

CHRISTIAN RESOURCES: The Church & Christian Stories

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1. THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH:

Belongs to God

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim. 3:15)

The body of Christ

Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (Eph 1:23)

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: (Col 1:24)

Christ, the foundation-stone of

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 3:11)

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; (Eph 2:20)

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2:4-5)

Christ, the head of

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, (Eph 1:22)

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. (Eph. 5:23)

Loved by Christ

I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. (Song 7:10)

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (Eph 5:25)

Purchased by the blood of Christ

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (Eph 5:25)

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (Heb 9:12)

Sanctified and cleansed by Christ

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:11)

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:26-27)

Subject to Christ

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. (Rom. 7:4)

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Eph 5:24)

The object of the grace of God

I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. (Isa 27:3)

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; (2 Cor 8:1)

Displays the wisdom of God

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, (Eph 3:10)

Shows forth the praises of God

The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord. (Isa 60:6)

God defends

For the Lord is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. (Ps 89:18)

And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. (Isa 4:5)

But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. (Isa. 49:25)

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt 16:18)

God provides ministers for

And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. (Jer 3:15)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (Eph 4:11-12)

Glory to be ascribed to God by

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Eph 3:21)

Elect

The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son. (1 Pet 5:13)

Glorious

The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. (Ps 45:13)

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:27)

Clothed in righteousness

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. (Rev 19:8)

Believers continually added to, by the Lord

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. (Acts 2:27)

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) (Acts 5:14)

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. (Acts 11:24)

Unity of

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Rom. 12:5)

For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

(1 Cor 10:17)

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28)

Saints baptised into, by one Spirit

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

Ministers commanded to feed

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Is edified by the word

He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. (1 Cor. 14:4)

Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. (1 Cor.14:13)

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

The wicked persecute

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. (Acts 8:1-3)

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us;

and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: (1 Thess. 2:14-15)

Not to be despised

What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? what shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

(1 Cor. 11:22)

Defiling of, will be punished

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy;

for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. (1 Cor. 3:17)

Extent of, predicted

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. (Isa 2:2)

Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it. (Ezek. 17:22-24)

Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. (Dan. 2:34-35)

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14)

THE EXCELLENCY & GLORY OF THE CHURCH

Derived from God

In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, (Isa. 28:5)

Derived from Christ

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. (Isa. 60:1)

And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Luke 2:34)

Result from the favour of God

Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. (Isa. 43:4)

God delights in

So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. (Psa. 45:11)
Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. (Isa. 62:3-5)

Saints delight in

That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. (Isa. 66:11)
Excellency and Glory of the Church: Consist in its:

Being the seat of God's worship

Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. (Psa. 96:6)

Being the temple of God

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. (1 Cor. 3:16-17)

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (Eph. 2:21-22)

Being the body of Christ

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (Eph. 1:22-23)

Being the bride of Christ

The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.

She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework:

the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. (Psa. 45:13-14)

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come,

and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. (Rev. 19:7-8)

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21:2)

Excellency and Glory of the Church: Consist in its:

Being established

As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God:

God will establish it for ever. Selah. (Psa. 48:8)

Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. (Isa. 33:20)

Eminent position

Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion,

on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. (Psa. 48:2)

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. (Isa. 2:2)

Graces of character

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. (Songs 2:14)

Perfection of beauty

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. (Psa. 50:2)

Members being righteous

Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever,

the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. (Isa. 60:21)

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white:

for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. (Rev. 19:8)

Strength and defence

Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. (Psa. 48:12-13)

Sanctification

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:26-27)

Augmented by increase of its members

Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. (Isa. 49:18)

The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee;

The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (Isa. 60:13-14) (see: Isa. 60:4-14)

Are abundant

That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. (Isa. 66:11)

Sin obscures

Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment. All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth? (Lam 2:14-15)

CHURCH TITLES

Assembly of the saints

God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. (Ps 89:7)

Assembly of the upright

Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. (Ps 111:1)

Body of Christ

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (Eph 1:22-23)

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: (Col 1:24)

Branch of God's planting

Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. (Isa 60:21)

Bride of Christ

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. (Rev 21:9)

Church of God

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Church of the Living God

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim 3:15)

Church of the first-born

To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, (Heb 12:23)

City of the Living God

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (Heb 12:22)

Congregation of saints

Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. (Ps 149:1)

Congregation of the Lord's poor O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever. (Ps 74:19)

Dove

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. (Songs 2:14)

I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. (Songs 5:2)

Family in heaven and earth

Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, (Eph 3:15)

Flock of God

I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. (Eze 34:15)
Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; (1 Pet 5:2)

Fold of Christ

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (John 10:16)

General assembly of the first-born

To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, (Heb. 12:23)

Golden candlestick

The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches:
and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. (Rev 1:20)

God's building

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. (1 Cor 3:9)

God's husbandry

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. (1 Cor 3:9)

God's heritage

I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. (Joel 3:2)

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. (1 Pet 5:3)

Habitation of God

In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (Eph 2:22)

Heavenly of Jerusalem

But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. (Gal. 4:26)

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (Heb 12:22)

Holy city

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21:2)

Holy mountain

Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain. (Zech. 8:3)

Holy hill

Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? (Psa. 15:1)

House of God

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim 3:15)

And having an high priest over the house of God; (Heb. 10:21)

House of the God of Jacob

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isa. 2:3)

House of Christ

But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. (Heb. 3:6)

Household of God

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; (Eph. 2:19)

Inheritance

Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever. (Ps 28:9)

Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance. (Isa. 19:25)

Israel of God

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. (Gal. 6:16)

King's daughter

The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. (Psa. 45:13)

Lamb's wife

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. (Rev. 21:9)

Lot of God's inheritance

For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. (Deut. 32:9)

Mount Zion

Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. (Psa. 2:6)

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (Heb. 12:22)

Mountain of the Lord's house

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. (Isa 2:2)

New Jerusalem

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21:2)

Pillar and ground of the truth

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim. 3:15)

Sanctuary of God

Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. (Ps 114:2)

Spiritual house

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2:5)

Spouse of Christ

A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. (Song 4:12)

I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;

I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk:

eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. (Song 5:1)

Sought out, a city not forsaken

And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord:

and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken. (Isa. 62:12)

Temple of God

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy;

for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. (1 Cor. 3:16-17)

Temple of the Living God

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God;

as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God,

and they shall be my people. (2 Cor. 6:16)

Vineyard

Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot,

they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. (Jer. 12:10)

They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. (Matt. 21:41)

FAMOUS QUOTES: (CHURCH)

Churchgoers are like coals in a fire. When they cling together, they keep the flame aglow; when they separate, they die out. (Billy Graham)

One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organizations do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always. (A. W. Tozer)

The root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has suffered, has been because of the effort of men to earn, rather than receive their salvation; and the reason preaching is so commonly ineffective is, that it often calls on people to work for God rather than letting God work through them. (John Ruskin)

Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man. (Dwight L. Moody)

Hypocrites in the Church? Yes, and in the lodge and at home. Don't hunt through the Church for a hypocrite. God home and look in the mirror. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less. (Billy Sunday)

One of the special marks of the Holy Ghost in the Apostolic Church was the spirit of boldness. (A.B. Simpson)

"An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others." (A.W. Tozer)

2. INTERVIEW ON LEADERSHIP

RAVI ZACHARIAS

April 2005 interview for a leadership class at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte, NC).

Major John Carter (Salvation Army): In our leadership class, Dr. Zacharias, we discussed metaphors or images which guide leaders. Do you have a metaphor or image which has guided you in your life?

Ravi Zacharias: I think the best description I would give is that of a “privileged servant.” That would be the best description. There are different types, of course, but the Son of Man came to seek and to serve. I remember a number of years ago being a part of a conference in Wales where the theme on Christ was “The Servant King.” If the King Himself came as a servant and to serve, then that should be the model we have for ourselves. So I see it as a privileged servant. Coming from the East, where we had trusted, household help, trusted servants in the home, my father would trust them with the entire household, the children, etc., doing all types of things. This is our role, being a real servant of the King.

JC: That’s a wonderful metaphor and image of what we should think of, when thinking of our role, in Christianity. What biblical leaders are most important to you, perhaps in defining your own leadership?

RZ: There are several of them actually. In the earliest days, when I first looked at my calling, Jeremiah was the one, as the weeping prophet. The one who had such a tender heart towards so many things and yet had to be taken into such tough situations. One of the things God has fashioned me with is a tender heart. I have never been able to deny this or speak in laudable terms or in less than laudable terms than just to tell you the way I am or who I am. When I see a need, my heart is touched. I think that comes through my mother, who was a very tenderhearted woman. Looking at Jeremiah and the demands God placed on him, with all of the questions that he had, he was always raising questions before God, Why, why, why? And yet he had such a tender heart. Being told at one point that he was not going to be able to marry, and here was a man that needed that type of support, but didn’t have it.

Then, as time went on, because of the reluctance in my own heart, I would say Moses became a model for me: “Here I am, send Aaron.” I always felt unprepared and ill-prepared for this. I’m not comfortable in front of people. I do not like the attention that it brings. I love my anonymity. I’m not necessarily comfortable as a speaker; I’m more comfortable writing. I do not like leaving home and yet half of my life is spent on the road. I would rather step back and let somebody else do it in the forefront, so Moses became that model leader that I looked at. I could see why Moses questioned whether or not he should go and whether or not he felt prepared.

But in the last few years, I think the one who has best represented my calling is the apostle Paul. Abnormally born as it were, wrenched from the womb (in terms of calling), the convergence of various cultures into his life—the Greek, the Hebrew, the Roman, and now speaking to the Christian. The one who was a traveling missionary; the one who reasoned with the Epicureans and the Athenians. His apologetic especially given to Felix, is, I think, absolutely marvelous. He reasoned with Felix of righteousness and self-control and the things to come—the judgment and points of relevance, points of reference, points of disturbance—which is what apologetics is all about. So I would say in these last few years of my ministry, Paul has become that person.

JC: Are there any leaders outside of the Bible or church that have influenced you in a specific way?

RZ: Yes. They do in terms of their writing. I love reading some of the great authors of our time. I think John Piper is clearly one of my favorites. He plumbs the depths of the Scriptures and keeps God always as God before us and we as his creation. English writers have also helped me greatly. In terms of leadership, I have learned a lot from the life of a man like Joseph Stowell, [former] president of Moody. I’m just a few months younger than he is, but Joseph has modeled a lot for me. My pastors I worked under while I was a young man. My professors were very influential in my life in the early days—people like Norm Geisler, his impact on me. And prior to that in my undergraduate studies, from a methodology point of view, there were people like John Montgomery in the early days. In terms of the leadership model, I also learned by observing fine pastoral men. Going back to India, just after my conversion, there was a man named Sam Kamaleson who became the vice president of

World Vision. He led their pastoral conferences. There was John Tiebe, who was a Canadian and was a Youth for Christ Director in Delhi under whose watch I really came to know Christ. There was Sam Wolgemuth, who was also the great Youth for Christ International Director. In reference to these men, there's something you borrow, not always specific, but an impression that is left in your mind. That impression begins to grow, nurtured by your reading and your studies. Observing the kind of men I worked under, they left me with this impression and a desire to be like them.

JC: In our leadership class, we discussed the paradigm from Jeremiah in the third chapter that related to calling, character, competence. We then we added a fourth word that could also be included, which was community. Dr. Zacharias, do you feel called to do this type of work?

RZ: Absolutely. And I don't use that word lightly. Yesterday, as I was driving my wife to the airport (she was going to see her father who is not well), I said to her, "You know, if it weren't for the call of God, this is not what I would do." It demands a type of mental mindset, especially the travel side of it. It takes its toll physically and emotionally. I've never wanted to be away from my wife and kids for any period of time, and yet that's what I have to do in my itinerant world. I think to know that you are called is a seal within your heart. I might also add—this is one thing that is not stressed for many who go into the ministry at this time. Today it is almost a manufactured profession. John Stott's comment years ago was very appropriate when he said that the pastor's study is replaced by the terminology "pastor's office." He said the study is where you learned and understood and heard from God and then went and spoke to the people. The office is where you manage a group of people. And without pushing it too far, the point is still well taken.

A calling is a beckoning. It is something like Samuel Wesley dying and telling his son: it's that inner witness. There is something in your heart that God seals, and when I look at the way it has happened, the steps one after another, I could never have engineered any thing like this. I wouldn't have wanted to or had the capacity to. It's the calling of God that prepares your heart and prepares the place for your heart. No doubt, I am a hundred percent sure in my heart that God's calling is on my life to do this work of a Christian apologist.

JC: How important do you feel character is in the realm of leadership?

RZ: Definitive. I think if character is not there, you are not only destroying the role that you are called to, but the message that you are carrying. You are in effect becoming a counterpoint to what it is you are propagating. When I think of character, I think of not only behavior, I also think of motive. Motive is key, that which drives a person to do this.

You see, the pulpit can become quite the show window for a person and it can become a big ego thing. You see it happening again and again, much more than you would want to or even thought it would happen. When I think of character, I just don't think of obedience or of simply being aligned with the claims of God upon your life. I think of it as the very motive: What it is that drives you to serve and do what it is that you are doing?

I really think that today, as Christian apologists, that the biggest challenge to the faith is not an intellectual question. In fact, I have not heard an intellectual question to the faith that has disturbed me. I am more convinced than ever of the message of the Gospel. But the biggest challenge to the Christian faith is this: If the message that we have lays claim to a supernatural regeneration, then why is it that we do not see that regeneration more often? No other religion claims a supernatural regeneration. They may claim ethics and morality. Hinduism does. But we are the only ones who claim a new birth. Born of the Holy Spirit, our hungers have changed, our disciplines have changed, our behavior has changed. If it is a supernaturally engendered thing, why do we not see it more often? And if that is true of the common person in conversion, how much more true it must be of ones in leadership. So I believe character is essential, and without that, you cannot serve.

JC: Where does competence play out in this area of leadership? You've talked about the calling, you've talked about the character formation that needs to be in place. What about the competence level of leadership?

RZ: This obviously is very important. I think Billy Graham made a very simple statement years ago when he said it was a great day in his life when he learned that God can use good organization. We sometimes are haphazard. Sometimes we are ill-equipped. Sometimes we are ragged in our planning and doing. Competence is very important, especially in the gifted situation. You have the calling to be

an expositor of the Gospel. You have that gift within you; it is there. The competence is shown by somebody who works at what it is that he is gifted and called to do. If a leader is not competent, many things will fall by the wayside. In the organization that he works with, there will be ripple effects of failure. The disciplines that are needed for sermon preparation and delivery will be taken for granted.

I think this whole idea of organization building—of the process that has to be taken on when you are moving from point A to point B—the vision and the passion in you wants to take you in that direction. However, the passion and the end will not automatically come together because it takes competence to get you there. Competence is a big word. It is important. I almost want to nuance it with the idea of giftedness because sometimes you can teach a lot of skills on exposition but a person may not have the competence or the giftedness to do it. Therefore, it is very important to have that.

JC: We added a word: community. We discussed the importance of leadership in the community that a person is engaged in and the type of impact that is needed in order to make change possible. Do you see community as being an important part of leadership?

RZ: Very important. I am more and more convinced, as the seventies and eighties have brought to our attention, you cannot have lone horses out there. There are dangers to it. That's one of the reasons why our organization is a team. It would have been very comfortable in a self-serving way to be the lone member of this organization and carry on with all of the privacy and all of the privilege of funding, etc. and keep going that way, but I never wanted it that way. I keep telling members who join the team: "You need to be part of a community. There is a fraternity that we all must have. Fire begets fire. Iron sharpens iron." And not only that, if the church is a community, then how can you in your own life not be part of one and expect to build community while you yourself are in isolation? Many entailments come from the concept of community.

In this postmodern era, one of the few redeeming factors is that there is still hunger for community. It is important that we understand how God has so fashioned us. The starting point of good apologetics is Trinitarian, and God Himself is a being in relationship. He has fine tuned us that way. So community is an essential part of what I do as a leader and what I do in my leadership.

JC: That is so very true. You spoke about your calling, and this is a personal question: Was there anything that came as a confirmation of your calling to do this type of work more than anything else?

RZ: Yes, there were several things. Most important are the people God brings into your life. John Stott played that early role when I was looking for a seminary and he directed my paths to Trinity. It became the school where I needed to be and with members of the faculty: Walt Kaiser, J.I. Packer, John R.W. Stott, John Montgomery, Norm Geisler, John Gerstner, Carl Henry, and Kenneth Kantzer. There were some fine men and women teaching in that seminary at that time. That was the first thing; God took me there.

But before RZIM was formed, I was a professor at Nyack, the Alliance seminary, and I had just spoken for Billy Graham in Amsterdam in 1983. I was flying back from there and I thought to myself, Apologetics... How desperately it is needed. All of my evangelism, as I heard it then, was geared to the unhappy pagan, as it were. And I thought, What about the happy pagan? What about the person who has questions and feels no need? What about that type of person? They are more lost in a sense, and desperately in need of finding the Savior.

I wanted to start an organization and I said to Margie, I wish we had \$50,000 to get a ministry like this going. She sat back in her seat and chuckled and said, "That's a lot of money." I was a seminary professor. I said, "If God were to bring that in, I would build an organization to reach the thinker and train men and women to do Christian apologetics all over the globe and to do it well." That was in August. I came back and resigned. I gave one year's notice, really believing that the Lord was leading us. She was uneasy with this. I was uneasy too, and we made one agreement: We would not tell anybody what we were thinking.

In November of that year, two months after that, I was speaking in Ohio to three hundred laymen, and after my last message I made this comment: "As you are driving back to the airport, would one of you in each car pray for God's leading in my life? I am seeking Him and his wisdom in a certain matter. I cannot tell you what it is, just pray for us." They did not even know that I had resigned from the seminary, effective one year after that. I went back to my room and picked up our bags. Margie and I were walking out, and there was a man standing there. He said, "Can I talk to you for a minute?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I don't know what it is you are seeking God for, but I went back to

my room and got on my knees and said, 'God, what is it that that young couple is seeking wisdom for? Is there a role you want me to play?'" The man said, "I have no idea what it is you are seeking wisdom for, but I just got off my knees with God impressing me to give you a check for \$50,000." I thought to myself, This is unbelievable. I mean, I have never received anything like that in my life. I looked at him and said, "Sir, I don't even know you." He said, "I'm going to trust you." I said, "You know, that is a lot of money to take from a stranger. I cannot do it. But if you tell me where you live, I will fly in sometime in the next two months to see you. We can talk, and then if it is still on your heart, we can move forward with that." He said, "You're a busy man. I have a plane. Tell me where you live; I'll fly in to see you." And he flew to New York where we lived, to White Plains. My wife and I shared with him the vision to reach the thinker and he had tears in his eyes. He said, "I'm not an educated man, but I know how to make money and God has blessed me. You stay faithful and you stay honorable. I'll take care of you. I'll support your ministry because God has his hand on your life and you are reaching a segment of society that needs to be reached." That was 1983. In January, we called together fifty friends, and this ministry was born in August of 1984. That was just one link, but there were a series of links from John Stott directing me to the seminary to the man, Mr. D.D. Davis. He passed away very suddenly two years ago. Also, the wife God gave me, who affirmed and reassured me. There are so many things to affirm that this was of God.

JC: That is quite a remarkable story. Here is an interesting question: Is there a relationship between your conversion and your call that is more than just incidental?

RZ: I think to me there is a very clear relationship. Sometimes it may not always be that evident. God raised Moses in a palace in order to use him in a desert. He raised Joseph in a desert in order to use him in a palace. God always works in some marvelous and mysterious ways. Although that theme in many ways is a bit of a cliché, God did prepare Moses to stand before kings and leaders. I think in my conversion, there are two or three things.

First, in my ancestry. My ancestors going back four or five generations were of the highest caste of the Hindu priesthood. They were priests in South India, the top rung of priests. They were officiants at ceremonies; they were Nambudiris. The Nambudiris are on the top rung of Hindu priesthood. And yet, they came to know Christ. I now look at my family tree and think it is remarkable. My great-grandfather and my grandfather were linguists. They translated the first Malayalam-English dictionary, which is one of the most difficult languages in the world. It's the Webster's of the Malayalam language. It's spelled front and back the same way. It's a very tough language. They were into languages. My great grandfather translated the works of Shakespeare and Arabian Nights; he was a linguist. When I think of my life as being so involved in words, I think of God putting in that DNA right from the beginning.

The second thing is that my conversion was on a bed of suicide. I was empty, purposeless. Those are the issues I address today and people sit up and listen. When you talk about life's meaning, everyone wants to hear your answer. People are looking for that. I was raised in the Anglican Church, and I never knew Christ. But now as I look back, the Anglican prayer book is a masterpiece—the hymns, the liturgy. I now think of worship as the clue to the meaning of life. So all of this, being raised in India, living in the West, connecting now between East and West, there is no doubt in my mind that my calling, my upbringing and conversion, there is a very real strand tying it all together.

JC: You have certainly given us definition of your calling. Has there been any time over the past in which you felt your calling has changed to some degree?

RZ: Not in the recent past. But twenty years ago when this ministry as an organization was formed, I moved from being an itinerant evangelist to an itinerant evangelist-apologist. Apologetics became the seasoning in the main course that I offered, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Apologetics does not dominate our message; it undergirds our message. Argument doesn't save people, but it certainly clears the obstacles so they can take a direct look at the Cross. The change came when I recognized that I needed to be in hostile and adversarial areas because those are where the people are that need to be rescued. That was a big change for me, moving from the comfort zone of church evangelism, where I cut my teeth. However, I'm still licensed and ordained by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. I've covered the globe for them. I've covered the country for them—little churches, country churches, big churches. I miss some of that; it was wonderful.

But God moved me away from my comfort zone. That is why we turn down ninety-nine percent of our engagements. I take very few within the Christian world. As much as I want to be there, I take a few for my need so I can be replenished and blessed, but my primary ministry is in adversarial settings.

JC: In speaking about difficult times and perhaps adversarial areas, have there been any low points in your life that have influenced you in your ministry? A low point and perhaps a high point that you would like to share with us?

RZ: Low points were generally induced by fatigue. If you are not getting the sleep, your body is being subject to a lot of strain. You get down and you have those times. There are some times when there are low points where great disappointment comes to you, maybe in people, in relationships. I've seen some great disappointments, and one of the things that I've learned through all of that is you cannot build a steady faith on the basis of human observation. There will be people who let you down, and I'm sure we let other people down. They may not have the expectation that you have in leadership. I don't mean in a moral sense; I mean in some reaction or whatever. So there have been some low points in the earlier days of ministry, some disappointments. But it helps to remember that you must keep your eyes focused on your calling, otherwise you will give up. The high points are wonderful, but also must be tempered with a grain of salt. You cannot live just for the success or happy moments. To quote Nietzsche, this requires "a long obedience in the same direction." The high points and the low points are markers along the way, but you have to keep the plain road ahead of you and not be guided by the extremes. They are the punctuation marks in life. For instance, a high point may be a wedding day, but the days that follow is where you really demonstrate what it means to be married. The emotions are not as mercurial as the high point in that sense, but your heart does that which is right.

JC: We are sitting in your office, and I see a lot of books on the wall. Is there any book outside of the Bible that has influenced you and your thinking?

RZ: There are several of them, but it is authors who have influenced me: Malcolm Muggeridge, G.K. Chesterton, F.W. Boreham, C.S. Lewis. Contrary to what a lot of people think, although I've read and loved Francis Schaeffer, my calling and mind had already been shaped by then. I would probably say the most powerful book I read in the eighties that changed my thinking an awful lot is G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*. I think it is one of the greatest books ever written.

JC: What about accountability structures? Are there any specific accountability structures you have in your life right now?

RZ: You know, John, when I looked at the questions, I thought, this is particularly a good one, but it's one of the toughest ones to answer, and I'll tell you why. My answer may be very different to what others may give you. As I see it, accountability comes at different tiers.

First, I believe I have a theological accountability, a doctrinal accountability. That's why I have always retained my ordination and my license with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. I have a doctrinal accountability to a denomination. We are not flying by the seat of our pants and manufacturing our own little theology as we go. I believe it is important to have that.

Then there is leadership accountability we put into our planning at the beginning of each year. My executive committee has time alone with me. We talk about things like my travel, my daily issues, what I'm wrestling with. There is a leadership accountability to a group of men and women who in turn are accountable to the Evangelical Council of Financial Accountability.

I really believe that I am also accountable to my wife and children. How do I measure that? I measure that by my availability to them and my willingness to listen to what it is they want to talk about. How do I do this? One of the things I've done is I do not take my engagements. My wife does. All of my itinerary is planned by her, so I go with her blessing and not simply justifying everywhere I want to go. This is critical. My life is on the road. I'm away from home fifty percent of the time. How do I remain accountable in that? I don't travel alone. In fact, the only time I am alone is when I'm writing, which happens maybe twice a year for a week. I stay in areas where I am known by the hotel personnel, so I am accountable in that sense. They know I'm a minister; they know what I do; they know my books; they know I'm preaching; they've heard my tapes, etc. I think that is important. I'm not alone.

Out of the fifty-two weeks of the year, there are maybe two weeks when I'm by myself writing. But here is the key: Deviant ways begin in the days of success when you do not have financial accountability to anybody. I think it is important to know that. When I've watched the lives of the big

men who fell, there was a lot of money involved. The money became the means of procuring what it is that felled them. Yes, power, but money is a big thing.

I believe that if you are going to remain honorable as a minister of the Gospel, you should always be accountable with your money to your spouse. To me, that is critical. You show me a man who has his own bank account and his wife knows nothing about it, and I'll show you a man who will probably get into trouble if he is not careful. My wife needs to know where my money goes if I'm spending it. She needs to know what checks I issue; she needs to know what I withdraw, and to me this is a very real thing that we talk about.

I talk about this to my colleagues. So accountability to me is when proclivities have resources, then possibilities become actualities. If you cut off the resources, you are in one way trying to stop the cash flow. I've watched fallen lives and I said money is key here. To me, accountability starts off with moral and doctrinal with your denomination. They are able to deal with me if I am not towing the line. Then, accountability to my executive committee, where they talk to me and ask me the questions they want. There is the accountability to my wife and children. An accountability on the road to where I don't travel alone. I have a traveling associate who is with me all the time. He knows where I am twenty-fours a day, and I don't go out at night on the road if I am not speaking. When I'm in my room at night, I don't watch much television. If I ever do, it is either news or sports. I could go a week in a hotel room and never turn the television on.

These are measures one has to take because no matter how many exterior structures there are, if you are not honest inside, you will find ways to be dishonest. The structures in that sense are restrictions; they are not absolutes. To me the key is, Who knows where your checkbook is, who knows where your money goes? If your heart is in the right place, your fiscal accountability should be under some one else's scrutiny, and I keep that under my wife's scrutiny.

JC: That's a wonderful answer. Here is the last question: Is there anything we have not covered that you think may be helpful to me and my colleagues? We are talking about leadership, and you probably have a lot of different ideas of how we could develop this, but is there anything you feel needs to be said about leadership in general?

RZ: I think there are two or three things that I feel are so important if the church is going to be the church among the leaders. Number one is humility. We really need to have a humble heart. God says in Deuteronomy, chapter eight, I wanted you to see what was in your own heart. I mean, He could have taken them six weeks across and brought them into the Promised Land, but He had them for more than forty years so they could see what was in their own heart. A true appraisal of my own heart and every man and woman's heart is that we need to be humble before God.

The second thing is that not only should you be humble, you must be very disciplined. A leader has to be very disciplined. The ministry can induce laziness, especially in our kind of work where you repeat. We can repeat an awful lot. That makes for laziness when we think, I got my sermon case and I got my hundred sermons in the bag, I don't need to be studying. That's not good.

Your time with the Lord is so critical. Every day, the nourishment of the soul needs to take place, probing new subjects, studying new material, reading new books, not lazing in the morning hours, getting yourself out of bed. If I could see humility and discipline as the twin realities brought into young ministers' lives, the future would be very bright. If we lose humility and discipline, we will end up being professionals at what we are doing where appearance will become more important than substance. So, as you are looking at leadership, humility and discipline are two very critical roles for young men and women as they labor to go into the ministry.

We have a great crop of young people coming up, but the problem is we have great temptations that stalk them, and so many of them go wrong so soon that we end up in salvage operations after that. If someone wants to go into ministry, my suggestion is: Find someone who can keep an eye on you early so that you don't develop bad habits that are hard to change once you get into ministry. Bad habits are formed early. Once you develop bad habits, they stalk you even after you've entered ministry. How you deal with members of the opposite sex, how you deal with fatigue, the challenges to your capacity, and the parameters of your own capabilities. Find the right habits to respond, the habits of the heart, and they will stay the course with you in the long run.

We should not underestimate the role of leadership. I would have to say, I did. If you do not lead, somebody else will. If you are called to lead and you don't lead, somebody else will. Biblical leadership takes its role seriously. With a servant's heart, people will follow a good leader, who is setting the example at the same time. It should never be underestimated.

3. DO'S & DON'TS FOR THE PASTOR

1. The 27 “Do’s” for the pastor in his personal life are:

1. Do make every effort to maintain close ties with your family. Spend quality time with them. Keep your wife and children as a first priority.
2. Do make sure, in the first place, that you marry a godly, consecrated woman, one who will be a good pastor’s wife.
3. Have special days and times to spend with your wife and children
4. Take time to pray, to be alone with God. Keep your mornings for God. Tell the people the arrangement so other lesser things can be done at later hours. Take everything to God in prayer. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17)
5. Commit each day to the Lord. Take a spiritual inventory of yourself each day. Are you growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord?
6. Be a splendid example of Christian living for all to see. Contribute more than a tithe to the Lord.
7. Be scrupulous and ethical in all your business dealings. Keep good financial records. Pay bills promptly.
8. Be truthful and dependable.
9. Be punctual in all your engagements.
10. Always seek to keep a positive attitude. Never allow yourself to become a negative, defeatist person. Always look for the positive side of a problem.
11. Keep your mind open to new ideas, but be slow to follow cheap fads.
12. Show enthusiasm and alertness
13. Keep well and strong physically. It makes the difference between victory and defeat in your ministry
14. Have regular physical checkups
15. Check to see that your breath is fresh. Halitosis in the preacher is offensive beyond description
16. Take a little time off each week to recuperate and recharge your mental, emotional, and spiritual strength.
17. Dress appropriately all the time, on Sundays and during the days of the week as well. Be clean, neat, immaculate, and in style. Church members want to be proud of their pastor in the way he looks.
18. Dress in fashion, not with wild and loud colors and styles
19. When it is appropriate, feel free to dress in a casual manner
20. In being well-groomed, keep your shoes shined, your socks matched in color with your shoes, your shirt and all linens clean, your hair cut and combed, your fingernails cut and buffed, your car clean, and your study in order
21. The best garment to put on every day is a wide, wonderful smile. The world needs it
22. Balance your study with your pastoral responsibilities; especially take time to study
23. Give yourself sufficient time for sermon preparation
24. Strive to be a student all the days of your life
25. Read the biographies of great men both in secular, as well as ecclesiastical history
26. Study the classics of literature, but above all, constantly study the Bible. A way to do this is to be constantly preaching through a book of the Bible.
27. Have a reading plan. Become familiar with great literature, with the stories of great art and artists and of music and musicians. As a result sermons and addresses can be enriched and strengthened.

2. The 19 “Do’s” for the pastor in his preaching ministry are:

1. Preach the Word. This is what God says we ought to do (1 Tim 3:16 – 4:2)
2. Preach as Paul did: First, the doctrinal truth of God, then the practical appeal based upon the revealed truth. Our pragmatic appeal ought always to come out of our doctrinal thesis.
3. Preach the truth of the Scriptures whether it is popular or not. Criticism will come no matter what is preached. If it is mere criticism from man, it does not matter
4. Let the reprimand for error or unfaithfulness never be from God. Always work and preach as pleasing to our heavenly Father.
5. Never waver from the truth of the Scriptures. Preach it with zeal and with conviction. Do not settle for mediocrity; be the mightiest preacher you can
6. Be true to your convictions, to your Lord, to yourself. Do not compromise yourself. A denominational executive said to me after I was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention: “Criswell, do not try to placate the liberals. They are not going to like you no matter what you do.” I learned how true was that admonition. If I had a liberal hair in my head, I would pull it out
7. Give first priority in your ministry to soul-winning and sermon preparation
8. Preach for a verdict. Drive for decisions. Make the message itself a strong appeal for the Lord. Do the work of an evangelist.
9. Use beautiful diction and grammar. Be careful in your choice of words and in your pronunciation of words. They are the vehicles with which you are carrying your message
10. Preach expositionally most of the time.
11. Take advantage of special days. Use them for the emphasis the occasion brings, as mother, or country, or our blessings from God, or the dead, or the resurrection. Special days can be great springboards if we turn them to the preaching of the truth of God.
12. The preacher is to be “apt to teach” (1 Tim.3:12). This is one of the qualifications of his calling. Teach in your sermons. The people need to be instructed in the way of the Lord.
13. Use appropriate illustrations in your sermons. They brighten a sermon with light. They are windows of heaven through which pour the wisdom and understanding of God. Most of them should come out of personal experience. If the preacher works with his people, he will have a daily assortment of interesting illustrations for the truth of his message
14. Make Christ Jesus the center of your preaching. If you would have the Holy Spirit with you, glorify the Lord Jesus. That is the work and assignment of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-14)
15. Always have a humble spirit. Clothe yourself with humility as you would with a garment.
16. Urge the congregation to pray for you as you preach. Encourage them to study their Bibles and to bring them to the worship services of the church
17. Display public respect and love for the Bible in the manner in which it is held. We try to teach children to care for their Bibles. When one stands before them and rolls his Bible or folds it back or slings it about in the air, that is contradictory to the reverential respect which ought to be so beautifully displayed.
18. Let the sermon always move toward a known and stated objective. If you aim at nothing, you are sure to hit it!

3. The 7 “Do’s” in connection with the pastor and church services are:

1. The physical appearance of the church ought to be in keeping with the respect we hold in our hearts for the house of God. It ought ever to be as clean, as comfortable, as beautiful, and as inviting as we can make it.
2. Let the people Sunday by Sunday place flowers in the church in honor of and in memory of loved ones.
3. Keep all the musical instruments in tune
4. Have something going on as people arrive in the sanctuary, at least an organ playing familiar hymns
5. Have a platform of personnel that look nice, pay attention, and who love the Lord, magnificently so.
6. Let the pastor be available after the service to meet visitors. This “makes friends and influences people”.
7. Let every service be a praise service. O come, let us magnify the Lord together, let us exalt his holy name! (Ps. 34:3)

4. The 18 “Do’s” for the pastor in ministering to people are:

1. Pray for and be concerned for the welfare of your flock
2. Be sensitive to their feelings, griefs, sorrows.
3. Be an empathetic listener
4. Be available to share your time with others. Help as much as possible to face and to meet the needs of the families in the church.
5. Be patient with the failures and weaknesses of others
6. Visit every family in the congregation if possible. Acknowledge the presence of little children. Call them by name if possible.
7. The most important thing next to leading a lost soul to Christ that a pastor can do for his people is to love them individually
8. Respect the confidentiality the church people pour into the ears of the pastor. Pray for them in all their problems, telling God all about it, not anyone else
9. Write letters of recognition and appreciation
10. Always compliment and encourage others. Look for the good in them. Help bury the bad
11. Listen to the members of the congregation. Many times they just need someone to listen
12. Minister compassionately and nonprofessionally to the ill and the bereaved. Be there in their sorrow, not because you are paid to do so, but because you want to do so.
13. Be a good shepherd. Take time to visit the sick in the hospital; it may mean everything to one in deepest despair
14. In counseling with women at the church, be sure your secretary or other personnel is close by. In a visit in a home, take your wife or a godly layman with you.
15. When death comes to a family member, be sure to visit in the home of the sorrowing
16. Ask God to keep you in loving sympathy and sensitivity to those who need you
17. Watch your temper! A pastor can undo in five seconds the progress and respect he has worked fifty years to achieve by berating a staff member, a church member, or anyone else. “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly....A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov.14:29; 15:1)
18. When an article appears in the newspaper featuring the accomplishments and achievements of one of your church members or colleagues, cut out the article and send it to him with a warm letter of appreciation. Such a thoughtful gesture will mean more than you could know to the person who sees that you take time for them in such a personal way.

5. The 32 “Do’s” for the pastor in connection with his administration & organizational work are:

1. Let the pastor pray that God will help him to be a good church administrator. He needs all the wisdom of a corporate executive
2. Plan a great program for the church. Dream dreams for the good of the people and believe that with God’s help you can bring the dream to a reality
3. Develop a balanced program to meet all the needs of the people and the kingdom of our Lord, remembering that the Sunday School is the greatest instrument we have for reaching people
4. Know the Sunday School personnel and their work. Visit with them in their work whenever and wherever possible
5. Expect excellence from both the staff and the leadership of the church. Delegate responsibilities to staff members and to lay leadership, and rely upon them to do the work well. When authority is delegated, stand by the one to whom the work is assigned, especially when confronted by disgruntled members. Give the chosen leader freedom to function
6. Brag on everyone. People love praise. Praise your staff and leaders publicly. Encourage them to do more for Jesus.
7. Let the pastor stay in touch with all church activities in some way. Let him be aware of every area of church life and know what is going on
8. Let the pastor work and choose and commend without partiality. It is easy to show partiality to people of means – people of leadership ability – people with much talent – people with charming personalities, but there are many others who need to be recognized.
9. Build a strong Sunday School. The Sunday School is the backbone of the church. As the Sunday School grows, so the church grows. It needs to be well-staffed by trained leadership. A constant training program is needed. Weekly times of praying and studying and preparing are necessary. The pastor must be an avid supporter of the Sunday School so often, as he is man times dependent upon the Sunday School to see a program through. In the majority of our churches, most of the lost people are won to the Lord out of the Sunday School departments.
10. Let the pastor particularly take advantage of and major on the experience of the age fifty-one through sixty-four. This is a time of attainment, financially, and socially, to a great degree. Many are professional people and have risen to prominence in their fields. Most of them have grown spiritually and have been active in church life. Not only can they contribute to the leadership need but can be a tremendous asset to the financial program of the church
11. Involve all the people you can in service opportunities. Disciple believers. Train them for places of leadership in the church. Organize them into a soul-winning circles. Keep it going throughout the years.
12. Plan and pursue the plans made for outreach ministries. Let us build our work far beyond the four walls of the sanctuary.
13. Attempt to meet with the staff leadership of the church regularly. Meet with them often on an individual basis. Let a splendid report in a spirit of love characterize the relationship between the pastor and his leadership
14. Surround yourself with people who love the Lord and his work

15. Use deacons and deacon committees to help you in your ministry, especially in the administration of the church
16. Spend time with the men whom God has sent your way. Disciple these men; make of them true servants of Christ. Pour your very life into them
17. Pray always and by name for these men who are elected to the fellowship of deacons, work on the appointed committees, and all who teach and train in the church organization
18. Express gratitude and appreciation for your workers. Many people give of themselves, their talents, their time for service to the Lord. God will bless, but it surely is encouraging to them for others to express gratitude and appreciation
19. Establish goals in writing for each area and division and department in the church and review progress toward the goals on a regular basis
20. Maintain straight and strict business practices and procedures in every function of the church. No question should ever be raised about the integrity of our financial program
21. Have a library or media center in the church and encourage the members to use the materials. Their lives can be enriched. Teachers can improve their teaching if they will find and use suitable materials. God speaks through the printed page too.
22. Establish definite, appropriate, respectable codes of conduct and dress for those participating in the regular work and service of the church
23. Involve as many leaders as possible in planning the program for the church. This will greatly heighten and deepen their interest
24. Do not hesitate to spend any amount of time discussing methods on how to improve the administration practices of the church with your capable laymen
25. Recognize the value of preschool (Cradle Roll, Nursery, Beginners) in the overall church programs.
26. Encourage men to teach children. How can a child who does not have a Christian father desire to relate to our heavenly Father unless we provide a relationship with Christian men?
27. Encourage capable people to teach in children's areas
28. Compliment leadership with children. Usually they are forgotten
29. Lead the church adequately to provide for the needs of the children in the yearly budget
30. Have classes for all ages in preparation for baptism and church membership
31. Remember that the women of the church can be a vast resource of help if they are cultivated in a positive manner
32. Before any problem, always ask yourself this question: How would Jesus handle this situation?

6. The 14 “Do’s” for the pastor in his Soul Winning Ministry are:

1. Let the pastor be the leader in every soul-winning effort. He should never ask the people to do something he himself does not do
2. Keep a program going in the church that finds prospects for the people to visit. This can be through a census, through information gained from church visitors, and in several other ways. But use them all zealously.
3. Call people on the telephone. That is an excellent way to contact prospects
4. Train all the people in the congregation in soul-winning and in discipling
5. Be consistent and persistent in your soul-winning efforts, not by fits and spasms, but as a matter of lifelong dedication
6. Let the pastor visit with other staff members and with other laymen in his church as often as possible
7. Keep evangelism foremost in the program of the church
8. Visitation must be considered by the pastor as the most important activity in the church, insofar as weekday activities are concerned
9. The people must be led to visit regularly. If we go, the lost will come
10. It is wonderful for the pastor to visit his people, to know them by families, to call them by their names
11. Let the pastor always magnify the invitation time at the public services. Let the people be in prayerful attention, remaining for the entire time of appeal
12. Establish a policy about the reception of children for baptism. Set a time period for their instruction in church membership, and an age for their baptism. I personally have a rule that the child is not to be baptized before he is nine years old.
13. Let the pastor be sure to visit with every child and his family before the child is baptized
14. New converts and new members should be received into and by the church individually and with every cordiality. Make each person feel special (he is!). This creates a spirit of warmth and fellowship in the life of the church.

7. The 5 “Do’s” of the pastor’s ministries beyond the church are:

1. There are many denominational responsibilities placed upon the pastor beyond his local church: associational, statewide, Convention-wide, worldwide, educational, missionary boards, committees, conferences. Help all you can.
2. In every way possible be a leader in the community. Take advantage of opportunities to help in worthwhile community projects
3. Cultivate friendship with other faithful ministers
4. With regard to our relationship with other denominations, no church ought to isolate itself. It ought not to stand aloof from the Christian community. There ought to be friendly relations developed with Christians of differing denominational views. We ought to be charitable in our judgment of each other and we ought to abstain from language that might reflect on the motives of those who differ from us. There are many ways that we can be helpful and encouraging to people who also call on the name of the Lord. A church will ordinarily develop more effectively its own gifts and its own spiritual power by working with others and especially with those of a common denominator, such as our own denomination.
5. In our relationship with our successor after we have left the church pastorate, faithfully follow the strictest ministerial ethics. The new pastor is now God’s man for the people. Pray for his work; do not hinder them. Return for a wedding or for a funeral or for a service only at the invitation of the present pastor. Without his word of consent, do not enter into the pastoral life of the people.

8. The 23 “Do’s” of the pastor as a Missionary Leader are:

1. Be mission-minded and mission hearted. As goes the pastor, so goes the church. When the pastor is concerned with the needs of people and leads his members to help meet those needs of people and leads his members to help meet those needs in the name of the Lord, his people will follow.
2. Cultivate a missionary spirit in the church. This has to be found in the pastor himself and then in the devoted effort on the part of the church to support the mission message. Giving should be presented not as a duty, but as an exalted privilege whose reward is in itself (Acts 20:35)
3. Encourage mission education for all ages. Support the missionary enterprises sponsored by the church
4. Be concerned about the Great Commission of our Lord. Let the pastor lead the church to do all three; disciple, baptize, and teach all nations.
5. The pastor should be familiar with the mission education program which WMU and Brotherhood provide for the total church
6. The pastor should promote missions through the pulpit in sermons and natural ways which show his concern and familiarity with missions. Missions should not always be a project, but promoted as a vital part of the church program
7. The mission education staff should be a part of the church staff which outlines and purposes the organized life of the church
8. Provide situations (prayer service, special mission emphasis in evening worship services, etc.) in which missions will be taught.
9. Provide opportunities for members of the church to share in large group experiences in lay missions
10. Encourage your youth mission teams to work within the church, in the city, and in areas away from home. Give youth an opportunity to share experiences
11. Encourage mission support by praying for the missionaries, by inviting missionaries to share in the church program, and by featuring the special times of weeks of prayer, by setting goals of giving
12. The pastor should encourage retired members to participate in mission teams in the missionary associate programs and in the Christian Service Corps
13. Have a basic understanding of the importance of mission education to preschool children and youth age levels
14. Learn the name and age level of each organization
15. Learn the goals of the organizations
16. Plan to attend one or more meetings, retreats, or parties held by each group during the year
17. Take an active part in recognition services
18. Recognize special achievements by the groups at the Sunday and/or Wednesday night services
19. Endorse these organizations through the pulpit as well as in the church bulletin
20. Call attention to special events sponsored by the organizations
21. Support “Weeks of Prayer”
22. Ask missionaries to speak in the church services
23. Express gratitude both publicly and privately for the volunteer leadership of the organizations.

9. The 31 “Don’ts” for the pastor in his personal life are:

1. Don’t compromise the Word of God. Preach it as it is in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Don’t make apologies for the truth of God
3. Don’t do anything that violates your sense of God’s will
4. Don’t be put in a corner or frightened by deacons, trustees, or influential members. Don’t be overly influenced by a certain few in the church
5. Don’t forget your friends
6. Don’t allow money to influence which church you accept to pastor
7. Don’t lose sight of your vision for winning souls
8. Don’t make important decisions quickly. Seek the Lord and wise counsel
9. Don’t drain yourself physically and emotionally. You become weak in the pulpit if you do
10. Don’t be afraid to admit you were wrong and ask for forgiveness
11. Don’t expect a thank you
12. Don’t get discouraged by circumstances
13. Don’t become a negative thinker
14. Don’t come to the point where you think you have all the answers. Do not pretend you have the solution to every situation
15. Don’t come to the point where you tell God how blessed he is to have you as his minister
16. Don’t forget your family
17. Don’t neglect the sick; don’t turn aside from your hospital ministry. Many times that can be an evangelistic opportunity to reach a whole family
18. Don’t forget to pray in every visit. People are more blessed by our intercessions than by our human arguments and observations
19. Don’t be careless and unreliable
20. Don’t resent constructive criticism
21. Don’t blame others for your failure
22. Don’t seek honors which come from men. The pastor stands or falls before God not men.
23. Don’t betray confidence shared with you
24. Don’t become materialistic in your life-style
25. Don’t let yourself fall into professionalism – ministering outwardly because you are paid to do it but losing the inward love that would make you want to help
26. Don’t become a “marrying-parson.”
27. Don’t become discouraged by the failures of others
28. Don’t give the devil an opportunity to destroy your ministry. Watch your times of counseling, especially with women.
29. Don’t become overly concerned with material gain
30. Don’t let personal problems “show”. Don’t lose your temper – always be in control of yourself. You are the spiritual leader. Don’t speak negatively about one member to another. Don’t be upset about trivial matters; your time is too precious. Don’t be disturbed with opposition or criticism. Stand tall; every leader experiences it. It may be used constructively.
31. Watch the temptation to be prideful in what you are able to do. Do not thank yourself for any victory won. Thank God. Praise him for every victory.

10. The 27 “Don’ts” for the pastor in the pulpit are:

1. Don’t preach the same sermons over and over again
2. Don’t neglect to prepare the sermon carefully and prayerfully. Don’t let anything interfere with study and preparation
3. Don’t underestimate the ability of your people to learn. If you teach the Word as you preach, they will learn enormously
4. Don’t speak above the level of the understanding of the congregation
5. Don’t be away from the pulpit too much. Sometimes a few times is too much
6. Don’t preach from notes if at all possible.
7. Don’t ramble all over the place. Have a definite thought, expressed in a definite message, reaching toward a definite goal. Organize the sermon well. Let it move logically from point to point
8. Don’t be pompous in the pulpit. In every way before God show deep humility and deference.
9. Don’t try to shine as a master magician in things spiritual. It is God who works the miracles. Give all the thought, honor, message, results, glory, praise to him. Magnify the Lord Jesus, not yourself.
10. Don’t forget to share the public services with all others possible, both on the pulpit platform and through audience participation. Don’t seek to do everything yourself.
11. Don’t try to be somebody else. Be yourself
12. Don’t forget with thanksgiving in everything to praise the Lord. Let the public worship have that ring, tone, and atmosphere.
13. Don’t forget the lost. Preach to them. Don’t forget the hurt in heart. They are always present. Comfort and strengthen them. Don’t forget the young. They are our hope for tomorrow. Don’t forget the old. They built the foundation upon which we stand. Keep them all in your heart, in your prayers, and in your sermons
14. Don’t forget to take a handkerchief with you into the pulpit. Check your pocket to see that you have it.
15. Don’t be pedantic, wearing out further the same old time-worn clichés, trite, stereotyped, and exhausted expressions
16. Avoid distracting gestures
17. Avoid facial expressions that do not match the point you are emphasizing
18. Don’t be pseudointellectual
19. Don’t accept Saturday night engagements, especially late hour ones. Get ready for tomorrow
20. Don’t be afraid of the unusual service. Instead of empty church on holidays, take advantage of the situation to pack the house with a dramatic production, a musical program, or a thousand other things that involve the interest of many people
21. Don’t let the hungry sheep come to church services and go away hungry and unfed
22. Don’t tell a joke relating to the Lord and to the Holy Spirit in the pulpit, or anywhere else
23. Don’t embarrass others in public
24. Don’t take advantage of your people in the pulpit
25. Don’t preach in your public prayers
26. Don’t be afraid to stand up for the truth
27. Do not be discouraged by personal handicaps. We all have them. God’s strength is perfected and honored in the inherent weaknesses of humans.

(Moses could not speak. Jeremiah was afraid. Peter was sinful and volatile. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. Wesley was diminutive. Moody was uneducated. Whitefield was afflicted with asthma (he died with an attack of it after preaching a sermon). It is God “Who maketh....his ministers a flame of fire” (Heb.1:7)

11. The 16 “Don’ts” for the pastor organizationally are:

1. Don’t become detached from your staff and from your leadership
2. Don’t reprimand staff or leaders publicly. Do it privately, and then with love and grace
3. Don’t criticize more than you commend
4. Don’t become so dictatorial that you lord it over God’s people and God’s heritage
5. Don’t show favorites, either in staff or in church leadership or in church membership
6. Don’t praise people when they don’t deserve it
7. Don’t be “an apple polisher”, a sycophant
8. Don’t become so involved in outside affairs until you don’t have time for your own flock. If God called you to shepherd the flock, then faithfully do it
9. Don’t feel that you have to make every visit yourself. Train others and use others to help you in your visitation program
10. Don’t be pulled away from the tremendous emphasis that ought to be placed on the Sunday School. A great Sunday School will pay dividends in every area of the Kingdom of God
11. Don’t underpay your staff. There is a saying, “You get what you pay for”
12. Don’t violate the chain of command established in the structure of the church. Don’t let people go over the heads of staff members to reach the pastor. Work through the organization and with the leaders
13. Don’t show undue consideration to one division, department, leader, or member. It takes a lot of diplomacy and tact, prayer, and wisdom, to prove your love for each alike.
14. Don’t magnify little problems
15. Don’t forget that you are a servant
16. Don’t isolate yourself from community activities and areas of community concern

12. The 16 “Don’ts” for the pastor evangelistically are:

1. Don’t get discouraged; you will eventually win somebody
2. Don’t talk about irrelevant things; keep your prospect face-to-face with Jesus Christ
3. Don’t argue or show irritations; God is love
4. Don’t monopolize the conversation; let the lost man talk of his background, experiences, and problems
5. Don’t talk at first about church; Christ has a better reputation than your church
6. Don’t ask questions that get no for an answer; get yes, yes, yes, until you get yes for Christ
7. Don’t feel compelled to answer all excuses; witness for Christ
8. Don’t be sidetracked into a social visit or be content to give an invitation to attend preaching; press for a decision for Christ
9. Don’t fail to have a prayer of consecration after one makes a decision to trust Christ
10. Don’t fail to follow through and to follow up. If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, and try again
11. Don’t hesitate the appeal for Christ at the conclusion of every sermon and service
12. Don’t “be weary in well-doing”. In due season you will reap if you faint no. God sometimes seems to want to see if we are really committed to the task of soul-winning.
13. Don’t fail to praise God for every soul win
14. Don’t leave the new convert to be swallowed up by the unbelieving world. Keep him in the fold, teaching, training, encouraging in every possible way.
15. Don’t baptize small children before the age of nine
16. Don’t ignore the poor, the needy, the unlovely. Sometimes they will respond the most readily to the gospel message of salvation.

4. Church Discipline:

Chastisement of Erring Members of the Local Church

What should local churches do when members practice sin and refuse to repent? Does God believe that His people should discipline or chastise church members who sin? Did He ordain discipline in Israel, in the family, and in government? What New Testament Scriptures teach about chastisement in the church? What purposes would it serve, when should it be done, and exactly what should be done (excommunication? disfellowship?)? What does the Bible teach?

Introduction:

Christians should be concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of other members of the local church.

We should help one another grow and remain faithful. Our teaching should diligently exhort members to be faithful and should warn about the dangers of sin. New and weak members should have special Bible studies to strengthen them. Older members should encourage those who are new. All members should show genuine love and concern for one another.

Ideally, we would wish to help every child of God remain faithful. But despite our best efforts, members sometimes become involved in sin. It happened in the first century church, and it will happen today. What do we do then?

The purpose of this study is to examine what obligations local churches have to members who are known to be guilty of sin.

This is a difficult but needed study. Many churches do little or nothing in such cases. Some argue that nothing can be done except in certain rare, extreme cases. But what does God's word say?

Part I: God's View of the Need for Discipline/Chastisement.

I. God Sets an Example of Using Discipline.

Some say that punishing sin contradicts God's nature. But just the opposite is true. God is love, but God is also just and righteous [Psalms 89:14]. He wishes His people to be saved, yet He cannot ignore sin. His nature requires sin to be punished. His may be longsuffering and delay punishment, but erring children who do not repent will eventually be punished [2 Peter 3:9].

A. Statements that God Believes in Discipline/Chastisement

Proverbs 3:11,12 — Don't despise God's chastening and reproof. He reproves those whom He loves, just as a father does his children. Such acts are not contrary to love, but are an expression of love because they are done for man's *good*.

Hebrews 12:5-11 — God chastens those whom He loves like earthly fathers chasten their children. This is for our *profit*, that we might partake of His holiness (v10), and might yield fruits of righteousness (v11). It also causes us to respect the one who chastises us (v9). (NASB and NIV use "discipline" instead of "chasten.")

Revelation 3:19 — Jesus warned the church of Laodicea that He reproves and chastens those whom He *loves*. "Chasten" means "discipline" (NASB, NIV, NKJV footnote). It is defined: "to chasten by the infliction of evils and calamities" (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer); "discipline with punishment" (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich), "to inflict suffering upon for purposes of moral improvement" (*Random House College Dictionary*).

Romans 11:22 — Behold the goodness and severity of God: severity to those who fall, goodness to those who continue in His goodness.

God loves His people, but this does not mean He will not punish us for sin. His love requires Him to work to motivate our repentance, but His justice and righteousness still require Him to punish those who sin.

[See also Deuteronomy 8:5; 28:15-68; Psalms 94:10-12; 119:75; 118:18; Leviticus 26:14-45; 1 Corinthians 11:32; John 15:1-6.]

B. Examples of God's Chastisement of His People.

Many Bible events demonstrate that God Himself has punished people who sin. He often punished evil people who had never served Him (people in Noah's day, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc.). But notice examples in which He punished His own people who sinned.

Genesis chapter 3 — Adam and Eve sinned. God decreed suffering, hard work, and eventual death as punishment. He sent them from Eden, away from the Tree of Life.

Genesis 19:17,26 — God told Lot's family to escape Sodom and not look back. Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt.

Leviticus 10:1-3 — Nadab and Abihu offered incense using fire that was different from what God had commanded. God sent fire from heaven to devour them. Note that the sin in this case, like many examples we will consider, was not an act of gross immorality. It was a violation of God's order for worship. Most people would call this a "little thing." But God considered it worthy of death.

Numbers chapter 16 — Korah, Dathan, and Abiram attempted to overthrow Moses and Aaron's leadership. Again, this was not immoral; it was rebellion against God's ordained organization. God caused the earth to swallow them, and fire consumed their 250 associates. When the congregation objected to this act of discipline, God causes a plague to kill 14,700 of them (vv 41-50).

Numbers 20:1-13 — God refused to allow Moses to enter Canaan because he smote the rock to produce water from it, instead of speaking to it.

2 Samuel 6:1-11 — Uzzah transported the ark of covenant on a cart, when the Levites should have been carrying it by its poles. When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah touched the ark, and God killed him.

Acts 5:1-11 — In the New Testament, God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead because they lied about the size of their contribution.

Many other examples can be given. Note that most of these were not cases of gross immorality, but violation of God's rules of worship, organization, etc.

[See also Numbers chapter 11, 12, 14, 25; 21:4-9; Genesis chapter 4; 1 Kings chapter 13; etc.]

C. Evidence that God Will Punish Sinners in Eternity

Matthew 25:41,46 — The wicked will receive everlasting punishment in eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 — Those who don't know God and don't obey His gospel will be punished with everlasting destruction.

Revelation 20:11-15 — All whose names are not found in the Book of Life will suffer eternal fire, which is the second death.

God does believe in discipline or chastisement for those who sin. This by itself does not prove **we** should chasten others. But it does show that God believes in the need for sinners to be disciplined. Let us now show that, as a result, He has authorized His ordained institutions to chasten erring members.

[See also Romans 2:6-10; Luke 12:4,5; Matthew 13:41f; etc.]

II. God Ordained Discipline/Chastisement in Israel.

We don't live under the Old Testament today. Specifically, the New Testament church does not discipline people in the same way or for the same things that people sometimes were disciplined in the examples we are about to study.

But note 1 Corinthians 10:1-12. The fact God that chastised His people under the Old Testament is expressly affirmed to be an example to **us**. Old Testament examples can teach us much about how God views the importance of discipline and its purposes. [Cf. Romans 15:4]

A. Examples of Discipline in Israel

In each of these examples, God did not personally and directly chastise sinners. Instead, He instructed His people to inflict the chastisement. And since religious and civil government were combined in Israel, our examples involved discipline for civil violations, as well as religious error. Today these functions are assigned to separate institutions: church and government.

Exodus 32:25-28 — When Israel worshiped the golden calf, Moses called for people who were on the Lord's side to take the sword and slay others who worshiped the calf.

Leviticus 24:10-16,23 — A man who cursed and blasphemed God's name was stoned.
Numbers 15:32-36 — God commanded Israel to stone a man who violated the Sabbath.
Numbers 35:30-34 — If a man was conclusively proved to be guilty of murder, he should be put to death.
Joshua chapter 7 (especially vv 10-13, 24-26) — Achan kept some of the forbidden spoils of Jericho. God said the people could not prosper in His work till they punished the sin by stoning Achan.
Multitudes of other examples can be given. We are simply showing here that God has always believed in discipline. It is a fundamental part of His dealings with men. And in these cases, He required His people to administer the discipline.
[See also Exodus 21:12-25; 22:16-20; Leviticus 20:1-27; 24:15-23; Numbers chapter 25; Deuteronomy 19:11-21; 13:1-18; 21:18-21; 22:13-27; etc.]

B. Purposes for Discipline in Israel

1. To motivate sinners to repent

Leviticus 26:14-45 (note vv 18,21,23,24,27,40,41) — God warned Israel that, if they sinned, He would chastise them in the ways listed, to lead them to reform, hearken to His commands, and confess their sin.
Numbers chapter 12 (especially vv 10,11) — Aaron and Miriam sinned in criticizing Moses. When God struck Miriam with leprosy, this led Aaron to repent.
Judges 2:11-3:15; etc. — The period of judges was a repeating cycle in which Israel would sin, God would bring foreign oppressors to chastise them, they would call on God, then He would send a judge to free them from the enemy, etc. In these and other cases, God brought suffering on the people to motivate them to repent.
[Deuteronomy 8:5,6]

2. To warn other people and remove harmful influences

Punishing the sinner warned other people that such conduct is unacceptable and has serious consequences.

Deuteronomy 13:10,11 — When evil was punished, all Israel would hear, fear, and avoid sin.
Deuteronomy 17:12,13 — The sinner should be slain and so evil would be put away and all people would hear and no longer act presumptuously.
[Numbers 16:30; Deuteronomy 19:19,20; 21:21.]

Removing the sinner eliminated a harmful influence that might lead others to sin.

Leviticus 20:14 — Sinners should be killed and then there would be no wickedness among the people.
Deuteronomy 13:5 — They should slay the sinner so as to put away evil from their midst.
Note that, in many cases, it is expressly stated that the sinner is to be punished, even though it will not lead to his repentance or reformation. Yet he should be punished as a lesson to the other people, and to remove the harmful influence.
[See also Deuteronomy 17:7; 22:21,22,24; 24:7.]

3. To maintain respect for God and His people in the eyes of society

Exodus 32:25 — Sin among God's people makes them a derision to God's enemies. Chastisement is needed to restore a good reputation.
2 Samuel 12:14 — David's sin gave great occasion to God's enemies to blaspheme, so God insisted he be punished.
[See also Nehemiah 5:9; Ezekiel 36:20ff; Daniel 9:16; Romans 2:17-24.]

4. To Obey God's Command

Joshua 7:10-13 — God would not be with Israel nor could they stand before their enemies until they punished Achan's sin.
Exodus 32:25-29 — To be on the Lord's side, people had to agree to discipline others who sinned, even though it be their own brother, companion, or neighbor. Those who refused to discipline others, were themselves among the number to receive discipline (cf. Deuteronomy 17:12,13). After they punished the people, Moses pronounced a blessing on them.
Deuteronomy 13:6-11 — Even if one was a nearest relative to you, he had to be punished. You could not hide him or cover for him, nor seek a lesser punishment. [Cf. Zechariah 13:3]

Deuteronomy 13:12-18 — When people punish those who are evil, God turns away His anger and has mercy and compassion on those who did the chastising.

Numbers 16:22-27 — People had to separate themselves from Korah or they would be punished with him.

Numbers 16:41-50 — Some people objected to Korah's chastisement. Because they opposed it, instead of agreeing to it, 14,700 of them were killed.

[Numbers 35:30-34; Deuteronomy 19:11-13; Deuteronomy 21:18-21]

All these passages show that, when a child of God sinned, others of God's people were required to punish him. If they did not, then they themselves became guilty, even though they had no part in his sin. If they would punish the guilty, then God would bless them for it.

We do not claim that the church should use physical violence against sinners today. That power is now reserved for the government (Romans 13:4). But we do claim that these examples prove God believes in discipline. And remember that these examples are lessons for us today (1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

We will see that, still today, God requires His people in the church to discipline those among them who sin. And it is done today for the same basic reasons that it was done under the Old Testament.

III. God Ordains Discipline/Chastisement in His Institutions.

God has ordained three special institutions to do special work. The methods of discipline are not always the same among the three, yet in all three of them God has ordained and commanded the use of discipline/chastisement. This illustrates again that God believes in discipline, and He expects His people to exercise it.

A. Civil Government

1 Peter 2:13,14 — Rulers are sent by God for vengeance on evil doers and for praise of those who do good.

Romans 13:1-6 — Civil rulers are a terror, an avenger of wrath, to those who do evil (vv 3,4). This is something God had ordained.

The purposes of this chastisement are: (1) to motivate erring citizens to reform (Romans 13:4; 1 Peter 2:13,14); (2) to motivate other citizens to obey the law and to protect law-abiding citizens from the harmful acts and influence of the criminal (Romans 13:4; 1 Peter 2:13,14); (3) to maintain the reputation of the government and the respect of the people for its authority (no one respects a government where justice does not prevail); and (4) to obey God's ordained commands (Romans 13:4; 1 Peter 2:14).

[Proverbs 14:34]

B. The Home

Hebrews 12:5-11 — God compares His chastisement of His people to a father who chastens his children. All true children are chastened, if the father loves them. This causes respect for the father, and promotes the children's well-being.

Ephesians 6:4 — Fathers must bring children up in the "nurture" and admonition of the Lord. "Nurture" (KJV) is translated "chastening" (ASV) or "discipline" (NASB), and is the same word for "chastening" in Hebrews 12:5-11.

Proverbs 13:24 — He who spares to use the rod, hates his child. If he loves the child, he will chasten him at times.

What are the purposes for discipline? They are the same as in Israel and in government. (1) It motivates the child to eliminate unacceptable conduct and develop good qualities (Hebrews 12:10,11; Proverbs 22:15). (2) It warns other children that the conduct is not acceptable and leads to serious consequences. (3) It maintains the good influence and reputation of the family (Hebrews 12:9). No one respects a family where parents have no control. In fact, such fathers cannot serve in offices in the church (1 Timothy 3:4,8; 1 Samuel 3:10-14). (4) To obey God's command (Hebrews 12:7,8; Proverbs 13:24).

For all these reasons, proper discipline in the home is an act of love (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 13:24).

[See also Proverbs 19:18; 22:15; 23:13,14; 29:15.]

C. The Church

The third of God's ordained institutions in the church. This study is primarily about discipline in the local church, so we devote the rest of our study to that specific application. We have studied discipline in the example of God, in Israel, in government, and in the home, to show the parallels to discipline in the church. God believes in discipline.

When we see that discipline is a fundamental part of God's dealing with men, and that He has authorized it in all these other institutions, then it should not surprise us to see that the church is to exercise discipline. In fact, it should surprise us that anyone should think the church should **not** exercise discipline. As it is in all these other areas we have studied, so it is in the church. God has authorized and commanded the church to discipline erring members. We will see further that discipline in the church is done for the same basic reasons that it is in these other areas we have studied. Discipline is not done for just anyone reason alone. Even when we think one particular reason may not be served, still there are other good reasons.

And when we understand the purposes of discipline, we learn that it is fundamentally an act of love. Isn't it loving to motivate people to repent of sin? Isn't it loving to motivate other people to avoid sin and its influence? Isn't it loving to maintain respect for God and His people? Isn't it loving to obey Divine commands? John 14:15 – If you love me, keep my commands.

The practice of church discipline is not a violation of God's will or character. On the contrary, we should expect that God's will is violated when local churches do not practice discipline!

Part II: Passages about Church Discipline of Erring Members

We have examined the Bible teaching about discipline in the example of God and in His requirements for other Divinely ordained institutions. This should help us appreciate the need for discipline and understand its purposes. Consider now passages specifically about discipline in the New Testament church.

Matthew 18:15-17

A. The Reason for Discipline

The erring brother has committed a sin against another brother (v15; cf. v21). Note the following points:

The conduct under consideration is "sin."

Sin is violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). We should not discipline people simply because they do things that are questionable ("iffy") or that violate some member's opinion. It must be something that can be proved by Scripture to be sin (cf. Romans 14).

This context discusses a private sin committed by one member against another member.

The sin is such that, at the outset, it could be resolved by a discussion between just two brethren. If they can reconcile the problem privately, that is the end of the matter (v15). The procedure is designed to solve the problem as privately as possible, which would be appropriate only if the sin was not generally known. But if others knew, they would have to be informed of the repentance, else they would be obligated to continue rebuking the sinner.

Some sins are publicly known and may be publicly rebuked from the outset (Galatians 2:1-14; 1 Timothy 5:20). The case in Matthew 18 is handled privately; other members learn of it only if the private efforts at resolution are unsuccessful.

Any kind of sinful activity might constitute the "sin" for which action is taken.

It might be lying to the brother, stealing, cheating in business, doing physical violence, etc. The principles here described would apply to any kind of sin that a brother might commit against another.

While this passage is discussing private sins, it necessarily implies that public sins should also require church disciplinary action.

This is a simple matter of justice, which is one of the weightier matters of the law (2 Corinthians 7:11 - NIV; Matthew 23:23). It is foolish and unjust to think that the church should discipline private sins, but should overlook public sins. The result would be, if you want to avoid church discipline, you should broadcast your sin. If you sin privately, the church can discipline you; so make sure your sins are widely known and then the church cannot discipline you!

We will see that other passages confirm that other kinds of sins should also be disciplined.

B. The First Step: a Private Discussion — v15

To resolve the alleged sin, the accuser must communicate personally with the brother whom he believes has sinned: “go and tell him his fault between you and him alone” (v15).

Privately, the one brother shows why he believes the other is guilty of sinning against him.

Note that the offended brother is commanded by God to speak to the brother who sinned. He must not spread gossip to other people. Nor may he just ignore the fact his brother has sinned. To fail to rebuke the erring brother is as much a violation of the passage as telling other people. A soul’s eternal destiny is at stake. Steps must be taken to restore him.

The problem is resolved when the accused brother “hears” and has been “gained” by his accuser.

Luke 17:3,4 - This requires the accused brother to be willing to discuss the matter, honestly considering the evidence against him. If there is proof he has sinned, then he must be willing to admit wherein he is wrong and ask forgiveness for it.

Obviously, if the brother refuses to even discuss the matter, he has refused to “hear.” But listening alone is not enough, even if he is polite and respectful. If the evidence of his guilt is clear, then he must admit error and ask forgiveness. [Cf. “hearing” or “hearkening” to the teaching of Jesus — Acts 3:22,23.]

Matthew 5:23,24 - “Gaining” the brother means the matter has been reconciled Scripturally. It may be that the accused brother will confess sin and ask for forgiveness. It may be that he can successfully defend his conduct, and both parties may conclude it was all a misunderstanding. Maybe both parties were wrong and must mutually apologize. Maybe the accuser will turn out to be wrong and he may end up apologizing. In all these cases, you have “gained your brother.”

The offended brother must sincerely desire for the problem to be reconciled.

He should not seek vengeance by tongue-lashing his brother, gloating over him, winning an argument, etc. The goal is reconciliation (Matt. 5:23,24). Acting from a different motive violates the passage.

Whenever the sinner repents and asks for forgiveness, the offended brother must willingly forgive.

The offended brother must sincerely hope the sinner will repent, so he can forgive him (vv 21-35; cf. Matthew 6:12,14,15; Luke 17:3,4). Forgiveness then must end the matter (provided the sin is not repeated). The matter must not be spread among the congregation, nor may it be brought up against the erring brother again. If the offended brother refuses to forgive, then he himself becomes guilty of sin.

This pattern is not a cause of problems, but is God’s plan for resolving problems.

Some people view a person as a trouble maker if he confronts another Christian for his sins. “Gain your brother” shows that the sin has already alienated the brethren. The offended party does not “cause” or create trouble by going to his brother. The problem was caused by the brother who sinned. The offended brother is trying to solve the problem by restoring his brother (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20).

Often this simple initial discussion could resolve the matter. But if it is neglected, wounded feelings fester, and bitterness develops. In case after case, problems that could be resolved by this procedure, become major problems because the pattern is not followed. Misunderstanding grows and the problem magnifies till it “blows up.”

C. The Second Step: One or Two Other Brothers Are Included — v16

What if the accused brother will not admit his sin, but the offended brother is still convinced the sin occurred? Then the sinner has refused to “hear” his brother, and the matter moves to the next step (15,16).

Each step continues until the accused brother clearly will not “hear” his brother.

This often takes several discussions or attempted discussions. We move to the next step only when, either the brother refuses to discuss, or it is clear that the present approach will not bring him to repentance.

If private discussion does not solve the problem, the offended brother takes one or two other brethren with him to talk to the offender.

These men must first examine the evidence. No man may be condemned if he cannot be proved to be guilty (Deuteronomy 19:15; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28).

If they are convinced of the man’s guilt, they too try to get him to “hear them.” Perhaps the man will be moved by the fact that others also see his guilt. If the man repents at this point, the matter is resolved. (Or perhaps these one or two men may convince the accuser that no sin has been committed.)

If the man still will not “hear them,” then the matter moves to the next step, and these brethren become “witnesses” by whose testimony “every word may be established” before the church (see Scriptures listed above).

D. The Third Step: the Church Becomes Involved — v17

The “church” must refer to the local congregation, since that is the only capacity in which the church can function (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:4). The whole church is now involved in the matter because the previous steps did not resolve it.

The fact the man is expected to “hear the church” demonstrates that the church becomes actively involved. They must listen to the evidence offered by the accuser and by the one or two witnesses, who “establish” the matter before the church by their testimony. The church then must make a judgment in the matter and rebuke the sinner, just as the brothers do in v16.

Perhaps the sinner will be moved to repentance by the knowledge that the whole congregation considers him to be in error. If the man refuses, however, to hear even the church, then it moves to the final step.

E. The Last Step: Treat the Sinner as a Heathen and a Publican — v17

Jews refused to associate with Gentiles or publicans; they would not eat or have social relations with them, because they viewed them as sinful people (Acts 10:28; 11:3; Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 19:1-10; Galatians 2:12; John 4:9; cf. Genesis 43:32). Jesus did not agree that people should be so treated simply because of nationality. But He here says this is how people should be treated if they, as members of the church, sin and refuse to repent.

Later passages will help explain this.

Romans 16:17

A. Kind of Sin Chastised: Divisions and Offenses

“Divisions”

Divisions (“dissensions” — NASB, RSV) are strifes, separations, or alienations among brethren (cf. Galatians 5:20). This would include people who cause bitterness or conflict between brethren, perhaps even causing some to leave a congregation, by teaching false doctrine, by turning people against one another, or by setting a sinful example (cf. Acts 20:29,30).

It would include those who stir up the trouble, those who leave a congregation to go into error, or those who encourage, support, or defend those who do such things (they partake of the evil — 2 John 9-11).

“Offenses”

Offenses (KJV, NKJV) are “occasions of stumbling” (ASV) or “obstacles” (ESV). This would include people who tempt others to commit sin, those who encourage sinful acts, or those who become an occasion that causes others to sin, hence a stumbling block (cf. Matthew 18:6-9; Luke 17:1,2; Revelation 2:14-16). Note that one may be guilty of tempting people to sin, even if those people resist the temptation and do not actually commit the sin (cf. Matthew 16:23).

The divisions and offenses referred to are those that are “contrary to the doctrine” (cf. Galatians. 1:8,9; 2 John 9; etc.). Truth can have the effect of dividing or upsetting people (Matthew 10:34-37; 15:12ff; etc.). The church must not chasten people who “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), even if such speaking does lead to division because others reject it.

B. The Discipline Administered

“Note” them

This is translated: “mark” them (ASV), “keep your eye on them” (NASB), “watch out” (NIV, ESV). These people must be identified to the “brethren” in such a way that all know to be on guard to avoid the harm such people can cause, and so the brethren can practice the next action listed.

“Avoid” them (KJV)

This is translated: “turn away from them” (ASV), “keep away from them” (NIV), “disassociate yourselves” (TCNT). It is defined: “...keep aloof from one’s society; to shun one” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). This is not a haughty self-righteousness, but a refusal to socialize. (This helps explain what Matthew 18:17 means regarding treating them as heathen and publicans.)

The brethren can treat the sinner this way only when he has been “marked” or identified, so that the brethren could know who he is, what he has done, and why they should act this way toward them. (Compare 1 Peter 3:11 which says that we are to so avoid the sin itself.)

1 Corinthians chapter 5; 2 Corinthians 2:4-11; 7:5-13

A. The Kind of Conduct to Be Disciplined

The particular case discussed here was a fornicator having a relationship with his own father’s wife (5:1). But to show Corinth how to deal with this particular case, Paul established general principles of how to deal with sinners in the church.

General terms for those to be disciplined:

V8 - “Leaven of malice and wickedness” instead of sincerity and truth

“Malice” means “depravity, wickedness, vice” (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich). [For examples see Acts 8:22; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Titus 3:3; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1.]

“Wickedness” means “depravity, iniquity, wickedness, malice” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). [See Matthew 22:18; Mark 7:22; Acts 3:26; Ephesians 6:12.]

V13 - A “wicked person”

“Wicked” means “evil, wicked, bad” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). [See Matthew 13:49; 18:32; 25:26; Mark 7:21-23; 2 Timothy 3:13; 4:18; Hebrews 3:12; 2 John 11; etc.]

Note that this command to put away the wicked man is virtually identical to the Old Testament command previously studied — Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7,12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21,24; 24:7; etc. This shows that there are valid similarities between New Testament discipline and Old Testament discipline. It also shows that the instruction to “put away the wicked person” is general, like in Old Testament usage, not intended to be limited to just the specific sin(s) being discussed in context. God’s people are to see that evil does not continue among the members.

Some specific examples of sins that are to be disciplined - v11

- * **Fornicators** — those guilty of sexual relations outside of scriptural marriage
- * **Covetous** — greedy, desiring to obtain what others have by some unauthorized means
- * **Idolater** — worshiping false gods
- * **Railer** — one who slanders or reviles others
- * **Drunkard** — one who gets intoxicated
- * **Extortioner** — thief, robber, swindler

This list is not intended to be exhaustive. These are just a few of the kinds of conduct that should be disciplined. If we could discipline only the sins specifically in this list, then we could never discipline murderers, pornographers, drug dealers, liars, people who curse and use profanity, kidnappers, nudists and strippers, etc., since none of these are in the list.

Note also that the person whom the church chastens must be a “brother,” one who is “within” (the church), in contrast to those who are “without” in the “world” (vv 9-12). God will take care of sinners in the world, but the church is to “judge” and chasten those in the church.

This means there are more severe restrictions with regard to socializing with erring church members than with regard to social contacts with those who have never been converted — else we would have to “go out of the world.”

B. The Disciplinary Action to Be Taken

V12 - The church must make a “judgment” in the case.

We must examine the evidence and reach a verdict regarding whether or not the person is guilty of sin. This may be difficult, but God requires it.

V2 - The sinner should be “taken away from among you.”

He should be “removed from your midst” (NASB), “remove, expel” (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich). Note again the similarity to Old Testament language.

V7 - We must “purge out the old leaven.” I.e., we must “clean out” (NASB), “to cleanse out, clean thoroughly” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). To keep the leaven from influencing the dough, a thorough removal of it is necessary.

Vv 9-11 - We should not “keep company” with such, “not even to eat with such a person” (NKJV). I.e., we are “not to associate” with them (NASB). Hence, we are to cut off social contact, just as Jews did regarding Gentiles (see notes on Matthew 18:17).

V13 - We should “put away from yourselves that wicked person” (NKJV). I.e., we are to “remove” (NASB), “expel” (NIV), “purge” (ESV). Remember the similarity of this to Old Testament discipline; there it was often done by killing the person, but in the New Testament it is done by refusing to have social contacts.

Note: To “take away” and “put away” a person from “among yourselves” is defined by context to mean to “purge out” the leaven of his influence, and to not “keep company” with him. Until the church takes action that requires the members to cease associating with a person so that he cannot influence them, then the man is still “among you” in a sense this passage forbids. The point is not that he is not attending church meetings or that he does not consider himself a member. The point is that he must be identified as a sinner and the members must be warned not to associate with him.

V5 - We should “deliver such a one to Satan.”

This cannot mean that the church puts the person into a lost condition; the man did that himself when he sinned and refused to repent. Rather, the church openly declares the man’s condition so that all are aware of it. Thereby they make clear to all that the man is guilty of evil, he is under Satan’s control, and the church does not approve of his conduct. Whereas we are in God’s fellowship, we declare him to be in Satan’s fellowship. (Cf. 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Romans. 6:16ff; John 8:34.)

V4 - This disciplinary action is to be a unified act of the whole church.

They declare the man’s condition and initiate their disassociation from him while “gathered together.” This is addressed to a local church (1:2). The whole church must be informed of the circumstances of the individual and of the action to be taken. The members must then follow through by avoiding social association with him. All this should be done, not in self- righteous pride, but in “mourning” for the man’s condition (v2).

C. The Purpose for the Discipline

V5 - To help save the sinner

“For the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” This may mean that he will suffer shame in this life because of the sin he has committed, or that his fleshly lusts and his desire to live in sins of the flesh will be destroyed (cf. Galatians 5:24). Both views harmonize with Scripture; perhaps both are meant. But we hope that the church’s action will eventually lead him to repent and be saved spiritually.

Vv 6-8 - To remove the harmful influence and warn other members to avoid the sin

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump” so “purge out” the leaven that the lump may be unleavened.

When the sin is publicly rebuked, the members are warned to avoid it. As they continue refusing to associate with the sinner (vv 2,11,13), this continues to warn them of his condition, and also limits his opportunity to influence them to sin with him (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33). The principle here is exactly the same as in the Old Testament.

Isolating a man with an infectious disease helps others avoid catching it. Removing a rotten apple helps the other apples avoid rotting. Removing a cancerous organ may help the other organs avoid corruption. So God’s people in the Old Testament and New Testament are told to “put away evil” from their midst.

We must take this action for the purity of the church regardless of whether or not we think the sinner will repent.

Sometimes people oppose withdrawing from a sinner saying, “The only purpose for withdrawing from somebody is to get him to repent, and I don’t think bro. so-and-so will repent if we withdraw from him. It’ll just drive him farther from the church.” Such is human reasoning without a shred of Bible evidence to support it.

What passage of Scripture tells us to judge ahead of time what results will follow from obeying a Divine command and then disobey if we think the results will not be favorable? Our job is to obey God’s command; the results are God’s job.

And in the church, just as in Israel, there are other reasons for discipline besides just to lead the sinner to repent. It is also to remove his bad influence and warn God's people to avoid his sin. The church has not done what God commanded until it takes action to be sure all members know they must not associate with the sinner: "purge out" the leaven of sin.

V4 - To obey God's command.

They should do this in Jesus' name and by His power. What Paul wrote are commands from the Lord (14:37). He rebuked them because they had failed to discipline the sinner. They had a command from God to "put away evil," just as surely as Old Testament Israel had (v13).

D. Additional Information from 2 Corinthians 2:4-11; 7:5-13

As a result of Paul's first epistle, the church apparently withdrew from the sinner and he repented. In the second epistle, Paul gives more information.

2 Corinthians 2:4-11; 7:5-13 do refer to the same situation as 1 Corinthians 5.

2:4 – Paul had written them about this subject.

2:5 - Some "one" had caused grief to Paul and to Corinth.

2:6 - The majority had inflicted a punishment on the man.

2:7-11 - Now he should be forgiven and comforted.

7:11,12 – A man had done wrong (v12) in a "matter" (v11).

7:8-12 - Paul had written them a letter about this "matter" and caused them to be so sorry Corinth repented and corrected themselves.

Clearly this is a case of church discipline, and the only such case mentioned in the previous letter was 1 Corinthians 5. Note the lessons we learn here.

2:6 - The church acted for the purpose of "punishment."

7:11 - It was a form of "vindication" (NKJV), "revenge" (KJV), or "avenging" (ASV), a "readiness to see justice done" (NIV). It was not personal antagonism, but fulfillment of obligation to chastise sin as God commanded. It was an expression of righteous "indignation" against evil.

7:11 - The church acted also to maintain the reputation of the church and respect for God.

By chastising the sinner, Corinth "cleared" themselves, and proved themselves to be clear ("pure" - ASV) in the matter (7:11) — i.e., they "demonstrated [them]selves to be innocent" (NASB).

When sin is known to exist but a church does nothing about it, the church appears to approve the conduct. Until they rebuke the sin and discipline the sinner, the church is not clear, not pure, not innocent in the matter.

No one respects a church that tolerates sin. Sin in the church causes God's name to be blasphemed just as surely as did sin in Old Testament Israel (cf. Acts 5:5,11,13).

2:9 – The church acted also to obey God's command.

Paul wrote to put them to the test to see if they would be **obedient** in all things. Because of their past failure to discipline the sinner, Paul rebuked them so that they were sorry to the point of repenting (7:7-10). This led them to correct their error with great care and zeal (7:11).

When sin is known to exist and the church fails to discipline the sinner, the church has not been obedient to God in all things, and they need to repent.

2:6-10 – The church must forgive the sinner if he repents.

They should comfort him, and reassure him of their love. If they don't do this, Satan gets advantage over them (2:11). Failing to forgive may cause the sinner to be swallowed up by too much sorrow, and it causes the church to disobey God. We need to reassure the sinner that, when he repents, he can be received back by God and by the church.

These accounts also help us to appreciate the emotions involved in such cases. The principles involved are sometimes stated very factually and objectively. But applying them can be very emotional. Paul described the affliction, anguish of heart, tears and sorrows involved (2:4,5; 7:7-11).

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

A. The Kind of Actions to be Disciplined

As elsewhere, this passage discusses the principles of discipline in *general* terms, then it applies them to a *specific* problem. Note first the general descriptions:

V6 - *“Every brother who walks disorderly”*

As in 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18:15, the person under consideration is a “brother,” a child of God. The application is to “*every*” brother who so acts.

“Walks” shows that the brother continues or persists in disorderly conduct. This discipline is carried out, not when one sins and then repents, but when one stubbornly refuses to repent or ask forgiveness even after he has been rebuked (Matthew 18:15ff; Titus 3:10).

“Disorderly” or “unruly” (NASB) is an adverb. The related verb is defined: “...to be disorderly; a. prop. of soldiers marching out of order or quitting the ranks ... Hence, b. to be neglectful of duty, to be lawless ... c. to lead a disorderly life...” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). Note that a person is disorderly if he disobeys orders, or if he neglects his duty, or if he quits the ranks.

They define the adjective: “disorderly, out of the ranks, (often so of soldiers); irregular, inordinate ... deviating from the prescribed order or rule...”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Paul used the adjective form saying “admonish the disorderly.” Now he goes further and says that if anyone walks disorderly, he should be withdrawn from. What is the “prescribed order or rule” that the “disorderly” man “deviates from”?

V6 - *“Not according to the tradition which he received from us”*

This further explains “disorderly” showing what rule is violated. “Tradition” refers to instruction that has been delivered or handed down (the source can be human or divine, depending on context). Paul here refers to the inspired teachings that had been delivered to Christians from God through inspired men. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 said to “hold fast” the traditions Paul had taught them. Those who refuse to hold them fast, but deviate from them and will not repent after repeated admonition, are “disorderly” and should be chastised.

V14 - *“Anyone [who] does not obey our word in this epistle”*

Once again he shows that the “order or rule” from which we must not deviate is the New Testament. Any man is disorderly if he deviates from the rules of the New Testament, including those who “quit the ranks” of God’s people.

The specific application

Having taught the general principle, as in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul applies it to a particular kind of disorderliness that existed at Thessalonica: those who are “working not at all, but are busybodies” (v11). Note that “disorderly” is explained to include both a sin of *omission* (not working) and a sin of *commission* (busybody). Some claim that “disorderly” just means idleness [cf. NIV], but the context of this very passage shows that it also includes active participation in evil.

B. The Disciplinary Action Taken

V6 - *“Withdraw”*

Also translated “withdraw yourselves” (ASV), “keep aloof” (NASB). It means: “...to remove one’s self, withdraw one’s self, to depart ..., to abstain from familiar intercourse with one...” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). The significance is the same as “have no company” in v14 and 1 Corinthians 5:11; etc.

Note that it does not say “withdraw fellowship.” When we “withdraw” from a sinner, we are not breaking our spiritual relationship with him, nor are we breaking his relationship with God. When the sinner violated God’s law and refused to repent, he himself broke his relationship with God and with God’s people (1 John 1:3-2:6). What we withdraw is our spiritual and social association with him (“withdraw yourselves” - ASV). But we do this as a sign that he has already broken the spiritual fellowship. [Cf. “deliver him to Satan.”]

V14 - *“Note that person”*

“Note” means “to mark, note, distinguish by marking...” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). The noun form means “a sign, mark, token; ... that by which a pers[on] or a thing is distinguished from others and known...”

(Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). Hence, the church is to identify such a person in a way that every member is made aware that they are not to associate with him.

V14 - “Do not keep company with him” (NKJV).

Translated “do not associate” (NASB). This is the same word so translated in 1 Corinthians 5:11. The church is to inform all members that they are to refuse social companionship with him.

V15 - “Do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”

Chastisement should not be done from hatred, from a desire to hurt the person, or from a desire for personal vengeance. The man is still a “brother” (erring child of God). We show concern by “admonishing” or warning him.

Note that not all contact with him is wrong. We are willing to initiate discussion about his soul and his need for repentance. But we refuse to initiate social association, whether or not he wants it; and if he tries to initiate social association with us, we refuse.

This also shows that “withdrawal” does not mean “get rid of” the man in the sense of stopping him from attending assemblies. If he continues to attend, then the teaching he hears will “admonish him as a brother.” But make it clear he is not part of the group spiritually or socially. (It also follows that a man has not “withdrawn from the church” just because he stops attending. “Withdraw” does not equal “stop attending.”)

C. Purposes for the Action

V6 - To obey God’s command

“We **command** you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Verse 14 also states a command to note and not keep company. This is not an option that we are free to take or leave. As in Israel, so under the gospel, God commands His people to exercise discipline. If we refuse, then the church is disobeying God.

We have no right to reason, “I don’t think it will bring him back, so let’s just forget it.” What other Divine command are we free to just decide for ourselves that it will not work, so we will not obey it? We must obey because God says so. If we refuse, how can we say we are obeying God?

V14 - To help the sinner repent

“That he may be ashamed.” The admonishing of v15 also implies we hope our action will motivate him to repent. But nothing says we have the right to judge ahead of time whether or not he will repent and then we refuse to withdraw if we think he won’t repent.

God commands us to preach to the lost so they will repent and be baptized. Do we please God if we say, “They won’t repent anyway, so just forget it”? Wouldn’t that be disobeying God’s command? Our job is to preach the gospel to each person; whether or not he obeys is between him and God.

So it is in church discipline. If the man is walking disorderly, then we should obey God’s command.

Withdraw yourselves. Don’t keep company with him. This will have the tendency to make him ashamed, and it will also serve the other purposes noted elsewhere. Whether or not he repents is then between him and God. But if the church is to obey God, we must exercise the discipline God commanded.

1 Timothy 1:18-20,3-11

A. The Disciplinary Action Taken

Paul delivered certain men to Satan.

He used this identical expression in 1 Corinthians 5:5 regarding the church’s duty to discipline the fornicator. The context there shows this is just another term for withdrawing ourselves and refusing to associate with the erring member.

Paul probably means here that, as an apostle, he led a local church in doing what 1 Corinthians 5 describes. In 1 Corinthians 5:3-5 Paul said that he had already judged the fornicator, then he commanded the church to follow through. Timothy would have understood Paul’s meaning here because of other teaching he had received, just as we understand it because of 1 Corinthians 5.

We are not led in such matters by living apostles today, but we are still led by their inspired Scriptures.

We are likewise led by the Scriptures today in many other things that apostles personally led churches to do in the first century (such as ordaining elders — Acts 14:23). To say we cannot do what was done here because no apostle is living, would be to defeat the whole purpose of the written word.

We learn from 1 Corinthians 5 that there are people whom the church must deliver to Satan. 1 Timothy 1 then describes certain *kinds* of sinners who ought to be delivered to Satan. So, by necessary inference, the church today should deliver to Satan the kind of people described in this passage. If such people need discipline, how could the church refuse to give it?

B. The Kind of Sin Disciplined

Again, as in 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3, we have general categories of sin listed, then application is made to specific men guilty of specific sins.

General descriptions

Instead of holding faith and a good conscience, some put these away and made shipwreck concerning the faith — v19.

“Faith” is the common word for conviction and trust in God and the gospel, which in turn leads to obedience [cf. Galatians 5:6; James 2:14-26; Hebrews chapter 11; etc.].

“Conscience” is the faculty of a person’s mind that approves or disapproves of his conduct.

To “hold” faith and good conscience, one must continue faithfully obeying the gospel. To “suffer shipwreck concerning the faith” would be to destroy one’s obedience to the gospel.

There are many ways a person might “put away” faith and a good conscience (rather than “holding” them), and so make shipwreck of the faith. But as in other passages, Paul refers, not just to people who sin and then repent, but to those who stubbornly refuse to repent even after repeated rebukes.

This is described further in vv 3-11, and elsewhere in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (see notes on Titus 3:10). Note that 1 Timothy 6:20,21 describes some who “erred” concerning the faith by accepting the profane and vain babblings that Timothy is warned to avoid.

So, this passage would include people who completely lose faith in God, people who “quit the church” and go back into the world, people who leave God’s true church and go into denominational error or who go to congregations that practice sin and false doctrine to the point of dividing God’s body, etc.

Specific sins

Paul applies this teaching specifically to two men who needed to be taught not to “blaspheme.” This can refer to slander and reviling of other people (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:11), or it can refer to speaking without proper respect regarding God or sacred things.

Verses 3-11 give additional information regarding what constitutes turning aside from faith and a good conscience. Note the parallel language:

<i>Verses 3-11:</i> Charge to Timothy (vv 3-5) Love, pure heart, good conscience & faith (v5) Some strayed, turned aside (v6) Specific examples (vv 3-11)	<i>Verses 18-20:</i> Charge to Timothy (v18) Hold faith and good conscience (v19) Some put away, etc. (v19) Specific instance (v20)
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Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to teach the need for love, good conscience, and sincere faith; then Paul listed some things that characterize people who turn aside from these (vv 3-11). In vv 12-17 he digresses to give thanks for his conversion from such vain things. Then vv 18-20 return to the charge of vv 3-11 to tell Timothy to avoid these departures, and warn that people who continue to stray from the faith need to be delivered to Satan.

So, vv 3-11 describe kind of actions that constitute turning aside from faith and good conscience; then vv 18-20 teach that people who turn aside from faith and good conscience should be disciplined.

Specific sins listed in vv 3-11:

Some teach different doctrines and fables, etc., that lead to disputing but not to godly edification (vv 3,4). Such people have turned aside to vain talking and don’t know the truth (vv 6,7). These are the same kind

of people described above in 1:19,20 (cf. 6:20,21). They are also described in 6:3-5 where Timothy is told to withdraw from them (KJV). [For more information about such people, see also the notes on Titus 3:9-11 below.]

Vv 8-11 list specific examples of the kind of conduct that often results when people seek to teach the law, but do not use it lawfully (because they have turned aside from the faith, etc.). Note them:

V9 - “Lawless and disobedient ... ungodly and ... sinners” (KJV)

These people lack respect for God’s word, so they fail to practice it. Note that “disobedient” is translated “unruly” (ASV), “insubordinate” (NKJV), or “rebellious” (NASB). Note the similarity to “disorderly” in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and “wicked” in 1 Corinthians 5:8,13. This again ties these discipline passages together.

V9 - “Unholy and profane”

These people lack respect for sacred things and so act disrespectfully of them, misusing them, speaking abusively of them, using them as objects of jokes or as expressions of anger, etc.

V9 - Murderers of family members, and manslayers

This is the only passage that expressly mentions murder in the context of church discipline. Either we must grant that 1 Timothy 1 authorizes church discipline for all the items in this list, or else we must grant that we can withdraw from sinners because of general descriptions of sin listed in discipline passages, or else we must affirm that murderers cannot be disciplined by the church. Which is it? We have cited evidence that both of the first two choices are true.

V10 - Fornicators (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:11), and those who “defile themselves with mankind” (KJV)

The latter expression refers to “homosexuals” (NASB) or “sodomites” (NKJV).

V10 - “Menstealers” or “kidnappers” (NKJV, NASB)

V10 - “Liars” and “perjured persons” (“false swearers” — ASV)

As with murderers, no other passage specifically lists liars as deserving church discipline. Do we grant that such people can be disciplined based on this passage and general teaching in discipline passages, or do we conclude that liars must not be disciplined?

V10f - “Any other thing contrary to sound doctrine, according to the ... gospel”

This category is extremely general. Just as surely as these other items in the list are proper grounds for church discipline, so is any clearly sinful practice which a member stubbornly refuses to correct. If this conclusion is not valid, then there is simply no valid basis for withdrawing from the murderer or liar.

C. The Purposes of the Discipline

V20 – This is done so the sinner may learn not to continue in the sin. This is the only reason stated in the passage, but other passages we have studied give additional reasons.

Titus 3:10,11

A. Kind of Action to Be Disciplined

V10 - A “heretic” or “divisive” man

Meaning of the term

Paul describes “a man that is a heretic” (KJV), “divisive” (NKJV), “factionous” (ASV, NASB), “schismatic, factionous, a follower of false doctrine” (Grimm- Wilke-Thayer).

Vine says regarding “heresy”: “...an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects...”

[In the context (v9), Paul again referred to people who hold to human doctrines that cannot be proved by Scripture, or views that do not profit anyone’s salvation, yet people press them to the point of serious strife and even division among God’s people. For similar references see 1 Timothy 1:3-7,18-20; 4:1-7; 6:3-5,20,21; 2 Timothy 2:14-18,23-26; 4:2-4; Titus 1:10-16; 3:9-11. Note that three of these passages state or imply that such people should be chastised (1 Timothy 1:20; 6:5 — KJV; Titus 3:10). See also the notes on Romans 16:17.]

Other passages use forms of the word for “heretic” (“divisive”).

2 Peter 2:1-3 - False teachers are guilty of heresy. They lead many to follow their destructive ways, exploiting them by deceptive words. So false teaching constitutes “heresy.”

1 Corinthians 11:19 - Paul uses the word (“factions” – NKJV) to refer to those who cause strife and division by perverting the worship or work of the church.

Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5,14; 26:5; 28:22 - A form of this word is translated “sect.” So, anyone who leaves a faithful church to join a “sect” is, by definition, guilty of “heresy” or “divisiveness” as described in Titus 3:10.

People are guilty of “heresy” or “divisiveness” if they teach false doctrine, including perverting the worship and work of the church, especially if they lead people into error, stir up strife and alienation in the church, or lead people to leave the church to join a false group. Remember that those who follow such teachers share in their evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

[See also Galatians 5:20.]

V11 - Such people are subverted (in their beliefs), sin, and are self-condemned.

By chastising them, the church does not place them into a condemned state. They are already condemned by their own conduct. In fact, that’s the reason why we discipline them: because their own conduct has condemned them. We simply affirm the truth about their conduct and chastise them accordingly.

Note that the divisive people often leave a congregation because of their false views. In fact, leaving the church because of false views constitutes obvious division. Paul nowhere makes an exception saying we should not chastise them if they have left. Rather, he commands us to discipline such people.

B. The Disciplinary Action Taken

“First and second admonition” (“warning” - NASB).

The sinner is not summarily cut off without first being given substantial opportunity to learn what his error is and why it is sinful. As in Matthew 18:15-17, we start with rebukes, then move to more serious steps only when it is clear that less stringent methods will not work.

“First and second admonition” does not mean exactly two, no more (just as Jesus statement to forgive 70 x 7 does not mean exactly 490). It says “**after** a first and second admonition” — that would mean at least two. But how much time is spent will depend on the person’s attitude.

The final form of discipline is taken only when it is clear that the preliminary steps will not work. Again, we disassociate only from sinners who demonstrate they are stubbornly rebellious and impenitent.

“Reject”

This is translated “refuse” (ASV), “have nothing to do with” (NIV, RSV), or “shun, avoid” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). This must mean the same as in all the other passages we have studied. The church must make clear to the sinner and to all members that the person is in sin, and that all members must disassociate themselves from him spiritually and socially.

Part III: Summary and Observations

Having studied the passages that discuss discipline in the local church, let us “put it all together,” summarize what we have learned, and draw some conclusions.

I. The Actions Involved in Church Discipline

Based on what we have learned, what should the local church and its members do when a member is known to commit sin?

A. Admonition and Judgment

The member who sinned must be rebuked.

Passages regarding church discipline

This rebuke may be given first by individual members (privately or publicly, depending on the nature of the sin), but must be given by the whole church if the person refuses to repent.

Matthew 18:15-17 — When a member sins against a brother, he must be told his fault by the one he sinned against, then by two or three, then by the church. Withdrawal occurs only if he “refuses to hear the church.” This necessarily requires that the church as a body must affirm to the sinner that he must repent.

Titus 3:10 — A divisive man should receive a first and second admonition.

2 Thessalonians 3:15 — Admonishing should continue even after the sinner has been withdrawn from.

Other passages regarding the need for rebuking sin.

Luke 17:3,4 — If your brother sins, rebuke him.

Galatians 6:1,2 — If a brother becomes overtaken in a trespass, spiritual brethren should restore him, acting with meekness, and examining their own lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 — Admonish the disorderly.

1 Timothy 5:20 — Those who sin should be reproved in the presence of all.

James 5:19,20 — If anyone errs from the truth, a brother who converts him saves a soul from death and hides a multitude of sins.

No one should ever be withdrawn from by a local church until he has had abundant evidence presented to him of his guilt, so he has opportunity to correct the error.

[See also Acts 8:9-24; Galatians 2:1-14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 2:16-18,23-26; Titus 1:9-14; 2:15; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Hebrews 3:13,14; many examples in Proverbs.]

Before rebuke is given, evidence must be considered and judgment must be made to be sure sin has been committed.

This necessarily follows from the above passages. We may question someone about a matter and consider evidence, but no one should be accused of sin until there is clear evidence of guilt. So all the passages about rebuking sin necessarily imply that the evidence is considered first and a judgment is made.

Specifically, the church must make a judgment about a matter before they discipline a member for sin.

Matthew 18:17 — The “church” should be told about the accusation of sin, and evidence considered “at the mouth of two or three witnesses” (v16). Withdrawal occurs only if he “refuses to hear the church.”

This necessarily requires the church as a body to make a judgment and affirm to the sinner that he must repent.

1 Corinthians 5:12 — The church must render a judgment or reach a verdict regarding the guilt or innocence of the person.

B. Marking or Noting

Romans 16:17 — “Mark” (note) that person.

2 Thessalonians 3:14 — “Note that person.”

1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20 — “Deliver to Satan” is similar in meaning. Gathered together (v4), the whole membership is informed of the man’s condition so that all know that his persistence in sin has put him under Satan’s control.

This “marking” is necessary in order to achieve the next step: the members must be told who the sinner is and what sin has been committed, so that all know why they should refuse to associate with him.

C. Refusal to Keep Company

Matthew 18:17 — Let him be to you as a heathen and publican.

Romans 16:17 — Avoid them.

1 Corinthians 5 — The sinner should be “taken away from among you” (v2), old leaven should be purged out (v7), we should “not keep company” with him not even to eat (v11), the wicked person is to be “put away from among you” (v13).

2 Thessalonians 3 — “Withdraw” (v6), and don’t “keep company” (v14). Yet don’t treat him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (v15).

Titus 3:10 — “Reject” him.

All these phrases require a deliberate choice by each member of the church to refuse to have social companionship with the sinner. We do not even eat common meals with them.

None of these passages specify that we do this only for sinners who want to continue to be part of the congregation or want to associate with us (the passages about division imply he may have separated himself from us). The verses do not tell us to trust the sinner to avoid associating with the members. The church is responsible to make sure the members know they should leave him alone, regardless of whether or not he wants to associate with us now or anytime in the future. **We** inform the sinner what **our** decision is and what **our** action toward him will be. Then we refuse to initiate association with him; and if he tries to initiate association, we refuse.

Note also that if we will not keep social companionship with him because he is in sin, it surely follows that we should not in any way have spiritual fellowship with him. We would not do anything that would

lead him to think we believe he is all right spiritually. The whole point is to make him realize he is wrong spiritually.

Spiritually, he is like a “heathen” (Matthew 18:17). We must not bid him Godspeed or support him in his teaching or spiritual work (2 John 9-11). We should not call on him to lead in any worship activity in any worship assembly. We would separate ourselves from him spiritually as well as socially (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Ephesians 5:11).

D. Forgiveness for Those Who Repent

Church discipline passages

2 Corinthians 2:6-11 — The repentant brother must be forgiven, comforted, and assured of our love. This too is a test of our obedience. If we refuse, Satan gets advantage over us.

Other passages that emphasize the need for forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35 — When there is repentance by the brother who sins against us (v15), we must forgive him as God forgives us.

Luke 17:3,4 – If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him (even to seven times in a day).

Matthew 6:12,14,15 — If we will not forgive others, our Father will not forgive us. [Ephesians 4:32]

Note that forgiveness is conditioned on the repentance of the sinner. It follows that the church’s discipline of the sinner must continue for as long as he refuses to repent.

[2 John 9-11 — Note that if a member refuses to honor the decision of the church to discipline a member, so he continues to associate with the sinner, then he becomes partaker with them in the evil deed, and he is in need of discipline just the same as the original man was.]

II. Purposes of These Acts of Chastisement

We learned the following purposes for discipline in Israel, in government, and in the home: (1) to urge the one who broke the rules to be sorry and decide to change — a form of punishment; (2) to warn other people to avoid the wrong-doing, and to eliminate the bad influence of the wrong; (3) to maintain respect for God and for the integrity and influence of the God-ordained institution; (4) to obey God’s command. All of these are the exact same reasons why the church should exercise chastisement when its members sin.

A. To Encourage the Sinner to Repent

Matthew 18:15 — The actions are taken that the brother might “hear you” and you might “gain your brother.” [Cf. v21ff; Luke 17:3,4.]

1 Corinthians 5:5 — That the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. [2 Corinthians 2:6]

2 Thessalonians 3:14 — That the sinner might be ashamed.

1 Timothy 1:20 — That the sinner may learn not to continue in sin.

Note that, when discipline is administered, some people will repent, and others will not. We should no more judge ahead of time what their reaction will be than we should judge ahead of time whether or not an alien sinner will obey the gospel.

Some want to let the sinner make the choice God gave the church and let the church make the choice God gave the sinner. Withdrawing is the church’s choice (not the sinner’s). Repenting is the sinner’s choice (not the church’s). The **church** chooses to refuse to keep company with the sinner; **he** does not decide that for us. (If he says he withdraws from us, are we supposed to trust him to stay away from the members?

Why trust a sinner? What if he changes his mind in the future? No, we make sure the members know to stay away from him, regardless of what he wants.) Then the **sinner** chooses whether or not he will repent; the **church** does not decide that for him (and the refuse to withdraw if we think he won’t repent).

B. To Warn the Members and to Overcome Bad Influences

Discipline passages

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 — A little leaven leavens (influences) the whole lump. So purge out the **old** leaven **that the lump may be new (unleavened)**. This purpose of discipline is just as surely a part of the pattern as is the purpose of baptism and the purpose of the Lord’s Supper! We must remove the association of

other members from the sinner (v11), so others will know they should not act as he did and so he will not influence them into sin. He should be taken away (v2) and put away (v13) from us.

Remember that this passage quotes an Old Testament passage about discipline in Israel (v13), and one of the main reasons given for discipline in Israel was to serve as a warning to other people to avoid sin and bad influence (Deuteronomy 13:10,11; 17:12,13). [Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 22:21,24; 24:7; Leviticus 20:14]

Other passages about warning people to avoid the sins and bad influence of other people

Rebuke of sinners constitutes a warning to other people.

Acts 5:11 — When Ananias and Sapphira were punished, great fear came on the whole church. God Himself did this act of discipline, but it served the very purpose we are emphasizing in the church. (And note that this purpose was served apart from whether or not the sinners repented – they were killed!)

1 Timothy 5:20 — Sinners should be rebuked so that others may fear. This is exactly what the Old Testament says would be accomplished by discipline, but here it is accomplished in the New Testament church. [See passages previously studied, and remember 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.]

Titus 1:10-14 – The mouths of insubordinate deceivers must be stopped because they subvert whole households, teaching things they ought not. They should be rebuked sharply so they may be sound in the faith. But, by implication, it is also done so other people will not be subverted by their evil influence.

We would have the right and responsibility to warn members about the sins of others on the basis of these passages, apart from the passages we have studied about discipline.

The danger of sinful influence among God's people.

1 Corinthians 15:33 — Evil companions corrupt good manners. Note carefully the context. Paul was speaking, not primarily about the influence of people outside the church, but about the influence of those in the church who were teaching false doctrine (no resurrection from the dead - v12).

Hebrews 12:15 — Look carefully lest anyone fall short of God's grace, and this become a root from which many are defiled. Note that this applies, not just to ringleaders of false doctrine, but to "anyone" who falls short of God's grace.

2 Peter 3:17 – Beware lest you also fall from steadfastness, being led away by the error of the wicked.

2 Timothy 2:16-18 – Shun profane and vain babblings (like those who say the resurrection is already past), because they increase to more ungodliness, their message spreads like cancer, and overthrow the faith of some.

Revelation 2:20-23 — Jesus rebuked the Thyatira church because it allowed a woman to continue to teach and tempt people to sin (occasion of stumbling). The woman had not repented, though she had been given opportunity, yet the church continued to tolerate her. For this, Jesus rebuked the church! Note that Jesus' concern was, not just to save the woman, but that the church "allowed" her to continue to tempt other members to sin – they did not take the Scriptural steps to stop her influence.

This shows that the church should take the disciplinary steps we have studied regardless of whether or not the sinner will repent. In fact, if the sinner will not repent, that makes it all the more important for the church to take steps to warn the members to avoid social contact with him.

[See also 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Acts 20:28-30; Galatians 6:1; Proverbs 24:1,2; 13:20; Matthew 18:6,7; 2 John 9-11; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; 8:20,21; Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; Romans 13:14; Genesis 39:7-12]

C. To Maintain Respect for God and His People

Church discipline passages

2 Corinthians 7:11 — By disciplining the fornicator, Corinth cleared themselves and proved themselves to be pure in the matter. It follows that, as long as they had not disciplined him, they had not cleared themselves or proved themselves to be pure.

When sin exists in our midst, in order to maintain the good name of the church, and therefore God's good name, the church must clear itself and prove itself to be pure by disciplining the guilty, just as surely as under the Old Testament.

Other passages

The Bible teaches as a general truth that our conduct as God's people, and especially as a church, reflects on how people view God. We are responsible to make clear that we oppose sin when it occurs in the church, just as Israel was commanded to do.

Acts 5:11 — The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira led, not only the church, but also "all that heard" to have respect (cf. v13).

1 Peter 2:11,12; 3:16 — When people speak against us as evil-doers, our good behavior may, instead, lead them to glorify God. Conversely, it follows that bad behavior tolerated among us, influences people to speak of us as evil-doers and to refuse to glorify God.

Romans 2:17-24 — When Jews lived in sin yet claimed to glory in God and in His word, the result was that God's name was blasphemed. This is just as true among God's people today as it was for Israel.

2 Corinthians 6:3 — We should not give occasion of stumbling in anything, so the ministry will not be blamed. When members live in sin, it hinders the whole effort of the church to minister to lost souls or to strengthen new or weak members.

A church that tolerates sin among its members will never be effective like it ought to be in saving souls.

On the contrary, it brings reproach upon the God we seek to serve.

[See also Proverbs 14:34; 22:1; Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15,16; 2 Peter 2:2; Titus 2:5,7,8; 1 Timothy 3:7; 6:1; 5:14.]

D. To Obey God's Commands

Nearly every passage we studied on church discipline contained direct statements commanding the church to discipline erring members (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; etc.). Note especially:

2 Corinthians 2:9 — The command to punish the sinner was written as a test to see if the church will be obedient in all things. This is the end or purpose for which Paul wrote the instruction.

It follows that saving the sinner is not the "only purpose" for church discipline. There are several other purposes, one of which is to see if the church will be obedient.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 — We are commanded in the name of the Lord Jesus to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly.

God has, at times, directly rebuked congregations for failing to discipline its erring members, tolerating sin when they should have punished it — (1 Corinthians 5 and Revelation 2:20-23).

As it was in Old Testament Israel, so it is in God's spiritual Israel today. When some of God's people go into sin, God calls upon the rest of us to demonstrate whose side we are on. Are we on the sinner's side or are we on God's side (Exodus 32:26ff)?

So, church discipline becomes a test to us. By chastising the sinner, we show to God and to all the world that we stand with God against sin. If we fail, then we have failed the test of obedience and have failed to take the stand that God commands.

III. Kinds of Sin that Require Discipline

Of the church discipline passages that we studied, several described broad or general categories of sin that need discipline. Sometimes these general principles were then applied to specific cases in the church being addressed.

Consider some of the classes of sin named:

A. Some Very General Descriptions of Sins to Be Disciplined

If a member commits any sin that falls into these broad categories (and then refuses to repent), he should be disciplined.

1 Corinthians 5 — Leaven of malice and wickedness (v8), wicked person (v13).

2 Thessalonians 3 — Every brother who walks disorderly (v6), not according to the inspired tradition (v6), anyone who disobeys inspired epistles (v14).

1 Timothy 1 — Those who put away faith and a good conscience, suffer shipwreck of the faith (v19), lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinners (v9), any other thing contrary to sound doctrine according to the gospel (vv 10,11).

B. Some Broad Terms Which Are Yet Not as Broad as Other Terms

Matthew 18:15 — Sin against a brother. Many kinds of sin could be included, but here it refers primarily to sin against another brother.

Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10 — Sin of causing division or occasion of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine. These are sins that result in a particular kind of effect (division, etc.), but there are many kinds of sin that could produce these effects.

C. Some Specific Kinds of Sin to Be Disciplined

Here are some of the much more specific kinds of sin named as specific examples of sins to be chastised by the church:

1 Corinthians 5:11 — Fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, extortioners.

2 Thessalonians 3:11 — Those who work not at all but are busybodies.

1 Timothy 1 — Blasphemy (v20), unholy and profane, murderers, fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars (vv 8-11), teachers of different doctrines (vv 3,4).

Remember, however, that these sins are just specific applications of the general descriptions of sins that deserve discipline. Any other sin that fits the general descriptions should also be disciplined, even though it be different from the specific application made in the context.

Conclusion

Chastisement of erring members, like all teaching, should be done in love. It is not an act of personal vengeance. It is not done to take out our frustrations on the sinner, to hurt him, or to “get rid of him.” Just like discipline of children in the home, it may be unpleasant to do, yet properly done it is intended to benefit everyone involved. Therefore, it is an act of love and should always be done with a proper spirit.

We should be patient, control our attitudes, and always speak and act for the good of others.

Yet discipline is just as necessary in the church as in the home and in all of God’s institutions. Those who neglect it, do so at the risk of allowing sinners to continue in sin, at the risk of allowing other members to fall into sin, at the risk of allowing God and His people to come into disrepute, and at the risk of themselves disobeying God’s commands about how such problems should be dealt with.

Application of Divine teaching is difficult. But our responsibility is, not to avoid the subject because it is difficult, but to study God’s word carefully and then follow it with diligence, with prayer, and with love for all.

5. BIVOCATIONAL BATTLE PLAN

One minister, two jobs and the family that's at the top of the list.

Ask almost any minister if he or she is stretched too thin between the responsibilities of home and the office, and the answer is a resounding *yes!* Ask the same question of bivocational ministers, and the same answer will be given, only *louder*.

The number of bivocational ministers, those in full- or part-time ministry who carry an additional job, is estimated by some researchers to be as high as 30 percent of ministers nationwide. Most are in small churches that cannot afford to pay a full salary, much less benefits, to staff.

Ralph Kelly, 43, a bivocational minister who works in Focus on the Family's Pastoral Ministries department and also pastors Good News Church (Church of Christ Holiness U.S.A.) in Colorado Springs, says there are definite challenges in juggling two jobs and a family.

"There are times when my jobs overlap. A member of the congregation will call me at the office and want to discuss an issue he or she is struggling with. Sometimes I can spend a few minutes with that person on the phone, and other times I have to ask if I can call back later or refer him or her to a lay person in the church who could offer counsel. When I'm at work, I have a responsibility to dedicate my time and energy to my job."

There are also issues with the care of the congregation and church facility. "There are no paid staff at our church," Ralph says. "If you name a role within the church, my wife and I have probably done it: cleaning, witnessing, leading music, calling on folks."

A Toll Road

One of the costs of being a bi-vocational minister is the toll taken on the family.

Ralph says one of the costs of being a bi-vocational minister is the toll taken on the family. To counteract that negative effect, Ralph and his wife have found ways to make family commitments their *first* priority.

"The key to keeping my family at the top of my list is my wife, Daisy," Ralph says. "If she wasn't as flexible and giving as she is, I wouldn't be able to succeed as a bivocational minister."

Daisy handles the family calendar, on which every person's activities are written. Ralph calls home to okay any work or church engagement with the family schedule. "We also set aside some family time, usually each week, that nothing can displace. Daisy and I work hard at staying in tune with our four children."

The evening meal in the Kelly household is a mandated family time. Of course, there are times when one of them has to miss it for an approved reason! "Dinnertime is when we can connect on lighter matters," Ralph says, "such as what's going on in our schedules, how a test went, etc. It's during our scheduled evening times that we get into deeper areas, such as our spiritual walks."

That one-on-one time is crucial to our relationship and ability to communicate.

"Another thing Daisy and I have committed to, for us and for the health of our family, is a date night. Our dates are on Friday night and can be as uncomplicated as going down to the corner store for an ice cream cone. That one-on-one time is crucial to our relationship and ability to communicate."

All in the Family

Ralph says he is blessed because his children enjoy helping out around the church. Krystal, 17, directs the youth choir, and their son Ralph Jr., 10, plays the drums for worship services. "Our ministry time becomes family time for us," Ralph says. "Whether we're cleaning together or praying together, we're still together!" His other two children live and work in Pasadena, Calif.

Nicole, 23, works for a daycare center run by her grandmother. Darnelle, 25, recently graduated from University of California at Berkeley and now works for Cal Tech.

"When I sensed the Lord calling me into ministry seven years ago, I immediately brought Daisy into the process. We sought his will together. And when the call was confirmed in our hearts, we approached the children and told them we'd have to make some adjustments in our family routine. But at the same time, we told them that family was still the No.1 priority for me, and that the Lord would enable me to honor that while taking on new ministry commitments. And he has!"

Post Script: After four years of hard work, Daisy and Ralph just received their bachelors degrees in religious studies from United Theological Bible Seminary in Colorado Springs.

Ralph's Balancing Act

1. Pray
 2. Go to bed on time.
 3. Get up on time so you can start the day unrushed.
 4. Say No to projects that won't fit into your time schedule, or that will compromise your mental health.
 5. Delegate tasks to capable others.
 6. Simplify and unclutter your life.
 7. Less is more. (Although one is often not enough, two are often too many.)
 8. Allow extra time to do things and to get to places.
 9. Pace yourself. Spread out big changes & difficult projects over time; don't put the hard things altogether
 10. Take one day at a time.
 11. Separate worries from concerns. If a situation is a concern, find out what God would have you do and let go of the anxiety. If you can't do anything about a situation, forget it.
 12. Live within your budget; don't use credit cards for ordinary purchases.
 13. Have backups; an extra car key in your wallet, an extra hidden house key, extra stamps, etc.
 14. K.M.S. (Keep Mouth Shut). This single piece of ad-vice can prevent an enormous amount of trouble.
 15. Do something for the Kid in You everyday.
 16. Carry a Bible with you to read while waiting in line.
 17. Get enough rest.
 18. Eat right.
 19. Get organized so everything has its place.
 20. Listen to a tape while driving that can help improve your quality of life.
 21. Write down thoughts and inspirations.
 22. Every day, find time to be alone.
 23. Having problems? Talk to God on the spot. Try to nip small problems in the bud. Don't wait until it's time to go to bed to try and pray.
 24. Make friends with Godly people.
 25. Keep a folder of favorite scriptures on hand.
 26. Remember that the shortest bridge between despair and hope is often a good "Thank you Jesus."
 27. Laugh.
 28. Laugh some more!
 29. Take your work seriously, but not yourself at all.
 30. Develop a forgiving attitude (most people are doing the best they can).
 31. Be kind to unkind people (they probably need it the most).
 32. Sit on your ego.
 33. Talk less; listen more.
 34. Slow down.
 35. Remind yourself that you are not the general manager of the universe.
 36. Every night before bed, think of one thing you're grateful for that you've never been grateful for before.
- GOD HAS A WAY OF TURNING THINGS AROUND FOR YOU. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

THOUGHTS (Bi-vocational Pastoring)

1. Lunch hour is a great time to schedule meetings with church leaders or one-on-one time with members.
2. When I receive a crisis call, and I'm unable to get away from work, I ask that a deacon attend to them until I'm free.
3. I recommend that bivocational ministers receiving income from more than one source use an accountant at tax time. It's too easy to make a painful mistake.
4. A time of renewal away from the church — for a matter of days or weeks — is crucial.
5. I cannot sacrifice my personal time with the Lord in the name of ministry commitments. Ministry takes a toll, both on the minister and the minister's family. Unless I'm renewing myself in the Lord daily, my work efforts will be for nothing.
6. I work well in the early morning hours, and that's often when I'll write my sermon or plow through church-related paperwork.
7. Daisy and I host many church meetings in our home. It makes it easier for our children to understand the demands made on us.

"Never borrow from the future. If you worry about what may happen tomorrow and it doesn't happen, you have worried in vain. Even if it does happen, you have to worry twice."

6. EASTER THOUGHTS

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1). There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel (Num 24:17). 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 (Mic 5:2). Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Is 7:14). For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given (Is 9:6). For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Lk 2:11). And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14). The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear (Deut 18:15, Acts 3:20, 22). For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel (Lk 2:30-32). The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined (Is 9:2). The government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, (Is 9:7). Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Lk 2:14)

Jesus said to Peter "Feed my sheep FOR ME."

"Feed my lambs FOR ME." John 21:15-17.

Under an Eastern sky
amid a rabble cry
A man went forth to die
For me - For me.

Thorn-crowned His blessed Head,
Blood-stained His every tread,
To Calvary He was led
For me - For me.

Pierced were His Hands, His Feet,
Three hours o'er Him did beat
Fierce rays of noon-day heat,
For me - For me.

Since Thou wast made all mine,
Lord, make me wholly Thine.
Grant strength and grace divine
For me - For me.

Thy will to do, Oh, lead
In thought and word and deed
My heart, e'en though it bleed.
To Thee - to Thee.

FOR ME!

"He answered nothing." - Mark 15:3

The day when Jesus stood alone
And felt the hearts of men like stone,
And knew He came but to atone -
That day "He held His peace."

They witnessed falsely to His word,
They bound Him with a cruel cord,
And mockingly proclaimed Him Lord;
"But Jesus held His peace."

They spat upon Him in the face,
They dragged Him on from place to place,
They heaped upon Him all disgrace;
"But Jesus held His peace."

My friend have you for far much less,
With rage, which you called righteousness,
Resented slights with great distress?
Your Saviour "held His peace."

We wish you a HAPPY EASTER! Easter is indeed a time to reaffirm our faith on the hope and power of resurrection. Paul says, **'If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!'** (1 Cor 15:17)

It fascinates me that even Old Testament saints Job and David believed in and talked of resurrection in the following verses! But if you look deeper, you will see it is really Jesus speaking about Himself!!

- **And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:27)**
- **"For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death ... that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living" (Ps 116:8-9)**

* David's prophecy on Resurrection is at Psalm 17:15, **"And I - in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness."**

Yes, the triumphant words of Jesus Who conquered death and holds the keys of death, (Rev 1:18), always rings in our ears: **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (Jn 11:25).** **"Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20).** How emboldening it is! Happy Easter! He is risen. Indeed He is risen!

The Passion Week Divided into Days

Palm Sunday

- Christ enters Jerusalem: (Mat 21:1-11; Mar 11:1-10; Luk 19:28-44; John 12:12-19)

Monday

- The second cleansing of the temple: (Mat 21:12-17; Mar 11:15-18; Luk 19:45-48)

Tuesday

- The barren fig tree: (Mat 21:18-22; Mar 11:11-14, 19-23)
- The questioning of the chief priests: (Mat 21:23-27; Mar 11:27-33; Luk 20:1-8)
- Parable of the two sons: (Mat 21:28-32)
- Parable of the wicked husbandmen: (Mat 21:33-46; Mar 12:1-12; Luk 20:9-18)
- The tribute money: (Mat 22:15-22; Mar 12:13-17; Luk 20:20-26)
- The Sadducees confuted: (Mat 22:23-33; Mar 12:18-27; Luk 20:27-40)
- The great commandment: (Mat 22:34-40; Mar 12:28-34)
- David's Son and David's Lord: (Mat 22:41-46; Mar 12:35-37; Luk 20:41-44)
- The hypocrisy and ambition of the Pharisees: (Mat 23:1-39; Mar 12:38-40; Luk 20:45-47)
- The widow's mite: (Mar 12:41-44; Luk 21:1-4)
- Christ's second coming foretold: (Mat 24:1-51; Mar 13:1-37; Luk 21:5-36)
- Parable of the ten virgins: (Mat 25:1-13)
- The last judgment: (Mat 25:31-46)
- Greeks visit Jesus. Voice from heaven: (Jhn 12:20-36)
- The judgment of unbelief: (Jhn 12:37-50)
- Last passover. Conspiracy of Jews: (Mat 26:1-5; Mar 14:1, 2; Luk 22:1-2)
- Judas Iscariot: (Mat 26:14-16; Mar 14:10, 11; Luk 22:3-6)

Thursday

- Paschal supper: (Mat 26:17-30; Mar 14:12-26; Luk 22:7-23; Jhn 13:1-35)
- Contention of the apostles: (Luk 22:24-30)
- Peter's fall foretold: (Mat 26:31-35; Mar 14:27-31; Luk 22:31-39; Jhn 13:36-38)
- Last discourse. The departure. The Comforter: (Jhn 14:1-31)
- The vine and the branches. Abiding in love: (Jhn 15:1-27)
- Work of the Comforter in the disciples: (Jhn 16:1-33)
- The prayer of Christ for them: (Jhn 17:1-26)
- Gethsemane: (Mat 26:36-46; Mar 14:32-42; Luk 22:40-46; Jhn 18:1)

Good Friday

- The betrayal: (Mat 26:47-56; Mar 14:43-52; Luk 22:47-53; Jhn 18:2-11)
- Christ before Annas and Caiaphas. Peter's denial: (Mat 26:57, 58, 69-75; Mar 14:53, 54, 66-72; Luk 22:54-65; Jhn 18:12-27)
- Christ before the Sanhedrin: (Mat 26:59-68; Mar 14:55-65; Luk 22:66-71)
- Christ before Pilate: (Mat 27:1, 2, 11-14; Mar 15:1-5; Luk 23:1-6; Jhn 18:12-28)
- The traitor's death: (Mat 27:3-10)
- Christ before Herod: (Luk 23:7-12)
- Accusation and condemnation: (Mat 27:15-26; Mar 15:6-15; Luk 23:13-25; Jhn 18:29; 19:16)

- Treatment by the soldiers: (Mat 27:27-31; Mar 15:16-20; Luk 23:36,37; Jhn 19:1-3)
- The crucifixion: (Mat 27:32-38; Mar 15:21-28; Luk 23:26-34; Jhn 19:17-24)
- The mother of Jesus at the cross: (Jhn 19:25-27)
- Mockings and railings: (Mat 27:39-44; Mar 15:29-32; Luk 23:35-39)
- The penitent malefactor: (Luk 23:40-43)
- The death of Christ: (Mat 27:50; Mar 15:37; Luk 23:46; 19:28-30)
- Darkness and other portents: (Mat 27:45-53; Mar 15:33-38; Luk 23:44, 45)
- The bystanders: (Mat 27:54-56; Mar 15:39-41; Luk 23:47-49)
- The side pierced: (Jhn 19:31-37)
- The burial: (Mat 27:57-61; Mar 15:42-47; Luk 23:50-56; Jhn 19:38-42)
- The guard of the sepulchre: (Mat 27:62-66; 28:11-15)

Resurrection Sunday

- The resurrection: (Mat 28:1-10; Mar 16:1-11; Luk 24:1-12; Jhn 20:1-18)

A WONDERFUL AUDIO/VISUAL OF CHRIST'S PASSOVER - ASCENSION

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MY MANNA

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me and the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:35-36).

Strive not so much to succeed! I remember addressing a group of ministers. I told them the story of my own failures- - which at that time amounted to a great many, and I said: "The lesson I have learned from my failures is that I don't have to succeed. I have to do the right thing under God's guidance and leave success or failure in His hands." One of the ministers came to me afterwards and said, "I am a pastor of one of the largest churches in this area and regarded by my peers as one of the most successful ministers in my denomination. But today you have helped me overcome the greatest pressure in my life - the pressure to succeed."

In the early years of my ministry- I was extremely success-oriented! When I succeeded, I felt good. When I failed, I felt devastated. Then God said to me quite bluntly one day- "Are you willing to be a failure for My sake?" The question shook me rigid.

God called Ezekiel for a ministry of failure. He said to him, "The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn...for they are a rebellious house."

Then God gave him a book that described his mission "on both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe." (Ezekiel.2:4,5,10).

The fruit of the Spirit is- - not only love, joy and peace - but also long suffering (Gal.5:22).

It was a whole week later before I found sufficient grace to answer that question with a "Yes!" When I did, I was instantly released from the two things that had crippled my life and ministry: 1) the pressure to succeed! 2) and the fear of failure!!

What matters is not succeeding or failing. But being faithful to Him! God has not called us- - to be successful - but to be faithful! Success and failure are in His hands.

I am not-- on the way to success! I am on the Way!! Success in life is-- neither achievement nor accomplishment! But It is the fulfillment of God's will in my life!!

7. OUR WORDS

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 45:1 Beautiful words stir my heart .I will recite a lovely poem about the king ,for my tongue is like the pen of a skillful poet.

Psalm 45:2 You are the most handsome of all. Gracious words stream from your lips. God himself has blessed you forever.

Psalm 49:3 For my words are wise, and my thoughts are filled with insight.

Psalm 50:17 For you refuse my discipline and treat my words like trash.

Psalm 52:4 You love to destroy others with your words, you liar!

Psalm 55:21 His words are as smooth as butter, but in his heart is war. His words are as soothing as lotion, but underneath are daggers!

Psalm 59:7 Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like swords. “After all, who can hear us?” they sneer.

Psalm 64:3 They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their bitter words like arrows.

Psalm 107:11 They rebelled against the words of God, scorning the counsel of the Most High.

Psalm 109:3 They surround me with hateful words and fight against me for no reason.

Psalm 119:103 How sweet your words taste to me; they are sweeter than honey.

Proverbs 2:12 Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose words are twisted.

Proverbs 10:6 The godly are showered with blessings; the words of the wicked conceal violent intentions.

Proverbs 10:11 The words of the godly are a life-giving fountain; the words of the wicked conceal violent intentions.

Proverbs 10:13 Wise words come from the lips of people with understanding, but those lacking sense will be beaten with a rod.

Proverbs 10:20 The words of the godly are like sterling silver; the heart of a fool is worthless.

Proverbs 10:21 The words of the godly encourage many, but fools are destroyed by their lack of common sense.

Proverbs 10:32 The lips of the godly speak helpful words, but the mouth of the wicked speaks perverse words.

Proverbs 11:9 With their words, the godless destroy their friends, but knowledge will rescue the righteous.

Proverbs 12:6 The words of the wicked are like a murderous ambush, but the words of the godly save lives.

Proverbs 12:13 The wicked are trapped by their own words, but the godly escape such trouble.

Proverbs 12:14 Wise words bring many benefits, and hard work brings rewards.

Proverbs 12:18 Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

Proverbs 14:3 A fool’s proud talk becomes a rod that beats him, but the words of the wise keep them safe.

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.

Proverbs 15:4 Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

Proverbs 15:26 The Lord detests evil plans, but he delights in pure words.

Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.

Proverbs 16:13 The king is pleased with words from righteous lips; he loves those who speak honestly.

Proverbs 16:24 Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.

Proverbs 16:27 Scoundrels create trouble; their words are a destructive blaze.

Proverbs 17:27 A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even-tempered.

Proverbs 18:4 Wise words are like deep waters; wisdom flows from the wise like a bubbling brook.

Proverbs 18:6 Fools' words get them into constant quarrels; they are asking for a beating.
Proverbs 18:20 Wise words satisfy like a good meal; the right words bring satisfaction.
Proverbs 20:15 Wise words are more valuable than much gold and many rubies.
Proverbs 24:2 For their hearts plot violence, and their words always stir up trouble.
Proverbs 31:26 When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness.
Ecclesiastes 5:3 Too much activity gives you restless dreams; too many words make you a fool.
Ecclesiastes 6:11 The more words you speak, the less they mean. So what good are they?
Ecclesiastes 9:17 Better to hear the quiet words of a wise person than the shouts of a foolish king.
Eccle 10:12 Wise words bring approval, but fools are destroyed by their own words.
Matthew 12:37 The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you."
Matthew 15:11 It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth."
Matthew 15:18 But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you.
John 3:34 For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit.
John 6:63 The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.
John 6:68 Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.
John 8:47 Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don't listen because you don't belong to God."
Ephesians 4:29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.
Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.

**Simon Peter replied,
“Lord, to whom would we go?
You have the words that give eternal life.
(John 6:68)**

8. Been Thinking About “The Da Vinci Code”

By Mart De Haan

The Da Vinci Code has been on the *New York Times* Bestseller List since its release in April 2003. In less than 2 years it has become a bestseller in 150 countries and one of the most widely read books of our time.

Author Dan Brown has done what many authors only dream of doing. He has written a book "everyone" is talking about. All over the world people are discussing his upscale murder mystery that teases readers with provocative theories about history, religion, and the arts.

This novel, however, is more than a page-turning murder mystery. *The Da Vinci Code* is a conspiracy theory that leaves many readers wondering whether everything they have believed about Christ and the Bible is wrong

A reviewer from Book Sense says, "This is one of those rare books that comes along and makes you question everything you thought you knew about religion, art, and what you were taught in school. It's fast-paced, enthralling, and simply impossible to put down."

The Da Vinci Code begins with a lengthy list of acknowledgments and then a "fact page" designed to leave the impression that the novel is based on careful research of little-known facts.

One of the book's main characters is Robert Langdon, a fictional Harvard professor of religious symbology. Claiming years of research, the professor maintains that for 1,700 years, the church has been covering up the real truth about Jesus. His views are later echoed by a fictional British royal historian referred to as Sir Leigh Teabing who says things like, "almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false" (*The Da Vinci Code*, p.235).

The title of the book comes from the claim that Leonardo Da Vinci—along with other notables like Sir Isaac Newton and Victor Hugo—was a member of a secret society entrusted with the truth about Jesus. The secret of this group (The Priory of Sion) is that Jesus had a daughter by Mary Magdalene. Mary, according to the Priory, was the true Holy Grail who bore the royal bloodline of Jesus on earth. This, according to the professor, is a fact the church will kill to suppress.

What many readers fail to keep in mind is that *The Da Vinci Code* is fiction. Worse yet, the story rests not on careful research, but on a documented fraud passed off as truth. The idea that Leonardo was a member of The Priory of Sion is based on a document proven by a French court of law to be a forgery and a hoax (*The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code* by Richard Abanes, Harvest House Publishers, pp.48-57).

The Da Vinci Code's "alternative view of history" also falsely states that Jesus was not regarded as a God until the fourth century when the Roman emperor Constantine decided it was in his own political interests to unite the empire by giving Jesus "an impenetrable cloak of divinity" (*The Da Vinci Code*, p.233).

To make the claim plausible, fictional historian Teabing says, "The most profound moment in Christian history" occurred when "Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which

omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned" (*The Da Vinci Code*, p.234).

The Da Vinci Code claims that some of the documents Constantine tried to destroy managed to survive in scrolls found in 1945 at Nag Hammadi, Egypt. These scrolls allegedly "highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base" (*The Da Vinci Code*, p.234).

The ancient texts found at Nag Hammadi, however, were not "lost books of the Bible," as Teabing claims. They were the writings of a mystery religion known as Gnosticism. Gnostics viewed spirit as good and matter as evil. They denied the physical body and crucifixion of Jesus and emphasized a secret knowledge received only by those initiated into the religion. The early church rejected their teachings long before Constantine.

But even if *The Da Vinci Code* doesn't stand up under scrutiny, is it possible that the Bible has been altered through thousands of years of countless copies and versions? This is the kind of question that is best answered by those who have applied the principles of science to manuscript evidence. Scholars spend lifetimes examining all available manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts. They note and map any variations of spelling or wording that show up in families of manuscripts that have been copied from a common source. In addition they analyze the writings of second- and third-century church fathers who left extensive quotes of the Scriptures they were reading and studying.

On the basis of such research, scholars assure us that our Bible is a highly reliable representation of the original manuscripts. In *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable*, F. F. Bruce writes, "To sum up, we may quote the verdict of the late Sir Frederic Kenyon, a scholar whose authority to make pronouncements on ancient MSS was second to none: 'The interval then between the data of original composition and the earliest extant evidence become so small to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scripture have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established' " (<http://www.worldinvisible.com/library/ffbruce/ntdocrli/ntdocont.htm>; *The Bible and Archaeology*, New York and London: Harper, 1940).

Backed by such evidence, the Bible also remains the all-time bestselling and most widely read book in the world. Challengers come and go. What remain are the words of those who were willing to die for their claim that they personally witnessed the miraculous life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. One of those witnesses wrote, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

Resume: Jesus Christ

Address: Ephesians 1:20

Phone: Romans 10:13

Website: The Bible

Keywords: Christ, Lord, Savior & Jesus

My name is Jesus - The Christ. Many call me Lord! I've sent you my resume because I'm seeking the top management position in your heart. Please consider my accomplishments as set forth in my resume.

Qualifications:

- * I founded the earth and established the heavens, (See Proverbs 3:19)
- * I formed man from the dust of the ground, (See Genesis 2:7)
- * I breathed into man the breath of life, (See Genesis 2:7)
- * I redeemed man from the curse of the law, (See Galatians 3:13)
- * The blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant comes upon your life through me, (See Galatians 3:14)

Occupational Background:

- * I've only had one employer, (See Luke 2:49).
- * I've never been tardy, absent, disobedient, slothful or disrespectful.
- * My employer has nothing but rave reviews for me, (See Matthew 3:15-17)

Skills Work Experiences:

- * Some of my skills and work experiences include: empowering the poor to be poor no more, healing the brokenhearted, setting the captives free, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind and setting at liberty them that are bruised, (See Luke 4:18).
- * I am known as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty Savior, Prince of Peace (See Isaiah 9:6). People who listen to me shall dwell safely and fear no evil, (See Proverbs 1:33).
- * Most importantly, I have the authority, ability & power to cleanse you of your sins, (See I John 1:7-9)

Educational Background:

- * I encompass the entire breadth & length of knowledge, wisdom and understanding, (See Proverbs 2:6).
- * In me are hidden all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, (See Colossians 2:3).
- * My Word is so powerful; it has been described as being a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path, (See Psalms 119:105).
- * I can even tell you all of the secrets of your heart, (See Psalm s 44:21).

Major Accomplishments:

- * I was an active participant in the greatest Summit Meeting of all times, (See Genesis 1:26).
- * I laid down my life so that you may live, (See II Corinthians 5:15).
- * I defeated the archenemy of God and mankind & made a show of them openly, (See Colossians 2:15).
- * I've miraculously fed the poor, healed the sick and raised the dead!
- * There are many more major accomplishments, too many to mention here. You can read them on my website, which is located at: [www dot - the BIBLE](http://www.theBIBLE.com). You don't need an Internet connection or computer to access my website.

References:

- * Believers and followers worldwide will testify to my divine healings, salvation, deliverance, miracles, restoration and supernatural guidance

In Summation:

Now that you've read my resume, I'm confident that I'm the only candidate uniquely qualified to fill this vital position in your heart. In summation, I will properly direct your paths, (See Proverbs 3:5-6), and lead you into everlasting life, (See John 6:47). When can I start? Time is of the essence, (See Hebrews 3:15).

Send this resume to everyone you know, you never know who may have an opening!

Thanks for your help & I am with you always – even to the ends of the world!

10. MEANINGS OF BIBLICAL NAMES

A

Aaron, a teacher; lofty; mountain of strength
Abba, father
Abednego, servant of light; shining
Abel, vanity; breath; vapor
Abiathar, excellent father; father of the remnant
Abiezer, father of help
Abigail, the father's joy
Abinadab, father of a vow, or of willingness
Abner, father of light
Abram, high father
Abraham, father of a great multitude
Absalom, father of peace
Achan, or Achar, he that troubleth
Achor, trouble
Adam, earthy; red
Agar, or Hagar, a stranger; one that fears
Ahab, uncle, or father's brother
Alleluia, praise the Lord
Amalek, a people that licks up
Ami, mother; fear; people
Ammon, a people; the son of my people
Ananias, or Ananiah, the cloud of the Lord
Anathema, separated; set apart
Andrew, a strong man
Anna, gracious; one who gives
Annas, one who answers; humble
Antichrist, an adversary to Christ
Antioch, speedy as a chariot
Apocalypse, uncovering, revelation
Apollon, one who destroys; destroyer
Artemas, whole, sound
Asaph, who gathers together
Asher, happiness

B

Baal, master; lord
Baalim, idols; masters; false gods
Babel, confusion; mixture
Babylon, same as Babel
Balaam, the ancient of the people; the destruction of the people
Balak, who lays waste or destroys
Barabbas, son of shame, confusion
Barak, thunder, or in vain
Barjesus, son of Jesus or Joshua
Barnabas, son of the prophet, or of consolation
Barsabas, son of return; son of rest
Bartholomew, a son that suspends the waters
Bartimeus, son of the honorable
Baruch, who is blessed
Bathsheba, the seventh daughter; the daughter of satiety
Ben, a son
Ben-ammi, son of my people
Benjamin, son of the right hand
Bethany, the house of song; the house of affliction
Boanerges, son of thunder
Boaz, or Booz, in strength

C

Caiphas, he that seeks with diligence; one that vomiteth
Cain, possession, or possessed
Caleb, a dog; a crow; a basket
Calvary, the place of a skull
Cana, zeal; jealousy; possession
Canaan, merchant; trader; or that humbles and subdues
Capernaum, the field of repentance; city of comfort
Carmel, circumcised lamb; harvest; full of ears of corn
Cephas, a rock or stone
Christ, anointed
Colosse, punishment; correction
Coniah, strength of the Lord
Corinth, which is satisfied; ornament; beauty
Cornelius, of a horn
Crete, carnal; fleshly

D

Dagon, corn; a fish
Damascus, a sack full of blood; the similitude of burning
Dan, judgment; he that judges
Daniel, judgment of God; God my judge
David, well-beloved, dear
Deborah, word; thing; a bee
Decapolis, containing ten cities
Delilah, poor; small; head of hair
Demetrius, belonging to corn, or to Ceres
Deuteronomy, repetition of the law
Diana, luminous, perfect
Dinah, judgment; who judges
Dorcas, a female roe-deer
Dothan, the law; custom

E

Ecclesiastes, a preacher
Eden, pleasure; delight
Edom, red, earthy; of blood
Egypt, that troubles or oppresses; anguish
Elam, a young man; a virgin; a secret
Eleazar, help of God, court of God
Eli, the offering or lifting up
Eli, Eli, my God, my God
Eliab, God is my father; God is the father
Eliakim, resurrection of God
Elias, same as Elijah
Eliezer, help, or court, of my God
Elijah, God the Lord, the strong Lord
Elisabeth, Elizabeth, the oath, or fullness, of God
Elisha, salvation of God
Elohi, Elohim, God
Emmanuel, God with us
Emmaus, people despised or obscure
En-ge-di, eye, or fountain, of the goat, or of happiness
Enoch, dedicated; disciplined
Ephesus, desirable
Ephraim, fruitful; increasing
Er, watchman
Esau, he that acts or finishes
Esther, secret; hidden
Ethiopia, blackness; heat
Eunice, good victory
Euphrates, that makes fruitful

Eve, living; enlivening
Exodus, going out, departure
Ezekiel, the strength of God
Ezra, help; court

F

Felix, happy, prosperous
Festus, festive, joyful

G

Gaal, contempt; abomination
Gabriel, God is my strength
Gad, a band; a troop
Galilee, wheel; revolution
Gamaliel, recompense of God; camel of God
Gennesaret, garden of the prince
Genesis, beginning
Gershom, a stranger here
Gethsemane, a very fat or plentiful vale
Gideon, he that bruises or breaks; a destroyer
Golgotha, a heap of skulls; something skull-shaped
Goliath, passage; revolution; heap
Gomer, to finish; complete
Gomorrah, rebellious people
Goshen, approaching; drawing near

H

Hagar, a stranger; one that fears
Haggai, feast; solemnity
Hallelujah, praise the Lord
Ham, hot; heat; brown
Haman, noise; tumult
Hananiah, grace; mercy; gift of the Lord
Hannah, gracious; merciful; he that gives
Hebrews, descendants of Heber
Hebron, society; friendship
Hezekiah, strength of the Lord
Hosanna, save I pray thee; keep; preserve
Hosea, Hoshea, savior; safety

I

Ichabod, where is the glory? or, no glory
Immanuel, God with us
Isaac, laughter
Isaiah (Esaías) the salvation of the Lord
Iscaiot, a man of murder; a hireling
Ishmael, God that hears
Israel, who prevails with God
Issachar, reward; recompense

J

Jacob, that supplants, undermines; the heel
James, same as Jacob
Jedidiah, beloved of the Lord
Jehoshua, same as Joshua
Jehovah, self-subsisting
Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide
Jehovah-nissi, the Lord my banner
Jehovah-shalom, the Lord send peace
Jehovah-shammah, the Lord is there
Jehovah-tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness
Jeremiah, exaltation of the Lord

Jericho, his moon; his month; his sweet smell
Jerusalem, vision of peace
Jesse, gift; oblation; one who is
Jesus, savior; deliverer
Jew, same as Judah
Job, he that weeps or cries
Joel, he that wills or commands
John, the grace or mercy of the Lord
Jonah, or Jonas, a dove; he that oppresses; destroyer
Jordan, the river of judgment
Joseph, increase; addition
Joshua, a savior; a deliverer
Judah, the praise of the Lord; confession
Judas, Jude, same as Judah
Judaea, Judea, same as Judah
Judith, same as Judah

L

Leah, weary; tired
Lebanon, white, incense
Levi, associated with him
Lucifer, bringing light
Luke, luminous; white

M

Martha, who becomes bitter; provoking
Matthew, given; a reward
Melchizedek, king of justice
Messiah, anointed
Micah, poor; humble
Miriam, rebellion
Mordecai, contrition; bitter; bruising

N

Nazareth, separated; crowned; sanctified
Nazarite, one chosen or set apart
Nehemiah, consolation; repentance of the Lord
Nicodemus, victory of the people
Noah, repose; consolation
Noah, that quavers or totters (Zelophehad's daughter)

P

Paul, small; little
Pentateuch, the five books of Moses
Pentecost, fiftieth
Perez, divided
Peter, a rock or stone
Pharisees, set apart
Philadelphia, love of a brother
Philemon, who kisses
Philip, warlike; a lover of horses
Pilate, armed with a dart
Pontius, marine; belonging to the sea

R

Rabbi, Rabboni, my master
Raca, worthless; good-for-nothing
Rachel, sheep
Rahab, proud; quarrelsome (applied to Egypt)
Rahab, large; extended (name of a woman)
Reuben, who sees the son; the vision of the son
Ruth, drunk; satisfied

S

Sabaoth, Lord of hosts
Sadducees, followers of Sadoc, or Zadok
Sadoc, or Zadok, just; righteous
Salem, complete or perfect peace
Samaria, watch-mountain
Samson, his sun; his service; there the second time
Samuel, heard of God; asked of God
Sanhedrin, sitting together
Sarah, lady; princess; princess of the multitude
Sarai, my lady; my princess
Satan, contrary; adversary; enemy; accuser
Saul, demanded; lent; ditch; death
Seraphim, burning; fiery
Seth, put; who puts; fixed
Shem, name; renown
Silas, three, or the third
Simeon, that hears or obeys; that is heard
Simon, that hears; that obeys
Sin, bush
Sinai, a bush; enmity
Sodom, their secret; their cement
Solomon, peaceable; perfect; one who recompenses
Stephanas, crown; crowned
Stephen, same as Stephanas

T

Tamar, palm; palm-tree
Tetrarch, governor of a fourth part
Theophilus, friend of God
Thomas, a twin
Titus, pleasing
Tryphena, delicious; delicate

Z

Zelotes, zealous
Ziklag, measure pressed down

11. STORIES & POEMS

I'VE NO HOPE by A.B. Earle (www.biblebelievers.com)

I was just sitting down at my own table, at twelve o'clock, one day, when one of my neighbors came in greatly excited, and said to me:

"I wish you would go over to my house as soon as you can. I fear my son Charles is dying, and I desire very much to know how he feels."

I did not stay to dine, but hurried to the house, and it was well I did for the young man was dead in thirty minutes after I reached the house.

I found him sitting in a large arm rocking chair, dying with a putrid sore throat. He could breathe easier in that position. I saw that death was upon him, and if I said anything to him I must do it at once. I very mildly asked him this question:

"Charley, if it should please your Heavenly Father to call you away pretty soon, do you think you have a good hope?"

He struggled with this terrible disease (the putrid sore throat) for a moment, determined to let me know how he felt, and finally got out these words:

"Won't you pray that God will have mercy on my soul?"

I said, "I will Charles."

After a few words pointing out the way to Christ (for I had to be very brief, death was doing his work so rapidly) I said to the neighbors in the room:

"Will you all kneel down with me whether you are Christians or not, and help me pray for this dear young man."

They did kneel down with me, and oh, how we begged of God for Christ's sake to save Charles if possible, even in this extremity; to pluck him as a brand from the burning. We could hear his strange voice during the prayer:

"O God, have mercy on my soul."

When we rose from our knees, his sobbing mother put her arms around his neck and her wet face upon his, bathing it with her tears, as if to get the comforting words, said:

"Charles, don't you think you will meet us in heaven?"

His reply was, "No, mother, I've no hope."

Turning his dying eyes on me, he said:

"Won't you pray that God will have mercy on my soul."

Although I had just risen from my knees, I said:

"I will Charley. Come neighbors, kneel down with me again and help me pray."

Oh, what a moment it was, while we plead once more that if possible, God would save Charley.

When we arose from our knees the second time, death was so near that I assisted in laying him upon the

bed. While we stood over him in his death struggles, his poor mother, said:

"Let me come, I must speak to him once more."

She spread her arms over him, putting her wet face upon his again as if determined to get the comforting words, and said:

"Charles, don't you think you will meet us in heaven?"

"No, mother, no, I've no hope."

These were the last words that dropped from his lips. He gasped a few times, and was gone. May God save any of you from witnessing such a scene.

The family threw their arms around each other and sobbed aloud. When I tried to speak a word of comfort to them, they cried:

"No sir, we can't have it so."

But it was so. I think they continued this sobbing for a full half hour. When they became calm enough so that I could, I kneeled and prayed with them, and for them, that God would sustain and comfort them.

As I left that house, and went towards my home, and looked up into the open heavens, I said:

"Jesus, I will be a better minister; wherever I go I will plead with young men, to seek thee while they may."

I do intreat every one who may read this incident, if you have not already done it, not to delay one hour in securing the salvation of your soul.

**The Spirit calls to-day,
Yield to his power,
Oh, grieve him not away,
Tis mercy's hour."**

MY TWO DOLLARS by A.B. Earle

At the close of a series of meetings in Springfield, Mass., a mother handed me a little girl's picture wrapped in two one-dollar bills, at the same time relating the following touching incident:

Her only child, at the age of six years, gave her heart to the Saviour, giving, as the pastor with whom I was laboring said, the clearest evidence of conversion.

At once she went to her mother and said, "Ma, I have given my heart to Jesus and he has received me; now, won't you give your heart to him?" (The parents were both unconverted at the time). The mother replied, "I hope I shall some time, dear Mary." The little girl said, "Do it now, ma," and urged the mother, with all her childlike earnestness, to give herself to the Saviour then.

Finding she could not prevail in that way, she sought to secure a promise from her mother, feeling sure she would do what she promised; for her parents had made it a point never to make her a promise without carefully fulfilling it. So time after time she would say, "Promise me, ma;" and the mother would reply, "I do not like to promise you, Mary, for fear I shall not fulfill."

This request was urged at times for nearly six years, and finally the little petitioner had to die to secure the promise.

Several times during her sickness the parents came to her bedside to see her die, saying to her "You are dying now, dear Mary." But she would say, "No, ma, I can't die till you promise me." Still her mother was unwilling to make the promise, lest it should not be kept. She intended to give her heart to Jesus some time, but was unwilling to do it "now."

Mary grew worse, and finally had uttered her last word on earth: her mother was never, again to hear that earnest entreaty, "Promise me, ma."

But the little one's spirit lingered, as if it were detained by the angel sent to lead her mother to Jesus, that the long-sought promise might be heard before it took its flight.

The weeping mother stood watching the countenance of the dying child, who seemed to say, by her look, "Ma, promise me, and let me go to Jesus." There was a great struggle in her heart as she said to herself, "Why do I not promise this child? I mean to give my heart to Jesus; why not now? If I do not promise her now, I never can."

The Spirit inclined her heart to yield. She roused her child, and said, "Mary, I will give my heart to Jesus." This was the last bolt to be drawn; her heart was now open, and Jesus entered at once, and she felt the joy and peace of sins forgiven.

This change was so marked, she felt constrained to tell the good news to her child, that she might bear it with her when she went to live with Jesus; so, calling her attention once more, she said, "Mary, I have given my heart to Jesus, and he is my Saviour now."

For six years Mary had been praying to God and pleading with her mother for these words; and now, as they fell upon her ear, a peaceful smile lighted up her face, and, no longer able to speak, she raised her little, pale hand, and pointing upward, seemed to say, "Ma, we shall meet up there." Her life's work was done, and her spirit returned to Him who gave it.

The mother's heart was full of peace, though her loved one had gone. She now felt very anxious that her husband should have this blessing which she found in Christ.

The parents went into the room where the remains were resting, to look upon the face of her who slept so sweetly in death, when the mother said, "Husband, I promised our little Mary that I would give my heart to Jesus, and he has received me. Now, won't you promise?"

The Holy Spirit was there. The strong man resisted for a while, then yielded his will, and taking the little cold hand in his, kneeled and said, "Jesus, I will try to seek thee."

The child's remains were laid in the grave. The parents were found in the house of prayer- the mother happy in Jesus, and the father soon having some evidence of love to Christ.

When I closed my labors in Springfield, Dr. Ide said to his congregation, "I hope you will all give brother Earle some token of your regard for his services before he leaves. As this mother heard these words, she said she could, as it were, see her little Mary's hand pointing down from heaven, and hear her sweet voice saying, "Ma, give him my two one-dollars."

Those two one-dollars I have now, wrapped around the picture of that dear child, and wherever I go, little Mary will speak for the Saviour.

Reader, is there not some loved one now pointing down from heaven and saying to you, "Give your heart to Jesus?" Are you loving some earthly object more than Jesus? God may sever that tie -may take away your little Mary, or Willie, or some dear friend. Will you not come to Jesus, without such a warning?

ASAP

Ever wonder about the abbreviation A.S.A.P.? Generally we think of it in terms of even more hurry and stress in our lives. Maybe if we think of this abbreviation in a different manner, we will begin to find a new way to deal with those rough days along the way.

*There's work to do, deadlines to meet;
You've got no time to spare,
But as you hurry and scurry-
ASAP - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER*

*In the midst of family chaos,
"Quality time" is rare.
Do your best; let God do the rest-
ASAP - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER.*

*It may seem like your worries
Are more than you can bear.
Slow down and take a breather-
ASAP - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER*

*God knows how stressful life is;
He wants to ease our cares,
And He'll respond to all your needs
A.S.A.P. - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER.*

PLEASURE IN SELFISH PRAYER by A.B. Earle

I once asked a lady whose character seemed as spotless as it is possible to be in this life, who said she had always enjoyed secret prayer, if there was a friend in the world whose society she enjoyed when she wanted nothing of that friend except to be in his presence, no personal or selfish end in view, nothing wanted except to enjoy being in his society. She said:

"There is just such a friend, in whose society and presence I spend hours of the greatest pleasure, simply because I love him."

I inquired if she felt the same or equal pleasure in the closet or in communion with God; whether she had seasons for secret praise to God, when nothing was wanted except to be in his presence, to praise him for his purity and holiness.

She replied:

"I see my heart, sir. I see myself a lost sinner. My pleasure in prayer has been all selfishness, no love for holiness. Although I have lived a moral life, and enjoyed secret prayer, it has been only when I wanted some favor from God, not because I loved his purity, and desired to be in his presence. I see that my heart has been dead in its affections towards God all this time; I see the need of being born again, of a new heart."

I have seldom seen a more earnest seeker than this lady. It was not a change in her outward life she sought, - this was apparently without blemish, - but a change in her affections toward the holiness of God.

There is nothing in our fallen nature, which, if cultivated in the best possible manner, would bring our hearts, or affections, into union with holiness and purity. If unregenerate men were taken into heaven itself, and if it were possible to live in the society of the pure and the holy for ages, even this would not bring love to God and holiness into the soul. "Ye must be born again," would still remain true. Being in heaven among the redeemed would not bring life into the dead affections.

I heard of a man who was a profane swearer, a rejecter of offered mercy, who could not sleep until he had repeated aloud the prayer his mother taught him when a child, "Now I lay me down to sleep."

Having repeated this simple prayer, he was so far satisfied that he could go quietly to sleep. If we were in the habit of going to a rich man for favors; even if we really disliked him, yet, if he received us kindly, and granted our requests, we should feel a kind of satisfaction in going for those favors, although we had no love for the man. So we may find a certain satisfaction in prayer, a degree of pleasure, it may be, in going to God for what we think we want.

This is a very different thing from feeling a real pleasure in simply being in God's presence to praise him for his holiness and purity, when we want nothing in particular, to have seasons for secret praise.

Let me ask the reader whether the pleasure you feel in secret prayer is only when you want something in particular of him, and so may be entirely selfish pleasure, or do you, at least, have seasons when you want simply to praise God for his purity and holiness, finding real pleasure in being in his presence, because you love him?

UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT by A.B. Earle

The most effectual, unanswerable argument with which to meet infidelity is intense desire for men's salvation, or, as Paul. expresses it, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Infidelity stands trembling in the presence of soul-travail. It is an unanswerable argument.

An incident occurred a number of years ago that illustrates the real power of this argument. A man of great ability and reading supposed himself invulnerable to any argument Christians could bring in favor of Christianity. Able ministers had endeavored to convince him, but he would laugh them down. A very able, pious lawyer had been sent to reason with him, but it was all of no avail, until a humble Christian satisfied him he was "greatly concerned for his salvation."

I will give his experience in his own language, as related by himself in a prayer-meeting:

"I stand," said Mr. R____, "to tell you the story of my conversion."

His lips trembled slightly as he spoke, and his bosom heaved with suppressed emotion.

"I am as a brand plucked out of the burning. The change in me is an astonishment to myself, and all brought about by the grace of God and that unanswerable argument. It was a cold morning in January, and I had just begun my labor at the anvil in my shop, when I looked out, and saw Mr. B____ approaching. He dismounted quickly, and entered.

"As he drew near, I saw he was agitated. His look was full of earnestness. His eyes were bedimmed with tears. He took me by the hand. His breast heaved with emotion, and with indescribable tenderness he said:

"Mr. R____, I am greatly concerned for your salvation - greatly concerned for your salvation,' and he burst into tears.

"He stood with my hand grasped in his. He struggled to regain self-possession. He often essayed to speak, but not a word could he utter, and finding that he could say no more, he turned, went out of the shop, got on his horse, and rode slowly away.

"'Greatly concerned for my salvation!' said I, audibly, and I stood, and forgot to bring my hammer down. There I stood with it upraised 'greatly concerned for my salvation!'

"I went to my house. My poor, pious wife, whom I had always ridiculed for her religion, exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. R____, what is the matter with you?

"Matter enough,' said I, filled with agony, and overwhelmed with a sense of sin. 'Old Mr. B____ has ridden two miles this cold morning to tell me he was greatly concerned for my salvation. What shall I do? What shall I do?'

"I do not know what you can do,' said my astonished wife. 'I do not know what better you can do than to get on your horse, and go and see him. He can give you better counsel than I, and tell you what you must do to be saved.'

"I mounted my horse, and pursued after him. I found him alone in that same little room where he had spent the night in prayer for my poor soul, where he had shed many tears over such a reprobate as I, and had besought God to have mercy upon me.

" 'I am come,' said I to him, 'to tell you that I am greatly concerned for my own salvation.'

" 'Praised be God!' said the aged man. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief,' and he began at that same Scripture, and preached to me Jesus. On that same floor we knelt, and together we prayed, and we did not separate that day till God spoke peace to my soul.

"I have often been requested to look at the evidence of the truth of religion, but, blessed be God, I have evidence for its truth here," laying his hand upon his heart, "which nothing can gainsay or resist. I have often been led to look at this and that argument for the truth of Christianity; but I could overturn, and, as I thought, completely demolish and annihilate them all. But I stand here, to-night, thankful to acknowledge that God sent an argument to my conscience and heart which could not be answered or resisted, when a weeping Christian came to tell me how greatly concerned he was for my salvation. God taught him that argument when he spent the night before him in prayer for my soul."

If we would lead men to the Saviour, let us satisfy them that we see and feel their danger; that alone before God we are "greatly concerned for their salvation."

WON BY HIS CHILD by A.B. Earle

A tender incident; one that illustrates the truth of Christ's word, "A little child shall lead them."

A saloon-keeper of considerable note had an only daughter, named Eva. The father almost idolized this child. She was very lovely. He would often take her into his saloon, to show her to his company. His life seemed bound up in this child. He would gratify, as far as possible, every wish of his Eva, of whom he was becoming very proud.

When she was about six years old; a Christian temperance woman came into that place and formed a Children's Temperance Society. Eva was invited to attend the meeting, and became a member. Her father, proud of having her noticed, gave his consent, thinking she was too young to be influenced by what might be said about his business.

The lady conducting the services asked the children to bow their heads while she asked God to bless them. Eva had never heard a prayer before. It seemed very strange to her, and made a lasting impression on her mind.

After returning home, she at once began her lifework, which was to terminate in a few weeks. She went at once to her father, and said:

"Papa, it is wrong to sell rum; it makes people bad."

He was pleased to see that she remembered so much that she had heard in the meeting, and so did not

keep her from attending them. Eva, though so young, had evidently given her heart to Jesus. A few weeks after giving herself to Christ, she was taken very sick. Her father watched over her day and night with the tenderest care. How could he have the pride and idol of his heart taken away! She would often look up in his face so earnestly, and say:

"Papa, don't sell any more rum, because it is wrong."

Still his saloon was open.

She was fast fading away. Death was about to liberate the soul of little Eva. Just then, with her face almost angelic, she looked up in her father's face, and said:

"Papa, dear papa, won't you promise me that you won't sell any more rum?"

The father, almost overcome with emotion, replied:

"Yes, Eva dear, I will promise you anything if you will only get well. How can I live without you!"

She asked him to go and shut up his saloon right away, that she could "tell Jesus what he had done."

He was too much affected to speak, but left the room. In a short time he returned, and said:

"My darling, I have shut up my saloon, so that no one can come in."

He then promised his child he would never sell another drop of liquor, and would throw away all there was in his saloon.

Eva was very happy about her father's decision, and for some time was very quiet. After a while she opened her eyes, and looking about the room, on them all, with her face beaming with the love of Christ, said:

"I am going to live with Jesus very soon, and I do want my papa and mamma there too. Papa, will you promise to give your heart to him and do all he wants you to, and then come and live with him?"

The father was silent. He did not like to promise anything he was not sure he could fulfill. His weeping wife said:

"Oh, George, do grant your dying child's request. I have promised to meet her in heaven, and I want you should."

At last, in broken accents, he said:

"I promise what you wish, my darling child. I will seek your Saviour with all my heart, and serve him the rest of my life, and hope to meet you in heaven."

Eva had accomplished her mission. Her work was ended, and she fell asleep. She went away with the angels to her happy home above, to welcome her father and mother when they come to meet her there.

Why would not these parents come to Jesus without this severe trial? Reader, will it be necessary for God to deal in a similar way with you, to bring you to heaven?

SMELL THE RAIN!

This is long, but such a good story.....

At the end of this story, it gives you two options. I think you will figure out what option I chose.

A cold March wind danced around the dead of night in Dallas as the doctor walked into the small hospital room of Diana Blessing. She was still groggy from surgery. Her husband, David, held her hand as they braced themselves for the latest news.

That afternoon of March 10, 1991, complications had forced Diana, only 24-weeks pregnant, to undergo an emergency Caesarean to deliver the couple's new daughter, Dana Lu Blessing.

At 12 inches long and weighing only one pound nine ounces, they already knew she was perilously premature. Still, the doctor's soft words dropped like bombs.

"I don't think she's going to make it," he said, as kindly as he could.

"There's only a 10-percent chance she will live through the night, and even then, if by some slim chance she does make it, her future could be a very cruel one."

Numb with disbelief, David and Diana listened as the doctor described the devastating problems Dana would likely face if she survived.

She would never walk, she would never talk, she would probably be blind, and she would certainly be prone to other catastrophic conditions from cerebral palsy to complete mental retardation, and on and on.

"No! No!" was all Diana could say.

She and David, with their 5-year-old son Dustin, had long dreamed of the day they would have a daughter to become a family of four. Now, within a matter of hours, that dream was slipping away.

But as those first days passed, a new agony set in for David and Diana.

Because Dana's underdeveloped nervous system was essentially 'raw,' the lightest kiss or caress only intensified her discomfort, so they couldn't even cradle their tiny baby girl against their chests to offer the strength of their love. All they could do, as Dana struggled alone beneath the ultraviolet light in the tangle of tubes and wires, was to pray that God would stay close to their precious little girl.

There was never a moment when Dana suddenly grew stronger. But as the weeks went by, she did slowly gain an ounce of weight here and an ounce of strength there. At last, when Dana turned two months old, her parents were able to hold her in their arms for the very first time.

And two months later, though doctors continued to gently but grimly warn that her chances of surviving, much less living any kind of normal life, were next to zero, Dana went home from the hospital, just as her mother had predicted.

Five years later, Dana was a petite but feisty young girl with glittering grey eyes and an unquenchable zest for life. She showed no signs whatsoever of any mental or physical impairment. Simply, she was everything a little girl can be and more. But that happy ending is far from the end of her story.

One blistering afternoon in the summer of 1996 near her home in Irving, Texas, Dana was sitting in her mother's lap in the bleachers of a local ballpark where her brother Dustin's baseball team was practicing.

As always, Dana was chattering nonstop with her mother and several other adults sitting nearby when she suddenly fell silent. Hugging her arms across her chest, little Dana asked, "Do you smell that?"

Smelling the air and detecting the approach of a thunderstorm, Diana replied, "Yes, it smells like rain."

Dana closed her eyes and again asked, "Do you smell that?"

Once again, her mother replied, "Yes, I think we're about to get wet. It smells like rain."

Still caught in the moment, Dana shook her head, patted her thin shoulders with her small hands and loudly announced, "No, it smells like Him. It smells like God when you lay your head on His chest."

Tears blurred Diana's eyes as Dana happily hopped down to play with the other children. Before the rains came, her daughter's words confirmed what Diana and all the members of the extended Blessing family had known, at least in their hearts, all along.

During those long days and nights of her first two months of life, when her nerves were too sensitive for them to touch her, God was holding Dana on His chest and it is His loving scent that she remembers so well.

"I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." (Phil.4:13)

When you are down to nothing, God is up to something!

FOR ME!

Under an Eastern sky
amid a rabble cry
A man went forth to die
For me - For me.

Thorn-crowned His blessed Head,
Blood-stained His every tread,
To Calvary He was led
For me - For me.

Pierced were His Hands, His Feet,
Three hours o'er Him did beat
Fierce rays of noon-day heat,
For me - For me.

Since Thou wast made all mine,
Lord, make me wholly Thine.
Grant strength and grace divine
For me - For me.

Thy will to do, Oh, lead
In thought and word and deed
My heart, e'en though it bleed.
To Thee - to Thee.

"He answered nothing." - Mark 15:3

The day when Jesus stood alone
And felt the hearts of men like stone,
And knew He came but to atone -
That day "He held His peace."

They witnessed falsely to His word,
They bound Him with a cruel cord,
And mockingly proclaimed Him Lord;
"But Jesus held His peace."

They spat upon Him in the face,
They dragged Him on from place to place,
They heaped upon Him all disgrace;
"But Jesus held His peace."

My friend have you for far much less,
With rage, which you called righteousness,
Resented slights with great distress?
Your Saviour "held His peace."

UNDERSTANDING

"A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. He painted a sign advertising the 4 pups. And set about nailing it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he was driving the last nail into the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy.

"Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies."

"Well," said the farmer, as he rubbed the sweat off the back of his neck, "These puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money."

The boy dropped his head for a moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?"

"Sure," said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle.

"Here, Dolly!" he called. Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur.

The little boy pressed his face against the chain link fence. His eyes danced with delight. As the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring inside the doghouse. Slowly another little ball appeared, this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid.

Then in a somewhat awkward manner, the little pup began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up....

"I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt. The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said,

"Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would."

With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said,

"You see sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands." With tears in his eyes, the farmer reached down and picked up the little pup. Holding it carefully he handed it to the little boy.

"How much?" asked the little boy.

"No charge," answered the farmer, "There's no charge for love."

The world is full of people who need someone who understands."

JESUS UNDERSTANDS!!!!

ROBBY'S Night – A True Story!!

At the prodding of my friends, I am writing this story. My name is Mildred Hondorf. I am a former elementary school music teacher from Des Moines, Iowa. I've always supplemented my income by teaching piano lessons-something I've done for over 30 years. Over the years I found that children have many levels of musical ability. I've never had the pleasure of having a prodigy though I have taught some talented students. However I've also had my share of what I call "musically challenged" pupils. One such student was Robby. Robby was 11 years old when his mother (a single Mom) dropped him off for his first piano lesson. I prefer that students (especially boys!) begin at an earlier age, which I explained to Robby.

But Robby said that it had always been his mother's dream to hear him play the piano. So I took him as a student. Well, Robby began with his piano lessons and from the beginning I thought it was a hopeless endeavour. As much as Robby tried, he lacked the sense of tone and basic rhythm needed to excel. But he dutifully reviewed his scales and some elementary pieces that I require all my students to learn.

Over the months he tried and tried while I listened and cringed and tried to encourage him. At the end of each weekly lesson he'd always say, "My mom's going to hear me play someday." But it seemed hopeless. He just did not have any inborn ability. I only knew his mother from a distance as she dropped Robby off or waited in her aged car to pick him up. She always waved and smiled but never stopped in.

Then one day Robby stopped coming to our lessons. I thought about calling him but assumed because of his lack of ability, that he had decided to pursue something else. I also was glad that he stopped coming. He was a bad advertisement for my teaching!

Several weeks later I mailed to the student's homes a flyer on the upcoming recital. To my surprise Robby (who received a flyer) asked me if he could be in the recital. I told him that the recital was for current pupils and because he had dropped out he really did not qualify. He said that his mother had been sick and unable to take him to piano lessons but he was still practicing. "Miss Hondorf . . I've just got to play!" he insisted.

I don't know what led me to allow him to play in the recital. Maybe it was his persistence or maybe it was something inside of me saying that it would be all right. The night for the recital came. The high school gymnasium was packed with parents, friends and relatives. I put Robby up last in the program before I was to come up and thank all the students and play a finishing piece. I thought that any damage he would do would come at the end of the program and I could always salvage his poor performance through my "curtain closer."

Well, the recital went off without a hitch. The students had been practicing and it showed. Then Robby came up on stage. His clothes were wrinkled and his hair looked like he'd run an eggbeater through it. "Why didn't he dress up like the other students?" I thought. "Why didn't his mother at least make him comb his hair for this special night?"

Robby pulled out the piano bench and he began. I was surprised when he announced that he had chosen Mozart's Concerto #21 in C Major. I was not prepared for what I heard next. His fingers were light on the keys, they even danced nimbly on the ivories. He went from pianissimo to fortissimo. From allegro to virtuoso. His suspended chords that Mozart demands were magnificent! Never had I heard Mozart played so well by people his age. After six and a half minutes he ended in a grand crescendo and everyone was on their feet in wild applause.

Overcome and in tears I ran up on stage and put my arms around Robby in joy. "I've never heard you play like that Robby! How'd you do it?" Through the microphone Robby explained: "Well Miss Hondorf . . . remember I told you my Mom was sick? Well, actually she had cancer and passed away this morning. And well . . . she was born deaf so tonight was the first time she ever heard me play. I wanted to make it special."

There wasn't a dry eye in the house that evening. As the people from Social Services led Robby from the stage to be placed into foster care, noticed that even their eyes were red and puffy and I thought to myself how much richer my life had been for taking Robby as my pupil.

No, I've never had a prodigy but that night I became a prodigy. . . of Robby's. He was the teacher and I was the pupil For it is he that taught me the meaning of perseverance and love and believing in yourself and maybe even taking a chance in someone and you don't know why.

Robby was killed in the senseless bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in April of 1995.

MY "PA"

Pa never had much compassion for the lazy or those who squandered their means and then never had enough for the necessities. But for those who were genuinely in need, his heart was as big as all outdoors. It was from him that I learned the greatest joy in life comes from giving, not from receiving.

It was Christmas Eve 1881. I was fifteen years old and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there just hadn't been enough money to buy me the rifle that I'd wanted for Christmas. We did the chores early that night for some reason. I just figured Pa wanted a little extra time so we could read in the Bible.

After supper was over I took my boots off and stretched out in front of the fireplace and waited for Pa to get down the old Bible. I was still feeling sorry for myself and, to be honest, I wasn't in much of a mood to read Scriptures. But Pa didn't get the Bible, instead he bundled up again and went outside. I couldn't figure it out because we had already done all the chores. I didn't worry about it long though, I was too busy wallowing in self-pity. Soon Pa came back in. It was a cold clear night out and there was ice in his beard. "Come on, Matt," he said. "Bundle up good, it's cold out tonight." I was really upset then. Not only wasn't I getting the rifle for Christmas, now Pa was dragging me out in the cold, and for no earthly reason that I could see. We'd already done all the chores, and I couldn't think of anything else that needed doing, especially not on a night like this. But I knew Pa was not very patient at one dragging one's feet when he'd told them to do something, so I got up and put my boots back on and got my cap, coat, and mittens. Ma gave me a mysterious smile as I opened the door to leave the house. Something was up, but I didn't know what.

Outside, I became even more dismayed. There in front of the house was the work team, already hitched to the big sled. Whatever it was we were going to do wasn't going to be a short, quick, little job. I could tell. We never hitched up this sled unless we were going to haul a big load.

Pa was already up on the seat, reins in hand. I reluctantly climbed up beside him. The cold was already biting at me. I wasn't happy. When I was on, Pa pulled the sled around the house and stopped in front of the woodshed. He got off and I followed. "I think we'll put on the high sideboards," he said. "Here, help me." The high sideboards! It had been a bigger job than I wanted to do with just the low sideboards on, but whatever it was we were going to do would be a lot bigger with the high sideboards on.

After we had exchanged the sideboards, Pa went into the woodshed and came out with an armload of wood - the wood I'd spent all summer hauling down from the mountain, and then all Fall sawing into blocks and splitting.

What was he doing? Finally I said something. "Pa," I asked, "what are you doing?"

You been by the Widow Jensen's lately?" he asked. The Widow Jensen lived about two miles down the road. Her husband had died a year or so before and left her with three children, the oldest being eight. Sure, I'd been by, but so what?

"Yeah," I said, "Why?"

"I rode by just today," Pa said. "Little Jakey was out digging around in the woodpile trying to find a few chips. They're out of wood, Matt."

That was all he said and then he turned and went back into the woodshed for another armload of wood. I followed him. We loaded the sled so high that I began to wonder if the horses would be able to pull it.

Finally, Pa called a halt to our loading, then we went to the smoke house and Pa took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and told me to put them in the sled and wait.

When he returned he was carrying a sack of flour over his right shoulder and a smaller sack of something in his left hand. "What's in the little sack?" I asked.

"Shoes. They're out of shoes. Little Jakey just had gunny sacks wrapped around his feet when he was out in the woodpile this morning. I got the children a little candy too. It just wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy."

We rode the two miles to Widow Jensen's pretty much in silence. I tried to think through what Pa was doing. We didn't have much by worldly standards. Of course, we did have a big woodpile, though most of what was left now was still in the form of logs that I would have to saw into blocks and split before we could use it. We also had meat and flour, so we could spare that, but I knew we didn't have any money, so why was Pa buying them shoes and candy?

Really, why was he doing any of this? Widow Jensen had closer neighbors than us; it shouldn't have been our concern. We came in from the blind side of the Jensen house and unloaded the wood as quietly as possible, then we took the meat and flour and shoes to the door. We knocked. The door opened a crack and a timid voice said, "Who is it?"

"Lucas Miles, Ma'am, and my son, Matt, could we come in for a bit?"

Widow Jensen opened the door and let us in. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The children were wrapped in another and were sitting in front of the fireplace by a very small fire that hardly gave off any heat at all. Widow Jensen fumbled with a match and finally lit the lamp.

"We brought you a few things, Ma'am," Pa said and set down the sack of flour. I put the meat on the table. Then Pa handed her the sack that had the shoes in it.

She opened it hesitantly and took the shoes out one pair at a time. There was a pair for her and one for each of the children - sturdy shoes, the best, shoes that would last. I watched her carefully. She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling and then tears filled her eyes and started running down her cheeks. She looked up at Pa like she wanted to say something, but it wouldn't come out.

"We brought a load of wood too, Ma'am," Pa said. He turned to me and said, "Matt, go bring in enough to last awhile. Let's get that fire up to size and heat this place up." I wasn't the same person when I went back out to bring in the wood. I had a big lump in my throat and as much as I hate to admit it, there were tears in my eyes too.

In my mind I kept seeing those three kids huddled around the fireplace and their mother standing there with tears running down her cheeks with so much gratitude in her heart that she couldn't speak. My heart swelled within me and a joy that I'd never known before, filled my soul. I had given at Christmas many times before, but never when it had made so much difference. I could see we were literally saving the lives of these people.

I soon had the fire blazing and everyone's spirits soared. The kids started giggling when Pa handed them each a piece of candy and Widow Jensen looked on with a smile that probably hadn't crossed her face for a long time. She finally turned to us. "God bless you," she said. "I know the Lord has sent you. The children and I have been praying that he would send one of his angels to spare us."

In spite of myself, the lump returned to my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes again. I'd never thought of Pa in those exact terms before, but after Widow Jensen mentioned it I could see that it was probably true.

I was sure that a better man than Pa had never walked the earth. I started remembering all the times he had gone out of his way for Ma and me, and many others. The list seemed endless as I thought on it.

Pa insisted that everyone try on the shoes before we left. I was amazed when they all fit and I wondered how he had known what sizes to get.

Then I guessed that if he was on an errand for the Lord that the Lord would make sure he got the right sizes.

Tears were running down Widow Jensen's face again when we stood up to leave. Pa took each of the kids in his big arms and gave them a hug. They clung to him and didn't want us to go. I could see that they missed their Pa, and I was glad that I still had mine.

At the door Pa turned to Widow Jensen and said, "The Mrs. wanted me to invite you and the children over for Christmas dinner tomorrow. The turkey will be more than the three of us can eat, and a man can get cantankerous if he has to eat turkey for too many meals. We'll be by to get you about eleven. It'll be nice to have some little ones around again. Matt, here, hasn't been little for quite a spell." I was the youngest. My two brothers and two sisters had all married and had moved away.

Widow Jensen nodded and said, "Thank you, Brother Miles. I don't have to say, May the Lord bless you, I know for certain that He will."

Out on the sled I felt a warmth that came from deep within and I didn't even notice the cold. When we had gone a ways, Pa turned to me and said, "Matt, I want you to know something. Your ma and me have been tucking a little money away here and there all year so we could buy that rifle for you, but we didn't have quite enough.

"Then yesterday a man who owed me a little money from years back came by to make things square. Your ma and me were real excited, thinking that now we could get you that rifle, and I started into town this morning to do just that, but on the way I saw little Jakey out scratching in the woodpile with his feet wrapped in those gunny sacks and I knew what I had to do. Son, I spent the money for shoes and a little candy for those children. I hope you understand."

I understood, and my eyes became wet with tears again. I understood very well, and I was so glad Pa had done it. Now the rifle seemed very low on my list of priorities. Pa had given me a lot more. He had given me the look on Widow Jensen's face and the radiant smiles of her three children. For the rest of my life, Whenever I saw any of the Jensens, or split a block of wood, I remembered, and remembering brought back that same joy I felt riding home beside Pa that night. Pa had given me much more than a rifle that night, he had given me the best Christmas of my life.

MRS. JONES

The 92-year-old, petite, well-poised and proud lady, who is fully dressed each morning by eight o'clock, with her hair fashionably coifed and makeup perfectly applied, even though she is legally blind, moved to a nursing home today. Her husband of 70 years recently passed away, making the move necessary. After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready.

As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, I provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had been hung on her window." I love it," she stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy. "Mrs. Jones, you haven't seen the room. Just wait."

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," she replied. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged... it's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it" It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away just for this time in my life. Old age is like a bank account: you withdraw from what you've put in. So, my advice to you would be to deposit a lot of happiness in the "Bank account of memories"

Dear Friend,

I just had to write to tell you how much I love you and care for you.

Yesterday, I saw you walking and laughing with your friends; I hoped that soon you'd want Me to walk along with you, too. So, I painted you a sunset to close your day and whispered a cool breeze to refresh you. I waited; you never called. I just kept on loving you.

As I watched you fall asleep last night, I wanted so much to touch you. I spilled moonlight onto your face trickling down your cheeks as so many tears have. You didn't even think of me; I wanted so much to comfort you.

The next day I exploded a brilliant sunrise into a glorious morning for you. But you woke up late and rushed off to work-you didn't even notice.

My sky became cloudy and My tears were the rain.

I love you! Oh, if you'd only listen. I really love you! I try to say it in the quiet of the green meadow and in the blue sky. The wind whispers My love throughout the treetops and spills it into the vibrant colors of the flowers.

I shout it to you in the thunder of the great waterfalls and composed love songs for birds to sing for you. I warm you with the clothing of My sunshine and perfume the air with nature's sweet scent.

My love for you is deeper than the ocean and greater than any need in your heart. If you'd only realize how I care. I died just for you. My Dad sends His love. I want you to meet Him. He cares, too. Fathers are just that way.

So please call Me soon. No matter how long it takes, I'll wait because I love you.

Your Friend,
Jesus

Dear Patrick

I was then an only child who had everything I could ever want. But even a pretty, spoiled and rich kid could get lonely once in a while so when Mom told me that she was pregnant, I was ecstatic. I imagined how wonderful you would be and how we'd always be together and how much you would look like me. So, when you were born, I looked at your tiny hands and feet and marveled at how beautiful you were. We took you home and I showed you proudly to my friends. They would touch you and sometimes pinch you, but you never reacted. When you were five months old, some things began to bother Mom. You seemed so unmoving and numb, and your cry sounded odd -- almost like a kitten's. So we brought you to many doctors.

The thirteenth doctor who looked at you quietly said you have the "cry du chat" (pronounced kree-do-sha) syndrome, 'cry of the cat' in French. When I asked what that meant, he looked at me with pity and softly said, "Your brother will never walk nor talk." The doctor told us that it is a condition that afflicts one in 50,000 babies, rendering victims severely retarded. Mom was shocked and I was furious. I thought it was unfair.

When we went home, Mom took you in her arms and cried. I looked at you and realized that word will get around that you're not normal. So to hold on to my popularity, I did the unthinkable ... I disowned you.

Mom and Dad didn't know but I steeled myself not to love you as you grew. Mom and Dad showered you with love and attention and that made me bitter. And as the years passed, that bitterness turned to anger, and then hate.

Mom never gave up on you. She knew she had to do it for your sake. Every time she put your toys down, you'd roll instead of crawl. I watched her heart break every time she took away your toys and strapped your tummy with foam so you couldn't roll. You'd struggle and you'd cry in that pitiful way, the cry of the kitten. But she still didn't give up. And then one day, you defied what all your doctors said -- you crawled!

When Mom saw this, she knew that you would eventually walk. So when you were still crawling at age four, she'd put you on the grass with only your diapers on knowing that you hate the feel of the grass on your skin, and smile at your discomfort. You would crawl to the sidewalk and Mom would put you back. Again and again, Mom repeated this on the lawn. Until one day, Mom saw you pull yourself up and toddle off the grass as fast as your little legs could carry you. Laughing and crying, she shouted for Dad and I to come. Dad hugged you crying openly. I watched from my bedroom window this heartbreaking scene.

Over the years, Mom taught you to speak, read and write. From then on, I would sometimes see you walk outside, smell the flowers, marvel at the birds, or just smile at no one. I began to see the beauty of the world around me, the simplicity of life and the wonders of this world, through your eyes. It was then that I realized that you were my brother and no matter how much I tried to hate you, I couldn't, because I had grown to love you.

During the next few days, we again became acquainted with each other. I would buy you toys and give you all the love that a sister could ever give to her brother. And you would reward me by smiling and hugging me. But I guess, you were never really meant for us. On your tenth birthday, you felt severe headaches.

The doctor's diagnosis -- leukemia. Mom gasped and Dad held her, while I fought hard to keep my tears from falling. At that moment, I loved you all the more. I couldn't even bear to leave your side. Then the doctors told us that your only hope was to have a bone marrow transplant. You became the subject of a nationwide donor search. When at last we found the right match, you were too sick, and the doctor reluctantly ruled out the operations. Since then, you underwent chemotherapy and radiation.

Even at the end, you continued to pursue life. Just a month before you died, you made me draw up a list of things you wanted to do when you got out of the hospital. Two days after the list was

completed, you asked the doctors to send you home. There, we ate ice cream and cake, run across the grass, flew kites, went fishing, took pictures of one another and let the balloons fly.

I remember the last conversation that we had. You said that if you die, and if I need of help, I could send you a note to heaven by tying it on the string any a balloon and letting it fly. When you said this, I started crying. Then you hugged me. Then again, for the last time, you got sick.

That last night, you asked for water, a back rub, a cuddle. Finally, you went into seizure with tears streaming down your face. Later, at the hospital, you struggled to talk but the words wouldn't come. I know what you wanted to say. "I hear you," I whispered. And for the last time, I said, "I'll always love you and I will never forget you. Don't be afraid. You'll soon be with God in heaven." Then, with my tears flowing freely, I watched the bravest boy I had ever known finally stop breathing. Dad, Mom and I cried until I felt as if there were no more tears left.

Patrick was finally gone, leaving us behind. From then on, you were my source of inspiration. You showed me how to love life and live life to the fullest. With your simplicity and honesty, you showed me a world full of love and caring. And you made me realize that the most important thing in this life is to continue loving without asking why or how and without setting any limit. Thank you, my little brother, for all these.

Your sister, Sarah

It's a LIFE, not a CHOICE. "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus."

CHRISTMAS

With Christmas just days away, the streets were decorated with colorful lights, and the department stores brimmed to overflowing with every item imaginable. There were new gadgets for the technology enthusiast, and household items which guaranteed to lighten the overburdened work load of those who could afford them. There was jewelry especially designed for the new millennium, endless racks of clothing in every size, color, and style, and scores and scores of toy cars and trucks and baby dolls that seemed more real than they ought. Every direction your eyes could travel carried the busy shopper to yet another dimension of what life could be. Surely, this Christmas would be like none other.

This particular weekend was typical for the height of the Christmas season. Every store was crowded with pushy people, grabbing up armloads of items they neither needed nor could afford. As people took advantage of the "bargains," they grumbled as they stood in long lines, waiting to get checked out. Children, already overtired of the endless routine were crying, and some threw tantrums when they were told they could not have the toy that their little eyes fixated upon immediately after having entered the toy department.

Santas, some of whom looked very real, and others who looked and smelled like they had been through an unbelievably tough year, were strategically positioned in the center of every store. And parents, determined that this year they would have a picture of their toddlers perched atop of Santa's lap, lost patience with those in the endless sea of tiny tots who stood crying and fussing, and sometimes frightened at the mere appearance of the strange man in the red suit.

By mid-afternoon on this particular day, one of the large department stores had already broken its all time record for seasonal sales. No doubt about it, this year would set record sales for the Christmas holiday. Since opening early that morning, the endless ringing of the many cash registers came close to drowning out the sound of Christmas carolers, as they sang their old familiar Christmas carols outside. The crowds, now exceeding those of any previous day this season, pushed and shoved, grabbed and shouted at one another, as they fought over the limited supply of this year's hottest items.

In the midst of it all, a tired looking little old man with a long white beard and somewhat tattered clothing entered the store through the side entrance. Nothing about him seemed very remarkable, except for his penetrating deep brown eyes, and the almost contagious smile of his tiny little mouth. As he proceeded through the store, it appeared as though he was looking for something that he could not find. Almost unnoticed, he continued in his endless pursuit for something which, undoubtedly, would not be found there.

A short while later, an announcement came over the store's speaker system that they had just received a new shipment of this season's perfect Christmas gift, and people everywhere flocked to the area of the store where this item was to be made available to those who could get there first. Shoppers, concerned only how having this sought after item was going to make their Christmas the best ever, literally began trampling one another in the flurry.

The little old man with the long white beard just happened to be in that area at the time of the announcement. Uninterested in the product, but unable to move quickly enough to get away from the impending stampede, he was first pushed from side to side. Then he was shoved up against the counters, and finally knocked to the floor and stepped on by the many who, caught up in their greed, failed to even notice.

At first, tears came to his deep eyes, as he felt the pain inflicted upon him by an uncaring crowd. Then, he finally succumbed to the trampling of the angry mass. There he lie, no one even noticing, much less caring, as they continued with their shopping. Several hours passed, and the store closed for the night.

By comparison to the day's hustle, a sense of quietude now overtook the store. The noisy crowds had left, and by now, most were deeply involved in their parties, which they considered so critical to their celebration of the holiday season. Those who were wearied from attending to the cash registers throughout this busiest of shopping days were at home by now, resting their feet for another long day tomorrow.

Children were now safely tucked into their beds, lulled to sleep by threats that Santa would not bring them any presents this year if they were anything but good. And Santa, well he was sitting on a stool in the neighborhood pub, enjoying some seasonal libations. Only the janitor remained at the store. It was his job to clean up all the mess, and have the store ready for the next day's activity.

Like every night this holiday season, the store janitor began his duties, repositioning the remaining racks of clothing, and sweeping under the many counters strategically positioned throughout the store. About halfway through his duties, his eyes were suddenly drawn to something he thought quite strange. He spotted something lying there beneath a table, mostly hidden by the table skirt adorning it. At first he thought it was just a pile of clothing which had been dropped to the floor, but when he bowed down for a closer look, he bolted backwards with fear. He had discovered the little man in the long white beard, lying face down. There was no longer any sign of life in him.

After a moment, the janitor decided he must try to find out who he was. He pulled the table skirt away, and began searching the man's tattered clothing to see if he could find a wallet or something else which might contain a clue to his identity. There was nothing to be found. There were some bruises and abrasions on the little man's head, but even that gave no clue as to who he might be.

Alarmed and frightened by his finding, he feverishly began to do the only thing he thought might help. He rolled the little man over to attempt some means of resuscitation. Upon doing so, he noted something very disconcerting. In each of his hands was a deep puncture wound, and there was a large stab wound in his side. Who, he wondered, could this have been, and what could have happened to him?

SHMILY

My grandparents were married for over half a century, and played their own special game from the time they had met each other. The goal of their game was to write the word "shmily" in a surprise place for the other to find. They took turns leaving "shmily" around the house, and as soon as one of them discovered it, it was their turn to hide it once more.

They dragged "shmily" with their fingers through the sugar and flour containers to await whoever was preparing the next meal. They smeared it in the dew on the windows overlooking the patio where my grandma always fed us warm, homemade pudding with blue food coloring. "Shmily" was written in the steam left on the mirror after a hot shower, where it would reappear bath after bath. At one point, my grandmother even unrolled an entire roll of toilet paper to leave "shmily" on the very last sheet.

There was no end to the places "shmily" would pop up. Little notes with "shmily" scribbled hurriedly were found on dashboards and car seats, or taped to steering wheels. The notes were stuffed inside shoes and left under pillows. "Shmily" was written in the dust upon the mantel and traced in the ashes of the fireplace. This mysterious word was as much a part of my grandparents' house as the furniture.

It took me a long time before I was able to fully appreciate my grandparents' game. Skepticism has kept me from believing in true love-one that is pure and enduring. However, I never doubted my grandparents' relationship. They had love down pat. It was more than their flirtatious little games; it was a

way of life. Their relationship was based on a devotion and passionate affection which not everyone is lucky experience.

Grandma and Grandpa held hands every chance they could. They stole kisses as they bumped into each other in their tiny kitchen. They finished each other's sentences and shared the daily crossword puzzle and word jumble. My grandma whispered to me about how cute my grandpa was, how handsome and old he had grown to be. She claimed that she really knew "how to pick 'em." Before every meal they bowed their heads and gave thanks, marveling at their blessings: a wonderful family, good fortune, and each other.

But there was a dark cloud in my grandparents' life: my grandmother had breast cancer. The disease had first appeared ten years earlier. As always, Grandpa was with her every step of the way. He comforted her in their yellow room, painted that way so that she could always be surrounded by sunshine, even when she was too sick to go outside.

Now the cancer was again attacking her body. With the help of a cane and my grandfather's steady hand, they went to church every morning. But my grandmother grew steadily weaker until, finally, she could not leave the house anymore. For a while, Grandpa would go to church alone, praying to God to watch over his wife. Then one day, what we all dreaded finally happened. Grandma was gone.

"Shmily." It was scrawled in yellow on the pink ribbons of my grandmother's funeral bouquet. As the crowd thinned and the last mourners turned to leave, my aunts, uncles, cousins and other family members came forward and gathered around Grandma one last time. Grandpa stepped up to my grandmother's casket and, taking a shaky breath, he began to sing to her. Through his tears and grief, the song came, a deep and throaty lullaby.

Shaking with my own sorrow, I will never forget that moment. For I knew that, although I couldn't begin to fathom the depth of their love, had been privileged to witness its unmatched beauty.

S-h-m-i-l-y: See How Much I Love You.

Thank you, Grandma and Grandpa, for letting me see.

JUST ME

Here is a story, reported to be true, about a nine-year-old boy who lived in a rural town in Tennessee. His house was in a poor area of the community. A church there had a bus Ministry that came knocking on his door one Saturday afternoon.

The child came to answer the door and greeted the bus Pastor. The bus Pastor asked if his parents were home and the small boy told him that his parents take off every weekend and leave him at home to take care of his little brother.

The bus Pastor could not believe what the child said and asked him to repeat it.

The youngster gave the same answer and the bus Pastor asked to come in and talk with him. They went into the living room and sat down on an old couch with the foam and springs exposed. The bus Pastor asked the child, "Where do you go to church?"

The young boy surprised the visitor by replying, "I've never been to church in my whole life." The bus Pastor thought to himself about the fact that his church was less than three miles from the child's house.

"Are you sure you have never been to church?" he asked again. "I'm sure I haven't," came his answer.

Then the bus Pastor said, "Well, son, more important than going to church, have you ever heard the greatest love story ever told?" and then he proceeded to share the Gospel with this little nine-year-old boy.

The young lad's heart began to be tenderized and at the end of the bus pastor's story, the bus Pastor asked if the boy wanted to receive this free gift from God.

The youngster exclaimed, "OF COURSE!" The child and the bus Pastor got on their knees and the lad invited Jesus into his little heart and received the free gift of salvation.

They both stood up and the bus Pastor asked if he could pick the child up for church the next morning. "Sure," the nine year old replied.

The bus Pastor got to the house early the next morning and found the lights off.

He let himself in, snaked his way through the house, and found the little boy asleep in his bed. He woke up the little boy and his brother and helped get them dressed. They got on the bus and ate a doughnut for breakfast on their way to church.

Keep in mind that this boy had never been to church before. The church was a real big one. The little child just sat there, clueless of what was going on. A few minutes into the service, these tall unhappy guys walked down to the front and picked up some wooden plates.

One of the men prayed and the child, with utter fascination, watched them walk up and down the aisles. He still did not know what was going on. Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning, it hit the child what was taking place.

These people must be giving money to Jesus. He then reflected on the free gift of life he had received just twenty-four hours earlier. He immediately searched his pockets, front and back, and could not find a thing to give Jesus.

By this time the offering plate was being passed down his aisle and, with a broken heart, he just grabbed the plate and held on to it. He finally let go and watched it pass on down the aisle. He turned around to see it passed down the aisle behind him. And then his eyes remained glued on the plate as it was passed back and forth, back and forth all the way to the rear of the sanctuary.

Then he had an idea. This little nine-year-old boy, in front of God and everybody, got up out of his seat. He walked about eight rows back, grabbed the usher by the coat, and asked to hold the plate one more time.

Then he did the most astounding thing I have ever heard of.

He took the plate, sat it on the carpeted church floor, and stepped into the center of it. As he stood there, he lifted his little head up and said, "Jesus, I don't have anything to give you today, but just me. I give you me!"

A GREAT CHRISTMAS

The brand new pastor and his wife, newly assigned to their first ministry, to reopen a church in urban Brooklyn, arrived in early October excited about their opportunities. When they saw their church, it was very run down and needed much work. They set a goal to have everything done in time to have their first service on Christmas Eve. They worked hard, repairing pews, plastering walls, painting, etc. and on Dec. 18 were ahead of schedule and just about finished.

On Dec 19 a terrible tempest - a driving rainstorm hit the area and lasted for two days. On the 21st, the pastor went over to the church. His heart sunk when he saw that the roof had leaked, causing a large area of plaster about 6 feet by 8 feet to fall off the front wall of the sanctuary just behind the pulpit, beginning about head high. The pastor cleaned up the mess on the floor, and not knowing what else to do but postpone the Christmas Eve service, headed home.

On the way he noticed that a local business was having a flea market type sale for charity so he stopped in. One of the items was a beautiful, hand-made, ivory colored, crocheted table cloth with exquisite work, fine colors and a cross embroidered right in the center. It was just the right size to cover up the hole in the front wall. He bought it and headed back to the church.

By this time, it had started to snow. An older woman running from the opposite direction was trying to catch the bus. She missed it. The pastor invited her to wait in the warm church for the next bus 45 minutes later. She sat in a pew and paid no attention to the pastor while he got a ladder, hangers, etc. to put up the tablecloth as a wall tapestry. The pastor could hardly believe how beautiful it looked and it covered up the entire problem area. Then he noticed the woman walking down the center aisle.

Her face was like a sheet. "Pastor," she asked, "Where did you get that tablecloth?" The pastor explained. The woman asked him to check the lower right corner to see if the initials, EBG were crocheted into it there. They were. These were the initials of the woman, and she had made this tablecloth 35 years before, in Austria.

The woman could hardly believe it as the pastor told how he had just gotten the tablecloth. The woman explained that before the war she and her husband were well-to-do people in Austria. When the Nazis came, she was forced to leave. Her husband was going to follow her the next week. She was captured, sent to prison and never saw her husband or her home again. The pastor wanted to give her the tablecloth; but she made the pastor keep it for the church. The pastor insisted on driving her home,

that was the least he could do. She lived on the other side of Staten Island and was only in Brooklyn for the day for a housecleaning job.

What a wonderful service they had on Christmas Eve. The church was almost full. The music and the spirit were great. At the end of the service, the pastor and his wife greeted everyone at the door and many said that they would return. One older man, whom the pastor recognized from the neighborhood, continued to sit in one of the pews and stare, and the pastor wondered why he wasn't leaving.

The man asked him where he got the tablecloth on the front wall because it was identical to one that his wife had made years ago when they lived in Austria before the war and how could there be two tablecloths so much alike? He told the pastor how the Nazis came, how he forced his wife to flee for her safety, and he was supposed to follow her, but he was arrested and put in a concentration camp. He never saw his wife or his home again for all he 35 years in between.

The pastor asked him if he would allow him to take him for a little ride. They drove to Staten Island and to the same house where the pastor had taken the woman three days earlier. He helped the man climb the three flights of stairs to the woman's apartment, knocked on the door and he saw the greatest Christmas reunion he could ever imagine.

A PRAYING MAN

A minister passing through his church in the middle of the day, decided to pause by the altar and see who had come to pray. Just then the back door opened, a man came down the aisle. The minister frowned as he saw the man hadn't shaved in a while. His shirt was kinda' shabby and his coat was worn and frayed. The man knelt, he bowed his head, then rose and walked away.

In the days that followed, each noon time came this chap, each time he knelt just for a moment, a lunch pail in his lap. Well, the minister's suspicions grew, with robbery a main fear, He decided to stop the man and ask him, "Watcha' doin' here?"

The old man said, he worked down the road. Lunch was half an hour. Lunchtime was his prayer time, for finding strength and power."I stay only moments, see, 'cause the factory is so far away. As I kneel here talking' to the Lord, this is kinda' what I say:

"I JUST CAME AGAIN TO TELL YOU, LORD, HOW HAPPY I'VE BEEN, SINCE WE FOUND EACH OTHER'S FRIENDSHIP AND YOU TOOK AWAY MY SIN. I DON'T KNOW MUCH OF HOW TO PRAY, BUT I THINK ABOUT YOU EVERYDAY. SO, JESUS, THIS IS JIM CHECKIN' IN."

The minister feeling foolish, told Jim, that was fine. He told the man he was welcome to come and pray just anytime. Time to go, Jim smiled, said "Thanks." He hurried to the door. The minister knelt at the altar, he'd never done it before. His cold heart melted, warmed with love, he met with Jesus there. As the tears flowed, in his heart, he repeated old Jim's prayer:

"I JUST CAME AGAIN TO TELL YOU, LORD, HOW HAPPY I'VE BEEN, SINCE WE FOUND EACH OTHER'S FRIENDSHIP AND YOU TOOK AWAY MY SIN. I DON'T KNOW MUCH OF HOW TO PRAY, BUT I THINK ABOUT YOU EVERYDAY. SO, JESUS, THIS IS ME CHECKIN' IN."

Past noon one day, the minister noticed that old Jim hadn't come. As more days passed without Jim, he began to worry some. At the factory, he asked about him, learning he was ill. The hospital staff was worried, but he'd given them a thrill. The week that Jim was with them, brought changes in the ward. His smiles, a joy contagious. Changed people, his reward. The head nurse couldn't understand why Jim was so glad, when no flowers, calls or cards came, not a visitor he had.

The minister stayed by his bed, he voiced the nurse's concern: No friends came to show they cared. He had nowhere to turn. Looking surprised, old Jim spoke up and with a winsome smile "The nurse is wrong, she couldn't know, that all the while Everyday at noon. He's here, a dear friend of mine, you see, He sits right down, takes my hand, leans over and says to me:

"I JUST CAME AGAIN TO TELL YOU, JIM, HOW HAPPY I HAVE BEEN, SINCE WE FOUND THIS FRIENDSHIP, AND I TOOK AWAY YOUR SIN. I ALWAYS LOVE TO HEAR YOU PRAY, I THINK ABOUT YOU EACH DAY, AND SO JIM, THIS IS JESUS CHECKIN' IN."

CAN I BUY SOME TIME?

With a timid voice and idolizing eyes, the little boy greeted his father as he returned from work, "Daddy, how much do you make an hour?"

Greatly surprised, but giving his boy a glaring look, the father said: "Look, son, not even your mother knows that. Don't bother me now, I'm tired."

"But Daddy, just tell me please! How much do you make an hour," the boy insisted.

The father finally giving up replied: "Twenty dollars per hour."

"Okay, Daddy? Could you loan me ten dollars?" the boy asked.

Showing restlessness and positively disturbed, the father yelled:

"So that was the reason you asked how much I earn, right?? Go to sleep and don't bother me anymore!"

It was already dark and the father was meditating on what he had said and was feeling guilty. Maybe he thought, his son wanted to buy something.

Finally, trying to ease his mind, the father went to his son's room.

"Are you asleep son?" asked the father.

"No, Daddy. Why?" replied the boy partially asleep.

"Here's the money you asked for earlier," the father said.

"Thanks, Daddy!" rejoiced the son, while putting his hand under his pillow and removing some money.

"Now I have enough! Now I have twenty dollars!" the boy said to his father, who was gazing at his son, confused at what his son just said. "Daddy could you sell me one hour of your time?"

Time is too precious to spend it all on work!

Appreciate your love ones and don't take them for granted...

ALL HE HAD

It was an unusually cold day for the month of May. Spring had arrived and everything was alive with color. But a cold front from the north had brought winter's chill back to Indiana. I sat with two friends in the picture window of a quaint restaurant just off the corner of the town square. The food and the company were both especially good that day.

As we talked, my attention was drawn outside, across the street. There, walking into town, was a man who appeared to be carrying all his worldly goods on his back. He was carrying, a well-worn sign that read "I'll work for food." My heart sank. I brought him to the attention of my friends and noticed that others around us had stopped eating to focus on him.

Heads moved in a mixture of sadness and disbelief. We continued with our meal, but his image lingered in my mind. We finished our meal and went our separate ways. I had errands to do and quickly set to accomplish them. I glanced toward the town square, looking somewhat halfheartedly for the strange visitor. I was fearful, knowing that seeing him again would call some response. I drove through town and saw nothing of him. I made some purchases at a store and got back into my car.

Deep within me, the spirit of God kept speaking to me: "don't go back to the office until you've at least driven once more around the square." And so with some hesitancy, I headed back into town.

As I turned the square's third corner, I saw him. He was standing on the steps of the storefront church, going through his sack. I stopped and looked, feeling both compelled to speak to him, yet wanting to drive on. The empty parking space on the corner seemed to be a sign from god: an invitation to park. I pulled in, got out and approached the town's visitor. Looking for the pastor? I asked. Not really, he replied, just resting. Have you eaten today? Oh, I ate something early this morning. Would you like to have lunch with me? Do you have some work I could do for you? No work, I replied. I commute here to work from the city, but I would like to! Take you to lunch. Sure he replied with a smile.

As he began to gather his things. I asked him some surface questions. Where you headed? St. Louis. Where you from? Oh, all over; mostly Florida. I knew I had met someone unusual. We sat across from each other in the same restaurant I had left earlier. His face was weathered slightly beyond his 38 years. His eyes were dark and clear, and he spoke with an eloquence and articulation that was startling. He removed his jacket to reveal a bright red T-shirt that said "Jesus is the never ending story."

Then Daniel's story began to unfold. He had seen rough times early in life. He'd made some wrong choices and reaped the consequences. Fourteen years earlier, while backpacking across the country, he had stopped on the beach in Daytona. He tried to hire on with some men who were putting up a big tent and some equipment. A concert, he thought. He was hired, but the tent would not house a concert but revival services, and in those services he saw life more clearly. He gave his life over to God.

Nothing's been the same since, he said, I felt the Lord telling me to keep walking, and so I did, some 14 years now. Ever think of stopping? I asked. Oh, once in a while, when it seems to get the best of me. But God has given me this calling. I give out bibles. That's what's in my sack. I work to buy food and bibles, and I give them out when the spirit leads. I sat amazed.

My homeless friend was not homeless. He was on a mission and lived this way by choice. The question burned inside for a minute and then I asked: what's it like? What? To walk into town carrying all your things on your back and to show you a sign? Oh, it was humiliating at first.

People would stare and make comments. Once someone tossed a piece of half-eaten bread and made a gesture that certainly didn't make me feel welcome. But then it became humbling to realize that God was using me to toughen lives and change people's concepts of other folks like me.

My concept was changing, too. We finished our dessert and gathered his things. Just outside the door, he paused. He turned and said, "come ye blessed of my father and inherit the kingdom I've prepared for you. For when I was hungry you gave me food, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, a stranger and you took me in." I felt as if we were on holy ground. Could you use another bible? I asked. He said he preferred a certain translation. It traveled and was not too heavy.

REKINDLED CANDLE

A man had a little daughter -- an only and much-beloved child. He lived for her -- she was his life. So when she became ill and her illness resisted the efforts of them best obtainable physicians, he became like a man possessed, moving heaven and earth to bring about her restoration to health. His best efforts proved unavailing and the child died.

The father was totally irreconcilable. He became a bitter recluse, shutting himself away from his many friends and refusing every activity that might restore his poise and bring him back to his normal self. But one night he had a dream. He was in Heaven, and was witnessing a grand pageant of all the little child angels. They were marching in an apparently endless line past the Great White Throne.

Every white-robed angelic child carried a candle. He noticed that one child's candle was not lighted. Then he saw that the child with the dark candle was his own little girl. Rushing to her, while the pageant faltered, he seized her in his arms, caressed her tenderly, and then asked: "How is it, darling that your candle alone is unlighted? "Father, they often re-light it, but your tears always put it out." Just then he awoke from his dream.

The lesson was crystal clear, and its effects were immediate. From that hour on he was not a recluse, but mingled freely and cheerfully with his former friends and associates. No longer would his darling's candle be extinguished by his useless tears.

"For You have delivered my soul from death. Have you not kept my feet from falling, That I may walk before God In the LIGHT of the living?" (Psalms 56:13NKJ) Jesus Loves You!

PRAYING

A man's daughter had asked the local pastor to come and pray with her father. When the pastor arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The priest assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said.

"No, who are you?"

"I'm the new associate at your local church," the pastor replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up."

"Oh yeah, the chair," said the bedridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?"

Puzzled, the pastor shut the door.

"I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man. "But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head.."

"I abandoned any attempt at prayer," the old man continued, "until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair, place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, 'I'll be with you always.' Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now."

"So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

The pastor was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, and returned to the church.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon.

"Did he seem to die in peace?" he asked.

"Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange, in fact, beyond strange--kinda weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed."

THE TRUE SPIRIT OF GIVING

It was only four days before Christmas. The spirit of the season hadn't yet caught up with me, even though cars packed the parking lot of our local discount store. Inside the store, it was worse. Shopping carts and last minute shoppers jammed the aisles. Why did I come today? I wondered. My feet ached almost as much as my head. My list contained names of several people who claimed they wanted nothing but I knew their feelings would be hurt if I didn't buy them anything. Buying for someone who had everything and deploring the high cost of items, I considered gift-buying anything but fun.

Hurriedly, I filled my shopping cart with last minute items and proceeded to the long checkout lines. I picked the shortest but it looked as if it would mean at least a 20 minute wait. In front of me were two small children -- a boy of about 5 and a younger girl. The boy wore a ragged coat. Enormously large, tattered tennis shoes jutted far out in front of his much too short jeans. He clutched several crumpled dollar bills in his grimy hands. The girl's clothing resembled her brother's. Her head was a matted mass of curly hair. Reminders of an evening meal showed on her small face. She carried a beautiful pair of shiny, gold house slippers.

As the Christmas music sounded in the store's stereo system, the girl hummed along, off-key but happily. When we finally approached the checkout register, the girl carefully placed the shoes on the counter. She treated them as though they were a treasure.

The clerk rang up the bill. "That will be \$6.09," she said.

The boy laid his crumpled dollars on top of the stand while he searched his pockets. He finally came up with \$3.12. "I guess we will have to put them back," he bravely said. "We will come back some other time, maybe tomorrow."

With that statement, a soft sob broke from the little girl. "But Jesus would have loved these shoes," she cried.

"Well, we'll go home and work some more. Don't cry. We'll come back," he said.

Quickly I handed \$3.00 to the cashier. These children had waited in line for a long time. And, after all, it was Christmas. Suddenly a pair of arms came around me and a small voice said,

"Thank you lady."

"What did you mean when you said Jesus would like the shoes?" I asked.

The boy answered, "Our mommy is sick and going to heaven. Daddy said she might go before Christmas to be with Jesus."

The girl spoke, "My Sunday school teacher said the streets in heaven are shiny gold, just like these shoes. Won't mommy be beautiful walking on those streets to match these shoes?"

My eyes flooded as I looked into her tear streaked face. "Yes" I answered, "I am sure she will."

Silently I thanked God for using these children to remind me of the true spirit of giving.

SOMEONE TO PRAY FOR HER

Helen closed her troubled green eyes and ran her fingers through her tousled hair. She was so scared. She tried to pray,

"Oh Lord, help me deal with this. Help me to be strong." Tears ran freely down her cheeks.

Helen was having a mastectomy today. Both of her breasts had to be removed. Could she handle that? Could her husband handle that? Would he still love her? Her mind was running in every direction. The devil was playing havoc with her and she was letting him. As a Christian she knew that God would never give her more than she could handle. This was close, very close, to more than she could handle. The whole scene terrified her. Nurses coming in and checking her temperature and pulse. The anesthetist telling her how long the surgery would take and what she should expect. Helen knew what to expect: after the surgery she would have no breasts. She prayed once more.

"Oh Lord, you know me better than I know myself. Help me! Grant me your peace.

If only they would let Dick in there. If only there were someone, anyone, to pray with her. She felt so alone. Not only alone, but so scared. Was she being weak? Was she lacking faith? It seemed as if she had been in this holding room for hours. Helen closed her eyes and tried to calm herself down. She was close to panic. Even the shot they had given her did not relax her. Why was this happening to her? She didn't want to question the Lord, but she was. Helen heard the curtain open again and she opened her eyes. An elderly lady with gray-brown hair approached her. She had a sweet smile and her eyes seemed to twinkle. With a soft voice she asked,

"Would you like me to pray with you?" Helen could only nod. The lady took her hand and started to pray. Immediately a peace came over Helen. The fear was replaced with the peace of God. The lady asked the Lord to wrap His arms around Helen and to comfort her. She asked Him to grant her His peace. Helen could feel the presence of the Lord. She could feel His peace. She had never felt a peace like this before. She just let the peace envelop her. She was not even aware that the lady had left. The nurses then came to transport her to the operating room. Helen quickly thanked the nurses for letting the lady come to pray with her. The head nurse looked at her strangely.

"What lady?" she asked. "There is no one allowed back here but hospital staff. Was she a nurse?" Helen shook her head.

"No, she was not a nurse. She was a sweet lady who came to pray with me." The nurse smiled and said,

"That is impossible, dear. Only staff is allowed back here." Helen lay back and said no more. She closed her eyes and whispered,

"Thank You, Lord. Thank you for sending someone to pray with me. Thank you for my peace." After several hours in surgery, Helen woke up in recovery. When the nurses asked how she felt, she just smiled. She felt fine. She knew that the Lord was with her. She knew that she would make it through this with Him by her side. He had promised never to leave her nor forsake her--and He had kept that promise.

MICHAEL

Right before the jetway door closed, I scrambled aboard the plane going from LA to Chicago, lugging my laptop and my overstuffed briefcase.

It was the first leg of an important business trip a few weeks before Christmas, and I was running late.

I had a ton of work to catch up on, half wishing, half praying I muttered, "Please God, do me a favor; let there be an empty seat next to mine, I don't need any distractions."

I was on the aisle in a two seat row. Across sat a businesswoman with her nose buried in a newspaper. No problem. But in the seat beside mine, next to the window, was a young boy wearing a big red tag around his neck:

Minor Traveling Unattended.

The kid sat perfectly still, hands in his lap, eyes straight ahead. He'd probably been told never to talk to strangers. Good, I thought.

Then the flight attendant came by, "Michael, I have to sit down because we're about to take off," she said to the little boy. "This nice man will answer any of your questions, okay?"

Did I have a choice? I offered my hand, and Michael shook it twice, straight up and down. "Hi, I'm

Jerry," I said. "You must be about seven years old."

"I'll bet you don't have any kids," he responded.

"Why do you think that? Sure I do." I took out my wallet to show him pictures.

"Because I'm six. "

"I was way off, huh?" I said.

The captains' voice came over the speakers: "Flight attendants, prepare for takeoff."

Michael pulled his seat belt tighter and gripped the armrests as the jet engines roared. I leaned over "Right about now, I usually say a prayer. I asked God to keep the plane safe and to send angels to protect us."

"Amen," he said, then added, "but I'm not afraid of dying. I'm not afraid because my mama's already in heaven."

"I'm sorry." I said.

"Why are you sorry?" he asked, peering out the window as the plane lifted off.

"I'm sorry you don't have your mama here." My briefcase jostled at my feet, reminding me of all the work I needed to do.

"Look at those boats down there!" Michael said as the plane banked over the Pacific. "Where are they going?"

"Just going sailing, having a good time. And there's probably a fishing boat full of guys like you and me."

"Doing what?" he asked.

"Just fishing, maybe for bass or tuna. Does your dad ever take you fishing?"

"I don't have a dad." Michael sadly responded.

Only six years old and he didn't have a dad, and his Mom had died, and here he was flying halfway across the country all by himself. The least I could do was make sure he had a good flight. With my foot I pushed my briefcase under my seat.

"Do they have a bathroom here?" he asked, squirming a little.

"Sure," I said, "let me take you there." I showed him how to work the "Occupied" sign, and what buttons to push on the sink, then he closed the door. When he emerged, he wore a wet shirt and a huge smile "That sink shoots water everywhere!" The attendants smiled.

Michael got the VIP treatment from the crew during snack time. I took out my laptop and tried to work on a talk I had to give, but my mind kept going to Michael. I couldn't stop looking at the crumpled grocery bag on the floor by his seat. He'd told me that everything he owned was in that bag. Poor kid.

While Michael was getting a tour of the cockpit the flight attendant told me his grandmother would pick him up in Chicago. In the seat pocket a large manila envelope held all the paperwork regarding his custody.

He came back explaining, "I got wings! I got cards! I got more peanuts. I saw the pilot and he said I could come back anytime!"

For a while he stared at the manila envelope. "What are you thinking?" I asked Michael. He didn't answer. He buried his face in his hands and started sobbing. It had been years since I'd heard a little one cry like that. My kids were grown -- still I don't think they'd ever cried so hard.

I rubbed his back and wondered where the flight attendant was. "What's the matter buddy?" I asked. All I got were muffled words.

"I don't know my grandma. Mama didn't want her to come visit and see her sick. What if Grandma doesn't want me? Where will I go?"

"Michael, do you remember the Christmas story? Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus? Remember how they came to Bethlehem just before Jesus was born? It was late and cold, and they didn't have anywhere to stay, no family, no hotels, not even hospitals where babies could be born. Well, God was watching out for them. He found them a place to stay; a stable with animals."

"Wait, wait," Michael tugged on my sleeve. I know Jesus. I remember now. Then he closed his eyes, lifted his head and began to sing. His voice rang out with a strength that rocked his tiny frame.

"Jeeesus looooves me--thiiiiis I knowwwwwwww. For the Biiiiible tells meeeeeee soooooo....."

Passengers turned or stood up to see the little boy who made the large sound. Michael didn't notice his audience. With his eyes shut tight and voice lifted high, he was in a good place.

"You've got a great voice," I told him when he was done. "I've never heard anyone sing like that."

"Mama said God gave me good pipes just like my grandma's," he said. "My grandma loves to

sing, she sings in her church choir."

"Well, I'll bet you can sing there too. The two of you will be running that choir."

The seat belt sign came on as we approached O'Hare. The flight attendant came by and said we just have a few minutes now, but she told Michael it's important that he put on his seat belt.

People started stirring in their seats, like the kids before the final school bell. By the time the seat belt sign went off, passengers were rushing down the aisle. Michael and I stayed seated.

"Are you gonna go with me?" he asked.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world buddy!" I assured him.

Clutching his bag and the manila envelope in one hand, he grabbed my hand with the other. The two of us followed the flight attendant down the jetway. All the noises of the airport seemed to fill the corridor. Michael stopped, flipping his hand from mine, he dropped to his knees. His mouth quivered. His eyes brimmed with tears.

"What's wrong Michael? I'll carry you if you want."

He opened his mouth and moved his lips, but it was as if his words were stuck in his throat. When I knelt next to him, he grabbed my neck.

I felt his warm, wet face as he whispered in my ear "I want my mama!!!"

I tried to stand, but Michael squeezed my neck even harder. Then I heard a rattle of footsteps on the corridor's metal floor.

"Is that you baby?" I couldn't see the woman behind me, but I heard the warmth in her voice "Oh baby," she cried. "Come here. Grandma loves you so much. I need a hug baby. Let go of that nice man,"

She knelt beside Michael and me. Michael's grandma stroked his arm. I smelled a hint of orange blossoms.

"You've got folks waiting for you out there Michael. Do you know that??. You've got aunts, and uncles and cousins?" She patted his skinny shoulders and started humming.

Then she lifted her head and sang. I wondered if the flight attendant told her what to sing, or maybe she just knew what was right. Her strong, clear voice filled the passageway, "Jesus loves me -- this I know..."

Michael's gasps quieted. Still holding him, I rose, nodded hello to his grandma and watched her pick up the grocery bag. Right before we got to the doorway to the terminal, Michael loosened his grip around my neck and reached for his grandma.

As soon as she walked across the threshold with him, cheers erupted. From the size of the crowd, I figured family, friends, pastors, elders, deacons, choir members and most of the neighbors had come to meet Michael.

A tall man tugged on Michael's ear and pulled off the red sign around his neck. It no longer applied.

As I made my way to the gate for my connecting flight, I barely noticed the weight of my overstuffed briefcase and laptop. I started to wonder who would be in the seat next to mine this time..... And I smiled.

CHANGED LIFE

How can I change, I'm to caught up in my mess, no one will want me, no one will ever give me a second chance. It's been sixteen long years of my life that all I've been doing is selling, dealing, and using, marijuana and any other drug I can get a hold of. On the streets I'm known as "Dr. M.J. The Giver of All." It's been days after the last crime scene last month that I've been seen hanging with the same old group. I guess you can say I've been up to bigger and better things lately.

One day I can remember me sitting up in my room meditating on the words of my mom before she past away, saying "Honey you be good now, and don't let anyone tear you away from the Lord. Just remember all the teachings I've taught you". I haven't found myself in a church since then, I guess you can say that since she is gone I've just been laid back and depending on my friends and my reliant, marijuana.

As far as I can remember, their use to be an old lady about the age of 45 that use to come to the house to pick up my mom and I for Sunday school and morning worship every Sundays. Until then, every day when I saw her coming up the stairs to ring the doorbell, I would either turn off all the lights and go hide, or give her every excuse under the sun not to bring me to church. Ever since then she hasn't been

coming anymore. Man did she use to bother me! Sitting next to her made sleeping worth wild. She use to always tap me on the shoulder with her scrawny pointer finger and ask me "do you understand what the preacher is saying?" I would just shake my head and nod, even if I were half asleep.

One day while sleeping, I had a vision, or you can say nightmare. I dreamed that I was being pulled to church by a heavenly man figure. He was dressed in all white and had a crown on his head. All he did was look at me and said "I know all about you, I know what you do and all you say, I know your past, present, and future. I know every time you try to run, hide, and shied yourself from every twist and turns. Honey I know you! It's not time to run anymore but to face everything that you have done, come to me and all your problems will be erased for ever. Don't turn your back on me".

When I awoke in a puddle of sweat, all I could do is try to shake every thought from my mind. There was no place or no one for me to run to. All my friends would just look at me strange and ask, "what are you talking about". It was just too much to explain to them and I knew they wouldn't get it, so the only person I had to turn to was that same old lady.

When I got to her house, no questions was asked about why I never opened the door to her, or why I made up all those excuses, all she did was open her arms to me. She invited me in and we talked about my dream. She said that the Lord was trying to tell me something and try to bring me closer to him. This time instead of closing my eyes trying to give her a clue that she was boring me out, I actually sat there grasping, and hanging on to her every word. When she was gone, I told her that I was going to go to church and that. Before I could finish she said "honey, don't tell me, show me", and she gave me a kiss and I was on my way.

That Sunday I was at church sitting in that same row as before, right next to the old lady listening to the preacher. What the preacher was saying was all for me. He was saying "how can a man stay in all his sins, try and run, and think that he can smile so no one knows what's going on? What you need to do is confess your sins, even though God already knows, he want's to hear it from you." That main part from the sermon was all I needed that night. After church I gave the old lady a big hug and said thanks for all you've done, you really made a difference in my life. She smiled and said "maybe that was the other part to your dream, God's part, he is smiling down at you right now".

When I got home I decided not to hang around with my friends but just to visit them one last time. I ended up telling my them about God and that there are better things in life that you should get hooked in instead of marijuana, crack, and cocaine. Drugs are what you think need to crave your inner self, but when it wears down you need to get some more. Taste and see that God is good and you'll never thirst or hunger in your life again. I just walked away leaving that on their minds.

My life has made a turn for the better since I've decided to serve the Lord and to get my life back on track".

CONQUERING FEAR

The fear of rejection may be one of the most basic fears of the human experience. Dr. Joe Harding tells a heart-warming story of a man who finally decided to ask his boss for a raise in salary. It was Friday. He told his wife that morning what he was about to do, All day the man felt nervous and apprehensive. Late in the afternoon he summoned the courage to approach his employer. To his delight, the boss agreed to a raise.

The man arrived home to a beautiful table set with their best china. Candles were lighted. His wife had prepared a festive meal. Immediately he figured that someone from the office had tipped her off! Finding his wife in the kitchen, he told her the good news. They embraced and kissed, then sat down to a wonderful meal. Next to his plate the man found a beautiful lettered note. It read: "Congratulations, darling! I knew you'd get the raise! These things will tell you how much I love you."

While on his way to the kitchen to get dessert he noticed that a second card had fallen from her pocket. Picking it off the floor, he read: "Don't worry about not getting the raise! You deserve it anyway! These things will tell you how much I love you."

Total acceptance! Total love! Her love for him was not contingent upon his success at work. In fact, just the opposite. If he were to fail there, if he were to be rejected by his boss he'd be all the more accepted at home. She stood behind him no matter what; softening the blows, healing the wounds, believing in him, loving him. We can be rejected by almost anyone if we're loved by one.

That's the way families can be with each other. And I like to think that's the way God is with us, too! "We love because he first loved us."

IMAGINE

Imagine the following:

It's a Wednesday night and you are at a church prayer meeting when somebody runs in from the parking lot and says, "Turn on a radio, turn on a radio."

And while the church listens to a little transistor radio with a microphone stuck up to it, the announcement is made: "Two women are lying in a Long Island hospital dying from the mystery flu."

Within hours it seems, this thing just sweeps across the country. People are working around the clock trying to find an antidote. Nothing is working. California, Oregon, Arizona, Florida, Massachusetts. It's as though it's just sweeping in from the borders.

And then, all of a sudden the news comes out. The code has been broken. A cure can be found. A vaccine can be made.

It's going to take the blood of somebody who hasn't been infected, and so, sure enough, all through the Midwest, through all those channels of emergency broadcasting, everyone is asked to do one simple thing: Go to your downtown hospital and have your blood type taken. That's all we ask of you.

When you hear the sirens go off in your neighborhood, please make your way quickly, quietly, and safely to the hospitals. Sure enough, when you and your family get down there late on that Friday night, there is a long line, and they've got nurses and doctors coming out and pricking fingers and taking blood and putting labels on it. Your wife and your kids are out there, and they take your blood type and they say, "Wait here in the parking lot and if we call your name, you can be dismissed and go home."

You stand around, scared, with your neighbors, wondering what in the world is going on and if this is the end of the world.

Suddenly a young man comes running out of the hospital screaming. He's yelling a name and waving a clipboard. What? He yells it again! And your son tugs on your jacket and says, "Daddy, that's me." Before you know it, they have grabbed your boy. Wait a minute. Hold on! And they say, "It's okay, his blood is clean. His blood is pure. We want to make sure he doesn't have the disease. We think he has got the right type."

Five tense minutes later, out come the doctors and nurses, crying and hugging one another -- some are even laughing.

It's the first time you have seen anybody laugh in a week, and an old doctor walks up to you and says, "Thank you, sir. Your son's blood type is perfect. It's clean, it is pure, and we can make the vaccine."

As the word begins to spread all across that parking lot full of folks, people are screaming and praying and laughing and crying. But then the gray-haired doctor pulls you and your wife aside and says, "May we see you for a moment? We didn't realize that the donor would be a minor and we need...we need you to sign a consent form."

You begin to sign and then you see that the number of pints of blood to be taken is empty. "H-how many pints?"

And that is when the old doctor's smile fades and he says, "We had no idea it would be a little child. We weren't prepared. We need it all!"

"But-but...You don't understand."

"We are talking about the world here. Please sign. We-we need it all!"

"But can't you give him a transfusion?"

"If we had clean blood we would. Can you sign?"

"Would you sign?" In numb silence, you do. then they say, "Would you like to have a moment with him before we begin?"

Can you walk back? Can you walk back to that room where he sits on a table saying, "Daddy? Mommy? What's going on?"

Can you take his hands and say, "Son, your mommy and I love you, and we would never ever let anything happen to you that didn't just have to be. Do you understand that?"

And when that old doctor comes back in and says, "I'm sorry, we've--got to get started. People all over the world are dying." Can you leave?

Can you walk out while he is saying, "Dad? Mom? Dad? Why - why have you forsaken me?"

And then next week, when they have the ceremony to honor your son, and some folks sleep through it, and some folks don't even come because they go to the lake, and some folks come with a pretentious smile and just pretend to care.

Would you want to jump up and say, "MY SON DIED FOR YOU! DON'T YOU CARE?"

Is that what GOD wants to say? "MY SON DIED FOR YOU. DON'T YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I CARE?"

"Father, seeing it from your eyes breaks our hearts. Maybe now we can begin to comprehend the great Love you have for us."

DEDICATED WITNESS

Every Sunday afternoon, after the morning service at their church, the Pastor and his 11-year-old son would go out into their town and hand out Gospel tracts. This particular Sunday afternoon, as it came time for the Pastor and his son to go to the streets with their tracts, it was very cold outside as well as pouring down rain. The boy bundled up in his warmest and driest clothes and said excitedly,

"Okay Dad, I'm ready!"

His Pastor Dad asked, "Ready for what?"

"Dad, it's time we gather our Bible tracts together and go out."

Dad responds, "Son, it's very cold outside and it's really pouring down rain."

The boy gave his Dad a surprised look, asking, "But Dad, aren't people still going to Hell, even though it's raining?"

Dad answered slowly, "Son, I am not going out in this weather."

Despondently the boy asks, "Dad, can I go -- Please? Come on Dad.."

His father hesitated for a moment then said, "Son, you can go.

Here's the tracts; be careful son."

"Thanks, Dad!" He jumped up and with that he was off and out the door dashing into the rain.

This 11-year-old boy walked the streets of the town going door-to-door and handing everybody he met in the street a Gospel tract. After 2-hours of walking in the rain he was soaked to the bone-chilled wet and down to his very last Bible tract. He stopped on a corner and looked for someone to hand a tract to but the streets were totally deserted.

Then he turned toward the first home he saw and started up the sidewalk to the front door and rang the door bell. He rang the bell -- but nobody answered. He rang it again and again but still no one answered. He waited but still no answer. Finally, this 11-year-old trooper turned to leave but something stopped him. Again, he turned to the door and rang the bell and knocked loudly on the door with his fist. He waited, something holding him there on the front porch. He rang again, and this time the door slowly opened.

Standing in the doorway was a very sad looking elderly lady. She softly asked, "Yes? What can I do for you, son?"

With radiant eyes and a smile that lit up her world, this little boy said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry if I disturbed you, but I just want to tell you that, JESUS REALLY DOES LOVE YOU! I came to give you my very last Gospel tract which will tell you all about Jesus and His great love." With that he handed her his last tract, and turned to leave. She called to him as he departed, "Thank you, son! And God bless you!" he heard a cheerful uplift to her voice.

Well, the following Sunday morning in church, Pastor Dad was in the pulpit and as the service began he asked, "Does anybody have a testimony or want to say anything?"

Slowly, in the back row of the church, an elderly lady stood to her feet. As she began to speak, a look of glorious radiance came from her face. "None of you in this Church know me. I've never been here before. You see, before last Sunday I was not a Christian. My husband has passed on, some time ago, leaving me totally alone in this world. Last Sunday, being a particularly cold and rainy day, it was even more so in my heart . . . as I came to the end of the line where I no longer had any hope or will to live.

"So I took a rope and a chair and ascended the stairway into the attic of my home. I fastened the rope securely to a rafter in the roof then stood on the chair and fastened the other end of the rope around my neck. "Standing on that chair, so lonely and brokenhearted, I was about to leap off when suddenly the loud ringing of my doorbell downstairs startled me. I thought, 'Wait, I'll wait a minute, and whoever it is will go away.'

"I waited and waited-- but the ringing doorbell seemed to get louder and more insistent and then the person ringing also started knocking loudly.

I thought to myself again, 'Who on earth could this be?! Nobody ever rings my bell or comes to see me!' "I loosened the rope from my neck and started for the front door, all the while the bell rang louder and louder. When I opened the door and looked I could hardly believe my eyes!

"There on my front porch was the most radiant and angelic little boy I had ever seen in my life! His smile! Oh, I could never describe it to you! And the words that came from his mouth caused my heart, that had long been dead, to leap to life again, as he exclaimed with cherub-like voice, 'Ma'am, I just came to tell you that JESUS REALLY DOES LOVE YOU.'

"Then he gave me this Gospel tract that I now hold in my hand. As the little angel disappeared back out, into the damp cold and rain, I then closed my door and read slowly every word of this Gospel tract. Then I went up to my attic to get my rope and chair. I wouldn't be needing them any more.

"You see, I am now a happy child of the KING, and since the address of your church was on the back of this Gospel tract I have come here to personally say, 'Thank you to God's little angel who came just in the nick of time, and by doing so, spared my soul from an eternity in Hell.'"

There were now no dry eyes in the church. As shouts of praise and honor to the KING resounded off the very rafters of the building, Pastor Dad descended from the pulpit to the front pew where the little angel was seated. He took him in his arms and sobbed uncontrollably.

Probably no church has had a more glorious moment and probably this Universe has never seen a Papa that was more filled with love and honor for his son, except for one: This Father, God, also allowed His Son, Jesus, to go out into a cold and dark world. He received His Son back with unspeakable, and as all of Heaven shouted praises and honor to the King, the Father sat His beloved Son on a throne far above all principality and power and every name that is named.

There may be someone, reading this, who is also going through a dark, cold and lonely time in your soul. You may be a Christian, for we are not without problems, or you may not yet know the King. Whatever the case, and whatever the problem or situation you find yourself in, and no matter how dark it may seem, I want you to know that I just came to tell you, "JESUS REALLY DOES LOVE YOU!"

"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)

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.'" John 3:16-18 (NIV)

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

To Whom It May Concern:

I am hereby officially tendering my resignation as an ADULT. I have decided I would like to accept the responsibilities of a 6 year old again.

I want to go to McDonald's and think that it's a four star restaurant. I want to sail sticks across a fresh mud puddle and make ripples with rocks. I want to think M&Ms are better than money, because you can eat them. I want to play kickball during recess and paint with watercolors in art. I want to lie under a big Oak tree and run a lemonade stand with my friends on a hot summers day.

I want to return to a time when life was simple. When all you knew were colors, addition tables and simple nursery rhymes, but that didn't bother you, because you didn't know what you didn't know and you didn't care. When all you knew was to be happy because you didn't know all the things that should make you worried and upset. I want to think that the world is fair. That everyone in it is honest and good. I want to believe that anything is possible.

Somewhere in my youth...I matured and I learned too much. I learned of nuclear weapons, war, prejudice, starvation and abused children. I learned of lies, unhappy marriages, suffering, illness, pain and death. I learned of a world where men left their families to go and fight for our country, and returned only to end up living on the streets...begging for their next meal. I learned of a world where children knew how to kill...and did!!

What happened to the time when we thought that everyone would live forever, because we didn't grasp the concept of death? When we thought the worst thing in the world was if someone took the jump rope from you or picked you last for kickball? I want to be oblivious to the complexity of life and be overly

excited by little things once again. I want to return to the days when reading was fun and music was clean.

When television was used to report the news or for family entertainment and not to promote sex, violence and deceit. I remember being naive and thinking that everyone was happy because I was. I would walk on the beach and only think of the sand between my toes and the prettiest seashell I could find. I would spend my afternoons climbing trees and riding my bike. I didn't worry about time, bills or where I was going to find the money to fix my car. I used to wonder what I was going to do or be when I grew up, not worry about what I'll do if this doesn't work out.

I want to live simple again. I don't want my day to consist of computer crashes, mountains of paperwork, depressing news, how to survive more days in the month than there is money in the bank, doctor bills, gossip, illness and loss of loved ones. I want to believe in the power of smiles, hugs, a kind word, truth, justice, peace, dreams, the imagination, mankind and making angels in the snow. I want to be 6 again.

FRIENDSHIP

It was a quiet morning in Korea. In a small valley, there was a little wooden building with a corrugated steel roof. It was an orphanage that housed many young children who had lost their parents in the war.

Suddenly, the quiet of the morning was shattered when a mortar shell fell and landed squarely on top of the orphanage. The roof was ripped apart by the blast and pieces of steel roofing were blasted all through the orphanage wounding many of the children. One little girl was hit in the leg by the flying metal and her leg was immediately amputated just below her knee. She was laying in the rubble of the orphanage quietly when they found her. A tourniquet was immediately applied and a runner was sent to the MASH hospital to fetch medical help for the children.

When the doctors and nurses arrived, they begin to triage the wounded children. When the doctor saw the little girl, he realized that her greatest need at the moment was blood. He immediately called for records from the orphanage to find someone with her blood type. A nurse who could read and speak Korean began to call out the names of all the children with the same blood type as the little girl.

After a few minutes there was a group of wide eyed children assembled. The doctor spoke to the group and the nurse translated, "Would one of you be willing to give this little girl your blood?" The children looked shocked, but no one said a word. Again the doctor pleaded, "Please will one of you give her your blood, because if you don't, she is going to die!" Finally a boy in the back raised his hand and the nurse laid him down on a bed to prepare him for the taking of his blood.

When the nurse ask for his arm in order to sterilize the skin, the boy began to whimper. "Relax", she said, "It won't hurt." When the doctor took his arm and inserted the needle, he began to cry. "Does it hurt?", the doctor asked. But the boy only cried louder. "I'm hurting him!", the doctor thought and he tried to ease his pain and comfort him, but to no avail. Finally, after what seemed like a long time, the blood was drawn and the needle was removed. The little boy just laid and sobbed for a few minutes.

After the blood was given to the wounded girl and her condition was stabilized, the doctor was curious. He took the Korean speaking nurse back over to the little boy and told the nurse to ask him, "Did it hurt?"

The boy said, "No, it did not hurt."

"Then why were you crying?", the doctor asked.

"Because I was afraid of dying", the boy said. The doctor was stunned! "Why did you think you would die?" With tears in his eyes the boy replied, "Because I thought that in order to save her you would have to take all of my blood!" The doctor didn't know what to say! Then he asked, "But if you thought that you were going to die, why did you offer to give her your blood?" With tears streaming down his face, he said, "Because she was my friend and I loved her!"

STANDING TALL

Our house was directly across the street from the clinic entrance of John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. We lived downstairs and rented the upstairs rooms to out patients at the clinic.

One summer evening as I was fixing supper, there was a knock at the door. I opened it to see a truly awful looking man. Why, he's hardly taller than my eight-year-old, I thought as I stared at the stooped, shriveled body. But the appalling thing was his face--lopsided from swelling, red and raw.

Yet his voice was pleasant as he said, "Good evening. I've come to see if you've a room for just one night. I came for a treatment this morning from the eastern shore, and there's no bus 'til morning." He told me he'd been hunting for a room since noon but with no success, no one seemed to have a room. "I guess it's my face...I know it looks terrible, but my doctor says with a few more treatments..." For a moment I hesitated, but his next words convinced me: "I could sleep in this rocking chair on the porch. My bus leaves early in the morning."

I told him we would find him a bed, but to rest on the porch. I went inside and finished getting supper. When we were ready, I asked the old man if he would join us.

"No thank you. I have plenty." And he held up a brown paper bag.

When I had finished the dishes, I went out on the porch to talk with him a few minutes. It didn't take a long time to see that this old man had an oversized heart crowded into that tiny body. He told me he fished for a living to support his daughter, her five children, and her husband, who was hopelessly crippled from a back injury. He didn't tell it by way of complaint; in fact, every other sentence was preface with a thanks to God for a blessing. He was grateful that no pain accompanied his disease, which was apparently a form of skin cancer. He thanked God for giving him the strength to keep going.

At bedtime, we put a camp cot in the children's room for him.

When I got up in the morning, the bed linens were neatly folded and the little man was out on the porch. He refused breakfast, but just before he left for his bus, haltingly, as if asking a great favor, he said, "Could I please come back and stay the next time I have a treatment? I won't put you out a bit. I can sleep fine in a chair." He paused a moment and then added, "Your children made me feel at home. Grownups are bothered by my face, but children don't seem to mind."

I told him he was welcome to come again.

On his next trip he arrived a little after seven in the morning. As a gift, he brought a big fish and a quart of the largest oysters I had ever seen. He said he had shucked them that morning before he left so that they'd be nice and fresh. I knew his bus left at 4:00 a.m. and I wondered what time he had to get up in order to do this for us.

In the years he came to stay overnight with us there was never a time that he did not bring us fish or oysters or vegetables from his garden. Other times we received packages in the mail, always by special delivery; fish and oysters packed in a box of fresh young spinach or kale, every leaf carefully washed. Knowing that he must walk three miles to mail these, and knowing how little money he had made the gifts doubly precious. When I received these little remembrances, I often thought of a comment our next-door neighbor made after he left that first morning.

"Did you keep that awful looking man last night? I turned him away! You can lose roomers by putting up such people!"

Maybe we did lose roomers once or twice. But oh! If only they could have known him, perhaps their illnesses would have been easier to bear. I know our family always will be grateful to have known him; from him we learned what it was to accept the bad without complaint and the good with gratitude to God.

Recently I was visiting a friend who has a greenhouse. As she showed me her flowers, we came to the most beautiful one of all, a golden chrysanthemum, bursting with blooms. But to my great surprise, it was growing in an old dented, rusty bucket. I thought to myself, If this were my plant, I'd put it in the loveliest container I had! My friend changed my mind.

"I ran short of pots," she explained, "and knowing how beautiful this one would be, I thought it wouldn't mind starting out in this old pail. It's just for a little while, till I can put it out in the garden." She must have wondered why I laughed so delightedly, but I was imagining just such a scene in heaven.

"Here's an especially beautiful one," God might have said when he came to the soul of the sweet old fisherman. "He won't mind starting in this small body."

All this happened long ago -- and now, in God's garden, how tall this lovely soul must stand.

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1Samuel 16:7)

A LETTER FROM JESUS

Ruth went to her mailbox and there was only one letter. She picked it up and looked at it before opening, but then she looked at the envelope again. There was no stamp, no postmark, only her name and address. She read the letter:

Dear Ruth,
I'm going to be in your neighborhood Saturday afternoon and I'd like to stop by for a visit.
Love Always,
Jesus

Her hands were shaking as she placed the letter on the table. "Why would the Lord want to visit me? I'm nobody special. I don't have anything to offer." With that thought, Ruth remembered her empty kitchen cabinets. "Oh my goodness, I really don't have anything to offer. I'll have to run down to the store and buy something for dinner."

She reached for her purse and counted out its contents. Five dollars and forty cents. "Well, I can get some bread and cold cuts, at least." She threw on her coat and hurried out the door. A loaf of French bread, a half-pound of sliced turkey, and a carton of milk...leaving Ruth with a grand total of twelve cents to last her until Monday.

Nonetheless, she felt as she headed home, her meager offerings tucked under her arm. "Hey lady, can you help us, lady?" Ruth had been so absorbed in her dinner plans, she hadn't even noticed two figures huddled in the alleyway. A man and a woman, both of them dressed in little more than rags.

"Look lady, I ain't got a job, ya know, and my wife and I have been living out here on the street, and, well, now it's getting cold and we're getting kinda hungry and, well, if you could help us, lady, we'd really appreciate it." Ruth looked at them both.

They were dirty, they smelled bad and, frankly, she was certain that they could get some kind of work if they really wanted to. "Sir, I'd like to help you, but I'm a poor woman myself. All I have is a few cold cuts and some bread, and I'm having an important guest for dinner tonight and I was planning on serving that to Him."

"Yeah, well, OK lady, I understand. Thanks anyway."

The man put his arm around the woman's shoulders, turned and headed back into the alley. As she watched them leave, Ruth felt a familiar twinge in her heart. "Sir, wait!" The couple stopped and turned as she ran down the alley after them. "Look, why don't you take this food. I'll figure out something else to serve my guest." She handed the man her grocery bag. "Thank you lady. Thank you very much!" "Yes, thank you!" It was the man's wife, and Ruth could see now that she was shivering.

"You know, I've got another coat at home. Here, why don't you take this one." Ruth unbuttoned her jacket and slipped it over the woman's shoulders. Then smiling, she turned and walked back to the street...without her coat and with nothing to serve her guest. "Thank you lady! Thank you very much!"

Ruth was chilled by the time she reached her front door, and worried too. The Lord was coming to visit and she didn't have anything to offer Him. She fumbled through her purse for the door key. But as she did, she noticed another envelope in her mailbox. "That's odd. The mailman doesn't usually come twice in one day." She took the envelope out of the box and opened it.

Dear Ruth,
It was so good to see you again. Thank you for the lovely meal. And thank you, too, for the beautiful coat.

Love Always,
Jesus
The air was still cold, but even without her coat, Ruth no longer noticed.

REMEMBERING GOD

About ten years ago, a young and very successful executive named Josh was traveling down a Chicago neighborhood street. He was going a bit too fast in his sleek, black, 12 cylinder Jaguar XKE, which was only two months old.

He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something. As his car passed, no child darted out, but a brick sailed out and "WHUMP"-it smashed into the Jag's shiny black side door! SCREECH...!!!! Brakes slammed! Gears ground into reverse, and tires madly spun the Jaguar back to the spot from where the brick had been thrown.

Josh jumped out of the car, grabbed the kid and pushed him up against a parked car. He shouted at the kid, "What was that all about and who are you?"

Just what the heck are you doing?" Building up a head of steam, he went on. "That's my new Jag, that brick you threw is gonna cost you a lot of money. Why did you throw it?"

"Please, mister, please...I'm sorry! I didn't know what else to do!" pleaded the youngster. "I threw the brick because no one else would stop!" Tears were dripping down the boy's chin as he pointed around the parked car. "It's my brother, mister," he said. "He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up."

Sobbing, the boy asked the executive, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me." Moved beyond words, the young executive tried desperately to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. Straining, he lifted the young man back into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts, checking to see that everything was going to be OK. He then watched the younger brother push him down the sidewalk toward their home.

It was a long walk back to the sleek, black, shining, 12 cylinder Jaguar XKE - a long and slow walk. Josh never did fix the side door of his Jaguar. He kept the dent to remind him not to go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at him to get his attention..

It's kind of stretching it, but sometimes in life we have it good and forget about God. We need to continue to praise him and look to him during the good times in life. Let us *"Be still and know that I am God"* Psalm 46:10

THE RIGHT DECISION

In those days, many had to seek work as hired servants for wealthy land owners. I was a poor peasant girl. I needed to find work and to be taken care of. Word spread throughout the village of one wealthy land owner who was very hard to work for but was fair and good to his servants. He always treated them well and didn't abuse them. The work was hard but he took good care of his servants as long as they were good workers. Those who slacked off were sent away without any further compensation.

I came upon the stately mansion. It was the most awesome mansion I had ever seen! As far as the eye could see were the vast fields, vineyards, and livestock. I was excited yet very much afraid to enter those gates. Many spoke of the owner's son. He was a very firm taskmaster but also kind, gentle and understanding. He required that when you work for him it was for a total of seven years. After that time, you were set free with a very handsome settlement in which you could take care of yourself for quite sometime!

I entered the gates, trembling. I was brought to the owner's son. He was very specific what he expected from me, but in turn, he would treat me fairly and pay me a just wage. My work began in the fields. We would put in a very long, hard day but at the end of the day, he would feed us a very good meal and our quarters were very comfortable compared to most servant's camps. Once in a while, the owner's son would walk among the fields just to check on us. Those of us who were working hard were encouraged. Those who were not working hard were warned and then later sent away if their work did not improve.

At the end of the seven years, each servant was given a graduation ceremony of sorts. There would be a special party where the master's son would congratulate them and give them a total of \$15,000 compensation to help them along the way. They were set free and on their own. Although the subject rarely came up, all servants were given a chance at that time to become the master's bond

servants -- servants for life -- completely sold out to the master, never to be free. In turn, the master would take care of them for the rest of their lives. Very few even considered this kind of servitude.

As the end of my seven years approached, I asked many of the other servants if they had ever considered becoming a bond servant. They laughed and said, "No way!!! Only a crazy person would even consider something like that!" Once in a while I would see one of the owner's bond servants. They were different. They would come out to the fields to bring a message from the master, but they didn't mingle among us. Everytime the master's son would come to the field, my heart would leap for joy! He was such a kind, gentle person, yet strong and unwavering. He was a very powerful man -- much like his father. At times when I would see him, it would almost take my breath away. My heart would beat faster and faster and I would cling to his every word, although he rarely spoke directly to me. One time, he stopped and asked me my name. I told him that I really didn't have a name. He just smiled.

It was time for my "graduation." I was being set free that night. The master's son called me up and congratulated me on a fine job. He was about to give me my compensation when I said in a very low voice, "I don't want to leave -- I want to be your bond servant." The crowd of servants gasped!!! He silenced them and asked me to repeat myself. I said, "I don't want to leave you master. I want to stay with you forever. I want to be your bond servant!" He asked me if I had any idea what kind of decision I was making. I told him I did, but he asked me to think about it overnight and let him know in the morning.

When the morning came, he approached me again, "Have you made your decision?" I said, "Yes, my lord. I want to be your bond servant." He smiled and escorted me to a block of wood. He told me to lay down. The block of wood was put behind my left ear. One of the other bond servants took a nail and pounded it into my earlobe to make a hole. He inserted an earring of fine gold. This was the seal of our commitment. The pain in my ear was very intense but the joy in my heart was overwhelming.

As I began to leave, the master's son called me over to him. He comforted me in my pain and told me to pack my bags. I said, "But master, where am I going?" He told me that I would no longer live in the servant's camp, but would live in the master's house. I was his property now and he would always take care of me -- no matter what! He even gave me a name!

The mansion was more awesome than I could ever imagine. I even had my own room! I still worked very hard for the master and his son, but the atmosphere was so different. I lived in his house. I began to know every intimate detail of his life. I saw exactly how he lived. Every once in a while he would come to my room and just chat with me. I waited on him hand and foot and took care of his every need. I began to know exactly what he liked and what he didn't like.

As the years passed by, I became very old and feeble. One day while I was taking a message for him to the field, I felt faint. I had to sit down. The master's son rushed out to check on me. He took one look at me and picked me up in his arms and carried me back to his father's house. He put me in my bed and waited on me hand and foot. He wouldn't let me lift a finger. I asked him why he was doing this and he replied, "I made a commitment to you years ago that if you became my bond servant, I would take care of you for the rest of your life, even when you are old and feeble. It is now my turn to wait on you!"

I have never regretted the day I made the decision to become his bond-servant. I know that no matter what happens, he will be there for me. And this earring of fine gold never fails to remind me of that relationship. I always wondered about the other servants -- how long did their money last? And what ever became of them when they were old? Who took care of them when they could no longer take care of themselves?

"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you." (John 15:15)

HE MADE A CHOICE

There was once a bridge which spanned a large river. During the day the bridge sat with its length running up and down the river paralleled with the banks, allowing ships to pass thru freely. But at certain times each day, a train would come and the bridge would be turned sideways across the river, allowing a train to cross it.

A switchman sat in a small shack on one side of the river where he operated the controls to turn the bridge and lock it into place when a train crossed.

One evening as the switchman was waiting for the light of the day to come, he looked off into the distance thru the dim twilight and caught sight of the train lights. He stepped to the controls and waited

until the train was within a prescribed distance within the bridge. He turned the bridge into position, but, to his horror, found the locking control did not work. If the bridge was not secure in position, it would wobble back and forth at the ends when the train came on to it, causing the train to jump the track and go crashing into the river. This would be a passenger train with many people aboard.

He left the bridge turned across the river, and hurried across bridge to the other side of the river where there was a lever switch that could hold to operate the lock manually. He would have to hold the switch back firmly as the train crossed.

He could hear the rumble of the train now. He took hold of the lever and kept applying the pressure to keep mechanism locked. Many lives depended on this man's strength. Then, coming across the bridge from the direction of his control room, he heard a sound that made his blood run cold. "Daddy, where are you?"

His four-year-old son was crossing the bridge to look for him. His first impulse was to cry out to the child, "Run! Run!" But the train was close; the tiny legs would never make it across the bridge in time.

He almost left his lever to run and snatch up his son and carry him but he realized that he would not be able to get back to the lever in time. Either the people on the train or his little son must die.

He took a moment to make his decision. The train sped safely about, on its way, and no one aboard was even aware of the tiny broken body, thrown mercilessly into the river by the onrushing train. Nor were they aware of the pitiful figure of the sobbing man, still clinging tightly to the locking lever long after the train had passed. They did not see him walk home more slowly than he had ever walked: to tell his wife how the child had brutally died.

Now if you comprehend the emotions which went through this man's heart, you can begin to understand the feelings of our Father in Heaven when He allowed His Son to bridge the gap between us and eternal life.

Can there be any wonder that He caused the earth to tremble and the skies to darken as His Son died? How does He feel when we speed along thru life without any thought to what was done for us thru Jesus Christ?

When was the last time you thanked Him for the sacrifice of His Son?

IT WAS ABOUT "JESUS"

About a year ago I was babysitting for this 4 1/2 year old little girl for the summer. I was out of college for the summer and it was the perfect summer job! Maddie and I would walk to the park everyday after lunch. Maddie loved to swing on the swings and go down the slide. She was a very good hearted little child and she always amazed me at the love she felt for other people. She had such goodness in her little heart. Both of her parents were the same way -- they always had such a peace about them -- I always wondered -- why are they so different?

That day at the park as I was pushing Maddie in the swing we heard a bunch of kids laughing. We looked over and all the kids were crowded around one of the park benches. Maddie wanted to stop swinging and go over there and see what they were laughing at. We walked over and a little boy ran up to Maddie and said, "Come over here and look at this funny lady! She is dirty and smelly and she is crying!!"

Maddie pushed the little boy away and walked over to where the woman was sitting on the bench. She looked to be about 50 years old -- even though she could have been very easily a lot younger. It looked like life had been very hard on her. The little boy was right, she did smell and she was all dirty.

My immediate thought was to grab Maddie by the hand and take her away from this woman. I looked over and Maddie was already sitting next to the woman and was holding her hand. The woman looked down at Maddie and she smiled. For that split second this woman was no longer dirty and smelly, she was beautiful!!! All the other kids finally left and Maddie gave the woman a hug and she too left.

On the way home Maddie was humming a little song and skipping a little bit. Her usual self, she was happy -- not a care in the world. I was waiting for her to say something about the woman but she didn't. Finally, when we got home I could not wait any longer. I went to Maddie and I asked her, "Maddie, why did you do that?" She said, "Do what Julie?" I said, "Why did you go up to that woman like that and hold her hand Maddie? All the other kids were either laughing at her or they were scared of her. You just went right up to her like that!"

Maddie looked at me and said, "Julie, Jesus wouldn't treat that woman like that. Everyone laughed and treated Jesus that way and look at what He did! He died for us on the cross. Every time I see someone like that being made fun of I always go to them and give them a hug and tell them that Jesus loves them. It always makes them feel better!"

Here I stood -- a 20 year old college student -- supposed to be so smart!! And here was this 4 1/2 year old little girl who knew so much more than I did. That's what it was about her!! It was Jesus. Jesus

Christ who came to this cold and dirty world, got stepped on, laughed at, spit on and still -- he died for us. I changed that day and the world now looks different to me. All because a 4 1/2 year old little girl showed me what it really means to love

TOMMY

A Professor at Loyola University in Chicago wrote the following about a student in his Theology of Faith class named Tommy.

Some twelve years ago, I stood watching my university students file into the classroom for our first session in the Theology of Faith.

That was the first day I first saw Tommy. My eyes and my mind both blinked. He was combing his long flaxen hair, which hung six inches below his shoulders. It was the first time I had ever seen a boy with hair that long. I guess it was just coming into fashion then. I know in my mind that it isn't what's on your head but what's in it that counts; but on that day I was unprepared and my emotions flipped.

I immediately filed Tommy under "S" for strange . . . very strange.

Tommy turned out to be the "atheist in residence" in my Theology of Faith course. He constantly objected to, smirked at, or whined about the possibility of an unconditionally loving Father-God. We lived with each other in relative peace for one semester, although I admit he was for me at times a serious pain in the back pew.

When he came up at the end of the course to turn in his final exam, he asked in a lightly cynical tone: "Do you think I'll ever find God?"

I decided instantly on a little shock therapy. "No!" I said very emphatically.

"Oh," he responded, "I thought that was the product you were pushing."

I let him get five steps from the classroom door and then called out: "Tommy! I don't think you'll ever find Him, but I am absolutely certain that He will find you!"

He shrugged a little and left my class and my life. I felt slightly disappointed at the thought that he had missed my clever line: "He will find you!" At least I thought it was clever.

Later I heard that Tommy had graduated and I was duly grateful. Then a sad report, I heard that Tommy had terminal cancer. Before I could search him out, he came to see me. When he walked into my office, his body was very badly wasted, and the long hair had all fallen out as a result of chemotherapy. But his eyes were bright and his voice was firm, for the first time, I believe.

"Tommy, I've thought about you so often. I hear you are sick!" I blurted out.

"Oh, yes, very sick. I have cancer in both lungs. It's a matter of weeks."

"Can you talk about it, Tom?"

"Sure, what would you like to know?"

"What's it like to be only twenty-four and dying?"

"Well, it could be worse."

"Like what?"

"Well, like being fifty and having no values or ideals, like being fifty and thinking that booze, seducing women, and making money are the real 'biggies' in life."

I began to look through my mental file cabinet under "S" where I had filed Tommy as strange. (It seems as though everybody I try to reject by classification God sends back into my life to educate me.)

"But what I really came to see you about," Tom said, "is something you said to me on the last day of class." (He remembered!) He continued, "I asked you if you thought I would ever find God and you said, 'No!' which surprised me.

Then you said, 'But He will find you.' I thought about that a lot, even though my search for God was hardly intense at that time. (My "clever" line. He thought about that a lot!)

But when the doctors removed a lump from my groin and told me that it was malignant, then I got serious about locating God. And when the malignancy spread into my vital organs, I really began banging bloody fists against the bronze doors of heaven.

But God did not come out. In fact, nothing happened. Did you ever try anything for a long time with great effort and with no success? You get psychologically glutted, fed up with trying. And then you quit.

Well, one day I woke up, and instead of throwing a few more futile appeals over that high brick wall to a God who may be or may not be there, I just quit.

I decided that I didn't really care ... about God, about an afterlife, or anything. I'd just like to spend what time I had left doing something more profitable. I thought about you and your class and I remembered something else you had said: 'The essential sadness is to go through life without loving. But it would be almost equally sad to go through life and leave this world without ever telling those you loved that you had loved them.'

"So I began with the hardest one: my Dad. He was reading the newspaper when I approached him. "Dad". . .

"Yes, what?" he asked without lowering the newspaper.

"Dad, I would like to talk with you."

"Well, talk."

"I mean ... It's really important."

The newspaper came down three slow inches. "What is it?"

"Dad, I love you. I just wanted you to know that."

Tom smiled at me and said with obvious satisfaction, as though he felt a warm and secret joy flowing inside of him: "The newspaper fluttered to the floor. Then my father did two things I could never remember him ever doing before. He cried and he hugged me. And we talked all night, even though he had to go to work the next morning. It felt so good to be close to my father, to see his tears, to feel his hug, to hear him say that he loved me.

"It was easier with my mother and little brother. They cried with me, too, and we hugged each other, and started saying real nice things to each other. We shared the things we had been keeping secret for so many years.

I was only sorry about one thing: that I had waited so long. I was beginning to open up to all the people I had actually been close to. "Then, one day I turned around and God was there. He didn't come to me when I pleaded with him. I guess I was like an animal trainer holding out a hoop, 'C'mon, jump through.' 'C'mon, I'll give you three days...three weeks.' Apparently God does things in His own way and at His own hour.

"But the important thing is that He was there. He found me. You were right. He found me even after I stopped looking for Him."

"Tommy," I practically gasped, "I think you are saying something very important and much more universal than you realize. To me, at least, you are saying that the surest way to find God is not to make Him a private possession, a problem solver, or an instant consolation in time of need, but rather by opening to love. You know, the Apostle John said that. He said 'God is love, and anyone who loves is living with God and God is living in him.'

Tom, could I ask you a favor? You know, when I had you in class you were a real pain. But (laughingly) you can make it all up to me now. Would you come into my present Theology of Faith course and tell them what you have just told me? If I told them the same thing it wouldn't be half as effective as if you were to tell them."

"Oooh . . . I was ready for you, but I don't know if I'm ready for your class."

"Tom, think about it. If and when you are ready, give me a call."

In a few days Tommy called, said he was ready for the class, that he wanted to do that for God and for me. So we scheduled a date. However, he never made it. He had another appointment, far more important than the one with me and my class. Of course, his life was not really ended by his death, only changed. He made the great step from faith into vision.

Before he died, we talked one last time. "I'm not going to make it to class," he said.

"I know, Tom."

"Will you tell them for me? Will you ... tell the whole world for me?"

"I will, Tom. I'll tell them. I'll do my best."

So, to all of you who have been kind enough to hear this simple statement about love, thank you for listening. And to you, Tommy, somewhere in the sunlit, verdant hills of heaven:

"I told them, Tommy... as best I could."

THE FATHER'S EYES

The day is over, you are driving home. You tune in your radio. You hear a little blurb about a little village in India where some villagers have died suddenly, strangely, of a flu that has never been seen before. It's not influenza, but three or four people are dead, and it's kind of interesting, and they're sending some doctors over there to investigate it.

You don't think much about it, but on Sunday, coming home from church, you hear another radio spot. Only they say it's not three villagers, it's 30,000 villagers in the back hills of this particular area of India, and it's on TV that night. CNN runs a little blurb; people are heading there from the disease center in Atlanta because this disease strain has never been seen before.

By Monday morning when you get up, it's the lead story. For it's not just India; it's Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and before you know it, you're hearing this story everywhere and they have coined it now as "the mystery flu." The President has made some comment that he and everyone are praying and hoping that all will go well over there. But everyone is wondering, How are we going to contain it?

That's when the President of France makes an announcement that shocks Europe. He is closing their borders. No flights from India, Pakistan, or any of the countries where this thing has been seen. And that's why that night you are watching a little bit of CNN before going to bed. Your jaw hits your chest when a weeping woman is translated from a French news program into English: There's a man lying in a hospital in Paris dying of the mystery flu. It has come to Europe.

Panic strikes.

As best they can tell, once you get it, you have it for a week before you know it. Then you have four days of unbelievable symptoms. And then you die.

Britain closes its borders, but it's too late. South Hampton, Liverpool, North Hampton, and its Tuesday morning when the President of the United States makes the following announcement: "Due to a national security risk, all flights to and from Europe and Asia have been canceled. If your loved ones are overseas, I'm sorry. They cannot come back until we find a cure for this thing."

Within four days our nation has been plunged into an unbelievable fear. People are selling little masks for your face. People are talking about "What if it comes to this country," and preachers on Tuesday are saying, "it's the scourge of God." It's Wednesday night and you are at a church prayer meeting when somebody runs in from the parking lot and says, "Turn on a radio, turn on a radio." And while the church listens to a little transistor radio with a microphone stuck up to it, the announcement is made: "Two women are lying in a Long Island hospital dying from the mystery flu."

Within hours it seems, this thing just sweeps across the country. People are working around the clock trying to find an antidote. Nothing is working. California, Oregon, Arizona, Florida, Massachusetts. It's as though it's just sweeping in from the borders.

And then, all of a sudden the news comes out. The code has been broken. A cure can be found. A vaccine can be made. It's going to take the blood of somebody who hasn't been infected, and so, sure enough, all through the Midwest, through all those channels of emergency broadcasting, everyone is asked to do one simple thing: Go to your downtown hospital and have your blood type taken. That's all we ask of you. When you hear the sirens go off in your neighborhood, please make your way quickly, quietly, and safely to the hospitals.

Sure enough, when you and your family get down there late on that Friday night, there is a long line, and they've got nurses and doctors coming out and pricking fingers and taking blood and putting labels on it. Your wife and your kids are out there, and they take your blood type and they say, "Wait here in the parking lot and if we call your name, you can be dismissed and go home."

You stand around, scared, with your neighbors, wondering what in the world is going on and if this is the end of the world.

Suddenly a young man comes running out of the hospital screaming. He's yelling a name and waving a clipboard. What? He yells it again! And your son tugs on your jacket and says, "*Daddy, that's me.*" Before you know it, they have grabbed your boy. Wait a minute. Hold on! And they say, "*It's okay, his blood is clean. His blood is pure. We want to make sure he doesn't have the disease. We think he has got the right type.*" Five tense minutes later, out come the doctors and nurses, crying and hugging one another - some are even laughing. It's the first time you have seen anybody laugh in a week, and an old doctor walks up to you and says, "*Thank you, sir. Your son's blood type is perfect. It's clean, it is pure, and we can make the vaccine.*"

As the word begins to spread all across that parking lot full of folks, people are screaming and praying and laughing and crying. But then the gray-haired doctor pulls you and you wife aside and says, *"May we see you for a moment? We didn't realize that the donor would be a minor and we need...we need you to sign a consent form."*

You begin to sign and then you see that the number of pints of blood to be taken is empty. "H-how many pints?" And that is when the old doctor's smile fades and he says, *"We had no idea it would be a little child. We weren't prepared. We need it all!"*

"But-but...You don't understand." "We are talking about the world here. Please sign. We-we need it all!"

"But can't you give him a transfusion?"

"If we had clean blood we would. Can you sign? Would you sign?" In numb silence, you do. Then they say, "Would you like to have a moment with him before we begin?"

Can you walk back? Can you walk back to that room where he sits on a table saying, "Daddy?

What's going on?" Can you take his hands and say, "Son, you know I love you, and I would never ever let anything, happen to you that didn't just have to be. Do you understand that?"

And when that old doctor comes back in and says, *"I'm sorry, we've - we've got to get started. People all over the world are dying."*

Can you leave? Can you walk out while he is saying, "Dad? Dad? Why - why have you forsaken me?"

And then next week, when they have the ceremony to honor your son, and some folks sleep through it, and some folks don't even come because they go to the lake, and some folks come with a pretentious smile and just pretend to care. Would you want to jump up and say, "MY SON DIED FOR YOU! DON'T YOU CARE?"

Is that what GOD wants to say? "MY SON DIED FOR YOU. DON'T YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I CARE?"

"Father, seeing it from your eyes breaks our hearts. Maybe now we can begin to comprehend the great Love you have for us."

You can now SPREAD THE GOSPEL...or delete it.

DO YOU TRULY LOVE ME?

One day, I woke early in the morning to watch the sunrise. Ah, the beauty of God's creation is beyond description. As I watched, I praised God for His beautiful work. As I sat there, I felt the Lord's presence with me.

He asked me, "Do you love me?"

I answered, "Of course, God! You are my Lord and Savior!"

Then He asked, "If you were physically handicapped, would you still love me?"

I was perplexed. I looked down upon my arms, legs and the rest of my body and wondered how many things I wouldn't be able to do, the things that I took for granted.

And I answered, "It would be tough Lord, but I would still love You."

Then the Lord said, "If you were blind, would you still love my creation?"

How could I love something without being able to see it? Then I thought of all the blind people in the world and how many of them still loved God and His creation.

So I answered, "It's hard to think of it, but I would still love you."

The Lord then asked me, "If you were deaf, would you still listen to my word?"

How could I listen to anything being deaf? Then I understood. Listening to God's Word is not merely using our ears, but our hearts. I answered, "It would be tough, but I would still listen to Your Word."

Then the Lord asked, "If you were mute, would you still praise My Name?"

How could I praise without a voice?

Then it occurred to me: God wants us to sing from our very heart and soul. It never matters what we sound like. And praising God is not always with a song, but when we are persecuted, we give God praise with our words of thanks.

So I answered, "Though I could not physically sign, I would still praise Your Name."

And the Lord asked, "Do you really love Me?"

With courage and a strong conviction, I answered boldly, "Yes Lord! I love You because You are the one and true God!"

I thought I had answered well, butGod asked, "THEN WHY DO YOU SIN?"

I answered, "Because I am only human. I am not perfect."

THEN WHY IN TIMES OF PEACE DO YOU STRAY THE FURTHEST? WHY ONLY IN TIMES OF TROUBLE DO YOU PRAY THE EARNEST?"

No answers. Only tears.

The Lord continued: "Why only sing at fellowships and retreats? Why seek Me only in times of worship? Why ask things so selfishly? Why ask things so unfaithfully?"

The tears continued to roll down my cheeks.

"Why are you ashamed of Me? Why are you not spreading the good news? Why in times of persecution, you cry to others when I offer My shoulder to cry on? Why make excuses when I give the opportunities to serve in My Name?"

I tried to answer, but there was no answer to give.

"You are blessed with life. I made you not to throw this gift away. I have blessed you with talents to serve Me, but you continue to turn away. I have revealed My Word to you, but you do not gain in knowledge. I have spoken to you but your ears were closed. I have shown My blessings to you, but your eyes were turned away. I have sent you servants, but you sat idly by as they were pushed away. I have heard your prayers and I have answered them all."

"DO YOU TRULY LOVE ME?"

I could not answer. How could I? I was embarrassed beyond belief. I had no excuse. What could I say to this? When my heart had cried out and the tears had flowed, I said, "Please forgive me Lord. I am unworthy to be Your child."

The Lord answered, "That is My Grace, My child."

I asked, "Then why do you continue to forgive me? Why do You love me so?"

The Lord answered, "Because you are My creation. You are my child. I will never abandon you. When you cry, I will have compassion and cry with you. When you shout with joy, I will laugh with you. When you are down, I will encourage you. When you fall, I will raise you up. When you are tired, I will carry you. I will be with you till the end of days, and I will love you forever."

Never had I cried so hard before. How could I have been so cold? How could I have hurt God as I had done? I asked God, "How much do You love me?"

The Lord stretched out His arms, and I saw His nail-pierced hands. I bowed down at the feet of Christ, my Savior. And for the first time, I truly prayed.

"TILL"

Till they reached the Red sea they never even thought
There is an invisible way below the water
(Patiently march till you near the sea)

Till they finished the last round they never even thought
That the Jericho wall was going to fall with out muscle power
(Finish your final round with out frustration)

Till the disciples put the net to the other side they never even thought
Fishes will fill their nets automatically
(Listen to the voice of God)

Till the stone was rolled no one never even expected
That Lazarus will be raised after so many days.
(Days doesn't matter when his time come)

Till the small stone hit Goliath no one never even expected
A small stone is going to bring great victory
(It's a small thing for God to solve the problem you have)

Till the last jar was filled with water no one never even expected
They will drink the invisible wine in it.
(It takes time for the jars to be filled, God is also watching that - Wait)

Till the morning of the third day no one never even expected
The lord will be raised from the dead
(No matter, VICTORY is ours through our Lord)

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD THOSE WHO BELIEVE THE LORD

The Professor

The university professor challenged his students with this question.

"Did God create everything that exists?"

A student bravely replied, "Yes, he did!"

"God created everything?" The professor asked.

"Yes sir", the student replied.

The professor answered, "If God created everything, then God created evil, since evil exists, and according to the principal that our works define who we are, then God is evil".

The student became quiet before such an answer. The professor, quite pleased with himself, boasted to the students that he had proven once more that the Christian faith was a myth.

Another student raised his hand and said, "Can I ask you a question professor?"

"Of course", replied the professor.

The student stood up and asked, "Professor, does cold exist?"

"What kind of question is this? Of course it exists. Have you never been cold?"

The students snickered at the young man's question.

The young man replied, "In fact sir, cold does not exist. According to the laws of physics, what we consider cold is in reality the absence of heat. Every body or object is susceptible to study when it has or transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (- 460 degrees F) is the total absence of heat; all matter becomes inert and incapable of reaction at that temperature. Cold does not exist. We have created this word to describe how we feel if we have no heat."

The student continued, "Professor, does darkness exist?"

The professor responded, "Of course it does."

The student replied, "Once again you are wrong sir, darkness does not exist either Darkness is in reality the absence of light. Light we can study, but not darkness. In fact we can use Newton's prism to break white light into many colors and study the various wavelengths of each color. You cannot measure darkness. A simple ray of light can break into a world of darkness and illuminate it. How can you know how dark a certain space is? You measure the amount of light present. Isn't this correct? Darkness is a term used by man to describe what happens when there is no light present."

Finally the young man asked the professor, "Sir, does evil exist?"

Now uncertain, the professor responded, "Of course as I have already said. We see it every day. It is in the daily example of man's inhumanity to man. It is in the multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil."

To this the student replied, "Evil does not exist sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is not like faith, or love that exist just as does light and heat. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light."

The professor sat down.

"For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee."

- Psalm 5:4

BROWN BAG CHRISTMAS

I asked our newlywed Sunday School class to share a favorite Christmas story, Carrie Fuller said, "Our family has one we call the 'brown bag Christmas.' "When she finished, I had to hear more. Two days later, I called a member of her family for more details.

It was the early 1930s during the Dust Bowl days of Kansas, in the heart of the Depression. The Canaday family---Mom, Dad, 7 children---were having a tough time existing, so there would be no luxuries at Christmas that year. Mom told the children to go outside and find a Christmas tree and decorate it. After a lengthy search, they returned with a dead branch, the only thing they had been able to find. They stood it up in a bucket of sand and decorated it with pieces of paper tied with string. Little Judy, almost four, did not know how a Christmas tree was supposed to look, but somehow she knew it was not like that!

As Christmas approached, the Canaday children, like children everywhere, pestered Mom and Dad about what presents they might get under their "tree." Dad pointed out that the pantry was bare, that they did not have enough to live on, and there certainly would be no money for gifts. But Mom was a woman of faith and told her children, "Say your prayers. Ask God to send us what He wants us to have." Dad said, "Now, Mother, don't be getting the children's hopes up. You're just setting them up for a disappointment." Mom said, "Pray, children. Tell Jesus." And pray they did.

On Christmas Eve, the children watched out the window for visitors, but no one came. "Blow out the lamp and go to bed", Dad said. "Nobody is going to come. No one even knows we're out here."

The children turned out the lamp and got in bed, but they were too excited to sleep. Was this not Christmas? Had they not asked God to send them the presents He wanted them to have? Did Mom

not say God answers prayer?

Late that night, when one of the children spotted headlights coming down the dirt road, everyone jumped out of bed and ran to the window. The commotion woke up Mom and Dad. "Don't get excited, children," Dad said. "They're probably not coming here. It's just someone who got lost." The children kept hoping and the car kept coming. Then, Dad lit a lamp. They all wanted to rush to the door at the same time, but Mr. Canaday said, "Stay back. I'll go."?

Someone got out of the car and called, "I was wondering if someone here can help me unload these bags." The children dashed out the door to lend a hand. Mom said to her youngest, "Stay here, Judy, and help Mom open the bags and put up the gifts."?

A deacon from the church in town had gone to bed that Christmas Eve, and lay there tossing and turning, unable to get the Canaday family off his mind. Later, he said, "I didn't know what kind of shape you folks were in, but I knew you had all those kids." He had gotten up and dressed and went around town, rousing people from their sleep to ask for a contribution for the Canaday family. He filled his car with bags of groceries, canned goods, toys, and clothing. Little Judy got a rag doll which remained her favorite for years.

With so much food, Dad wanted to have a Christmas feast, to spread it all out and eat as they had never eaten before. Mom, ever the caretaker, said, "No, we need to make this last." And it did last, for weeks.

The next Sunday, Mrs. Canaday stood in church and told what the members---and the deacon in particular---had done for her family. There was not a dry eye in the house.

Years later, the oldest sister Eva wrote up this story about her family for a school project. Eva said, "We were so thrilled by all the wonderful things in the bags, for a while; we lost sight of the most special gift. The best gift that Christmas was not in brown bags at all. It was Mom's faith, as she taught her children to bring their needs to Jesus and trust Him to meet them. And a Dad's love that wanted only to protect his children from hurt and disappointment."

When Carrie finished telling her story, she added, "Little Judy is my wonderful grandmother." Today, Judy Canaday Dryden lives in Sanger, Texas. As she relived this event from seventy years ago over the phone, one could hear the tear in her voice and feel her pride in being the recipient of such a precious heritage from her mother and father.

At Christmas, we celebrate praying mothers and caring fathers and believing children. We give thanks for sensitive deacons and generous friends and sleepless nights. And we praise God for the hard times that teach unforgettable lessons, stories of faithfulness that get told and retold through the years inspiring each new generation to place their faith in a loving Savior.

- Author Unknown -

THIS DAY IS YOURS DON'T THROW IT AWAY

May God Bless You,

"To the world you might be one person,
but to one person you just might be the world"

"May the Lord Bless you and keep you,
May the Lord Make his face shine upon you,
And give you Peace.....Forever"

"Good friends are like stars... You don't always see them,
But you know they are always there

God Said No

I asked God to take away my habit.
God said, No.
It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole.
God said, No.
His spirit is whole, his body is only temporary

I asked God to grant me patience.
God said, No.
Patience is a byproduct of tribulations; It isn't granted, it is learned.

I asked God to give me happiness.
God said, No. I give you blessings; Happiness is up to you.

I asked God to spare me pain.
God said, No.
Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares And brings you closer to me.

I asked God to make my spirit grow.
God said, No.
You must grow on your own! ,
But I will prune you to make you fruitful.

I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life.
God said, No.
I will give you life, so that you may enjoy all things.

I asked God to help me LOVE others,
as much as He loves me.
God said. Ahhhh, finally you have the idea.

CHILD OF JESUS, OFT DEPRESSED

Child of Jesus, oft depressed,
Yielding to thy doubts and fear,
In thy trials sore distressed,
Fainting for some word of cheer;
Come, thy need is all supplied,
Take by faith what God doth give;
Believe that you in Christ have died,
Believe that you in Him now live.

Often weary, often weak,
Foes without and fears within;
Knowing not what path to take,
To escape from self and sin;
In thy risen Saviour hide,
From Him risen life receive;
Believe that you in Christ have died,
Believe that you in Him now live.

Sorrowing oft, and often sad,
As thy failures thou dost scan;
Selfish aims those failures made,
Now let Jesus lead and plan.
Let the Spirit ever guide,
Let the flesh no more deceive;
Believe that you in Christ have died,
Believe that you in Him now live.

MORE STORIES

There was a very gracious lady who was mailing an old family Bible to her brother in another part of the country. "Is there anything breakable in here?" asked the postal clerk. "Only the Ten Commandments," answered the lady.

.....

A minister parked his car in a no-parking zone in a large city because he was short of time and Couldn't find a space with a meter. Then he put a note under the windshield wiper that read: "I have circled the block 10 times. If I don't park here, I'll miss my appointment. Forgive us our trespasses."

When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with this note "I've circled this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. Lead us not into temptation."

.....

There is the story of a pastor who got up one Sunday and announced to his congregation: "I have good news and bad news. The good news is, we have enough money to pay for our new building program. The bad news is, it's still out there in your pockets."

.....

While driving in Pennsylvania, a family caught up to an Amish carriage. The owner of the carriage obviously had a sense of humor, because attached to the back of the carriage was a hand printed sign...
"Energy efficient vehicle: Runs on oats and grass.
Caution: Do not step in exhaust."

.....

A minister waited in line to have his car filled with gas just before a long holiday weekend. The attendant worked quickly, but there were many cars ahead of him in front of the service station. Finally, the attendant motioned him toward a vacant pump.

"Reverend," said the young man, "sorry about the delay. It seems as if everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip."

The minister chuckled, "I know what you mean. It's the same in my business."

.....

People want the front of the bus, the back of the church, and the center of attention.

.....

A father was approached by his small son who told him proudly, "I know what the Bible means!"

His father smiled and replied, "What do you mean, you 'know' what the Bible means?"

The son replied, "I do know!"

"Okay," said his father. "So, son, what does the Bible mean?"

"That's easy, Daddy. It stands for

'Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.'

.....

Sunday after church, a Mom asked her very young daughter what the lesson was about. The daughter answered, "Don't be scared, you'll get your quilt." Needless to say, the Mom was perplexed.

Later in the day, the pastor stopped by for tea and the Mom asked him what that morning's Sunday school lesson was about. He said "Be not afraid, thy comforter is coming."

Give me a sense of humor, Lord,
Give me the grace to see a joke,
To get some humor out of life,
And pass it on to other folk.

HOW TO STAY SAFE IN THE WORLD TODAY.

1. Avoid riding in automobiles because they are responsible for 20% of all fatal accidents.
2. Do not stay home because 17% of all accidents occur in the home.
3. Avoid walking on streets or sidewalks because 14% of all accidents occur to pedestrians.
4. Avoid traveling by air, rail, or water because 16% of all accidents involve these forms of transportation.
5. Of the remaining 33%, 32% of all deaths occur in Hospitals. So, ... above all else, avoid hospitals.

BUT , You will be pleased to learn that only .001% of all deaths occur in worship services in church, and these are usually related to previous physical disorders. Therefore, logic tells us that the safest place for you to be at any given point in time is at church!

And.....Bible study is safe too.

The percentage of deaths during Bible study is even less.

So,..... for SAFETY'S sake - Attend church, and read your Bible.

IT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE! IT WILL SAVE YOUR SOUL!

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS: (more effective than 911)

WHEN:

You are sad, phone John 14
You have sinned, phone Psalm 51
You are facing danger, phone Psalm 91
People have failed you, phone Psalm 27
It feels as though God is far from you, phone Psalm 139
Your faith needs stimulation, phone Hebrews 11
You are alone and scared, phone Psalm 23
You are worried, phone Matthew 8:19-34
You are hurt and critical, phone 1 Corinthians 13
You wonder about Christianity, phone 2 Corinthians 5:15-18
You feel like an outcast, phone Romans 8:31-39
You are seeking peace, phone Matthew 11:25-30
It feels as if the world is bigger than God, phone Psalm 90
You need Christ like insurance, phone Romans 8:1-30
You are leaving home for a trip, phone Psalm 121
You are praying for yourself, phone Psalm 87
You require courage for a task, phone Joshua 1
Inflation & investments are hogging your thoughts: Mark 10:17-31
You are depressive, phone Psalm 27
Your bank account is empty, phone Psalm 37
You lose faith in mankind, phone 1 Corinthians 13
It looks like people are unfriendly, phone John 15
You are losing hope, phone Psalm 126
You feel the world is small compared to you, phone Psalm 19
You want to carry fruit, phone John 15
Paul's secret for happiness, phone Colossians 3:12-17
With big opportunity/ discovery, phone Isaiah 55
To get along with other people, phone Romans 12

ALTERNATE NUMBERS

For dealing with fear, call Psalm 47
For security, call Psalm 121:3
For assurance, call Mark 8:35
For reassurance, call Psalm 145:18

**ALL THESE NUMBERS MAY BE PHONED DIRECTLY.NO OPERATOR ASSISTANCE IS
NECESSARY.ALL LINES TO HEAVEN ARE AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY.**

FEED YOUR FAITH, AND DOUBT WILL STARVE TO DEATH

<http://www.biblegateway.com>
<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/>
<http://www.biblegateway.com/keyword/>
<http://www.biblegateway.com/topical/>
<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/>
www.altogetherlovely.org

12. FOR CHILDREN (AND PARENTS)

A Christmas Alphabet Poem

A is for Angels, appearing so bright, telling of Jesus that first Christmas night.
"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host." Luke 2:13.

B is for Bethlehem, crowded and old, birthplace of Jesus by prophet foretold.
"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel."
Micah 5:2.

C is for Cattle, their manger His bed, there in the trough where He laid His head.
"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." Luke 2:7.

D is for David and his ancient throne promised forever to Jesus alone.
"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David." Luke 1:32.

E is for East, where shone the bright star which Magi on camels followed afar.
"Behold, there came wise men from the east asking 'Where is the king of the Jews?'" Matthew 2:1,2.

F is for Frankincense, with myrrh and gold, brought by the Wise Men as Matthew has told.
"And when they had opened their treasurers, they presented unto him gifts gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Matthew 2:11.

G is for God, who from heaven above sent down to mankind the Son of His love.
"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

H is for Herod, whose murderous scheme was told to Joseph in a nocturnal dream.
"The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt... for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." Matthew 2:13.

I is for Immanuel, "God with us," for Christ brought man back to the Father's house.
"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14.

J is for Joseph so noble and just, obeying God's word with absolute trust.
"Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife." Matthew 1:24.

K is for King. A true king He would be, coming in power and authority.
"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, the King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation." Zechariah 9:9.

L is for Love that He brought down to earth God enfleshed in lowly birth.
"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." 1 John 4:9.

M is for Mary, His mother so brave, counting God faithful and mighty to save.
"And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." Luke 1:38.

N is for Night, when the Savior was born for nations of earth and people forlorn.
"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Luke 2:8.

O is for Omega, meaning "the last;" He's eternal present, future and past.
"I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Revelation 22:13.

P is for Prophets, when living on earth foretold His redemption and blessed birth.
"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel." Numbers 24:17.

Q is for Quickly, as shepherds who heard hastened to act on that heavenly word.
"And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." Luke 2:16.

R is for Rejoice. The sorrow of sin is banished forever when Jesus comes in.
"And you will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice at his birth." Luke 1:14.

S is for Savior. To be this He came; the angel of God assigned Him His name.
"She will bring forth a son, and you will call his name JESUS, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21.

T is for Tidings of joy, not of danger, telling of Him who was laid in a manger.
"And the angel said unto them, Fear not for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Luke 2:10.

U is for Us, to whom Jesus was given to show us the way and take us to heaven.
"For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11.

V is for Virgin, foretold by the sage, God's revelation on prophecy's page.
"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.

W is for Wonderful, His works and His words, the King of all Kings, the Lord of all Lords.
"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given... and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6.

X is for Christ. It's X in the Greek, Anointed, Messiah, mighty, yet meek.
"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power." Acts 10:38.

Y is for Yes, called God's Yes in His Word; God's answer to all is Jesus the Lord.
"For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Z is for Zeal as it burned in Christ's heart. Lord, by thy Spirit to us zeal impart.
"And his disciples remembered that it was written, the zeal of your house has eaten me up." John 2:1.

The Christmas Story (a musical play)

You can have one child recite each verse of the poem or you can have one person read the whole thing while the children sing. My thought was to have 3 groups of children each sing a different song, dressed in different costumes. Then have all of the children join together to sing the final song.
I've added a second song suggestion, in red in case you have more than three groups of singers.

Once upon a time,
A long, long time ago.
Begins the story of a baby,
That most of you should know.
His daddy's name was Joseph,
And Mary was His mom,
This babe was very special
He was God's only Son.
"Mary's Boy Child" (one singer can be dressed as Mary holding a baby doll, one as Joseph and others as various animals)
Sing: "What Child is This?"
Some angels came from heaven,
And they began to sing.
To the shepherds in the fields below,
"Glad tidings do we bring!"
Sing: "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" (singers can be dressed as angels, shepherds and sheep)
Sing: "The First Noel"
A bright star lit the heavens,
To light the magi's way,
To the baby in the manger
Who was born on Christmas day.
Sing: "Away in a Manger" (singers can be dressed as the three kings/magi and as stars (use poster board cut in a star shape and wear it as a sandwich board -- decorate the star shape with garland))
Sing: "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" (toddler/preschool aged children dressed as stars)
And all who gathered round Him,
Rejoiced and praised His birth.
For the babe, the King, named Jesus,
Is our Saviour here on earth!
Sing: "Joy to the World" (all singers, singing together)
(written by Leanne Guenther)

~Too Little~

Said a precious little laddie
To his father one bright day,
"May I give myself to Jesus,
Let Him wash my sins away?"

"Oh, my son, but you're too little,
Wait until you older grow;
Bigger folk, 'tis true, do need Him,
But little folk are safe, you know."

Said the father to his laddie,
As a storm was coming on,
"Are the sheep all safely sheltered,
Safe within the fold, my son?"

"All the big ones are, my father,
But the lambs, I let them go,
For I didn't think it mattered;
Little ones are safe, you know."

Oh, my brother! oh, my sister!
Have you, too, made that mistake?
Little hearts that now are yielding
May be hardened then-too late.

Ere the evil days come nigh them,
"Let the children come to Me
And forbid them not," said Jesus,
"Of such shall My kingdom be."

~Author Unknown~

A Little Girl's Prayer

(As told by Helen Roseveare, a doctor missionary from England to Zaire, Africa)

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do she died leaving us with a tiny premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive, as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator) and no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts.

One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that, in filling the bottle, it had burst. Rubber perishes easily in tropical climates.

"And it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. As in the West it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. "All right," I said, "Put the baby as near the fire as you safely can; sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle. The baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During the prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. "Please, God," she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby'll be dead, so please send it this afternoon." While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added by way of corollary, "And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen"? I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything. The Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the verandah, was a large twenty-two pound parcel! I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children.

Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas -- that would make a nice batch of buns for the weekend.

Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the . . . could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out -- yes! A brand-new, rubber hot water bottle! I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!"

Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, "Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?" That parcel had been on the way for five whole months! Packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child -- five months before -- in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it "that afternoon."
"Before they call, I will answer!" Isaiah 65:24

*Helen Roseveare, a doctor missionary from England to Zaire, Africa, told this as it happened to her in Africa. She told it in her testimony on a Wednesday night at Thomas Road Baptist Church. The following Wednesday night Jerry Falwell, choked up, and said, "I almost feel guilty for standing in the pulpit after the one who spoke here last week."

Gather The Children

"Some would gather money
Along the path of life,
Some would gather roses,
And rest from worldly strife;

But I would gather children
From among the thorns of sin,
I would seek a golden curl,
And a freckled, toothless grin

For money cannot enter
In that land of endless day,
And roses that are gathered
Soon will wilt along the way.

But, oh, the laughing children
As I cross the sunset sea,
And the gates swing wide to heaven.
I can take them in with me!"
~Author Unknown~

Special Little Angel

Barefoot and dirty, the girl just sat and watched people go by. She never tried to speak, she never said a word. Many people passed, but not one person glanced her way. No one stopped, including myself.

The next day I decided to go back to the park, curious if the little girl would still be there. Right in the very same spot as she was yesterday, she sat perched up high, with the saddest look in her eyes. But today I could not just walk away, concerned only with my own affairs. Instead I found myself walking over to the little girl.

As we all know, a park full of strange people is not a place for young children to play alone. As I began walking towards her, I could see the back of the little girl's dress indicated a deformity. I figured that was the reason the people just passed by and made no effort to care. As I got closer, the little girl slightly lowered her eyes to avoid my intent stare.

I could see the shape of her back more clearly. It was grotesquely shaped in a humped over form. I smiled to let her know it was okay ... I was there to help, to talk. I sat down beside her and opened with a simple "Hello!"

The little girl acted shocked, and stammered a "Hi" after a long stare into my eyes. I smiled and she shyly smiled back. We talked until darkness fell and the park was completely empty. Everyone was gone and we were alone.

I asked the girl why she was so sad. She looked at me and with a sad face said, "Because I'm different."

I immediately said, "That you are!" and smiled.

The little girl acted even sadder. She said, "I know."

"Little girl," I said, "you remind me of an angel, sweet and innocent."

She looked at me and smiled. She slowly stood to her feet and said, "Really?"

"Yes, ma'am, you're like a little guardian angel sent to watch over all the people walking by."

She nodded her head yes and smiled, and with that she spread her wings and said with a twinkle in her eye, "I am ... I'm your guardian angel." I was speechless ... surely I was just seeing things! She said, "For once you began thinking of someone other than yourself, and now my job here is done." Immediately, I stood to my feet and said, "Wait! Why did no one stop to help an angel?"

She looked at me and smiled, "You're the only one who could see me, and you believed it in your heart." With that, she was gone. And with that, my life was changed dramatically. So, when you think you are all that you have, remember, your angel is always watching over you.

~ Author Unknown ~

~Make Childhood Sweet~

Wait not till the little hands are at rest
Ere you fill them full of flowers,
Wait not for the crowning tuberose
To make sweet the last sad hours.
But while in the busy household band
Your darlings still need your guiding hand,
Oh, fill their lives with sweetness!

Wait not till the little hearts are still
For the loving look of praise,
But while you gently chide a fault,
The good deed kindly praise.
The word you speak beside the bier
Falls sweeter far on the living ear,
Oh, fill young lives with sweetness!

Ah, what are kisses on clay-cold lips
To the rosy mouth we press,
When our wee one flies to her mother's arms,
For love's tenderest caress!
Let never a wordly babble keep
Your heart from the joy each day should reap.
Circling young lives with sweetness.

Give thanks each morn for the sturdy boys,
Give thanks for the fairy girls:
With a dower of wealth like this at home,
Would you rifle the earth for pearls?
Wait not for Death to gem love's crown,
But daily shower life's blessings down,
And fill young hearts with sweetness.

Remember the homes where the light has fled,
Where the rose has faded away
And the love that glows in youthful hearts,
Oh, cherish it while you may!
And make your home a garden of flowers,
Where joy shall bloom through childhood's hours,
And fill young hearts with sweetness.

~Author Unknown~

Little Eyes

There are little eyes upon you,
And they're watching night and day;
There are little ears that quickly,
Take in every word you say.

There are little hands all eager,
To do everything you do;
And a little child who's dreaming,
Of the day they'll be like you.

You're the little child's idol,
You're the wisest of the wise;
In their little minds, about you,
No suspicions ever rise.

They believe in you devoutly,
Holding all you say and do;
They will say and do in your way,
When they've grown up just like you.

There's a wide-eyed little child,
Who believes you're always right;
Their ears are always open,
And they watch you day and night.

You are setting an example,
Everyday in all you do and say;
For there is a little child who's waiting,
To grow up to be just like you.

~ Author Unknown ~

~Please Daddy, Let's Go~

A little girl with shining eyes,
Her upturned face aglow,
Said, "Daddy, it's almost time
For Sunday School, you know;
Let's go and hear of Jesus' love
Of how He died for all,
To take them to His home above
Who on His name will call."

"Oh no," said Daddy, "Not to-day;
I've worked hard all the week;
And I must have one day of rest,
And fishing's find they say;
So run along, don't bother me,
We'll go ANOTHER day."
Months and years have passed away,
But Daddy hears that plea no more--
"Let's go to Sunday School..."
Those childish days are o'er.

And now that Daddy's growing old,
And life is almost through,
He finds some time to go to church,
BUT, what does daughter do?
She says, "Oh, daddy, not to-day.
Was out almost all night;
I've got to get a little sleep:
Besides, I look a fright."

Then daddy lifts a trembling hand
To brush away the tears;
Again he hears that pleading voice,
Distinctly through the years,
He sees a small girl's upturned face,
Upturned with eyes aglow,
Saying, "It's time for Sunday School.
Please, daddy, won't you go?"

~Author Unknown~

Children Live What They Learn

If a child lives with criticism,
he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility,
he learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule,
he learns to feel shy.

If a child lives with shame,
he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance,
he learns patience.

If a child lives with encouragement,
he learns confidence.

If a child lives with praise,
he learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with fairness,
he learns justice.

If a child lives with security,
he learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval,
he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
he learns to find love in the world.

-Author Unknown-

~The Soul Of A Child~

The soul of a child is the loveliest flower
That grows in the garden of God
Its climb is from weakness to
knowledge and power,
To the sky from the clay and the clod.

To beauty and sweetness it grows under care,
Neglected, 'tis ragged and wild.
'Tis a plant that is tender, but wondrously rare,
The sweet, wistful soul of a child.

Be tender, O gardner, and give it its share
Of moisture, of warmth, and of light,
And let it not lack for the painstaking care,
To protect it from frost and from blight.

A glad day will come when its bloom shall unfold,
It will seem that an angel has smiled,
Reflecting a beauty and sweetness untold
In the sensitive soul of a child.

~Author Unknown~

THIS IS THE STORY OF "LEE".

Lee is a 4 year old boy. Lee lives with his mother and father. He also has a younger sister named Erin. Erin is 2 years old. Lee's father and mother are Christians. They live a very busy Christian life. Lee's father is a pastor. He has been a pastor for 8 years. Lee's mother stays at home. She takes care of Lee and his sister. Lee is a happy young boy. He loves to play with his toys. Erin is also very active. She loves to play with her dolls. Next time, we'll tell an exciting story about Lee and his family.

One morning Lee woke up early. Lee felt funny inside. He decided to go downstairs. His mom, dad, and sister were still asleep. Lee went to the kitchen and began to make cereal. He poured the cereal in a bowl. Then he started to pour the milk. The milk spilled all over the floor. Lee bent down to wipe up the milk. Then Lee heard a voice.

"Lee, what are you doing?" said his dad.

Lee felt very sad. "I'm making cereal," Lee said. Lee's dad bent down and helped Lee clean up the milk. Lee looked at his father. He knew he should have waited for his mother.

"Lee, did you pray this morning?" said Lee's father. Lee then realized that he had not prayed. He had started his day without praying to Jesus.

"No, I never," said Lee to his dad. His father looked at him and finished cleaning up the milk.

Then his dad said, "Let's pray right now, son." Lee smiled. He knew his dad had forgiven him. They bowed their heads and prayed.

Lee sat down at the kitchen table. He was hungry and wanted breakfast. His father asked him if he was hungry. Lee said that he was very hungry.

"Would you set the table?" asked Lee's dad.

"Yes, father," said Lee.

"Setting the table is being like Jesus," said Lee's dad. "Jesus was a servant. We want to learn to be servants too."

Lee wanted to be like Jesus. His father had told him how wonderful Jesus was. Lee went to the cupboard. Then he reached for a plate. All of a sudden there was a big "CRASH". Lee had dropped the plate on the floor. The plate was broken into many pieces. Lee looked at his father. Tears began to roll down Lee's cheeks. Was Lee's dad going to spank him for dropping the plate? Was Lee's dad going to scold him?

Last time, Lee dropped a plate. Lee was worried that his dad would be mad. Lee looked up at his dad.

"That's okay Lee. Please try to be more careful," said Lee's dad.

Then Lee's dad got the broom and dust pan. Lee held the dust pan for his father. His father swept the broken plate into the dustpan. Lee began to wonder why his dad was so kind and gentle.

"Daddy," Lee said, "why didn't you get mad at me?"

"Son, Jesus lives in my heart. He gives me the power to be kind and gentle. He also helps me forgive," said Lee's dad. Lee thought that sounded great. Lee and his father then sat down for breakfast. Soon his mother and sister Erin came to the kitchen. Lee's mother walked up to Lee's dad and gave him a kiss. Then she walked over to Lee.

"Good morning Lee. Did you have a good sleep?" she said as she kissed his forehead.

"Yes, I did," Lee smiled.

Something told Lee it was going to be a great day!!!

Lee and his family were now ready to eat breakfast. Lee's father asked Lee to pray. Lee shook his head and said "no". Lee's father asked him why he didn't want to pray.

"I don't know how. I'm scared, daddy," said Lee.

"Lee are you afraid to talk to me?" asked Lee's dad.

"No," said Lee. "You love me."

"Well, God loves you more than I ever could. God made you and He wants to talk to you. He also gave us everything we have. That is why we pray."

"You mean he gave me you?" said Lee.

"That's right," said Lee's dad.

"OK," said Lee. "I'll pray." Lee bowed his head. He looked at his mom and dad and his sister Erin. His mom and dad had their eyes closed. Erin looked at her mom. Then she bowed her head.

Lee started to pray, "God, thank you that you love me as much as dad and mom do. Thank you for my truck and my sister Erin. Thank you for forgiving me when I broke the plate. Amen." Lee looked up. Everyone was smiling. Lee knew this was going to be a special day.

Lee had just finished praying before breakfast. Lee looked at the toast in front of him. "Mommy, I don't want toast. I want pancakes,"

"I love pancakes too," said Lee's mother. "But we had them yesterday. Today we are going to try something different."

"But I want pancakes," said Lee. "I could eat pancakes everyday."

"But God has given so many different things to eat. He has given us pancakes, toast, cereal, French toast, waffles, and so on. Isn't it great!! We can have so many different things to eat. In that way, we don't get tired of eating the same thing everyday," explained Lee's mom.

Lee started to think. He thought about all the different food he liked. He thought about ice cream, pizza, candy, hamburgers, and hot dogs. Then he asked his father, "Dad did God give us hamburgers too?"

"He sure did," said Lee's dad. "He has given us so much to enjoy. He's a wonderful God."

"He sure is," said Lee. He wondered what else God would give him today.

Lee and his family were eating breakfast. Lee looked at his sister Erin. He wondered why she was here. "Dad," said Lee, "where did Erin come from?"

"From God," said Lee's dad. "God gave her to us. She is a very special part of our family. And so are you."

"Did God really give her to us?" Lee asked.

"He sure did," said Lee's dad. "But God used your mommy and I also. God filled our hearts with His love. Then we made you and Erin. It is a very special thing."

"Wow," said Lee happily, "that is why we are a family. God made me and Erin. And God put love in your hearts to make us. That is special."

"Very special," said Lee's mom. "And God gives us love each day. He gives us love to care for each other. That is what family is all about. Caring for each other."

"I love you mommy and daddy," said Lee. "And I love Erin too."

"We love you too Lee," said Lee's dad.

"And we love Erin too," said Lee's mom.

Lee's heart seemed to fill up like a balloon. It was a warm, wonderful feeling inside of him. He knew it was the love of God in his heart. This day was getting better all the time.

Lee and his family were talking at the breakfast table. Lee decided to run to his bedroom. He wanted his toy.

"Where are you going?" his mother asked.

"To my bedroom," Lee replied. "I want my toy."

"Lee, said his mother, "please come back now. This is not play time. This is when we sit together as a family."

Lee came back to the table. "I'm sorry," he said. "I wanted my toy."

"Lee, your mother is right," said Lee's dad. "This is where we talk about our day. Jesus has a special plan for our day. What are you going to do Lee?"

"I'm going to go to the playground," said Lee. "I'm going to play with my friends."

"That sounds great," said his mom. "But first, we've got to clean the house. Every Saturday morning we clean the house as a family. So right after breakfast we'll have family worship. Then we'll clean the house. Then you can go out and play this morning."

"OK mommy," said Lee. Lee loved to play with his friends. And he knew that his mother wanted everyone to help her. Maybe cleaning the house wasn't going to be all that bad.

After breakfast, it was time to clear the table. Lee took his dishes to the sink. Then he put the milk in the fridge. Next, he put the cereal in the cupboard. This was his job. He didn't always like his job. But his father told him he needed to be responsible. Lee wasn't sure what responsible meant but he felt good helping his mom.

Then, Lee went upstairs. His mom helped him make his bed. Then Lee went to the bathroom. Lee washed his hands and face. Next, he brushed his teeth. Then he watched his mom help Erin. Erin didn't like having her face washed. She would always fight with her mother. Lee thought Erin was cute. He loved having a baby sister. She was so cute.

Lee remembered when mom brought Erin home from the hospital. She was just a baby then. At first Lee was jealous. Erin got all the attention. Then Lee understood that babies need to be cared for. His mother had to change her diapers, bath her, feed her, and put her to sleep. That was a special time in Lee's life. He loved to watch his mother. He also loved to play with Erin. He would tickle her. Then he would kiss her all over. Those were good times. Lee was thankful because God had given him a little sister.

Lee was getting ready for his day. Lee had just washed and brushed his teeth. Now he went to his bedroom. On his bed were his clothes for the day. He put on his underwear. Then he put on his socks. Next, he put on his pants. Then he put on his long sleeve shirt. He then went to the mirror. Something was wrong. Lee didn't like how he looked.

"What's the matter?" his mom said.

"Mom am I ugly?" said Lee quietly and sadly.

"Lee, nobody is ugly. God does not make ugly people. He makes beautiful people," said his mom.

"But my friend George is ugly," said Lee.

"Lee, nobody is ugly. You see, people look at the outside. But God looks at the heart. God sees some hearts full of bad things. That is ugly to God. But God sees some hearts full of good things. That is beautiful to God."

"So nobody is ugly on the outside to God?" said Lee.

"That's right," said Lee's mom. "And we should see people how God does. God loves everyone. And we should love everyone."

Lee thought that was neat. God loved everyone. He is a good God.

Lee was all dressed now. He was ready for a big day. He walked to his sister Erin's room. His mother was getting Erin dressed. Then he walked to his dad's bedroom. He wasn't there. "Where's daddy?" Lee asked his mother.

"He's outside," said his mother. "Why don't you go find him?"

That sounded great! Lee ran down the stairs. But about half-way down he tripped. He fell down the last five steps. OUCH!! He banged his head on the floor. He began to cry. His mother came running. "Lee! Lee! Are you OK?" his mother called. Lee was still crying. His head hurt. He had banged it really hard. His mother picked him up. She looked at his head. "You've got a big bruise Lee," she said. "But you are going to be alright. Let me get some ice. I'll put it on your forehead." Lee's mom went and got some ice. She put it on his forehead. It was very cold. Slowly Lee's head started to feel better.

"I'm going to pray for you now Lee," said Lee's mom. "Lord, Jesus thank you for taking care of Lee. He has banged his head. Please heal his forehead. Lord will you also comfort him. Let Lee know how much you love him. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

Lee felt a lot better. He knew that God loved him and would heal him. Lee was so glad that his mother was there to help him.

Lee had fallen down the stairs. He had been on his way to see his dad. Lee felt a lot better after his mother prayed for him. Lee told his mother he was alright. Then he ran outside to find his father. His father was washing the car. Lee asked if he could help. His dad said "yes" and handed him a wash cloth. Lee began scrubbing the car. His father was spraying the car with the hose. Lee told his dad how he had fallen down the stairs. He also told him how his mom had prayed for him.

"God is still healing people Lee," his father said. "Jesus healed people over 2,000 years ago. And Jesus is still healing people now. Whenever someone you know gets hurt – pray for them."

"Dad, does God heal all the time?" asked Lee.

"Yes, He does. Sometimes he heals something right away. Sometimes he wants people to keep praying to Him. God wants us to talk to Him all the time. Sometimes He uses our hurts and sickness so that we will talk to Him more. God is slowly healing your forehead. He wants you to know how much He cares about you!!"

Lee could feel God's love right then. Lee loved God very much.

Lee was helping his dad wash the car. Lee was getting tired. He was tired of scrubbing. "Dad, can I spray the car now?" asked Lee.

"Alright, but first let's finish the scrubbing," said Lee's dad. So Lee and his dad kept scrubbing. Finally Lee sat down and watched. He was tired. Then Lee's dad said, "OK Lee! That should do it. Now you spray the car with the hose." Lee was very excited. He loved to spray the car. The water came spraying out. It splashed on the car!! It was great!! Lee was really enjoying himself. Finally, Lee was done. His dad took the hose and did the last bit.

"Thank you Dad," said Lee. "That was fun."

"You're welcome, son," said Lee's dad. "You did a great job."

Lee felt good inside. He had helped his father. Lee liked to help. His father had told him that to help is being a servant. Jesus had come to earth to be a servant. And Lee wanted to be like Jesus.

Lee had just helped his dad wash the car. Lee's dad wanted to go run some errands. He wanted to put gas in the car. Then he wanted to mail a letter at the post office. Finally, he wanted to buy some bread at the store. Lee's dad asked Lee if he wanted to come. Lee was excited to go and said "yes". Lee's dad asked him to go to the bathroom first. So Lee ran into the house. Then he ran into the bathroom. All of a sudden he heard his mother. "Lee, what are you doing?" said his mom. "You've tracked in dirt and water all over the floor." Oh, no!!! Lee forgot his shoes were dirty. He had been so excited to go with his dad.

"I'm sorry mom," said Lee quietly. "I was so excited. Dad is going to take me with him. I forgot to take off my shoes."

"Lee, please try to be more careful," said his mom. "I worked very hard to clean the floors."

"OK, mom. I will try," said Lee. "I've got to hurry now. Dad is waiting."

"Alright. I forgive you," said Lee's mom.

Lee felt better. He gave his mom a quick hug. Then he ran out the door. He was so happy that his mom forgave him. Being forgiven felt so good.

Lee's dad wanted to go run some errands. First, he wanted to put gas in the car. Then he wanted to mail a letter at the post office. Finally, he wanted to buy some bread at the store. Lee said goodbye to his mom. Then he ran out to his dad. His dad was waiting in the car. "Buckle up your seat belt," said Lee's dad. Lee buckled up his seat belt. Then his dad slowly backed the car up and out of the driveway. Then off they went!!

"Where are we going first?" asked Lee excitedly.

"We are going to get some gasoline," said Lee's father. "It is just down the road here. Would you like to help?"

"Yes," said Lee. "Can I?"

"Of course," said Lee's dad. "We will drive up to the gas pumps. Then I'll take the gas cap off the car. Then I'll hand you the gas line. Then you can put the nozzle in the car's tank."

Lee was very excited. Lee's father drove up to the gas tanks. But all of a sudden there was a bang. Somebody had hit their car from behind.

Lee and his dad had just driven into the gas station. Somebody had hit their car from behind. They weren't hit too hard.

"Are you alright Lee?" asked Lee's dad.

"I'm OK, Daddy," said Lee timidly. "What happened?"

"Someone ran into the back of our car," said Lee's dad. "It is a good thing we had our seat belts on. Let's go see what happened."

Lee and his dad got out of the car. Behind them was a woman. She was crying and very upset. Lee's dad asked if she was alright.

"Yes, but my husband is going to be very angry," she said.

"We seem to be OK," said Lee's dad. "Let's look at our cars." The lady got out of her car. Lee's dad's car had a small dent. The lady's car was fine.

"Why don't you give me your driver's license number, insurance number, and phone number?" said Lee's dad. "Everything will be alright I'm sure. God has a way of looking after these things."

"Are you a Christian too," the lady asked.

"Yes, I'm a pastor," said Lee's dad. "Let's move our cars side and talk."

Lee and his dad's car had been in an accident. Now they were going to talk to the lady who hit their car.

"My name is Pastor Mike," said Lee's dad to the lady. "This is my son, Lee. What's your name?"

"My name is Mrs. White," said the lady. "It is nice to meet you both."

"It's my pleasure," said Lee's dad. "When did you become a Christian?"

"About 3 years ago," she said. "But I haven't been going to church."

"I'm sure you have your reasons," said Lee's dad. "We really do need each other in the Body of Christ."

"I know," Mrs. White said. "Maybe this accident was a blessing after all. I need to find a good church. Can I get your business card?"

"Sure," said Lee's dad. "And maybe you can give me your information. I can give it to my insurance company."

"Here you are," said Mrs. White.

"Before you go," said Lee's dad. "There is one more thing I want to ask you. I hope you don't mind."

Lee's dad wanted to ask Mrs. White one thing before she left.

"Can I pray for you?" asked Lee's dad.

"You sure can," said Mrs. White as she bowed her head.

"Father God, we come to you through the blood of Jesus. Father, thank you for your goodness. Lord, thank you for keeping us safe. Lord you protected us in the accident. Lord, you really care about us. Lord, will you be with Mrs. White. Help her to learn more about you. Please guide her Lord to find a church. Help her to know your love. Help her to know the love of your people. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."

"Thank you," said Mrs. White. "I will give you a call."

"You're welcome and God bless you," said Lee's dad.

Lee was quite amazed at everything. He saw how upset Mrs. White was. He also saw how calm she looked after his father prayed for her. God seemed so real.

"Son, we are God's helpers," said Lee's dad. "We must always be ready to help people. And the most important thing is to pray for people."

Lee quietly said a prayer in his heart. He thanked God for his love. This was a special day.

Lee and his dad had just said goodbye to Mrs. White. Now Lee remembered something. "Dad," said Lee, "we forgot to get gas."

"You're right!!" said Lee's dad. "And I promised to let you help me."

Lee's dad drove the car up to the gas pumps again. This time nobody hit them from behind. Lee and his dad got out of the car. Lee's dad grabbed the gas hose. Then he put the nozzle into the car. "Lee," said Lee's dad, "will you hold the nozzle please?" Lee reached out his hand to grab the nozzle. He held the nozzle of the hose. Lee loved to help his dad. It made him feel like a grownup. All of a sudden the pump went "click". The car was full of gas.

"Now, put the nozzle back into the pump," said Lee's dad. "Can you reach?"

"No, daddy," said Lee. "Help me please."

Lee's dad reached out and helped him. Then he put the gas cap back on the car. Then they both got into the car. And off they went to mail a letter and get a loaf of bread. Lee was having a wonderful time with his father.

Lee and his dad were now on their way to the post office. Lee's dad wanted to mail a letter. Then he wanted to buy a loaf of bread. When they got to the post office, Lee's dad parked the car. Then they walked into the post office together. Lee's dad gave Lee the letter and some money.

"Now walk up to the counter," said Lee's dad, "and give the lady the money. Then ask her for a stamp."

"Daddy, I'm scared," said Lee. "I'm scared to go."

"Son, I'm right here with you," said Lee's dad. "And Jesus is in your heart. He is with you also. So you have your dad and Jesus with you."

Lee felt better. He had forgotten that Jesus was in his heart. He said a short prayer. "Jesus help me to be brave. Amen". Lee believed that Jesus was with him. He walked up to the counter, gave the money, and asked for a stamp. He wasn't afraid anymore. Jesus was with him.

The lady put the stamp on the envelope. Then she gave Lee the stamped envelope. She told him to put it in the mail slot in the counter. Lee saw the slot and put it in. "Thank you," Lee told the lady.

Lee looked around at his dad. His dad was smiling. Lee was so thankful. Jesus and his dad were with him. He felt like a big boy now.

Lee and his dad have just left the post office. Now, Lee's dad wanted to buy a loaf of bread. As they walked to the car, Lee's dad sees one of his church members. "Hello, Mr. James," he says. "How are you today?"

"Well, I'm fine Pastor Mike. I'm just on my way to mail a letter. How are you Lee?" said Mr. James.

"I'm fine Mr. James," said Lee politely.

"You are sure growing Lee," said Mr. James. "I can really see God working in your life."

"Thank you sir," said Lee. Lee liked it when people talked about God.

"Say, Pastor," said Mr. James, "I really was blessed by your sermon last Sunday. It really spoke to my heart."

"Thank you Mr. James," said Lee's dad. "God really spoke to me as I prepared it. I was touched by what God was showing me."

"Lee, what has God been showing you lately?" asked Mr. James.

"A lot sir," said Lee. "He is showing me how to be brave. How he heals me. How he forgives me. He has been showing me a lot."

Lee looked at his dad. His father was looking at him. Lee could tell that he was very proud of him. This was some special day!!!

Lee and his dad had just met Mr. James as they left the post office. They had stopped to talk. Mr. James was a nice Christian man who loved Jesus with all his heart.

"Well, I should run," said Mr. James. "I'm off to help at the Mission House. We are serving the street people meals. Then we share the wonderful Gospel with them. We have seen many people come to know Jesus there."

"God bless your work, Mr. James," said Lee's dad. "Let me pray for you. 'Father God be with Mr. James today. Let your Holy Spirit speak words of love and comfort to the people. Draw people to your Son, Jesus. Lord I pray you will continue to be glorified in Mr. James' life. In Jesus name I pray. Amen'"

"Thank you pastor," said Mr. James. "I'm going to trust God to set people free from the devil. Alright, God bless you both and goodbye."

"Goodbye and God bless you," said Lee. "Dad, he's a nice man, isn't He?"

"Yes, he is," said Lee's dad. "Jesus helps him. Jesus lives in his heart and Jesus' goodness and kindness through him. Well we had better get going. We still got to get that loaf of bread." Lee wondered what would wonderful adventure they would have next.

Lee and his dad had just said goodbye to Mr. James. Now they were on their way to the store. Lee's father wanted to buy a loaf of bread. As they drove, Lee's dad began to talk to Lee.

"Lee, I'm always very proud of you," said Lee's dad. "I love you very much. Today, I was especially proud of you. You were very polite when Mr. James talked to you. I could see the love of Jesus in you. I was very happy.

"Thank you daddy," said Lee humbly.

"Lee, God is teaching you many things," continued Lee's father. "He's teaching you to be polite, to trust Him, and to ask for forgiveness."

"It's not easy daddy," said Lee.

"I know son," said Lee's dad. "But God's way is always the best way. Sometimes the 'easy' way turns out to be more difficult. And sometimes the 'hard' way turns out to be easier."

"What do you mean daddy?" asked Lee.

"Well," continued Lee's father, "sometimes people take the easy path. It looks easier but as they walk along it gets more difficult. Other people take a path that starts out difficult. But it becomes easier."

Lee didn't understand but he knew that God would teach him.

Lee's father has been explaining something to Lee. They were on their way to pick up some bread. They stopped at the store and picked up the bread. Lee looked down at the floor by the front counter. He saw a \$5.00 bill. What should he do? Should he pick it up and put it in his pocket? Should he give it to the man at the counter? Lee decided to pray. Lee asked God what to do. Then Lee felt he was to give the man the money.

"Sir, I found this money on the floor," said Lee. "Here you are." Lee handed the man the money. He didn't feel good doing it but God told him to.

"It is not mine son," said the man. "You can keep it. I appreciate you being so very honest. You deserve the money for being so honest."

"Thank you sir," said Lee happily. Then Lee realized something. This was what his father had talked to him about.

"Dad is that what you meant by the difficult path. It was hard to give the money but it turned out to be easy."

"Yes, son," said his dad proudly. "If you had put the money in your pocket it would have been easy. But you would have felt very guilty later. That would have been the easy path. You choose the right path."

Lee couldn't believe the wonderful things he was learning. God was truly an amazing God. Lee's dad reached down and hugged him. God was good!

This story is about a four year old boy named Lee. He has a father who is a pastor. He has a mother who is a housewife. And he has a two year old sister named Erin.

The last time Lee and his father were running some errands. Now they were on their way home. Lee's father was driving through the streets. Lee loved to look at the people as they walked along the streets.

"Daddy," said Lee, "does God love everybody?"

"He sure does," said Lee's dad. "He loved them so much He died on the cross for them."

"Why doesn't everybody love God then?" asked Lee.

"That's a hard question," said Lee's dad. "Many people want to do things their own way. They want to do their own thing. But it is our job to share the Good News that God has died for them."

Lee thought about friends he knew who didn't follow God. He felt sorry for them that they didn't know the wonderful love of God. He decided that he would tell them about Jesus. He wanted them to know how much God loved them.

"Daddy," said Lee, "I'm going to tell my friends that Jesus loves them."

"That will make God very happy," said Lee's dad. "God wants to be everyone to come to know Him and His love."

Lee couldn't imagine his life with out God. He felt he was the luckiest boy alive.

Lee and his father were driving down the street. Lee was feeling so blessed to know God's love. Suddenly, Lee saw his friend John.

"Daddy," said Lee, "pull over. It's my friend John. He looks sad."

Lee's father pulled over. John was walking down the street crying. Lee and his father got out of the car.

"What's wrong John?" said Lee's dad. "Are you alright?"

"I just had a fight with my mother," said John. "My mother doesn't love me."

"What happened?" said Lee.

"I was bad and my mother yelled at me," said John. "She always yells at me. I try to be good but I just can't. I'm so sad."

"John," said Lee's dad, "do you know that God can help you?"

"Really," said John. "Can He really help me?"

"Yes," said Lee's dad. "God can help you to be good. You see we are all bad at times. But we need God's goodness and power to help us."

"How can He do that?" said John.

"Well we need to ask Jesus into our heart," said Lee's dad. "Jesus can come into our heart and fill us with His goodness. Then when we trust Him everyday, He will be good for us. It is too hard to try to be good. We need Jesus to come and be good for us."

"That sounds wonderful!!" said John. "How can I get Jesus into my heart?"

Lee and his father were talking to Lee's friend John. John had just fought with his mother. He was very sad. Now John wanted to know how he could get Jesus in his heart.

"Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross?" asked Lee's dad.

"Yes," said John.

"Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead?" asked Lee's dad.

"Yes," said John.

"Do you believe Jesus forgave your sins by dying on the cross?" asked Lee's dad.

"Yes," said John.

"Then pray this prayer after me," said Lee's dad. "Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for my sins". John repeated what Lee's dad said each time.

"I ask you to forgive me of my sins. Thank you that you forgive me right now. Come into my heart and become Lord of my life. I need you Jesus. Thank you that I'm now saved because of what you did for me on the cross. Teach me your ways. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

"Sir, something happened to me inside of my heart," said John.

"It did to me too when I prayed that prayer. That is Jesus. He now lives inside you to give you the power you need to be good. He is there by the power of His Holy Spirit. He now lives in you."

"Now John," said Lee's dad. "Let's drive you home and talk to your mother, alright?"

"OK," said John. "I feel a lot better and now I have Jesus to help me."

John got in the car. Lee was amazed at how God had helped his friend.

Lee and his father had just led John to the Lord. Now they were driving him home to see his mother. John started to look a little scared.

"What's the matter?" said Lee.

"My mother was angry at me," said John. "I'm scared to go home."

"John, you are a Christian now," said Lee's dad. "Jesus is going to help you. Just ask Jesus to give you courage."

John bowed his head and prayed softly to Jesus. He lifted his head and seemed to feel a lot better.

When they arrived at John's house, John's mother came running out.

"John, where have you been?" said John's mother. "I've been looking everywhere for you. I've been praying you would come home."

"Mommy, I'm okay," said John. "Lee and his father brought me home."

"That's answered prayer," said Lee's mom. Then she looked at Lee and his father. "Thank you for bringing John home. I was so worried about him."

"John was very afraid," said Lee's dad. "But he has asked Jesus into his heart now to help him to be a better boy."

"Really," said John's mom. "We've been praying that he would become a Christian. Praise the Lord!!" John's mom gave John a big hug. "I'm so happy!! I'm sorry we had a fight John. I love you so much."

John and his mom hugged and kissed each other. You could see the love in their eyes. The love of Jesus!!

"Won't you come in and have some cake?" said John's mom.

"Another time," said Lee's dad. "We've got to get home now. But thank you so much. Please feel free to call me if I can help. I'm a pastor."

"We sure will," said John's mom. "Goodbye and God bless you."

Lee felt very happy as he walked to the car with his dad. He waved goodbye to John. Then he thanked Jesus for His love for his friend John.

Lee and his father had just left John and his mother. Now they were driving home. Lee was thinking about what had happened to his friend John.

"Daddy," said Lee, "what does it really mean to have Jesus in your heart?"

"Lee, that's a wonderful question," said Lee's dad. "Jesus wants to be our God and our friend. It is nice to be around people. But people can never really be as close to us as Jesus can. Jesus living in our hearts is having our best friend close to us all the time. We are never alone."

"Never alone?" said Lee.

"That's right," said Lee's dad. "We are never alone. If we are by ourselves we can talk to Jesus just like our friends. Jesus is a wonderful listener. He also loves to answer our prayers when we ask Him to help us. He is a wonderful friend and wonderful God."

Lee remembered the time he had a good friend once. That friend moved away. Lee never heard from him again. Lee had felt very sad. Lee wondered if Jesus would ever move away.

"Daddy," asked Lee, "will Jesus ever move away?"

"No, son," said Lee's dad. "Jesus will never leave you. He will never do anything bad to you. He will always be there for you. He will never hurt you. He is a friend to the very end."

That sounded great to Lee. Lee loved his mom and dad but sometimes they weren't around. Then Lee felt alone. Now Lee knew that Jesus was with him all the time.

It was a quiet trip home after that. Lee decided to talk to his wonderful friend Jesus.

Lee and his father were on their way home from John and his mother's house. They finally arrived at the front of the house. Lee's father drove up the driveway. Lee jumped out of the car and ran into the house. Then he remembered his father. He ran back and helped his dad with the groceries. Lee and his father then walked into the house. Lee's mom greeted Lee's dad with a kiss. Then she hugged Lee. Lee's sister Erin hugged her daddy. They were all glad to see everyone.

"Anything special happen?" asked Lee's mom.

"Oh, same old thing," said Lee's dad. "We led a boy to Christ. It was a real blessing to see the boy receive Christ."

"That's wonderful," said Lee's mom. "The angels must be rejoicing in heaven over the lost soul that was saved."

"It was great mom," said Lee. "My friend John has a new friend that will never leave him."

"That's right Lee," said Lee's mom. "Jesus will always be with him."

"What did you both do?" asked Lee's dad.

"Well, Erin and I cleaned up the house this morning," said Lee's mom. "Now we are going to have lunch. Why don't you both wash your hands and we can have lunch together?"

"Sounds great," said Lee. "I'm starving."

"Leading people to Jesus can give a guy an appetite," said Lee's dad.

Everyone laughed. Lee thought about how wonderful it was to have a family that loved each other and cared for each other. Lee's dad had told him that family is a gift from God. Lee looked at his dad, mom, and baby sister. What a wonderful family God had given him. God was really good.

Lee and his father were just going to sit down to lunch. Lee enjoyed lunch with his family. His mother was a great cook. She always made wonderful lunches.

"Lee, would you mind helping me set the table?" Lee's mom asked.

"OK, mom," said Lee.

Lee went to the table. His mom had put the plates, dishes, knives, forks, spoons, and glasses on the table. Lee's job was to put them around the table. First, Lee put the plates at each person's place. Then he put the bowls beside their plates. Then he put the glasses next to the bowls. Then he put the forks on the left side of the plates. Finally, he put the knives and spoons on the right side.

"Ready mom," said Lee.

"Alright, let's eat," said Lee's mom.

Everyone came and sat down. Then Lee's mom put the sandwiches and soup in the middle of the table. Lee's dad brought the water. Everyone then sat down.

"Who wants to pray today?" asked Lee's dad.

"I do. I do," said Erin.

Everyone looked surprised. But dad said it was alright. Everyone bowed their head. Then Erin began to pray.

"Thank you for the soup. Thank you for the sandwiches. Bring us some chocolate and cake. Amen."

Everyone smiled. Erin loved to be a part of the family. Lee was so happy to have a younger sister. Sometimes broke his toys. Sometimes she wrecked his things. Yet, Lee still loved her. God had given him a younger sister to love and take care of.

Lee and his family were eating lunch. They were talking about their afternoon. Lee is going to go grocery shopping with his sister Erin and mom. Lee's dad is going to prepare Sunday's sermon.

The soup and sandwiches were great. Lee was very hungry.

"Dad can I have another sandwich please?" asked Lee.

"Sure son," said Lee's dad, "here you are. I've noticed you are really growing lately."

That made Lee feel good. He wanted to be big like his dad.

"Anymore soup, honey?" asked Lee's dad. "It sure hit the spot."

"I'm sorry but it is all gone," said Lee's mom. "There was just a little bit left over from yesterday. Would you like me to make some more?"

"That's okay," said Lee's dad. "I should probably watch my weight."

Lee thought about his mom and dad. They sure seemed to love each other. He watched as his mom smiled at his father. Then his father smiled back.

"Daddy," said Lee, "do you love mommy?"

"I sure do Lee," said Lee's dad. "God has put a real love in my heart for your mother and for you and Erin. I love you all so very much. I'm so thankful that God has given me my wonderful family. Everyday I thank God for all of you."

"And I love your father Lee," said Lee's mom. "Did you know that the first time I met your father – God spoke to me. He told me that your father would be my future husband. I was not looking for a husband. I just went to a prayer meeting and I noticed your father. Then God spoke to me. After that, God began preparing my heart for marriage. I was so blessed that God showed me His way of bringing two people together."

Lee felt so happy inside that his mom and dad loved each other.

Lee's sister Erin had just prayed before lunch.

"That was a beautiful prayer, Erin," said Lee's mom.

Erin smiled. Erin was 2 years old. She had black curly hair. Her face was round shaped. She had rose colored cheeks. She was a little bit chubby. Erin loved to play with her dolls. She always got into everything. She was a busy young lady.

All of a sudden, the telephone rang. Lee's dad got up to answer the phone. He talked for a while and then came back to the table.

"That was one of my flock," said Lee's dad. "It was Mr. Graham. He had a question about the church. He is a good man and he really loves Jesus."

Lee knew Mr. Graham. He always greeted people when they came to church. He always had a big smile on his face.

"Daddy," said Lee, "what are we going to do this afternoon?"

"Alright," said Lee's mom, "we'll finish lunch and then get the groceries."

Lee looked at his soup and sandwiches. He had forgot how hungry he was. It had been a very busy morning. He started to eat very quickly.

"Slow down son," said his dad. "You don't want to get a stomach ache and not be able to go shopping."

Lee slowed down. Lee was still excited and wondered what adventures Jesus had for them this afternoon.

Lee and his family were finishing their lunch. Then they were going to go grocery shopping while Lee's dad stayed home.

"Will you help me clear the table, Lee?" asked Lee's mom.

"OK, mommy," said Lee.

"Can you put these plates on the cupboard?" said Lee's mom. "Please be careful."

"Alright mommy," said Lee. "I'll be careful."

Lee carried the plates to the cupboard. Then he carried the glasses. Then the spoons, knives, and forks. Lee's mother always washed the dishes. Lee's father would take Erin and look after her. Lee was to help his mother.

"Lee, I'm going to wash the dishes," said Lee's mom. "Will you take this washcloth and wipe off the table?"

Lee took the wet washcloth. He climbed on a chair and began washing off the table. Lee felt very good. His father had talked to him about being responsible. Lee didn't always like helping but he knew it was his job. He was a special part of the family. Each member of the family had a job to do. God had made it this way. God had made families and taught them how to live together. Families worship God, love each other, and help each other. Lee loved his family very much.

"Now, Lee," asked his mom, "will you push the chairs under the table?"

Lee pushed the chairs under the table.

"Mommy," asked Lee, "can I go now?"

"Alright," said Lee's mom, "you can go now. Thank you very much."

Lee ran to the washroom. He felt very good about helping his family.

Lee was just finished helping his mother clear the table. They had just finished lunch. Now Lee ran to the bathroom. He washed his hands, used the toilet, washed his hands again, and then he brushed his teeth. Just then Lee's dad came into the bathroom.

"I hope you have a nice time with your mom and sister," said Lee's dad.

"I will," said Lee. "I love going to the grocery store."

"Great," said Lee's dad. "Make sure you get some oranges while you are there, alright?"

"Alright, daddy," said Lee. "Well I got to go. Goodbye daddy."

"Bye, son", said Lee's dad. "I'll see you soon."

Lee ran to his bedroom. He quickly combed his hair. Then he ran down stairs to meet his mom and Erin. Lee's mom was putting on Erin's coat and shoes.

"Should we walk or take the bus?" asked Lee's mom.

"Let's walk," said Lee.

"Bus, bus," said Erin.

Erin always wanted to do the opposite of Lee. Sometimes Lee thought she just liked to get him mad.

"OK," said Lee, "let's take the bus."

Lee, Erin, and his mom walked out the door. They started walking to the bus stop. It was a beautiful day. Lee's mom said hello to their neighbor Mrs. West. She was mowing her lawn. Then they reached the bus stop. Sometimes it seemed like forever for the bus to come.

"When is the bus coming mommy?" asked Lee.

"It will be here soon," said Lee's mom. "Remember, PATIENCE!!"

Lee hated that word "patience". It always meant he had to wait longer.

Lee, Erin, and his mother were waiting for the bus at the bus stop. They were on their way to the grocery store. Lee was trying to be patient.

"The bus will be here any minute dear," Lee's mother said.

Lee loved going grocery shopping. He was so excited. Finally, the bus drove up. Lee and his mom and sister got into the bus. Then off they went. When they got to the store, Lee ran and got a shopping cart. Lee's mom then put both the children in the shopping cart. Then down the aisles they went.

"Dad wants some oranges mom," said Lee.

"Thanks Lee," said his mom. "I just about forgot."

Lee's mom put some oranges in the cart. They also got some apples, pears, and bananas from the fruit section. Then they went to the bakery and got some bread, buns, and doughnuts. After that they went to the dairy section and got some milk, butter, eggs, and yogurt. Next, they got some lettuce, potatoes, tomatoes, and onions from the vegetable department. Finally, they picked up some cereal, peanut butter, and ground beef.

At the checkout counter, Lee's mom met her friend from church. They had a chance to talk about the Lord. Lee's mom always loved to talk about the Lord. She loved to talk about what Jesus was doing in her life. She really loved Jesus. Finally, they paid for the groceries and took a taxi home. It was a great time.

When Lee and his family got home they unpacked the groceries. Lee's dad was just finishing his sermon. He came down and helped. Then they sat down at the table and had a snack together. They decided to go for a walk to the park that afternoon. The park was not far away and so they packed a lunch. Lee was having a great day.

Lee and his family were on their way to the park. As they walked to the park, Lee's dad began to ask them questions.

"Who was the first man?" said Lee's dad.

"Adam," said Lee's mom.

"Who was the first woman?" asked Lee's dad.

"Eve," said Lee.

"Erin, who do you love?" asked Lee's dad.

"Jesus," said Erin.

Everyone laughed. Erin was such a special part of the family.

"How many books are in the Bible?" asked Lee's dad.

"69," said Lee.

"69?" asked Lee's dad.

"Ooops," said Lee. "66."

"That's right," said Lee's dad. "How many Old Testament books?"

"There are 39 Old Testament books," said Lee's mom.

"And how many New Testament books are there?" Lee's dad asked.

"Are there 27 New Testament books?" asked Lee.

"That's right," said Lee's dad. Then he asked, "Who wrote the Gospels?"

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John," said Lee's mom.

"What is the book after John's Gospel?" asked Lee's dad.

"It is Romans," said Lee.

"Is it Romans or Acts?" asked Lee's dad.

"Oh, I always get those mixed up," said Lee. "It is Acts."

"Who wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts?" asked Lee's dad.

"Luke did," said Lee's mom.

Lee loved this game. He loved answering his father's questions.

Lee and his family were on their way to the park. They were playing a Bible Game as they walked.

"Who was Ruth's husband?" asked Lee's dad.

"Boaz was Ruth's husband," said Lee's mom.

"Alright, who was Mary's husband?" asked Lee's dad.

"Joseph was Mary's husband," said Lee.

"Wow, you guys are really good at this. OK, let's see if you know this one now," said Lee's dad.

"Name three women that God gave children to in a special way."

"Mmm, let's see," said Lee's mom. "Mary, the mother of Jesus."

"That's one," said Lee's dad.

"I know, I know," said Lee. "God gave Hannah a son named Samuel."

"Great," said Lee's dad. "Now one more. I'll give you a hint. His son's name means 'laughter'."

"Laughter," said Lee's mom. "Oh, I remember. It was Abraham's wife Sarah. She laughed when they told her she would have a baby in her old age. So they called the baby Isaac which means 'laughter'."

"That's right," said Lee's dad. "You guys are very good at this. We'll play some more another time. We are almost at the park now. I can see it."

The park was very close now. It was a large park with a lake in the middle. People would sit by the lake and throw food to the ducks. The park also had a playground.

"Can we go to the playground?" said Lee.

"Playground, playground," said Erin.

"Alright," said Lee's mom. "Let's put our blanket down here first."

Then off the kids went to the playground. Lee was very excited.

Lee and his family had just got to the park. They put their blanket and food down. The kids ran over to the playground.

"Lee," yelled Lee's mom, "you watch your little sister now."

"OK," Lee said. "Come on Erin. Let's go to the playground."

Lee grabbed Erin's hand. Erin could walk and run now. Lee remembered when she couldn't even walk. But now she could even climb up the slide. Finally, they got to the playground. There was a swing set, a merry-go-round, a slide, climbing bars, a teeter-totter, and a sandbox. It was the best playground in town. Lee loved the swings and the slide. Erin loved to go in the sandbox.

"Lee!" someone yelled. "What are you doing here?"

Lee looked. It was his friend from church, Bill.

"We're playing," said Lee. "When did you get here?"

"We just got here," said Bill. "My folks are over there with your parents."

Lee looked over to where his parents were. He saw Bill's mom and dad. They were putting their blanket down on the ground. Lee waved and everyone waved back. Bill didn't have a brother or sister yet. But Bill had told Lee that his mom and dad were going to have a baby soon.

"Come on Bill," said Lee. "Let's go on the swings."

"Great," said Bill.

Off they went to the swings. Erin ran to the sandbox. This was turning out to be a better day than Lee could imagine. It was a beautiful day. His family was here. And his good friend Bill was here with his family. Everything was perfect. God was a good God. Lee decided that he would serve God forever and ever. How about you? Do you love Jesus and want to serve God?