, we can feel blessed beyond measure:

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the HOPE to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way!" Ephesians 1:18 NIV

That doesn't leave any room for wishful thinking, come rain or shine.

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52. The Thorn

At a ministers' conference the evening speaker began by saying he was writing a book: ***Humility and How I Obtained It***. He went on to say he had the first four pages completed: full sized photographs of himself. Well, there was no book, but it was a good attention getter.

Earlier this week, that subject came up during my devotions. Usually when that happens, the first thing I do is see how many times it's mentioned in Scripture. I found fourteen references. I then went to the Greek and Hebrew scholars to see what hidden meanings I could find. To my surprise, in both languages, it means (drum roll) ***humility!*** Meekness also tags along, but the truth that unfolded itself to me was that there is no place for pride in our life. How do we handle it? Well, I will share Paul's and my solution.

He said, ***"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 NIV.***

What was his thorn? He never reveals it. What is my thorn? I'll never tell, but it's there whenever I might tend toward being proud of something I did. Do you have a thorn? Well, if you ever feel boastful and a painful jab in your heart wakes you up to how you actually are, no use asking it to be removed, His grace is sufficient for you.

53. The day after the Resurrection

Hell was a busy but gloomy place today. The party was over, the cheers that sounded out when the thorns were pressed into that sacred brow and the nails driven into those anointed hands and feet grew quiet. A final cry from that bloody cross had silenced the demonic crowd:

IT IS FINISHED! John 15:30.

The realization of what would later be written, *“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”* I Corinthians 15:55, was sinking in. Back on earth, the religious leaders who had orchestrated the false charges and illegal trial were trying to figure out how to squelch the rumors that surfaced that He was going to rise from the dead. Bribes had been paid and Roman soldiers dispatched to guard the tomb. The one who had betrayed Him with a kiss had hung himself. His disciples had fled and locked themselves away in hiding.

The one exception was the one who had denied Him with curses. He found a place to weep and cry over his cowardly deed. They couldn't fathom what was about happen on Sunday morning. But praise God we know!

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54. He is Risen

The Temple priests were wringing their hands as they gazed up at the veil that had been ripped open from top to bottom two days before. Six stories high by thirty feet wide and four inches thick it served as a barrier to the Holiest of Holies allowing only the High Priest entry once a year on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle blood on the Ark of the Covenant for the sins of the nation. Repairs could not begin the day before since it was the Sabbath. It was a monumental task that had required 300 priests to hang it originally.

Thirty-seven years later the Roman general Titus would invade Jerusalem and, fulfilling Jesus' prediction, destroy the Temple completely. It has never been rebuilt and an Islamic Mosque sits in its place.

But for the believers in Christ a greater Truth prevails.

“You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you?” I Cor. 3:16 and that *“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.* Hebrews 9:12-13 NIV.

May every Temple of the Lord shout, **He is risen!**

55. Pray For Them?

Yes, that's what it says.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 1 Timothy 2:1 (NIV)

Paul was actually instructing Timothy, pastor of the church of Ephesus, to pray for Nero. The obvious irony of this verse is that Nero and the Roman Senate were responsible for horrible persecution of Christians. Tradition holds that he had Paul beheaded. This did not go un-noticed by God. Soon afterward Nero committed suicide.

Paul was following our Lord's example. While the blood flowed from His brow His lips formed the words "forgive them!" Pilate too tried to wash the blood from his hands but also eventually committed suicide.

Recently, leaders were chosen by the American people who have historically passed laws that are contrary to Biblical and patriotic values. However to comply with Scripture we must pray for them. The Lord knows how to handle men like Pilate, the Nero, the Hitler and anyone else who rules against Him. This will give us peace in knowing that we are obedient to the Word.

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56. Donkey

"What have I done to you that deserves your beating me three times?" This sounds like a case of domestic violence. Actually, this is the voice of Balaam's donkey as recorded in Numbers 22:8 NLT, and it describes the strange story of a prophet who is offered money by a Moabite king to pronounce a curse on Israel. God warns him against this arrangement, but he goes ahead and pursues it. As he travels through a narrow gorge, an angel blocks the way. The donkey sees him, but Balaam doesn't, and stops in its tracks. That's when the beating starts and, after the third time, the Lord lets the donkey speak. This is a prophet who can't make up his mind to do the right thing. James describes this type of person in New Testament language: ***"A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."*** James 1:8 KJV

In the older planes I used to fly, the first thing I would do is press the master switch to get it started. Immediately, the sound of the gyro winding up would be heard. In flight, it would send a message to the instrument that monitored the attitude of the aircraft in relation to the ground. If I entered clouds, visibility would be zero. Vertigo would be possible, leading to disorientation and ultimately crashing. But if I kept my eye on the instrument, I could maintain level flight until clear of the clouds.

This is what Paul tells Timothy: ***"In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."*** 2 Tim 2:20-21 NIV

57. BLM Meets Vidor

I was scanning the latest news on the racial unrest when one report caught my eye. The headline read, “BLM Meets Vidor, Texas. “My parents moved to Vidor when I was 10 years old. They leased a small service station and repair shop. The two movie theaters in town showed a different movie every other night and a double feature on Sunday. Admission for my age was 9 cents. My dad gave permission to one of the theaters to advertise on the shop wall with pay being free admission to their theater. I fixed flats in the shop and earned 25 cents each one.

We had no TV in those days, so this was great. I would go to a different theater every night and twice on Sunday. I had two best friends, Gerald and Robert Bowen. They came by one Sunday evening and invited me to their little Nazarene church. Well, I couldn’t turn them down, so I ended up sitting on a hard pew trying to follow the words in the hymnbook.

What happened next changed my life forever. Pastor Brown was preaching his sermon and I began to weep uncontrollably. My heart felt heavy and I didn’t know why. I was eleven years old, and my family was not church folks. I didn’t know what to do next. The pastor asked if anyone wanted to be saved. I didn’t understand what that meant. He saw what a state I was in and motioned me forward. I just wanted help so I knelt at that altar and poured out my heart.

That was over 65 years ago, but it’s as clear in my mind today as it was then. “**My burden was lifted at Calvary.**” Vidor was a “sundowner town” and headquarters for the Ku Klux Klan. For me it’s the place where I met Someone special.

“On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” Rev. 19:16 NIV

58. Catfish

As we approach Father’s Day it’s easy to recall wonderful memories of my dad. He wasn’t educated because the farm’s crops were planted in the spring and harvested in the fall. He said he finally quit after failing the eighth grade 3 times. He was the oldest of 12 children and had a lot of responsibility.

One thing he always found time for up to his early nineties--hunting and fishing. He instilled it in me as well. I traveled a lot in ministry and wasn’t always able to go with him as much in later years. When I did make it home, he would tell me about his latest hunting or fishing trip.

On one occasion he told me about the big one that got away. He and my cousin Whig went up on Rayburn Lake. His favorite spot was where an old abandoned log truck had been left in the lake with only the roof of the cab showing above water. On this trip they were fishing around the truck when they saw a huge catfish swim through the right side window. They cast their shiners inside the cab but couldn’t get a bite. Whig put a big treble hook on the line and told my dad to get the boat up close so he could snag-hook it the next time it swam into the cab. Dad said he did that and just as he cast...the catfish rolled up the window. Did I mention that my dad had a sense of humor?

A merry heart does good, like medicine. Proverbs 17:22 NKJV

59. Joe

My older brother, by 14 years, Joe was a rowdy teenager. Right after Pearl Harbor, he lied about his age and joined the Navy. He came home from the war wilder than ever. There were no drugs back then but liquor provided him his high. He married a lovely young lady named June. She bore him four wonderful children. The marriage didn't survive his drinking and womanizing. I didn't like to be around Joe. When I would go visit him, he would have a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other and every third word would be profanity with no respect for my wife and children.

During that time, I went on a ministry trip to Guatemala. In the market, I made a good deal on some chrome plated machetes with a leather case. I brought home a suitcase full of them with plans to give them to my supporting pastors.

I went home for a brief visit with my parents. One of my pastors lived about an hour away. We arranged to go see them and have a meal. He was thrilled to receive his machete. My typical mother said maybe I could visit Joe on the way home. As we got close to home, I said, "Well it's late," so that gave me a good excuse to not go see Joe. This person riding with me said, "How about those messages you've been preaching on unconditional love?" I shot her a "mind- your- own business" glare and grumbled on down the road. Well, I came to a fork in the road; left turn to my parents, right turn to Joe's house. I turned right. When I pulled up in front, the porch light came on and out the door he came. Cigarette in one hand, and beer in the other, he said, "What the *+%#x&+ are you doing here this time of night? "Well", I said, "I just stopped by to say I love you and give you a gift from Central America."

He told me he had bought a camp on Lake Sam Rayburn and where he kept a key. A year later we had a couple days off and decided to go to the camp. When I opened the door, I came to dead stop. Proudly hanging on the wall was a chrome machete. The next time I went to see Joe he was dying of cirrhosis of the liver. I knelt by the bed and shared with him the message of Romans 10:9. ***That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*** NIV When I stood up, Joe was a born-again believer. The next time I see him, his hands will be raised, and praise will come from his lips.

60. The Tongue

In the study of linguistics, it's called the articulator. English and Spanish have 7 points of articulation. It's important to know them if either of those two languages are not your native tongue. I was 22 years old before I started to learn Spanish. I discovered that there are 2 more consonants in Spanish than English. To not learn the correct pronunciation is to speak with an accent that can be hard to understand. How did this happen?

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel — because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. Gen 11:5-9 NIV

There over 7000 spoken languages today. There is one that is not on that list that is the most important of all. This is true, especially in light of the all the protests and accusations, both true and false, being shouted out constantly.

It is found in 1 Corinthians 13:1-2 NIV ***"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."***

When we were in language school, we had to practice speaking Spanish every day. We, as God's people, must practice speaking LOVE every day. That's God's language: ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*** John 3:16 NKJV

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61. Love Letters

The U.S. Postal Service has fallen victim to technology probably more than any other government program. I can't remember the last time I wrote a letter, put it in an envelope with a stamp, and mailed it. Nor have I received one in recent memory. I did a study a couple of years ago about early mail service. As the Roman Empire continued to expand by the first century A.D., roads crisscrossed the land connecting the conquered nations. Roman vessels plied the Mediterranean going from port to port.

The emperor put in place a mail service for getting messages to military outposts. The demand was so great that the general public was included in those routes.

The most important Letters in history were being written at this time. They were called Epistles and became part of the New Testament Canon. You and I have copies around our house and loaded on our smart phones and computers. This is included in one of those Letters:

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:14-17(NIV)

No doubt The Roman mail service carried many of these letters to waiting churches around the Empire over the next scores of years. Like Augustus Caesar called for a census that sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem the Lord has rulers in the palm of His hand.

62. What's for lunch? Pig slop again!

Our Israeli tour bus stopped at the bottom of the hill, and we unloaded and walked up. We stopped at the top and looked over at the ruins of an ancient Decapolis city. In Christ's day, they were largely populated by Greeks, and the one we were looking at, according to our guide, had houses of prostitution and would be considered a *party town*. "Not the kind of place," he continued, "that a young Jewish man would patronize, unless he had left home with his inheritance."

We read of such a young man in Luke 15:11-14 (NIV). ***"There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living."***

Even though this is often called "the parable of the prodigal son," Jesus never uses that term, He just says he was a son. Written almost 2000 years ago, the scenario in one way or another describes millions of our youth today. Broken hearted parents bail them out of jail or worse, have to identify their body.

The happy part of the Bible story is the return home and of the father waiting for his son with open arms. The same is true with many of our youth today who are embraced in the arms of a loving Father. ***Lord I pray that our youth today will trade the "pig slop" of the world and enter into the bountiful banquet room that's awaiting them.***

63. Ruby

I never knew my grandma and grandpa Oxley since they both died before I was born. Before they passed away, they brought into the world seven, mostly red-headed children. Maybe that's why they named my mother *Ruby*.

My dad, who lived in Texas, was in Louisiana with a crew to cut logs for a sawmill. He met my mother and was smitten by that red-haired farm girl. He took her back to Texas and they were married in 1927.

Neither of my parents went past the eighth grade, so the future only held a lifetime of low paying jobs. My mother was an excellent cook, so she worked in several short order cafes over the years.

She had three sons, all seven years apart. The household joke was that she had to wait that long before she could take on another one. I was the youngest of the three, and as long as she lived, I was always the baby.

When the Lord called Deloris and me to do missionary work, Mother would come up with a little cash each month to send us a small check. Once, when we were home for a few days, she asked for some of our business cards. She said the local laundry mat had a table where businessmen could leave their cards and maybe pick up some business. We never received any money from the laundry mat, but it kept alive one of the precious memories of my mom.

As her health failed, she battled diabetes. She loved sweets and if any were left on the table, we would see a tablespoon size missing. I came home from the store one day where I had bought a jar of hot salsa. I left it on the table and in a little while we heard mom hollering "water, ice water." She discovered it wasn't a jar of jelly.

She loved ministers and missionaries, and none ever left our house without a paper bag full of fried chicken. She was a Proverbs 31 woman by every measurement. ***"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies."*** Verse 10 (NIV)

64. JLM

As a white Christian I deplore the injustices suffered by our black citizens. I applaud the peaceful demonstrations that have awakened our nation to the need for change. Discrimination against people of color has to stop.

I believe, however, that the most horrible example of cruelty occurred in the 1930's and 1940's. Adolph Hitler singled out a people to vent his hatred. Six million were tortured and murdered during that time period. He eventually was stopped, and those people were allowed to return to their homeland.

I see a new trend sweeping the country of removing statues of anyone connected with the Confederacy and slavery even to George Washington, who was a slave owner. When it comes to the Jews, I hear mostly silence. They live on a tiny strip of land no larger than seven western Louisiana parishes. They have been attacked for decades by Islamic extremists firing rockets into Israeli territory. They are consistently voted against in the United Nations. Anti-Semitism rarely makes the news and even then, portrayed as somehow justified.

The sun is rising on the horizon: *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'* Romans 11:25-27 NIV

JLM JEWISH LIVE MATTER.

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65. Do the math

If we employ the math principle $1 + 1 = 2$, we usually say, "It adds up." The new formula, 1 mediocre quarterback + kneel, instead of stand with hand over heart for the national anthem = protesting police brutality. To me "It doesn't add up."

The injustices committed by a small percentage of racist police officers + peaceful protests and prosecution = corrective measures. Yes, "It adds up." I'm not a T shirt person, but if a baseball cap comes out with ALM (All Lives Matter), I will buy one.

As professional sports try to resume, more players than ever will take the knee. I won't know because I don't watch anyway. Because of Corona Virus there will probably be less people to cheer or boo when the anthem is played. I quit viewing the games when those millionaire athletes began to dishonor the flag that so many veterans fought and died for.

There is an upcoming event that I will bow both knees for. I won't be the only one; the whole planet will join me.

"It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" Romans 14:11 NIV

"It all adds up."

66. Who are you?

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. Acts 9:15 (NIV)

The blinded man lying on the road knew one thing: he was speaking to someone of authority by using the Greek word *kurios* for Lord which means *master*. The answer he got would change that. ***"I am Jesus!"***

This highly regarded Jewish religious 007 (licensed to kill) agent of the Sanhedrin instantly recognized that the One he had persecuted was now the most important person he had ever met. They led him to Damascus, and for the next 3 days he didn't touch a bite of food while he pondered what had just happened to him. By the time Ananias arrived, he was ready to receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit and the calling for the rest of his life. He loved to recount this experience and, while under arrest in Caesarea, he shared it with 3 different kings, Felix, Festus and Agrippa.

The most powerful soul winning tool we have is our testimony. Whether you are a former murdering, robbing, cheating, lying junkie or a GUBA (GREW UP BORN AGAIN) who can't remember when you accepted the Lord, you have a life changing story to tell. You're a child of God; that's who you are. Tell somebody!

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; Revelation 12:11(NIV)

67. What? Forgive!

Sister Perkins had been hurt, offended, gossiped about and ignored so many times she gave up on forgiveness. So, she ended up in the hospital and was lying on her bed when the doctor walked in. "Mrs. Perkins, "I have bad news for you. You have rabies! Since we have no cure, you will die shortly from this dreadful disease. I have brought you a legal pad so that you can make out your will before it's too late."

She took the pad and began writing. The doctor passed by later and she was still writing. The third time he came by he asked, "Mrs. Perkins you have a long will, don't you?" "This is no will," she shot back, "I'm making a list of people I plan to bite!"

Peter, who seemingly had taken the role of spokesman for the disciples, missed it by a wide margin. ***"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*** Matthew 18:21 (NIV)

In simple terms, there is no limit to how many times we must forgive. All of us have faced this dilemma many times. We have learned that unforgiveness cancels out peace. I've had to send letters, make phone calls, or most difficult of all, look the person in the eye and say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me."

If anyone is at this point in life, I suggest you make it right sooner rather than later. ***And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*** Philippians 4:7 (NKJV)

68. The Race

Then King David said to the whole assembly: "My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced." I Chronicles 29:1(NIV). Solomon might have been thinking "Dad, I'm the wisest man in the world, I can handle this kingdom business."

I do know that when my dad was released from the hospital after a fall, it was hard for him to accept that he would depend on a battery powered wheelchair to get around. Both of my older brothers had passed away and I was his primary care giver. His kingdom was his large yard surrounding his small frame house. A couple of years after turning 90, he realized that he needed a riding lawn mower to properly mow the yard. He took the mowing seriously and had a precise plan to carry out the job.

Now he had to turn his kingdom over to me. I pulled the lawn mower up front and he motored up right behind me and started barking out instructions on the correct and only way to drive the thing and cut the grass. I'm thinking, "Dad, I have a commercial driver's license, and have been checked out in 3 high-performance single engine aircraft, I can handle this mower." The flow of commands continued.

This was not going to work. I put the mower in high gear and soon had the house between me and the wheelchair. Around and around we went. The Lord invented laughter and I could picture Him and the angels cracking up watching the scene from heaven.

David son of Jesse was king over all Israel. He ruled over Israel forty years — seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. He died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth and honor. His son Solomon succeeded him as king. I Chronicles 29; 26-28 NIV. Dad died December 22, 2006 at 101 years old. I miss that race.

69. Generation Gap

I had two teenagers by the time I heard the term "generation gap." Our son, Chris, and I sailed along seamlessly. We both enjoyed hunting, fishing and playing golf. Our daughter, Laura, was a different story.

I grew up with two brothers and no sisters. So, when I checked the mail and found a cassette titled "Staying Alive" by some group called The Bee Gees, it was time for an accounting. "But dad, it only cost a penny." She had fallen for one of those magazine ads that said if you buy the first cassette for a penny you get one a month at a discount. "If you plan on *staying alive* you have two choices: cancel the order or get a job and pay for the rest." The order got cancelled. Was this that *Gap*?

My missionary friend, Buddy Holder, sold me his Ford F250. To take advantage of low-cost diesel in Mexico, he had a 453 Detroit installed (no diesel pickups then). There's no sound like a Detroit diesel. Whenever I pulled into a truck stop to fill up, truckers flocked around when I raised the hood. I basked in the admiration. Then on the first day of school, Laura insisted I let her out a block from school. *Gap*? Did I mention that I had installed an air horn that I planned to use to announce her arrival?

Fast forward 15 years and Laura has four children of her own. I was able to observe the *Gap* from the bleachers as her four little "tax deductions" put her through the wringer. Today, she and I are in the bleachers together watching her ten little "Grand Gappers" continue the cycle. ***"Whose daughter are you?"*** Genesis 2:23 NIV. She gives me a smile and picks up the binoculars. ***May the Lord bless you... and may you live to see your children's children.*** Psalms 128:5 (NIV)

70. The Cloud

Hebrews 11 and 12 paint a powerful portrait of an athletic event that takes in Heaven and Earth. The first time I saw a TV image of an 11 inch football lying on the field suddenly spread out for more than a square mile as the camera in the overhead blimp went from macro to infinity in an instant, I was mesmerized.

“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command.” Hebrews 11:3 (NIV). This verse represents the infinity of the passage.

“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline.” Hebrews 12:5. The word *discipline* in the Greek is *paidiea* which means training and speaks to the macro or single runner. It places each Christian on the track and describes what he or she needs to do in order to win the race. It's an unusual competition in that it does not pit one against another, but rather everyone who finishes is a winner.

It is an uneven course filled with obstacles that's not for a sprinter but for the long-distance runner. It requires stripping off anything that will slow down or hinder the competitor. It is imperative that patience set the pace. Faith is the fuel that provides the power and energy to prevail. With past top runners in the stadium cheering us on and the Coach at the finish line waving us forward, how can we not win!

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7 NIV

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71. Sit Down

In the olden days a school teacher told Johnny to sit down. She said, “The next time you refuse to sit down you're going to get a paddling!”

“Alright,” he said, “I'll sit down, but in my heart, I'm standing up!”

Government agencies, protesters and educators are telling haters to quit hating. Laws are passed, symbols are removed, and curriculums are redesigned to effect change. The truth is, there will always be hatred until the following takes place.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him —the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord — and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. Isaiah 11:1-10 NIV

72. Genealogies

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Matthew 1:1 (NIV). Another list of Jesus' family appears in Luke chapter three. This type of information is found in other places in the Bible. Most of us, myself included, have put together a family tree. It is interesting to trace our roots and learn about the people who make up our history.

Recently my grandmother, Sally Williams, was the focus of my research. She was born in Polk County, Texas in 1887. She and my grandpa were married in 1904 and settled on his 160 acres homestead in the Devil's Pocket community of southeast Texas. She was illiterate and always signed papers with an "X". They had their first child in November of 1905 and named him Joseph. He was my dad. Eleven more children followed including one set of twins. Their "dog trot" log home was an active place. I was born in 1942 and, as a young boy I remember that life had changed little around the home place when we visited from time to time.

There was no electricity, so coal oil lamps provided light. Meals were cooked on a wood burning stove. Food was mostly homegrown with pork and chickens providing a meat source. This was supplemented by fish and squirrels along with deer and wild turkeys. Water came from a pitcher pump on the front porch and a wooden bucket sat next to it with a community dipper handy for a quick drink. The bathroom was a cane patch surrounding the back yard.

I recall the evenings when the men folk would sit around the living room and swap stories. I ended up sleeping with two or three more on a feather mattress. The last one to bed made sure the mosquito net was pulled down.

Things changed drastically in 1954 when the log house burned down. The twelve families went together and built a three-bedroom house. Grandpa passed away in 1963 and my dad inherited the house. He took care of grandma until she died in 1979 at 92 years old. She and I and my forty-seven cousins spanned parts of three centuries. ***Thus, there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.*** Matthew 1:17 (NIV)

73. Give Honor

“Give everyone what you owe him: if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.” Romans 13:7 (NIV)

During our years of missionary ministry, we were often in areas where no reliable education was available. This was a situation common to ministers both foreign and domestic. Thankfully, Christian educators created curriculums to meet this need. At different times Deloris was our children’s teacher, principal, counselor, librarian and cafeteria cook. She was also my officer manager, secretary and allowed me to eat in the lunchroom.

As public schools were forced to teach evolution, unscriptural sex education classes, deleting any reference to the Bible and forbidding prayer, Christian parents began to provide homeschooling for their children. The concept has proven to be superior to public education with 37% of homeschoolers outperforming their counterparts.

This has not happened without criticism. *The National Educators Association* is against homeschooling. It is illegal in some countries. It is legal in all fifty states with requirements differing in some.

When the pandemic struck our nation, all schools were forced to close their doors. Homeschoolers didn’t miss a beat. It’s ironic that public schools are scrambling to put together a system that will incorporate many methods employed by homeschooled students. I pray for their success. At the same time, I salute the parents that chose to provide their children a quality education in an ideal environment.

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (NIV).

74. Reference Points in Relationships

“Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” Matthew 27:42

Thankfully, He didn't. Though innocent, ***“He humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross”!*** Philippians 2:8 (NIV). The world has no idea what the significance of the cross is.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18

For me to try and expound on the many facets of the cross in a few paragraphs would be futile. I would like to remind us of the six truths that emerge as we, *who are crucified with Christ*, gaze from these beams of rugged wood.

Upward: ***“Christ is the head of the church.”*** Ephesians 5:23

Right: We reach out to the lost.

Left: We reach out to the found.

Downward: Christ has put the Devil under our feet.

Frontward: Spouse

Rearward: 🎵 *No turning back, no turning back. “Remember lot’s wife”*

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

75. An Apostle

A guy named Jeff Foxworthy grew up in the Atlanta area and has become famous for his comedy routine *You Might Be A Redneck If*. He could have been raised in my community Devils Pocket, Texas and be describing a lot of us folks who lived there when I was growing up.

I was mulling over that today and my thoughts took on a more serious tone as I applied it to my great Bible hero, Paul. It goes like this:

You might be the Apostle Paul if...

“Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night, they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.” Acts 9:22-24 (NIV)

You might be the Apostle Paul if...

“When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.” Acts 9:26-27

You might be the Apostle Paul if...

“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.” Acts 16:22-24

You might be the Apostle Paul if...

“Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand.” Acts 28:3

You might be the Apostle Paul if...

“Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.” 2 Tim 4:10

I think I might not be an apostle Paul.

76. Eyes

How many of you remember the first time you looked into each other's eyes and knew that he or she was the one you wanted to spend the rest of your life with? I do; it was in a steamy kitchen at International Bible College where we both worked to pay for our tuition. That was in 1960. I know this is a peculiar way to open a devotional thought, but it came to me in prayer last night and I wanted share it.

This is my own experience and is not intended to introduce a new doctrine. As old age advances and I no longer live by a set schedule, my sleep time is irregular. I have just gone through my devotional prayer time which can be inconsistent. I had begun by closing my eyes as was the norm and noticed a problem I had been experiencing for some time without realizing it. With my eyes closed, I was distracted by thoughts and images that didn't lend themselves at all to intercession. The rest of my prayer time I prayed with open eyes, looking heavenward and my problem was solved. I know. It sounded strange to me, but it caused me to go to the Word. First, I found this: ***"I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth"***. Psalm 121:1 (NIV)

I read on further: ***"I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven...so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he shows us his mercy."*** Psalm 123:1-2 (NIV)

This next verse speaks to running the race of life and seems to fit in with our prayer relation with the Lord:

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV)

Many pray while walking or if they live in a scenic area gaze upon God's creation so this not new to them. The important thing is to blot out any images that attempt to crowd out our focus on prayer.

♪Open the eyes of my heart, Lord! I want to see you!

77. Old Faithful

It's the most famous geyser in the world. It has pretty much lived up to its name since 1870 when it received its title. You can't set your watch by it but you can count on a performance within a two hour timeframe. However, it is doomed. One verse of Scripture predicts it and at the same time reveals what really is "Faithful."

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my Words will never pass away." Matthew 24:35 (NIV)

What do we find in scripture that speaks to "faithfulness?" The following verse declares the most obvious: ***"Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."*** Deuteronomy 7:9-10

It's established that the Lord is faithful, and every Christian acknowledges that. It's reasonable then for Him to expect us to be faithful. We could all make an endless Spiritual *bucket list* of what we should be faithful in doing. It behooves us to work on that list until we hear these words:

"Well done, good and faithful servant!" Matthew 25:23

78. Hello! Reservation for Twenty Thousand, Please.

I have seen many paintings and sculptures depicting scenes of Jesus and his disciples. I have yet to see one revealing the expression on their faces when He gestured toward that multitude of hungry souls and said, ***“Feed them!”*** The only thing on hand was five matzos and two kid-sized fish. The Scriptures give very few details of the logistics of the process other than to have them form groups of fifty. We are left to wonder how those twelve men were able to serve that many people at lightning fast speed.

The last command that He gave them was even a greater challenge. ***“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”*** Mark 16:15 (KJV)

Well, they had certainly seen Him do many miraculous deeds in the three and a half years of ministry. But once again he caught them off guard with this statement, ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*** Acts 1:8 (NIV) No doubt they were thinking, “Okay Lord, we will follow you as always and get the job done.” Then this happened: ***“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”*** (NIV) Once again they had that look on their face: ***“why do you stand here looking into the sky?”*** Acts 1:9 (NIV)

This time these men who had never travelled more than fifty miles were commanded to go anywhere on the planet where there were people and take them the Gospel. This sent them climbing the stairs into the upper room. Seven days later they were blown out of that room by a mighty rushing wind with their hair on fire speaking seventeen languages. Peter preached one brief message and three thousand Jews were transformed by the power of God.

We are living in times that humanity has never experienced in all of history. This time we know what the answer is and we are part of it. We just need to climb those stairs. When we do, the second part of that verse comes to pass.

“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 2:11 (NIV)

79. We Don't Live There

♪ *Oh give me a home where the buffalo roam and the deer and the antelope play. Where seldom is heard, a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day.* I read the lyrics of the song and discovered the secret: there's no mention of people. There are bound to be some since no one cowboy can control the whole herd alone. Well the job requires social distancing until they finally bed down for the night and most everyone is too tired to talk much.

If you understand anything I'm writing, I have an idea how old you must be. The rest of you will just have to look it up. The truth is we have plenty of sources that can bring on discouragement. If you need to, you can always watch CNN. The truth is we don't live on the range.

The Bible has many references to encourage us even if like David we have to do this. ***“And David was greatly distressed; for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”*** 1 Samuel 30:6 (KJV)

I would like to refer to the one person who I never dreamed would need to be encouraged. Paul had recently experienced a number of hardships. He had just been released from jail in Caesarea only to be put in chains and sent to Rome to face a trial before the Supreme Court of the day.

On the way he was shipwrecked and had to float ashore on a board. Then, as he helped to build a fire to warm up and dry out, he was bitten by a poisonous snake. Eventually, he was put on another ship to continue on to Rome.

It seems that things had finally caught up with him to the point when they docked in port, the greatest Apostle who ever lived was discouraged. We know this by reading in the Word and discovering a wonderful truth. ***“And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and the three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.”*** Acts 28:15 {KJV}

You never know when, just by going to check on someone, even if you wear a mask and stand six feet away to wave, you may encourage that person.

80. A New Way of Looking

In the first five chapters, Isaiah is confirmed as the *voice of the Lord*. As he seems to sense that future prophecies will proclaim powerful predictions that will speak to the ages to come, he is constrained to seek a deeper relationship with the Lord. This is borne out with the death of King Uzziah.

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs...and they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips..." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6:1-8 (NIV)

The death of the king and the wickedness of the masses had driven the prophet to see only his weaknesses. Whereas before he looked to the human king's leadership that had now been stripped away, it was at that point the Word says, "*mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.*" He goes on in the next sixty chapters to unfold prophecies that span the centuries to the day in which we live. I look at our great nation and relive in my mind how God has used her to send the Gospel around the world. She has rid the world of tyrants and dictators. She has fed the hungry and welcomed the displaced. Her flag flies over the embassy in Jerusalem.

I also see her today reeling under the scourge of sickness. I see that same flag being legally burned. Her leaders spout hateful epithets at one another with no thoughts of conciliation. I want to shout woe!

Most of all I want that coal of fire to touch my lips so that I can say somehow, Lord, some way, send me.

81. The Power in a Stick

It wasn't a routine day for Moses at the office.

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.” Exodus 3:1-2 (NIV)

The Lord came into his office and said, “Moses you’ve been in charge of these sheep long enough. You are being promoted to *Deliverer of My People*. This was not good news. He had *Wanted Dead or Alive* posters plastered all over Egypt. He was blown out of his sandals. A torrent of excuses and doubts tumbled from Moses’ lips. After exhausting all his disqualifications for the position, the matter was settled with a question. ***“What is that in your hand?”***

Staff: *A short pole or stick used for many different purposes in Bible times. A staff was used much like a walking cane by travelers (Genesis 32:10), the elderly (Hebrews 11:21), and the lame (2 Samuel 3:29); but it could also serve as a simple weapon, especially in the hands of a shepherd. (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)*

Before Moses’ assignment was completed, that short stick would bring the Egyptian empire to its knees and lead Israel to the Promised Land. Often the Lord speaks to us and gives us an assignment that we feel unable to fulfill. We can rest assured that whatever He calls us to do, He’ll put in our hands what’s needed for the task.

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

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82. One Hundred Percent Whole Wheat

Deloris and I took a course in Bible College called “Temple Care”. It was a health class taught by Bro. Fred Irwin. He targeted many foods that he considered unhealthy. The two most deadly were white flour and refined sugar. We were convinced enough that from that time on until today we never buy a loaf of white bread. We use white flour at a minimum, but I splurge occasionally on biscuits and gravy. There is no greater failure than Krispy Kreme products: I know because I always feel guilty afterward.

White flour came about in the late 1800’s as millers discovered that by removing the germ and bleaching the flour it had a much greater shelf life. Or as Bro. Irwin would say, “Everything that’s healthy is stripped away.”

In Bible days the different grains would have been ground and eaten in whole state. Bread is referred to more than 270 times in Scripture. To me the most powerful is: ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”*** John 6:51 (NIV)

Another reference is found in that mystical book of Ecclesiastes 11:1. ***“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.”*** I focused on *waters* finding many shades of meaning that frequently refers to humanity. In one place the adjectives mentioned are impetuous, violent and overwhelming. It also can imply the hungry. I came away with this mandate: We are to take this Bread we have and share Him with humanity regardless of their condition and we will see the results in transformed lives. We may not see them in this life but in the one to come.

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”
Habakkuk 2:14 (NIV)

83. The War Room

Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix." Acts 23:23-24 (NIV)

Throughout his ministry Paul had firsthand knowledge of what a Roman soldier wore. He was chained to one after the other for over two years while in prison in Rome.

He could clearly see:

A helmet...to protect the head

A breastplate ...to protect the upper body

A heavy loin belt...to protect the reproductive organs

A pair of sandals...to protect the feet

A shield...to protect from any incoming projectiles, even fiery ones

A sword...to fight the enemy

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)

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84. Bible Thumper

Definition: Noun, slang: An enthusiastic or aggressive exponent of the Bible-*Collins Dictionary*. This nomen is often used in a negative way to describe Christians.

When I was a pastor, we would have a yearly visit from a representative of Gideon's International. This is an organization formed to place copies of the Scriptures in such places as hotels, hospitals, funeral homes, and schools. One such speaker stands out in my memory as he gave this testimony in our church in Louisiana. He told about a businessman in Baton Rouge who, because of alcoholism, had lost everything. His wife and children had left him, and everything he owned had been repossessed.

In desperation he stood on the banks of the Mississippi River prepared to jump in and end his life. As he looked at the swirling waters, he noticed something on the shore in the mud. He picked it up. By now he had lost his nerve and cancelled his suicide plans. He headed back to the flop house hotel where he was staying carrying what appeared to be a book. After cleaning the mud off, he discovered that it was a Gideon Bible. He carefully dried the pages and began to read it. Somewhere around John 3:16 he fell on his knees and accepted Jesus as his Savior. He became a Gideon and dedicated his life to getting the Bible to the world.

I hereby declare myself to be a confirmed *Bible Thumper*.

85. Black Holes

When the Lord was ready to create our galaxy, He began to issue divine commands. His first order: ***And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.*** Genesis 1:3-5 (NIV)

Light and dark are a part of creation and serve their purposes in nature. In Spiritual terms, light almost always has a positive, Godly meaning. Light is always shown to be superior to darkness.

Jesus declares He is the light of the world and that we also are the light of the world. As the moon reflects the light of the sun, so we reflect the light of the Son.

Scientists often use discoveries to try to contradict the Scriptures. They state *the black holes* are so dense that they can't be penetrated by light, thus throwing doubt on the Christian's belief in the greatness of light.

I'll admit this argument was difficult to disprove in my thought process. I asked the Lord to reveal to me the answer. It turned out to be easy.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. Colossians 1:15-17 (NIV)

Whatever His divine plan and purpose is for black holes, they're His property. ***I plan to walk in the Light.***

86. A Tribute to an Old Disciple

"And after those days we took up our carriages and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge." Acts 21:15-16 (KJV)

All we know about this gentleman is his name, where he lived, that he was old and what he did for the Kingdom of God. We have never heard of him before and nothing later. Yet the Holy Spirit includes him in the Scriptures.

When Deloris and I began our missionary ministry, we were twenty-one years old. To us, most everyone we met were *old disciples*. Over the next twenty-five years as we traveled in the USA and many foreign countries, those people opened their homes and treated us as family.

Well, here I am, an *old disciple*. Now it's younger folks who open their doors to us. Since our daughter Laura was diagnosed with cancer a year ago and, more recently, her husband Chris tested positive for Corona Virus, you, our FB friends and family, though unable to physically, have Spiritually opened your homes to us. You've invited us in, listened to our hearts, gathered around and laid hands on us and prayed for us. We know you did because when we asked for prayer, you filled FB with your posts. In the Spirit, we sensed God's presence and knew you all were there for us. This *old man* can't thank you enough.

87. Let There Be Silence

For someone who, as a child, had never heard of television, I've marveled at the innovations that have come along since that time. I was a teenager before we had one in our home. Programming began at 4:00 p.m. and the tall antenna we put up outside struggled to pull in the sometimes snowy, black and white images from three distant channels appearing on the fifteen- inch screen.

Today I have three sets scattered around our house. The smallest is thirty inches. There are three features that I especially enjoy: 120 channels (still on an antenna), closed caption (hard of hearing) and the most beloved, a *mute* button. Especially when a guy comes on and in that deep voice demands ATTENTION SENIORS! I know that this self-proclaimed general is about to try and sell me burial insurance, Medicare supplemental protection, or a walk-in bathtub. It's a delight to press that little *mute* button and go back to reading my AARP magazine that I keep for reading between commercials.

About the most the Government requires of Deloris and me these days is to **stay home**. When we do go to get groceries at Walmart and pull into the curb-side pickup space, we make sure we wear a mask. When we get home, we sanitize our purchases, and do the mandatory wash our hands routine. If we do those things, then whatever else that's going on in the world is covered by this *mute* button verse.

“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” 1 Peter 2:13-15 (NIV)

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88. The Background Disciple

There are few scriptures that refer to Andrew. He seemed to be a message carrier. He was a follower of John the Baptist and, through him, was told to look for another who was the Messiah.

Dwight L. Moody was an evangelist who carried the Gospel to many areas of the U.S.A and the U.K. He founded *Moody Church* in Chicago and went on to establish *Moody Bible Institute and Moody Press*. His father had died when he was four. His mother, a destitute widow had to send some of her children to live with relatives. Dwight ended up with his uncle who owned a shoe store. One of his rules was that Dwight had to attend church. His Sunday School teacher Edward Kimball led him to Christ and was a background influence to launch Moody's far reaching ministry.

“Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.” John 1:40-42 (NIV)

In churches around the world there are background disciples working in nurseries, children's church and youth groups. It's yet to be seen who will come out of those ministries and shake the world for Jesus.

89. You Want Fries with That?

“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.” Ruth 1:1-2 (NIV)

From this devastation flows the love story of the Bible starring the lady for whom the book is named. In those four chapters we are introduced to an array of intriguing characters. One of the more interesting of the list is not even mentioned. Rahab the harlot was Boaz’s mother. That would have been an interesting topic at family reunions. The days of famine are long past. The beauty of the book is that they were all living in the small town of Bethlehem where centuries in the future, from that family the Messiah would be born.

Between 1845 and 1852 as many as 1,000, 000 poor people died when a blight destroyed the potato crops of Ireland and people were gripped in a famine. William Oxley was born in 1824. He was in his mid-thirties when that disaster struck that ancient Celtic nation. The records are sketchy, but at some point, he and his wife, Rhoda, boarded a ship for America. They eventually settled in Many, Louisiana. They were my great grandparents. So, for me, an *order of fries* has an interesting history!

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90. The Comeback Kid

“When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.” Acts 12:12

To say that Peter had a praise report for the folks at the prayer meeting would be a colossal understatement. They were inside praying for him to get out of prison. The Holy Spirit led Luke, the author of Acts, to name two of the *many people* who were there. Obviously, Mary, the owner of the house would be mentioned, but her son, Mark, was also included. During this same time Barnabas and Saul had been commissioned to take financial support to people affected by a famine in parts of Judea.

When they left to go to Antioch, they took Mark with them. This is what happened there: ***“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*** Acts 13:1-3 (NIV)

We read later that Mark went along on this First Missionary Journey at least as far as Cyprus. Then he packed his bags and headed home to momma. Paul and Barnabas had great success having established many churches. Later Paul decided to return for a visit to those churches. Barnabas agreed but wanted to take Mark. Paul would not hear of it and the team broke up. Paul chose Silas and Barnabas took Mark back home. Mark was his cousin and he stood by his family.

The years pass and we don’t hear anything from young Mark. Obviously, the Lord is working in his life as Paul, in his final epistle writes: ***“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”*** 2 Timothy 4:11. The final seal of approval was when the Holy Spirit anointed Mark to write the second Gospel of the New Testament. God is a God of restoration.

91. The Symbol of Equality

A graph of my high school grades would show a straight line with two exceptions. There would be a sharp rise for social studies. It would fall off the chart when measuring my math skills. Then that glorious day arrived when all the seniors met in the auditorium to receive their class ring. More than anything else, that set us apart from the rest of the vermin crawling around on campus. I still have it sixty years later. It had to serve double duty and move to my right hand when I finished college. It had been replaced by a wedding ring. That event excluded a college ring from the budget.

The wearing of a ring in Bible days goes back to Genesis: ***“So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, ‘Make way!’ Thus, he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.”*** Genesis 41:41-43 (NIV). Not bad for a former prisoner. In this modern era the most sought and treasured rings are championship sports rings.

There is an award coming up in which every believer throughout history will receive one:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)

92. Identifying the Enemy

There are thirteen references to the word *enemy* in the New Testament. There is only one word in the Greek: *echtros* and refers to an adversary. They are described as human and satanic.

When we accept Jesus as Savior, we become a target of the Devil and often of former friends. Segments of society rise up against Believers. Laws are passed in defiance of Biblical truths. Our task is to learn how to deal with them. I usually feel inclined to take the Disciples' approach.

“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’” Luke 9:51-54 (NIV)

Jesus squelched that plan and, in fact, commanded the opposite when dealing with human adversaries.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:43-45

When it comes to satanic adversaries, he gives a different set of instructions:

“He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.’” Luke 10:18-19

93. Tipping the Scales

Daniel wasn't invited to the party! ***“Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords and drank wine before the thousand.”*** Daniel 4:37 (NIV)

This feast flew in the face of The King of the Universe. They drank wine from vessels that had been plundered from the Holy Place of Solomon's Temple. They worshipped false gods in their merriment. Then everything came to a screeching stop.

“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.” Daniel 5:5-6

One sentence of the message stands out: ***“Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting”.*** Daniel 5:27

Daniel was sent a rushed invitation to the party. The king promised him great wealth if he would interpret the message. Hard to believe a ministry turns down an offering. We know that before the night was over the Babylonian empire would end and the Syrians would become the greatest force of the era. The Spiritual truth that I go away with in this story is that God has a heavenly scale to measure the heart of mankind.

Athletes who are runners have a rigid conditioning routine that they adhere to in order to stay competitive. The first thing they do when they go into the gym is to step on the scales. If they are above their weight level, they will take steps to return to their running form. The writer of Hebrews shows us the same is true in the Christian's life.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1

“The next verse reveals the method of staying in condition.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Hebrews 12:2

How do we see Jesus? As it has always been-- by daily study of His word, and through prayer.

94. Writing A Spiritual Résumé

The word résumé comes from the French word summary. It is a document created and used by a person to present their background, skills and accomplishments in order to impress a prospective employer. Most people looking for a job keep several on hand.

What should a Spiritual résumé look like? I found one example at the beginning of the Gospel of John. John the Baptist shook up the land of Israel. Huge crowds were not only following him but were jumping in the river to be participants in this new teaching of being immersed in water. After a while some came to him and said the Man you were with recently is also baptizing followers. Johns response: **“He must become greater; I must become less.”** John 3:30 (NIV)

Jesus reveals what He is looking for in a follower. **“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 'But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"** Luke 18:9-14

After doing a search I came up with this brief Spiritual résumé.

♪ *Jesus use me oh Lord don't refuse me, for surely there's a work that I can do. And even though it's humble Lord help my will to crumble, Though the cost be great I'll work for You.* Written by Jack and Billy Campbell

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95. Which Way Is the Wind Blowing?

When I was an active pilot one of the major factors to planning a flight was determining the winds aloft. I recall one trip in which I encountered a pilot's dream. I had a 50 MPH tailwind. My Cessna was zipping along at close to 200 mph. The opposite, a headwind, becomes a bad dream.

Adam was a lifeless form, and then: **“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”.** Genesis 2:7 (KJV }

One of the last things Jesus did for His disciples was to gather them together to receive a gift. John 20:22

“And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.” John 20:22 NIV

The fulfillment of this promise would come a few days later. Those same disciples had gathered in the upper room of a large house. They had a business meeting to choose a replacement for Judas. I think it likely besides praying they reminisced over the final days they spent with the Lord. It was a casual time because the Scripture says they were all seated. Then one of those of my favorite words in the Bible occurred.

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting”. Acts 2:2 Once again God breathed on His people and they left that room and began to take the Gospel around the World. This is my prayer, “Lord once again Breathe on your people!”

♪ Let it breathe on me, let it breathe on me, Let the breath of God now breathe on me.

96. Father

I know it's in the English language, but it was never used in our neck of the woods. If my daddy would be across the street talking to the neighbors and I yelled from the front porch, "Hey father!" They would all look behind to see who I was trying to call out to.

You might need more information in order to understand where I am coming from. I lived my teen years in the community where my dad was born called The Devil's Pocket. Most of the menfolk were farmers or loggers or drove to the bigger cities to work in a plant. We respected our elders and would say yes sir and yes ma'am.

In Bible days there were a mixture of languages spoken. We know this by reading Pilate's command concerning the cross.

"Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek". John 19:19-21 (NIV)

When Jesus went to Gethsemane and found a place of solitude knowing He was about to die a horrible death He prayed.

"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Mark 14:36

This form of addressing a male parent was not just a term of respect but was saturated with love and affection. It becomes clear as we read Paul's letter to the Galatians.

"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." Galatians 4:6

97. No Detour

When Jesus walked on Earth, Israel was divided into three regions: Judea to the south, Samaria central and Galilee to the North. The Jews lived in the north and south, and the Samaritans lived in the middle. The two groups despised one another. The Jews were the pure descendants of David, and the Samaritans were a mixture of Israel and Gentiles.

When travelling from Judea to Galilee, the Jews would turn east at the Samaritan border and cross the Jordan River to avoid passing through Samaria. Imagine the Disciples amazement when Jesus made this decision:

"When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria." John 4:3-4 (NIV)

There was probably some muttering on their part, but they had learned that the Lord had a purpose to whatever He did. They arrived in the Samaritan town of Sychar. They had been walking all morning and were tired. They stopped at the well that had been dug by Jacob centuries before. The Disciples went on into town to buy food. Jesus sat down by the well which was deserted by noon because of the heat. Only one person showed up to draw water. It was a woman who came at that time of the day to avoid the other women gossipers. She was amazed when this Jew began to talk to her and knew about her troubled life. Before she left that well she had come to know the Messiah.

The Lord will disregard every protocol, custom or tradition to reach the lost. He set an example for us.

98. How Big Is He?

When we lived in Durango, Mexico over fifty years ago I was always amazed at the clear sky. I grew up in southeast Texas which averages from zero to about 45 feet above sea level. Durango is over 6000 feet above sea level. When driving home late at night the stars were brilliant. It was as if Heaven touched the earth.

Job, even in the midst of his tribulations, could still say, ***“Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens — what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.”*** Job 11:7-9 (NIV)

They taught us in HS science class that the sun is one million times bigger than the earth. We can however, take two coins and hold them up covering our eyes and make them bigger than the sun. We can take our problems and focus so intently on them that we can make them bigger than God. We can gaze into the eyes of the Creator and make Him bigger than our problems.

♪ *How great is our God? Sing with me how great is our God!*

Sing with me, how great, how great is our God?

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99. What Are You Worth?

The sixty trace elements in a human body are worth about one hundred and sixty-eight dollars. The value of human organs can be priceless to the recipient. That is why I signed the back of my driver’s license to be an organ donor.

One part of a human being that can’t be measured in monetary terms is the soul.

“What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” Matthew 10:27-28 (NIV)

Yesterday I saw news coverage of an event that has California officials baffled. Huge crowds of young people gathered on the beach to worship the Lord. They’re not sure if it’s legal or not and if so, how do they go about arresting them. The same youth plan another gathering in the next few days. They need our prayers.

As we strive to follow the guidelines set by officials and conform to the laws of the land, we can’t close our eyes to what happened almost two thousand years ago.

“Then someone came and said, ‘Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.’ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this Name,’ he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this Man’s blood.’ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!” Acts 5:25-29 (NIV)

100. Heavenly Returns

With the crash of the stock market in 1929 the world ended for many people. Traders jumped out of buildings. Many who once sold high dollar commodities now were selling apples on a street corner. Those who couldn't were in line at the sidewalk soup kitchens.

As I studied the different theories of the cause of the depression, I came away with the idea that the people no longer had confidence in financial institutions. They stopped buying into a failing economy.

I'm reminded of a parable from scripture.

And he told them this parable: The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" Luke 12:6-20 (NIV)

As our 2020 world faces unprecedented disease, poverty, violence, hatred, crime and rebellion, again we find the reason for it all in the Word.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." John 10:10 KJV) Thank the Lord for the rest of that verse!

"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."

When we accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, we invested our spirit, soul and body into His account. We will receive Heavenly Returns.

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101. Epiphany

Definition: The appearance or manifestation of a divine being. *Webster*

Most of us have probably seen a comedy routine of two boxers in the ring-- one is short and the other tall. The shorter boxer attacks the taller and he just puts his hand on the shorter guy's head. The little guy just swings in vain because he doesn't have the reach. After a while he tires out and can only try for a clinch. He just goes low and gets so close he can't get hit.

That's about the only way I can visualize what happened in Genesis 32:24-30 (NIV). ***So, Jacob was left alone, and a Man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the Man saw that He could not overpower him, He touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the Man. Then the Man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The Man asked him, "What is your name?" Jacob, he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But He replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then He blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."***

The Scripture says, ***"He could not overpower him"***. Hey, I mean this was God Almighty! I'm thinking the Lord saw He could not overpower Jacob's determination to be blessed. He even changed his name from "Mama's Boy" to "Prince." I want to be blessed of God! I wrestle with Him in prayer. I see Him face to face through His Word. I want Him to change the way I walk. I want Him to call me faithful.

One of the more recent expressions that have entered our language is “to think outside the box.” This has been defined as: *To think or behave in an unconventional way.* Television ads ask, “What do you have in your wallet?” This is followed by information of how to build up your financial portfolio.

This next statement is totally opposite of that plan:

“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.” Matthew 6:19-21

This is an interesting concept:

Cryonics (from Greek: κρύος kryos meaning 'cold') is the low-temperature freezing (usually at $-196\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ or $-320.8\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$ or 77.1 K) and storage of a human corpse, with the speculative hope that resurrection may be possible in the future. Wikipedia

I prefer this one:

“We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with Him in his resurrection.” Romans 6:4-5 (NIV)

Bookstores have whole sections of literature promoting *meditation*. These instruct the reader to take certain physical positions, usually sitting with legs crossed and hands resting on legs with palms upward. The participant then attempts to think good thoughts.

I like David’s method:

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” Psalm 1:1

103. Guess Who's Coming To DINNER?

This was a 1967 movie that was considered ground-breaking because it depicted a black man whose fiancée was a white woman.

A similar situation in Scripture occurred that was not fiction. If it were performed as a drama, the stage would be set up as a large dining room in a rich man's house.

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," He told him, and Matthew got up and followed Him. While Jesus was having DINNER at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:9-13 (NIV)

It's interesting that this passage is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. This man gave up a lucrative career to follow Jesus. Church tradition suggests that he became a missionary to many countries of Asia. His name in Hebrew is "Gift of God".

Jim Elliot was a missionary to the Auca Indians of Ecuador. He died at their hands as a martyr. He said, "*He is no fool who gives that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*"

"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" Revelation 19:9 (NIV)

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104. She Dug Her Heels In

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come:" Genesis 9:12 (NIV)

My niece, Charlene Board, is one of the historians of the Williams family. She told me that she has an old photo of her in the arms of her mother, standing with her grandmother, great grandmother and great-great grandmother. The last on the list was Jessie Ann Williams. Details are sketchy, but she was born around 1868. When her husband Joseph died, she moved in with her son Amos, my grandfather. She was known affectionately as *Little Granny*.

I have faint memories of her since she died when I was just a boy. One thing that stands out was her enjoyment of dipping snuff. She had an acorn with a matchstick sized twig stuck in a hole to form what looked like a mini-tootsie pop. She would put it in her mouth to moisten it and then roll it around in her snuff can. She walked around with it in the corner of her mouth until she went out on the porch and spit in the yard.

When they finally got electricity in the Devil's Pocket community, Grandpa ran wires throughout the house. Granny pitched a fit when she went into her tiny bedroom and saw that light fixture hanging from the ceiling. "I don't want that thing in here," she fumed. Grandpa told her he had to do every room while he was at it. She was cranky all day. She always went to bed and got up with the chickens. Grandpa had put a string on the pull chain of the light fixture and stretched it over and tied it to the headboard. She went in that evening and lit her coal oil lamp, undressed, blew out the lamp and climbed in bed. She didn't know that the family was all standing outside the door. Sure enough, about 15 minutes later a light shined through the crack at the bottom of the door. On, off, on, off, until she finally went to sleep. They never did have to put coal oil in that lamp again.

105. Spiritual Interpol

Up until the late 1800's solving crimes depended on eyewitnesses and circumstantial evidence. Then law enforcement discovered that fingerprints could prove that the accused was at the scene of the crime. In the 1900's an organization was formed to share criminal information such as fingerprints among its 193 member nations. It is called Interpol. If a crime is committed anywhere in the world and the criminal leaves a fingerprint, there's almost nowhere he can flee to and avoid detection.

Fingerprinting has also been used to solve missing person identities. No two people have the same fingerprint. God made us totally unique and different than anyone else. He made us in His image. We have fingers...God has fingers.

“When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.” Exodus 31:18 (NIV)

Every democracy in history has, to some degree, based their rules of order on this Divine Document. This nation that has *In God We Trust* stamped on every coin we mint has now voted to prohibit these Holy Words to be exhibited on government property. The matter is not settled. Court will convene.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Rev 20:11-15 (NIV)

I thank God my name is in the Book.

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106. Redemption Ticket

When we were still involved in missions, we had a small office set up on the Border. We were producing video teaching tapes as well as making trips into Mexico. One month we were running short on finances. We, of course, prayed about it. I decided to help the Lord out and began to look around for something to pawn. I hesitantly approached Deloris about her accordion. She agreed and I headed down to the pawn shop. I left with some money and a pawn ticket. The Lord was faithful, and I was soon able to redeem the accordion.

The Scriptures reveal a beautiful story in the book of *Ruth* of redemption. Boaz wanted to redeem the property that had once belonged to his relative Naomi. He had an interest in the land but mostly because he had fallen in love with Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth. He was in line to be the *kinsman-redeemer*, but there was one ahead of him. He turned down the deal because it would affect his current standing. Then, as they say, they got married and lived happily ever after. The family line would produce another Redeemer.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to REDEEM us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good. Titus 2:11-15 (NIV)

107. Fame Can Be Fleeting

In the late 1990's Deloris and I were on staff at International Bible College. Our home church was Destiny but representing the school we would occasionally visit other churches. One morning we decided to go to Cornerstone, pastored by John Hagee. We sat in the center row next to the aisle. During the preaching a camera was panning around the congregation and focusing on the listeners. Unknown to us, the camera focused on us. We were on national TV for about five seconds. There was no social media back then, but a couple days later we received some phone calls from friends telling us what happened.

In 1953 two friends had invited me to a night service in their little rural Nazarene church. As I sat there listening to the sermon, something happened that I only learned about later. ***"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry."*** Psalms 34:15 (KJV)

God's celestial camera focused on an eleven-year-old boy. When he cried out for salvation, he was forgiven and became righteous. We had an old family Bible at home, and I began to read it as often as I could. I found out what happened that night in heaven.

"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:10 (NIV)

The more I read the scripture, the more I found out what I had experienced that night. My name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life. I was promised and soon received the Holy Spirit. Plans were laid out for my mansion. I was fitted for robes and a crown. I found a good thing...a wife, still in love after 58 years. I received a call to preach and teach...and the list goes on. I was on national TV for 5 seconds. The blessings are for all eternity.

♪*I will sing of His love forever.*

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108. I'm the Greatest

So said Muhammad Ali and backed it up for quite a while in the boxing world. And then, like all athletes, age set in as well as illness. He was no longer *the Thrilla in Manila*. John Lennon of the Beatles said, "We're more popular than Jesus Christ." He was shot to death by John Chapman, one of his fans at age forty.

In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this for you." So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree.

Absalom sought to be the greatest king in in Israel. He was not the man chosen by God to rule. I remember in elementary school one of the favorite games the boys played was *King of the Hill*. A dirt pile in the corner of the school yard served as the battle ground. We learn from Adam that there is a desire *to be like God* -- to be the GREATEST! Even the disciples brought up the subject. This was the Lord's response:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:1-4 (NIV)

109. What's Holding the World Together?

According to one of my students when I was still teaching, the answer is easy: duct tape. He had ongoing projects featuring rolls of the stuff in a variety of colors. It first came out in the early 1900's. It's served as material for everything from wedding gowns to hand cuffs.

Since it's only been around for a little over a hundred years, there's bound to be something else holding the world together. We know that gravity keeps everything stuck to it, but how is everything orchestrated so that civilization survives?

This is really the easy answer:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things HOLD TOGETHER.”
Colossians 1:15-17 (NIV)

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110. Touch Not

It's been almost five years since I was part of pastoral team in a local church. I still have a heart for those ministers. As I was meditating on this in prayer, I became burdened for my active pastor brothers. We have read many times where *we are commanded to “lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.” Mark 16:17*

That was written almost 2000 years ago but it's still in effect. Now, these men and women in many areas of the country still can't have people in the church building. If they do, they have to tell folks only to come forward if they feel comfortable being prayed for.

Over fifty years ago we were doing missionary work in Sinaloa, Mexico. We had several churches started and quite a few converts. We began to teach the believers about receiving the Holy Spirit. Those who had come for salvation previously were reluctant to be prayed for to receive. The Casteel family, with whom we were working, along with ourselves, began to meet to pray about this. We found out that another sect in town was telling the people if the Americans prayed for them, they would become demon possessed.

Help Lord! One evening after preaching I invited the believers to remain seated and I began to pray from the pulpit. I noticed Sister Hermelinda's lips began to tremble. From where I stood, I shouted to her “receive!” She began to speak in a Heavenly language. This spread to others and several were filled that night. Our Mexican ministers saw this and were encouraged to pray for the believers and experienced the same results.

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.” Acts 10:44-46 (NIV)

“And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” Acts 19:11-12 (KJV)

The Lord is not limited to *social distancing!*

111. Case Dismissed

I'm thinking all of us have one or more kinds of TV programming that we favor. In law enforcement for me, it's Walker-Texas Ranger; for Deloris, it's Barney Fife. We both enjoy courtroom drama starring Perry Mason or Ben Matlock. They hold us in suspense until the last set of commercials is finally over and then the villain is revealed.

Such is not the case in the real life of the Christian. Our accuser is Satan. He is introduced in the book of Job and appears throughout Scripture with one purpose and that is to prove us guilty of whatever charges he can bring against us. His detectives have dug up evidence of our failures that can't be denied. The Judge has no choice but to consider us unfit to live. The wages of sin are death.

But then in steps our Lawyer. ***"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."*** 1 John 2:1-2 {KJV}

That word propitiation is not one we use in everyday English, so how does it apply to our case. He becomes the defendant, and, in this usage, He is saying to the Judge, "I have sacrificed My blood in place of the accused."
CASE DISMISSED!

The prosecutor, who later faces charges of "killing, stealing, destroying and lying," has to appear before this same Judge and is pronounced guilty.

"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down." Revelation 12:10 (NIV)

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112. Follow the Leader

This was one of the many playground games we enjoyed in elementary school. The leader would try to go fast and lead the rest through obstacles so that whoever couldn't follow would have to fall out. Whoever was left was the winner.

Graveyards around the world contain the remains of powerful leaders who promised their followers great rewards if they would follow them and take up their cause. Not even a single one of them remain today because they all ultimately had an appointment with death that they could not cancel.

Only One died and rose again and fulfills the promises He made to His people. Acts 3:24-26

"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'" Acts 3:24-26 (NIV)

When Paul wrote instructions to young Timothy 2000 years ago the Holy Spirit included them in the Scriptures we read today.

"But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses." 1 Timothy 6:11-12 (KJV)

113. Bible Translations

During my early years as a Christian the only Bible I knew was the King James Version first printed in 1611 A.D. To this day when I am searching for a passage, the verse comes to me from the KJV. I didn't know there was any other translation until I went to Bible College and discovered the Amplified Bible. With few resources available at the time in the Bible languages, it was very helpful in my studies. I now have a Bible program providing seventeen different translations.

One of them I couldn't read until I graduated from Spanish language school. From that time forward for 25 years it was the Bible version that I did most of my preaching from. I still quote from it daily, and until Corona Virus limited attendance, we went to our Spanish Language home church.

In prayer every day I pray the 23rd. Psalm in both languages. Today I paused at the first sentence:

Salmo 23:1 ***“Jehová es mi Pastor; nada me faltará.”***

(from RVR 1960 © 1960 Sociedades Biblicas en América Latina.)

I'm sure that you can figure out what the Holy Spirit is saying. *Jehovah is my Pastor; nothing I will lack.* Pastor Erik Leos is the pastor of our home church. He is a loving shepherd as well as a gifted preacher and teacher. If we had any special needs, he would do everything possible to help us. We have other pastors over us who would do the same. Yet there are times and circumstances beyond human ability. Thank the Lord for our heavenly Pastor.

♪ *In times like these you need a Savior. In times like these you need an anchor.*

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114. Compelling Love

“For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.” 2 Corinthians 5:14 (NIV)

Paul is teaching this church about the coming judgment and the need to reach out to the lost with the Gospel. The Greek word here for *compel* is *sunecho* which implies to press or urge. It has another interesting meaning found in Luke 4:38. (KJV)

“And He arose out of the synagogue and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her.”

The word ***taken*** is the same Greek word as ***compel***. Paul's message is that the call to take the ***Good News*** to a lost and dying world should burn within us like a raging fever. Jeremiah, in a moment of discouragement, was ready to quit preaching and just stay home.

“Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”

Jeremiah 20:9 (KJV). Then at the end of the Book ***“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns.”*** Revelation 19:11-12 (NIV)

♪ *And he's calling out to you and me, "Will you ride with me?"*
We say "Yes, yes Lord; We will ride with you"

115. A Worm on a Mission

Jonah was an enigma among the prophets. He had been used of God to bring messages to Israel early in his ministry. He was now older and had grown harsh regarding heathen nations. So, when God assigned him to go and prophesy to the city of Nineveh, he fled. When he booked passage, he was asked if his trip was business or pleasure. His response, "I'm running away from God."

Well his three-day vacation in the fish's belly affected him enough to repent and proceed to obey God. And sure enough, God had mercy on the repentant city. This caused him to say something fairly childish. I know from experience, because when I was about ten years old, I was being punished for something I did. I remember sitting in the corner wishing I would die, and they would be sorry then.

Well, Jonah's corner was a little trellis that he built as shade from the sun. Then the Lord caused a gourd plant to shoot up and make it nicer still. Jonah was happy but still angry. Then out of all the millions of worms, one wiggled over and cut down the gourd.

I think there is some Jonah in all of us. We watch the news and see our flag desecrated. Babies are still being aborted. And the world is like the people of Nineveh.

"But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left." Jonah 4:11 (NIV)

This is the only prophetic book that ends with a question. ***"Should I not be concerned about that great city?"*** Jonah 4:11. Is God concerned about this crazy world?

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

116. The Case of the Scarlet Cord

Israel's Mossad is the second largest spy agency in the world after America's CIA. That's amazing for a country less than one third the size of Louisiana. Spying is nothing new for the Jews. Right after crossing the Red Sea, Moses sent twelve men into Canaan to spy out the Promise Land. Ten of them turned out to be a bad choice, costing a forty-year delay in taking the land.

After Moses' death Joshua took over the leadership of the tribes and began the march to ultimate victory. The first city to be conquered was Jericho. It was highly fortified surrounded by a massive wall and a strong gate. The spies he sends into the city are being led by the Holy Spirit. They slip in and after finishing their assignment plan their escape. They go to Rahab the prostitute's house. She hides them and misleads the pursuers.

She is aware of the reputation of the God of Israel. She is drawn to Him and the Scriptures declare: ***"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."*** Hebrews 11:31 (NIV)

The arrangement was made to hang a Scarlet Cord that would stream down the wall of her house providing salvation from destruction.

♪ *A stream is flowing from Calvary. A stream is flowing that cleanses me. A stream is flowing from Calvary, A stream is flowing that sets me free.*

117. How Did I Get Here?

We've probably all heard a version of the story of the hunter who slipping through the woods comes up on a turtle sitting on top of a fence post. He stops and while he sets the turtle down on the ground says, "You didn't up there by yourself."

Our journey began when the ark settled down and the three families emerged to start human life over. Later we were separated by languages and scattered all over the planet.

Our most important journey began when we were born again. Here's where the Lord wants us to be.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" Eph. 2:4-6 (KJV)

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118. Have a Little Talk with the Devil

It's no great secret that we have all been tempted by the Devil. But we are not alone.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin." Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)

In Matthew 4 we have a detailed account of His temptations by the Devil. His response each time "It is written!" Finally, the third time:

"Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan!" Matthew 4:10 (NIV)

Here's a way we can follow up on that:

♪ *You will find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.*

119. Mending Broken Pieces

*Humpty dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again.*

I faintly remember having to learn this old English nursery rhyme early in elementary school. I never knew what the meaning was. Covid 19 has kept me home a lot and I have ended up doing a lot of research-- like *Humpty Dumpty*. I found all sorts of theories of why it was written. It seems no one is sure of its significance. While pondering why I was even drawn to this silly little rhyme, a passage of Scripture came to mind.

“When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time, this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!” For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times, it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.” Luke 8:27-29 (NIV)

This account is repeated in Mark and gives us a little more information about his former life.

“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” Mark 5:19 (NIV)

He had a home and family before he fell and his life was shattered, but the King of Kings put the pieces back together again.

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120. What Do You hear?

One of my favorite melodies is titled “The Sound of Silence.” It was written in 1963 by Paul Simon. It lends its notes to the acoustic guitar like few songs. Trying to trace the meaning of the lyrics can be a puzzle. Simon was only 23 when he wrote it and was caught up in the anti-war movement, but yet it doesn't clearly carry that message. When interviewed, he doesn't solve the mystery at all. It speaks of injustices that people see but don't respond to. One version is a moving tribute to fallen police officers.

It could serve as an anthem for churches without a vision for the lost.

“Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” John 4:35 (KJV)

When itinerating for missions' support, I looked for Bible events that could form a sermon that would stir people's heart to pray and give. One of my favorites centered around the four lepers who went into the Syrian camp and found it deserted. They began to eat and drink and trade their rags for robes and count the gold and silver. Then they stopped and received a missionary vision.

“Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.” 2 Kings 7:9 (KJV)

♪ Spread the gladness all around, Jesus Saves, Jesus saves!

121. He Wrote What?

I was on my way to a doctor's appointment and passed an old, rusty jalopy with faded paint. In large black letters painted on the side was "JESUS IS COMING SOON – ARE YOU READY? I cringed as I thought about this true message on such an ugly canvas. I continued on down the road still fuming. It was then that I sensed that Inner Voice speaking to me. The gist of the message was that there might be another old rusty jalopy with faded paint going down the road that needed to see those words. If they were written on the side of a 2020 Escalade, to that person it might have little meaning. I do a lot of repenting.

I got home later and went to my office, sat down and asked, "Okay Lord, what?" This passage came to mind:

"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again, he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." John 8:3-9 (KJV)

That simple message written in dirt sent the religious leader slinking away. I look forward to meeting this woman in Heaven and asking her what was written that day.

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122. Que Será, Será

This catchy tune was written in 1956 and was made popular by singer Doris Day. It has been used as a title for a book and a movie. It appears on restaurants, airplanes and racehorses. Though the words are Spanish and translated *Whatever will be, will be*, it's not used in proper Spanish.

The lyrics follow the life of a young girl as she grows up and has children of her own that ask questions about the future. The answer is always: who knows?

Psychics have websites, 800 phone numbers and myriad ways to make money off desperate people looking for answers about the future. Saul of Tarsus lay blinded on the road pleading for an answer to *Who are you, Lord*. When the answer came back "*Jesus*," the next question was, "*What would You have me do?*" The answer to that question was revealed to Ananias.

"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Acts 9:15 (NIV)

As Christians we find ourselves asking the Lord what He would have us to do? The bedrock answer is found in the Word.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:11-14 (NIV)

123. Forwarding Address

In the 25 years we were involved in missionary ministry we travelled much of the time. We lost count of how many places we lived in. We were not a part of a mission board, so our support came from several churches and individuals through the mail. Every time we moved to a different place we would have to arrange for our mail to be forwarded.

Even after moving our ministry to the USA, we moved a lot. Now our travelling days are over, and we have only one more move planned. Our next move is described in a beautiful brochure.

Meet our future Landlord. ***“In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”*** John 14:2 (KJV)

Here is a description of the property: ***“The Holy City, Jerusalem, shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, the great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”*** Revelation 21:1-11 (NIV)

A welcoming celebration is planned: ***“Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.”*** Revelation 19:9 (KJV)

This describes the Promise Center: ***“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”*** Revelation 21:4 (KJV)

I'm leaving instructions that my mail not be forwarded, I'll leave it for the next tenants.

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124. Ring Around the Collar

Growing up without A/C in the rural south produced a lot of sweat. Living on a dusty road added the second ingredient along with gravity to create a necklace of grime. This would become unattached and transferred to the nearest part of the garment I was wearing. It wasn't until 1971 that industry decided to wage a war against this social malady with the development of Whisk. Just pour it on and the ring disappears.

Sin left its stain on the human race. No one has ever escaped its hideous mark.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:24 (NIV)

Any attempt of redemption through human effort is futile. ***“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;”*** Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

Thankfully, we have a loving and reasonable Heavenly Father.

"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land.” Isaiah 1:18-19 (NIV)

♪ *What can wash away our sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus,*

125. Two Brothers

On December 17, 1903, an event took place that would tremendously affect human history. From a beach near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina two brothers launched a heavier-than-aircraft that traveled 120 feet at 6.8 miles per hour. I carry a photograph of the Wright brothers in my wallet. It's embossed on a credit card sized piece of plastic. It allows me to do the same thing that they did 117 years ago.

Unless you have had this experience it's hard to describe the feeling when your instructor climbs out of the right seat and says, give me three full stop takeoffs and landings. In the next five minutes you're climbing to pattern-altitude vividly realizing that you alone are responsible to get this thing back on the ground in one piece.

Physical conditions have prevented me from enjoying flight for several years now. Every time a plane flies over, I look up and bemoan the fact that it's not me. Friends have offered to take me up, but I no longer am able to do that. I am, however, looking forward to the most important flight of my life.

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 (NIV)

♪ *When I die, Hallelujah by and by, I'll fly away, fly away!*

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126. Scars for Scars

After almost twenty-five years of ministry in Latin America we were led to pastor what is now Family Worship Center in Leesville, Louisiana. We had been there about three years when I received an invitation to be a facilitator for a one-week outreach in Oakdale Federal Prison. It was led by Chuck Colson (convicted member of Richard Nixon's cabinet) and his Prison Fellowship Ministries team.

Not long afterward I was asked by the warden to minister every other Sunday afternoon to the Spanish speaking prisoners. So, after our services at FWC, I would drive the fifty miles to the prison and preach and drive back to Leesville for our Sunday night services. Did I mention I was a lot younger? We later were able to have one bi-lingual service a month with a team from our church.

One service vividly stands out in my memory. Several of our prison church leaders had arranged with the Chaplain to reserve the portable baptistery for a baptism service. This was like a large bathtub on wheels. I stood on the outside and the inmate would climb up the steps and then down into the tank and sit down. I would reach over to perform the baptism.

This was an all-male unit, so they just wore a pair of shorts. I stood there in awe as these shirtless men climbed those steps revealing bodies covered with scars from bullet and knife wounds.

I was reminded of a passage of scripture: ***“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.”*** John 20:26-28 (KJV)

127. Simon Who?

For some time, I have searched the Scriptures for people who are not well known but whom the Holy Spirit chose to include their names. One of those is Simon. There are, in fact, nine individuals with that name in the Word. There is one that caught my attention as I was following Jesus to Calvary. He is called Simon the Cyrene. He was a Jew from a region of North Africa that formed part of Libya. These Jews had been banished there by Ptolemy Soter, a companion and historian of Alexander the Great. They grew to great numbers and many ended up in Jerusalem. They had their own synagogue.

On this day Simon was standing by the *Via Dolorosa* as Jesus stumbled under the weight of the cross. ***“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.”*** Mark 15:21(NIV)

The question in my mind was, did Simon unwillingly carry the cross? Mark names two members of his family, his sons Alexander and Rufus. I found a reference to one of them in Romans 16:13.

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.”

Some scholars think he might have been part of those mentioned in Acts 11:19.

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.” I came away from this study convinced that Simon was honored to carry the cross of Jesus. I’m inspired anew to follow His instructions. ***“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*** Mark 16:24 (NIV)

128. Close Your Eyes... It's a Surprise!

Seems the older you get family surprise parties are harder to pull off. Since we became empty-nesters and everyone is scattered, it doesn't happen anymore. I learned to just tell Deloris to buy what she wants. I could never come up with what she needs or wants. I did score points when I bought her a robot vacuum cleaner. I really enjoy the mystery and intrigue found in this verse:

“However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’— but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” I Corinthians 2:9-10 (NIV)

The Jews had awaited the coming Messiah for centuries. When Jesus did not reveal Himself as Conqueror of the Roman Empire, He was rejected. Their eyes were closed to the far greater blessing accomplished on Calvary. In Acts chapter ten, the paper was torn off the salvation package as the first Gentiles were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. This was a complete surprise to Peter and the Jews who came to the party with him. The longer we serve Him, the more gifts we receive from our Heavenly Father. The last one on Earth is yet to come.

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NIV)

129. Twin Peaks

No! I'm not referring to the TV series of the early nineties. Jesus had returned to Nazareth where He had been brought up. He went to the synagogue and was asked to read the Scripture passage for that particular day.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

This was a direct quote of Isaiah 61:1-2 except for a phrase that is omitted in verse two: ***“and the day of vengeance of our God.”*** Anyone who lives near or has traveled in mountainous areas has experienced the *Twin Peaks* phenomenon. If you stand on ground level facing a mountain range, it's possible to look at two mountains that appear lined up and not realize there is a valley between them.

Isaiah was looking at the second range of prophesy when the Messiah will return to judge the world, and Jesus in Luke's Gospel is looking to bring salvation to the present world. He shocked the audience by declaring:

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

For the last two thousand years mankind has lived in this Valley of God's provision. The anointed Christ has proclaimed “Good News” to the world. I know because I heard it and accepted it. I'm looking toward that second mountain which is described like this:

“On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south...then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. Zechariah.” 14:4-5 (NIV)

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130. Hee Haw

When the show came out on June 15, 1969, my dad was ecstatic. A country music fan all his life, he was glued to the screen for every episode. For him one of the highlights of the program was when four of the characters sat around telling hard luck stories of life. They were punctuated by a little ditty I call “An Anthem to Misery.”
♫ *Gloom despair and agony on me, deep dark depression excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all.* Country music has always thrived on lost love, lost money, lost dog and lost pickup truck. I pulled up that segment this morning and was reminded of what would seem like a true-life hard luck story for many people.

Paul had been rescued by Roman soldiers from a murderous mob in Jerusalem. He was placed under arrest in Caesarea under false charges. After two years he appealed his case and was placed on a prison ship bound for Rome. On the way the ship-wrecked, and on shore he was snake bit. In Rome he was placed under house arrest chained to a Roman soldier.

In this setting, he wrote a letter to a church that was birthed in a jail house. The jailer and his family were among the first members. If I were writing a letter under those circumstances it would be filled with *gloom despair and agony on me.*

I read those four chapters this morning and was overwhelmed with their focus on one theme. Nineteen times he speaks of joy and rejoicing encouraging the reader ***“to press toward the mark!”***

131. Grandpa to The Rescue

Last year my granddaughter Rochelle and her husband were moving to another house. Deloris and I were helping with the transition. Cordero, the oldest son, was in school. That left Mason, then three, at home. At that age, although willing, he was mostly in the way and actually slowing down the packing.

As Patriarch of the clan with all the powers that go with that office, I made an executive decision. I would take my great-grandson to town for lunch at McDonalds. At that moment, I grew monumentally in his eyes.

The plan was two-fold. First, order his Kid Meal and sit down for lunch. Then he would be free to climb into the huge two-story play-kingdom and play to his heart's delight.

The food arrived and I started to load him in the highchair. Well, Mason is supersized himself, thanks to the Williams' genes. It was a tight squeeze, but mission accomplished.

Burger and fries consumed and included toy assembled, he was ready to explore play-land. I got behind him to lift him up, but now gravity was not my friend. I needed to enlist some help. The waitress came and still no success. She called the manager and after failure, she decided to take drastic measures. "Bring butter," she commanded. So after Mason was well anointed with butter, to everyone's relief he slipped out of the highchair. A quick cleanup and he was good to go.

I settled back down in my chair to read my newspaper. An occasional glance up saw that little monkey doing his thing.

After a while, he was out of sight and I couldn't see him anywhere. It was time to check this out. I walked around to the side and there on the top level he was staring down with that "deer in the headlights look."

"Let's go home Mason," I pleaded. Nothing! Then the Lord sent an angel in the form of a petite mother who climbed up and led Mason down.

"Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers." Proverbs 17:6 (KJV)

132. Stage Mother

A film is set to release this month based on this theme. Hollywood has indeed produced many such persons over its one hundred plus year history. They have ranged from a sincere desire to encourage their gifted child to criminal acts such the fraudulent payoffs to get them enrolled into select universities.

We have an example of this in Scripture.

“Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” “You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” Matthew 20:20-23 (NIV)

These two sons, James and John along with Peter, did form part of the “inner circle” that were mentioned at various times in the Gospels. James is believed to have been a missionary to Spain and to John was given the task of recording the mystery of the book of Revelation.

A beautiful example of a stage mother is found in 1 Samuel 15 (NIV) ***“ And she made a vow, saying, “O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head. As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.”***

133. The Stone Pile Revelation

Paul wrote half the *New Testament*. Over half of the book of Acts follows his ministry. There are two events that tie together, revealing the source of the truths that were revealed to him.

“They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city.” Acts 14:19-20 (NIV)

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.” 2 Corinthians 12:2-5 (NIV)

In Acts 14 we don't know how long Paul lay on the ground. It's conceivable that he was there quite some time. His companions had to make funeral arrangements. They had to make new plans of ministry now that their leader lay dead. Time wise this verse fits in with his description of being caught up to the third heaven. By the time he comes to, he has received divine revelation. The amazing thing is that he got up and went back into the city where he had been stoned.

What I came away with in this study is that there are times when we are serving the Lord in whatever capacity He has placed us and the stones of the very ones we tried to help, rain down upon us. We are flattened. But it's possible that the Lord is about to reveal Himself to us in a new way. That means we get up and go right back doing the same things that got us stoned.

134. Your Coverage Includes:

Last week I received a written summary of my insurance policy. All my benefits were spelled out to determine if there were any possible changes in my coverage.

Psalm 105 is a summary of Israel's coverage during the period of time they entered Egypt through their wandering in the desert to their possession of the Promised Land. As for any changes the Writer declares:

"I the Lord do not change." Malachi 3:6 (NIV)

The New Testament believer can read their full policy beginning with Matthew 1:1 through Revelation 22:21. I like the brief summary found in 2 Peter 1:2-4 (NIV)

"Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

♪ *Every promise in the Book is mine, every Scripture, every verse every line!*

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135. What's Your Number?

Several years ago, my glasses didn't seem strong enough for me to see clearly. After the exam I was sent to an ophthalmologist who told me I had cataracts and astigmatism. The surgery was a success and today I have 20-20 vision with no glasses needed.

The Lord impressed me this morning to have a Scriptural eye exam. I began to study the charts of His Word. This came to Abram to whom God revealed would have descendants that would number as the stars of the sky. He had a couple of problems, however. He had no son, he was a hundred, and his wife was ninety. This was the Lord's response:

"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1 (NIV)

Seventy times the Scripture refers to His people receiving visions that impacted the world. My prescription: "Lord help me to see beyond sickness, disease, violence, poverty, and famine. Help me to visualize Worldwide Revival and to fervently pray for it to happen soon."

♪ *Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full into His wonderful face,*

and the things of earth will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace.

136. Stormy Weather

Don't know why there's no sun, up in the sky. Stormy Weather, keeps raining all the time. Oh yeah life is bad. Ethel Waters first sang it at The Cotton Club in 1933. This could have been an anthem of the disciples.

"Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'" Matthew 8:23-25 (NIV)

To everyone who travels to the Holy Land, a highlight is getting into a boat moving out to the middle of that same sea as one of the ministers shares a devotional of the event. I was pondering this passage and could draw a parallel with what's happening in our world today.

The New Year began as usual with resolutions and hope for twelve months of hope and prosperity. Then on January 22, 2020 the first case of what had been a problem in faraway China, was diagnosed in the USA. Everything we took for granted came to a screeching halt. Restaurants, schools, and most shocking, our churches closed the doors. Our Christian leaders did a crash course of learning technology, and the Message was soon beaming into our homes. Prayer and Scripture study intensified. One verse stood out to me concerning the future.

"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:2-3 (KJV)

137. Fickle

All the dictionaries I referred to give about the same meaning to the word-- *Quickly changeable in loyalty, opinion, affection and behavior.* The word came to me as I was studying the Gospels. The same home town crowd was amazed when Jesus read the Scripture in Isaiah 61: "***The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...***" Luke describes what happens next:

"Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked." Luke 4:20 -22 (NIV)

Six verses later we read: "***All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.***"

Here in America the press constantly bombards us with the latest polls that bring out the *fickle* nature of people. James describes them this way:

"A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." James 1:8 (KJV)

Paul teaches us that a Christian should have a different mindset.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:58 (KJV)

When the Philippian jailer left home that day to take his shift, he had no idea that he would attempt suicide that night. At one point two prisoners were brought in who had already been severely whipped. They had many charges against them, so the jailer put them in a dark, damp inner cell and placed them in painful stocks. Then this happened:

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, ‘Don't harm yourself! We are all here!’ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.” Acts 16:25-34 (NIV)

Along with Lydia and her household, Paul had a good church in place. Years later he would write a powerful Epistle to that congregation from another prison. He was still rejoicing in the Lord.

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139. That's Normal?

Elijah is a fascinating Bible character. He is the nemesis of Ahab and Jezebel. He has been commissioned by God to rid the land of idolatrous worship. He delivers a message of judgment to Ahab. He then goes in hiding at the brook Cherith. Many miracles happen that we are all familiar with.

James makes a profound observation concerning Elijah.

“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again, he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.” James 5:8 (NIV)

The only difference that Scripture makes between Elijah and us are the assignments. Jesus has assigned us to pray for answers that Elijah didn't have to deal with. We are commanded to pray for the lost. We are constrained to pray for missionaries, ministers, family, friends and the list goes on. We are now focused on a worldwide pandemic. The key is consistency.

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!’” And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?’” Luke 18:1-7 (NIV)

That sounds normal to me.

“Elijah was afraid and ran for his life... He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.” 1 Kings 19:3-5 (NIV)

This man of God had prayed, and it didn't rain for three years. He prayed and fire fell from heaven. He prayed and a dead boy was raised from the dead. Now he is praying that he might die.

What happened to him? James writes one thing about him that is revealing.

“Elijah was a man just like us.” James 5:17 (NIV)

I know that I have looked for a broom tree at times in my life. I have asked the Lord, “What am I living for? I have failed at what I've tried to do. People have failed me and I didn't feel that I deserved it.” I would preach so great a sermon that I wanted to take notes on myself...hardly an amen.

One thing I've learned that Elijah decided-- sleep on it! Remember the old cliché, “The quickest way to a man's heart is through his stomach.” That's not a Scripture, but when he woke up, he smelled the aroma of fresh baked bread. I read into this passage (Williams translation) that the Lord is saying:

“Elijah take a vacation. I'm not through with you. I've got some kings for you to anoint. When you've finished all I have assigned you, I will send you a replacement.”

Elijah obeyed the Lord, and He sent a flaming chariot to pick him up. As he was going away, he tossed down his mantle for the next generation. I'm waiting for my chariot, and these devotionals are my mantle.

♪ *Swing low sweet chariot coming for to carrying me home.*

141. Guilty as Charged

Anyone who has children or been around them knows that when something bad happens, they each point the finger at the other. In all the courtroom dramas on TV, the person that the prosecutor is looking for is a witness who will point their finger at the defendant and say, "That's who did it!"

In the course of living for God, every Christian is going to do wrong things. I was in charge of the Evangelism Center in Guatemala City when Juan staggered in. He was dirty, his clothes were in rags, and he reeked of liquor. He blurted out his sad story. He had been serving the Lord. He was an air-traffic controller at the Guatemala airport. He was successful in his career and had a wife and three children. As he was going home from work, he met some former friends who talked him into going to a bar for a drink. When he got saved, he had been delivered from alcoholism. Now he was binge drinking on a daily basis. He lost his job and family and most tragically, his relationship with the Lord.

He knelt that day and cried out in repentance. Once again, he was delivered and restored. A few weeks later he came in dressed in a suit wearing a broad smile. He got back everything he lost and was involved in a local church. Satan had pointed his finger at Juan and screamed *guilty!* He had a good Lawyer.

I was reminded of this passage in Zachariah 3:1-7(NIV). ***"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?' Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Take off his filthy clothes.' Then he said to Joshua, 'See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.' The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua: 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.'"***

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142. Tums Won't Help.

Hank Williams (no relation) made a fortune with these lyrics: ♪*I tried so hard my dear to show that you're my every dream. Yet you're afraid each thing I do is just some evil scheme. A memory from your lonesome past keeps us so far apart. Why can't I free your doubtful mind and melt your cold, cold heart.*

Following his shameful affair with Bathsheba David wrote: ***"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."*** Psalms 51:10 (KJV)

Both writers described the feeling associated with a broken heart. Hank lost his lover and David lost his relationship with the Lord. Hank was howling at the moon and David was calling on the Creator. In real life Hank was writing about his ex-wife, Audrey, with whom he never reconciled. David repented and was restored as Israel's greatest King. I've had experiences in my walk when my heart would sink because I had failed the Lord. Thankfully, He would once again forgive, and I would sense what the two disciples felt as they walked along the road to Emmaus.

"And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?" Luke 24:28 (KJV)

My generation would sing along with Red Foley. ♪ ***Just a closer walk with Thee. Grant it Jesus is my plea. Daily walking close to Thee. Let it be dear Lord let it be.***

143. God is Greater Than Our Profile.

I took a workshop years ago on *Teaching an Elementary Class*. One of the points suggested was to give a simple profile test. This was to be given at the beginning of the school year.

The students would be given a blank sheet of paper and instructed to draw a picture of their house. They were to draw their family and pets standing in the front yard. Then they were to fill in details like flowers and trees as well as play equipment.

It was designed to show how the student perceived their home life. Right away the teacher would know if it was a large family or small. It would be obvious if it was a single parent family. The details would reveal a lot about whether the child was happy at home

Offender profiling is used extensively in police investigations. They are often able to determine probable guilt or innocence by studying the suspect's prior acts and linking them to the current charge.

One criminal that I've observed had already been sentenced to death. He was to die at the same time as two other accused. It took place almost two thousand years ago. The method of execution was crucifixion. The one in the middle, *The Creator of the Universe*. That thief recognized that and before the day was over, together they entered paradise. God is greater than our profile!

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144. What's in Your Wardrobe?

One of the interesting characters in the *Peanuts* comic strip is Pig-pen. When he appears, he's always in a cloud of dust with flies buzzing around his head. I never was able to figure out what his purpose was in the cartoon. His counterpart in Scripture would be the young man in Luke 15 who took his inheritance and squandered it in some sin resort of the day. We know he ended up in a pig pen.

When he finally decided he needed to head home to daddy he would have been a sad sight. The first thing the father did was to send his servants for clean clothes so he could get out of those filthy rags.

Some of us may have been raised in a Christian home but until we come to Jesus, ***"we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."*** Isaiah 64:6 (KJV) So all of us were at some point in life pig pens.

The world today is fashion obsessed. Here is what the Lord has to say about earthly trends: ***"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you."*** Matthew 6:28-30 (KJV)

145. He What?

On one occasion I had been invited to preach in a remote area of Central Guatemala. I caught a flight on one of the venerable old DC 3's. Since it was mainly for cargo, I had to sit on a pile of chicle sacks. After landing, I met the pastor at a small café where we ordered cokes and sat at an outside table. While there I saw one of the most incredible feats of strength in my entire life.

A man of the Cakchiquel tribe walked past us. He was like most, small of stature. On his back was a four-cylinder engine block. There was a thick strap attached to each side that went up and rested on his forehead. He held on with his hands and hunched over so that his back took some of the weight. I stared in unbelief as the pastor explained that those tribesmen were known for their ability to carry heavy loads.

This had returned to my memory as I meditated on the following passage in Isaiah fifty-three. All twelve verses are Messianic and detail the suffering of the Savior. I focused on verse twelve.

“Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he BORE the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.”

When He hung upon the cross, He BORE the sins of the entire human race, past, present and future. He displayed the most incredible strength in the history of the universe.

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146. Stupid!

Why would I put this word in a devotional? I was amazed that it was found in Scripture. It's found once in the New Testament. In 2 Timothy 2:23 (NIV) we read, ***“Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.”***

Two cases pop up in my memory. Dormitory discussions in which we young zealous students of the Word argued over baptismal formula, eternal security, the Godhead, *ad nauseum* (referring to something that has been done or repeated so often that it has become annoying or tiresome). The second case is ministers, missionaries sitting around the table in the cafeteria after a great service. The Great Tribulation is a favorite. Score: arguments 14,000,000,000, arguments won 0.

In Paul's epistle he has to deal with church members about legalism, the resurrection, the rapture, communion, etc. A passage that brings correction to the table:

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Phil 4:8 (KJV)

So why is this awful word in this devotion? Just trying to follow the advice of the wisest man in the Bible.

“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.” Proverbs 12:1 (NIV)

147. Omnipresent

This is a theological term describing one of the virtues of God. It means being everywhere at all times. I looked into the Scriptures for evidence. He came physically to this planet born of an unwed teenage girl in a drafty barn lying in a feed trough wrapped in strips of cloth that were evidence of a loving mother. Shepherds looked on as an angelic choir sang of His glory.

Twelve years later he stood in the midst of the foremost theologians of the day unfolding the mysteries of His place of origin. In Cana He performed His first miracle at a wedding. He mingled with ten lepers and boldly violated the laws of social distancing by declaring them healed.

He stepped out of a boat that had come through the perfect storm that normally would have sunk it until he commanded it to subside. He was met by a man filled with six thousand demons who at His command entered a herd of suicidal pigs. He was present at Jacob's well when a five-time divorcee came face to face with the Messiah. He was nailed to a cross with the burden of every sin committed from the beginning to the end of time.

What about here and now? ***"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."*** Hebrews 4:16 (KJV)

♪ *I sense an awesome moving of the Holy Spirit. And I see His countenance resting on your face. I know that there are angels hovering all around us. For the presence of the Lord is in this place. He is here, hallelujah. He is here, amen.*

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148. Peter Bares His Soul

An anguished father had brought his demon possessed son to Jesus for deliverance. Jesus said, "it will happen if you believe." The father's response expressed what I have experienced at times in my own life.

"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Mark 9:24 (NIV)

Paul's life and ministry have always inspired me to keep going. Peter seems to walk alongside me and this distraught father. He has a tendency to blurt out his feelings without much forethought. Boy I can relate to that. He jumped out of the boat forgetting about the law of gravity which at that point was stronger than his faith. In Matthew sixteen Peter hears Jesus tell him, ***"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."***

Six verses later, ***"Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*** Matthew 16:23 (NIV)

In Acts chapter two Peter preaches the first message in the Church age. He gives the invitation and three thousand are saved. In chapter ten he opens the Church doors and the Gentiles come pouring in. He went on to write two powerful epistles of the New Testament. How did Peter cope with these up and down blessings and corrections that the Lord piled on him? I think I found the answer in the following passage.

"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:66-69 (NIV)

I fall back on this passage whenever I can't figure out what the Lord is doing in my life.

149. What's a Robber to Do?

One of the childhood games that my friends and I would play was *Cops and Robbers*. The cops would make a badge out of cardboard and cover it with tinfoil and attach it with a safety pin. The robbers would dig out one of grandpa's old red bandanas to cover their face. Our weapon of choice was a wooden pistol with a clothes pin on the back of the grip. The bullets were strips of inner tubes cut about a half inch. The loot was usually cookies and Kool-Aid. This was all played out from scenes of the latest picture show.

Real life has been much the same as robbers would walk into a bank, jewelry store or Circle K with a mask on and gun in hand and everyone knows what they are and what they want: loot.

Now in 2020 everyone in the world who walks into one of those places is wearing a mask. There's no more *shock and awe* and if they are in Texas or one of many other states, the customer is likely carrying a pistol.

Who's been around for 2000 years?

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10 (NIV)

"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder." James 2:19 (NIV)

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150. Alliteration and Healing

This is not written to hinder anyone's faith, just something I found that provided an answer for me. Several years into ministry I was troubled by the fact that even though I was familiar with the truth that God is Healer, I didn't always see the result I was praying for. Sometimes the person died. I usually just figured it was a lack of faith on our part. I never could say and still can't that God doesn't heal every time we pray. What brought peace to me was I could see that heals in three different ways.

The first thing I saw was that He doesn't always heal instantly. Paul was used mightily in healing. However, he had a fellow worker that did not immediately respond to prayer. ***"Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus."*** II Timothy 4:20 (NIV)

Without going in depth on the subject, since this not the purpose of this post, here are the three "P's" of healing. God heals by His

Power – Miraculously

Physician – Through medicine and treatment

Promotion – Taking us home to heaven

I then believe He always heals.

151. Be Still!

I can remember many times as a hyper kid, one or the other of my parents issuing that stern warning. Years later, a father myself as well as a pastor, reminding my children that while I was preaching, they better *be still*.

My son Chris and I enjoyed hunting. Sometimes when nothing showed up near our blind, he would get fidgety. Then out of the corner of my eye I would see something coming. A harsh whisper was all it took especially if it was his turn to shoot first. That command put a lot of meat on the table.

In Scripture I read:

“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, do You not caret that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” Mark 4:37-39 (KJV)

In that little ship were men who had been raised on that sea. They had been through many storms but had never been at the point of death. It was *the perfect storm*. But it was no match for the Creator.

Last January 22, 2020 the clouds of the greatest storm the world has ever seen grew dark. The first case of Covid 19 was discovered in the USA. Hundreds of thousands have perished. We have had fire storms in the west, hurricanes in East and Gulf Coast. Political storms have divided the nation. The Church cries out to the Lord, help us!

“Be still, and know that I am God; “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

152. The Queen is Coming

In 1977 we were on our way home after ministering for several months in Spain. British airways overbooked our flight so they put us up overnight in the Penta Hotel in London. We checked in mid-afternoon and walked around to see some of the local sights.

After some fish and chips, we headed for our room since we had an early morning flight. I settled down for some British TV. There were only about seven channels. As I flipped from one to another, I was disappointed that they were all covering the same event. It happened to be the twenty-fifth Anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Well, for a fifth generation Texan, this was low on my hooray list.

I continued watch hoping it wouldn't last long. It was now after sundown and all the cameras were focused on a large field just outside of London. There was a huge mound of wood stacked up in the middle. Then the spectators surrounded the wood pile and lined the road that led to it. They all lit torches that shone brightly in the night. Then the cry went up, thousands of voices shouting, "The Queen is coming!" The Rolls Royce limousine pulled up near the mound of wood. The Queen was handed a torch and as the crowd shouted, "Long live the Queen!" she deftly tossed the torch on the wood and stepped back as it slowly began to burn. With the onlookers at a safe distance, the flames reached an accelerant in the center of the pile and the whole thing shot flames high into the sky. The announcers informed us that this was repeated throughout the UK. In a short time, the entire nation glowed in honor of her Majesty.

I jumped out of my chair shouting as I remembered: ♪ *The Market place is empty. No more traffic in the streets. All the builders' tools are silent. No more time to harvest wheat. Busy housewives cease their labors. In the courtroom no debate. Work on earth has been suspended as the King comes through the gate. The King is coming, the King is coming I just heard the trumpet sounding. And now His face I see. The King is coming, the King is coming. Praise God, He's coming for me.*

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153. It Began with Miriam

We were living in San Antonio and occasionally would take in some of many events held in that city. When I heard that *River Dance* was coming to town, my Celtic blood had me hurrying to buy tickets. Once in a while I still pull it up on U Tube.

"Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: Sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea." Exodus 15:20-21 (NIV). That took place after the Red Sea crashed down on the Egyptian army.

I was saved at age eleven in a Holiness Church. Dancing was not permitted in that denomination. The result was I never learned to dance. Eventually I began attending a *Full Gospel church* where folks made it a part of worship.

I enjoy reading about David's experience: ***"So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets."*** 2 Samuel 6:12-15 (NIV)

I never have danced very well, even before the Lord. Mostly I've danced at home. Today I only manage to tap my toes, but in my heart, I'm dancing with all my might.

154. Love It...Hate It

What could possibly evoke such opposite emotions? For a certain group of us the answer is easy: golf! I didn't pick up a club until I was in my forties. My son Chris kept bugging me to try it. Like everything else we did after he reached eleven years old, he crushed me. There seems to be a bug associated with the game that once bitten, there's no remedy.

Well, if I could just get a better driver I could add to my distance. A better putter would improve my performance on the greens. And so, it was for the next twenty years until an old knee injury forced me to sell my clubs and let Jack Nicklaus hit for me.

My goals weren't too high...just break a hundred. I'm not sure I ever did. There was one high point in my golfing career. I actually won a trophy which proudly sits on my bookcase. I entered a local tournament which grouped the players by age. I played with the 50 to 60-year-old hitters. At the end of the day I received my third-place trophy. I can't brag too much since there were only three in my group.

The one thing that I continue to strive for began when I was eleven years old.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:" 2 Timothy 4:7 (KJV)

As a participant, I will stand on the winner's podium. ***"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."*** 2 Timothy 4:8 (KJV)

I look forward to seeing you at the Crowning Ceremony.

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155. God's Girlfriend

I've been guilty of this and I've heard other Christians do the same thing. We've made statements about what's wrong with the church. Every married man reading this knows that while courting your wife, you would not tolerate anyone saying anything negative about her. When I realized this applies to those who would say anything critical of the one He has chosen to be His bride, I repented and vowed never to do that again.

I remind us of what He first said about her.

"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18 (KJV)

Paul reminds us of what was revealed to him.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." Ephesians 5:25-27 (KJV)

John the Revelator describes her beautifully'

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." Revelation 19:7-8 (NIV)

I remind myself frequently...She's God's Girlfriend!

156. Prayer, Seriously?

That's the question that ran through my mind as I sensed the Holy Spirit nudging me to write on this basic truth. In one form or other it's found more than 360 times in Scripture. Highly respected scholars have written volumes on the subject spanning hundreds of years. I was wondering what I could add in a few paragraphs? In answer I was reminded of a passage found in Peter's second epistle.

"So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have." 2 Peter 1:12 (NIV)

He, unapologetically, was saying, "This is nothing new." Jesus instructed the Apostles concerning the work of the Holy Spirit.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14:26 (KJV)

The final passage that He laid on my heart was:

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV)

So this is a simple reminder. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking and we'll keep receiving, we'll keep finding, and doors will keep opening.

157. You're Not from Here Are You?

I was asked that question a lot when we moved to Minnesota from Harper, Texas in 1997. I actually felt like I passed as a Minnesotan until I talked. It was a dead giveaway. We had moved there to be with our daughter and her family from whom we had been separated for many years.

I didn't have a church at first so I got a job selling furniture. One day a family came in to shop and one of their teenage daughters pleaded with her parents, "Please buy something, I love the way he talks!" When asked where Harper was, I would ask if they were country music fans. I was surprised at how many actually were. My stock answer was, "thirty two miles from Lukenbach." I think the population at the time was three. That is until Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson would show up for a concert and sing about the little town. When the performers left on Monday so did the people except for the three.

This reminded me of another small town.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be Ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Micah 5:2 (NIV)

Today that One who was born in a barn has billions of followers. More books have been written, more songs sang about Him than anyone in history, more of His Word published. I have never met Waylon Jennings but I do know Jesus as my personal Savior.

158. IBC

No, I'm not referring to the International Bank of Commerce. However for those of my FB friends who may not be aware, I'm talking about **International Bible College**. It was established by Englishman Leonard Coote, a missionary to Japan. Having to leave Japan at the beginning of World War II, he was led to San Antonio. He founded a local church. He called it Revival Temple (later renamed Destiny). He also had a vision for a missionary training center which he built on an eleven acre piece of property called Hallelujah Hill.

After the war he returned to Japan and established another IBC (**Ikoma Bible College**). He left the work in San Antonio in the hands of his son David and son-in-law John Bell.

The campus was also affectionately known as **International Bridal College**. Many students met there and fell in love and later married. Such was the case with Deloris and me.

The work eventually transitioned to IBC (**International Bible Church**). It is pastored by former student and later president of the college, David Cook.

The inspirational acronym has always been **Impossibilities Become Challenges**.

"Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Mark 10:27 (NIV)

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159. Idiomatic Expression

I had never heard of this term until I started studying Spanish. Idioms are the most difficult parts of speech to learn in a language. Imagine a foreigner listening to two Americans conversing: "Have you seen Joe?" "No, but I'll keep an eye out for him." "How do you remove the eye to look for someone?" wonders the foreigner?

I looked for an example in the Scripture. I found two in one verse.

"I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth." Job 19:20 (NIV)

Then there is what I call a *first cousin* to an idiomatic expression; a *simile*. It begins with *as* or *like*. For example in literature: *He was as fidgety as a cat on a hot tin roof*. One of my favorite verses is a *simile*.

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." Psalm 42:1 (NIV)

160. Superdome in the Desert

I remember taking my son Chris to a baseball game at the Astrodome. We were in awe that an entire field was under one roof. I learned later it was dwarfed in comparison with the Superdome in New Orleans. Besides enclosing more than 75,000 fans in heated and cooled comfort there were food vendors that could sell them meals and drinks during the game.

It, too, pales in comparison with what the Lord did in the Sinai Desert. Streaming across the highway opened up through the Red Sea were some two million Israelites. For the next forty years God covered them with a cloud and pillar of fire. The temperature remained at 72 degrees year in and year out.

When they woke up in the morning food for the day was at the entrance of their tent. Water for their thirst gushed out of a rock when spoken to. Children's clothes and sandals grew with them and never had to be replaced.

Worship took place in the center of the camp. There were choirs and musicians and dance teams to lead them in praise. Lambs were slain to cover their sins with blood.

When the Amalekites attacked, Moses sat on a rock with his arms lifted up and the enemy was defeated. A new word was added to the Hebrew dictionary; Jehovah-nissi (God is our banner).

Today the Lord has His people covered around the world.

“I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18 (KJV)

“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

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I61. Record Shattered

It was in August of 1954, a few weeks before school started back and my 13th birthday. My uncle, who was a plumber, called me one Friday and asked me to help him finish a job. That afternoon he connected the last pipe and told me to cover up the ditches and load up the tools. He sat in the shade and kept emptying bottles of “Lone Star” beer. At last we climbed in the work truck and started home. After driving a short ways he pulled over and said he was feeling dizzy and needed me to drive. I explained to him I didn't know how. He said, “No problem, I'll tell you what to do.” That was the extent of my Driver's Ed.

School started and my mother got a job at Nicks Café in Deweyville as a cook. So I drove her and went on to school. When I turned 16, I got a license. I eventually got a CDL and drove everything from a school bus to a Van Hool charter coach. When someone would complain about getting a ticket I would boastfully share with them I had never gotten one in over 60 years of driving.

Missionary Jerry Owens invited me to Ecuador to minister in several churches and do a leadership conference. I did a fabulous job. Jerry would email glowing reports to my home church in Louisiana. When I left the airport in Houston heading home, I was continually patting myself on the back. That is until I flew through “Mayberry” and “Barney Fife” turned on his red and blue lights. After 60 years, he had the audacity to give ME a ticket.

As I continued down the road fussing at the Lord for letting that happen He said, “Don't blame that officer, I recruited him to My “Pride Busters Squad” and he did a good job!

“To the arrogant I say, 'Boast no more.’” 'Psalm 75:4 (NIV)

162. Not Invited

Probably most of us have known of a child who has experienced this. Maybe because they are shy, or not cute, or disabled or in the eyes of other classmates just not “cool” when the invitations are passed out to a party they are “not invited.”

Maybe the mother of the child tries to compensate and prepares a party and sends the child’s classmates invitations to come. The party time rolls around and for the same reasons nobody comes.

There are a number of passages that I have memorized and make them part of my daily prayer time. One of them caught my attention this morning and even though I have prayed it 365 times this past year, I saw one verse in a new way.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Psalms 23:4 (NIV)

Regardless of our station in life or the world’s perception of us, we are invited to the party. The table is loaded down with Gifts and Heavenly Manna. **“Satan, you’re not invited!”**

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163. A Literary Orphan

You won’t find it used by Tom Clancy or John Grisham. In fact you never hear it in modern day language. However it appears prominently in the King James Version, in fact 1326 times. I can’t imagine what led to its demise in current usage.

The Lord introduces it in the first chapter of the Bible. ***“And God saw everything that he had made, and, Behold, it was very good.”*** Genesis 1:31 (KJV)

David reminds us of the Lord’s care for His people. ***“Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.”*** Psalm 33:18 (KJV)

Isaiah speaks to kings, rulers and politicians of their insignificance.

“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.” Isaiah 40:15 (KJV}

Matthew refers us to his prophecy concerning his miraculous birth.

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” Matthew 1:23 (KJV)

John announces our position in Christ. ***“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”*** 1 John 3:1 (KJV)

In Revelation he extends an invitation to come in and have a meal together.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Revelation 3:20 (KJV)

This then is our final song: .♪”Behold He comes, riding on the **clouds** Shining like the sun, at the trumpet's call Lift your voice, it's the year of Jubilee Out of Zion's hill, salvation comes.”

164. Time To Check The Mirror?

“As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man.” Proverbs.27:19

Most folks, when Solomon wrote this Proverb did not own a mirror. They would have to find a basin of water. It would have to be clean.

We, on the other hand, have mirrors everywhere and spend a certain amount of time every day looking at our appearance. Some time we have to clean those mirrors when they get dirty.

My prayer: “Lord, clean the dirt from the mirror of my heart.”

♪Search me, O Lord, and try this heart of mine,
Search me, and prove if I indeed am Thine.
Test by Thy Word, that never changed can be,
My strength of hope and living faith in Thee.”♪

165. Paul Clears the Walls

He is under house arrest chained to a Roman soldier. He is writing a letter to the church in Philippi among them a jailer and his family. He loves those people and says so in verse after verse. He begins chapter three with the word *finally*.

It seems he is reminiscing and describing what I like to think of as a crisis experience while sitting in his office seeking a closer walk with God. The walls are covered with diplomas and awards like we ministers like to hang up.

He was not a mixed blood Jew. His birth certificate declares he is a Hebrew of Hebrews. He is awarded for being a Pharisee. He received his doctorate from the great theologian Gamaliel. He was a noted persecutor of heretics.

In desperation he whirls around and begins pulling them off the wall tossing them in the rubbish can. Why? He answers in verse ten.

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.” Philippians 3:10 NIV

I confess. I’ve still got a few things hanging on the wall, but the day’s not over yet!

166. Two Types of Stones...Used and Unused

Of the many times stones that are mentioned in Scripture, I was drawn to two passages that set the tone for the thought the Lord quickened to my heart as we arrive at the last morning of an incredible year.

“And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had...and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.” 1 Samuel 17:40 (KJV)

The stones that David selected had a specific purpose. They were carefully chosen to defeat an enemy.

The next stones were picked up at random by a mob bent on killing a woman. They not only wanted to take her life, they wanted to accuse Jesus of disobeying the law.

“So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone and the woman standing in the midst”. John 8:7-9 (KJV)

The next sounds were *thud, thud, thud*, as one stone after the other hit the ground. The crowd slinked away red faced and smitten by guilt. Those unused stones lay in mute testimony to the grace of God.

“And Jesus said unto her, neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” John 8:11 (KJV)

167. The Power of Worship

After several months of ministry in Mexico we were looking forward to the Missions Conference hosted by Pastor John Bell and Revival Temple in San Antonio. It was also a time of reunion with our fellow missionaries.

The missionaries were invited to the platform to be introduced to the congregation. This was followed by the singing of Praise choruses. It was during this time that the Holy Spirit began to move and everyone was caught up in the moment and shifted from singing a specific chorus to wave after wave of lifting up our voices in spontaneous worship.

I threw up my hands and heard a faint ripping sound and felt a rush of air from the AC in an area from my right knee upward. In those days everyone wore a suit. Mine was a little threadbare and gave way to the strain I placed on it. I glanced around and thankfully all eyes were looking toward Heaven. I slipped out of my coat and covered up the open space and eased out of the nearest exit.

I jumped in my car and headed for our motel room. Fortunately I had brought another suit and did a quick change. Returning to church I peeked in that same exit. Worship was still going strong as I returned to the platform. Following the service, thankfully, the only one who noticed the change was Deloris. Such was The Power of Worship.

168. Life

One of the most memorable lines in movie history is uttered by the mentally challenged character Forrest Gump. *“Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re going to get next.”* That of course is Hollywood’s take on the subject of life.

Our founding fathers wrote. "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" is a well-known phrase in the United States Declaration of Independence. The phrase gives three examples of the unalienable rights which the Declaration says have been given to all humans by their creator, and which governments are created to protect. Like the other principles in the Declaration of Independence, this phrase is not legally binding, but has been widely referenced and seen as an inspiration for the basis of government.

Countless soldiers, throughout American history and to this day, have served to protect the right to life. Many have given their life to protect that right. Today we are the freest nation in the world that caravans of thousands risk their lives to enter.

The One who can absolutely deliver on that promise proclaimed, ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”*** John 14:6 (KJV) He also said, ***“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*** John 10:10 (KJV) The seal to those promises is found in the same document, ***“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”*** Matthew 24:35 (KJV)

169. Vision and Provision

Over 60 years ago I preached my first message. I was senior pastor of several churches over the years. When January would roll around I would cast a VISION for the new year. This has been a common practice for most pastors I have known. Our favorite passage has been: ***“Write the VISION and make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it.”*** Hab. 2:2 (NKJV)

Time after time I have seen this verse fulfilled in churches around the world. In my early years a congregation of a few hundred was considered large. Many today have grown to tens of thousands.

This was true at the beginning of 2020. In thirty days the doors to every church was closed. The VISION remained the same: take the Gospel around the world. Pastors and congregations went to their knees. The verse of the hour was now: ***“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*** 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

The PROVISION was the internet and video cameras. Facebook became a venue for fellowship. Friendships that were dormant now came alive and reached around the planet. Now 2021 is a few days old. I am challenged by the words of Paul, ***“Whereupon I was not disobedient unto the heavenly VISION:”*** Acts 26:19

170. Two Cajun Heroes

Though I'm a fifth-generation Texan, I lived more than 20 years in Louisiana. My mother was from the Pelican State. Most of our missionary support came from those generous folks.

Rich in folklore, no two individuals are more famous than Boudreaux and Thibodeaux. From early on in my travels, I heard many stories about their adventures.

During this time of home confinement I spend a lot of time writing. Last night, for some unknown reason, I created a story about those two gentlemen that might have actually happened.

I imagined them as seniors in high school. Being rice farm boys they took Ag classes. Their final year required them to raise a farm animal for market. Well, Boudreaux decided to raise a hog since pork was a favorite meat with his family. Now Thibodeaux, since they had a small pond on their land, decided to raise an alligator. He would sell the hide and they would eat the meat.

Now the school year was coming to an end and their projects would be harvested. One morning Boudreaux saw Thibodeaux frantically running around in a state of shock. Well, Boudreaux caught up with him and asked him what was wrong. "Oh, it's sad Boudreaux," he blurted out. "My homework ate my dog!"

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Proverbs 17:22 (KJV)