

In a

WORD

Letters from a Father to his Children

By

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2004 - 2007

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About this Project

This project began in late 2003 at the suggestion of family, and has been accomplished letter-by-letter.

The mission was to present the intimacy that the Lord offers in our relationship with him; and that should be present by all means in our relationship with our children and children in our charge.

The scope or content is a collection of one-page letters, each with a single-word topic with references to my experiences as a child, and my experiences as a parent and step-parent, and the understood or anticipated interest of the children.

The pictures are a selection of images and photos obtained through software resources and Web sites. Selection of pictures was largely based on my interest in black-and-white photography, the relevance of the picture to the topic, and the clarity of the image translated to the end-document.

The letters have enabled me to reach out to my children in a personal, transparent, and enduring way. Furthermore, the letters have encouraged me to document my own beliefs as a Christian and, although through written word only, to convey these beliefs to my children, to family, and other readers.

My hope and prayer is that In a Word will be a source of encouragement, entertainment and instruction to children, parents, or grand-parents in their role within a family, step-family, church family, or other social setting.

An Apology

December 16, 2003

To my Children – Matthew, Abby, Ben and Brian

Today, I begin these letters at the urging of your grandfather - who suggested that it would be helpful to you as you read it for the first time and possibly for years to come.

As of today, it has been about two years since we have been together. I last saw you in December, 2001 and have had only limited contact through my letters and an occasional telephone call by you. It is this separation and the uncertainty of its length that serves as the basis for the letters.

From the recent trial in Jacksonville, my concerns include the possibility that you have not received my letters and gifts; still, this possibility does not deter me from preparing the letters as a continuation and expression of my thoughts concerning all matters and events pertaining to our separation. Most important is that you hear, accept, and understand the following:

First, I am deeply sorry for the failure of my marriage to your mother and, in spiritual terms, the breaking of a covenant or promise in marriage before the church and God.

Second, I am deeply sorry for separation between us and the pain it has caused each of you; again, in spiritual terms, the breaking of a covenant or promise in each of your dedications before the church and God.

Third, I love you very much and am blessed by God to have you as my children.

As I close this letter, the most prevalent thought at this moment is that one day we will see each other again and that beyond that moment, we will be rejoined as father to children and children to father. It is my hope that this day will come tomorrow such that I and your grandparents may celebrate this much awaited moment.

Until that day, I will not forget you or stop loving you; indeed, I think of you every day. My trust is completely in the Lord that, no matter the length of separation, that he will keep you under his care and protection; and that you have or will find a relationship with him and know that he knew you even before you were born, and has a plan and purpose for your life.

Always your father, Kirk

Being a Parent and a Step-Parent

Being a parent has had many rewards and with few if any actual regrets. I remain convinced that children are a gift and that, as parents are guardians, we are obligated and should be committed to the instruction, care, and love of our children within the framework of friendship.

This commitment was not easy in the moment; particularly when the children were babies and could not respond or communicate. But as they matured, and as I adjusted to the role and requirements of a parent, the commitment spawned and flourished without reservations or regrets. Yes, mistakes occurred and, as the children became of age, were sometimes admitted for the purpose of seeking forgiveness, showing fairness, and allowing for reconciliation. Becoming a parent was gratifying and fulfilling – it gave me a sense of purpose that is unique and beautiful.

Becoming a step-parent has been very different in the sense that I was not present at the children's births, did not participate in some of their childhood, share parenting responsibilities with their natural father and step-mother, and cannot relate physical characteristics between us. The fact of being a step-parent allows for certain fears to creep into the role-relationship such as: the fear of rejection; the fear of failure; and the fear of lost relationships, yet again. Needless to say, step-parenting requires time, effort, and patience – for all of us!

In spite of these differences, step-parenting is a wonderful and challenging role. In the process, I have grown to appreciate the accomplishments of other step-parents, foster parents, and otherwise guardians with no natural connection. I am thankful and blessed with the gift of children, step-children, and children in general.

Fatherhood

In addressing the role of the father, or fatherhood, my words must be carefully chosen as my heart has been changed through a litany of court-related events and conditions. Through the course of this legal process, the possibility to become disgusted and even bitter has been a recurring threat – which could be cause for either assuming a victim status or establishing a permanent and monumental chip on my shoulder. But with some reserve, let me continue with my comments on the important and irreplaceable role of a father or father-figure in the lives of children.

Fatherhood is a much-needed resource in the family with the capacity to make radical change in the lives of children through direct and indirect influence. Without going into the history of this key role, or the plight of diminished influence from the media and other sources, fatherhood should stand the test of time and social changes that threaten the value of the father and the structure and importance of the family in general.

I have never questioned my desire, ability and even general record in this role; but, admittedly, some reactions and decisions have not been accomplished in prayer and with the children's overall interest in mind and heart. Perhaps, most fathers and parents share this same view point with the realization of their vulnerability to criticism and to the passing down of generational, but questionable practices. Even with this realization and the negative influences that abound, fatherhood remains a primary call for men to influence the young people about them in a positive, affirmative way. To those who carry on this practice, often as a chief ambition, much gratitude and appreciation will be forthcoming if not already evident. Although not necessarily expressed, the children in your circle of influence have taken mental notes of the sacrifices and commitments necessary for fatherhood and will surely remember them in their lifetime for their children.

“Call Me Daddy”

Call me daddy some distant time
When word first formed from child to Dad
And set the making of daddy proud
To be daddy to the child

Call me daddy some needed time
When word is heard from child to Dad
And quick response from daddy near
To rescue child from moment fear

Call me daddy some recent time
Said from another child to another Dad
And brings to mind the longing word
That once meant me instead

Call me daddy some longing time
When the word no longer from child to Dad
That distance and isolation have caused
The child to lose all sense of word

How my heart aches for this word
But that child is forever certain
That daddy remains a word
No matter how long deferred

Daddy, daddy, a thousand times daddy
A sweet sound to my ears
A celebration for my heart
A heavenly image to my mind

Call me daddy another time
When time and place will allow
The freedom to use this word
Without restraint, but full assured

Call me daddy forever time
That long deferred will still remind
That I am daddy and you are child
What God ordained will never end

A promise is only made
But a covenant, it will stay
The course that has fallen us
Until that day, you call me daddy, again

“Children & Parents - Lost & Found”

To count my blessings does take time
For God has shed his grace on me
Still help the Children Lost for now
Soon find them in the best of state

Father that I use to be
When by decision placed in role
Of parent to the Children Found
From places dark my Father knows

But on the way, the role was held
In strong contempt to gain the edge
By parent to the Children Best
To change the truth to something less

And should reaction be in kind
To fight with might to pass the edge
By parent to the Children Least
And risk the chance of further harm

The effort made to be content
Is eased by other little ones
Of children to the Parent Most
A source of love transcends my hope

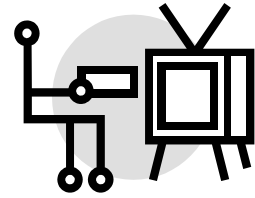
That brings forth beauty refined through time
By her devotion and heart to bear
Of Children to the Parent Lost
With wisdom wrought in younger years
Help us all in the hearts that hurt

To overcome from blessings flow
Of Parent to the Children Lost
Of Children to the Parent Lost
From Father high to Father low

That when the moment finally comes
Let sweetness take the bitterness
Of Children Lost to Children Found
Of Parent Lost to Parent Found
Of Father High to resound,
That Love conquers all...

MEDIA

By “media”, I mean the mainstream news and information via television, radio, newspaper, and a variety of magazines and internet sites. The concern and focus of this letter, however brief, is that the primary emphasis of the news is to sell advertising – not to deliver unbiased and representative information. The old adage, *don’t believe anything you hear and half of what you read*, does not necessarily apply to television since the media is visual. According to some sources, the visual dimension of television makes the news more believable – which has something to do with its popularity.



The news’ networks are intended to inform the viewer, listener, and reader; but somewhere in that process come opportunities to shape or develop public opinion. It is this two-fold mission that has enabled television to exercise a tremendous level of power beyond the basic service of information and unbiased reporting.

The biases the media has are much bigger than conservative or liberal. They're about getting ratings, about making money, about doing stories that are easy to cover.

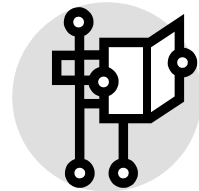
- Al Franken, "Lies and the Lying Liars who Tell Them", 2003

Enter the Christian network CBN and its affiliates, and a variety of Web sites to include but not be limited to:

- 👉 www.mediaresearch.org – Media Research
- 👉 www.frc.org – Family Research Council
- 👉 www.family.org – Focus on the Family

Accessing such media sources may be less convenient than other mainstream networks, but the additional effort will provide a Christian-World view of the issues and stories of the day; moreover, it will *open your eyes* to the differences in both what and how information is reported by each source.

Thank God that we live in a free society that allows such alternative sources like those described above. For many nations, such freedom does not exist; thus, the public is relegated to the government-controlled news source(s) – which is a powerful political tool for forming opinion and controlling the state.



Discernment, or the ability and insight to understand the truth, takes more than alternative sources – it takes the presence of the Holy Spirit. The spirit enables us to discern or recognize the truth on the basis that Jesus is *the way, the truth and the life*. Even for the natural man, an inherent ability exists to recognize truth; but the Spirit enables us to understand the truth of the Bible...or the ultimate truth. With the Spirit comes the freedom to understand the truth.

MERCY

When I was a kid, wrestling was common among friends and family. If one pinned the other for any length of time, the pinned fellow would likely ask for mercy; afterward, one would let go and free the other for more or less of the same. Mercy is compassion or simply the choice of one to allow a blessing or benefit when such is not deserved or earned by the other.

In 1865, at the surrender of the Confederacy, Abraham Lincoln had mercy on the southern states on the basis of reforming a nation and brotherhood – rather than giving continued cause for division and resistance. His view of mercy is described in the text box below.

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.

- Abraham Lincoln, *speech in Washington D.C., 1865*

In my mind and by all experience, the greatest act of mercy was from God through the giving of our savior, Jesus Christ. Yes, many acts of mercy have occurred and been recorded, but no greater act of undeserving compassion has occurred than that salvation made possible to the sinner.

Luke 1:50 tells us, *His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.* Paul asks the question: Is God Unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, *I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.* The footnotes of this scripture explain that God is not arbitrary in his mercy, but basis his mercy on the belief in him. Matthew 5:7 tells us, *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.* Perhaps God's mercy is reflected in his children toward others...

The parable of the Unmerciful Servant is described as follows:

A king, in settling his accounts, elects to show mercy on other servants who owes him money; in contrast, the same servant is unmerciful towards another who owes him money. In his insistence toward collecting the debt, the unmerciful servant has them thrown into prison. Finding out about this matter, the king calls the unmerciful servant to his court; and inquires as to why the servant would not cancel other debts while the king had cancelled his debt. *In his anger, the king turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all that he had owed.*

Have mercy on others, just as God has mercy on you.

METAL

To my right is a blacksmith or a “smitty”. You probably remember seeing such an artisan at Stone Mountain, Fort Clinch, or other historic venues. The basic idea of hand forging is to heat the metal to a bright-red or workable state (approximately 1250°C), and hammer or beat the object into a tool, weapon or other item. But the primary reason for this letter is not discuss metal or metal-forming as much as to use the applications of metal-working for comparison to the human-working.



Isaiah 48:10 tells us: *See I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.* This scripture refers to a purification process whereby Egypt was the figurative iron-smelting furnace used to purify the Hebrews in preparation for their inheritance. Iron production evidently occurred during a period of at least 3000 years before Christ; the process involved tremendous heat to separate the iron from the ore, and the end-product from the raw material. Hardening iron, for such uses as weapons, also involved heat

The exact date at which people discovered the technique of smelting iron ore to produce usable metal is not known. The earliest iron implements discovered by archaeologists in Egypt date from about 3000BC, and iron ornaments were used even earlier; the comparatively advanced technique of hardening iron weapons by heat treatment was known to the Greeks about 1000 BC.

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treatment – again, that the end-product would be highly reliable and ready for action for the intended use. Iron ore is heated into wrought iron; and this iron along with carbon are heated to form steel.

The expression, *test your metal*, has some possible association to this purification and refining process from ore to steel; versed as a question, the expression is aimed at determining how reliable and ready for action someone or somebody is the task or test at hand. Even semi-finished metals, or items being machined into finish parts, must undergo heat treatment or tempering to soften the metal following machining. Tempering results in a decrease in hardness and strength and an increase in ductility and toughness. Time and temperature are critical to the outcome or desired condition of the end-product.

In your growth and development, God will *test your metal* just as he did in the Hebrew nation and in the Church of Acts. This process occurs through our lifetime and is aimed at preparing us for his service and his kingdom. *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*

METHODS

Methods describes the way that we carry out tasks and activities: the way we clean our rooms, do our homework, conduct household chores, and a myriad of other things from the time we get-up until we go to bed. Emerson said:

Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it. The man who knows how will always have a job. The man who also knows why will always be his boss. As to methods there may be a million and then some, but principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble.

- Emerson

Methods can be many; but, on the basis of principles, can be refined through experiment, trial-and-error, or other such techniques. All of us apply methods. The doctor or medical staff applies methods for general medicine, examinations, surgery and other care services. These methods are learned through a combination of education, internship and continuing practice and education.



The painter uses learned and developed techniques for prepping and painting using a variety of paints, brushes and other materials and equipment. A steady hand and an eye for style and paint combinations are among his or her attributes.

The mail carrier must be able to complete a variety of administrative and manual duties to receive, sort, and delivery mail and parcels; as well as manage the front office for additional services. They learn the best methods for delivering with accuracy and timeliness.



The secretary of administrative support personnel must learn the best methods for developing and sending documents, making appointments and scheduling meetings and travel, responding to messages, and generally keeping the staff informed and organized.

The engineer must design, plan, schedule, and produce products and services – all of which require methods applied from product development to aftermarket support.



Methods are necessary; better methods are worthy; the best methods are ideal; now, use that mind and body to develop your best methods!

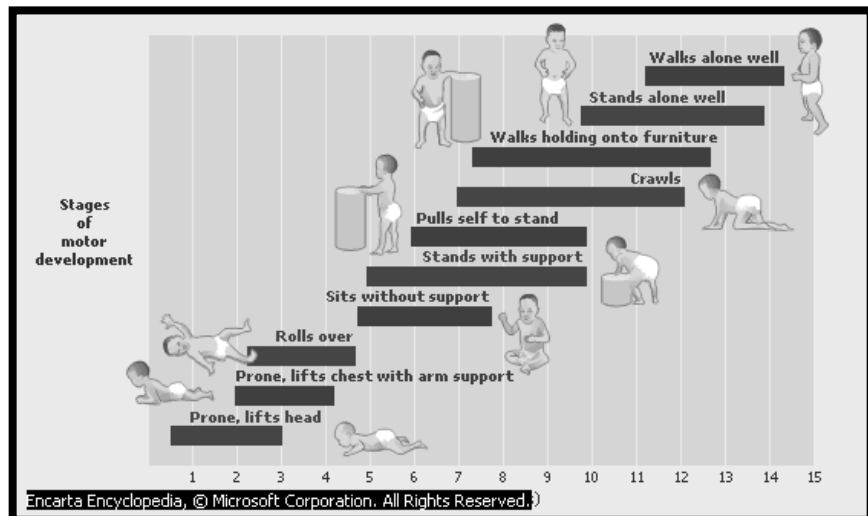
MILESTONES

A milestone is a marker for distance such as miles and kilometers – which is not to be confused with a millstone which is a flat stone used for grinding grain.

In a bicycle trail near my home, milestones are used every few miles to help bikers & walkers track their speed and progress. An actual stone, such as illustrated in the picture, is not typical in this day but instead metal signs and wood posts. These signs usually appear on the interstate and other major highways marking distance to certain locations or the actual mile marker along an interstate. Actual stones probably dates back to the earliest days of roads; and were probably used for the simple reason that rocks were prevalent and once in place, the marker would remain a permanent fixture.



Milestones can be used for other purposes; in the example to the right, the milestones mark various physical developments and abilities in a developing baby. In this illustration, a baby should be walking at around fifteen months give or take a few months.



Milestones are used in planning and scheduling – these specific dates indicate when certain events should occur, when activities or collections of tasks should be started and finished, and when the overall project should be complete.

Though milestones are as old as roads, the opportunity exists to use such points-in-time in your own lives. Completing a grade in school, getting your drivers' license, graduation, marriage, and many more planned or anticipated events may qualify. For me, one key milestone is the day that we see each other again and are able to talk, to walk, to have fun, and be social without the constraints or limitations that now exist. Yet, there are many more milestones to go.

MIND



Years ago, a television ad for drug-use had the following caption and emphasis:

A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste

The ad was aimed at warning the public about the immediate and long term effects of drug and alcohol use. On this note, let's take a few minutes to explore some details on the mind without delving into a lot of complexity.

First, the mind is a place that always has capacity; well, you may not think so in the moment after a series of tests at school, but it's true. George Santayana said a sign of wisdom is a mind that is always learning or ready for learning; perhaps, wisdom can never develop if the mind is not ready.

The wisest mind has something yet to learn.

- George Santayana,

If the mind is ready to learn, the next matter is what to learn. The mind can be filled with a lot of stuff; but not all the stuff is beneficial or helpful. Countless hours of television is not good for the mind, as it breeds passivity and the notion that the programming and information is true and real; in fact, much of the programming is aimed largely at selling advertising and not at actually helping the mind. On the other hand, books and interactive learning media are much more two-way and thus enable greater opportunity for learning.

Aside from the media, the content of information or programming is very important in the young, developing mind. The old adage, *garbage-in-garbage-out*, implies that a poor diet of information will result in a poor level of performance of output from the mind. If the mind is inundated with sex, violence, and other common programming of the day, the response will be similar behavior and conduct. I cannot emphasize this point enough as our media and society are very aggressive in targeting and programming young people with such garbage - undeniably, as a form of exploitation!

Consider the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson regarding the integrity of mind – the mind may be the last sacred vestige of our soul; thus, I pray that God will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. *Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.*

MIRACLES

What is a miracle? Einstein seemed to think that everything in our lives should be considered a miracle from the simplest involuntary act of breathing to the most complex derivation for the speed of light. A miracle, while not necessarily explained by natural laws, is probably more complex than even rocket science...at least for Einstein!

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

- Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

Sometimes the assignment of a miracle may be rather arbitrary; that is, a miracle is something we want but are not confident we will get or experience – then it happens against our reasoning! Other times, miracles may be assigned the status of “luck”, “good fortune”, or something of that kind. Still, many miracles may go unnoticed or unacknowledged because we simply do not realize that such is a miracle if it even exists. But miracles happen among us all, and for reasons not always recognized or understood.

Jesus and his disciples performed many miracles during and after his ministry; in fact, His miracles occur even today. Miracles performed by disciples occur through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit under the authority of Jesus. Case after case of faith healing occurs when the cure is sourced to pray, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil. Just as the onlookers and faithful in the New Testament observed such miracles, so too do others in the modern time of advances in science and medicine. Somewhere in the combination of medical developments and God's power and providence, we can find ourselves receiving and observing natural or supernatural healing; the one is over a life time as the need arises for intervention; the other is throughout our lifetime in God's providence for this life and the hereafter.

The miracle of birth stands out in my mind – having witnessed each of your births, and having held you for this first time. How blessed I am to have shared in this miracle and to have seen your first entry into the world; yet, your birth is but the first of many that will occur in your lifetime. Know that each day brings miracles as we look to God in wonder and awe, and await his word, his direction, his answer to our prayers, and his prevailing message that he loves us.

MISFORTUNE

This is a word that can apply to a normal life problem, a crisis, a tragedy, or something similar. A Russian writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, suggest that a misfortune should not be something to fear. Considering that Alexander spent

Do not pursue what is illusory - property and position: all that is gained at the expense of your nerves decade after decade and can be confiscated in one fell night. Live with a steady superiority over life - don't be afraid of misfortune, and do not yearn after happiness; it is after all, all the same: the bitter doesn't last forever, and the sweet never fills the cup to overflowing.

- **Alexander Solzhenitsyn**, Russian author & dissident in US (1918)

many years in a Russian prison, his advice has some credibility. Sometimes misfortunes cannot be helped; events or seasons occur in the lives of everyone – both the righteous and the unrighteous. Long-term sickness, the loss or absence of a parent or other difficulties in a family are a few examples of life's problems; basically, a misfortune not caused by you but, nevertheless, incurred by you. Everyone experiences problems and misfortune at some point in their lives.

Misfortune can also come by way of sin. When sin re-occurs in a family, from one generation to the next, it is sometimes called a generational curse. Alcoholism and other addictions, abuse of form or another, and infidelity and divorce are examples of generational curses. One generation, having indulged in such a lifestyle, models the same lifestyle for their children....and so on. Generational curses can be broken through the process of understanding and faith in Christ for forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration of the child to the parent or similar. As a footnote, the parent may not understand or be aware of such curses; hence, they too must be *willing to come to the foot of the cross* for repentance and a similar process toward their parents.

By whatever cause, if any, misfortune is an opportunity to test our faith in our Lord. He has promised to supply the strength needed to face all trials and testing; therefore, let us embrace Him by faith that whatever misfortune should come, we will be found faithful in Him! Even joy can occur during testing as a supernatural disposition; that is, beyond our natural inclination which would be to bemoan and avoid such a circumstance if at all possible.

Blessings come in a variety of packages; yet, even our very existence is a blessing and, on that certainty, we should be ever thankful to God for the apparent blessings as well as the circumstances categorized as misfortunes.

Reflect on your present blessings, of which every man has many; not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.

- Charles Dickens

MISSION

A mission can be of several types:

1. A place or period of time for missionaries to work (e.g. mission trip, mission church, etc.)
2. A difficult set of tasks sometime occurring over a large distance (e.g. "Mission Impossible")
3. A group of envoys to a foreign country – possibly for purposes of diplomacy or relations

Make your life a mission - not an intermission.

- Arnold Glasgow

By any definition, a mission seems to involve great challenges – even perilous at times with dangers of opposition, attack, and death. A mission seems to be, at its core, a trip with the potential for much success or failure – with failure to include accomplishing nothing of significance or of not accomplishing the objectives from the onset. Even before the trip, the individual or team spends much time preparing and planning to accomplish these objectives.

Arnold Glasgow urges us *to make a mission of our lives*. On this idea, our lives may be considered as a mission in total; but also, many sub- or smaller missions pertaining to educational, physical, emotional and spiritual objectives. Even during one mission, we may be training and preparing for another... and yet another; thus, the mission(s) and the preparation overlap each other.

Paul spent several years preparing for the mission that God had called him. From his radical conversion on the Damascus Road, Paul set out on a new mission to be a *servant for Jesus*. To prepare for this mission, that involved four sub missions, he spent time with the disciples (training) and *grew more and more powerful* as he preached about salvation through Jesus. Led by Holy Spirit, Paul endured many difficulties, hardships and persecution along the way; yet, he remained steadfast in the purpose and mission for which he had been assigned by God – he *pressed on toward the upward call in Christ Jesus*.

During and since those days of the first Christians, missionaries have spanned the globe with the same conviction and resolve as Paul for the Great Commission: *Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you*. Many have sacrificed much in their mission for God – even their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Yet, in keeping with Paul's conviction, *to live is Christ and to die is gain*, these saints of the Lord made themselves *a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God*. Our mission is no less than that which those before and those now commit themselves in God through Christ Jesus: *to love the Lord God with all our heart, our soul and our strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves*.

MISTAKES

"We all make mistakes" – is the adage that comforts us when mistakes occur. A simple statement but all so true – none of us are perfect though, at times, we may think so. The possibility of making a mistake may be reduced or mitigated; but the fact remains, that we live in an imperfect world with imperfect people. Mistakes should be avoided if possible but, when occurred, should be embraced as an opportunity to learn – a lesson if you will. Mistakes can be costly both to you and to others – but no lesson of any significance is ever cheap.

George Bernard Shaw realized that *all the pains* of proving or verifying his own perfection were *wasted time*. Mistakes are not necessarily sins: a sin is act of disobedience to God whether realized or not; whereas a mistake may occur without being disobedient to God. Let's try some situational examples.

"The longer I live the more I see that I am never wrong about anything, and that all the pains that I have so humbly taken to verify my notions have only wasted my time."

- George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

A mistake on a test or homework assignment is not a sin; but if you don't try or don't study and invest your attention in the assignment, you are not being a steward of the skills and talents God has given you. The mistake(s) may occur because we make mistakes; on the other hand, we may have fewer mistakes by planning, preparing and using the resources provided to us. Mistakes happen! Don't be discouraged but, rather, use the lesson to identify areas of improvement. If your mistake hurts others, try to reconcile with them by apologizing with an explanation; even if you are wrong, a sincere apology and desire for reconciliation is all that you can do – the rest is up to the Lord.

In the words of Al Franken, mistakes should be appreciated for the lesson gained however difficult it may be.

Do not veer from opportunities because of concern about mistakes. *Far better than to have tried and failed, than to not have tried at all* – so get out there and give your best and, *at the end of the day*, rejoice and find satisfaction in *all your labor and toil*.

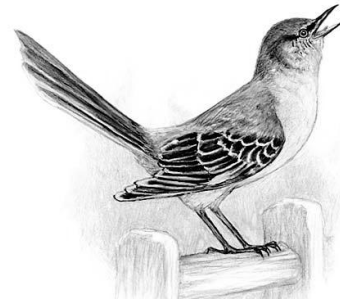
Mistakes are a part of being human. Appreciate your mistakes for what they are: precious life lessons that can only be learned the hard way.

- Al Franken, *"Oh, the Things I Know"*, 2002

Among your opportunities is the value in learning from other's mistakes: whether by observation or through instruction, lessons can be applied from the wisdom of others who *blazed the trail ahead of you*. Above all else, remember God loves us – mistakes and all!

MOCKER

A mocker is someone who treats someone else with contempt or ridicule. Another definition is to mimic or to sound like another; the mockingbird is able to make the sounds of other birds as a form of deception. Mockery is deception as well; for example, when someone attempts to mislead or deceive a legal court or judge, the act may be described as *making a mockery of the court*.



In the *old days* of live theater or stage, the audience could include mockers – patrons who jeer and ridicule the actors during the play. This conduct may have been common and even expected as part of the entertainment and participation of the audience. In a Western, the entrance of the *bad guy wearing the black hat* could invoke instance hissing, boos, and other jesters from the audience. Good or bad, if an actor didn't perform well, they might have expected to be pelted with fruit and vegetable or more dangerous stuff.

Lee Harper of Monroeville, Alabama wrote the classic novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird". The story takes place in a small, Alabama town in the 1950's. Using a six-year old girl as character telling the story, Lee is able to temper racial segregation and the tension surrounding a trial; in addition, she is able to develop the story through the innocence of a young girl very much in the discovery of her own place and position within in her single-parent family. From the title, a "mockingbird" had been killed by her brother – who was an upstart hunter and basically tried to kill everything in his sight. Other than for sport, the boy had no reason to hunt and kill the bird and, from the viewpoint of a little girl, the bird had every reason to be protected and to live. Using the seeming tragedy of the bird for a lesson, the father explains that the accused in the trial (his client) deserves to be saved and protected for the same reason that she believes the bird should have been saved and protected – both are innocent.

With the exception of the mockingbird, mocking or being a mocker is generally considered as a negative or unlikable behavior. In Psalm 119, David describes his present suffering to include *mocking by the arrogant*; yet, he *will not turn from the law* or word of God. Proverbs, in describing the fool, describes him as mocking calamity; *mockers stir-up the city* or bring anger and frustration; the *mockers will suffer*, while the wise will be rewarded. Though David was mocked in Psalm by his enemies, and Jesus was mocked in the Gospels by those who rejected him; God cannot be mocked in his glory. In Galatians, *a man reaps what he sows*: to the one who indulges in his sinful pleasure (rejecting God's glory), he will find destruction; but the one who gives himself to the Spirit will find eternal life. Don't be that fool, that mocker!

MODESTY

Modesty is a word with several definitions: it can apply to dress or appearance, with modesty including less-revealing clothing; it can apply to personality or self-awareness with modesty being the opposite of boasting or prideful; it can also apply to size or scope with modest portions being ample but not necessarily sufficient for the stomach with much volume.

When you dress modestly, you are not necessarily ashamed of your body; but do not want your attraction to others to be for your body alone. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, *they were suddenly ashamed of their nakedness* and commenced to wearing the first loin clothes with accessories as able. Modesty occurred because of sin and a sense that being naked is not very comfortable in the presence of others. I believe that modesty is good and, though often mocked as something old and outdated, is appropriate in all applications described above.

As far as personality and behavior, the opportunity to *toot your own horn* may seem advantageous for your own ego but, let's face it, *talk is cheap*. Action does indeed speak louder than words and, in all honesty, if you're that good at something, bragging and boasting will not be necessary or even helpful. If you're going to boast, then boast in the Lord who made you, loves you, and has saved you. Modesty is the result of humility; and as Jesus humbled even to death on the cross, so too should we be humbled by the realization that nothing we can or will do deserves his mercy and grace.

Modest portions are probably a good thing as well; yea, it may only wake your appetite and not bed-it-down, but at least the taste buds have something to dance about. A practice of modesty in the area of diet is something that all of us Americans should practice; frankly, gluttony and over indulgence is over rated and often leads to an insatiable appetite of more of whatever the craving happens to be.

Modesty should not be an act or superficial; rather, it should be a reflection of your true-self – or who you have become humbled by the knowledge of who you are in God's mercy and glory.

Modesty is a shining light; it prepares the mind to receive knowledge, and the heart for truth.

- Madam Guizot

While my version of the Bible does not use “modesty”, the foundational word, “humility” is used frequently. Humility is necessary to develop wisdom as described in the text box above; once more, it enables us to place our attention on the creator rather than the created; on God rather than on us.

MOMENT

A moment is a short period of time, but it can be a special or unique occasion just the same. Jokingly, a person may say, “I’m having a senior moment”, coinciding with forgetfulness or a delayed reaction. A child that is pitching a temper tantrum may be described by his mother as having *one of his moments*; but if the mother is the one having the moment, I suppose the child just has to contend with it.

A lot of things can happen in a moment:

- ⌚ A bolt of lightning can strike
- ⌚ An accident or mishap can occur
- ⌚ A newborn baby can cry aloud for the first time
- ⌚ A natural disaster can destroy land or property
- ⌚ A thought can enter the mind
- ⌚ A word can be expressed – that may not be retractable
- ⌚ An e-mail can be sent from a young person to her father
- ⌚ A phone call be transmitted over a great distance
- ⌚ An opinion can be altered
- ⌚ A marriage proposal can be replied to
- ⌚ A heart can stop beating or a respiratory system stop breathing

Since the time period or elapsed time representing a moment is somewhat variable, a moment is a somewhat relative term. For example, a testimony from a witness might indicate that he saw the crime occur in a moment – which could be a few seconds or just a *split second*. The survivor of an accident replies that she *saw her life pass before her eyes in a moment* – which means that, in a moment, she realized the mortality of her life or the possibility that her physical life is vulnerable and could be no more.

The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.

- Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
English painter & poet

The Bible uses the word “moment” on occasion – let’s look at a few applications:

- ⌚ Job 20:5 - ...*the joy of the Godless lasts but a moment* – which means that those without God have no permanent source of joy
- ⌚ Psalms 30:5 - ...*for his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime* – referring to the Lord from David
- ⌚ Proverbs 12:19 – *Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment* – which means that in time, the lies will be refuted {or exposed} and the liar punished
- ⌚ Galatians 2:5 – *We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain in you* - Paul replying to the Gentile believers concerning the false teaching that circumcision was necessary.

MONEY

Is the *Love of money the root of all evil*? Yes, because to love money is a symptom of greed; to have greed is to be without love; and to be without love is to be without God. The central concern is not that money or wealth is bad, but the treatment of such. Ponder the following:

- ☒ Do you worship money – is it all that you think about (and the things money can purchase)?
- ☒ Do you think the money belongs to you whether you actually earned it or not?
- ☒ Do you realize that your money and other resources (strength of mind, body, etc.) belong to God and that you are a *steward* of the money and other resources?

Other questions could be listed above; but the point is to determine the relationship of you and the money (and everything else) you possess now and in the future. If money and material things are all you think about, then these things are all that matters to you. The problem with love of money is the *more you have, the more you want, and the more you want, the more insatiable you are*. Is life



all about money and material things? – I do not think so. When you consider all your money and other things to be your own, you hoard or become *tight-fisted*; that is, the greed described earlier is a disease for which you neither love nor receive love.



In the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the character Mr. Potter refused to share his wealth with anyone; he took a demented pleasure in denying the opportunity to have their homes among other things. He was a “bitter, frustrated, man.”

When you realize that the money and other things belong to God, and not to you, the response becomes one of appreciation and generosity; rather than bitterness and greed. With what you have, or have given, you strive to be a good steward – which means to manage these resources well and to make those dollars *s t r e t c h*.

We live in a capitalist society. Capitalism was structured on the idea and practice of saving and investing money to earn more money (compounded interest or dividends); yet, on average, Americans do not save much at all, but are more in debt than at any time in our history. I mention this statistic, not because I have always practiced good stewardship, but because such a lifestyle and practice is of vital importance for all of us.



MOON



The moon remains a fascinating celestial body; why it's the only moon we have and for that reason alone, must be appreciated for its beauty and purpose. Such admiration could probably not be exceeded by the Psalmist who said:

When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

According to the Psalmist:

- ☾ The moon *marks off the seasons* (104:19)
- ☾ The moon and the stars govern the night {136:9}
- ☾ The sun and the moon praise the Lord {148:3}

The moon was once a mystery to scientists and others interested in astronomy; but science and space exploration have allowed earlier beliefs and ideas to be tested and confirmed regarding the properties and other aspects of this body. For thousands of years, history records the study of the celestial bodies by the Babylonian, Greek, and subsequent civilizations and cultures; with a major change in theory occurring in 1500's by Nicolaus Copernicus as described below.

Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus revolutionized science by postulating that the earth and other planets revolve about a stationary sun. Developed in the early 1500s but not published until years later, his heliocentric (sun-centered) theory disputed the Ptolemaic theory, popular at the time, which held that the sun and the planets revolved about the fixed earth...

Using one of the first telescopes, Galileo found evidence to support the Copernican theory that the Earth and the other planets revolved around the Sun.

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His theory would be later confirmed by Galileo using one the first telescopes.

Very little detail and depth is offered in this letter; but let the



content be a motivation for you and others to explore the accomplishments and theories that have transpired from recorded history of the moon, space and the cosmos. With the same sense of awe and wonder as the Psalmist, may you come to realize the universe remains unbounded as does the power, majesty and love of its

creator – the one who new the properties and the other aspects of the moon long before telescopes, photography, and lunar landings.



MORALS

Morals are the rules or behavior of living considered right by some standard. Much concern in the Christian, world view is not that morals exist or are practiced; rather, that the standard for the morals has changed in a direction away from Biblical truth. In this concern, the view for American culture could be that morals of fifty years ago were of a higher or more Biblical standard than morals of today.

There is a definite link between the media and morals: the media, in particular television, has been able to shape and fashion morals through the type programming that it produces and broadcast. Because television is distributed over such a large market or viewing audience, the effect is pervasive and penetrating. My belief is not that television as a whole is immoral; but that mainstream programming has been very instrumental in the shifting of the standard away from Biblical truth.

Some may argue that the media is simply a representation of society – that the programming and broadcasting is a direct reflection of the general public views and standards. Some may counter that the media is the driving force, while others may be confused or even ambivalent in the mix of this *chicken and egg* scenario.

As I write this letter, a current concern is over the morality of the war in Iraq. At the center of this controversy, is whether Americans be fighting and dying for the establishment of a democracy; whatever the reason or reasons for the war, are the causes worth the costs and casualties? Some would argue that the war is immoral – the cause(s) is not worthy of the costs. Again, the counter argument is that the war is being fought to preserve peace in the homeland and to initiate peace in Iraq and perhaps the Middle-East.

Over and above this war, and all previous wars, morality will never be achievable in this world – immoral behavior or sin will remain even if the standards did not change; however, as standards have changed, the degree of immoral behavior has heightened in my generation, in my society and culture. Trends of various indicators would show that the standard has shifted and the level of moral conduct has changed in this time period and place. My uncertainty and concern lies with your generation and the developing standard for morality.

As I ponder this matter, my prayers remain consistent for your development and growth. Having little contact with you and no opportunity to provide any direct parenting, prayer remains the balance of my responsibility and duty to you as my children.

MOTHER

For children, the mother is most often the central point of their lives. She has both the unique qualities to usually carry, bear, and care for the child or children through much of their childhood or early years; and is most willing to sacrifice and commit herself toward this purpose with a genuine, boundless degree of love. Whether the mother actually carried the child from inception or received the child through adoption or by other circumstances, such a relationship may occur both naturally and through the bonding that occurs between them.



At the core of this bond is a deep sense of appreciation on the part of the mother for this child for which she has been elected the caretaker for their developing years. Even the most challenging moments that stifle others may be easily accepted by the mother as this bond seems to prevail. Accounts and stories of a mother's dedication are far reaching and well support the described relationship to child and the vital role in the family, village and society across cultures and nations.

A query on quotes for the word "mother" resulted in many hits; but below are a

The world is full of women blindsided by the unceasing demands of motherhood, still flabbergasted by how a job can be terrific and torturous.

- Anna Quindlen, O Magazine, May 2003

Sometimes the laughter in mothering is the recognition of the ironies and absurdities. Sometime, though, it's just pure, unthinking delight.

- Barbara Schapiro, O Magazine, May 2003

The most important thing she'd learned over the years was that there was no way to be a perfect mother and a million ways to be a good one.

- Jill Churchill, O Magazine, May 2003

A father may turn his back on his child ...but a mother's love endures through all.

- Washington Irving, US essayist, historian, & novelist (1783 - 1859)

few of the more pertinent to the tone and tribute of this letter.

The calling of motherhood is unparalleled; thus, the need for the pre-described appreciation and love is essential for the mother and for the child's sake. God bless the mother's who posses such an appreciation and, consequently, have sacrificed much in their children's care and best interests.

MOUNTAIN

I live in area that has many foothills of the Appalachian Mountain chain – not far from the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee. The area surrounding my home is sometimes enveloped in a range of hues, caused by the sun as well as low-lying fog that add to the majesty and brilliance of these hills. Even a flatlander like you would like it.



One of my favorite movies pertaining to mountains is *The Englishman that Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain*. It is an epic story of two English cartographers {map makers} commissioned by the war department to a village in Wales. The Welsh, like the Irish and the Scots, do not have the best of relationship with the English; thus, the two Englishmen receive a less-than hospitable welcome. Using the signature English-humor, the story involves a dispute over the qualification of the village's mountain as a hill. While the town adds some 20 feet to the crest, for a re-measurement of the elevation, the English find themselves forestalled from departure to the next location.

Internal disputes arise however over the methods to qualify the mountain: some want to add dirt (or earth) to the crest, while others want the English to change their measurement or the standard. Leading the later method, a Protestant minister insists that adding earth smacks of deception and foul play; but after the English are unrelenting, he joins (and even leads) the alternative method – even if the excavating must occur on the Sabbath to get the job done!

This choice does not occur without a revelation or message from God: in preparing for the Sunday morning sermon, the minister randomly selects the scripture from Psalm shown below – truly a message that God has ordained the village's choice to build-up the mountain, the holy mountain as a celebration of all the great mountains that God has made. It is an epic story of how a Welsh village, surviving through the losses of World War I, rally behind their mountain as the centerpiece and cause for unity and hope.

Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.
- Psalm 99:9

The Bible uses several mountains as the place of Holiness:

- ▲ Ararat Mountains – in modern day, Turkey; Noah landed the Ark
- ▲ Mount Sinai – in modern day, Southern Saudi Arabia or Yemen; God descends and Moses receives the Ten Commandments
- ▲ Mount Herman – possible location for Jesus' Transfiguration
- ▲ Mount Zion – the intended location in Jerusalem for 'the mountain of the Lord' where his kingdom will be established in the *last days*

MUSIC

Music should be a given and developing part of our repertoire. Music is a reflection of who we are and what we consider to be important; it is the *most beautiful and most perfect way...of expressing a sweet concord of the mind according to Jonathan Edwards.*

The best, most beautiful, and most perfect way that we have of expressing a sweet concord of mind to each other is by music.
- Jonathan Edwards



My favorite music is probably folk music: folk music has its roots in Irish/Scottish ballads from the 1800's with stories and legends about people, events, love, war, and a full array of subjects of both human kind and experience. Folk music is taking a verse with possible rhyme and setting it to what I consider to be easily played chords on a guitar. I am sure that both my description and the notion of easily played chords is probably somewhat off, but I accept the error of my understanding and will just play on for the cause of those unsung, *want-ta'-be*, lovers of music.

I recently attended a 5th grade concert where the single instrument was a recorder: the kids are beginning their possibility in music and had prepared four songs for the concert; "Amazing Grace" and "All through the Night" were two of the classic pieces. Supported by a CD of background instrumentals, the recorders sounded fine and the students looked very proud despite momentary nervousness.

Music has a way of triggering a memory or a time or moment in our past lives: when I hear rock-in-roll from the early seventies, my thoughts return to Beaufort and living by the river; music from the late seventies reminds me of High School and that time period; and so on and so forth. In the recent concert, "All though the Night" reminded me of a cassette of baby-time sleeping music that was purchased in the early 90's for my children. Music not only reminds me of such moments but it is also identified with a movie or play for which the composition is a significant part. The classic *West Side Story*, as both a Broadway play and a movie, contained numerous Leonard Bernstein pieces to include: "Maria", "I want to an American", "Tonight" and much more.

Make music in your heart and let it sing and play with every part of your soul.

NAPPING

A nap can be *just what the doctor ordered* – since rest and sleep is necessary. Our bodies need some consistent degree of sleep to operate at prime; sustained periods of insufficient sleep will eventually take its toll on us – and those for whom we come in contact.



A nap can be both good and bad: sometimes, the outcome is refreshing and energizing; other times, the outcome may be a continuing sense of drowsiness and lethargy. Regardless of the outcome, a nap may be the only relief in near sight; thus, it is the best thing to do whether you are told as a child or are compelled as an adult.

Contrary to Mark Twain's apparent habits, sleep and rest is not the panacea for good health as I'm sure you realize; indeed, hard physical work can improve on the whole process of sleep with results unparalleled in terms of the timing between your head hitting the pillow (or even a rock) and your mind and body drifting into oblivion.

I have never taken any exercise except sleeping and resting.

- Mark Twain

Rest comes in several forms to include even some form of work; for example, the guy who performs office work all week long, may ironically find some degree of rest and relaxation in doing yard work on the weekends. In actuality, he is not resting; but mentally, he is being replenished by the sweat from his brow and the satisfaction of the resulting yard or garden. In short, his choice of work may be the break from the monotony of work that he thinks he needs to be his best.

Jesus said: *Come to me all you who are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* In the book of Hebrews, we are told: *for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did.* The message of the later scripture is simply that believers know that salvation rests in the finished work of Christ on the cross – not on the continued and unending work of man. A Psalm of David tells us: *My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.* Each of these passages describes a rest of a different sort: not a rest for the weekend, for the summer or any time period; not a rest from the fatigue of work whether physical or mental; but a deeper rest of the soul – an acceptance of God's work as sufficient.

NAVY

When I was a boy and continuing into manhood, the Navy was my choice of military branches. Yes, your grandfather was a Marine but I wanted to be in the Navy. Why you might ask?

Maybe it was the countless movies; or maybe it was the sense of adventure about sea travel brought about by books such as *Kidnapped*, *Treasure Island*, or *Mutiny on the Bounty*. I'm really not sure as to why but only that the Navy seemed right for me.



A serious interest in this organization came to some substance while a freshman in college. During preparation for my first term, I enrolled in Navy Reserve Officer Training (NROTC) and continued in the program for about a year. Much was learned about marching, competition, dress codes, and marine engineering; but my experience stopped short of actual sea duty or even exposure to actual ship side duties. As reminded from time to time, some regrets prevail about continuing the program and possibly receiving a commission as an active officer.

Other association to the Navy has occurred as a federal employee at a depot facility for aircraft and as a contractor for several aircraft assembly programs and one actual ship construction project. In these experiences, the connection to the Navy has some association to my earlier ambitions but certainly stops short of actual duty and direct involvement.

From your studies and general knowledge, the Navy has much history dating back to the Greek and Roman cultures among others; and continuing with such noteworthy sailors as the Vikings who threatened much of western Europe with their low-draft but sea-worthy long boats. In my recent travels, the Civil War Maritime Museum was a great stop to learn about engineering and history of that period. Another intended but never realized trip, was to the Yorktown: an aircraft carrier permanently moored at Charleston, South Carolina and available for overnight stay.

One final piece of Navy history involves an old ship, the *La'Amistad* that was featured in a movie of few years ago of the similar title. A replicable of this famous slave ship was recently docked in Jacksonville; though not actually touring the ship, I have a video of the movie and have enjoyed learning about this historical event and excellent movie by Steven Spielberg. Maybe you have seen the movie or are familiar with the story.

Anchors Away!

NEED

By some means, I must draw the distinction between a need and a want; a *must have to survive* and a *must have to succeed or prevail*.

How do we distinguish and identify the needs from the wants; what standard do we use to define a need; do the standards really clarify the need; can we ever be satisfied with the result if it does not agree with our own lifestyle, expectations, etc.?

Consider the example of a personal computer – which has become both a household and business necessity or need; yet, according to Andy Rooney, this device does not do what he thinks it should...or perhaps what he wants it to do.

Computers make it easier to do a lot of things, but most of the things they make it easier to do don't need to be done.
- Andy Rooney, US news commentator (1919 -)

Stepping back in time to a different appliance, the television became a household fixture throughout the 1970's and has only perpetuated with cable and satellite communications. An interesting, and sometimes subject of humor is that the more stations that television offers, the fewer programs of interest or benefit; yet, many households today have a relatively inexpensive television in several rooms with a mega-widescreen unit to *top it all off*. My views of television should be quite clear at this point; basically, the cost of the hardware and the communications service does not warrant the purchase simply because the programming and information is of little value...but my opinion may be extreme!

Television has done much for psychiatry by spreading information about it, as well as contributing to the need for it.
- Alfred Hitchcock, British movie director (1899 - 1980)

You and I live in a society and culture of marketing products and services as needs rather than luxuries. In the 1960's, families had one car on average; in the 1970's, families had one TV on average; and in the 1980's and beyond, many of the previous luxuries or discretionary things have become a must-have or pseudo-need. Our basic necessities keep changing as consumption maintains its insatiable appetite. Though living long before this period, Mark Twain described our natural inclination to *have more of a good thing than we need*. When will this trend in our society stop or even begin to change? Only when it becomes a need.

A human being has a natural desire to have more of a good thing than he needs.

- Mark Twain

NEGOTIATING

Negotiating is something that even the youngest of people attempt to do. Attempts begin as toddlers may try to *strike a deal* with a parent over developing rules and guidelines. If the child has developed some vocabulary, or is able to construct a sentence, negotiating will likely become one of the frequently practiced events to *test the waters* or integrity of the rule, etc. The conversation may go something like this:

Parent: *Pick-up your toys and put them in the box.*
Child: *If I do, can I have candy?*

In this brief conversation, the child is attempting to negotiate or bargain with the parent. Once the parent rewards the child with candy, or basically agrees to the deal, the child begins to expect the candy every time they pick-up their toys or possibly every time the parent asks them to do something. For the child, the occasional reward of candy becomes a standard part of the transaction. To get a positive response or results from the child, the parent must have candy available.

I am sure there are all kinds of psychiatric theory and experiments associated with the above scenario categorized under a conditioning process or something of the sort; but for the general parent, the short term gain by agreeing to the deal may invariably become a long term loss by succumbing to the child's every deal. Not to over complicate the parent-child relationship, but this conditioning stuff can turn into an ugly mess and leave the parent acquiescing to the child's every want. In short, the child becomes spoiled by the expectation that everything they want can be obtained by one means or another.



In the life of both children and adults, the basic practice of listening and obeying must be modeled and developed – negotiating is not always an option. Sometimes the rewards for non-negotiable requests may only be the avoidance of some negative consequence, threat or risk.

Parent: *If you don't pick up your toys, than you will not be able to go outside and play.*

Negotiating has its place in the family and in business. Whereas negotiating does enable some favorable outcome for the negotiator, it also relegates the child to a conditional outcome; that is, it places on the relationship the basic logic statement: IF you do this, THEN I will do that. Such a relationship runs the risk of invading and replacing the essence of true love – which is unconditional.

NEIGHBOR

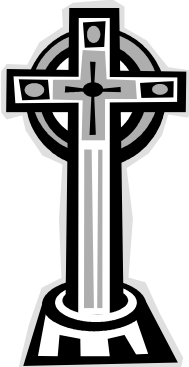
The State Farm Insurance tag line is:
Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.

This longstanding commitment is to remind both the insured and the insurance prospect that State Farm will treat its subscribers and their claims with the courtesy and attention of a good neighbor. I can attest that State Farm has been a good choice for me through the years with auto, home, and personal property insurance. Well, own to the word at hand.



A neighbor is really more than someone who lives next door or in your neighborhood; a neighbor is anyone whom you consider to be a friend or friendly acquaintance. Within the *greatest commandment* is found the part, *Love your neighbor as yourself*. Like the *Good Samaritan*, love should extend beyond the friend however, and be “ready” for the one who may be needy no matter their color, age, or other differences. In this parable, the least likely candidate for charity was the saint that, not only carried the man to get care, but left a sum of money for the services.

When Jesus described the commandment to *Love your neighbor*, he also followed it with the command to *pray for those who persecute you*. In fact, we are called to love our enemies by God’s power that our action may be a light to a world of darkness. Yes, loving a neighbor and an enemy may be one-in-the-same at times, but Jesus leaves no doubt or loop-hole; we are to love because we are loved, to forgive because we are forgiven, and to sacrifice ourselves (our time, our abilities, and other resources) for God because of God’s sacrifice of Jesus for all our sins both past, present and future.



The cross should be a reminder of God’s love; consider the cross to your right that includes both the conventional symbol with a circle representing the sun. This cross was designed by Saint Patrick who ministered to the Irish in ancient times. The decision to use the symbol was based on act of love for both God and for the Irish. Though he was abducted by the Irish as a boy, Patrick compelled to return to Ireland and minister. From his minister comes Saint Patrick’s Day. I guess he was just being a good neighbor....and more.

NETWORKING

Networking refers to several relationships: on a technical or Management Information Systems' basis, it refers to the integration of computers and other hardware; on a social basis, it refers to the transfer or communication of information and the establishment of relationships – usually for business of some kind.



All forms or examples of networking involve communication: the practice or availability of networking should enable or improve the exchange and sharing of information; thus, networking is a tool or enabler for better performance and control.

A television news station is sometimes referred to as a news network although communication is strictly one-way or one-directional. Any question or doubt regarding the news' content is virtually limited to your mental response, a discussion among a network of family or class, or a reply to the station in the form of a letter or e-mail. A news network is a network because the stations are enjoined or affiliated with other stations – all of which share the same news and information. Public television is a network with affiliate stations in Jacksonville and other major cities throughout our country; news and other broadcasting is shared or networked among the stations or regions of the country.



Other networks offer two-way communication. Telephone and e-mail, direct or personal contact, and video conferencing are all examples of networking with two-way communication or the receiving and transmitting of information. In the previous example of the news, information is largely aimed at informing the viewing or listening audience; while this example of information exchange is aimed at collaboration among those involved in the network or group. In the later case of networking, the ability to effectively communicate and collaborate depends not only on the network hardware or systems, but also on the people or personnel. Yes, the systems do enable the sharing of information, but the individuals and groups must be responsible to interpret, reply, and agree to be effective and complete.

For families, networking is essential...two-way communication. A family must be able to communicate, collaborate, and even appreciate within the developing role and responsibility of each and all members.

NEWSPAPERS

"Extra, extra – read all about it!" was often the cry of a newsboy standing at a downtown corner with newspaper in hand. This audible was a common advertisement for the local paper; obviously, aimed at the passerby who must be informed on the latest and most tantalizing article.

Newspapers have forever been a mode of communication or networking and, in our modern society, published and distributed with ever increasing velocity through high-speed printing and collation, and the electronic modes of transcribing and transmitting remote reporting. The newspaper is relatively inexpensive thanks to such advancements as well as advertising and volume distribution.



My only experience in newspaper delivery was *The Grit* – a home delivery newspaper published nationally, this paper was a news item of a different sort.



The papers in my present hometown include the *Anniston Star*, the *Gadsden Times*, the *Birmingham News*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*. Other national, daily publications include the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Newspapers were once the primary source of news in America; perhaps in other countries, and even our own television intensive society, the paper continues to be a favored form of information among some older age groups – that still prefer to follow the routine of the newspaper and a cup of coffee.

Famous or learned people may have differing opinions and views of newspaper... or the news in general. Some like



Half of the American people have never read a newspaper. Half never voted for President. One hopes it is the same half.
- Gore Vidal, US author & dramatist
(1925 -)

Gore Vidal may consider the newspaper to a vital medium for educating the public and associated those who bother to read it as those who also bother to vote. Still, others may find the sometimes over-dramatic and sensationalized themes and headlines of the paper

be too confusing and even misleading – but not everyone can be an editor.

NONCUSTODIAL

This word is possibly very foreign to you and most people who have not endured a divorce or state-directed loss of their children; but a “non-custodial” parent is one whom I believe has lost their right to be parent in the true sense. Let me explain.



A non-custodial is one who does not have the legal right to communicate, have contact, or otherwise associate except under the terms and conditions of the state, and at the discretion of the custodial parent or authority over the children. In a simple example, the probable father in the illustration above could no longer see his presumed daughter at the front steps of the likely home; instead, he would have to abide by the conditions sanctioned by the state and executed by the custodial parent or other authority over the children. If the terms and conditions are violated, or he attempts to contact his daughter beyond that sanctioned by the state, he risks the chance of further restrictions or even loss of the privilege still granted him as a so-called father.

If the father is *worth his salt*, the responsibility that he assumed for his child (or children) will be an overriding reason to remain steadfast through such an ordeal or period in their lives. This responsibility must endure the lean years in order to *be ready* for the later years when both the children and father are free from the regulation of the state and other authorities. Though this season can be very disheartening and painful, they (father or mother) must *stay the course* for the opportunity and privilege that will potentially emerge. But how does he keep such on such a course; how does wait patiently and be ready for a time or period when such restrictions in his parenting will be gone?

Even in such an ordeal as the loss of one's children, there is hope found in God. It was God who created the family and who established a model by which a parent or guardian would assume responsibility, who love and care for children. Christ himself described the children in such a loving way as precious way; he saw in children the disposition (sincerity, honesty, innocence) that was needed in the life of servant or Christian. Please help me to trust in Christ alone.

NUANCE

On to a lighter subject, a nuance is described as: a shade of difference or delicate variation in the tone or meaning {such as in a word, phrase, or event}.

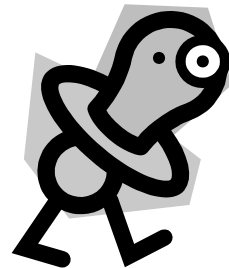


A nuance is not a piece of *breakthrough* or *flash* news – like something that the newspaper would print on the front page; rather, it is a small development or change that may get only an equal degree of attention. Still, the information is beneficial if just because it is new.

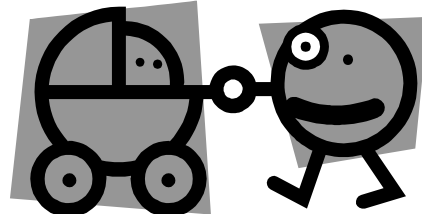
I suspect that such flash, headline news might possibly be simply a nuance if the truth were known – but this is just my opinion of course.

If a couple announces that they are going to have a baby, the announcement is likely big news; but information through that process as well as between major steps in the child's development, could be nuances. Recall in a previous letter entitled "Milestone", the development of a child was provided in graphical form. All the stuff that occurs in between these major milestones could be considered as nuances.

Two of you were pacifier kids; and one of you liked pacifiers like the Gerber NUK. We spent many hours searching for a pacifier or maintaining them for one of those moments. When you were without, we were in trouble! Searching high and low, in the house and in the car, the retrieval of your NUK would easily qualify as a nuance but could easily be elevated to a flash or something on scale of a crisis. As your desire for the NUK dissipated, so too did one concern on our part...which was probably a nuance.



Raising children has all kinds of nuances. I have spent much time thinking of those nuances from the routine stuff like bathing, eating and diaper changes to potty-training and walking. These early years of your life remain an indelible part of my memory for which we share without restraint or limitation by any decree, state or authority; as such, I will hold these memories in the capacity of my mind such that my heart may remain affectionately and always your father.



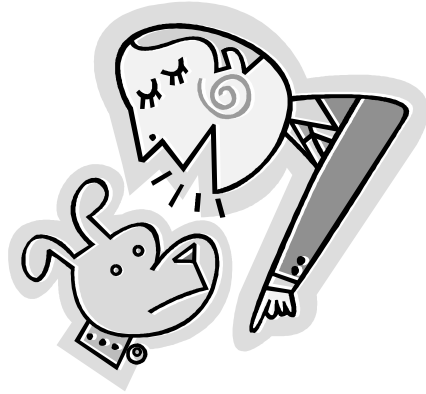
OBEDIENCE

Obedience is not only for the dog, but is for all of us – and the sooner we learn it, the better off we'll be.

Starting with a dog however, the opportunity to train is often limited to the puppy stage as the saying has it:

You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Every once-in-a-while, that saying may be proven wrong by both the dog and the owner of the dog. But dog or not, the opportunity to learn (to practice obedience) never stops though we defer or forgo the moment to obey, to learn, to change.



Obedience does not come easy to many, and may be difficult if not impossible for some; but obedience or the action to obey, is critical in to your development, your progress, and your overall position foremost in your service to God and secondary to your citizenry in this nation. As a child and young person, the practice or opportunity for obedience is first learned through your parents who should establish an understanding and discipline for obedience. Though at first such response may be driven by fear (through discipline), the ideal and desire should be that fear gives way to love, honor, and duty. In summary, we obey our parents because of the fifth commandment to “honor” them – a commandment that sets the stage for our ability to obey God and obey our government becomes more understood and acceptable.

To honor our parents, and in turn obey them, raises questions concerning the parent's intention and desire for the children: basically, the parent(s) must love the child and perform her duty on this basis; thus, the understanding and discipline are applied with the best intentions and interest of the child and include the combination of training by example (or action) and through word. The love exemplified by the mother becomes the central or core value in allowing the transition from fear to love, honor, and duty.

OBLIGATIONS

An obligation is an action(s) performed on the basis of a contract or promise; for example, the completion of homework as an assignment for a class or course would be an obligation to your course, teacher, school, education, etc.

Obligations are honored or maintained for a variety of reasons:

1. Fear of failure or what others may think {e.g. “I can’t let them down” or “if I don’t study for the test, I may fail”} – not meeting the obligation could result in failure, a loss of trust or the ability to *count on you*.
2. Love, commitment, or consideration for the needs of others – an argument might be that a commitment is not an obligation; a commitment is to entrust the action whereas an obligation is to enforce the action.
3. Legal or contractual requirements or conditions – failure to comply could result in financial penalties, both in present and future opportunities.

Obligations are effective in creating results or accomplishments; but generally have a negative consequence or penalty if the action is not completed satisfactorily. Commitments are effective as well, with results that sometimes *go beyond the call* of any preconception of what was expected or understood. In the *days of old*, one might say: “I’d be obliged if you would _____” – which means that they would be appreciative. Seemingly “obliged” would be the precursor of a potential obligation but it’s really an old way of asking a favor or action out of kindness and consideration.

In our relationships, and especially marriage, we can commit ourselves to others (and to the relationship) on the basis of love – which is the way marriage and some other relationships should be. On the other hand, we can be obligated to the other (and the relationship) for reasons other than love. Since love is the *most powerful force in the world*, a commitment is ideal for such relationships....with obligations left to business and other interests.

When Jesus died on the cross, he committed his spirit to the Father. When Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the church, they committed them to the Lord. When Paul said farewell to the Ephesians, he *committed them to God and to the word of grace*. Peter encourages those *who suffer according to God’s will* to commit themselves to their faithful Creator. Speaking to all of Israel, Samuel instructed them that if they were returning to God than to *rid themselves of any foreign Gods* and to commit to the Lord and serve him only.

Commitment or obligation – I prefer commitment!

OBSESSION

An obsession is described as a disturbing preoccupation with an ideal or feeling. Someone may say jokingly that they are obsessed with the thoughts of food – which means that they think about food all the time...even when their eating or the appetite is satisfied. But an obsession can be no laughing matter; indeed, an obsession can so preoccupy someone that they are consumed by it or they become a slave to it.

Alcoholism or drug addition has long been an illness of our society – and perhaps much of the world. In AA {Alcoholics Anonymous), the alcoholic and family are instructed on the matter that controlled and pleasurable drinking is an obsession; that is, the alcoholic will one day be able to control his drinking and thereby enjoy rather than be enslaved by alcohol. In this circumstance, the alcoholic lives an illusive dream that independently, or without help and intervention, he will be able to break the addiction and put the drink or drug at his mercy; yet, it is he who remains at mercy to feed and maintain his habit.

The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker

- Chapter 3, The Big Book of Alcoholics
Anonymous

Obsessions can be protracted to the category of a personality or mental disorder – for which your grandfather would no much being an RN in psychiatric medicine. But in laymen's terms, here are a few of my limited findings from Encarta:

- Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder is characterized by a preoccupation with details, orderliness, perfection, and control. People with this disorder often devote excessive amounts of time to work and productivity and fail to take time for leisure activities and friendships.
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is mental illness in which a person experiences recurrent, intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and feels compelled to perform certain behaviors (compulsions) again and again.

Aside from clinical and formal disorders, an obsession can occur in periods of one's life. For the young lady, concerned about her weight, an obsession can occur regarding food, diet, and exercise. She may find herself bingeing and purging her stomach in a vicious cycle of gorging and self-induced vomiting – a condition that may lead to eventual death. For a young man, the recurring and sometimes frequent thoughts of sensual matters and the opposite gender may seem like an obsession. An obsession is obviously different from a commitment or obligation; it is more than being focused to the task or matter. An obsession is a god that replaces the Lord with a counterfeit, an aberration, a vexing if not debilitating master.

OPTIMISM

On to a much more positive word, “optimism” is an inclination to expect the best possible outcome. Winston Churchill, former Prime Minister of England, described an optimist as one who *sees the opportunity in every difficulty*.

Given his relentless fight against the onslaught of the Nazi offensive, Winston Churchill should know.

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

- Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

Colon Powell, former US General and Secretary of State, described perpetual or continual optimism as a *force multiplier*; which, if I understand it correctly, the attitude of “best case scenario” can be significant to a military engagement.

Whether in combat or any other challenge, attitude seems to make a big difference – *a good or positive attitude goes a long way*...but is obviously not everything.

Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.

- Colin Powell, US general (1937 -)

Where does optimism come from; what is the source of optimism; is optimism and hope one in the same? Well, I am not sure about any of these questions but would still like to try...let's just say that I'm optimistic about my chances of saying something of interest and application.

Let's just say that the two are similar: hope and optimism deal with the future and presume that something positive or beneficial is going to occur. This sense of the future is not be without a basis or reason; in other words, optimism or hope cannot be arbitrary or whimsical – it must be founded on something!

I believe that the “something” is a belief or faith. To be hopeful or optimistic is to have faith in something or someone, or to believe in something or someone. If you believe that the Sun is going to rise tomorrow, you may be optimistic that the sky will be sunny and free of rain clouds. If you have faith that the one who created the Sun will supply your needs (including ultraviolet light), you have hope beyond tomorrow.

Digging a little deeper, the belief or faith must be further under girded by something else; after all, you don't believe something just because you read it, heard it, or even saw it. You may believe the Sun will rise tomorrow because it has risen every day of your presence on Earth; but to have faith that God will supply your needs requires trust. You actually trust that the Sun will rise tomorrow – but to whom do you place your trust in, who holds the Sun? From the book of Psalm: *For the Lord God is a Sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.*

OTHERS

What is meant by “others”? – it is a general description for anyone who, well, is not you. Others may be your family, your friends, your parents or grandparents, your children, your neighbors, your classmates and so on. You get the idea of who the “others” are; now, to elaborate on the question posed by Martin Luther King, *what are you doing for others?*

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?"

-- Martin Luther King, Jr.

In our inherent selfishness, the notion of helping others is limited best by:

- ✦ self-indulgence – responding to our own needs and desires
- ✦ self-reliance – taking care of ourselves and *looking out for #1*
- ✦ self-centeredness – the world revolves around me; *It's all about me*

Of course, more extensions of selfishness may exist, but the three listed above provides a good start of the inherent nature to not only serve ourselves but to desire, expect and even demand that others serve us as well. Such a human trait can become so predominate or obsessive that self-deity, where one thinks of themselves as god or a perfect being, is the outcome. Therefore, the developing and increasing attention to self may eventually lead to a disregard for other people, a disposition of grandeur and a strong sense of *being above it all*.

In a very evident way, children may exhibit the extensions of selfishness described above (while they may also exhibit opposing forms of unselfishness within virtually the same hour). For children, an insatiable appetite for attention and other wants is driven by an undeveloped understanding of the needs of others and their own relationship with others. Though a child may have access to countless toys, the one toy most desired at one moment is the one toy being held by another child. Children have not yet mastered the skills of discretion; hence, the acts of selfishness can be an *open book* to the even causal observer.

As the child matures and their perspective changes, these overt acts of selfishness should subside; yet, these extensions of selfishness remain at large throughout our lives and can languish and emerge in extreme and damaging ways. Paul said: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

Our opportunity to increasingly shift our attention away from ourselves and toward others comes with an understanding of who we are in Christ. Jesus told us *to not only love our neighbors, but to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us*. A high-calling to be sure, but with Jesus all things are possible – even denying ourselves, talking up the cross, and following him.

OVATION

The use of the word “Ovation” actually pertains to a brand of guitar as displayed in the picture to the right.



Years ago, I had the opportunity to purchase an Ovation and a very good price: working for the company that manufactured the guitar, I purchased an Ovation Legend direct from the factory in Connecticut. The event alone was exciting enough, but to possess and play the instrument was a real joy. Music, however simple and brief in my understanding and ability, has a way of elevating the soul.

I have an appreciation for music, however limited my understanding, and in particular like to hear the guitar – it is the one instrument that I can at least *play at* (as opposed to play). My primary interest is in the folk guitar, flat picking and Bluegrass and Folk music; but I also enjoy listening to a Classical guitar; electric guitars are ok but not nearly as interesting to me.

As I touch on the subject of music, let me add that my desire is that each of you gives some attention and interest to this area as well. I would be very pleased to hear you play and/or sing, and to watch you talents come alive through song and instrument. As you have opportunity through school or church, music will allow you to further your ability in the performing arts – it just for a few years but preferably for a lifetime.

My heart, which is so full to overflowing, has often been solaced and refreshed by music when sick and weary.

- Martin Luther, German religious reformer (1483 - 1546)

I think I should have no other mortal wants, if I could always have plenty of music. It seems to infuse strength into my limbs and ideas into my brain. Life seems to go on without effort, when I am filled with music.

- George Eliot, English novelist (1819 - 1880)

As *music calms the beast* or at mesmerizes the cobra, so it also brings satisfaction to many as both Martin Luther and George Eliot describe. Though the form or type of music may vary among music lovers, the common condition is that it is well received and even pursued for its entertaining and pacifying qualities. Some like to dance to music, others like to play and sing it, still others enjoy listening to it; but all of us must

live with it....so find your way.

OVERCOMING

What does it mean to overcome; is it better than failing, getting by, or surviving? To overcome opposition is certainly not failing; it is more than getting by or surviving; and is possibly more or at least different from winning. In 1 John, the question of “Who overcomes the world?” is answered as “he who believes that Jesus is the son of God”.

When I think of this word, the immediate thought is often of the 1960's and the black population's plight for racial equity. The familiar verse, “We'll shall overcome” comes to mind as the anthem or creed for this group who may have equated themselves in early time periods to the Hebrews in Egypt. At the core of this movement was one man's belief that love, not violence, would be essential to the effort to overcome oppression, segregation, and racism.

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for mankind to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Mankind must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

- Martin Luther King Jr., *December 11, 1964*

In the book of Revelation, the Church of Ephesus is instructed: “To him who overcomes, I (Jesus) will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God”. Other promises relating to overcoming also occur in this chapter and book:

- He who overcomes will not be hurt by a second death
- To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna
- To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations
- He who overcomes will be dressed in white
- He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of God
- To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne just as I {Jesus} overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne
- He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son

The last promise for those that the overcome, taken from chapter 21, continues by differentiating those who do not overcome: the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars.

To overcome is more than getting by, than getting through, than getting on, or than getting over; it is having faith in the one who has already defeated the evil of this world and has gone to prepare a place for us in eternity.

PACIFIC

At some point in your lifetime, you will probably visit the West coast; Northern California, Oregon, and Washington are the states that offer a coast line like that illustrated to the right. The abruptness at which beach becomes hills and cliffs is like nothing offered on the Atlantic coast; the Pacific coast appears to be more imposing, intimidating, and even breathtaking – it is majestic yet treacherous in appearance.



The Pacific coast is also much more expensive on balance: property in these regions can be among the highest in the country; but can also be the most geological unstable due to the Sierra-Nevada fault line and a history of earthquakes and mud slides. While visiting northern California in the late 1990's, I witnessed coastal properties eroding into the ocean; entire developments were at risk of collapsing or incurring structural damage. Again, the Pacific coast can be treacherous in appearance and in actuality!

In association to the cost of property, the Pacific coast is a very popular place to live: major municipalities like California ranked among the highest appreciated or desired places to live because of the climate as well as other typical preferences. When your grandparents were young, they lived in San Diego; although the relative cost-of-living was not as extreme as today and their purpose for being there pertained to the military. From their comments on the experience, the land was very fertile – virtually anything would grow with the simplest of care and preparation. Of course, the richness of the soil has been a key attribute with the citrus, grapes and related products synonymous with this region.

When I visited San Francisco, or more accurately Palo Alto, a weekend between business affairs allowed me to hike along the coast line. From the drive up steep, winding roads to the mammoth, Sequoia trees, the trip was unforgettable. At one point, my vista included Stanford University below and to the right, with the bluffs and beach to my left – the view offered an unusual combination of land formations that could probably not occur on the Atlantic costs...but I could be mistaken. Further north at Half-Moon Bay, I watched surfers tackle the tide girded with wet suits and such. Traveling further along the coastal highway offered much additional scenery although driving frequently got in the way. Finally in the heart of San Francisco, my afternoon was most complete and the sourdough bread most fulfilling.

PAINTING

Don't ask me why, but painting is something I enjoy a great deal; it's simple and relatively expensive to paint a room, but seems to make a significant difference if just for the moment. You may be thinking that this letter is about famous paintings or the art of painting; but since I lack much knowledge in that area, I'll stick to the simple roller and brush with an occasional addition of wall paper.



My first painting experience was actually painting our first home: a condominium with fresh white, contractor paint could not last long; thus, painting became one of the first *honey-do(s)* after marriage. Replacing the basic white with a light, modern gray gave the small rooms and corridor a needed degree of spaciousness and further accented furniture and other stuff. No, I am not an interior decorator or even skilled painter...just a guy who likes to talk-the-talk in a crowd who either doesn't care or doesn't know the difference.

Of course, one home was not enough; painting continued as a primary contribution to the series of dwellings in our track. Some of the "projects" were practical, others were more decorative, while others were somewhat undesirable if even tolerable. To complicate the project, wallpapering and other decorative ideas would occasionally *enter the mix*. One word of advice: never use a bathroom to do your first wallpapering project...it is designed for failure! Oh, and another thing, allow for shrinkage when you're lining up those seams; and make sure you get the paper fully wet...dry spots don't stick!



If you find yourself in need of a painter, a wallpaper-hanger, a general handy-man; please, give me call. If I can't help you, I'll certainly talk the language as though I know something or do a quality job. My approach is to consider that planning and preparing is half the fun, doing it is the other half; with regrets and consolations to follow on the appearance of completion however questionable or doubtful the outcome.

Thus, hand me a brush; prepare me a roller; stir the paint if necessary; and let's get to work!

PARTNER

A partner, buddy, friend or similar can be a good thing. In marriage, your spouse is often described as *your partner for life*. But partners may also occur in business of form or another. Essentially, partners must work together in a close relationship to ensure the vitality of the business, marriage or other basis for the endeavor.



In the movie, *Paint Your Wagon*, a gold-miner by the name of Ben forms a partnership for property (a claim) with another man referred to simply as “Partner”. The partner is laid-up for a period of the movie due to an accident involving a wagon: the wagon rolled down a hill out-of-control, killing his brother, and leaving Partner with a broken leg and other injuries. During his convalescence, Partner shares equally in the gold found at their claim – although he is unable to work or dig as Ben does. Partner, unsure of why he is given an equal share, expresses his own concern that he is basically not *earning his keep*. Ben explains that their partnership is the basis for the unearned portion and, that while he has done some pretty terrible things in his life, “he has never gulled (deceived) a partner”. Ben continues that, on the basis of this partnership, Partner will need to avail himself to solace Ben in his melancholy state that visits periodically. The two form a partnership, not on the promise of gold, but on the trust that each will be honest and fair to the other – that is a partnership!

Though as partners, Ben and Partner have their moments when one has greater needs or wants than the other, or one has a different opinion than the other; yet, through much turmoil and some indifference, the two depend on each through *thick-and-thin*, ups and downs, good times and bad. Though the partnership does not last, the two depart on good terms and mutual respect. Somehow, the marked differences between them are offset by the common quest for gold and the developed trust in one another.

A partner is a good thing; and a life-long partner is even better; yet, the two must be sensitive to the needs and opinions of the other and be willing to make compromises in view of the basis of the relationship. Where love is the basis, whether God and man, a husband and wife, or two friends; a partnership has a much greater chance of succeeding, of lasting or staying the course.

"The man who goes alone can start today; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready."

- Henry David Thoreau

PASSOVER

The Passover is a Jewish celebration of the passing of the Lord through Egypt, nearing the exodus of the Hebrews from bondage. One of a series of plagues, the Passover occurred as the finale to convince the Pharaoh to honor Moses request and to release the Hebrews from slavery.

As Exodus describes, the event began with the instruction to apply an unblemished, year-old male lamb's blood on the doorframes of their homes. When the Spirit passed through, any home with the blood would be passed-over; but any home without the blood would lose the first born child and livestock to death. To lose a child was a tragedy, but to lose a first born child was the end of one's legacy or the passing on of an inheritance. Among the plagues, the Passover was the most severe and decisive.



In Exodus, the Lord instructs that this is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord – a lasting ordinance. The celebration is known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread; other references to the feast and Passover occur throughout the Old and New Testament.

In the days prior to Jesus' crucifixion, on the first day of the celebrated Feast, The Last Supper takes place in the upper room. During this meal, as described in the Book of Mark, Jesus leads the Lord's Supper:

- ✞ the breaking and eating of the bread, as a symbol of his body given up for mankind
- ✞ the pouring and drinking of the wine, as a symbol of Jesus' blood shed for the remission or forgiveness of sins

God's commitment to the New Covenant was possible only through Christ's atoning death; as the blood of lambs had been sacrificed in the Old Testament as an atonement for sin, Jesus' blood was shed as the final atonement for all of man's sin for time eternal. From this event in the upper room, Jesus redefined the Passover meal. Whereas the meal had been a celebration of redemption to the Hebrews from the bondage of slavery, the New Covenant represents Christians' redemption from the bondage of sin, death.

PAYDIRT

Pay-dirt refers to striking of gold or some other precious metal in a mining venture; or in the case of the minor to the right, panning for gold in a river. In the movie, *Paint Your Wagon*, the miners of the then California territory are looking for that *mother-load*, big vein, or otherwise discovery of a major find.

When I was a kid, my family went panning for gold up in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee. I vaguely remember the event, much relying on pictures and stories; but, the event is still one to think about giving the topic of this letter. Of the few memories, the one that stands out is that one of us actually found some gold – if just a small amount contained in an amber-colored vile.



From Encarta, some reference to pay-dirt below.

In 1848 placer gold was plentiful. The miners could pick it up or scratch it out of ravines, dry streambeds, and gulches. By the end of the year, however, dry digging gave way to wet digging, or panning. Miners put gold-bearing dirt or gravel, which they called pay dirt, into a shallow washing pan. They then held it underwater for a few minutes. The current would wash away the dirt and gravel, leaving the heavier gold on the bottom of the pan.

By the end of 1849 there were so many miners that individual operations were replaced by larger ventures. Miners formed groups to dry up riverbeds by diverting the waters with dams. Even more rewarding was coyoteing. This method called for digging a shaft 6 to 13 m (20 to 40 ft) deep into the bedrock along the shore of a stream. Then tunnels were dug in all directions to get at the richest veins of pay dirt.

Having a pan and some patience were some of the basic requirements to pan for gold; that, and the method of circulating the pay-dirt until the water had sifted the dirt away from the gold.

Mining towns or communities would emerge and decline over the time in which gold could be found. A *strike* was the needed word to raise *gold fever* and send miners venturing to new grounds. Still today, we venture out to new opportunities to find that *pot-of-gold*...whatever the gold happens to be.

PEACE

What is peace? When I was young, in the 1970's, "peace" was often communicated by a hand sign like that shown below. This hand sign and the implied message pertained to an end to the Vietnam War; - although it may have



been borrowed from Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England during World War II, who used it to represent victory.

Peace is also associated with Christ – since he is the “prince of peace” and his arrival on earth was pronounced with “peace on Earth and good will to men”. Jesus said: “peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.”

But peace may also be a message of goodwill passed from one to another; expressed as “be at peace” or simply, “peace”. A similar phrase, “Go in

peace”, means to go with the understanding of that the relationship(s) are on good terms.

For you, I pray for peace in your hearts with the knowledge and understanding that you are loved by me, by family and mostly by God himself. Though we will always have trouble in this world, yet peace is still possible. How you might ask? Well, it cannot be found in the things (people, property, or places) of the world because these are not eternal or not perfect – these things can not and will not be the source of peace.

In the book of Philippians, Paul tells us to be anxious for nothing but in everything pray to our Lord – this will bring peace beyond our understanding because our hearts and minds will be guarded from the enticements and distractions of this world. Paul goes on to instruct us with the following passage.

Whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, or praiseworthy --- meditate on it. Do the things you are learning, receiving, hearing, and seeing in me.
YOU WILL HAVE PEACE

PERCEPTION

Perception has to do with awareness of something through the senses {such as through sight, hearing, etc.}. Perception may not be reality, or the truth, but is understood to be so because of feedback or response from our senses.

Perception is different from deception: to deceive or be deceived is to mislead with falsehoods, or to be mislead; perceive is to understand from the senses with or without the presence of deceit.

If you perceive something to be true, you have determined or believe it be true; in actuality or reality, it may not be true or in complete correspondence to your senses; in other words, your physical senses may not be giving you an accurate understanding or conclusion. Your ability to perceive accurately may depend on more than your physical senses; but, to perceive the truth of the Bible relies on more than physical senses – it relies on the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

When Jesus was questioned by Pilate before the crucifixion, Pilate responded with the question (whether sincere or not), “What is truth?” Jesus did not respond, according to the account in John, but did previously describe himself as *the way, the truth, and the light*. Jesus came *to testify to the truth*. What then is the truth? What appeared to be (the truth) in the understanding of many at that time was not indeed the truth. Jesus was the messiah of which prophesy occurred in the Old Testament; but few believed at that time for reasons described in both the Old and New Testament.

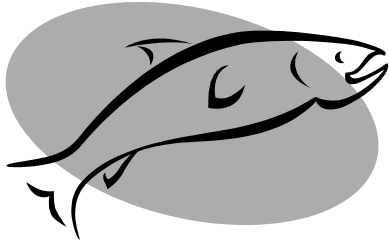
“You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them”

- Acts 28:26-27

Preceding this scripture in Acts, Luke tells us, “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers...” – by the spirit, we understand spiritual things, and the truth regarding he who is the truth and who came to testify to the truth.

More than the physical senses, our ability to perceive the truth depends on our heart: a calloused or *hard-heart* describes an unwillingness to consider the possibility that what was known or understood is not completely true. To question the possibility that our understanding is not accurate and, even worse, that others have mislead us, can sometimes be difficult if not impossible. Yet, we are strengthened and enabled to understand or perceive the truth when God, through the Spirit, indwells our hearts and softens us for such a time as this.

PERSEVERANCE



Perseverance can be described by the salmon swimming upstream; though not actually seeing this natural feat, my immediate thought of perseverance is associated with the fish as they find sanctuary to spawn or lay their eggs. For some species, such a difficult and challenging journey is their last because they die after spawning. What is true of the salmon

and any other fish that must brave the tide or the turbulent to survive, is a natural or innate desire to succeed or to survive.

According to Samuel Johnson, English writer in the 18th century, great works depend on perseverance over strength. It is not the sheer strength or might that is the key to such accomplishments; but rather, the ability to keep trying with the sheer determination and fortitude.

"Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance."

-- Samuel Johnson

Perseverance is a core value of the early church of Acts and continues to ring true among many Christians today living in adverse conditions such as oppressive governments. In *the parable of the Sower*, Luke describes Jesus' words in concluding as follows:

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by perseverance produce a good crop.
- Luke 18:15

A noble and good heart, as opposed to *hard-heart* as described in the last letter, is a condition of the one who hears the word and does the word. To be a doer however, the one must be able to retain it (hide it in your

heart), and persevere through the figurative rain, sun, and other elements (challenges) along the path to maturity. On this path, however difficult, an abundance of fruit or yield awaits those who are able to persevere.

James tells us that *blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

To blend the comments of Samuel Johnson with those of James, the essence of perseverance is our faith in the Jesus as our only source of salvation.

PESSIMISM

Pessimism means to expect the worse possible outcome. If several possibilities or outcomes could occur in an event, the worst possible outcome would be prediction of the pessimist.

In the cartoon “Flintstones”, a character by the name of “Bad-Luck, Slip-Rock” was always associated with the worst outcome; whenever he showed-up, a figurative black cloud loomed over the group. All this is recalled from many years ago, so my memory may not be completely accurate; but his very approach would lead into a chorus of “Oh No, It’s Bad-Luck, Slip-Rock” by the new teen-generation of the “Flintstones”. Though he may not have been a pessimist, his arrival meant some calamity and thus, pessimism in advance.

All cartoons aside, pessimism can be a disease of its own that can strike an individual, a group, or much larger populous. Turning to our peace-loving source again, Sir Winston Churchill describes the symptoms as finding *difficulty in every opportunity* as opposed to *opportunity in every difficulty*.

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

- Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

Given the source and his critical role during *England’s finest hour*, Sir Winston Churchill should have known the differences between a pessimist and an optimist; he should have recognized that England would have to remain hopeful and vigilant in the continued struggle against the Nazi aggression. The view of each English citizen and, in turn, the collective view of the nation was central to the outcome of the Battle of Britain and strategy for the Allied forces in staging military resources. Evidently, optimism prevailed over pessimism.

Presently, I am reading a book called The Book on Leadership, by John Macarthur. Among the attributes of a good leader is **optimism** and **enthusiasm**. The central story of the book is Paul in route from the city of Caesarea to Rome. Though a prisoner aboard a ship, Paul becomes a leader through appointment from God; during the voyage, Paul is told by an angel that a severe storm awaits the ship, and that the remainder of the voyage should be delayed; though the ship continues the perilous voyage, Paul reassures them that they will survive the journey.

Even the seasoned sailors had much to fear as the storms lasted two weeks, and the ship was bound together by ropes to keep it intact; yet, Paul remained faithful to God’s word and projected assurance, optimism and enthusiasm. He imbued a sense of hope and power into the crew that gave them the desire to press on, to not give up, and to never stop trying.

PHONES

To my right is something that is seldom seen today – a telephone booth. In older movies and pictures, a telephone booth may appear as a common street corner fixture; why even Superman changed clothes in a phone booth. With the mass use of cell phones, however, actual phone booths became virtually nonexistent.



One can never underestimate the value of a booth:

- ☎ On a rainy day, a booth would keep you dry
- ☎ You could go for the world record of cramming as many people as possible into it
- ☎ Than of course, you could actually make a local call with all the comfort and quietness of the booth

Beyond booths lies the realm of cell phones; oh, what did we do before cell phones? The handheld devices have become a regular convenience and even attachment to both business and casual users. Using the phone is not generally a single task; no, the real professionals can switch between calls while



driving the car and doing one or more other tasks as well. Simply using the phone would be boring aside from the party on the other end; instead, we must juggle the one with the other...and sometimes many others.

This letter could become very gender-oriented in terms of phone usage, but I probably shouldn't go there; no, my comments will be carefully chosen, unbiased – but I find that men in general do not have the same skill and talent for conversation. What's more, men do not have world class capabilities to manage phones whether wired or wireless. Maybe Jimmy Buffet was alluding to this condition in the title song, "If the Phone..." as men have an aversion to the phone and may be inclined to communicate...well, by other means.

If the Phone Doesn't Ring, It's Me

- Jimmy Buffett, Song Title

Before hanging-up this letter, let me close by saying that the few phone calls between us have been a delight; if more conversation were possible, I would forget that I am a man and would opt each ear to the receiver for the full duration of my calling card...and then some! Though I am reluctant to do so, let me give my phone right now: 256.782.0204. And use my calling card number with instructions: call 1.888.508.557; dial "1"; enter Pin Number 4033081830, and enter my number 2567820204. I'm waiting for your call but if the phone doesn't ring, I'll know your still my children.

PLAYGROUNDS

I like this illustration for three reasons:

1. The boy reminds me so much of Ben
2. Playgrounds are a lot of fun for children and parents alike – the children play and the parent can usually relax with minimal demands
3. The playground is a simple way to pass the time; we use to spend time at such places with a lunch or snack to eat – simple and easy

To go back in time is to track the many playgrounds that we visited or frequented on those summer mornings or weekend afternoons.

In Lawrenceville, Georgia:

- ① Cedar Hill Elementary School
- ② Stone Mountain
- ③ The park by the lake in old downtown Lawrenceville – this is where I took the last pictures I have of you
- ④ Our Subdivision and our backyard at 2272 Birchmore Cove

In Jacksonville, Florida:

- ① Kings Trail Elementary School & YMCA
- ② University of North Florida nature trail
- ③ Ponte Vedra State Park and Beach
- ④ Saint Augustine – the Carousel, the Fort, and the Chapel
- ⑤ The Old Plantation – that head the old tabby quarters and house/museum
- ⑥ River Front – Downtown Jacksonville near the Children's Museum
- ⑦ San Marco – near the Saint Johns River and the Square
- ⑧ Down the street from our house at 8446 Glade Lane
- ⑨ Christ's Church

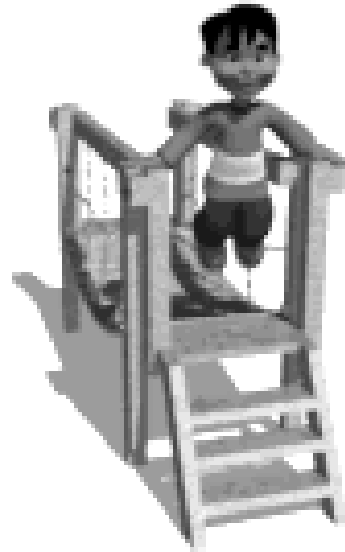
In Savannah, Georgia:

- ① Fort Pulaski
- ② Fort McAllister
- ③ Ardsley Park
- ④ Forsyth Park

In Anniston, Alabama:

- ① Museum of Natural History
- ② Berman Museum
- ③ Woodland Park – the pond and softball park near my parent's house
- ④ Liver River Canyon
- ⑤ Fort McClellan
- ⑥ Weaver Cave Road
- ⑦ Ladiga Trail

And we'll do it again; yes, we will play again on yet another playground.



PLEAD

To the right is thorn bush (maybe a rose bush), and the hands of a likely gardener who is pruning the bush. As you may know, a plant or tree may be pruned as a method of increasing its produce or fruit; cutting-back the stems or limbs usually enables the tree to increase its bloom or fruit production.



The notion that cutting actually brings increased health should not be too foreign to you – since you must know of medical surgery that is intended to bring healing through cutting as one step in the process. As the adage is somehow worded, *sometimes pain (in the form of surgery) must be incurred to effect healing.*

When Wesley was very young, he has his adenoids removed: which is a form of surgery that removes swollen tissue from the throat to improve breathing and swallowing. In order to improve Wesley's health, surgery and removal had to occur.

To associate this concept with the word “plead” is to describe the life of Paul and, in particular, this problem that he described as *a thorn in his flesh, a messenger from Satan*. In 2 Corinthians, Paul says: “Three times, I pleaded with the Lord to take it {the thorn in the flesh} away”. But in that the Lord did not take it away, God's response did not deter or decrease Paul's faith; indeed, it increased his faith by increasing dependence on God. God or Jesus' response was: *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness*. Paul realized that God's grace in his life (on the Damascus Road and beyond) was sufficient; thus, he could delight in his own weaknesses or embrace the suffering caused by *the thorn in the flesh* as well as other sources of suffering for Christ's sake. Basically, his faith was not contingent on God's removal of the thorn or any other suffering; but his faith was based solely on God's grace through Jesus Christ.

In our lives, trouble and difficulty will likely draw us to God – when our own methods fail to render a sufficient response, we may turn desperately to God. Though his response may not be to our satisfaction at the time, God still listens to his children and answers their pleas according to his desire and will. Through these times or trials, he is pruning us like the gardener prunes the plant – such that we can be stronger, healthier, more fruitful and stronger in faith. Though we have weaknesses in our lives, yet through the realization that grace is sufficient, do we find the freedom to say, “not my will, but your will be done”.

PONIES

The pony, mule or donkey to my right reminds me of the character in the Shrek- the donkey that seems to do more than test its welcome...it give perseverance a bad name when it comes to making itself at home in the ogre's swamp.

Near my house, a pasture of mules reminds me often of you and in particular Abby who is our certified horse expert. What she doesn't know about these creatures is probably little, but what she desires is to know everything about them and to one day have a job working with them in some capacity.

In the second of the Shrek series, this donkey is transformed into a fine steed: a white thoroughbred with dazzling lines, blazing speed, and an ego or temperament to match. As you have probably seen this movie more than once, the story does not have to be explained in detail. In case you may not know however, the donkey is still a donkey though dressed like a white stallion. Like Cinderella, however, he ends-up returning to his true self in physique though with much disappointment.

For most of us who have watched this donkey in action, there is both an attraction and a "bit-of-irritation" as Shrek might put it. The donkey is cute, with all his gregariousness and cheer; but leaves little room for anyone else's desires however strongly communicated. He has the gift-of-gab, is quick-witted when it comes to his needs and desires, and is persistent and even stubborn as his true nature purports. Yet we love him – because he just wants to be loved and accepted with all his wit, his gab, and his stubbornness.



Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character, can make any stand against good wit.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

PORN

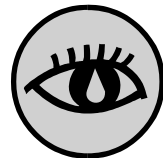
This letter is among a few that addresses a very sensitive but necessary subject: attention to sex and the relationships that begin to develop through the teen years is of vital importance and should and be directed from the home by your parents or guardian. Yes, education does include some curriculum in this matter – but only because we, as parents and guardians, have not filled this responsibility and obligation to the children. In the adolescent years, young people are developing physically but are generally undeveloped emotionally for the intimacy of a relationship.



To play at this intimacy is to threaten the senses that sex is a pastime or causal affair – rather than intimate and blessed as it is intended marriage. In the dating game of adolescence, young people may subconsciously lose their sense of the value and integrity of marriage through a few or cycle of relationships – especially when sex (to include foreplay) is involved – and I say this with some knowledge and experience on the matter.

To further threaten the covenant of marriage, the media is responsible for publishing and broadcasting information aimed at appealing to the natural drive for sex; and exploiting both those employed in the business as well as those who consume, view, or read the information. Described as **Pornography**, the information targets the audience (usually boys and men) with Internet, television, magazine and other media. Though such tactics of enticement have long been in existence, never before has the information been as easily accessible as through the Internet. Without parental or adult authority or supervision, young people can indiscreetly view and become addicted to such images. Through continued ingestion of such information, the young person's view of sex and the opposite sex becomes very distorted and malformed – which leads to the bondage to Porn and many negative consequences in any possible relationship toward and in marriage.

Proverbs warns the man to be cautious of these tactics and to realize the seriousness of both viewing and becoming consumed by the information: Do not lust in your heart after her beauty
Or let her captivate you with her eyes;
For the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread
And the adulteress preys upon your very life.



To reduce you to a "loaf of bread" is to leave you without a mind, heart, or soul. Be careful my children and young people, and do not stray from teachings, the practices, and the lifestyle that bring health, purity, and eternity.

PRAISE

Praise comes in many forms ranging from the simple recognition of one's accomplishments or successes to the exaltation and glorification of one who is worthy to be called king or master. When a developing child does a good deed or behaves, the parent should be quick to praise his conduct or behavior as a positive reinforcement. When a team or group accomplishes their goals and objectives at or above the expectation, they should be praised for hard work, determination, and the other attributes leading to success. But when a king or master, who holds such power and position, is all loving and forgiving among many other attributes of goodness, praise and worship should be unparallel and unchallenged. Praise God from whom all blessing flow...

Praise of even the smallest is this range has much value to a relationship. A word of encouragement such as:

- 👍 "Good Job"
- 👍 "Way-to-go"
- 👍 "Keep-up the good work"
- 👍 "That's what I'm talking about..."

Such simple comments do wonders for motivating and empowering others to succeed; and sets an example for them to follow in their own opportunity to praise others.

Most of us, swimming against the tides of trouble the world know nothing about, need only a bit of praise or encouragement - and we will make the goal.

- Jerome P. Fleishman

Positive reinforcements or rewards must be included in the balance of instructing and leading. A relationship of strictly negative reinforcements or penalties is one that is probably a dictatorship or autocracy where those in subjection are motivated by fear and oppression. Such methods will become diluted over time as those in subjection grow weary and hopeless; and, consequently, become less responsive to or motivated by penalties, fear, etc.

For young people, the ability to praise others and ultimately God is to some degree determined by the praise received by parents and others. Without receiving praise, but perhaps instructed through many negatives, the young person learns that duty and obedience are performed out of fear rather than a positive reason such as love and devotion. At the same time, these young people are less accepting of praise and recognition because they do not think they are worthy or have earned it – praise is foreign to them.

Our praise for God is necessary – his love and devotion to us, who have sinned against him, is reason to worship and praise him. Our desire for his praise toward us ("Well done good and faithful servant") should be valued and desired more than any other source of praise.

PRAYER

Prayer is talking to God and listening to God. Jesus taught us how to pray when he presented The Lord's Prayer in the Book of Matthew. Jesus established a model for us pray as *he went off to a solitary place where he prayed.*



Prayer with fasting occurred in both Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament, in Exodus and Leviticus, entering the presence of God occurred in *The Most Holy Place* or the room that in which God appeared; but also occurred for Moses in other appointed areas. In the New Testament, prayer enables all whom have accepted Christ to enter God's presence – it is Jesus who makes us pure or clean of sin. From 1 Timothy, Paul writes:

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time...I want all men to everywhere to lift up Holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing
- 1 Timothy 2:5-8, Paul's Instructions to Timothy

Because of what Christ did on the cross, everyone who receives him as Lord can pray directly to God, can be in the presence of God, and can delight in God forever. In Christ, a man is justified or made righteous by his faith alone. Paul tells us in Romans that our faith, which is grown in the reading and accepting of God's word, is the testimony of our relationship with God.

Though we sin when *our flesh becomes weak*, yet we can be forgiven as we confess sins and receive forgiveness; moreover, Christ will provide sufficiency to overcome temptation through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In our weakness (in the flesh), we are made strong in the Spirit by faith that comes through reading the Bible and by praying to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For in the Gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith"
- Romans 1:17

Finally my children, if you are in trouble, than pray as James instructs us. Prayer with Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication – which means with love, honesty, thankfulness, and to ask or plead in humbleness and earnestness in the example of Christ who said "Not my will, but your will be done".

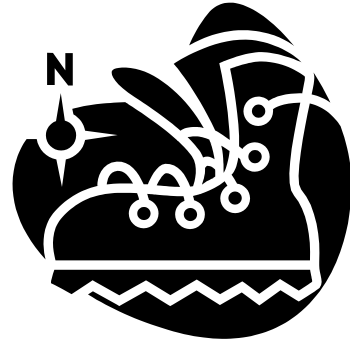
No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
- 1 Corinthians 10: 13

PREPARE

Be prepared! – is the motto of the Boy Scouts. What does it mean to “be prepared”?

Well, if you’re a scout, being prepared probably has to do with making preparation for all possibilities or conditions that are foreseeable in an event, whether a summer camp or hike or other excursion.

To be prepared, one must consider the risks involved in the event, and provide measures or means to counter or mitigate those risks. In a simple example, if the day includes the possibility of rain, the scout must include a poncho and other provisions to ensure that their feet remain dry. An extra pair socks and shoes, water-resistant footwear and other provisions may be necessary to accommodate the weather and reduce the possibility of blisters and other problems with their feet.



The example of scouting and hiking can apply to so many areas:



- ✌ For school, being prepared means to study for tests, to do your homework, and to be punctual and focused in class
- ✌ For a job {whether at home or for someone else}, to understand what needs to be accomplished, what the others {employer, customer, etc.} are expecting in terms of a complete and satisfactory outcome and future.
- ✌ For relationships {both in family and elsewhere}, to understand your position {e.g. friend, child, etc.}, responsibility and level of commitment to the relationship and to each other – why is the relationship important?

In the effort to be prepared, conditions always exist that cannot be planned or predicted – these conditions may be beyond your ability, knowledge, and so forth. There are controllable risks and uncontrollable risks. A relationship depends on two or more people, thus both or all must contribute or participate to make the relationship work – you can control yourself but you cannot control the other person or people. You may have heard or even sang the words, “God is in control” – which means that he is in supreme authority and power. Though God gives man a *freewill* to make his own decisions (to include worshiping God), we trust in faith that God is indeed in control. *Though a man makes many plans, it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.*

PRESSURE

Pressure usually associated with a force exerted over an area: for example, air pressure is measured as pounds per square inch (PSI) using an air gage; atmospheric pressure is measured as millimeters (MM) of mercury using a barometer; and blood pressure is measured as described in the excerpt below from

Pressure is measured in millimeters (mm) of mercury by an instrument called a sphygmomanometer, consisting of an inflatable rubber cuff connected to a pressure-detecting device with a dial. The cuff is wrapped around the upper arm and inflated by squeezing a rubber bulb connected to it by a tube. Meanwhile, the health professional making the examination listens to a stethoscope applied to an artery in the lower arm. As the cuff expands, it gradually compresses the artery. The point at which the cuff stops the circulation and at which no pulsations can be heard is read as the systolic pressure. As the cuff is slowly deflated, a spurting sound can be heard when the heart contraction forces blood through the compressed artery. The cuff is then allowed gradually to deflate further until the blood is flowing smoothly again and no further spurting sound is heard. A reading at this point shows the diastolic pressure that occurs during relaxation of the heart. In healthy persons, blood pressure increases from about 80/45 in infants, to about 120/80 at age 30, to about 140/85 at age 40 and over. This increase occurs when the arteries lose the elasticity that, in younger people, absorbs the force of heart contractions.



Encarta.

Blood pressure is very important to your health and thus is measured with routine visits to the doctor or clinic. Of particular concern, hypertension causes a restriction of blood flow; thus increased blood pressure. If left

untreated, this illness can lead ultimately to death by heart attack – the restricted flow causes the heart to work harder.

Pressure can be defined in other ways where pressure, tension, and stress are used interchangeable or in association. A job or profession that involves a lot of “pressure” or stress and ironically contribute to high blood pressure and heart problems; conversely, a person with a weak or damaged heart may have to avoid high-pressure or tension.

Atmospheric-pressure variations can also affect our temperament or general disposition. For those who suffer from hypertension, blood pressure variations can also affect the senses and behavior. Variations in air pressure, such as in the cabin of an aircraft cause momentary loss of hearing. Changes in the water pressure, when you submerge into the deeper water also place pressure on your ear drums. Pressure is a natural, necessary condition for life; but must be measured and controlled to keep things balanced and running best.

PRIDE

One definition of pride is unwarranted self-esteem or the belief that self is more important or more esteemed than God. But sometimes pride has a positive meaning such as when we use the saying, ‘take pride in yourself’ or “be proud of your accomplishments”. There maybe a variety of meanings and connotations associated with the word or condition of pride; but the definition as described above, as well as a discussion, is based on Biblical references.



Pride may have first appeared in Genesis with the construction of the tower of Babel. Nimrod, a descendent of Noah, leads the Babylonians in the construction of tower as “a gateway to heaven”. Much is described in details of this project but, in short, the tower represented man’s attempt to share in or even overrule God’s glory. It was an attempt for the created, man, to *make a name for himself* although possibly erecting this monument in the name of or for glory of God.

As a historical note, this city is the same city so profiled in the current news - yes, the city of Babylon in Iraq! But at that time, the city and the tower were reflections of the Nimrod who was described as a warrior or conqueror. His accomplishments were the basis for his defiance of God and foolish thinking that he did not need God as Lord. This same position continued with Nebuchadnezzar, who considered his god(s) – a consequence of the capture of Judah and the captivity of the Hebrews like Daniel.

As believers, we have the benefit of reading and applying the Bible – of *hiding God’s word in our hearts*. The stories of pride should remind us that, although a godless position last for a season, it cannot withstand the judgment, sovereign power and plan of God.

Consider that the tower was never completed but that God riddled the project by replacing the common language of the citizens with different languages. Without adequate communication, the project could not be completed or was not successful. Secondly, that Nebuchadnezzar lost his kingship in a single evening and, from the loss and his mental illness was brought to understanding and belief that God is supreme.

Instead of building a *gateway to heaven*, the Babylonians should have looked to heaven as eventually Nebuchadnezzar. From this view, we understand a foundation of our belief of God, his mercy, his grace, his blessings and his Lordship toward us, his children.

PRIVILEGES

“With privilege comes responsibility”, is a saying that I often use around my step-children. The saying means that privileges, such as using the kitchen between meals, require clean-up as well. If you use the kitchen and don’t clean-up afterward, you may lose your privilege.

To be given a privilege is to be given favor to do something that you want to do – whether you’ve earned it or you’re gracefully given it. When you turn the age of 16, driving privileges are given once a license is acquired. When you turn the age of 18, voting privileges are invoked once you register. When you turn 65 (an unimaginable age at this time of your life), senior citizen privileges are granted to include Social Security and other benefits.

Privileges can be granted and be taken away depending on the decision of those who allow or grant privileges and the recipient’s response, responsibility, treatment or behavior. If the recipient abuses the privilege, he may lose it if just for a temporary period. If you drive recklessly and acquire several tickets, you may have your license suspended or revoked; in addition, you may have to appear in courts, pay fines, and attend driver’s school.

Privilege is different from an entitlement. An entitlement is something you have earned or in some way expect based on circumstances. Sometimes entitlements and privileges are misunderstood or confused with each other. Consider the young person who believes that borrowing the car, or even having one purchased for him, is an entitlement when he turns 16 or acquires his driver’s license; thus, at 16, he expect a car or some form of *wheels and road-time*. In his confusion, driving or borrowing the car is not a privilege but rather an entitlement; driving does not result from responsibility and conditions but is instead a right simply because he has a license and desire to go somewhere.

It is the province of knowledge to speak
and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.
- Oliver Wendell Holmes

A privilege should be under girded with trust, respect, and appreciation; but more than likely, a privilege is never fully appreciated, or the source fully respected, until the privilege is in jeopardy or has been lost for some reason. To lose appreciation and respect is to take both the privilege and the source for granted; that is, to assume the once-privilege is now an entitlement.

Freedom, though a relative term, is a privilege. Other privileges are as follows:

- Education – yes, even going to school you can believe it
- Parents – having parents, grandparents and other relatives who love you and enjoy spending time with you
- Health – good health is under rated...until your seriously ill or diseased
- Salvation – nothing else or no one else even comes close to this one

PROBLEMS

“Houston, we have a problem” – was the famous line from Apollo 13. Problems come in many sizes and degrees from the simple to the impossible; the simple solved without much effort, and the impossible...well, unsolvable! Problems have synonyms and similar titles such as “issues”, “conflict”, “crisis”, and “catastrophes” – all of which raise levels of concern and attention.

Henry Kaiser defines a problem as an opportunity in work clothes – which would suggest that problems should be welcomed and even desired for the purpose of challenging rather than frightening or bemoaning the effort.

Problems are only opportunities in work clothes
- Henry J. Kaiser

Used frequently by one of my former work mates, the quote below is so very true – there are no simply solutions to human problems because humans are complex!

For every human problem, there is a neat, simple solution; and it is always wrong

- H. L. Mencken, Mencken's Metalaw, US editor (1880 - 1956)

Please bear this quote in mind as you explore and develop relationships. Sometimes people will confuse, perplex and befuddle you with their behavior, habits, opinions and lifestyle; but that doesn't you completely right and them completely wrong... it only means that you are confused and different.

Problems begin in the earliest days of our lives and continue to the day we die. Our first problems may not be recognized or identified as problems but instead as obstacles, hindrances, or things in our way. Problems arrive in our school work – for which understanding of rules, procedures and practice render a solution...most of the time. Emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, and social problems arise in our lives though identification and resolution will depend on maturity, understanding, and host of other aspects of character and strength. Problems will invariably find us in one form or another – the questions and uncertainty is with our response, our willingness to embrace the problem rather than run from it.

Understand that some apparent solutions may be popular or even well accepted among your circle or social realm; yet the solutions may be very poor, insufficient, and lacking. I urge you to take problems to prayer if just to *bounce the problem* off of the one who is the source of wisdom; and wait patiently for direction and understanding such that the solution will be real, accepted and complete in terms of God's Lordship. Solving problems enables us to get better at solving other problems. Success or failure, the experience can be a wealth of information for character building, faith building and wisdom.

PROTECTION

Protection is one of the matters that I pray over you on a frequent basis: protection from physical, emotional and other harm is often laid on my heart for you and for other children in my life. Though I should not worry or be anxious about these matters, my responsibility should include prayer for these *little ones* that are vulnerable to the ugliness and cruelty that exist among us, between us and within us.

Laws are designed to protect the innocent by prosecuting the accused and convicting the guilty. This process, called justice, is based on the identification or revelation of the truth – if the truth is not found, than justice is not served and the protection is not adequately executed under the law. Laws are important and necessary; yet if not enforced by justice, will lose the intent and purpose.

In the state of nature...all men are born equal, but they cannot continue in this equality. Society makes them lose it, and they recover it only by the protection of the law.

- [Charles de Montesquieu](#), *French lawyer & philosopher (1689 - 1755)*

As with problems, protection comes in many forms:

- The President and other state officials require protection or security in the public arena
- Witnesses of a crime or act receive protection against others who may want to hurt them as a result of their testimony {i.e., witness protection program}
- Endangered species of animals receive protection under federal law
- Property, land, and other environments receive protection under federal and state law

From Psalm, David prayed that integrity, uprightness and truth and the Lord protect him. Jesus prayed that believers would be protected from the evil one. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “But the Lord is faithful, and he will protect and strengthen you from the evil one.”

As I close this letter, my unknowing of anything about you in the present state does not stop me from praying; indeed, my faith in God’s protection is all that I have to be convinced that you are ok, safe and protected.

PURITANS

Puritans were among the first colonists in America; indeed, the European founders of New England were identified generally as Puritans due to the origin of their worship and lifestyle. As described below, Puritans represented the growth of Protestant Reformation in Europe and the desire to practice their religious beliefs removed from government control or restrictions.

Thus, the Separatists in the 16th century, the Quakers (see Friends, Society of) in the 17th century, and Nonconformists after the Restoration may be called Puritans, although they were no longer part of the established church. The founders of New England, for whom immigration to America constituted withdrawal from the mother church, are also commonly called Puritans.

Puritans included Separatists and Quakers as described below; these Europeans and their practices had great influence in the culture, politics and other aspects of the developing colonies.

Puritanism, movement arising within the Church of England in the latter part of the 16th century that sought to purify, or reform, that church and establish a middle course between Roman Catholicism and the ideas of the Protestant reformers (see Church of England). It had a continuous life within the church until the Stuart Restoration (1660). Puritanism reached North America with the English settlers who founded Plymouth Colony in 1620. It remained the dominant religious force in New England throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.

Furthermore, these beliefs regarding Christ, the Bible and worship were woven deep into the fabric of the American nation of the United States. The essence of Democracy, or a nation *led by the people and for the people*, was one of the primary tenants of our government. In terms of personal responsibility toward their fellow man, the Puritans exercised great devotion and piety in the worship and practice of Christianity – a condition that could be argued as the very foundation of democracy or a free society.

In America, Puritan moralism and its sense of an elect people in covenant with God deeply affected the national character. The Puritan belief that communities were formed by covenants produced America's first democratic institution, the town meeting. At the town meeting every church member had the right to speak, and decisions were made by majority rule. The Puritan emphasis on simplicity of worship, its asceticism (austerity and self-denial), and its Sabbatarianism remained influential into the 20th century. The Puritan devotion to popular education, high standards of morality, and many, if not all, democratic principles had an important effect on American life.

The Puritans and Reformation offers a lot of value for our own consideration, understanding and practice. Though the role, influence and participation in the young nation may not be as appreciated in some circles, Puritanism played an integral role in forming the privileges of generation upon generation

PURITY

Well, we have learned more about the Puritans, but what about “purity”? Of course, you don’t have to be a Puritan to have purity; after all, many things can be pure.

Advertising something as pure can be a real feature: bottled water is sometimes identified as pure; some ice cream products are made from pure cream or milk; while a host of other products are marketed as being pure in whatever constitutes purity.

Aside from these products, the application of purity in the letter is aimed at ourselves, our hearts, or minds, and our spirits. For these aspects of ourselves, purity does not mean that we are totally pure, clean, or without flaw; rather, purity is a desire or expectation that we pursue through our relationship with Christ. In the Book of James, the religion or practice of our faith is described as *pure and faultless* when, in part, we keep ourselves from *being polluted by the world*. Although we live in the world, we do have to be *of the world* or behave as the world {or the secular society} behaves. Christians are actually sojourners or are passing through the world toward eternity; thus, the focus, attention and pursuit should be toward living for and like Christ and the things that are eternal.

In the instructions to the church in the Book of Titus, young women are called to be self-controlled and pure...among other qualities. In Philippians, Paul encourages the church with the following passage: “Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure.”
- Titus 1:15

In 2 Corinthians, Paul address the church on the matter of false apostles by description that he desired to present them as *a pure virgin* – as one who accepted the true Jesus, the true Spirit and the true Gospel; but, in actuality, they were not pure, but has accepted false teaching from false apostles. Understanding, discerning and accepting the truth has much to do with the quest for purity.

Truth is necessary for purity; and the truth is found in the one who is absolutely pure, Jesus Christ.

PURPOSE

By purpose, we mean your mission, your reason for living, or why and for what reason did God make you.

In the last year, I read and studied a book entitled, The Purpose Driven Life, by Rick Warren. In the bestseller, he outlines a 40-day or series study plan to learn the scripture-based purpose for your life – to put you *on the road* of understanding the basic question: “What on Earth am I here for?” The book, that includes a video and other materials, really invokes the reader {Christian or not} to understand that God is real, God made you and knew you before you were born, and God has plan for your life to include a relationship through his son, Jesus Christ.

As you get older and mature, the deep thoughts of life will surface from time to time. Among the questions that may be pondered is the overall question of your purpose and place in this world:

- Who are you?
- Why were you born?
- What are you to do with your life?
- Where will you go?
- How will you get there?

Yes, many questions abound though the answers are not always found immediately and are not always understood with clarity.

To understand our purpose, we must first believe that God is God and that his son is the son – acts of faith that come through prayer and reading the Bible. *Faith comes through hearing and hearing through the word of God*; but sometimes our hearing is impaired {not literally but figuratively} by our own will, our own desires, our own choices and decisions.

God is love and is good, but he also disciplines those he loves in order that they will hear and understand, will see and perceive, and will give up their own faulty will for that of God’s perfect will. Like a tree that requires pruning to increase its yield, we are *cut-back* in order that we grow in greater abundance and fruitfulness in Christ’s likeness. It is this pathway that leads toward, and indeed is God’s purpose for us – to become like his son through the consistent dying of our flesh and growing in his spirit. John the Baptist said it in simple terms, “he must increase as I decrease.” This passage is a response to the growing awareness of Jesus in the land over John (his ministry); yet it represents what should be our general position for finding and accomplishing our purpose.

QUESTIONS



Questions are generally a good thing – they enable you to learn, to find-out, to know, and to build your knowledge base. Without questions, what would we do with answers?

The fundamental, introductory, and open-ended question is: “How are you doing?” The origin of this question may have been the large cities in the northeast where the guys & gals would ask in the vernacular, “How ya’ do’en?”; but in a generation ago, the more formal expression may have been, “How do you do?” Both questions are basically the same – and opening statement of introduction rather than a question for extended response.

Sometimes questions are not well received – especially when order or instruction is being given and the recipient {e.g. child} is asking too many questions ostensibly to forestall a response and possibly to avoid following instruction. Such an episode draws a variety of reaction from the instructor {e.g. parent or guardian} who may find the questions charming and entertaining, to a point, but frustrating if the questions linger or if the questions turn to an argument or disagreement. In short, parents’ instructions should be taken as orders with the response limited in questions are replete with action and reliability.

The important thing is not to stop questioning.

- Albert Einstein

Questions are found in a host of different forums and dialogue. Issues, whether between two or many people, must include questions - with answers of some kind - to address and potentially resolve the issue. Of course, learning must include questions; otherwise, how would we learn?

In the words of Albert Einstein, never stop questioning the matters of doubt, uncertainty and ignorance – we don’t everything but, as a child in a sense, must continue to ask, seek and find the answers to the questions on a continuing quest of learning. Asking a questions is not a demand for an answer, but is an entreaty for learning.

You know that children are growing up when they start asking questions that have answers.

- John J. Plomp

RAGE

You may remember “the scrooge” from A Christmas Carol. Whether it was animated, as in the Disney version, or any of the other versions, the scrooge is a positively angry man whose cruelty and self-centeredness has no bounds or limits.

“Rage” is an uncontrolled anger – when someone is angry to the point that they cannot control themselves. Often cited, “Hell has no rage like love to hatred turned” is a quote that has become a condition or malady in my life...followed by the rest of the

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

- William Congreve, English dramatist (1670 - 1729)



quote! The rage of others, however and whenever inflicted, has lasting, adverse consequences.

Condemnation of the person enraged is not my advice, but verbal and action-packed condemnation of the behavior is necessary; basically,

such behavior is childish and, in cases of the family, marks an immaturity in emotional development, substance abuse, and/or other possible conditions deserving professional intervention. Never *face-off* or go *head-to-head* with such rage – it will accomplish nothing; but most likely, will feed, encourage and elevate the behavior.

To my sons, I especially address you as the eventual leader of your family: do not fight *fire-with-fire* but, instead, rise above such behavior in yourself or that of others in the family, workplace, etc. Only when righteousness is at stake, should rage be the course taken – and only then, when the costs are understood. Rise above this behavior – do not feed it!

RAINBOW

In the classic movie, “Wizard of Oz”, Judy Garland sings the memorable “Somewhere over the Rainbow”. In a wistful manner, she longs for a special place that, her imagination, is “over the rainbow”. The place describes a Nirvana, Heaven, or some place that is perfect by her opinion.

Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high,
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby.
Somewhere over the rainbow
Skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.

Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far
Behind me.
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me.

Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly.
Birds fly over the rainbow.
Why then, oh why can't I?

If happy little bluebirds fly
Beyond the rainbow
Why, oh why can't I?

In the day and time, such a place, however real or factual, is described as one's *happy place*. This figurative place can apply to any state or condition that makes you happiest, content or at peace. Children have a way or ability to find their happy place – even in the midst of an otherwise bleak situation. The simple things are sometimes sufficient to bring us to our happy place – to have a sense of security, peace, and even tranquility if just for a moment.

Dolly Parton, country music singer, advises that the rainbow (or the happy place) must also include the rain. For Dorothy, this adventure meant an ongoing confrontation with a wicked witch

and the added responsibility to help three characters acquire some aspect of their happy place. Her desire for this happy place was fraught with near death experience for both her and these three characters. As most of us know, the adventure ends with the intended happy place; for her, back home in the state of Kansas on her farm...where she began.

"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."

-- Dolly Parton

Where is your happy place? I hope that you have such a place, and on

occasion, find yourself *somewhere over the rainbow*.

RATIONALIZE

A criminal may rationalize committing a crime; but he has still committed a crime. A witness to a crime may rationalize that she should not tell the truth under oath – because it may lead to someone else’s prosecution and incrimination; but she is still committing perjury or giving false testimony. A country may rationalize the invasion of another country; but both the innocent and the participating will die and much destruction could occur.

In the movie, “The Big Chill”, Jeff Goldblum takes a position that people make more rationalizations than any other thing: that is, that people are constantly making rationalizations or justifying what they do as the moment-by-moment thought processes occur. I think he is right – we do rationalize a great deal whether we realize it or not...maybe it’s to clear our conscience, to make us feel good about ourselves or our decisions, but we make rationalizations all the time.

Rationalizations are not necessarily bad – sometimes such thinking is just a logical way of approaching a problem or decision; but if the rationalization involves justification of a wrongful act, it could be bad. As in the examples described in the first paragraph, rationalization can sometimes occur as a wrongful action seemingly intended to benefit someone...but at the expense of someone or something else.











The basis or justification for a decision and action may not be sound; in other words, it may not have been given sufficient thought, time, etc. Even with sufficient thought, however, the basis may be altogether corrupt, sinister, and even wicked – intended to cause evil or hurt to others for one’s entertainment, satisfaction, or desire for revenge of some kind. To rationalize decisions with a corrupt basis is to determine that pain and suffering caused to others is, in a demented way, necessary and justified to bring a sense of satisfaction or appeasement to another – one will bask in the pain and hardship of another. Proverbs tell us that *a man’s ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths*. Those who devise wicked schemes, who rationalize such behavior and decisions, are known for their folly.

Even if the basis seems sound, by much thought and time, it may still be lacking in the sense that sin or wrong may be included in the *total package*. Again, Proverbs tell us that *there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death*. Following along this same chapter, *a simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thoughts to his steps*; and yet further still, the chapter address the worst of rationalizations with a question:

Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.

READING

From a recent article on MSN, steps that will you become more interested in reading:

-  **Fill your child's world with reading.** Take turns reading with your older child, or establish a family reading time when everyone reads her own book. It's important to show her that "it's not only a school task," says Ted Feinberg, Ph.D, assistant director of the National Association of School Psychologists.
-  **Encourage him to express his opinion, talk about his feelings, and make choices.** He can pick out a side dish to go with dinner and select his own extracurricular activities. Ask for his input on family decisions, and show that you value it.
-  **Show enthusiasm for your child's interests and encourage her to explore subjects that fascinate her.** If she's a horse nut {i.e. "Abby"}, offer her stories about riding or challenge her to find five facts about
-  **Provide him with play opportunities that support different kinds of learning styles** -- from listening and visual learning to sorting and sequencing. Fanjul recommends supplies that encourage open-ended play and "do more than one thing," such as blocks -- your child will develop his creative expression and problem-solving skills as he builds.
-  **Point out the new things you learn with enthusiasm.** Discuss the different was you find new information, whether you're looking for gardening tips on the Internet or taking a night class in American literature.
-  **Ask about what he's learning in school, not about his grades or test scores.** "Even if he doesn't do well grade-wise compared to the other students, he might still be learning and improving, and you don't want to discourage that," cautions Fanjul.
-  **Help your child organize her school papers and assignments so she feels in control of her work.** If her task seems too daunting, she'll spend more time worrying than learning; as she gets older and has more responsibilities, things can get "excruciatingly painful," warns Fanjul. So check in with her regularly to make sure she's not feeling overloaded.
-  **Celebrate achievements, no matter how small.**
-  **Focus on strengths, encouraging developing talents.** Even if she didn't ace her math test, she may have written a good poem in English class. In addition to a workbook for math practice, give her a writing journal.
-  **Turn everyday events into learning opportunities.** "Being educated doesn't mean knowing a lot of disconnected facts," says Fanjul. "Learning is building from what you know and connecting it to new facts." Encourage him to explore the world around him, asking questions and making connections.

Reading does the mind good! – regulate and balance your time...try reading instead of just television and video – you'll be surprised how much you learn, and retain.

REAPING

Reaping is to harvest that which was planted and cultivated. This farming term is often applied in the Bible to denote a time of joy, of abundance, and celebration.

Psalm tells us that those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. In Hosea, those who sow for righteousness reap the fruit of unfailing love. A colleague of Job (in the book by the same name) tells Job that those who plow evil and those who sow trouble, reap it the same. Reaping joy and celebration requires clearing, plowing, sowing and cultivating the things that honor God.

This application (of farming) continues in the New Testament. In Galatians, Paul tells us:

A person reaps what he sows; to the one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; but to the one that sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Let us not grow weary in doing good {in planting and cultivating 'good'} for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people – especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Ok, what can learn from these passages? First, that the ground (in which we plant the seed) must be carefully chosen – it must rich and fertile. Second, it cleared and plowed to remove unwanted briars and other things that will hinder growth and fruition. Third, it must be planted and then cultivated over time. In the application to our spiritual lives, the process includes a continuing desire to please the Holy Spirit...and not the world. Pleasing the Spirit includes doing good – not as the world necessarily defines good but as Jesus and his Word have taught us through his Spirit.



REASON

To reason is to think. Reasoning over a matter or decision, results in a basis or justification for the decision and action. "Reason" is both a verb {to think about it} and a noun {a basis or justification}.

From the Book of Isaiah,

"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword."

Sometimes you may hear the expression or appeal, "Let's be reasonable...."

Such an expression is to beseech another to think and consider what is practical, logical, and mutually-acceptable or something of that kind. To be reasonable is to consider everyone or what is best for everyone; to not be reasonable is usually to be inconsiderate of others and to essentially demand or expect one's own will or favor in the matter at hand. Consider the following quote from one who was

against slavery. William Lloyd

Garrison describes: "reason" as the effective response to those who are reasonable; a plea or appeal to those who are humane {or compassionate}; and to tyrants, no consideration or mercy. If you don't know, a tyrant is someone who governs with oppression or brutality; one who uses power or authority harshly without consideration of attention to the needs and desires of others – unreasonable to put it mildly.

With reasonable men I will reason; with humane men I will plea; but to tyrants I will give no quarter, nor waste arguments where they will certainly be lost.

- William Lloyd Garrison, US abolitionist & editor (1805 - 1879)

The ability and desire to reason is an indication of one's general position: those who will not reason are bigots; those who cannot are fools; and those who dare not, are slaves. A "bigot" is one who has no tolerance or willingness to consider the opinions, desires or

needs of others – they are entirely consumed and controlled by their own prejudices and opinions. A "fool" is one who lacks the ability to reason, to think, or to have good judgment; and a slave is one who is totally subservient to another, lacking any right or freedom to reason, to be heard, and to have their desires addressed, considered and granted in some degree.

He who will not reason is a bigot; he who cannot is a fool; and he who dares not is a slave.

- Sir William Drummond

"Come let us reason and bow down, Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker"

REFLECTIONS

In the 1960's or 70's, the Supremes produced a song entitled "Reflections". Below are the lyrics to this song. A rhythm and blues type song, "Reflections"



Through the mirror of my mind
Time after time
I see reflections of you and me

Reflections of
The way life used to be
Reflections of
The love you took from me

Oh, I'm all alone now
No love to shield me
Trapped in a world
That's a distorted reality

Happiness you took from me
And left me alone
With only memories

Through the mirror of my mind
Through these tears that I'm crying
Reflects a hurt I can't control
'Cause although you're gone
I keep holding on
To the happy times
Oh, when you were mine

As I peer through the window
Of lost time
Looking over my yesterdays
And all the love I gave all in vain
(All the love) All the love
That I've wasted
(All the tears) All the tears
That I've tasted
All in vain

Through the hollow of my tears
I see a dream that's lost
From the hurt
That you have caused

Everywhere I turn
Seems like everything I see
Reflects the love that used to be

In you I put
All my faith and trust
Right before my eyes
My world has turned to dust

After all the nights
I sat alone and wept

is an account of likely "lost love" that has become only a memory, though vivid in the mind and indelible in the heart. Not only is "love lost" in this relationship but has been taken away along with happiness and any sense or understanding or grasp of reality.

The scorned lover is irreparably damaged by the lost relationship without any sense of hope save the memory of the love and happy times that once were, but now and forever will not be. From the perspective of the lover, much was given and yet little remains to account for the time, the relationship, and the love that seemingly occurred between and among them. "All in vain" is the summation of given love, shed tears, those many years together.

"Reflections" is supported by a an upbeat rhythm that combines the outcry of the refrain, "Reflections of the way life use to be..." with the tranquil reminiscence of the relationship with all its illness. The tempo of the refrain as well as the lyrics have an embedded degree of anger, though expressed as hurt, regarding the pain and suffering caused by the other.

The question might occur: will the lover ever recover and *move on with life*, as they phrase it. Ideally, the lover will move on and take account in the failed relationship such that mistakes of the sort will not occur again. Such lessons in life are difficult, and near impossible in life; yet, anyone who commits themselves to another, whether in marriage or other, will find that hurt and suffering are just part of the sacrifice embodied in love.

REJOICING

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.

The Bible has much to say about rejoicing – it is the act or outward expression of the joy that supernaturally indwells us even in the seeming worst of times. In James, we are instructed to consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds. Paul and Silas, while locked away in prison, rejoiced in that they could suffer for the name of Jesus; the apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering for the name of Jesus.

To be happy is an emotion based on current or developing circumstances – a general sense of security, well-being, or other conditions that invoke a good feeling. Rejoicing in all kinds of adversity is entirely different – it is a supernatural power that enables a prevailing sense that God is in control, loves us, and abides in us. Mary, mother of Jesus, spoke of such rejoicing when she said, “...and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.”

The often cited chapter of love, 1 Corinthians 13, tells us that love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Such a message gives distinction between the things that invoke rejoicing and those that do not. Evil, wickedness, and the host of such thoughts and actions are not stimuli for rejoicing; indeed, these things should render sorrow, remorse, grief, and contrition among those who observe and partake. But truth is a stimuli for rejoicing.

Isaiah delighted in the Lord and he rejoiced in God. He described this rejoicing as like that of a bridegroom that rejoices over his bride. Yes, marriages and births are generally happy times, but these events invoke a much greater degree of rejoicing for each and all should realize the magnitude, the blessings, and the gift(s) to us all.

Rejoicing is not an emotional response, but is pre-disposition or condition whereby the gifts the Holy Spirit are at work. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control are all represented in the life of one filled with Spirit; these fruits of Spirit are available and present in the best of times and the worst of times...and all the time.

In keeping with the event of a wedding or marriage, the Book of Revelation describes the wedding of the Lamb {Jesus} and his bride {the church} as a time of great rejoicing for those who are present.

Rejoice, Rejoice, and again I say rejoice – for he is God and worthy to be praised

RELAYS

A relay is a foot race that involves a team - usually four members - that each run a "leg" of the race. From my experience in track and field, a relay could be 440 or once around the track, or 1 mile or four times around the track.

During the Olympics, a monumental relay occurs over a large distance as the torch is passed from runner to runner culminating with the lighting of the Olympic torch. This

ceremony has historical significance, of course, with its origin dating back to the first recorded events in Greece.



The baton is usually made out of metal {aluminum} or plastic – it is very light-weight. A good relay team must have speed, of course, but also excellent exchange of the baton whereby each runner does not lose stride or speed during the hand-off. Needless to say, when an exchange goes bad so too does the whole relay, and in the worst case, can result in poor performance for even the fastest of runners. Among the exchanges:

1. A bad receiver or attempt to take the baton because the receiver is not paying attention, has not assumed his stride or does not extend his hand for the exchange
2. A willing and able receiver who is waiting patiently though realizing that the deliverer is not trying, has dropped his hand, or refuses to give up the baton for some unknown reason
3. A balance of delivery and receiving that is smooth, clean, and precise without breaking stride, stumbling or worst yet, dropping the baton

If you have had, or do have an opportunity to participate in a relay, do not attempt to throw the baton to the receiver – this is not a recognized form of exchange, though my high school 440-relay team attempted to do on one occasion.

RELEVANCE

When something has relevance it has application; that is, it has a relationship or has bearing on the matter. Synonyms for relevance are pertinent, germane. Irrelevance is when something does not have application. Let's try some examples – you decide whether the two words are subjects have relevance:

Topic	Relevant Topic?	Yes	No
Birds	Nest		
Birds	Eagle		
Birds	Cave		
Flying	Birds		
Migrating	Bears		
Eagles	Birds		
Eagles	Hair		
Pigeon	Seeds		
Talons	Eagles		
Beak	Bears		
Flock	Eagles		
Geese	Flock		

From the few words in the table to the left, determine if the each set of words have some relevance or association; for example, an eagle is a bird, but a bird does not typically live in a cave - or maybe some do. Finding relevance in two or more topics is important; indeed, is the center of some tests used for academic and psychological testing. Among the important aspects of finding relevance is that such ability gives you a broader understanding of such topics and the relationships between and among words, topics, etc.

Relevance has some subjectivity to it – which means that opinion and perspective play into the determination or conclusions regarding relevance. Consider the following personal example of differing perspective or opinion regarding a matter of utmost importance.

I am actually your father...and you are my children. By a covenant with God, my responsibility as your father is to take care of you, to raise and instruct, to nurture and to love as God designed the family and relationship. But my perspective in this matter is not shared by others who are involved in your care and your present circumstances; in actuality, they do not consider this covenant as relevant and have facilitated the demise of our relationship through the civil court system in both Georgia and Florida. Though the exercise of such opinion or perspective has caused great destruction and expense to this family, God is able to bring reunification through the Covenant that will prevail beyond bleak period of your lives.

RELIGION

Religion is not just Christianity, but includes many other religions. Religion, or religious practices, can be beneficial to a society by placing authority and accountability to a higher, supernatural power. The Greeks had their gods whom fulfilled various roles and places of authority in the culture and society – which came into direct conflict and association to Christianity during the initiation and early growth of the church.

Few references occur in the Bible yet, most of us might consider “religion” to be very appropriate, very relevant. The worship of God is only one of many religions; and the theology of Christianity should be distinguished as more than a religion, but the absolute truth. Again, there are many religions – here are few just for thought:

- Gnosticism – esoteric religious movement that flourished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. and presented a major challenge to orthodox Christianity; most Gnostic sects professed Christianity, but their beliefs sharply diverged from those of the majority of Christians in the early church
- Hedonism – the doctrine that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life and that the pursuit of it is the ideal aim of conduct
- Monasticism – mode of life practiced by persons who have abandoned the world for religious reasons and devote their lives, either separately or in community, to spiritual perfection.
- Occultism – belief in the efficacy of various practices—including astrology, alchemy, divination, and magic—regarded as being based on hidden knowledge about the universe and its mysterious forces
- Paganism – beliefs and practices associated with the worship of nature.
- Pantheism – equates God with the forces and laws of the universe
- Pluralism – the acceptance of many groups in society or many schools of thought in an intellectual or cultural discipline.

Christianity is unique in that the central figure of salvation, Jesus Christ, is alive – he overcame death, visited hundreds of people, and ascended into Heaven to be with the God. Yet, the knowledge of the Bible and the message of the gospel is not enough for salvation. Jesus told us: “any one who loves his family more than me is not worthy to worship me, and anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy to worship me.” No one else should come above your love for God, and no one or no thing should be worshiped as a god, except God. Christianity should not be reduced to a religion but assigned its due recognition as God made manifest in Christ – who was born, lived, died, and still lives.... Knowledge is good and beneficial, but you must believe by faith!

REMEMBRANCE

"Forgive your enemies,
but never forget their
names."

- John F. Kennedy

The word, "remembrance", is usual applied to the history of war, and the fallen or victims of desolation, destruction, and despair. These victims may include the fallen but, in addition, those who endured hardship and difficulty during a perilous period. Refugees displaced because of conquest, religion, and race are among the remaining and the fallen who may not have

directly engaged in battle, but no less deserve or have earned the right to be honored and remembered for generations to come.

In our civil war, remembrance is applied all who fought and suffered through this most divisive period of our history. Hundreds of thousands died by one means or another, while still many more suffered from the losses both in kin and in property. Even today, and perhaps for unforeseeable future, this war and its casualties are memorialized each year for the sacrifice and the costs to both sides.

The World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam are memorialized as well – many died to protect our allied forces and to forestall Communism. Though American sentiment may wane because of time lapsed or because of the circumstances of American intervention, the fact remains that citizens died. On this fact alone, respect and remembrance should be in order for those who gave the greatest human sacrifice.

On occasion, I'll pass by a military cemetery or memorial – it's usual at that moment that I give attention and thought to all those represented by the setting and in the wars referenced above. What must have driven these individuals to commit themselves to such an act of sacrifice? Honor, duty and love of country are among the more noble attributes afforded to such endeavors. Could the reason(s) to enlist, honor the draft, or otherwise participate have pertained not to the question of "why do it?", but rather the statement and affirmation, "I must do it!" Though such a setting can invoke sorrow and remorse, the eventual response may be: gratitude for the many who sacrificed; forgiveness for the many who caused or provoked the events; and remembrance that all was not in vain if even on the basic message that we are imperfect and, left to own means, will most surely destroy others and ourselves in the process. God save us!



RENEWED

To be renewed is to be made anew...all over again!

Pearl Buck described a place within her from which was wellspring of renewal.

To understand this quote in more depth is to understand Pearl and her

profession as a writer. Thanks again to [Encarta](#); the information below on Pearl.

Inside myself is a place where I live all alone and that's where you renew your springs that never dry up.

- Pearl Buck, *US novelist in China* (1892 - 1973)

Born Pearl Sydenstricker, she was the daughter of American missionaries and lived in China until 1933. She wrote more than 65 books, many of which sympathetically portray China and its people. Her simple, direct style and concern for the fundamental values of human life were derived from her study of the Chinese novel. With her work she strove to create a better understanding of China, and she was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1938.

Pearl witnessed much in the suffering and hardship of the agrarian and primitive lifestyle of China. Through this period, and with evident training and skill, she wrote about her observations for others to experience if just through the pages of her work. An humanitarian, or one who cares deeply about the human conditions and suffering, Pearl may have committed herself to the concerns and interests of these Chinese as her parents had done before her. The life that she lived was rich, not because of monetary gains, but the realization that she was very blessed – with an endless spring of life within her.

Turning to Psalm again, renewal is described by David that *your youth is renewed like the eagle* – maybe to suggest that, as an eagle soars effortlessly, so too we can soar figuratively being renewed by God as in our youth. In 3 Corinthians, Paul writes: *Therefore, do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* In Titus, Paul writes: *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

In my lifetime, the opportunity for renewal has occurred more than once. God gives the gift of renewal, as described in the last paragraph, through his Holy Spirit; yet even in salvation, we are being renewed still further...day by day. To be renewed, or made anew over again, is to become more like Christ and less like our old self. As with an old house, antique or something similar, renewal may involve some destruction, some disassembly, and some period of brokenness; but the Master mechanic, architect, and artisan of all time is able reassemble and rebuild for the better.

REPORT

By “report”, the title of this letter could mean several things:

- 📁 A report card – from school
- 📁 To report for duty – as a soldier would do
- 📁 A report of many other kinds such as to measure performance or status

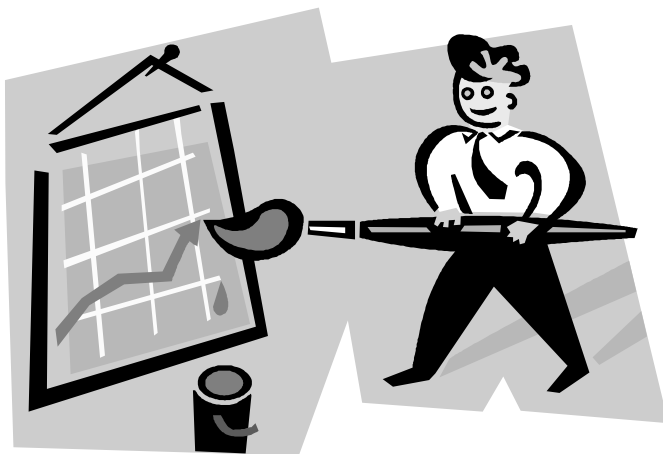
...and still many other kinds of reports as you might guess.

Reports can be verbal {voice only} such as:

- 🗨️ How is school going? - it's going well
- 🗨️ Where do you live? – I live in a hours in Jacksonville
- 🗨️ Does your father love you – Yes, my father loves me very much and prays for me each and every day

Reports can be written or by a visual such as:

- 💻 A letter, standard format, or something similar
- 💻 An e-mail or attachment to an e-mail
- 💻 A CRT or flat-screen – such as with the stock exchange, etc.
- 💻 Sign language...if I knew sign language
- 💻 Coded or cryptic messaging

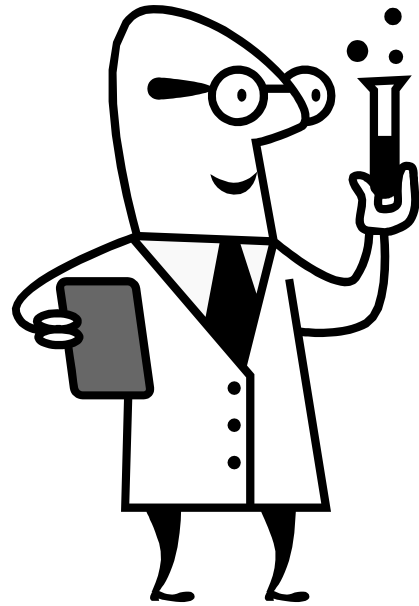


Reports can even be sent by other people who are willing and able to convey or forward message...especially messages that would mean a great to those who received them.

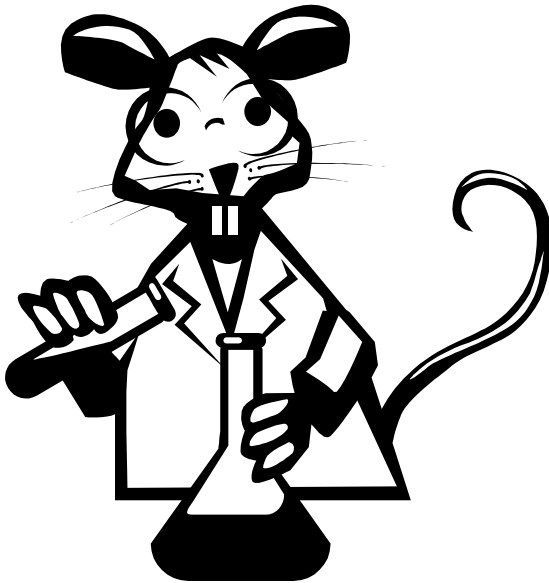
It is late and I am tired, but let me report that I am ok...how are you?

RESEARCH

Research can occur in a variety of ways from a simple home experiment to a heavily funded project involving multiple institutions, agencies, and other stakeholders. Research, by its definition, involves experimentation and exploration, to examine the unknown and uncertain for greater knowledge and certainty. Though we may think of research as a laboratory with white-gowned scientist such as the fellow to the right, the fact-of-the-matter is that research or R&D occurs in other forums and among other characters as well. Universities and similar agencies conduct much of this R&D under government and private grants and fellowships; but such endeavors are not restricted to the academia.



Animals can conduct a bit of R&D; take the other character below, for example. Many of the rat, mouse, and similar vermin participate in experiments all the time. From behavioral science to cancer research, these otherwise menaces to society have a special and critical role for which you may one day have opportunity to



see first-hand. My understanding is that college students, in certain programs, have course requirements to handle these creatures in the name of science. Well, should you find yourself in such a predicament, remember that you were forewarned!

In closing this letter, much has been unaddressed on the word, “research” – but I leave that for you to do your own research and discover much along the way. Though the object {or victim} of your experiments may only have a short lifespan...that is, if the object is still alive during your experiment; you can have many years of opportunity to

learn and grow in knowledge and understanding. Don’t be afraid to pursue such opportunities. Though you may fail on occasion, don’t worry about it – you are still learning, still growing, still getting beyond what was uncertain yesterday.

RESOLVE

Resolve entails a desire or disposition to deal constructively with differences between individuals, groups, or even in your relationship with God. An old hymnal has the words: “I have resolved no long to linger, charmed by the worlds delight...” In these words, the person is committing themselves to be freed from worldliness (or the love of world and its possessions); to allow God to change their interests and desires to be on spiritual rather than worldly basis.

When something goes unresolved, it is said to be contention or strife. A quarrel, fight or even war may be the result of unresolved issues. Several Proverbs support this concept:

- ☞ A foolish son is his father’s ruin; and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping
- ☞ Better to live in the corner of a roof, than share a house with a quarrelsome wife
- ☞ As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife

Quarrel not at all. No man resolved to make the most of himself can spare time for personal contention.

- Abraham Lincoln, in a letter to J. M. Cutts, October 26, 1863

Our current President describes “resolve” as a key attribute for free nations – nations that are free of aggression. Attempting to describe the differences in ideologies, President Bush identifies the measure for resolve as benefit to the citizen by enabling peace rather than aggression, freedom rather than terror, and

We know that dictators are quick to choose aggression, while free nations strive to resolve differences in peace. We know that oppressive governments support terror, while free governments fight the terrorists in their midst. We know that free peoples embrace progress and life, instead of becoming the recruits for murderous ideologies.

- George W. Bush, *Speech to UN General Assembly, September 21, 2004*
43rd President of US (1946 -)

truth rather than lies. While no nation or individual can be completely attune or ascribed to resolve, they can make a choice and have a desire for peace over continuing oppression and control . As long as a quarrelsome or aggressive relationship exists, the citizens will suffer – both the innocent and the guilty...but especially the innocent!

RESPECT

(oo) What you want
(oo) Baby, I got
(oo) What you need
(oo) Do you know I got it?
(oo) All I'm askin'
(oo) Is for a little respect when you come home (just a little bit)
Hey baby (just a little bit) when you get home
(just a little bit) mister (just a little bit)

I ain't gonna do you wrong while you're gone
Ain't gonna do you wrong (oo) 'cause I don't wanna (oo)
All I'm askin' (oo)
Is for a little respect when you come home (just a little bit)
Baby (just a little bit) when you get home (just a little bit)
Yeah (just a little bit)

I'm about to give you all of my money
And all I'm askin' in return, honey
Is to give me my profits
When you get home (just a, just a, just a, just a)
Yeah baby (just a, just a, just a, just a)
When you get home (just a little bit)
Yeah (just a little bit)

----- instrumental break -----

Ooo, your kisses (oo)
Sweeter than honey (oo)
And guess what? (oo)
So is my money (oo)
All I want you to do (oo) for me
Is give it to me when you get home (re, re, re ,re)
Yeah baby (re, re, re ,re)
Whip it to me (respect, just a little bit)
When you get home, now (just a little bit)

R-E-S-P-E-C-T
Find out what it means to me
R-E-S-P-E-C-T
Take care, T-C-P

Oh (sock it to me, sock it to me,
sock it to me, sock it to me)
A little respect (sock it to me, sock it to me,
sock it to me, sock it to me)
Whoa, babe (just a little bit)
A little respect (just a little bit)
I get tired (just a little bit)
Keep on tryin' (just a little bit)
You're runnin' out of foolin' (just a little bit)
And I ain't lyin' (just a little bit)
(re, re, re, re) 'spect
When you come home (re, re, re ,re)
Or you might walk in (respect, just a little bit)
And find out I'm gone (just a little bit)

When I think of 'respect', I think of Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul. Take notice of the words to this well known song – if you can, listen to a recording...you'll see what I mean.

Above all, the message is that respect is a necessary condition of the relationship. Respect means: to hold in high regard or esteem; to consider important and to honor and value their relationship, their person.

For this courtship, marriage or similar, respect is being demanded by the rhythm and rhyme with a lot of "oo's", appeal, and patience. Even for the most in love and committed, respect must eventually surface and show its necessary face.

If one does not appreciate the other, honor and value them, and hold them in high esteem...it will not work... Someone may have said that respect must be earned – but if so, what are the conditions, require-ments and measurements? I'm not sure, but respect is still necessary and, I believe, a precondition for the two to be in good order.

RESPONSE

There are many responses in life; or many ways to respond to our circumstances. You can be strong in midst of adversity, and possibly receive much attention and praise for your ability and endurance. You can simply laugh at your circumstances, whether seemingly funny or not, on the basis of a good sense of humor and willingness to take life in good measure and not so seriously. You can be frustrated and slap your hand to your forehead with the thought, expression or question:



Now why did that have to happen?
Why did I {or they} do that?
Why did God allow that to happen?



You can be calculating and precise – waiting for your move and decision. You can be shocked and even outraged – which can both a real emotion as well as act of drama. You can role up your sleeves and climb that figurative mountain with every ounce of ability and energy.



You can celebrate – for with every problem comes an opportunity; every dark cloud has a silver lining; consider it joy when face trials of many kinds; count it all as blessings. You can simply act cool, hang-out, and let it ride.



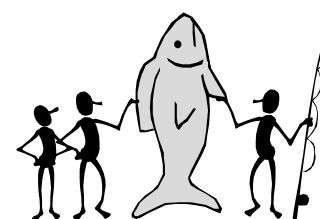
You can run {and maybe hide}; but the problem or circumstance may just snowball. You can try to disguise yourself {also hiding} or put on a happy face – even though you're not very happy. You even go scuba diving and bask in the serenity of life below the water's surface.



You can try to make amends – in the case of a broken or damaged relationship by practicing the command to love your enemy and pray for those who want to do you harm.



You can be impatient, watching the clock or calendar to see how many hours, days or weeks, months or years must be endured in this ordeal, problem, situation or circumstance.



You can do all these things, and may at one time or another; but above all, you must trust, by faith, that God loves you, knows you, and is very aware of your circumstances and your response(s). Talk to God – it will do you well!...and respond to his instruction, guidance and direction.

RIGHT

To distinguish the use of this word, “right” means that which is correct, appropriate, reasonable or righteous.

Mark Twain suggested that doing right will gratify some and surprise the rest – those who desire right will be gratified while those who don’t appreciate right will be surprised. To do the right thing is predicated on understanding the right thing. Let’s talk about it.

"Always do right- this will gratify some and astonish the rest."

-Mark Twain (1835-1910)

If you’re familiar with situational ethics or relative morals, doing the right thing is subject to change. If understanding the right thing was not confusing enough, situational ethics further complicates and obfuscates what is right or righteous by incorporating relativism, circumstance and condition. It would seem that lying under oath, or committing perjury would not be right under circumstances; yet, such incidences will be rationalized in order to promote a charge, evade a conviction, or defame or falsely accuse someone else for a wrong they did not commit.

Clarity, understanding and even guidance are found by reading the Bible and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Reading the Bible provides faith the Jesus is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit provides discernment to understand and follow what is right or righteous in God’s sight. As believers, we should not base our understanding of what is right based on situational ethics or societies’ relative standards; instead, we should rely on the Bible as our authority and on the Holy Spirit as our helper.

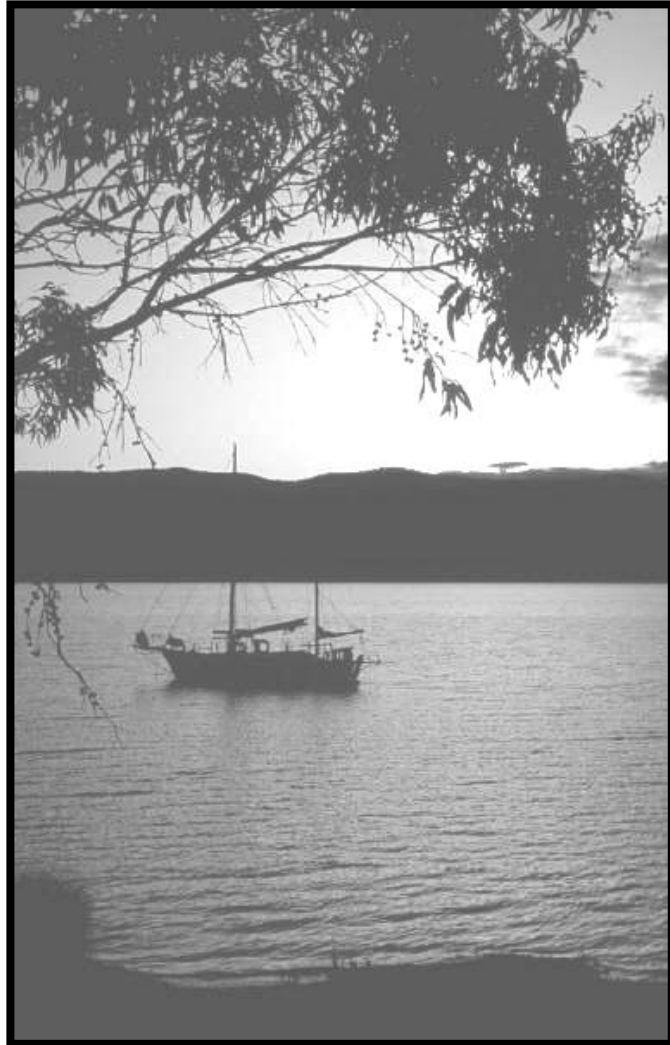
In the Book of 1 John, we are told that if we know that he {God} is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him – members of God’s family are marked by holy living. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians, to “never tire of doing what is right – to encourage these members to stay this course, to finish the fight, and to keep the faith.” Furthermore, he writes in Philippians, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

What is the right thing to do?

RIVERS

A scene, such as that to the right, would have to be along a fresh-water or brackish water river with a terrain of rolling hills. The sailboat is moored or anchored just off the bank; and if it were moving, you could see the wake in the water. I am not familiar enough with boats to perceive its type or size with accuracy, although I would judge it to be between 40 and 50 feet in length – making it easily sea worthy.

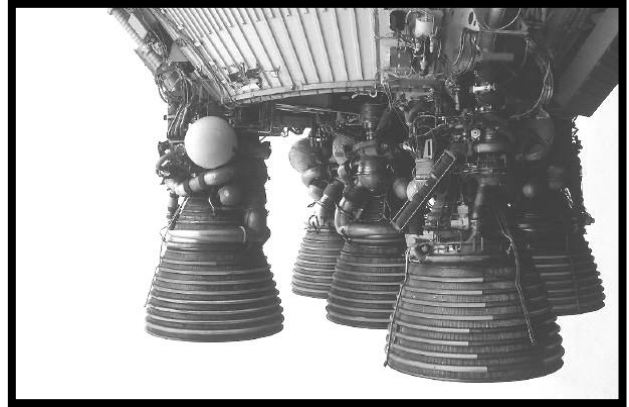
Such scenes could be common place on the Saint Johns River where you live, but to a much lesser degree along the Coosa River where I live. Some freshwater rivers are large enough to accommodate such vessels ; these include Lake Guntersville {North Alabama}, Lake Martin {Birmingham} Alabama, Lake Altoona {North Atlanta}, and Lake Lanier {North Atlanta}. Of these lakes and rivers, you have driven by all of them and have swam in the Coosa near the local dam.



I like rivers and lakes more than the ocean. Yes, I enjoy visiting the ocean and seeing the beauty of the marshes and coastal vistas, but my preference are the freshwater lakes and rivers. A typical river may have similar offerings to the ocean, such as boating and fishing, but generally is protected from erosion and the storm fronts that sometimes wreak havoc on the beaches (and its inhabitants). In keeping with this relative sense of protection, tides and strong current are not altogether as torrent and common. The river is simply more peaceful and at rest.

ROCKETS

To the right are the exhaust nozzles for a large rocket. Describing the rocket's operation, fuel is ignited and discharges through a narrow passage {i.e. nozzle} with a tremendous thrust – which propels the rocket into the air and possibly into space. Similar to a rocket, a missile uses a similar principle but is described as being armed with some type of explosive device. Some rockets *breathe air* like an aircraft while others contain an



internal supply of oxygen like a rocket. Rocket engine propulsion is described in some detail in [Encarta](#) – here are the different types:

- ☛ Chemical
 - Solid fuel
 - Liquid fuel
 - Hybrid fuel
- ☛ Nuclear – more powerful than chemical but still considered risky or unsafe for use in Space or on Earth
- ☛ Electric – application is only for Space or where a vacuum exist

A basic description of the chemical fuel rocket is described below.

Rockets produce the force that moves them forward by burning their fuel inside a chamber in the rocket and then expelling the hot exhaust that results. Rockets carry their own fuel and the oxygen used for burning their fuel. In liquid-fueled rockets, the fuel and oxygen-bearing substance (called the oxidizer) are in separate compartments. The fuel is mixed with the oxygen and ignited inside a combustion chamber. The rocket, like the balloon, has an opening called a nozzle from which the exhaust gases exit. A rocket nozzle is a cup-shaped device that flares out smoothly like a funnel inside the end of the rocket. The nozzle directs the rocket exhaust and causes it to come out faster, increasing the thrust and efficiency of the rocket.

North of my town, Huntsville is the place where much rocket and space development began after World War II and continues today. Matthew has visited the Space Camp with the Cub Scouts – someday I hope to take the rest of you there. Space Camp is an intriguing place...even for an adult! In the meantime, venture off into this subject of rockets and space; and try to watch the movie "October Sky" – it will inspire you *to boldly go where no one has gone before, to take one small step for man and one large step for mankind, and to go to infinity and beyond!*

ROCKS

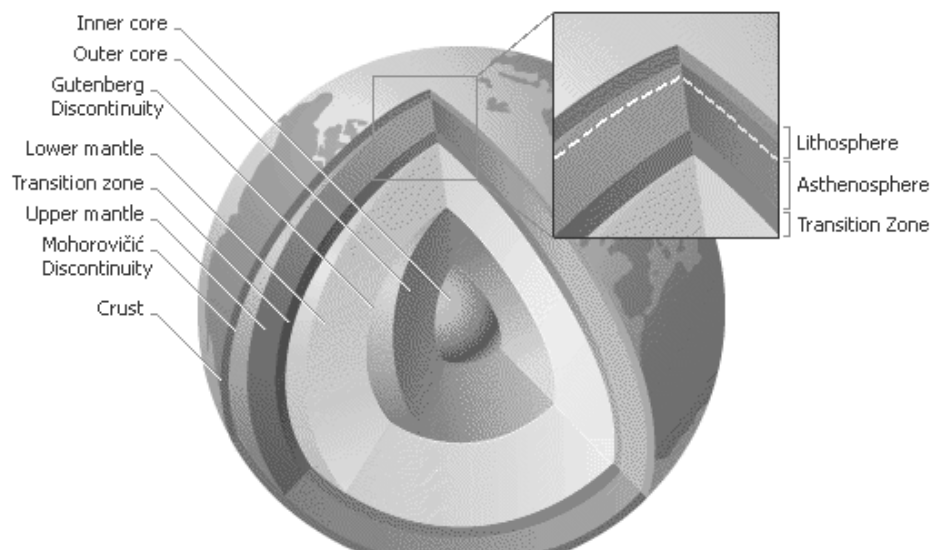
By now, most of you have had some introduction to rocks and the three basic types.

Rocks have so much association to our daily lives...think about it:

- ✳ We step on rocks in the yard, or stones. or concrete that are composed of rocks
- ✳ On a whim, we may pick-up a rock and through it at a designated target or through it just to see how far we can
- ✳ We study rocks, as in geology, and learn the properties of each and where the rocks are found
- ✳ Are houses, schools, and other public buildings are constructed with remnants of stone or rock; and bridges and others large construction are built on a firm foundation of bedrock

And now, a brief lesson on the Earth and rocks...

From Encarta, the Earth has a rock crust on the outer perimeter that extends from 9 to 47 miles {15 to 75 km} below the surface. Below the crust are two layers of "mantle" that extends another 1800 miles {2900 km}; followed by The "Moho" is a boundary that separates the crust from the mantle. Apparently the layers have much to do with the travel pattern of earthquakes; thus, Geologists and Seismologists have used earthquakes to study, examine and document the layers of the Earth as illustrated below. Now, think about that when you come in contact with those rocks!



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RODEOS

Several years ago, you and I went to our only rodeo; honestly, I did enjoy it that much...but I think most of you did. It was fascinating to watch the bucking bronco: the rider prepare for the event and, of course, the bridling of the unbridled, bucking horse. In my opinion, those riders are either crazy, courageous or a combination of the two.



Several years ago, I came across a fellow that grew-up in the rodeo – his father was an announcer and manager of a rodeo. The life he described included a strong bond or unity among the crew and participants in this circus-like affair. In the

conversation, he eluded to the risks and the occasional loss of a rider {broken neck or other fatal injury incurred during the event}.

It sounded like an interesting lifestyle and one that would make for much interesting writing and reading. The rodeo is legendary with the longstanding cowboy and the events and contests that have long been a part of our society and culture. It must be a special breed of person to take-on such a feat with a special breed of animal that will take you out from under your feet!



Someday, I would like to go back to a rodeo and take in more of that riding, roping and stuff. Maybe you can join me – we'll have a great time. Until then, let's round up the wagons in a circle and bed-down for the night...we have a long trail ahead.

ROMANS

Romans were among one of the great civilizations of all time. Beginning around 753 BC, the village grew into an empire extending from England to Northern Africa and from the Atlantic Ocean to Arabia. Identified by the three phases, the history of the kingdom:

- 753–509 BC, the city developed from a village to a city ruled by kings
- 509–27 BC – the Romans expelled the kings and established the Roman Republic
- 27 BC–AD 476 – Following the collapse of the republic, Rome fell under the domination of emperors and flourished for another five centuries as the Roman Empire



To the above right, and in the painting and textbox below, the Coliseum and Arch of Constantine is symbolic of the immensity and development in Roman culture and architecture. Serving as a template for today's sporting arenas, the Coliseum served as a public meeting place for gladiator fights, executions, and other events of entertainment. In the portrait to the left, with some details below, the once profound Coliseum would eventually succumb to damage and



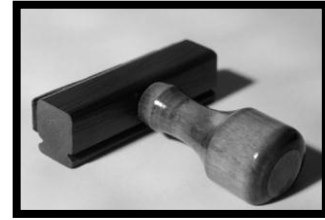
decay; but still remains to today as a monument to the empire. Among the features of this building is the oval arena, the tiered stands for the patrons, and the Roman arches extending on three, possibly four levels.

Lasting for more than 1,000 years, the Roman Empire was an integral part of the Biblical content and the early Christian Church. The emperor Nero was responsible for persecuting and executing thousands of Christians;

Constantine the Great was responsible for proclaiming Christianity as the state religion which led to the formation of what is today the Roman Catholic Church. Read more and learn, not only about Rome's greatness, but the empire's role in Christianity.

RUBBERSTAMPS

A rubberstamp, like that shown to the right, is a device used for marking permanent lettering and messages on to documents; some of the messages could be:



- ☐ “Return to sender” – which means that the intended receiver’s address was not correct and the letter/parcel cannot be delivered to the intended person or location {as strange as it might sound, my letters to you have never returned with this message although that’s because I know that I don’t know where you live or how to acquire you mailing address}
- ☐ “First Class” – this is what most of us would like stamped on ourselves...or least to be considered by our peers, etc.; but the message applies to the best shipping mode for regular U.S. Postal Mail {I’m not sure if the mode still carries the same clout since express, overnight, and next-day mail have become the elite forms of delivery}.
- ☐ “Top Secret” – this stamp appears on many government documents but is probably not seen by the general public except in movies and such – the rubber stamp is probably as obscure and cloaked as the message embossed therein; never the less, to see such as document almost begs it’s reading just to see what “top secret” information contains
- ☐ “Fragile” – means the contents are delicate, breakable and possibly very expensive; again, a message that has human application...especially to young children who are tender, impressionable hearts
- ☐ “Copy” – means that the content is the not the original, just a copy
- ☐ Date Stamp – to indicate the date of the printing or distribution of the document.

Countless messages have been applied to the rubberstamp – both general messages and specific messages.

Sometimes both the message and the term “rubberstamped” have a negative meaning. To rubberstamp something is imply that a certain routine or indiscriminate approval. As with the image of mass production, where a similar product flows down an assembly line of some kind, the

rubberstamp gives little attention to the details; on the contrary, the stamp is merely a convenient formality with little more effort than the arm’s stroke.

The father will be granted visitation with his children every other weekend and on designated...

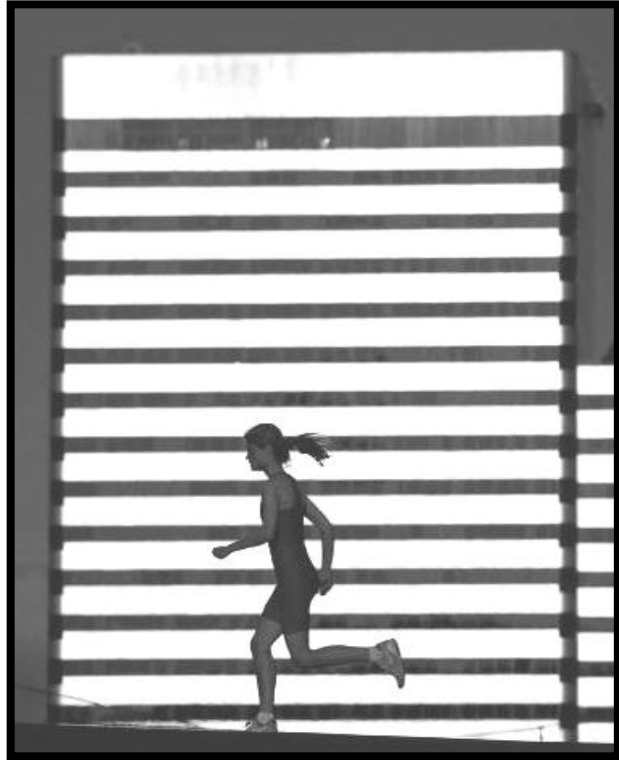


RUNNING

Running is a good thing – it was once a frequent pastime and even a pseudo-hobby with fun runs such as 5 and 10K's. In 1985, I ran in the Jacksonville River Run and a host of other races along the First Coast – it was a great year and a lot of fun.

Running looks relatively easy: you tie on a decent pair of running shoes, shorts and you're *off to the races*; but in actuality, the sport takes many hours of running exercises along with good diet and nutrition; and there is always that occasional injury that slows you down.

From high-school track, my interest and participation in running continued beyond college and even to my late twenties. My brother had a similar experience to include at least one marathon in his 30's. Even my dad ran for most of his life beginning in track and continuing through his career in the Marine Corps. We're just a couple of guys that like to run...or at least we use to like to run.



Regular exercise of some kind is good living – it does the heart, body, and muscles well and keeps you in semi-shape. I suggest you try running although many other forms of exercise and sports are worthy:

- ☒ Swimming, surfing
- ☒ Tennis, racket ball
- ☒ Basketball, baseball or similar
- ☒ Hiking, mountain climbing
- ☒ Biking
- ☒ Karate and similar

Why not try several and pick out one or two that you prefer; oh, and if you need some advice or coaching, don't ask me – I'm just your biggest fan, patron, supporter, etc. Just Do It!



SARCASM

Sarcasm: a cutting or contemptuous remark; ironic criticism or reproach.

From Encarta, the textbox below uses “sarcasm” in a vivid, poignant way. Sarcasm, or words that are sarcastic, are

On the Fourth of July in 1852, African American antislavery leader Frederick Douglass denounced the celebration of independence while people are enslaved. Douglass delivered a speech in Rochester, New York, where he based his abolitionist activities. From this speech, he wrote “The Mournful Wail of Millions” – here is an excerpt from the speech.

At a time like this, scorching iron, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would today pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.

Sarcasm can be found in all manner of writing, speech and music; it is often funny but can be an indication of hostility, frustration, and anger. In the excerpt above, Frederick Douglass is angry at the state of the society whereby freedom and independence are celebrated on one hand, while others remain enslaved ... without any freedom. On the possibility that some perspective or insight can be gained by such comments, sarcasm may be effective though a covert method of expressing an opinion; for Frederick Douglass, the dichotomous state of the culture was of such degree and condition, that hypocrisy overshadowed any cause for celebration – what was true and available for one race of people, by-and-large, was not true for another.

Sarcasm can sometimes be a clever or coy device for criticism disguised as humor. Be careful with your words – the tongue can get you into a lot of trouble! *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

SCALES

Scales are used to weigh something. The scales to the right are basic with a standard weight {or known weight} applied to one side and the unknown weight applied to the other. Scales vary in size, type and capacity from devices that may measure molecular weight to large equipment used to measure tonnage. Measuring weight has its obvious importance – many things are valued or priced based on weight (such as gold and other precious metals).



Proverbs 11:1 tells us that *the Lord abhors {or detests} dishonest scales.*

This scripture means that God does not like or appreciate foul business practices – where someone is cheated or sandaled in a transaction.

In the book of Daniel, “O Belshazzar” receives a message from God when a hand {yes, a single hand alone!} made an inscription on the wall:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

MENE – God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

TEKEL – **You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting**

PARSIN – Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians

According to the Book of Daniel, that very night Belshazzar was slain {or killed} and Darius, the Mede, took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

Yes, scales can be used to weigh a lot of things and, if accurate and calibrated, can give a true measure of our value, our worth and our character. What one day may seem like a possession and ownership can, in a moment and with little or no warning, be taken away – as was the case for this evil king, Belshazzar.

How do we measure-up or weigh-in on God’s scales? Deuteronomy tells us: *Do not have for yourself two different weights in your bag – one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house – one large, one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*

SECURITY

Security can mean several things:

- A law enforcement agency, such as at a school or the policy and procedure that ensures something is secure or is protected from theft, etc.
- A payment-pledge such as a down-payment to rent an apartment
- The inherent need to feel protected or free from fear

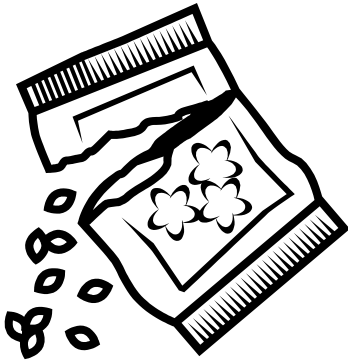
Sometimes security is more of a sense or feeling than an actual state. When the door of the house is locked at night, you may feel secure; although, the locked door does not guarantee security. A child may feel secure with his mother in sight or by his side – but this is only feeling and does not guarantee or ensure that his security or general well-being. Finally, a security in monetary terms may not be honored by the receiving party; that is, a cash security is only as good as the honor, trust, and credibility of the party that receives it.



Security is not a guarantee regardless of our feelings or senses, but I believe that faith in God provides a certainty that offers security. Job said: *If I put my trust in gold, or said to pure gold, "You are my security"...then these also would be sins to be judged, for I have been unfaithful to God on high.* In this passage, with much left out in the above quote, Job is concluding that trust or security placed in such worldly things is no security at all; indeed, it is a sin because worship and faith are being placed in these material things rather than in God alone.

To feel secure with locked doors or mother in sight is only natural and understood – especially as a child who lives by his natural or instinctive nature. As believers, such feelings should give way to faith in God. Proverbs tells us: *He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children, it will be a refuge.* In Psalm, the "man who fears the Lord" {or is righteous} is described as: *Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end, he will look in triumph on his foes.*

SEED







Seed is both a process and an item, both a verb and a noun: a farmer plants the seed {noun} ; he seeds or sows the field {verb}; and he may also elect to let his field *go to seed* which is to defer or pass on planting...maybe to allow the nutrients to rejuvenate or something like that.

Seed is a fascinating item and process: packed into a small, sometimes insignificant capsule is the substance that produces vegetables, fruits, flowers and trees. This process of seed to plant, called germination, is particularly amazing when viewed with an accelerated video – the sprouting, growth, and blooming of the flower is highly accelerated and puts into perspective the transformation or generation process.

Seed, as a noun, can also pertain to lineage or generational relationships; for example, Jesus was in the lineage of David – he was from the seed of David or was a descendent of David's family or lineage. The idea behind the use of seed is that it is the beginning, the starting point, the first step in the process. With other key ingredients, the seed is able to grow and possibly flourish into something magnificent with much yield and abundance – but other less desirable outcomes are possible as well.

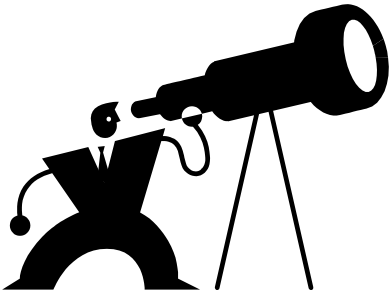
In Matthew, the *Parable of the Sower* {or farmer} describes the outcomes:

-  Some seed fell along a path, and the birds at it up – representing people who hear the Word but do not understand
-  Some seed fell on rocky places {rather than soft dirt} and, with shallow roots, the plants were scorched by the Sun, and withered and died – representing those who hear the Word and are joyous for a spell...but then, the joy wears off as does his faithfulness when times are less joyous or are difficult
-  Other seed fell among thorns and was choked – representing those who hear the word but are distracted by the worries of life and by the deceitfulness of wealth
-  Finally, other seeds fell in good soil where it produced a crop and much yield and abundance – representing those that hear and understand, producing much fruit in the form of Spiritual growth and ministry.



Pray that the seed planted in you, the Word of God, will grow and flourish.

SEEING



“Seeing is believing” is a saying that means to see it {with your own eyes} is to believe it; but “seeing” can also imply understanding or comprehending. The saying “I see what you mean” suggests that the words or comments of one is understood by the other.

Another saying, “Do you see the light?” pertains to understanding and receiving the Word of God. To understand to not enough – you must also receive the Word by faith. To “see the light” is to understand on hearing, perceive on seeing, receive on decision, and follow on faith.

History provides portraits of those who, with physical blindness or other disabilities, overcame great obstacles to accomplish much. As one example, the recent movie on the life of Ray Charles, an accomplished piano and soul singer...a great story that I highly recommend! Try to think of some you know (or know of) that have overcome similar challenges.

Several accounts of Jesus’ healing involve the restoration of physical vision:

- Two blind men are healed, Matthew 20:29-34
- Blind are healed, Matthew 9:27-30
- The man was *blind but now he sees*, John 9:25

But other accounts describe a generation or group that are blind in the Spirit – who are unable to understand the Word of God and, in turn, follow in faith.

- A blind man leads a blind man – both will fall, Matthew 15:14
- Woe to you “blind guides”...woe to you, Matthew 23:15-22
- The man was *blind but now he sees* – to indicate that his healing was not only physical but Spiritual...he understands and accepts Jesus and Lord, John 9:25

God *gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning*; but when such insight and understanding is rejected, we are left in blindness and subject to being misguided, distracted and deceived – we become fools *whose thinking is futile and who have exchanged the glory of God* for other things that do not compare to God. God grant us wisdom, understanding, and faith.

SEEKING

Seeking is to look and search, often in some direction or location, with the purpose of finding or discovering. Seeking may not result in finding.

Some seek after fortune {wealth, money, material things}; others seek after knowledge {study, learn and develop}; still, others seek after the “deeper” things of love, joy, and peace. What are you seeking after...what is it that you want or need...and what is the basis or motive for the energy and time devoted to the matter or thing that you seek?



What you seek defines your purpose and describes who you are...what you're all about. Seeking gives meaning to your life! What are some worthy purposes or things you should seek? Some verses to consider in addressing this question are:

- 👉 Seek first his kingdom, Matthew 6:33
- 👉 Jesus sought {seek} not to please himself, but the Father, John 5:30
- 👉 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others, 1 Cor. 10:24
- 👉 God rewards those who earnestly seek him, Heb. 11:6
- 👉 He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it, 1 Pet. 3:11
- 👉 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near, Isaiah 55:6
- 👉 I {God} love those who love me, and those who seek me find me, Prov. 8:17
- 👉 Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it full, Prov. 28:5
- 👉 Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord until he comes and showers righteousness on you, Hosea 10:12
- 👉 Seek me and live, Amos 5:13

SHADE

Well, the ideal of shade is very appealing in the heat of the summer; especially in your *neck of the woods*. A shade can such a relief from the blazing Sun with or without humidity or a breeze. Shade is most commonly found beneath a tree...a thick, hardwood kind of tree.

Charles Dickens (author of many classic books) advises that careful nurturing of a tree will yield ample shade in the year's to come. Perhaps using the Proverb, "Train up a child...", Mr. Dickens inserts "fig tree" – his wisdom evidently found in the experience and relief of its shade. Phillip Chesterfield describes "knowledge" as like a shade in the sense that it be a shelter or retreat in our age. Our mind or ability may decline but not at the rate of our physical strength; knowledge will help keep us sound and useful in those senior years. In both applications, shade is analogous to comfort, shelter, security and other names of similar definition and description,

Train up a fig tree in the way it should go, and when you are old sit under the shade of it.

- [Charles Dickens](#), *English novelist*

Knowledge is a comfortable and necessary retreat and shelter for us in advanced age, and if we do not plant it while young, it will give us no shade when we grow old.

-[Phillip Chesterfield](#), *English politician (1694 - 1773)*

When I was boy, living on the Broad River in South Carolina, shade came largely by the Live Oak Trees. These monstrous Oaks have no match in the family of trees as far as the branches are concerned; branches extending out far enough to challenge gravity to its most. Give me a Live Oak in the face of a Summer Sun and I'll be much happier.

At the same time, I might just climb that tree for in that day...I would climb these trees on a challenge or on a whim. I would scoot out on one of those forever branches to the point of jumping if the notion caught me. At the height of the branch, the distance to ground seemed much further than from the ground looking up.

SHAME

What is the difference between shame and guilt?

Shame is described as a painful sense of having done something wrong. The expression, "You should be ashamed" was sometimes applied in chiding someone for doing wrong – to invoke a sense of wrongdoing or what's called contrition. Guilt is defined as a responsibility for wrongdoing. Shame is an internal matter perhaps resulting from our conscience that tells us, "you did something wrong, or that was wrong". The well-known author and counselor, John Bradshaw addresses both positive and negative aspects of shame in his book, "Healing the Shame that Binds You":

Our **healthy shame** is essential as the ground of our spirituality. By signaling us of our essential limitations, our healthy shame lets us know that we are not God. Our healthy shame points us in the direction of some larger meaning. It lets us know that there is something or someone greater than ourselves. Our healthy shame is the psychological ground of our humility."

Toxic shame is no longer an emotion that signals our limits, it is a state of being, a core identity. Toxic shame gives you a sense of worthlessness, a sense of failing and falling short as a human being. Toxic shame is a rupture of the self with the self – it is described further by the self-analysis: If I am flawed, defective and a mistake, then there is nothing that can be done about me.

"Any human emotion can become internalized. When **internalized**, an emotion stops functioning in the manner of an emotion and becomes a part of our character. You probably know of someone who could be labeled 'an angry person', or someone you'd call a 'sad sack'. In both cases the emotion has become the core of the person's character, her identity. The person doesn't have anger or melancholy, she is angry and melancholy. Shame is internalized when one is abandoned. **Abandonment** is the precise term to describe how one loses one's authentic self and ceases to exist psychologically. Children cannot know who they are without reflective mirrors. Parents or caretakers who are shut down emotionally (all shame based parents) cannot mirror and affirm their child's emotions.

"The shame binding of feelings, needs and natural instinctual drives, is a key factor in changing healthy shame into toxic shame. **Shame-bound** means that any feeling, and need or any drive, prompts shame...you are shamed to the core."

Healthy shame begins at birth and through the Holy Spirit that indwells us with discernment and understanding of sin, disobedience, conviction, forgiveness, healing and restoration. Toxic shame is characterized by a *sense of worthlessness, a sense of failing and falling short as a human being.*

SHELLS

There are many types of shells...and even a type of rock called "shell". For you, living near the beach, shells are abundant to the point that such sea life becomes a theme for decorating a room, house or office. Having the ocean, beach, or similar theme for a property on the beach only seems appropriate – what you don't see at the sea, you can always place in your place. If someone has never seen a Marlin on the water, they can place a picture or a replicable of a Marlin on their wall.



I remember that you enjoyed walking the beach and finding shells and other marine life when possible. From these excursions, all sundry of sea life can emerge from dead fish to crabs and then some. The ocean seems to possess an endless number of life forms and a boundless volume of water and other substances. The single shell that is discovered on the shore is such a small and insignificant piece of the ocean's entirety; though, as children and adults alike, a piece that is attractive, alluring and valuable if just for the day. Isaac Newton compared the ocean and shells to his journey of discovery and knowledge – his claims and accomplishments but a small part of an *ocean of truth undiscovered*...

I was like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

- [Isaac Newton](#)

English mathematician & physicist
(1642 - 1727)

The vain man is generally a doubter. It is Newton who sees himself as child on the sea shore, and his discoveries in the colored shell.

- Peter Willmott, Socialist England

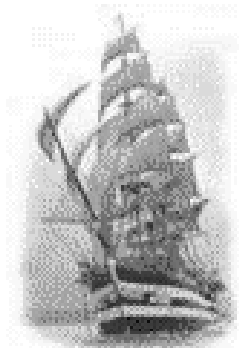
If such discovery can be found in a shell, its hue and texture, than what lies ahead in the "great ocean" is an unfathomable form of unclaimed discovery waiting for those who do not doubt and who are not so vain and to convince themselves otherwise.

Therefore, lay aside the humdrum and complacency that may be weighing you down – keeping you

from discovering, not only the shell on beach, but the place from whence it came and from where other shells and the like still remain. Discovery is a beautiful place to be - where looking forward is not certain, looking back is not an option, and pressing on is necessary.

SHIPS

Ships are fascinating to watch; perhaps more fascinating to be on board barring no sea sickness. Ships are one of the earliest forms of long-distance travel. From the tall ships as illustrated to the right {or should I say the “starboard”} to the first vessels of the sea, to the modern ships in service and under design, these vessels have been central to cultural, economic, and military development for recorded history.



Recently I read of some of the Navy’s newest designs in Popular Mechanics: called Littoral Ships {LCS}, the primary mission is to keep the operating area around aircraft carrier battle groups clear of submarine-delivered and floating mines. Much as with the versatility of Viking ships with seaworthy and low-water negotiability, the LCS would be able to enter



tributaries and low-draft waterways, deploy forces without pier or dock facilities, and remain relatively stealth due to its design features of low signature. Fast, stealthy, and maneuverable – sounds much like a high-performance car.

You may remember the few times that we went over to Mayport – the Naval base north of Jacksonville. Currently, Mayport provides a home port to several classes of ships

including one carrier and many guided missile cruisers and destroyers and frigates. In addition, the base has an air command that support six helicopter squadrons classified as Light Airborne Multi-purpose System (LAMPS). These helicopters may be deployed aboard the ships that are equipped to hanger-support the aircraft. LAMPS indicate the functionality to locate and identify threatening submarines.

Some day we will go again to this place and learn more about the Navy, ships, and such stuff. Until then, keep the hatches battened-down and an eye peeled to the forward...and anchors away!

SICK

Being sick is generally not fun; and being sick may require you to be hospitalized or receive home care over an extended period of time. Being sick may involve a disease, disability, or similar serious illnesses; indeed, such sickness can be fatal or result in death. Being sick, or knowing someone who is sick, is discouraging at times: you want healing for you or for them and can grow weary at the onset or continuation of such a condition.



Our bodies and health are a gift from God – something that is all the more appreciated and understood when a sickness occurs with you or even someone you know.

Colds are considered mild, but the Flu is much more serious; still, Pneumonia can be fatal and often lead to death before modern medicine and care. Sore bones and muscles can occur with exercise in both conditioning and when strained by extraordinary activity. Warming-up with stretches and progressive conditioning can limit such strains and stresses on the muscles and body. Since the heart is a muscle, care must be taken to exercise the heart and lungs. Nutrition is also very important remembering the old adage: junk in and junk out. Diet and vitamins are important; recently, I began taking vitamins on a regular basis.

The body is like an engine – it needs fuel...good fuel! Nutrition, exercise, and periodic visits to the doctor for a physical is the right combination to ward off many common illnesses. Even with some a regimen, sickness can come our way; but such occurrences, however few, remind us the precious gift of life, of health, and of our bodies and minds.

I am not sure why we get sick and why some sickness leads to death; but I do know that God offers a perfect place called Heaven where sickness, illness or any other malady or deformity is no more – this perfect place will be such a relief for those who have been sick for a long time or suffer with tremendous and unending pain and illness with their present, physical bodies.

SILENCE

Silence is without noise or sound; to be silent is to refrain from comment or speech or even any form of communication. Silence does not necessarily mean that you don't have an opinion or voice; it means that you

are purposely or actively refraining from communication to listen or because you don't have sufficient information. Similar to some Proverbs, the quote from Abe Lincoln advises silence and reservation as a substitute for foolish conversation or behavior.

"Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt."

-- Abraham Lincoln

The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak – the challenge may be figuring out each time! In the Book of Acts, the Ethiopian eunuch read from the book of Isaiah: *He was lead like a sheep to the slaughter, and a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice...*

The passage, which is found in both Isaiah and Acts, describes the Savior's silence. It seems ironic that one would remain silent when confronted by injustice and attempts to hurt and even kill him, yet Jesus did just that! "Why?" you might ask. Because he was doing his Father's will – to die a ransom for many that all may have the opportunity for internal life.

In keeping with this subject of silence is the practice of controlling the tongue – or being mindful of what you say.

Proverbs describes the wise as having a tongue (or speech) that brings healing; and to elaborate, the book continues with the following verses:

A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble; he who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

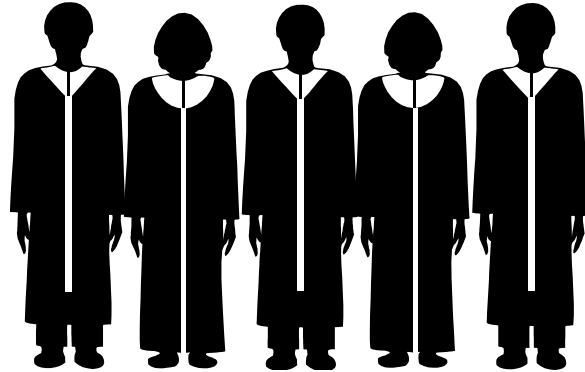
In Romans 3, Paul describes the unrighteous as *their tongues practice deceit...their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness* – this behavior is but part of their unrighteousness of the unbeliever.



But on a high note, the following from Psalm: *Set a guard over my mouth O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil...*

SING

To the right is most obviously a choir or ensemble. Clad in the familiar robes of a church choir, the figure can invoke the mental sound of praise or traditional music, a rhythmic and synchronized movement of the members, and the possibility of a piano and other instruments to accompany the vocal expression of aged and modern hymns and songs of worship .



Singing is fun, its entertaining, it's gratifying, and it generally has meaning and purpose; it is an art form, is a source of culture and history, and it describes or represents society. Song and music is diverse beyond an individual's imagination with an endless mix of instruments, notes, interludes, tempo, inflections and all the other features of composition and performance. Song is the backbone of many plays and movies – providing the mood and setting.

Folk music provides a story of a legend of some type (e.g. Davy Crockett) having acclaim through a struggle, conflict or the like. Blues is similar but with undertones or overt messages of “down-on-luck” situations, episodes, or lifetime commandments – both the instrumentation and words blend such messages with apparent depth and sorrow to the point of intrigue and empathy. Rock & Roll can be simple and lively with few words repeated over and over; although, this class of music can be very complex and detailed as well. Country music has moved into the Pop category but in its origin was a lot like folk music in terms of the instruments, messages, and meaning; unlike Folk music, Country is often fun to dance to...if you can even two-step. Classical music is complex with or without vocal – as a novice to this music, my only comments are that that Classical is uplifting, providing some sense of refinement and culture beyond the real grind of life. Rap has to be my least favorite of all forms of music both in its form and content – no further comments on this so-called music.

I have not even began to cover the essence of song and the importance of music to you; but I close with the simple request to make music a part of your lives, to learn it, experience it, desire it, sing it, play it, and bask in this universal language that God created and has bequeath to us for his Glory.

SITUATION

A situation usually describes a condition or circumstance. The English seem to use this word more often than Americans – but this is only a casual observation.

To understand the present situation, the participant(s) must first accept the represented conditions and circumstances. Consider the following example in mine and your lives. For several years, the situation of your and my estrangement or separation has been, in the most basic description, a situation. To accept the conditions and circumstances is to realize that your best interest and genuine care is not a priority; indeed, the single-parent lifestyle forced on you has placed your present and future lives at greater risks, hardship and difficulty. Though the situation grieves me, acceptance is a necessary step toward change for the better as Peter McWilliams describes below.

Acceptance is not a state of passivity or inaction. I am not saying you can't change the world, right wrongs, or replace evil with good. Acceptance is, in fact, the first step to successful action. If you don't fully accept a situation precisely the way it is, you will have difficulty changing it. Moreover, if you don't fully accept the situation, you will never really know if the situation should be changed.

- **Peter McWilliams**, *Life 101*

My current response is not passivity or doing nothing; but has been prayer over the matter, for you and for us – prayer that seeks repentance, healing and restoration in broken relationships, hardened hearts, anger and revenge in the midst of children's suffering and loss. Taking this situation *to the Cross of Christ* has not been a choice, but a necessity – only God can bring healing and restoration...not the courts! Still, the courts and attorneys have been involved, if just to collect their retainers or spoils from the situation where two parents cannot be responsible for the care of their children, faithful to God and committed to a covenant made before the church. In short, the courts do not care about you; indeed, they do even know who you are or the relationship that once existed between us.

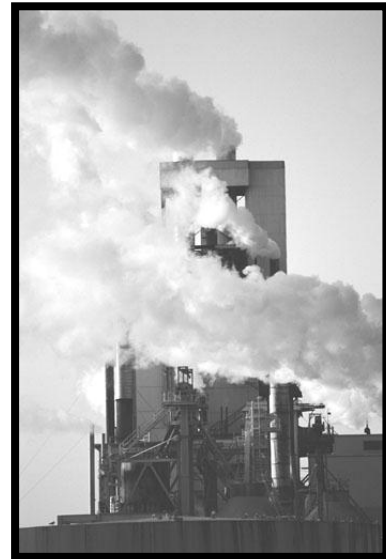
Yet, there is hope that rest entirely God, his promises, his love for you, and his commitment to hear our prayers and to respond by his will. In the interim, and while we wait, do not befall the easy disposition of victim or self-pity; but instead take on the acceptance of the situation that has been placed at the Cross and is heavy on the hearts of those who love you, miss you, and await your return to our lives.

If you see in any given situation only what everybody else can see, you can be said to be so much a representative of your culture than you are a victim of it.

S. I. Hayakawa

SMOKE

Smoke can refer to both the substance and the practice; the stuff that flows into the air, and the stuff that seeps into our nostrils and lungs. Smoke can be bothersome, causing a reaction of watery eyes and coughing; but it can be somewhat pleasurable with an alluring smell depending on the source and your attraction to aromas. Industrial smoke, like that pictured to the right, is seldom if ever alluring; but smoke from a fire or cigar can invoke a degree of pleasure if just to prompt the mind of a pleasing memory, individual, or situation from the past.



Smoke is elusive with a density that ranges from the blinding thickness, like a fog, to barely noticeable both visibly and by smell. Smoke cannot be controlled very well but, due to condition of hot air, will generally float upwards and away from its source. The use of the phrase, “Smoke and Mirrors”, is often applied to a condition or situation that is illusive or one aimed at creating one message or meaning though being entirely different. Smoke, combined with mirrors, creates a blurred and distorted impression of the situation – transforming reality into imaginary, understanding into impression, and truth into misleading if not false information.

Smoke may provide momentary pleasure to the senses but, generally, is a by-product of energy applied to some cause or purpose. Smoke can draw attention to a point on the horizon, but once there, only stifles and suffocates those who arrive. Consider the habit of smoking that obviously brings pleasure to the smoker but annoyance to the surrounding noses, eyes and lungs. The smoker may not be totally sold on smoking but does not have enough desire to stop the practice – even with the understanding that the habit will cause death to them and harm to those closest to them. Having the choice between smoking and not, they choose to smoke – they choose to continue this lifestyle and behavior because it is what they know, what they’ve learned, and what serves them well. Whether smoking or some other behavior or habit, the life commandment is both pleasurable and punitive in its effect; though the effect may be veiled in the nature of smoke with all its elusion, illusion and aroma.

SNOW

It may be some time before you experience snow and, for me, it has been a seldom occurrence...but just enough to appreciate the beauty without too much of an inconvenience.

As the picture illustrates, snow is beautiful: pure, uniform, untouched, unblemished, contoured, and consistent. A layer of snow can transform an image – as the natural setting becomes a wonderland of black, white and shades of gray.



Snow and ice can also be a headache – especially if you have to drive in it, shovel it, or otherwise work around it instead of playing in it. Snow and ice cause many accidents in the form of slipping, sliding, skidding, spinning, and many more actions verbs. Nothing is more concerning than losing control on ice.

To hate snow, you only have to live in it for a few seasons; to love snow you only have to enjoy it every few seasons. Yet, most of us would probably agree that snow is cold and white – that is a fact!

So was the impression of a man riding on a wagon in the silence of a snow-laden forest; stopping for a moment to rest himself along the tiresome journey, he writes about the scene of *woods filling up with snow*.

Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village though; He will not see me stopping here to watch his woods fill up with snow.

[Robert Frost](#), *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, US poet (1874 - 1963)

When I was in the 3rd grade, living in Jacksonville, I memorized this poem. As I think of my boyhood and these fun experiences, my hope is that you too can read of and bask in the snow – for it leaves you with a memory that is pleasant and rejuvenating about such times and such words as these.

SOWING

Sowing is laying seed or making preparation for reaping or harvest. Using it as a metaphor, sowing can be applied to other areas of life; consider that love can be sown to conquer and destroy hatred, and good can be sown to overcome evil. To sow requires energy and the vision that much will be reaped or collected from the toil and effort. Preferably, "good" seed is sown – which is presumed to reap good things; but "bad" can be sown with or without the intention to reap bad things.



Let me use an example that may apply to all cases or outcomes described above. If you buy or pick flowers for someone, you expect that the flowers will bring them happiness. You attempt to reap happiness by sowing with a bouquet of flowers but it did work – your intentions were right but the outcome was not as predicted.

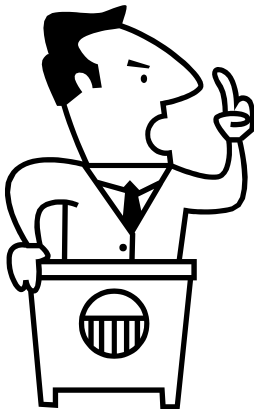
Suppose you sow a bad seed; for example, you intentionally lie or mislead someone with the intention of hurting them or those involved in the deceit. Sowing bad seed can yield bad fruit or can reap a bad result for those who were misled – while giving some pleasure to the one who planted the bad seed. This intention may seem unusual but the fact-of-the-matter is that all of us have done something like this simply out of anger, revenge or spite. The hurt that we cause in others can render a perverted degree of pleasure – it happens, but it is not right!

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace!
Where there is hatred let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

-Saint Francis of Assisi, "Prayer of
St Francis" (attributed)
Italian monk & saint (1181 - 1226)

Sow good seed for the promise of good fruit; do not sow bad seed with the intention of producing bad fruit or causing harm to others for your pleasure. Like the farmer who conducts his operations with the best outcome or intention in mind, *put your hand to the plow* and sow good seed for the intended abundance.

SPEAKING



Speaking is a skill or talent that has value. Being able to succinctly and convincingly deliver a message is of vital importance to leaders, politicians, coaches, and other such members of society. But sometimes *talk is cheap*; the most eloquent and well-developed speech can be worthless if it does not foster action or results. Great diction and composition can be a clever disguise for a subtle message of misinformation, lies, and other such devices. Not all great orators were good people or even had the best intentions in mind, but were often self-engrossed with the aim of manipulation and control.

Speech or public speaking can be used: *to plant good seed or bad seed*; to invoke the best in the audience or incite the worst; to promote redeeming things, or to fuel the absolute worst.

Speech can be embellished with passion driven by anger or outrage. These emotions are not necessarily bad, but can be justified if the emotions or reaction is due to an injustice. When Jesus found the merchants selling their wares in the temple, he was outraged and angry. The house of God is not a place to conduct business or profit through merchandising – as Jesus made that very clear. Anger was also evident in the dialogue between Jesus and the Hebrew leaders; again, anger can be justified as an outcry to injustice.

Caution and reserve must be practiced in the course of our speech. What we say in a moment of anger can cause a lifetime of regret; thus, you must be careful to *guard that tongue* in such moments – even if the matter involves an injustice or something unfair.

Furthermore, injustice must not be met or countered by more injustices or evil. In your words and in your actions, pray for control and guidance that justice may be served through Christ.

Speech is conveniently located midway between thought and action, where it often substitutes for both.

- [John Andrew Holmes](#), "*Wisdom in Small Doses*"

Speak when you are angry--and you will make the best speech you'll ever regret.

- [Laurence J. Peter](#), US educator & writer (1919 - 1988)

A good man would prefer to be defeated than to defeat injustice by evil means.

- [Sallust](#), 'Jugurthine War,' 41
B.C. Roman historian & politician
(86 BC - 34 BC)

SPILLS

“No use crying over spilled milk” is an adage that applies to worrying over something that has already occurred and seems relatively minor or incidental. Some spills are not that important while other spills, that have environmental consequences, may be very serious – and having young children creates a combination of both types.



To elaborate on this subject, children and spills, let's begin with the uncovered cups and such that invariably get tipped or dropped from day to day...hour to hour; not a serious spill but certainly a routine to be sure. Moving on to the less frequent, but more serious, are the spills that emanate or ooze from the so-called seep-less diapers; oh yeah, this can render all kinds of fun and frenzy to the unexpected child bearer or the innocent



bystander. Nothing says I love you like the fountain that springs from the baby boy as he lays diaper-less on the changing table. Like the whalers of old, *there she {I mean he} blows.*

Whether simple or serious, spills must be cleaned...if it can be done. Whether a parent or an organized reclamation team, the clean-up of spills represent an opportunity to *call to arms* the most determined and bravest of souls.

Other spills can be broadcast at the market such as: “clean-up on aisle 9”. Once again, the clean team is quickly deployed to the department for the inspection and follow-on procedure of clean-up of that bottle of liquid soap, beverage, or other food-grade stuff. Seldom is the question, “How did that spill occur?” as the matter at hand is getting that spill cleaned-up! .

STANDARDS

By “standards”, I am referring to morals, ethics, rules, and personal practices and beliefs. Ray Kroc describes the *quality of a leader* as measured by the standards that he or she has set...

The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves.

Ray Kroc, Founder McDonald's

Standards apply in many areas:

- ✧ Products are designed and manufactured to certain standards regarding fit, form and function
- ✧ Services are designed, executed and rendered to certain standards of performance and customer expectations
- ✧ Activities or tasks are carried out with certain procedures that include standard policies, practices, and procedures
- ✧ School systems have standards for testing, grading, and conduct
- ✧ Institutions and organizations have standards for any variety of measurements, calibrations, techniques of time, distance, weight, and the list goes on and on
- ✧ Individual, families, societies and cultures establish standards for living to include economic, political and social conditions and conduct

What are your personal standards in terms what you think about yourself, your behavior, your values and morals?

Do you place high value in yourself; or as a believer, do you love yourself realizing that God made you and has a purpose for your life. If you don't love yourself, you cannot love anyone or anything else...not really.

Set high standards and few limitations for yourself.

Anthony J. D'Angelo, *The College Blue Book*

If you love yourself, it should be because God made you and is ever changing you into the likeness of Jesus; in other words, you don't love yourself in some self-acclaimed-egotistical way, but because you are God's creation and he desires that we love ourselves. The scriptures tell husbands that they should love their wives *as their own bodies*; thus, if a husband does not love himself, how can he love his wife?

Standards are very important and are formed and maintained by the influences in our lives and by our own opinion of ourselves. Though we are not perfect, yet through his Lordship, we understand the basis for these standards and find freedom and truth.

STARS

Stars come in many forms and applications:

- ★ Movie stars
- ★ Stars in space
- ★ Star Wars
- ★ Stars on the law enforcement
- ★ Star ships
- ★ Star Galaxies
- ★ Star Fish
- ★ Star players in sports
- ★ Stars on a flag
- ★ Star of David



One of my favorite Psalms is chapter

8 – *When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers, the moon and the **stars**, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?*

Around my home, starry nights are very evident because we don't have the light pollution of large cities. The brightness, vastness, and multitude of the celestial bodies is overwhelming, awesome, magnificent... From the brightest to the faint and clustered, stars and planets have long fascinated man and served him well in navigation and travel.

A clear night, as described by the Psalmist and in my observation, is a vivid reminder that our existence and environment are framed in a much large expanse than we generally think about or consider. At your age, the framework may pertain to your home, family, and the school you attend; as you get older, it may be the city, country or even state; but, of course, the actual framework is much, much larger than that for which we dwell, see and experience routinely. When the Psalmist described this unbounded expanse, he expressed his own smallness and seeming insignificance compared to the heavens, to God.

Though I want begin to explore and summarize the latest findings or theories of space distance and expanse, the fact is that any bounds or limits have not yet been discovered or validated; indeed, space remains an unknown in terms of extraterrestrial existence, bounds and limits, and composition or matter. It is an unimaginable body of space and distance that continues to perplex and profound the mind of even our greatest scientists and astronomers. We believe that God created the heavens and the earth; thus, he understands this region that we call space and the matter that we define as celestial bodies.

STEPS



This letter is about steps on a staircase, or rungs on a ladder. Climbing the steps or the rungs is not effortless – it takes energy and work to climb, with a bit of caution and safety for the ladder. Climbing one of these devices enables us to get to a place with objectives in mind; yes, the effort is necessary, but also justified by the opportunity to accomplish the objective.

The objective may be nothing more than to change one's perspective...to get a better view of things; yet, it is has an objective in mind just the same. Ladders and staircases can sometimes represent a opportunity to escape – such as a fire-escape in a building or something of the kind. Access to this egress is sometimes vital to our safety as life-threatening circumstances, such as fire, can surround us and quickly overwhelm our senses and abilities. An escape or a place of refuge is the objective in a staircase or ladder that leads from somewhere dangerous to somewhere that is safe, tranquil, and secure.

In Genesis, Jacob dreamed of a ladder or a stairway leading to heaven. During his escape from a very angry brother named Esau, Jacob dreamed that he would not be killed by his brother, but would prosper as part of the lineage of David; moreover, Jacob would one day return to his homeland. Though he deceived his father and bargained for his brother's birthright, Jacob would be delivered from the wrath and fury of his brother; and would be blessed through God plan and purpose for his life.

"Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood The Lord, and He said, "I Am The Lord, The God of your father Abraham and The God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I Am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land." (Genesis 28:10-15)

What a relief and a joy to know that those who believe in God and receive him as Lord of their lives are climbing this stairway toward heaven; step-by-step, rung-by-rung, we are ever increasing in Christ's likeness.

STONEHENGE

Stonehenge has long been studied in archeology and antiquity: the formation and meaning of this structure; the circular pattern and symbolism of the configuration; the practice or pagan worship that represented the culture of that day...



Some believe that this structure served as a religious center or temple for the Druids in ancient England; perhaps built in stages with modification over an extended period of time. It might be conceivable that a pagan religion of that time offered sacrifices of some kind to a god or gods of some kind; but such practices or religious orientation are only speculation. The obvious is that the stones had to be erected by some great effort and have endured through the ages in some form.

This morning, my reading took me to the book of Ecclesiastes; in chapter 5, the following relates to both the last letter entitled "Steps" and this letter if ever so tacitly: *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.* This scripture continues with: *When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.*

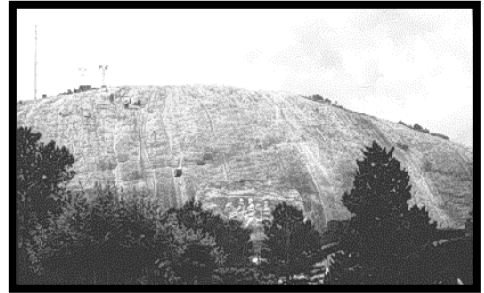
As I think of Stonehenge and the scripture above, the connection arises that this monument of some ancient religion is meaningless without an understanding and belief in the religion for which it stands; likewise, the many church buildings and other artifices of Christianity are largely meaningless unless one understands and believes in Christ. To pose as a believer does not in anyway fool God; indeed, we may only be fooling ourselves while deceiving some in the process.

Call it hypocrisy or apostasy, but to effectively abandon our faith in God is to break a vow, a commitment, and covenant. The consequences of this egregious act of betrayal and denial are devastating to the individual and to others as well. Though Peter denied his relationship with Jesus, he repented and was restored; yet Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, did not repent and died in grief. The lesson is that our belief must be real, and when we falter, that repentance must come followed by forgiveness, restoration, and wisdom.

StoneMountain

Stone Mountain, Georgia was a favorite place for us. In the summer, or on weekends, we might just mini-van down Five Forks Trickum while picking-up a watermelon along the way.

Spending a day at the park could include swimming, hiking, playing in the park, visiting a petting zoo or museum, perusing the gift shop, or hanging-out in the antebellum village dressed in 1860's period clothing. In short, Stone Mountain offered a lot of enjoyment and adventure.



As we neared the park, a vista on the road gave a clear view of "the rock". At that point, I would prompt Wesley with the usual reply, "Look, there's Stone Mountain"; after which, he would get all excited and prepared for the day.

One particular spring, we participated in the annual antebellum festival as civilian or military re-enactors. Abby loved to hang-out at the one-room school house and pretend that she was a pupil. Matthew would assume his role as a courier in the 125th Ohio and muster-up for his day's duties and activities. Ben and Brain would generally watch and play with the simplicity of the period and imagination.

I was very proud of my daughter who, by reports from the Pedagogue, received good marks for her conduct and studies. Ben did not do quite as well but still got to ring the bell for class to commence. Wesley was best left beyond the confines of the school house among the soldiers or near the camp. Matthew was too pre-occupied with the protocol of the army to concern himself with schooling. It was a fine scene that leaves lasting memories for my mind to cherish into my years.

If the rocks really do cry out, Stone Mountain would murmur a wistful expression regarding the time and distance of my children who played and danced below her dress skirt and who, on occasion, climbed into her arms. The mountain might lament on the matter; that somehow, her apparent and imposing hardness caused such a condition. But she is majestic with her forest, lakes, and venues; adorned with all these qualities, she has confirmed the very attraction to and enjoyment of her presence.

Having recently called on her once more, Stone Mountain remains resolute that one day she will see these children again - one day they will play and dance beneath her, and climb into her outstretched arms.

STONES

No, this story is not about the Rolling Stones; but it is about those things that we sometimes call rocks...big rocks.

Stones can be used for many things:

- ✿ Throw stones or shoot them from a sling or catapult
- ✿ Skip them across the water – if the stones are small and preferably flat
- ✿ Build a wall or some other structure – if the stone are large enough and you happen to be stone mason
- ✿ Make a rock garden or other decorative things
- ✿ Polish, collect and otherwise make a hobby
- ✿ Crush into some granular material, such as gravel



Many additional things could probably be done with stone but I'll let you think about it.

In my town, this same word is used for other purposes: a building at the local college is called "The Stone Center"; there is a local golf course called "Stony Brook"; and there are likely one or more subdivisions that bear the name. In all cases, the reference to "stone" probably has much to do with someone by the name as it does to actual stones.

In the Bible, there are many accounts of stones:

- 📖 David used fine round stones to kill Goliath
- 📖 Jacob slept on a stone {a hard pillow} when God promised his future
- 📖 Jesus was described as the capstone, the *stone the builders rejected*
- 📖 As Jesus is a living stone, so too are we living stones *being build into a house*, according to Peter
- 📖 Building upon this living stone with costly stone {or silver and other materials} will be tested for its integrity – if one's work is real and worthy, he will be rewarded...but *it will tested with fire* to test the quality of the work
- 📖 Stoning was a common form of punishment or execution...such as with Stephen
- 📖 For those who overcome, God will give him a white stone – as the key or pass into Heaven {see Revelation 2:17}
- 📖 Jesus is the living stone – *a chosen and precious cornerstone*

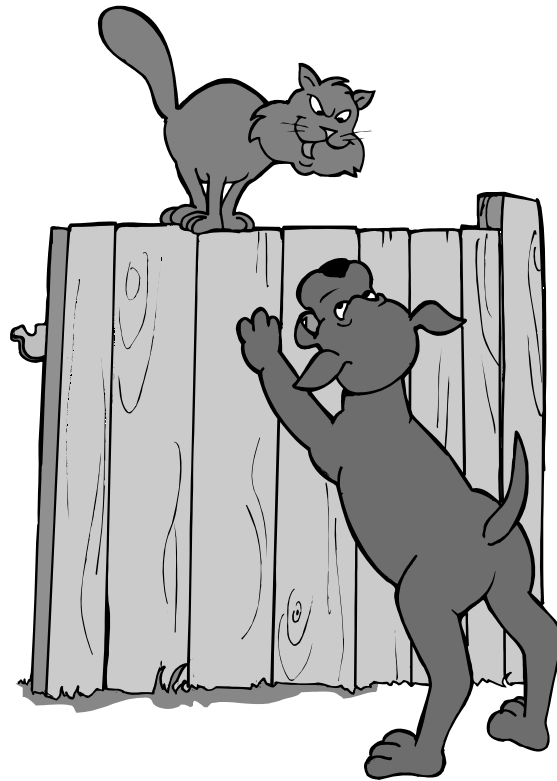
Find some other uses of the word for yourself.

STRADDLE

The expression, “straddle the fence” means to not take a position on a matter or to be indecisive or stand in the middle of the issue or argument.

Some people belong to the Democratic Party, others to the Republican and still other to another political party; yet, some claim no political party, but remain independent or non-party. Those who do claim or belong to a political party might say that those who do not are *straddling the fence*.

Issues, ball teams, and other matters of varied opinion often result in some participants who are indecisive or remain unaffiliated with one side or the other – they seem to decide to be undecided! George Shultz described this predicament as very dangerous; essentially, those who stand in the middle of the road {or fence} get hit from both sides. Who knows, the cat straddling the fence may have a dog barking on the other side as well – not a good position to be in!



To be undecided on a matter is not so bad – maybe additional time and information is needed to make a decision or choose a side. Some would call this postponement a form of wisdom or a methodical, calculated decision; but in the course of human events, a position or side must invariably be taken at one time or another.

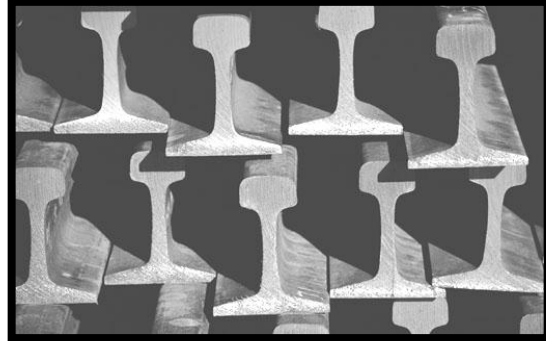
"He who walks in the middle of the road gets hit from both sides."

--George P. Shultz, in Richard M. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 1978.

In the Bible, Paul instructs Christians to *put on the full armor of God* so as to *take a stand against the devil's scheme*. Similar instructions to stand firm in the faith based on teaching and by God's power all require a decision, conviction, patience and promise...and not to *straddle the fence*.

STRENGTH

When I was in college, one of the courses that I had to take was called “strength of materials”. From my recollection, this course provided some understanding of the molecular structure of materials such as iron, steel, aluminum and other metals and similar materials. Metals, such as iron, are extracted from iron ore using intense heat; the liquid metal is cooled and formed into a solid through a process called annealing; and the process continues to produce a strong material defined by its molecular structure.



The strength of a material or substance is usually measured in terms of physical or chemical properties; but the strength of a person is measured in terms of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual abilities. An athlete is most identified to physical strength but certainly must possess the mental and emotional strength to focus on the game or event. Often, the athlete or sports in general are applied to the idea of dedication, discipline, training, and success.

In the Bible, Paul describes his relationship with the Lord as being like an athlete in that he buffets or conditions his body to the degree as though to *win the prize*. Like the metal described above, human strength is developed through processes that take time, energy, control, precision, and great attention. As the blacksmith or steelworker processes metal, so the Lord processes us – it is through the development of our faith, that his strength is enabled within us.

Whereas processed metal is used to construct buildings, ships, and all sundries of products, we are used by the Lord to glorify him through the strength he supplies to us. Understand that the products of metal can be durable; but the products resulting from your strength can be eternal for you are *storing treasures in heaven whereby moth and rust cannot destroy*.

You may have heard the saying, “testing your metal” – which means to test your strength, will or determination. I pray that your metal may be found strong having been refined through fire. Remember, that *as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another* (Proverbs 27:17).

STUPIDITY

Stupidity is just an extension of the word, “stupid”; and being stupid is said to have a dullness of the mind.

Will Rogers, a wise man of many years ago, asks a somewhat humorous question for “the mess” – which probably refers to The Great Depression.

Stupidity can be broadly and sometimes inaccurately sited as the cause for many-a-problem; most likely, the cause or causes go much deeper than the broad brushed condition of stupidity.

"If Stupidity got us into this mess, then why can't it get us out?" "

- Will Rogers (1879-1935)

Continuing with the practice of a broad brush application, society or a society is sometimes discredited with this behavior (of stupidity). In such conditions, some will profit and some will lose. Maybe the ones who profit are filled with greed!

There are only two ways by which to rise in this world, either by one's own industry or by the stupidity of others.

Jean de LaBruyere

Stupidity has a number of characteristics – it is:

- Incurable – even with lots of money, education, or legal recourse
- Universal – or global or international...it's everywhere!
- Criminal – considered a crime without pity or reprieve

Well, now that you know something about stupidity, be careful to not misidentify other redeemable qualities or behavior. Don't confuse love and forgiveness with stupidity; these qualities (of love and forgiveness) are vitally important and should not be mistaken for stupidity. Don't confuse meekness with stupidity.

Meekness is having courage and patience to endure mistreatment or offenses lodged against you; for example, Jesus was meek when he was being prosecuted for blasphemy. Finally, don't confuse faith with stupidity; remember, that *faith is being sure of what is hoped for, and certain of what we do not see.*

Your faith in God, his promises, and his miraculous power can never be considered as stupidity.

SUFFER

To suffer is to bear loss, damage or injury – often with great and enduring pain. Suffering is a condition that few if any of us cherish and, in many cases, would avoid at all costs. Yet, as Thomas Merton describes, the purposeful avoidance of suffering can only produce more suffering – the process of avoidance reduces the tolerance or capability to endure suffering...it is inevitable.

Suffering in many forms from the physical pain of an injury to the emotionally trauma of a climatic event or experience. Suffering can occur over a period of hours or days, or it can last a lifetime.

Suffering does not occur to only whom we think might deserve it – as though they are receiving their due reward for wrongdoing; no, suffering an experience that is irrespective to the person and their disposition, or the presuppositions of others regarding the assessment or judgment for suffering. Yes, some do cause others to suffer whether they intend to or not; the decisions made by the powerful do have consequences on the powerless and the evil present in the world does render some pleasure in witnessing and even causing the suffering of others...all this is true.

Thus, the question is not whether you will suffer but to what degree and for how long. Jesus said *suffer not the little children* – the love of God applied to the precious, the innocent, the children; but also applied to....well, everyone. God is merciful to those who seek mercy and who humble themselves before him. Jesus suffered like no other such that we do not have to suffer beyond the grave; while in the place, suffering by some lesser degree will find us no matter how hard and determined we try to evade it.

Suffering does not mean that pain is intense; the pain can be dull, like a malaise, and occur in the form of grief, loneliness, isolation or other malady of a broken heart or troubled spirit. Yet in this suffering can emerge the strength in our faith that God is able to deliver us from all such suffering by and by because of Jesus.

From my house, the west is very clear and on such clear days, a beautiful sunset may appear. Periodically, I will look opposite this sunset, to the Southeast, and wonder what and how

The truth that many people never understand, until it is too late, is that the more you try to avoid suffering the more you suffer because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you in proportion to your fear of being hurt.

Thomas Merton (1915 - 1968)

It is better to suffer wrong than to do it, and happier to be sometimes cheated than not to trust.

Samuel Johnson, (1709 - 1784)

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

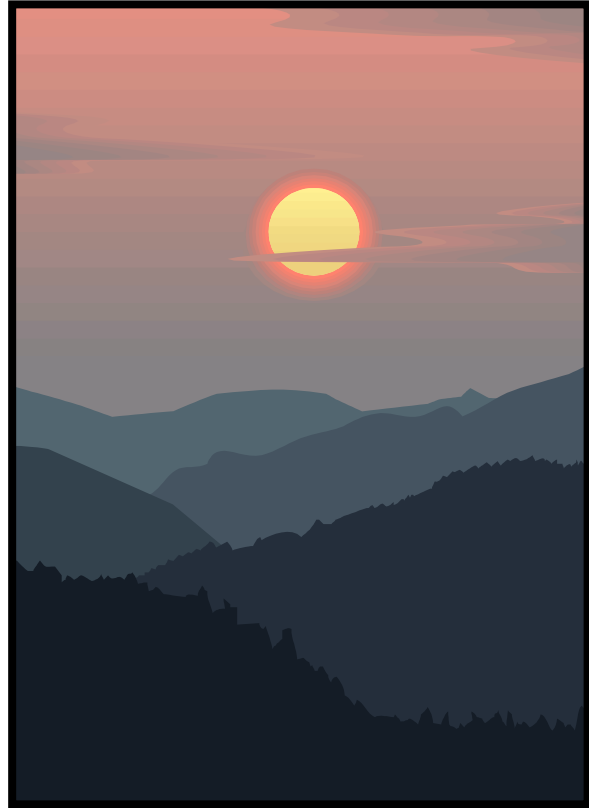
Helen Keller

SUNSET

you are doing. I might think about the day and what you may have done, what you accomplished and what you struggled with; it is a moment of reflection and wonder that happens to me about once a week or so.

Sometimes the Sun will have already passed, and the stars and moon will be the sources of light. Though I am not much of a star gazer, the same thoughts regarding you may occur...but not as often as at sunset. Maybe the setting reminds me that one more day has passed since I last saw you, or that one more day has passed until I'll see you again.

The foothills are beautiful...I long for you to see them again. Sometimes, I may pass a place or see someone that reminds me of you...at least one of you. The moment may be profound or it may be sad in the sense that I know that once we were together and free to play, to talk, and to be a family. My hope and prayer is that some day, we will be free again to talk and to be friends if possible. Yes, I will always be your father, but I long to be your friend.



As I finish this letter, the Sun has already set and the sky is filled with all kinds of stars. The foothills that I mention are not visible, of course; but will return to my sight in the morn. Should you read this letter before I see you again, look to the sunset as well – maybe from the event alone, we can begin to re-build our relationships, to play, to talk, and to be a family again.

SUPERMAN

Yesterday, Christopher Reeves died of heart failure – you may remember that he played Superman in a three movie series among other roles on stage and in the movies.



He died from injuries related to a fall from a horse. During his post-accident days, he spent a great deal of time and energy on raising attention and support for spine-related injuries and other health conditions; and solicited the support of others in the movie-making industry as well. His work both on and off the screen has undoubtedly left a positive role on children and adults alike; especially those who are suffering from similar illnesses.

Long before Christopher Reeves, Superman appeared in Marvel comic books and in a TV series. Though the effects and technology of the early productions would seem lame by today's viewer, the figure and idea of super-human strength was enough to maintain the interest of the young fellows with aspirations of being like him. "Up, up and away" he would pronounce on

his launch from any ground point. Superman was an icon and perhaps the foremost figure of all super heroes in that day.

Clark Kent was quite the opposite; whether posing or actually assuming the character, he was shy, reserved, and quite unassuming as anything similar to a super hero – which may have been a clever disguise to keep the wraps on the actual person behind this capped crusader.

A few months after the accident, he told interviewer Barbara Walters that he considered suicide in the first dark days after he was injured. But he quickly overcame such thoughts when he saw his children.

"I could see how much they needed me and wanted me... and how lucky we all are and that my brain is on straight."

SURGERY



Surgery has a mixed reaction: on the one hand, surgery is generally intended to help, but on the other hand, it involves recovery and may not actually help in the final effect.

Surgery is broadly categorized as minor and major, out-patient and in-patient, invasive and so on. The tools might include clamps, forceps, scalpel,

tweezers, and many more general and unique instruments and such. Before I include something that is very wrong, here is Encarta...

Surgery is performed by specially trained medical physicians known as surgeons. General surgery training and training in some surgical specialties, such as neurosurgery, which concerns the brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nerves, and orthopedic surgery, which repairs the bones and joints, is conducted in association with a hospital and usually lasts from five to seven years. At the end of this period, known as a residency, the general surgeon may receive further training to learn the skills of a particular specialty, or subdivision, of surgery. Surgical subdivisions include, for example, thoracic surgery, which is concerned with diseases of the chest; vascular surgery, which corrects diseases of blood vessels; plastic surgery, which reconstructs or cosmetically improves features of the body; and pediatric surgery, which is concerned with operations on children.

Further reading indicated that surgery was once performed by barbers – in addition to shaving and cutting hair, barbers performed a variety of surgical procedures from removing teeth to bloodletting. A little know fact, but the red-a-white pole symbolic of barbering, represents blood {red} and bandages {white}. So the next time you go to get a haircut, ask the barber what surgical procedures he or she performs. Oh, and don't forget to leave a tip as a haircut is sometimes all one needs to get better.



SURVIVING

Several possibilities come to mind on the matter of surviving; at the core, surviving can be narrowly averting death or a gradual progression toward health and well-being. Surviving can mean merely getting by or it can be overcoming an obstacle; it can be a moment of near perilous end, or a new contract on life.

To survive in the basic sense, life must be fueled: a plant needs water, sunshine, and nutrients; an animal needs water, rest, and food; and humans seem to need a lot more things. The greatest of all God's gifts, love must be nourished by giving of oneself with a full commitment, unselfish devotion, and much sacrifice. Without such fuel, love will *wither on the vine*.

Love cannot survive if you just give it scraps of yourself, scraps of your time, scraps of your thoughts.

Mary O'Hara

Being wise is part of the fuel for life; wisdom from God helps us discern or make decisions on life's choices and circumstances. Proverbs tells us that the *fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and understanding*. The absence of wisdom is folly.

Every man is wise when attacked by a mad dog; fewer when pursued by a mad woman; only the wisest survive when attacked by a mad notion.

Robertson Davies

Surviving is a process through which we can learn much – even mistakes enable a lesson even if it is a hard one! Soldiers and similar professions sometimes conduct survival exercises as a mean of training or conditioning for actual combat or similar environments. Through this rigorous training, the soldier learns much with some learning occurring through mistakes or failures in the course toward success. Though the training must be grueling – beyond anything I've ever experienced – the outcome and result must be very rewarding.

To relate this topic to another recent letter, surviving does include some degree of suffering. Surviving is much deeper than being inconvenienced or *put-out* – it is being *blown off your feet*, tossed into the air, and forced into a situation or circumstance that will seem impossible. Surviving should bring you to your knees with thanksgiving and rejoicing for God's mercy and salvation.

TEAMS

Teams are groups of people that work together as a multiplier of energy and talent. A team of horses is a good example where each is contributing toward a common cause of hauling or pulling something. When teams are not cohesive or unanimous in their effort, everyone suffers or is held back. Collaboration, cohesiveness, cooperation, coaching, caring and commitment are some the “C” words that describe effective teams.



Countless books and articles have been written on teams and similar topics ranging from the autobiography of a team member to the instructive texts on building champion teams. The subjects have not always been athletic teams – although this is a common theme in our society since many relate to sports and individual athletes because of the apparent talent and gifts. On a lesser scale, great entrepreneurs, statesmen, and military leaders will surface as the sources and expert on team building and such. Understand that these sources have much to contribute from their own experience, success and failures.

All of these sources, and perhaps everyone, would agree that good teams are built on a commitment to some common cause or purpose – so much so that in some cases, the teams put their lives on the line to face dangerous circumstances. Second, the team members must have a love for the activity – it is their love that renders commitment even to the point of self-sacrifice and self-interest...again a common cause. As a footnote, the team may not always feel the presence of love, especially in the midst of conflict and hardship; but feelings are whimsical, and while emotions can be a source of fuel for a team in the short term, love and commitment are the foundational qualities for the long haul. Third, the team must have talent – which can be a combination of gifts and lessons combined in practice and desire to improve or be better. Commitment, love, and developing talent...now there's a team.

TEARS

Tears are literally an outpouring of our emotions. Tears can indicate extreme relief, happiness, sadness, or terror. Sometimes when we laugh a lot, tears come to our eyes...and out of our nose. When we see a sad or gut-wrenching scene in a movie, such as when Dan and Ann (the dogs) die in *Where the Red Fern Grows*, we get all choked-up. The idea of this boy's dogs dying in the prime of their hunting lives seems unfair or unnecessary. But aside from the variety of movies that move us, real life circumstances can also produce real tears that cover the range of real emotions in our lives.

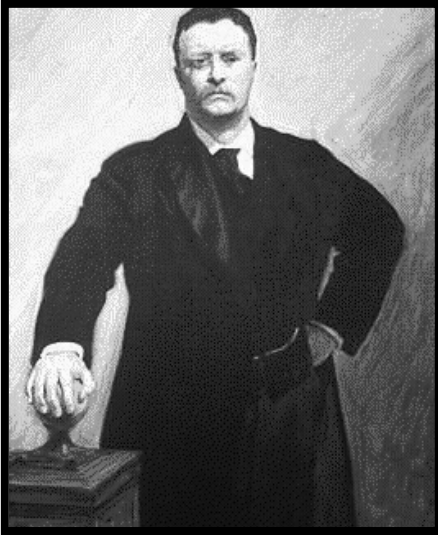


When we are *moved*, tears are a way of expressing our sensitivity – tears are an outward expression of an inward feeling, emotion, and even general disposition. A person who loves horses may cry during the recent production, *Sea Biscuit*, or some of the earlier movies of similar line such as *The Man from Snowy-River*, *Black Beauty*, or *National Velvet*. Horses have a sentimental place in a horse-lover's heart.

Parents may have similar places in the heart for their children. When the child or children tells a parent that he or she loves them...well, there is nothing more special and sentimental for a parent. When the children are hurt, the parents hurt with them; when the children celebrate with excitement, the parents celebrate with excitement too; and when the children are lonely or upset about something however trivial it may, the parents share in this experience with understanding and attention. There are times when the parents do something to make the children cry, and sometimes when the children do something {or don't do something} that makes the parents cry – but at least one of the two is crying!

Tears are natural and crying is natural. I have cried throughout my life and continue to cry on occasion as I am moved; but the tears may not always involve sadness, but also gladness.

TEDDY



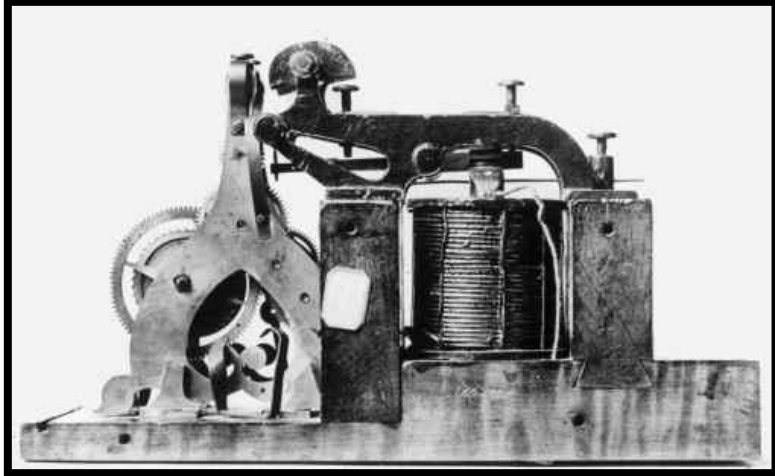
Theodore Roosevelt was our president in 1901 and served until 1909. You may be familiar with the history of his terms in such events as the building of the Panama Canal and the creation of numerous national parks. In the movie, *The Wind the Lion*, he seems to be well represented as the youngest, but most popular, president in history at the time. He is described as one who believed the president should exercise full executive power for the protection and security of the nation – which apparently was well received by the general public. Both a family man and statesmen, “Teddy” imbued the qualities of leadership during a period of American expansion and growing influence.

As with other presidents, books have been written about this man, his success as a soldier, his accomplishments as president, and quite possibly his entire life. But the purpose for this letter and the topic is to take some of his qualities for personal application. In particular, that with great leadership, Teddy was able to identify with a broad range of citizens though himself raised in a wealthy, affluent setting. He had a way of connecting to the heart of America that left many with the sense that he genuinely cared and was determined to action. His basic instinct may have been that no one was going to go unpunished for the threats or actual harm to the United States and, to that end, all resources would be utilized at his discretion to deter and dissolve all such threats. He was the personification of America’s will to defend her national interests and security. He carried “the big stick”.

With the little I know of him, this leader seemed to possess an extreme level of zeal and energy that fueled his sometimes extreme and risky endeavors. I believe that Teddy would approve and respect those who followed a similar course – even if it conflicted or ran cross to his position. He would probably measure someone by their victories and losses and not by their draws; he would probably have looked at Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of one who seemingly lost so much yet changed the course of man forever.

TELEGRAPH

In 1844, the telegraph produced a message over wire, extending 37 miles from Baltimore to Washington, D.C. The message, which read “What God hath wrought”, ushered in the age of communications via electric impulse – the first of many such events that would forever change society.



You may be familiar with Morse Code – the form of communications transmitted via telegraph that consist of a series of pings, dots and dashes, that can be translated to words such as the first message pertaining to God. To understand that Samuel Morse was a painter is to place the telegraph in a more profound place in our history. Needless to say, the development of such a device by a painter seems almost unbelievable. Once more, he remained resolute in marketing this invention to the U.S. Government – a process that lasted for more than a decade.

Samuel Morse was a professional painter whose talent in portrait work was well known. However, his career as an amateur scientist would soon overshadow his artistic endeavors. Morse went from painting to patents when he began investigating Joseph Henry's development of the electromagnet. Henry's success in sending the first electric impulse along a wire in 1831 sent Morse to the drawing board to develop a way to use this discovery in the field of communications.

You will probably never use Morse code or telegraph equipment; yet, the services of telephone and other networked communications began with this technology. As you partake and benefit in the “Age of Information”; remember that a painter was among the pioneers that began this era and forever changed our way and speed of communicating.

TELEVISION

This letter begins some discussion on radio...not television. The story of radio and its rise in popularity is fascinating. Before TV, before the Internet and PC's, before other technology of today, there was radio.



From a recent read, the following:

In 1899, radio was the result of technology capable of transmitting messages among a select group of individuals. It took 18 years for its evolution into a wide-reaching communication vehicle, providing information, entertainment, and advertising. For society, the invention had tremendous impact. The concept of distance and time for communicating information was forever changed. Information and entertainment were now transmitted simultaneously and no longer bound by geographical proximity. If people owned or had access to the appliance {radio equipment}, their lives were changed...people scheduled their days around radio programs.

To my recollection, television emerged in the 1950's and continued to expand rapidly in homes in the 1960's. If you can believe it, only three or four networks or stations were available when I was a kid; but whether you have 4 stations or 400 stations, television seems to lack quality programming as commented by Dave Barry.

Another possible source of guidance for teenagers is television, but television's message has always been that the need for truth, wisdom and world peace pales by comparison with the need for a toothpaste that offers whiter teeth *and* fresher breath.

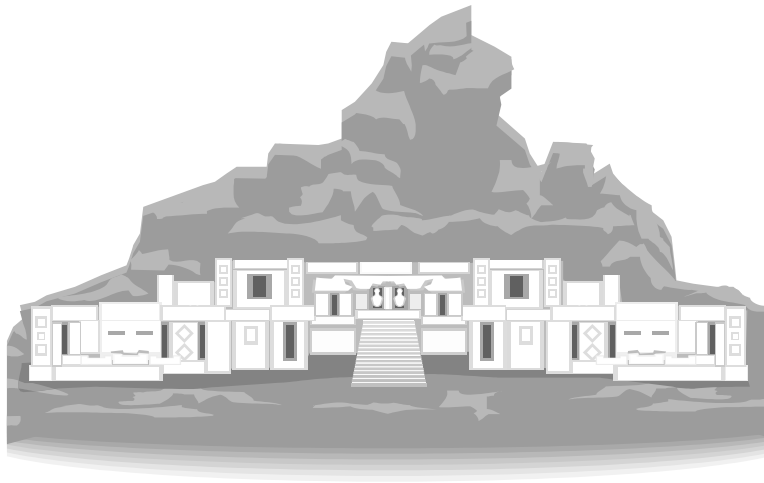
- [Dave Barry](#), "Kids Today: They Don't Know Dum Diddy Do", US columnist & humorist (1947 -)

Television is an example of a technology that had {or has} so much potential but so few results. For one, TV is a passive form of communication: the viewer does not have to respond but can idly sit amidst the glowing screen and drift-off into oblivion. TV is a mode of advertising and, by chance, a means of learning; it robs the attention span and imagination of many of us in this age of mass media and micro-second imaging...

Since the early 1990's or about the time Matthew and Abby were born, the Internet began its ascent to businesses and homes. The year 1994 is referred to as the "public Internet explosion". For all us, the Web has brought radically improved access to seemingly endless information.

TEMPLE

A temple is a church or place to worship. A temple can represent a variety of religions, gods, forms and practices of worshipping; but in general, a temple is sacred, ceremonial space being thought as the dwelling place of the divine – whom ever or what ever the divine may be. The broad concept includes the mosque, the synagogue, and the church; the word is also used to refer to buildings for fraternal orders and other religious organizations.



A temple can be very elaborate and ornate in the design or architecture – you have probably noticed the mosque in Iraq, from video recording of Desert Freedom, or such classic structures as Stonehenge mentioned in a previous letter. Great expense and painstaking details have distinguished such buildings as the center of many villages and regions as a tribute to the divine for which is represented in some earthly form. Even Christian churches, and in particular cathedrals, place much attention on the superficial or façade as symbolic of the greatest of God and his followers.

Much detail of a temple in the Old Testament begins with Solomon's construction in 1 Kings, through the desolation of the temple during the Babylon conquest, and continuing with reconstruction and dedication under Haggai the prophet in the Book of Ezra. In this dedication, as well as in general practices or rituals, animal sacrifices were made as atonement for sin. Jesus Christ was the ultimate sacrifice and represented God in the flesh and *one greater than the temple*. When Christ was crucified, the curtain of the Most Holy Place was torn signifying that Christ enabled believers to be in the presence of God rather than via a Levite.

As believers, we are temples of God. Paul tells us in the Book of Corinthians that *our bodies are the temple of God as the Holy Spirit lives in us*; therefore, we are to honor God with our bodies. In Acts, Jesus is described as one who *does not live in temples built by hands*; he gives all men life, and breath, and everything else. Remember, that the church is you – and you are part of the church, the bride of Christ.

THANKS



It is Saturday, June 11 – days before Father’s day and my birthday. I am so blessed by God for all who are a part of my life. My desire to give thanks has not been without some reservation considering that we have not seen each other in almost four years; yet, I must give thanks for all that which God given me.

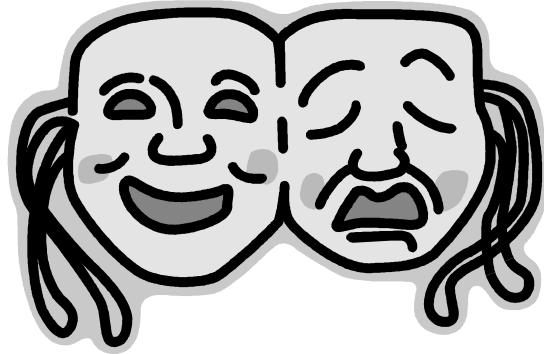
The uncertainty of your general well-being has sometimes plagued me with worry and regret – I have anguished much over the condition that prevails, the covenants that were broken, and the consequences that have and will develop in your precious lives. My desire and plan was never to subject you to a life disparate from one or both parents; indeed, my desire was to be present, accessible, and giving as parent should be.

Yet, with time and prayer of many, has come a peace that you and I will one day be together again; and in the interim, that you are protected and doing well. As I think of you often, daily even, I must be thankful that God blessed me with children – that he provided the gifts of children natural, in marriage, and by association. How wonderful life can be in the presence of children with their wonder, their innocence, and the attributes that Jesus recognized as key to the believer’s life and disposition.

Thank you for being Matthew, Abigail, Benjamin, Wesley, Keegan, Garrett and the other children in my span; yes, I must be thankful that, though some of us are not together, yet God is sufficient to buffer the hurt, to heal the heart, and to reconcile us unto Him and unto each other in his time, plan, and place.

THEATER

The theater is an exciting place; whether a movie or live production of some kind, the theater is able to take us away to another life, however imaginary and if just for a moment in time. For thousands of years, the theater has been a gathering place for entertainment, amusement, drama and other such things to fancy the soul. The theater can be magic by transforming the audience onto the stage and into the characters, scenes and instruments of the event.



Movie theaters offer the modern Dolby sound systems, high-back rocking chairs, and other creature comforts and enhancements – all of which surround you with the ease to focus on the featured presentation. Cinemas with multiple theaters offer all the latest mainstream films as options to the goers. As I write this letter, a Star Wars epic is selling tickets at hyperspace velocity, *National Treasure* has captivated the audience with its mystery and history, and *The Longest Yard* is presenting a second rendition of a film first produced when I was about ten years old. Still, other films are *holding their own* as a one-time viewer or, perhaps as a DVD favorite down the road. Movies and movie theaters have been popular in our culture for many years; and will probably remain so because of the social preference for the silver screen over home entertainment systems.



When you get the opportunity, try a concert or live play – it is a lot of fun and a must-see. Some of the plays that I've seen include:

- 🎭 "Westside Story" – a musical classic about gang activity and romance
- 🎭 "Chorus Line" – a film about auditioning for a chorus line....
- 🎭 "Mama Mia" – a light-musical based on Fleetwood Mac music
- 🎭 "Grease" – do I have to tell you!
- 🎭 "South Pacific" – a 1940's Navy film involving romance in a tropical island
- 🎭 "Sound of Music" – again, do I have to tell you!
- 🎭 "My Fair Lady" – a story in England of how a street woman is formed into a lady...

THINKING

About this time last year, I visited a museum that featured the sculpture and artwork of Auguste Rodin. Among his great works was the sculpture shown below, “The Thinker” that depicts the genius or deep thinking in mankind. The story of Auguste is fascinating but the purpose of this discussion is to introduce the value of thinking.

You may recall that Pooh Bear’s words, “now let’s see – think, think, think” as he scratched his head. Thinking is to reflect or meditate; to conceive or imagine; to suspect; or to have an opinion. You may be often encouraged or instructed to simply think about a school-related problem, to think about the consequences of your actions, or to think before you act.



A thought is an idea, plan, conception, or opinion produced by mental activity...or by thinking. Thoughts can vary in description from an impulse, or spontaneous thought, to an obsession that occupies one's mind all the time. A result of thinking can be knowledge and increased knowledge can be good. But thinking does not necessarily result in increased knowledge; and increased knowledge is not necessarily good but depends on the use and value of the knowledge or thinking.

As your muscles respond to voluntary {deliberate or controlled} and involuntary {automatic like a heart beat}; so can we respond to our thoughts. An action, whether a spoken word or a physical movement, can result from a thought; and however good we may consider ourselves to be, bad thoughts can enter the mind and be translated to bad or hurtful actions.

In the book of Philippians, Paul encourages the church to *fix your thoughts on what is true*...In 1 Peter, we are told to *think clearly and exercise self control*.

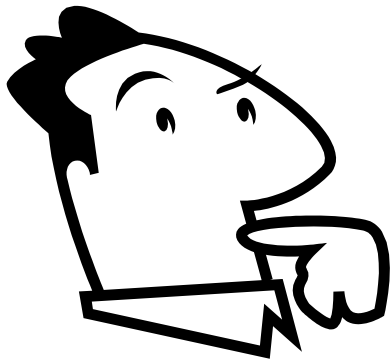
This verse describes a link between our thinking and our actions.

Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise...

As believers, we are being constantly transformed into Christ's likeness. The old saying, *an idle mind is the Devil's workshop*, has some merit as thoughts are entertained and lead to

disobedience or an action against our Lord. But the transformation of our thinking, by prayer and the study of the Bible, can surely lead to think clearly; to know God and to know our purpose in him.

THOUGHTS



I just had a thought, and then another, and then still more thoughts; wow, so many thoughts that I may as well think about what I thought about.

Thoughts vary in length and in other ways too; thoughts can be expected or come right out of the blue; thoughts can even be bizarre and downright scary, but true.

At your age, your thought patterns are changing and increasing constantly. Sure, you think about food or eating when you're hungry; or you think about what you might do tomorrow or even once in while about the more distant future. But as you develop from a child to a young person, your thoughts will change radically to the point that even you may be concerned with the *flashes* in your mind. You may dwell on thoughts because in some way it brings a relief, an escape from reality, or some pleasure for the moment.

An old Indian legend tells of a warrior who followed the advice of either the black wolf or the white wolf. In the warrior's mind, the black wolf represents the thoughts that are evil or that are intended for hurt and suffering; the white wolf, as you may have already considered, represents thoughts that are good and are intended to help and support. These two wolves were sometimes present alone or sometimes together; but the two were opposed in their desire and their will. In his fear, the warrior might obey the black wolf and commit something evil – possibly hurting others but certainly hurting himself. At other times, his fear might be overcome by the presence and power of the white wolf; hence, he might commit good and help others and himself in the process. He wanted to always obey the white wolf, realizing the outcome, but could not escape the black wolf that frequently paid visit – especially in the warrior's fearing moments. As the warrior learned not to fear, the black wolf became less and less present.

The understanding and discipline of the warrior kept the black wolf progressively at bay; consequently, good thoughts and actions became more common and the rewards of such more frequent. The Bible tells us, *to take every thought captive making it obedient to Christ*. Like the warrior who overcame his fears, we too must overcome those who create fear in our lives; conversely, we must embrace courage that comes from knowing the Lord and knowing who we are in him. Just as the warrior overcame the black wolf, so too can we overcome the desire to accept and act on bad thoughts; so too can we obey the Lord when he tells us, *fear not, for I am with you and...do not be discouraged, for I am your God*.

TIME

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

- ⌚ A time to be born and a time to die
- ⌚ A time to plant and time to uproot
- ⌚ A time to kill and a time to heal
- ⌚ A time to tear down and to build
- ⌚ A time to weep and time to laugh
- ⌚ A time to mourn and time to dance
- ⌚ A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them
- ⌚ A time to embrace and a time to refrain
- ⌚ A time to search and a time to give up
- ⌚ A time to keep and a time to throw away
- ⌚ A time to tear and a time to mend
- ⌚ A time to be silent and a time to speak
- ⌚ A time to love and a time to hate
- ⌚ A time for war and a time for peace



It is now 7:00 a.m. on June 13, 2005. God grant me the wisdom to know and understand that time is a gift from you; thus, the time granted should be used to worship you as lord, to wait upon your will, and to work for your glory. Allow me to see *the eternity that he has set in the hearts of men* – to see that which you, my Lord, *have made beautiful in its time*.

Joy comes to those who believe, yet happiness and other measures of satisfaction cannot be derived by the toil of our work; rather, that our desire and source of fulfillment should be my Lord, my savior, Jesus Christ. Help me not to chase or depend on those things that are fleeting and short-lived; rather, to seek and pursue the things that are eternal. May I serve you as the *living sacrifice*.

Help me to be friend, first your friend than a friend to those who are need – whom you call me to serve and to help. For my children and my wife, a father and husband that you desire: serving, loving, patient, encouraging, empathetic, and hopeful; to desire to keep your commandments and to revere and worship you as my Lord, my hope, my salvation.

TOLERANCE

Over the last several years, the term “tolerance” has gained much circulation in our society – often in the context of homosexuality but, at times, in connection with minorities by race, religion, or other criteria. The attention and promotion of tolerance is aimed at improving society through the identification and elimination of such bigotry, racism, prejudice, and other attitudes and conditions that limit our ability to get along, to live in harmony, and other such affairs.

The test of courage comes when we are in the minority. The test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority.

Ralph W. Sockman

Tolerance has other applications: design, engineering and manufacturing uses tolerances to control the quality of products and services. For example, the tightness of “torque” of a nut to a bolt may measure in units of foot-pounds: the nut can be tightened within specified limits or tolerances; otherwise, the nut may loosen or fail due to stress or for other reasons. Tolerance or tolerances have application in design and engineering, and are the result of testing or analysis.

Back to the social context, tolerance may be a convenient and even compelling excuse for personal behavior that is at the least questionable and possibly beyond decorum. If a child is intentionally defiant to the point of repeated and escalated acts, tolerance may be an inappropriate replacement for negligence – overlooking or excusing the child’s behavior is neither helping the parent or the child....it simply makes both frustrated with the strained and uncertain relationship.

Tolerance may not be two-way or bidirectional. For example, one group or minority may appeal for acceptance on the basis of tolerance, but another group within the same realm may not receive an equal share of tolerance; consequently, tolerance or the ideal of unbiased and equal acceptance becomes diluted by prejudice and bias. When one group is singled-out or does not receive an equal share of tolerance, the concept of tolerance loses its meaning and benefit...the whole idea or basis.

I was the son of an immigrant. I experienced bigotry, intolerance and prejudice, even as so many of you have. Instead of allowing these things to embitter me, I took them as spurs to more strenuous effort.

Andre Bernard Buruch

TOMORROW



On the matter of tomorrow, let me say this today

Tomorrow is more than the day after today.
For tomorrow could surprise us beyond,
What we can say prior to that day, or
What can be understood on this day;
Still, tomorrow is more than the day after today –
It is the future if only for the day, a day.

Tomorrow may bring sunshine in the form of a ray.
That starts as a minute inkling of light that
Pierces the dark turning dim into day,

And reminds me that tomorrow has become today;
Still, tomorrow is more than the day after today –
It is ray of sunshine that lights our way.

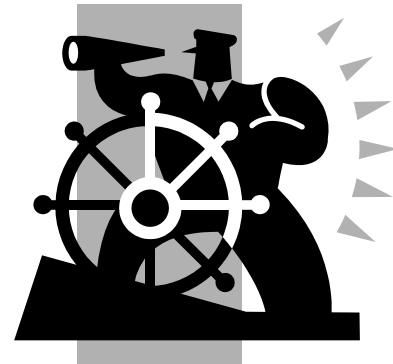
Tomorrow may bring rain whether by trickle or by a deluge: claps of thunder,
Flashes of lightning that causes us to shudder with intrigue and even dazzle;
Cast on dryness, the rain with sheen that causes everything to appear new.
Much that may exist would never have been noticed if not for the rain –
To unveil the otherwise unknowns however good or bad and cause –
Reflection, consequence, condition, and cleansing at the same time.

Tomorrow may bring nothing more than a continuation of today
Immeasurable difference from the day before or the day after... rather blasé
A mast ship on the ocean with neither wind nor current to drive away;
Certain weather for the day is no less different than yesterday.
The monotony of it all – how long will it stay? God speed to wash away the
Doldrums by weather, whether storm or wind, gale, and spray.

Yesterday, I did not give much thought to today; but
tomorrow...it is a new dawn!

That offers hope that my ship will speed along with
trimmed sail; dauntless to the storm or stale of
yesterday and leaving aft today; pressing forward
for distant land beyond the morrow.

By chance that in my travel and on this route that we
meet at port or sea, know that the helm of my ship
will be my Lord who has never failed me...and
whom I promise will never fail you for all tomorrows
that be.



TOOLS

To the right is a monkey wrench; I'm not sure where it got its name, but I have used one on occasion.

The word "tool" usually means anything that helps get something accomplished; for example, a computer program could be a tool to accomplish a project. Encarta is a very useful on-line encyclopedia – which I've used on many occasions.



As far as hand tools, my inventory is very limited to the basic equipment and a few power tools given as a Christmas gift. Among these items are wrenches, ratchets, screwdrivers, files, pliers, and an assortment of other similar things that prove useful to at least take something apart.

The broader view of the word "tool" can be considered in light of my or your abilities. We can possess any number of tools that potentially enable us to accomplish something; yet, if we do not use them or know how to use them, the tools are of little or no value to us. Tools must be used (not simply collected and possessed) to render any value.

Give a man a fishing pole and he may be able to catch a fish; but give him training in use of the pole and directions to a "good spot" and he will be more likely to catch fish. Give a man a pole, training, directions and a boat with a fish-finder, and he will be even more successful.

A tool is not valuable until it is needed...and sometimes that tool can make all the difference in the world. For a project at home, this "tool" may be the least in terms of its purchased cost, but the most valuable for a particular task – it is one of those ironies of the trade.

Here is the answer which I will give to President Roosevelt... We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire. Neither the sudden shock of battle nor the long-drawn trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down. Give us the tools and we will finish the job.

[Sir Winston Churchill](#), *Radio speech, 1941*
British politician (1874 - 1965)

TRAINING

Training occurs in so many places: training occurs for academics and education; athletics and sporting events; and for other endeavors and pursuits. As described in the soldier's comments aside, training is the forum or practice by which victory occurs; it determines how well the team will perform on the battlefield.

The most important lesson that I'd learned, however, is that victory is not secured on the battlefield, but on the training range.
- Chuck Holton. "A More Elite Soldier". 2003

Training conditions the trainee for potential or certain events and circumstances. For the student, training helps prepare for tests and exams along with other measures of performance in learning and practice. Even dogs and other pets may undergo a certain degree of training to teach them how to obey and follow rules...commands and such. A trained dog is capable of tracking animals and other things, of leading a blind person, and carrying out other worthy, civic duties.

Fire departments conduct a lot of training to prepare for the inevitable fire or similar emergency. Fire departments respond to medical emergencies as well as fires and accidents of all kinds – they must be ready to respond at a moment's notice! Police departments, hospitals, and other public services must be equally trained for such possibilities.

Effective training should expose and present as much realism as possible to the trainee; the more real or actual the training, the more effective the training. Training should be designed to *test the mettle* of the trainee(s) by placing them in challenging situations and observing their reaction or response.

How do we prepare and train for life...for all that lies ahead? I believe the first and continuing approach should be to turn to our Lord who is genuinely interested in our lives and has purpose and plans for us. What do you think?

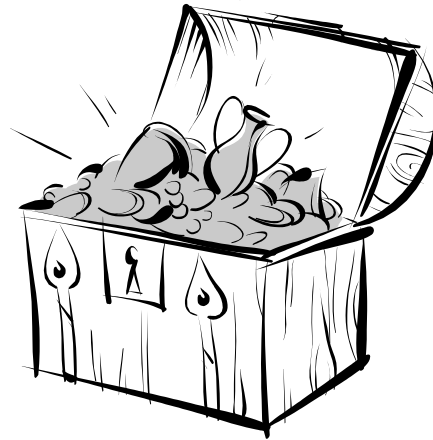
Look at a man in the midst of doubt and danger, and you will learn in his hour of adversity what he really is. It is then that the true utterances are wrung from the recesses of his breast. The mask is torn off; the realty remains.
- Lecretius

TREASURE

Do not store-up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust will destroy; but store-up for yourself treasure in heaven, where moth and rust cannot destroy.

Treasure comes in many forms. For the pirate, treasure is most often the booty commandeered during a raid or excursion. For the collector of antiques, treasure may be the rare item with distinguishing and authentic features. For the sports fan, a treasure may be the autograph of a favorite player or athlete. Treasure does not have to have actual appraised value, such as gold or diamonds; but can have intrinsic value or value determined or measured by the individual and their basis of worth.

Consider things that you have that may have this type of value. Above my desk is a collection of things that remind me of you: a plastic horse figurine, a *Blues-Clues* dog-figure, a plastic model of a knight, and small toy soldiers – each have value to me because of the association to you.



National Treasure is a mystery and suspense movie about a man's {families} quest to locate vast collection of valuables acquired by the Free Masons over a period of perhaps hundreds of years. If you have seen the film, you know that eventually the treasure is found beneath the city streets. The estimated value would be difficult to appraise – although the figure is mentioned at the conclusion of the story. For the main character and family {and still, possibly others in the line of searchers}, the quest and mystery may have had more interest than the treasure. Expressed another way, the quest or adventure had a value its own.

What are your treasures...what do you value and why? Is your value intrinsic or extrinsic, of depth and personal interest?

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

TREED

No, I don't think I misspelled this word in that "treed" means to tree an animal such as a raccoon or opossum. This term is used a lot in hunting and included frequently in the folklore of Jerry Clower. In one of Clower's stories, the dogs mistake a Bobcat for a raccoon. One of the hunting party, a "John Eubanks", climbs this mammoth tree to knock the animal out...but discovers the cat rather than a raccoon.

Have you ever climbed a tree and wondered if you would get down? If so, than you have some sense of what John was going through when he yelled to Mr. Baron (the man who owned the property they were hunting on), "well, just shoot-up in here amongst us...one of us has got to have some relief". Imagine trying to fend off a cat, domestic or otherwise, in the top of tree – not the situation that anyone, including this *professional tree climber*, wants to find himself. But climbing the tree is only one option.

Sometimes a hunter would have to chop the tree down – a process that was well illustrated in the movie, "Where the Red Fern Grows". Remember that the boy used a hatchet to fell a tree...and the process took many hours of determination and chopping.

Over a year ago, I read about tree-climbing gaining popularity as a sport or hobby. The story described a growing interest and participation in tree-climbing as a method of building confidence while communing with nature. The picture showed some young man climbing a tree in or around Atlanta.

If you could choose a tree to climb, what tree would you choose? I would probably choose a Live Oak – that mammoth tree that grows along the southern coastal regions and has long, broad branches. It may seem silly to extend such effort over a raccoon but, even today, we spend countless hours driving our cars here-and-there for less reason or profit than the pelt of a raccoon. Still, the boy could have possibly taken a lesson for old Abe about chopping a tree down; but at least he didn't chop down a Cherry like George Washington.

"If I had six hours to chop down a tree, I would spend the first four hours sharpening the ax."

--Abraham Lincoln

TROUBLE

In the book of Job, an attending friend, so called, makes the comment that *man is born into trouble as surely as the sparks fly upward*; this particular comment has stuck with me in that it is poetic and true. We are all born into trouble and generally follow this course without God as Lord of our lives.

Job is a favorite book of mine in that it describes a very good man - the *most righteous man in the world* - who loses everything from his children, to his property and health. At God's allowance, Job endures an unimaginable degree of pain and suffering to the point that even his wife questions his continued faith, and his friends consider his plight to be the result of his unfaithfulness to God; yet, *God gives and God takes away* is the certain condition of all creation. We are given all things from God and must should understand that nothing is deserved or earned.

Another comment or phrase, by Job himself, is that he *knows that his redeemer lives*, and that in the end, he will see him with his own eyes. Though *men at ease have contempt for misfortune, as the fate of those whose feet are slipping*, not all men understand that God gives and he takes away; but not necessarily to punish or destroy, but to prepare and strengthen so that man may glorify Him.

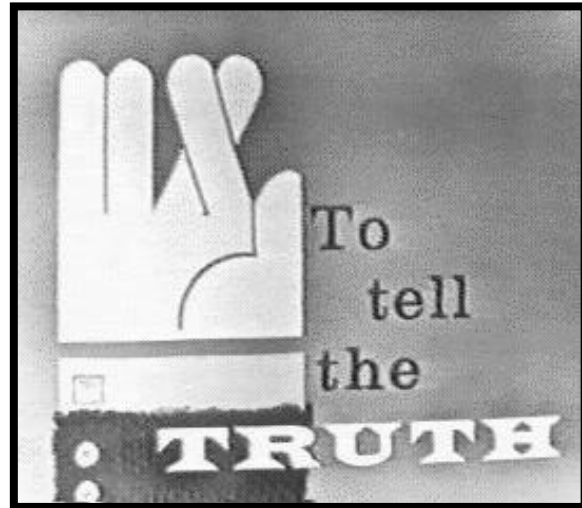
Trouble and difficulty are not options; but the response or reaction is a choice. To blame God and be angry with him is folly; God is patient as such impulses give way to the reminder that God is perfect and loves us – more than we can know and understand. As Job portrays in his time of testing, the response should not be one of blaming God and being angry with God; rather, the position should be that God is faithful and fulfills his promises to us.

The difficulty with analyzing life challenges is that often we are not aware of their source. We may accuse God when really the source is spiritual warfare, a consequence of sin, or even just a result of chance...It is foolish to automatically blame God for problems and barriers. In fact, as you look at Biblical examples, the source of the challenge often makes little difference. What matters is your response, your attitude toward your trouble – does it make you better or bitter, closer to God or further from God, broken and humble before Him or hard and hostile toward Him?

How do you respond to trouble? Do you consider such trouble as punishment for your own wrongdoing? Is it possible that God is trying to purify you *by fire*, so that you may be prepared and strengthened for his work? As I close this letter, my thoughts are of those who lived their lives sacrificially because they loved God and considered nothing more important than serving Him. They must have known, or know, that life hereafter awaits all who live such lives.

TRUTH

Since the 1950's, there has been a game show called *To Tell the Truth*; a game in which four contestants are questioned by a celebrity such that the "real" person may be identified from the other three imposters. In this investigative type program, the real person is responding to the questions in truth while the other contestants are deliberately lying. The art is to ask the right questions and discern or reveal the real person.



Often the truth or true statements are difficult to discern from lies. Truth becomes a relative rather than absolute matter; in other words, truth becomes a matter of perspective or perception thus creating added conflict or disagreement in identifying the real person.

The book called *Mein Kampf* was the basis for his political movement in Germany prior to WWII. Regarding truth, Hitler wrote that it is much easier to make the masses {population} believe a big lie than a small one. History tell us that many lies were propagated by Hitler (and the Nazi party) who claimed to acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator.

From the Bible, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus the question, "What is truth?" Perhaps the question would have more appropriately phrased as "Who is truth?" as Jesus told the world that he was and is the truth...and the truth will set us free.

T-SQUARES

To my right is a T-Square: a device used for drafting or drawing that enables the drawer to maintain a perfect, horizontal line.

T-squares are not found too often these days – like typewriters, the T-square has been replaced in large part by computers, or more specifically, Computer-Aided Design software.



When I was in high-school and college, the T-square was in vogue: I took a drafting class in both high-school and college; thus, requiring the company of such equipment along with assorted pencils, templates, paper and even a board. The T-square, like a compass or calibrated gauge, should lend to a true standard for measurement – it is reliable, trustworthy...always right.

If I was like a T-square, always true and right, life would be a lot easier and simple; but because I am not, life is complicated and difficult. The T-square is actually more like God than like me; that thing I carry around and use to keep my bearing, to know the baseline, to know what is true and absolute. Well, God is certainly much more than a T-square, but you can see the similarity...can't you? Ok, maybe the T-square is more like the Bible and God is the master draftsman – I don't know...just trying to finish this letter with some association between the antiquated T-square and the trueness of God whether by his word or through the Lord Himself. Oh, if only you were here to help me with this letter, I'm sure that we could agree that the T-square and God do have some similarity.

Aside from the association, drawing and sketching is fun and creative; Matthew use to do a lot of that stuff...I still have some of his work and look at it occasion.

TWO-FACED

“Two-faced” is an expression that means someone or some group may pose as having one position or belief but, in actuality, have an opposing position or belief. A political party may address the public on a platform or position pertaining to the issues and concerns but, on election or in practice, are different in a radical way. Abraham Lincoln follows the question of potentially being two-faced with the humor that his real, physical face would not be the preferred one if he had another to choose.

Countless cartoons and captions have illustrated and depicted the notion of the two-faced politician – the abject hypocrite who will sell the audience on their passions

"If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?"

- Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

and interests only to counter the expressed or implied sentiments on the other stops of his stump. The two-faces, or two sides of the mouth, may be very clever in choosing the right composure and position to tease the audience and even gain their vote on election day; yet, such tactics further show the absence or limits of integrity and character in view of the end game – to win at all costs and by all means possible, lawful or not.

The Bible warns against being two-faced – the term applied is “double-minded”. In the book of James, the message is that the double-minded person is unstable in all he does. Doubt, or the absence of faith, is the symptom of the double-minded that is *tossed and blown like a wave of the sea* during the trials of life. Doubt and double-mindedness are used interchangeably to describe the person who claims to be a servant of God but does not yield or trust God in all matters. I see double-mindedness in my own life.

Double-mindedness is detestable to God, but is also maligned and even ridiculed by believers and non-believers alike. For the onlooker such a condition creates doubt and disbelief regarding the work and power of God in changing lives. To say that I believe and love the Lord, and then deny and refute that position, is the worst possible testimony that I can bear. I don’t mean that we can be sinless but rather that our testimony should be true and earnest – it should be an expression of who we have become in Christ for whom we serve as our Lord.

I warn you, both in regard to yourself and against others, to be careful and attentive to double-mindedness. Absolute truth can be discerned by God’s word and through his presence in your life – he is the source truth!

UNLIMITED

Unlimited means to be without limits or boundaries. In math, unlimited is described as infinite or continuing forever, indefinitely.

The idea or concept of “unlimited” is hard to imagine – the discrete, concrete and tangible of our environment seems to often have limits – though we may not prefer such in the areas of rules and responsibilities. For a young person, limits mean curfews in the evening and age-restrictions for certain events or privileges; again, limits may not sit favorable with most of us. On the other hand, the unlimited sense of our galaxy and beyond as well as the less tangible seems hard to understand and conceive. Limits or boundaries have a favorable and unfavorable aspect or position; with the reaction or attitude dependent on the application, person, perspective, and other things.

Limits or boundaries have some favorable aspect in providing a sense of place and position. If a young person has boundaries with enforcement, a level of security will develop simply because they know *where they stand*. Yes, they may not like the boundaries and even challenge and test the boundaries at times; but if the boundaries are enforced for the young person’s general protection and well-being, who could argue that security will result in the parent or guardian’s position as well as the young person(s). Even an offering of some unlimited amount, such ice cream at a birthday party, has its limits; thus, the consumption may be much but will still end at some point when either the ice cream is gone or the child is sick or develops a perpetual case of brain freeze.

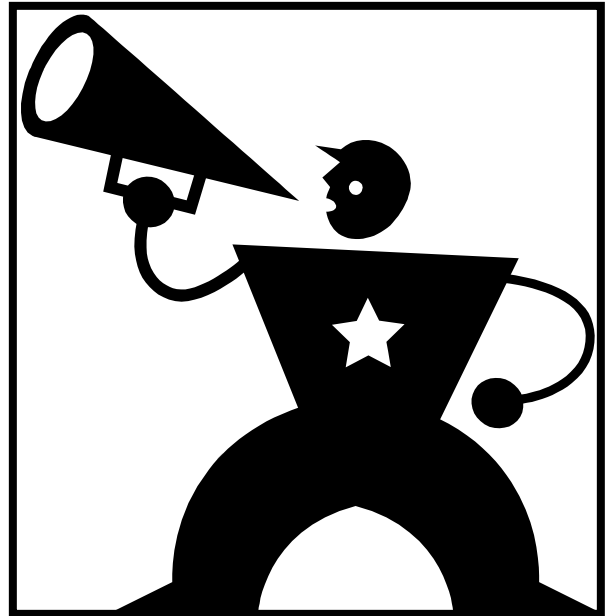
When I think of God’s love for man, the word “unlimited” comes to mind; mercy and grace are included as allied forms of love. Patience and wisdom are two more characteristics of God that would be grouped among the unlimited. Omnipotent and omniscient are two words that describe God as having unlimited or all-inclusive authority and understanding. Though God has shown to have the power to create and change our world, he also has offered salvation to save or redeem mankind. How can we argue that God is limited or thinks and reasons as we do? – He is God and we are not! He is unlimited and we have obvious and certain limits.

Though we have limits, most notably the limits of our flesh and our sinful nature; yet, we are offered the unlimited character of Jesus through a relationship with him. To be unlimited in him to accept that we are growing in his spirit with no limits or boundaries to his mighty work in our lives. Though we might be inclined to make the bold proclamation, “to eternity and beyond”, this growth of unlimited proportion must occur over time and through our willingness to please God – to know and do what pleases God. The opportunity is like no other.

UNSTOPPABLE

This letter is dedicated to Matthew who used this very word in an art assignment in his younger days; indeed, the picture included a super-hero of sort like the one to the right along with the caption, “I am unstoppable”.

As with the previous word, “unlimited”, unstoppable indicates some lack of boundaries or constraints. The super-hero was evidently so super that no one or nothing could stop him...whatever he was attempting to do or to represent. In my recollection, the same word was used in a minister’s simple description of the game of football.



A minister, who himself played the game at the college level, explained that the objective of the game (football) is simple. One team makes a claim or challenge that they can move an oblong ball made of pigskin across a line while the other team accepts the challenge that they cannot – the team is either stoppable or unstoppable. Depending on the integrity of the claim, or occurrences that such a claim has proven true, the challenger may travel great distances to prove the exception – a good game is when the challenge is questioned to the very end, overtime or sudden death.

If the story has a moral, I am not sure what it might be; but what is generally true is that a good challenge will trigger challengers and that eventually someone is proven wrong. As with limits, the challenge and condition of stopping has both good and bad aspects. If someone is stopped from hurting themselves or others, the outcome is most likely good. If someone is stopped from doing a good deed or helping others, the outcome is most likely bad. In many cases, the aspect of good or bad may be convoluted by a host of conditions.

Throughout history, great civilizations and commanders have wielded their power and dominance with relative success to the point of being unstoppable; yet, time and conditions result in eventual stops, retreats, and even falls – everyone is indeed stoppable at some point and time – except in the mind of a child.

UNWORTHY

Unworthy am I to be loved by God; yet, because of Jesus, I am found worthy.

These words are true for even one of us...and for all of us; though, we may understand or agree that such is true, it is indeed true! The most assumed blessings that include life, food, and shelter are sometimes considered entitlements or things that we have earned or deserve; but in actuality, even the basic necessities are gifts from God for which we are unworthy.

Job, who was considered to be the most worthy of all men, responds to God as one unworthy. In his awareness of his own unworthiness, Job was brought to silence – he would not continue to complain to God for the conditions and adversity that had been brought upon him. In response, God says: *Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.* In the scripture that follows in chapter 40, Job is admonished to leave behind all his prior complaints and questions concerning God's apparent indifference to the wickedness of man. In the remaining scripture of this book, Job finally realizes that God and his purposes are supreme. What's more, Job repents before God regarding his prior complaints and is restored in his relationship to God.

When the position of being unworthy is forgotten, or the blessings are taken for granted, we may forget or at least lessen the power of God; thus, we become rebellious to varying degrees of independence or self-sufficiency – we think we are in control instead of God. Recall the tower of Babel, in Genesis, when the post-flood population became egotistical and proud in the worst sense. The tower of Babel would represent this new-found, man-centered society – a world in which God would be displaced and excluded, while man became embroiled in rebellion and eventual collapse. As the story developed, God showed that man cannot defy him and survive.

We must always remain aware that we are unworthy of God's love and mercy; and that all things are gifts or blessings from him. As with the tower of Babel, any deviation from this position allows pride and arrogance to create a false sense of self-sufficiency and supremacy. When such a disposition occurs in the life of a believer, God will chasten and chastise to return and restore faith.

VALOR

“Uncommon Valor” was the description for the Marines that overtook Iwo-Jima in World War II. Of the 71,000, 17,000 were injured while 6,000 died against the entrenched and resolute Japanese. Uncommon valor goes beyond the normal or accepted courage and conduct – it is unique with immeasurable costs and sacrifice.

In paying tribute to the Marines of Iwo Jima, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz said: "Among the Americans on Iwo Island uncommon valor was a common virtue."



Does uncommon valor require a war or military engagement? I don't think so, but I believe that uncommon valor occurs when individuals *rise above their station* showing courage and bravery beyond the expected or norm. Yes, such action is usually described in the context of the military and battle; but valor is not excluded to soldier or to the battlefield. Even dogs have shown such behavior by doing seemingly impossible feats to rescue people or to guide their master to safety. Valor is

beyond the human condition that protects one's self and self interests – it is in fact the opposite whether the self is an animal or a human being.

Courage, bravery, and honor have close association to valor – all of these qualities describe the characteristics that will go beyond the apparent limits to defend that which is considered important, right and necessary. When young David volunteered to fight Goliath, he did so with overwhelming disbelief {by others} that he would win; yet, he volunteered on the basis of God's righteousness. Of course, he won handily and sent the Philistines retreating in mass. Goliath's challenge to the army of Israel was a direct affront to God and, acting on God's purpose, David showed valor in response.

Valor may be predicated by fear but, in the process of the event, fear is put to rest and nothing short of death or extreme disablement will stop the mission. Of all prefaces in the Bible, "Fear not" is used most often. From 1 Corinthians, *Be on your guard; be children of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.* For in adversity, God will supply you with the strength needed to overcome, to endure, and to emerge greater in faith in Him.

VALUES

Much is mentioned about values in our society. Some believe that our values have diminished; that we have lowered our values pertaining to social norms. Values are sometimes applied to a politician or political race – to connote personal integrity, character and other intrinsic qualities that manifest in decisions, behavior, and ethics.

"Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of values."

-- Albert Einstein

What do you consider valuable; or what do you value the most?

- ✖ Do you value money and personal wealth, material possessions such as a car or house, or a closet full of clothes and other personal items?
- ✖ Do you value social acceptance, being popular or well-liked by others to the point that you willing to do much, even things you don't like, to win acceptance or attention?
- ✓ Do you value yourself? In other words, do you consider that you are valued by God and that he loves you very much and knows everything about you?

Values are developed through our families, friends, society, and the media. To rely on the media, and in particular television, would be to relegate yourself to a sliding scale of relevant values, so-called, that will utterly leave you vacillating from one day to the next. Not to over exaggerate, but television and the movie industry has done much to damage and destroy the values of children and adults alike by programs that demean chastity, honesty, respect and other virtues. The significant influence of television, movies, and media cannot be ignored – it has had a profound influence that must be recognized and understood within our framework of what is right and what is valuable in God's sight.

We can claim one set of values but live by a different set of values – a condition that is sometimes referred to as double-mindedness. Having two lifestyles or sets of values may seem convenient or even pleasurable; eventually however, the condition is learned by others (friends and such) while having been known all along by God.

Whether you're a child or adult, values are very important; and what you value is very important as well. To value God, his mercy and love, is the right place to begin our framework of values – God will develop your values and help you discern those sources, the media or otherwise, that stand in contrast.

VICTIM

Among the definitions of a victim is a person or persons who have been cheated, fooled, or injured through unjust circumstances. Examples include the Jews who were victims of the Holocaust during World War II; and for that matter, the many who were displaced, imprisoned, pressed into slavery, tortured and killed in some cases. Victims or victimization has occurred throughout history in the matter of war and conquest, but also in less obvious or overt ways in societies among citizens as well as families.

The Bible offers a variety of victims such as Joseph, who was a victim of sibling jealousy and a dysfunctional family, to the entire Hebrew nation in the bondage in Egypt. Many additional cases of victimization could be identified and discussed both directly from the Bible and through known history; but for the limits of this letter, the two specific examples will be applied for learning and perhaps application in your lives.

Joseph was clearly Jacob's favorite and, with preferential treatment, was subjected to the envy and eventual plot of his brothers. As you are aware of the story, the details can be deferred in view of the clear victim status passed to Joseph in a foreign land. Though remaining faithful in his worship of God, Joseph was subjected to many years of injustice and even imprisonment before emerging to a commanding position in Egypt. What is very important is not that Joseph was dealt such injustice; rather, that he responded in faithfulness in spite of the injustice and praised God in the adversity.

Of course, Joseph's journey led the way for the relocation and survival of his family; and in time, this family or nation would be enslaved under a tyrannical and oppressive government. The victims of an oppressive leader, the Hebrews placed their hope in God's deliverance and their return to the promise land. In this plan, God appointed Moses as the leader and used supernatural powers to prepare and lead the way. The Hebrew people were victims but the merciful God answered their prayers with deliverance and redemption.

The particular beauty that I find in these two cases of victims or victimization is that God set them free and enabled joy and praise in periods where human despair and pity would have been more likely. Not to say that such human behavior did not occur in these two cases but, still, was not of such degree that it resulted in rejection or denial of God; on the contrary, their faith was developed through hope in God alone.

VICTORY

Though rather faint or blurred, the old victory posture to the right is one of many that promoted the war effort during World War II. For the Coast Guard in this case, victory meant protection of coastal waters against spy missions, enemy submarines, and other tactics launched by Germany and Japan. As you may know, a German landing did occur at Ponte Vedra Beach whereby several plain-clothed soldiers made their way north with plans to commit acts of terrorism in the Northeast against civilians. Though the landing was successful, the terrorists were intercepted and the mission was thwarted.



Victory meant not only fighting and defeating the enemy abroad but also protecting our national interests and security at home. As with our circumstances today involving militant Islamic forces, Nazi Germany and their allies represented a threat to civilians in the states; hence Homeland Security is not a recent development but has been in place for many years for similar reasons of international terrorism lodged at the innocent, civilian population.

In a raw definition, victory means to win; but in order to win against radical and vigilant forces, victory may require a long-term, wide-scale and very costly campaign. In one of my favorite movies, "The Patriot", the main character stands before the South Carolina congress to denounce the voting of levy that would commit the state to a revolt against Great Britain. Himself a legislator, Benjamin Martin is certain that a revolt would be very costly where battles would *take place among us, our children would see it with their own eyes, and the innocent would die along with the guilty*. He recognized that the cost of victory would be enormous and that all citizens would bear the price with or without final victory.

Victory, in its ebb and flow, does always go to those who are right or those who have righteousness on their side. Thank God that the greatest victory has been won on the cross and that death, the penalty of sin, has been defeated; and that on Christ's final return, evil will be finally brought to an end. Yet, in the mean time, evil and wickedness continue to thrive on earth and to exist in every corner of our world. Such forces are strong and will attempt to take down and destroy everything that is righteous, good and pure in God's sight; yet, God remains in control and is able to keep that which he has committed. Amen

VIGOR(OUS)

Vigor or vigorous means to act with intensity and strength; such as the chemical reaction when an acid and base are joined together. Vigor in our mind and perhaps our lives in general, can be sapped by inaction, passivity and other such behavior and habits.

Iron rusts from disuse; stagnant water loses its purity and in cold weather becomes frozen; even so does inaction sap the vigor of the mind.

Leonardo da Vinci, 1452 - 1519)

The combination of a firm decision and determination are similar to the acid and base in that the combination or mixture (of the two) will produce a vigorous reaction. *Be vigorous in attaining your goals by mild or composed in the method of accomplishing your objectives.* One does not contradict the other, but as with a mast-ship on the sea, the destination must be sought with a combination of speed and precision.

Vigorous let us be in attaining our ends, and mild in our method of attainment.

Lord Newborough,
Motto

Men must be decided on what they will not do, and then they are able to act with vigor in what they ought to do.

Mencius, Works
Chinese Confucian
philosopher (371 BC - 289 BC)

Believe it our not, vigor may also include some degree of patience or a methodical approach. In the movie, "The Mask of Zorro", the young developing Zorro is an understudying to the original Zorro played by Anthony Hopkins. At one point of the move, the understudy is described as "vigorous" in his demeanor or character. By this time, the

developing Zorro has shelved his emotions of revenge that caused carelessness and folly, and has focused his attention {or at least most of his attention} on the plan at hand. He is vigorous in protecting the innocent and helpless and prosecuting the guilty tyrants who have taken advantage of the land and its people – he is in tune with the very essence of Zorro as a hero and humanitarian. As you must be familiar with the story, getting tune to the mission is not with pain and hardship. At first, young Zorro is unwilling to focus because of his emotions and desire for revenge; once more, his is lacking in the skills of a gentleman and the other facets of the job. Being vigorous is not an option!

VIRTUE

What is virtue...if you don't know?

Virtue: conformity to a standard of right; moral excellence; strength and courage; a commendable quality or valor; active power to accomplish a given effort. Well, this should give some idea of virtue; in short, it is doing the right, moral thing regardless of the circumstances.

Voltaire describes virtue as the difference in human character. Cicero described natural ability as a more likely prerequisite for glory and virtue than education alone – although the pursuit or desire for learning often coincides with the natural ability that he describes.

Men are equal; it is not birth but virtue that makes the difference.

Voltaire, *French author, humanist, rationalist, & satirist (1694 - 1778)*

Natural ability without education has more often attained to glory and virtue than education without natural ability.

Cicero
Roman author, orator, & politician (106 BC - 43 BC)

George Washington described virtue as a key quality or ingredient for his highest

I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.

George Washington, *First president of US (1732 - 1799)*

ambition or title to be an honest man.

Virtue comes in so many aspects of human character – it is a common if not a necessary component of honesty and integrity. I believe that virtue is the basis for a host of qualities; the book of Colossians describes some qualities as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. The scripture continues by encouraging the believers to *bear with each other, and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another...forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all in perfect unity.*

VICES&VICES

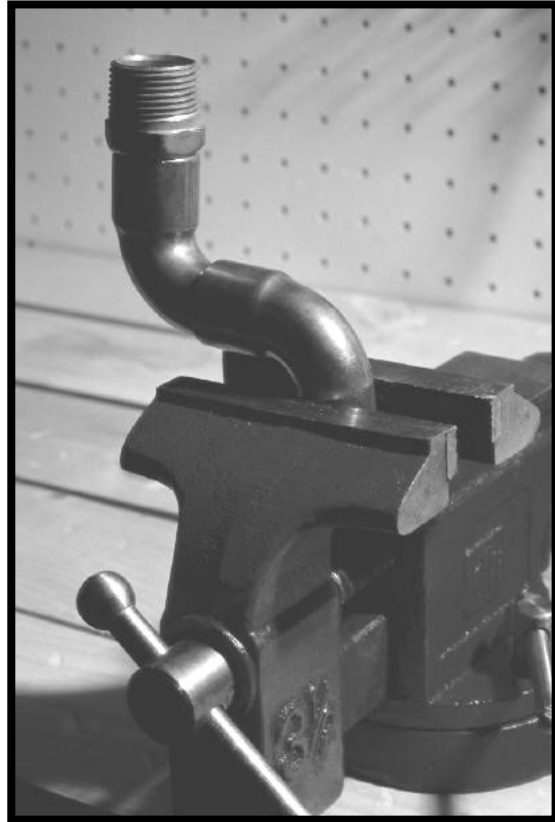
“Vises” come in two types and two spellings:

1. A vise is a mechanical clamp like that shown to the right – used for holding things tightly for some type of work or modification
2. A vice is moral fault or undesirable behavior that, in the extreme, can be depraved and wicked

A vise is formed from steel and includes a gear and lever to hold the piece or work in position. Vises are used in shops of all kinds simply to hold something while additional pressure and force are applied.

A vice can be a variety of bad habits but usually pertains to habits or addictions that are quite serious and may even lead to death. In an odd way, a vice and a vise has some similarity however limited or loose that it may be. A vice can hold someone down in the sense that it limits their abilities and their opportunities. For example, smoking tobacco can reduce the effectiveness of your lungs and respiratory systems. Other forms or types of vices or addictions might include alcohol, legal or illegal drugs, and other substances that harm your mind and body over a long term. Once more, the vices may cause indirect harm to others who care for you and hurt as a consequence.

To further draw a comparison between the two, the metaphorical *jaws* of a vice will grip tightly and not let go; but continue to tighten the grip such that all strength to break the grip is diminished over time. A big word for this process is debilitation – which means to undermine and disable or destroy the strength of something. Our society is marked by vices that have left untold damage and destruction both to the user or primary and still to others. Organizations such as Alcoholics’ Anonymous {AA} and other similar support groups exist to help us when we have vices that lead to addictions of one kind or another. Three cheers for these organizations and their tireless effort and devotion!



VOTING

Voting is a privilege that we have in our country. As you probably know, voting is not allowed or legal in many countries – the leaders are not elected but rather are installed by other means.

Voting has not always been a privilege for all Americans or all citizenry or population of the United States. Initially, women could not vote and neither could slaves. The abolitionist and temperance movement prior to the Civil War provided some opportunity to press for voting



rights; yet women did not receive the full right until the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1919; by this time, many states had already approved such legislation.

It is unimaginable to think that women could not vote and would struggle for the right over a span of at least 80 years. African Americans faced a similar struggle to gain the right to vote. Each of these segments of society could have well understood the true privilege of voting having been unjustly denied for so many years. Consider that, on average, only a modest percentage of registered voters go to the polls – particularly during small or non-presidential elections. The taste of freedom and human rights may lose its flavor with

each passing generation. One never truly values what they have until it is lost or it is taken away...and I have never valued the privilege and blessing of having children more than I do now.

WAGONS

“Wait for the Wagon, Wait for the Wagon...and we’ll all take a ride”.

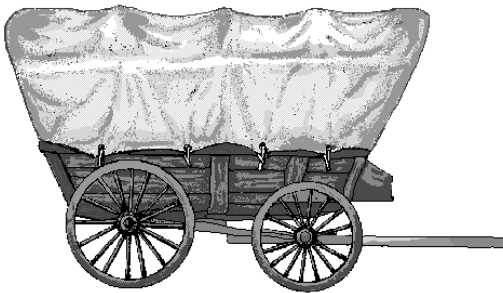
These words were used in a classic old song that I used to have on a tape – yes a cassette. Hey, cassettes may be passé, but they are not as old as wagons!

I am certain that wagons were not very comfortable; the only springs, as I recall, were located on the rider’s seat. But I also think that riding on a wagon every once-in-a-while would be a lot of fun; I think that the opportunity to experience this form of transportation, as generations ago, makes us appreciate the modern forms of transportation that much more. What do you think?



Many movies have been produced with wagons. Countless Westerns and cowboy movies have included these four-wheeled, covered boxes as well as variety of surreys and stage coaches. But my favorite of all time has to be “Dances with Wolves”; I just like that movie, the characters, the perspective and expose’ on the Indians, and the beauty of the Southwest...I love that movie! Following John Dunbar’s recovery of a leg injury, he proceeds Westward with a large wagon in tow.

I have a second-cousin who participates in a cross-country wagon trains; she has participated on several occasions according to family. I wonder what it would be like to reenact the Northwest Passage or some other historical route; authentic costume, food, living conditions, etc? Imagine facing the same kind of dangers that this pioneers faced along the journey such as a hail storm, high winds, blazing heat, frigid temperatures, and so on – wow, what an adventure!



The Conestoga wagon was a large, sturdy, four-wheeled wagon used by American pioneers. The horse-drawn wagons, precursors of the prairie schooners, carried freight and settlers westward until about 1850. Normally built with both ends higher than the middle, a Conestoga wagon’s wheels could be removed, and the wagon bed could float as a boat.

WALKING

Moving in silent desperation
Keeping an eye on the holy land
A hypothetical destination
Say, who is this walking man?

Well, the leaves have come to turning
And the goose has gone to fly
And bridges are for burning
So don't you let that yearning
Pass you by
Walking man, walking man walks
Well, any other man stops and talks
But the walking man walks

Well the frost is on the pumpkin
And the hay is in the barn
An pappy's come to rambling on
Stumbling around drunk
Down on the farm

And the walking man walks
Doesn't know nothing at all
Any other man stops and talks
But the walking man walks on by
Walk on by

Most everybody's got seed to sow
It ain't always easy for a weed to grow, oh no
So he don't hoe the row for no one
Oh for sure he's always missing
And something is never quite right
Ah, but who would want to listen to you
Kissing his existence good night

Walking man walk on by my door
Well, any other man stops and talks
But not the walking man
He's the walking man
Born to walk
Walk on walking man
Well now, would he have wings to fly
Would he be free
Golden wings against the sky
Walking man, walk on by
So long, walking man, so long

"Walking Man" by James Taylor, has some application to my life; for the past few years, I have made walking a regular part of my routine – at times, walking with my dog was a favorite past-time and enabled much to be pondering, meditation, and prayer.

I do not fully understand this song, though I like it as with other songs by James Taylor. On a whim, the *walking man* is obviously not prone to stop and talk but is content or set on simply *walking on by* – as though he either doesn't care {to talk or discuss anything}. He is *in silent desperation*; yet fixed on a higher calling, the holy land. With the seasons, and perhaps passing years, his pace and position remain resolute: walking toward something beyond the concerns and affiliated characters, he is not free from the past but is no less committed to a position of relative silence while pursuing a higher calling...or perhaps a message or blessing.

To physically walk a route and end up where you began seems pointless; but the accomplishments may come in the form of an increased relief, peace of mind, or sense of what and who is important. A simple walk can do much to ease the pain and loneliness that can plague our lives at points in time; a walk can relieve the stress of some pressing problem at home or work.

Thus, I say as the song has expressed, *walking man, walk on by* that you may find this message or blessing.

WALLS

To the right is the Great Wall of China. Historians believe that the wall was constructed to protect the Chinese from the Huns – although I am not sure of the accuracy of this belief. What is true, however, is that the wall is an enormous structure that has captured the attention of the world over in terms of its historical relevance and size – it is the largest of castle-like structures for which construction must have equaled the great pyramids of Egypt or the coliseums of the Roman Empire.



Though the wall had some apparent strategic value, it is obvious that warring armies could have potentially go around the wall rather than make a direct or frontal approach – which, if the case in history, would have negated or at least diminished the value of the wall. At the same time, the massive army necessary to arm the wall could have been another factor is this garrison – the wall extended approximately 1500 miles according to Encarta! In time, fortresses and garrisons of this type would become obsolete due to development in siege weapons, gun powder, and matching tactics. You may recall that masonry forts build along the Eastern sea board during the early 1800's were rendered obsolete by the rifled cannon, etc. Much later, in the French invasion of World War II, the Maginot line offered little resistance to the insurgence as described in Encarta. The moral to the story is that walls and fortresses, whether actual or metaphorical {emotions, thoughts, etc.} , are not impregnable; rather, someone or something could eventually breakthrough or pass-over or go-around these obstacles.

At the start of World War II, the German blitz campaigns in Poland and Western Europe skillfully combined air and surface mobility and striking power. These campaigns made the elaborate permanent fortifications of the Maginot line, built by the French in the 1930s and named after its creator, the war minister André Maginot, the symbol throughout the world of military futility.

Walls and the fortresses are constructed to either contain the occupants from leaving and/or to keep others from entering; yet, the forces that compel some to leave and/or others to enter will eventually overrun these walls and leave them as mere monuments at best and ruins as the more.

WAR

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things; the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing he cares about more than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature that has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than him.

- John Stuart Mill

War is an ugly thing – and few of us can not begin to understand that if we have not experienced it in our life time. According to John Mill, the decay of patriotism, or value of freedom, is perhaps more ugly than the cost of war with all the destruction and desolation.

Writer and theologian Chuck Colson commented about a protestor that was holding a sign that read, “Nothing is

worth fighting for”. Chuck commented on this particular sentiment with a simple counter argument that if nothing is worth fighting for, than nothing is worth living for either. In other words, freedom has a definite cost and those who have paid the price place the greatest value in this privilege.

It is within our nature to be free and, in fact, true freedom can only occur when we are released from the bondage of sin, death. Some semblance of freedom, as we consider our citizenship in the United States, provides certain liberties regarding speech, press, bearing arms, etc.; yet, these privileges sometimes come into conflict with the misconception that such are entitlements and thus are granted by virtue rather than by grace. In other words, freedom is expected with no investment and is defined by one’s individual terms and benefits rather than a sound basis of right, wrong, and responsibility.

Sometimes I like to visit military cemeteries to grasp but a small measure of the sacrifice born by many deaths through our internal and external conflicts and differences. Such an event really *hits home* with thoughts of these causalities, their families, and their duty to country. Gratitude is not enough to express the debt paid by these many throughout our history; and although the cause may have been controversial if not wrong in large part, the losses cannot be denied and the desire for freedom, however defined, understated. I try to think of the grief and sorrow over such losses; yet I cannot fully grasp the conditions and much-less the losses in the aftermath of battle and war. I thank God that I have not had to endure such; and should be eternally grateful and respectful for those who have...

In the movie, “The Patriot”, Ben Martin foresees that the innocent {of a revolt against England} will die and suffer along with the guilty; that the young, the children, will see the war with their own eyes. It is especially sad that children must suffer through such hardship and forever be in memory of indelible images, sounds, and smells of conflict...if they survive such an ugly thing as war.

WATER

Can you recall when you were the thirstiest; when water was the most desirable thing you in your mind; when you would do anything just to have one swallow of that refreshing beverage called water.

I remember when I was very young, about seven or eight, being in vacation Bible school in Jacksonville. Each day, we were served Kool-Aid made with Sulfur water. Now if you don't know, Sulfur water smells like rotten eggs – it is suppose to be good for you, I think, but the smell is downright nasty. On that first day, being thirsty, the drink looked great and very appetizing; but as I got closer and smelled the Sulfur, drinking the stuff became a real chore. It looked like Kool-Aid but it neither smelled nor tasted like it. Looks can be deceiving – even in Bible school!



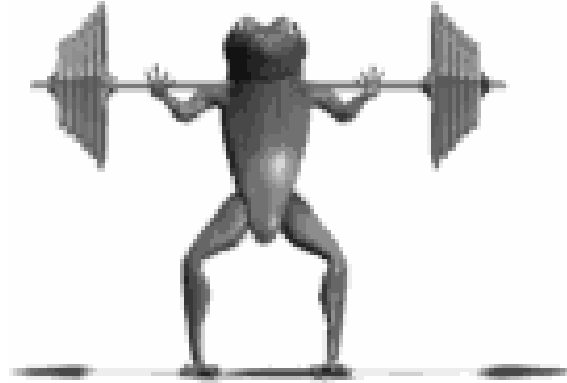
In spite of that experience (and the memory of Sulfur water), the need for water remains a clear and necessary part of our lives – without it, we would simply dehydrate or lose more water than our bodies can take without replenishment. Water is an obvious and understood need for human life and life in general.

In his message and ministry, Jesus used water as an object (or substance) for spiritual life. In his discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well, he used the term *living water* to describe the joy that enters the life of those who believe. It is the spirit of Christ or the Holy Spirit that enables this joy in the believer's life and also enables insight and understanding as to the scriptures and message. Having this living water makes the scriptures as clear as water.

So drink that water and enjoy its refreshment – but first make sure it's not Sulfur!

WEIGHT

Yes, frogs are very strong and can even lift weights – especially with their legs. Frogs have many talents in addition to croaking, jumping and catching flies; but this letter is not so much about frogs or amphibians as it is about weight whether I mean free weights, exercise equipment, or some of form of weights that have poundage. Well, without more of an introduction, let's leap on to the subject of weights and stuff.



With each passing year, our physical weight may change: for children and young people like yourselves, weight is increasing...sometimes at an unprecedented rate; for older folks like myself, weight may be relatively stable although some shifting is occurring to signify that our bodies are not as forgiving or tolerable as in our youth; for women, weight may be more of concern than for men although extreme weight fluctuation is a health problem for anyone regardless of sex or age.

Weights or dumbbells and physical weight have some association: the more exercise or conditioning of our physical bodies, the more production of muscle over fat, and the more toned our muscular girth. Lifting weights is not for everyone; there are other forms of exercise that does the body well...but lifting weights helps build that muscular girth mentioned before. Numerous machines are available that substitute for free weights and offer some degree of independence in terms of "working-out". These machines, for which you may have already utilized, are generally great in my opinion. In addition, the equipment offers other forms of exercise such as stationary cycling, walking and running with on-board controls for measuring your mileage and your calorie-burn.

Never before in our society have so many options been available for diet and exercise; yet, ironically, never before has our populous, to include children, been more out-of-shape and over weight. Video games {or limited physical play} and junk food are cited as causes for the bulge occurring in our ranks and while weight may fluctuate for the young and old alike, the change in this demographic is of concern if not alarm to educators, physicians, and others involved in children's development. The moral to the story is regulate what you eat with moderation toward high-calorie items and junk-food, and stay physically active with some form of sport or outside activity – Just Do It!

WESLEY

In the history of the church, or more specifically Christianity, the name “Wesley” is of critical importance. Two characters, John and Charles, are the subjects of this letter and, in particular, the contribution they made in God’s work and reform to the early church.

From Encarta, the following brief on John and Charles Wesley.

John Wesley was born in the rectory at Epworth, Lincolnshire, on June 17, 1703, the 15th child of the British clergyman Samuel Wesley. He was educated at Charterhouse School and Christ Church, University of Oxford. Ordained deacon in 1725 and admitted to the priesthood of the Church of England in 1728, John Wesley acted for a time as curate to his father. In 1729 he went into residence at Oxford as a fellow of Lincoln College. There he joined the Holy Club, a group of students that included his brother Charles Wesley and, later, George Whitefield, who was to become the founder of Calvinistic Methodism. The club members adhered strictly and methodically to religious precepts and practices, among them visiting prisons and comforting the sick, and were thus derisively called “Methodists” by their schoolmates...

Note, that much is not included regarding their lives and work; yet, both were directly involved in “The Great Awakening”: a revival that occurred in the U.S. during the early and mid 1700’s, this movement brought both increased activity

Charles Wesley (1707-1788), English clergyman and hymnist, born in the rectory at Epworth, Lincolnshire, and educated at Westminster School and Christ Church, University of Oxford. While at Oxford, he was a member, with his older brother John, of the Holy Club.

In 1735 Wesley was ordained in the Church of England. Later that year he went to Georgia with his brother John as secretary to the colonial governor James Edward Oglethorpe. Ill health forced him to relinquish that post, however, and he returned to England the following year.

On May 21, 1738, Charles Wesley experienced a religious awakening similar to that which his brother John was to undergo three days later. Charles subsequently was closely associated with the Wesleyan movement and traveled extensively as an evangelical preacher. After 1756 he carried on his work chiefly in Bristol and in London, where he lived from 1771 on...

as well as controversy and division in the early American churches. Other leaders of this movement included Jonathon Edwards and George Whitefield whom, as itinerant ministers, carried the Gospel and revival to all corners of our land.

Again, some controversy occurred from mainline or home-based ministers who saw this emotional wave or fervent condition as unsettling at the least. What do you think of the reformed church, of revival and other related topics?

WHO

Who are you? Tell me who you are...if you can. You should be able to describe yourself to me or to others, and should be able to describe yourself on the basis that you are loved, admired, and purposed by God. He made you and knows everything about you – you are his child and a resident of his eternal kingdom. Amen

"Tell me what you learned last and I'll tell you who you are."
- Kevin Marler

Your mind, body and soul are collectively to be used to glorify God – since he made you and knows you as his own. When you feed these parts with good stuff, good stuff is produced and presented; but when you feed these parts with bad stuff...well, you know what happens.

In a Walt Disney film, *Dear to my Heart*, an animated wise owl sings a song "You got to do with, what you've got...". In this segment of this great story, a boy is in need of guidance and encouragement – it is in the owl of his imagination that he finds the a pedagogy spirit that not only invokes the value of wisdom, but sings a nice ditty to lift the boy's spirit to use that which God has given him. In trying to be as the wise owl, keep on trying and never give up.

The man who doesn't read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them.
- Mark Twain

Yet, the temptation to become a cynic seems to grow with age. A cynic is one who attributes all motives to selfish motives. Cynicism is thinking that has gone awry with the notion that everything done, pursued or performed is done in order to serve self and no other.

The power of accurate observation is commonly called cynicism by those who have not got it.

- George Bernard Shaw, Irish dramatist & socialist (1856 - 1950)

This 'ism gives a sense of knowing and understanding while, in actuality, is misleading in conclusion that God does not exist as the purveyor of goodness in man. Sarcasm, though an 'asm rather than an 'ism, generally includes overtones or blatant remarks aimed at cutting or denigrating someone or some thing. Both cynicism and sarcasm describe one who is immersed in their self-assessed knowledge and understanding, yet do not realize their ignorance and even embittered and insecure soul within them. Please do not become mired in the mud of cynicism and sarcasm; at the least, these characteristics or conditions are not the least bit attractive and sometimes spread as the worst, most vile of behavior.

WICKED

Wicked is a very strong word; it describes someone or something that is dangerous or evil. Many references to this word are found in Psalm and Proverbs and still many more throughout the Bible. To site some examples seems appropriate.

It's so easy to be wicked without knowing it, isn't it?

L. M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*, 1908
Canadian novelist (1874 - 1942)

Psalm 32:10 tells us that *many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.*

Psalm 37:13 explains that *the Lord laughs at the wicked for he knows that their day is coming*

Proverbs 6:18 indicates that, of the six things the Lord hates, one of them is a *heart that devises wicked schemes*

Proverbs 21:29 describes the wicked man as *putting up a bold front, but the upright man gives thought to his ways.*

With a few verses on the table, consider this character description in detail. What is an indication that a person or thing is wicked – as opposed to basic sin or disobedience to God? If a person is bad or misbehaves, are they wicked? How does someone or something become wicked...or are they born wicked? Ezekiel 18:21-23 indicates that wicked person can turn away from all the sins they have committed; Jesus will forgive them of their sins both past and present if they sincerely ask for and receive forgiveness; indeed, Jesus desires that all come to him to be redeemed. In 1 Samuel, Eli-the-prophet's sons were described as wicked *because they had no regard for the Lord*. Nabel, the husband of Abigail, was such a *wicked man that no one could talk to him {or reason with him}*.

These and other examples of wickedness are characterized by the rejection of God as God and, instead, the embracing of individual will and behavior however depraved, ruthless, and destructive it may be.

I believe that everyone is given some opportunity to know God; that *since the beginning, God's qualities, his divine nature and eternal power, have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made*. I also believe that God is a fair and perfect judge of character. On these beliefs, wickedness occurs when the counsel and Lordship of God is rejected as a lifestyle or life commandment, thus leaving the individual and masses to their own devices

WILBERFORCE

William Wilberforce was a leader in the abolition of slavery in England during the early 1800's. Wilberforce was a believer that practiced his faith through the political system of England; his principle or basis for social reforms was Christianity and the expression of God's love for man regardless of race, creed, or color. In 1833, shortly before his death, England passed the legislation to illegalize slavery and slave trading in British territories. For the Africans, this act meant that captives could be protected by the British Navy from being transported through British waters; it meant that fewer Africans would find themselves in bondage, enslaved and destitute...if they survived the voyage and process.



The Evangelical church was a vanguard for social reform, and in particular, the inhuman treatment and enslavement of the African. In England as well as the United States, segments of the church took this matter to God and considered their participation to be ordained by him – it was their responsibility on the basis of what is right, what is of God regardless of the costs and circumstances. .

British statesman and reformer, born in Hull, England, and educated at the University of Cambridge. In 1780 he was elected to Parliament, where he was an eloquent supporter of the Tory program advocated by the British prime minister William Pitt the Younger. Wilberforce embraced Evangelical Christianity in 1784 and along with other Evangelicals, later devoted himself to the social reform activities of the so-called Clapham sect. The fight to abolish the slave trade soon attracted Wilberforce, and he became the abolitionist movement's chief spokesman in the House of Commons.

In 1807 Wilberforce secured enactment of legislation prohibiting the trade. He joined the struggle for the complete abolition of slavery and in 1823 was a founder of the Anti-Slavery Society. Ill health forced his retirement from Parliament in 1825. The Emancipation Bill abolishing slavery became law one month after his death. Wilberforce fought for other causes, notably for Roman Catholic emancipation

WILL

This letter is not about the name “Will” but is about the human will otherwise described as determination, desire, or even commanding.

When a child is described as willful, it means that they are very defiant or stubborn; they are most likely to do what they want to do rather than what they are told to do by the parents or some other authority in the lives. A child does not usually know what is good {or safe} for them and the right way to behave. Parents are responsible for protecting their children {even from themselves} and are called to instruct and teach their children *in the way they should go*. Parents may become disheartened and regretful at times; on the other hand, they may become angry, blaming the young person for all his problems and circumstances. The child may respond with similar feelings and attitudes. Each and all of them have a will for which the measure of its strength may be determined by the size and length of their differences and dilemmas.

When Christ enters a life, the will of the individual is progressively surrendered {or dies} giving way to the will of God, the father. Jesus was obedient to the will of his father even to death on the cross. Numerous texts describe the will of God made manifest in the lives of characters and circumstances. Paul, in writing to the Church at Ephesians, says that the *he has not hesitated to proclaim to the whole will of God*. Jesus taught us to pray, *thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven*. Romans’ chapter 12 tells us that the will of God is tested and approved through our own transformation from our flesh or carnal nature to the Spirit or Christ. In 1 Thessalonians, we are told that *it is by God’s will, that we be sanctified* – or be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

The will that occurs in a child, as described previously, remains in similar form throughout our adulthood, but the opportunity and blessing occurs when we surrender that will to God and embrace his will as perfect and pleasing. As a child, we obeyed because we were told or we feared the outcome if we did not obey. As adults, we must obey or surrender to God’s will out of an unprecedented level of praise and reverence – that he is God and is supreme in every way. Our decision to follow is done so by the free will of man. We may: choose to reject him; we may publicly go on record as accepting him, but in effect reject him; or we may earnestly accept him and surrender our will for his will.

What are you going to do?

WILLOW

This letter could be about the tree, a Weeping Willow; this distinctive tree reminds me of my grandmother, Nell Christian, because such a tree was in her front yard. Several months ago, I wrote poem to commemorate the occasion.

Through your lifetime, your mind will collect symbols, smells, and images that remind of some occasion, some one or thing. An event that includes one of

Memory serves me well, the Weeping Willow of childhood days:
Marked the spot of Grandmother's home, East Gadsden way;
Shadowed earth beneath her limbs, and remnants of her living birth;
Flower of her hanging limbs, the foliage of her vibrant stem;
Beneath the Weeping Willow, a speckled pink and blends of green.

Why to you weep, are you sad, will you change and be glad?
Flower of your youth still grows and blossoms each and every year;
Limbs though drooped remain in tact to hold you firm and sure;
Whether storm, wind, snow, heat, all elements, yet still steadfast;
Silhouette fall of grief and woe but why, I do not know.

Reflecting on the memory, a Willow seen along my way;
The questions of my childhood dreams give way to adult thought.
Perhaps the Willow is not sad at all, or otherwise considered
As remembered in her stance and by her name; but rather, is an
Irony that below her appearance is just as glad as other similarity.

She struggled like all other kind, she given birth and carried vine.
Generations sway within her view, and others stop and give her due.
Credit her for life and youth and they and offspring further score.
Weep not of sad or otherwise bereaved, but Weep of life and youth;
Tears of joy beneath her limbs are speckled pink, blends of green.

Descriptions of her further still, a perfect head of silver hair;
Adorned with other supplements stored in her purse or put away.
In day or night, at work or play, down stairs or down town or anyway;
Well put-together, impressed was I of eloquence and dignity.
Weep or laugh aloud, your beauty will always stay with me.

these objects will trigger a memory of that person, place or thing. Your mind already has a storehouse of knowledge that goes largely untapped or recalled on a regular basis; yet, these objects will trigger the deep and hidden information that resides in your brain.

Even in the toddler years, memories and information were collected and filed away for potential recall in the future. Please do not forget the times that we had together – the

good times that allowed me to be your father and you to be my children. I will never forget them and sometimes recall particular occasions, words, expressions, and even moments. How about you?

I am hopeful that our relationship will not be measured in memories only; I believe that reconciliation and restoration will occur in time and through the opportunity that God prepares. Until then, the memories and trust in God's work is sufficient.

WISDOM

Wisdom may be thought of as knowledge obtained over time, and well-applied to the reoccurrences of life; hence, the degree of wisdom is often marked by age, and is measured by the outcome or result of decisions. The older, more-experienced you are, the more likely that you are to make good decisions {whatever the definition of a “good” decision is}. Abigail Van Buren, known as “Dear Abby”, suggests that age does not guarantee wisdom; rather, the quality of the basis or foundation is more-likely the determinate of gained wisdom.

Many references to wisdom and its counterpart, foolishness, appear in the Bible; but before referring to some in detail, consider the Biblical definition or description of wisdom. Psalm 111:19 tells us: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and all who follow his precepts have good understanding.* In Proverbs

“Wisdom doesn't automatically come with old age. Nothing does - except wrinkles. It's true, some wines improve with age. But only if the grapes were good in the first place.”

- Abigail Van Buren, 1978

2:2, *the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.* Continuing in Proverbs, the reader {and follower} is encouraged to *esteem wisdom - which will exalt you.* By these scriptures, which are a few of the many, the origin and the outcome of wisdom are described with clarity; but also is the disposition of one who desire's {and needs} wisdom – to gain wisdom, one must fear {honor} God as their authority, seek fellowship with God through Jesus Christ, and live in God through the Holy Spirit.

Does wisdom apply to only those who *fear the Lord*; or is wisdom also available to all mankind? Perhaps Abby's orientation to a basis or foundation may apply to this question with regard to the definition or understanding of the differences between man's wisdom and God's wisdom. Man's basis for wisdom is himself or mankind; God's basis is himself or the creator of mankind. Mankind has and will always drift from wisdom or be inclined to folly; God has and will always originate wisdom as he is he creator of all good things. For some who deny the true origin of wisdom, nature is the substitute; God created nature. For others, the substitute could be simply experience or learning by *trial-and-error*. God created mankind with the capacity to learn, to think, to reason, and to exercise his freewill – even when freewill is a diversion from the truth.

In our youth, the opportunity to gain wisdom may be more limited because of the need to experiment ...or even an unwillingness to listen to others who have tried the experiment and logged the outcome of both good and bad. Thus, wisdom begins with the ability, the willingness and the desire to listen, to observe and to embrace knowledge from God; therefore, do not only listen, but embrace that which God tells you.

WORD

The picture below is an old microphone that was probably among the first design to transfer sound to electrical signals. It is from such equipment, that the voices of radio could be broadcast “over the air”, songs could be recorded on records and tape, and public speeches and announcements could be amplified to a large audience. The microphone was not only an instrument but became the symbol of mass communication whereby words could be heard rather than read for the first time. This change could have ushered in the saying, *don’t believe anything you hear and half of what you read*.



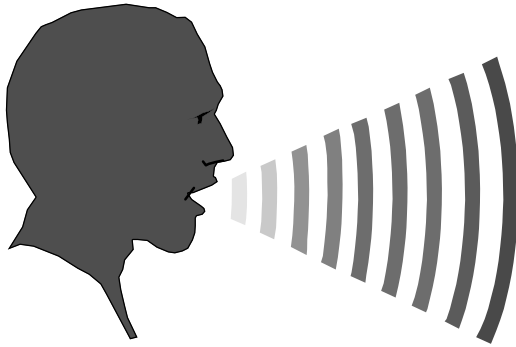
Words can be very powerful – to invoke a range of emotions and conditions. In the book of James, we are told that *people can tame animals of all kinds, but no one can tame the tongue* {words}. James goes on to tell us that we can use words to praise God but also to curse God or to curse people made in the image of God.

Our words are one aspect of our character and can be an indicator of our heart. In the book of Matthew, Jesus addresses this matter by associating it to our diet or what we eat. He says, *you are not defiled by what you eat; you are defiled by what you say and do*. Later Jesus is questioned by the disciples and, as often the case, explains in further detail. He explains, *but evil words come from an evil heart and defile the person who says them*. He describes a series of actions that begin with an evil heart, followed by an evil thought, followed by evil words.

But an evil thought or even word is not necessarily an indicator of the heart. From the Old Testament, David was described by God as *a man after God’s own heart*; yet David committed an evil thought, words, and actions that had very damaging consequences. The difference was the prevailing condition of David’s heart: he was a man who believed in the faithful and forgiving nature of God and, in the belief, was quick to confess and repent of his sins. David experienced the joy found in God’s forgiveness yet also embraced the suffering from the consequences described as damaging. He did not repeat evil or relish in this evil but embraced the power of God to forgive, to heal, and to restore. In short, he pursued God’s unconditional love.

Again, words are very powerful and, from an *unbridled tongue*, can cause great trouble. But, as Jesus is the Word {from John 1}, so too do we profit from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by the thoughts in mind and the words that result. I pray that your thoughts and the words that result will be pleasing in our Lord’s sight; that *the words of your heart and the mediation of your mind will be acceptable unto Christ our Lord*.

WORDS



“Words are cheap, action is what counts” is an expression often used to de-value or minimize the impact of words. Yet words can be very powerful in conveying our thoughts, our feelings or opinion.

A single word, whether expressed intentionally or not, can cut-down or altogether destroy a longstanding relationship whether between two people, two families, or two nations. Words are

very powerful in not only a relationship but also in the measure of an individual’s character.

The book of Proverbs includes much instruction and wisdom in regard to words or what we say. Abraham Lincoln said “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt”. If your words are not valuable or well-thought out, than perhaps you should remain silent.

Continuing in Proverbs, the reader or follower is instructed to limit or refrain from his words while hearing and taking heed to the words of the wise. In chapter 16, a favorite proverb is: “well-ordered words are as a honeycomb: sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” In this theme, Proverbs offer many verses to distinguish the fool {and his mouth} from the *well-ordered words* of the wise.

In the book of John, Jesus is described as The Word present in the beginning {of creation}. Further, that in Jesus was life {eternal} that became the light in men.

Remember that words are valuable and The Word invaluable. Use your words carefully allowing the Holy Spirit to *guard your tongue* that you may be *sweet to the soul and health to the bones* – to give glory to Him.

WORKING

Working or work is described in physics as a force applied through a distance. Pushing a lawnmower would certainly be an example of work – albeit a riding mower or self-propelled would represent less work.

Working is a fundamental part of life; we all have to work to support ourselves, our family, and still others to whom we are indebted such as creditors. The Ecclesiastical conclusion to working is that

everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God. This same book continues with the advice: *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.* The good news is that we will not always have to labor and toil but by working, we can please and glorify God. With the certainty that you too will have to engage in working, some advice is provided below that could be described as the 7-R's of working.

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all for Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Work saves us from three great evils: boredom, vice and need.

Voltaire, *Candide*, 1759
French author, humanist,
rationalist, & satirist (1694 - 1778)

1. Respect: everyone, worker and boss alike, deserves the respect of others. Respect, however, is more often earned than handed out at random.
2. Reliability: doing what is expected and doing what is right are traits of a reliable person. All employees, top to bottom, should be relied upon to perform their function to the best of their ability.
3. Recognition: A simple "Thank You", the realization and giving credit for good work and even identifying problems are all positive forms of recognition. How do you recognize others?
4. Responsibility: Every employee has a function they are responsible for. If we all respond in a positive manner, everyone grows. If not, everyone suffers.
5. Resourcefulness: Creatively working through our difficulties indicates our resourcefulness. Winning or losing has much to do with this trait.
6. Rewards: How do you reward your fellow employee? Are their problems as important as yours? Are their good deeds rewarded like you would like yours to be?
7. Recommendations: Identifying the problem without suggesting a solution accomplishes nothing. Every employee must have the freedom and desire to make recommendations for improvement.

WORKS

In the context of Biblical teaching, works have both a negative and positive meaning with regard to salvation and redemption. First of all, works are things that you do – the outcome of working or exerting yourself with objective. The grace offered by God to all mankind is a gift. We cannot earn grace or acquire it by works or any merit of our own; though works are insufficient for salvation, works are the result of salvation – we do good works as a result of our salvation and Jesus' redemptive work in our lives.

"Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance."

-- Samuel Johnson

Don't misunderstand me; works are very important and can benefit you and others. Sometimes our performance or proof is measured by our works or achievements. Hard work or applying yourself to the task-at-hand is considered as a virtue, quality or attribute of character; that is, if the works are good and redeeming.

Clearly, some works are not good at all; indeed, *the heart is deceitful in many ways* and can contrive ideas that lead to bad or evil works – aimed at hurting, destroying, and otherwise producing pain and suffering.

Often an entire city has suffered because of an evil man.

Hesiod

Greek didactic poet (~800 BC)

Sometimes works are intended to be good but end-up resulting in pain and suffering. The one performing the works may have had worthy intentions but, for reasons beyond his intentions, did not produce the desired outcome; on the contrary, the outcome was damaging and perhaps even devastating. In such cases, the heart or true intention is known by God – he will judge the works accordingly. If the works violate a law, the man is judged by the law – they examine and judge his works based on evidence. God's judgment, or his execution of justice, is fair and perfect; man's court is subject to mistakes though the intentions are to serve justice and render an accurate verdict.

Romans 8:28 is possibly one of the more-frequent verses quoted in the Bible: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.* Again, God's judgment is fair and perfect. The question should be whether I love him and have been called according to his purpose. If the answer to this question is "yes", the works of God should be understood to be good, right, and perfect.

WORRY

Some years ago, a song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” {by Bobby McFerrin} was popular. A Caribbean-form of music, with all the overtones of a care-free and relaxing life, the words and tempo gave every reason to embrace the advice, sit back, and watch the tide ebb and flow.

I recently heard a message or sermon that, as believers, we have two choices or conditions in response to life: we can worship God or we can worry. The human tendency is to worry on the basis that we actually have or had some control over the matter; but God calls us to worship and to *cast our anxieties to him who cares for us.*

Here is a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note
Don't worry be happy
In every life we have some trouble
When you worry you make it double
Don't worry, be happy.....

Ain't got no place to lay your head
Somebody came and took your bed
Don't worry, be happy
The land lord say your rent is late
He may have to litigate
Don't worry, be happy
Lood at me I am happy
Don't worry, be happy
Here I give you my phone number
When you worry call me
I make you happy
Don't worry, be happy
Ain't got no cash, ain't got no style
Ain't got not girl to make you smile
But don't worry be happy
Cause when you worry
Your face will frown
And that will bring everybody down
So don't worry, be happy (now).....

There is this little song I wrote
I hope you learn it note for note
Like good little children
Don't worry, be happy
Listen to what I say
In your life expect some trouble
But when you worry
You make it double
Don't worry, be happy.....
Don't worry don't do it, be happy
Put a smile on your face
Don't bring everybody down like this
Don't worry, it will soon past
Whatever it is
Don't worry, be happy

- Bobby McFerrin

I also heard that worship is not the only thing that we do; indeed, there are three basic modes or conditions that should occupy our time:

- ✎ Worship – praise, glorify, exalt God
- ✎ Work – act on his commands and prompting to glorify God
- ✎ Wait – wait patiently on prompting and answers to prayer from God

You may not always have a smile on your face or even appear to be happy; but no joy can surpass that which God can supply – even in the worst of times and conditions.

Don't mistake momentary happiness, so-called, with this joy. Joy goes much deeper than a smile on your face and a warm-and-fuzzy in your stomach. Joy is a supernatural phenomena that prevails in the most unexpected and unimaginable way. If you don't believe me, than turn to the Bible – it contains literally hundreds of references to joy from Genesis to Jude. In Psalm alone, “joy” is used about fifty times – which means that David found joy when he was being pursued by Saul with intent to kill. Now, what do you think of that?

What does it mean to worship? Can we

WORSHIP

worship other things besides God? If we consider something or someone to be more important or greater than God, are we worshipping it or them. The answer, as I understand, is that other things can be worshiped – this is called idolatry in the Bible, in the Ten Commandments.

Things that are sometimes worshiped include:

- 🌐 Ourselves – like Satan, we try to place ourselves on the throne or become what is called self-deified – which means that we crown ourselves as a god or king
- 🌐 Money – the love of money is described as the *root of all evil* because money and wealth become a god
- 🌐 Material possessions – clothes, jewelry, home furnishings, cars, boats, and all sundry of material things become gods
- 🌐 Other people – Elvis and other entertainers were described as *teen-idols*; if we worship them, they too are idols.
- 🌐 Entertainment and Pleasure – these aversions can be become idols; Hedonism is the lust for pleasure or unmatched pursuit of things that bring pleasure

Understand that having such things described above is not wrong; but it's worshipping those things, pursuing those things and making them life's ambition that is very wrong.

In the things listed above, a globe was used as bullet to signify that idolizing such things is worldliness. As believers, we are called *to be in the world but not of the world*. The instruction may leave you somewhat confused or uneasy; after all, how do we survive and live our lives without attention to these things and, when justified, pursue them with a passion? The answer is that we alone cannot be immune to such enticements or distractions, but must turn to God for strength through our relationship with Jesus. In a supernatural way, God will alter your interests or change your priorities such that these things become less important and, in some cases, not important at all; but instead of these things, God remains important and the focus of your desires to please, to worship, and to pursue.

Therefore my children do not store up treasures on earth where moth and rust will destroy, or where thieves will steal; but store up treasures in Heaven. Yes, press-on toward the eternal things, the things that matter, the things of God. This action and ambition will please God – he will provide for your needs and will surely care for you. He promises to do so.

YOO-HOO

One of my favorite beverages is a Yoo-hoo – drinking one takes me back to my younger days as a kid. A Yoo-hoo is not chocolate milk, but something that is still rich and unique.

When I was a kid, my grandmother use to say “yoo-hoo” as an introduction...like “hello” or “good morning”. Ironically, Abby used the same expression at least once – an expression that has stayed with me all this time!

Thanks to the Web site, the photograph of the drink, at close to full size, is enough to wet the appetite and send you dashing to the convenience store. You're just not cool, unless you drink

Yoo-Hoo

In case you may wonder, this drink does not have any caffeine and is packed with nutrition as well. Oh, and a similar drink is offered in a rich, double fudge as well.

So why are you waiting? Why not rush out now and grab one while the store is still stocked...before it's too late!



ZEAL

Zeal is a neat word because the pronunciation implies energy or fervor. Now, you try it, “ZZZZZZZZZZZeeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaaaaaaa|||” Come-on, can really say this word with emphasis and exclamation? I don’t think so.

Someone who has a lot of zeal may be called a zealot; but more commonly is described as zealous. Do you know someone who pursues a hobby, subject, or sport without intensity and vigor? Well, they may be a zealot. If you're watching a football game and you see one or more men in the stands with their shirts off and bodies painted, they may be zealous or they may just be maniacs!

In the Bible, Zealots were a Jewish group that emerged during the reign of King Herod; again, Encarta provides some additional information below.

Zealots were a Jewish religious-political faction, known for its fanatical resistance to Roman rule in Judea during the 1st century AD. The Zealots emerged as a distinct political group during the reign (37-4 BC) of Herod the Great. In AD 6, when Judea was put under direct Roman rule and the authorities ordered a census for purposes of taxation, the Zealots, led by Judas of Galilee, called for rebellion. Acknowledging the authority of the pagan Roman emperor, they argued, would mean repudiating the authority of God and submitting to slavery. An extremist group of Zealots, called Sicarii ("dagger men"), adopted terrorist tactics, assassinating Romans and also some prominent Jews who favored cooperation with the Roman authority. The rebellion led by the Zealots in AD 6 was quickly put down, and many of them, probably including Judas, were killed, but others continued to advocate uncompromising resistance to the Romans. One of Jesus' disciples, Simon, was a Zealot (see Luke 6:15). According to Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, the Zealots played a major role in inciting and sustaining the general Jewish uprising against the Romans that began in 66. Although they continued to attack other Jewish groups, they fought bravely in defense of Jerusalem until its fall in 70. Another group of Zealots held the fortress of Masada against besieging Roman troops until 73, when they committed suicide rather than surrender.

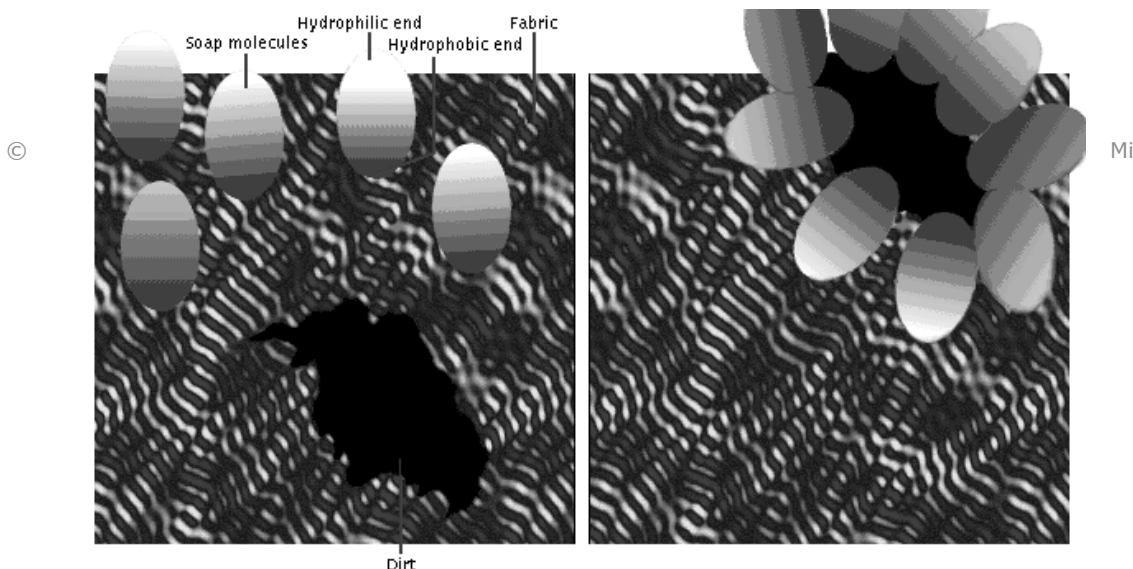
The Zealots chose a militant response to Roman rule – not only against the Romans, but against Jewish leaders who compromised the religious order in their view. Even one of Jesus' disciples, Simon, was a Zealot; perhaps his affiliation or allegiance to this group was tempered by his devotion to Jesus and the Way; still, Jesus chose him knowing of background and the inclination if not fanaticism toward aggression and such devices.

In Galatians, Paul urges the believers to be zealous, provided the reason is good; but do not allow Judaizers, or those who demand compliance with Jewish customs, to mislead or deceive the church in false doctrine. Be zealous, but do allow the zealousness or enthusiasm of false teachers to steer you wrong.

ZEST

Zest is the name of a soap. According to the Web site Zest.com, this soap is: “refreshing different from ordinary soap...it rejuvenates you with a combination of great refreshing scent and clean-rinsing lather that won't dry out your skin like soap.” I was curious about soap and, in particular, how soap {or detergent} makes things clean.

I learned recently that the term “fuller” was the equivalent of a professional launder in Biblical or ancient times. I'm not sure how they performed their job...without the modern equipment and products available at home and elsewhere; but I'm sure that they must have had their own methods if just to slap the item against a rock or something. Below is the process of stain removal along with an illustration of soap attacking and removing dirt. Bye-bye Mr. Stain!



Soap

This diagram represents the action of soap on dirt in a fabric. Once soap has dissolved in water, its molecules will surround any patch of dirt on the fabric, forming a ring around it called a micelle. This occurs because soap molecules have “ends” that differ in their properties. One end is attracted to water (hydrophilic), the other is attracted to nonsoluble substances such as oil and grease (hydrophobic). When soap molecules attach themselves to grease stains, they form a new surface that is soluble in water. Cleaning action is the absorption of dirt and grease into the center of soap micelles, which transforms a stain into a soluble substance that can be rinsed away.

Well, I hope you've enjoyed this brief explanation of how the tenacious soap molecules surround the oily substance and render it water soluble. Now back to our program.

ZONE

There are many uses of the word “zone”:

- ⇒ An end zone is part of the field in football
- ⇒ The Twilight Zone was a science fiction series that aired on TV
- ⇒ “End the Zone” is an expression that describes a time when everything is clicking or *in the groove*
- ⇒ “Highway to the Danger Zone” was the theme song for the movie, *Top Gun*
- ⇒ “No Packing Zone” is used to describe just that
- ⇒ “Penalty Zone” is another sports term
- ⇒ “Zoned-Out” is a term that means someone has lost their focus or attention
- ⇒ “Zone-Home” was almost a phrase used in E.T...change the “Z” to a “Ph”

Where or what is your zone? By this question, where do you feel most comfortable or secure? Before you were born, your zone was your mother’s womb; there, you were nicely nestled, warm, and fed on the tap. When you were a new baby, the zone may have been a combination of your mother’s arms, a crib or rocker, or some other place wrapped tightly in a receiving blanket. As you grew, the zone may have varied from your room to the sight of a parent or close relative or friend. Continuing to grow, the zone may become the relationship and time spent with family, at church, a club or team, or friends in your school or neighborhood. Dimensionally, your zone may seem to grow as you grow, starting with your mother’s womb and continuing to this great big world in some degree. But I ask again, where or what is your zone?

At times in his ministry, Jesus went off to a solitary place where he prayed; perhaps, this intimate time with God was one of his zones...a place of solitude where strength and direction could be supplied for his continuing ministry. At times, he went to the temple; still, other times he taught his disciples, preached to the multitudes, performed miracles, and addressed the inquisitions and attacks of those aimed at destroying him. Possibly, any one or more of these places or circumstances could have been his zone; yet, the place or circumstance was always doing the will of his Father in heaven. If doing his Father’s will was his purpose, he would have considered his zone everywhere at any time. Oh, there were times which grieved him and he did not prefer them in his humanity; but he still considered them to be in the zone because his ultimate desire was to do the will of God.

You are growing everyday and your zone, as you think of it, may be changing frequently; but if you are a believer in Christ, and have received him as Lord of your life, your zone should be to do the will of God just as with Jesus. No matter your circumstances or condition, you are in the zone if you desire to please God. Know this zone and pursue it.

ZORRO

It was a few letters ago when the word “vigor” prompted some reference to Zorro. Whether considering the original Zorro or the most recent film “The Mask of Zorro”, the image of a great hero wearing a black mask is the image that this name conjures up.

Once again, Encarta is the source for some limited information and a picture of the original Zorro. I’m not sure if the picture is actually Zorro – since he has no mask on...but maybe he has used the mask to gag the villain.

In any case, the question occurred to me, “Why end all these letters with the subject of Zorro? I really can’t provide a solid answer except that the word ends in “Z”...that’s all.



I liked this guy for the simple reason that he looked out for the helpless, the down-trodden, and the innocent. Zorro, however real in actual character, was some semblance of Robin Hood without the merry men. His skill with the sword, his horsemanship and general fighting prowess made for an **unstoppable** figure.

In the “Mask of Zorro”, his fortune was a combination of a great instructor or mentor, a smart horse, and a lot of luck; yet, who could argue with the results: he saved the people, married the beautiful daughter of the original Zorro and instructor, and avenged the death of his brother – yes, he seemed to have it all. Though the final chapter has yet to be written on the second-generation Zorro, I suspect that he would have to continue his campaign simply because the people need him and place their faith in him. Therefore, I end this final letter with a salute to Zorro and those who stand for what is right against perilous odds.

Final Comments

In these final comments, I must consider the many that have prayed over my long term estrangement from my children and, though not fully aware of the circumstances, have no less given their attention and prayerful thoughts. For these people and their genuine interests, I am eternally grateful and appreciative.

Secondly, my family deserves more than I can possibly provide in the way of appreciation and gratitude – they have been present through the darkness and have never left me or my matters alone; rather, they have embraced me both physically and otherwise in both obvious as well as discrete ways. As I side note, I have learned more about my father in the last few years than I learned in all prior years. As for my mother, she has always been there to bid us welcome and to lift us up in prayer – whether we seemed to need it or not.

For my wife and step-children, the blessings continue to pour in as my opportunity to experience intimate family-life has been rekindled. I must say again, that my appreciation and respect for step-parenting has reached a new plateau but, still the lessons and experience may serve me well in the eventual reconciliation with my nature children. As for Jill, my wife, I could not have a more blessed help-mate, friend, and companion.

I close by praising God for those described above as well as my own children and the circumstances that exist – it is only by God's grace that I can give thanks for the circumstances that separate me from my children, but must continue to trust that reconciliation will occur in his time and for his glory...I do not understand but must trust and must learn to trust.

God Bless You.