



THE
CHRIST
OF CHRISTMAS

Booklet 16

Effective Christian Living" Series

By

Ron G. Christian

*THE **BIG** QUESTIONS*

#16

"THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS!"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Title

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	"IN WHAT WAYS ARE THE ACTIONS OF THE SHEPHERDS AN EXAMPLE TO ME?"	5
2.	"SHOULD I BELIEVE THAT THE INFINITE GOD COULD BECOME A HUMAN BEING?"	9
3.	"HOW CAN I POSSIBLY COMPREHEND GOD'S DESCENT FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH?"	13
4.	"WHAT SHOULD BE MY RESPONSE DURING AUTHENTIC WORSHIP?"	20
5.	"HOW CAN I MORE APPROPRIATELY WORSHIP THE SON OF GOD?"	25
6.	"WHEN I SHARE WITH MY FRIENDS, WHAT SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF MY WITNESSING?"	31
7.	"CAN I LIVE A LIFE WITH SPECIAL FAVOR WITH GOD?"	36
8.	"WITH WHAT MOTIVATION AM I TO SERVE THE LIVING GOD?"	41
9.	"IN MY PRESENCE, DO PERSONS AROUND ME LEAP WITH JOY?"	46

10.	"SHOULD I BELIEVE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS THE GREAT LEVELER IN SOCIETY?"	50
11.	"CAN I FIND THE SECRET TO A LIFE THAT IS MOST FRUITFUL?"	54
12.	"HOW SHOULD I REACT WHEN INJUSTICE TOWARDS ME GOES UNPUNISHED?"	59
13.	"IN MY WEAKNESS, HOW CAN I RECEIVE GOD'S OVERWHELMING ASSIGNMENTS?"	63
14.	"SHOULD I BELIEVE THAT JESUS' COMING WAS FOR HUMAN SALVATION?"	67
15.	"HOW CAN I BEST UNDERSTAND THE CHARACTER OF JESUS?"	72
16.	"WHY MUST I MAKE A PERSONAL DECISION REGARDING JESUS CHRIST?"	77
17.	"WHY IS CHRISTMAS RELEVANT FOR MY PERSONAL LIFE?"	82
18.	"WHAT MUST I DO TO SPIRITUALLY SEE JESUS?"	86
19.	"WHAT SHOULD BE MY MOTIVATION FOR WITNESSING FOR CHRIST?"	91
20.	"HOW CAN I SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS TO THOSE AROUND ME?"	97
21.	"WHY SHOULD MY HEART BE FULL OF PRAISE TO GOD?"	101
22.	"AMIDST MY ROUTINE LIFE, CAN I EXPECT ANY SPECIAL DIVINE REVELATIONS?"	106
23.	"IF I ADOPT CHRISTIANITY WILL MY PERSONAL LIFE BE ELEVATED OR RESTRICTED?"	111

- 24. "HOW COULD GOD BEST COMMUNICATE TO ME?" 116**
- 29. "DARE I BELIEVE THAT CHRIST CAN HEAL GREAT SPIRITUAL BROKENNESS?" 139**

1.

"IN WHAT WAYS ARE THE ACTIONS OF THE SHEPHERDS AN EXAMPLE TO ME?"

The 'movement' of witnessing is described in the following words: "When they (the shepherds) had seen him (the Christ child), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." (Luke 2:17)

It was most natural for the shepherds to leave the Bethlehem manger and to spread the word far and wide regarding this newborn baby—the Savior of the World!

When you have received news that your wife is to have a baby, or that you are getting a long-awaited-for job, or that you have been awarded with a sizeable college scholarship, or that you have been promoted to a coveted position of prominence, or that you have been granted a large financial gift in the settlement of an estate, how do you respond?

Usually, If not always, with great gladness and excitement! You can hardly wait to tell a friend about your new gift or your

new promotion, etc.! It is natural, and almost inevitable, for you to share good news with someone else.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

What is witnessing? Witnessing is both a Noun and a Verb. It is first a Noun before it is a Verb. I witness by what I am before I witness by what I say. The shepherds first became witnesses of the event (Noun), and then they went forth and told what they had experienced firsthand (Verb).

We are to witness first by personally experiencing an encounter with God, and then we do witnessing by telling others about the Christ who has personally touched our lives. Using our lips, we desire to introduce others to the Christ who wants to change their lives as well.

In terms of witnessing, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples." He said "Go out into the highways and byways and compel men to come into the Kingdom of God."

It is Christians who are commanded to go to sinners, not sinners who are com-

manded to come to the Church. It is great when sinners come to our Churches to become converted to Christ, but Church was never intended to be the primary place where sinners are converted.

It is in the 'highways and byways' of life (i.e., in the home, office, factory, school, and neighborhood) where people are to be reached for Christ; "When they (the shepherds) had seen him (Christ), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." (Luke 2:17)

What had been told them regarding this Bethlehem Babe? That He is the Savior, that He is Christ the Lord (i.e., that He is the Messiah who is in charge of all life), that He is the One through whom God is glorified and sinners are reconciled. "Glory to God in the highest heaven," they sang, "and peace on earth for all those pleasing him." (v. 14).

Jesus is the Messiah (the Anointed One of God), the One who can save from sin , the One who can rule the hearts and lives of people, the One who can speak peace to troubled hearts and who can reconcile alienated souls to God!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Dearest Heavenly Father, you have clearly taught me that when I fall in love with Jesus, my love for Jesus and my excitement about the saving message of Jesus, will compel me to 'spread the word' to others. Because of my transformed character, my personal testimony, and my compassionate deeds, there will be many who will surrender their lives also to Christ the Lord, the Babe of Bethlehem, who transformed the lives and the words of those first shepherds long ago! Thank you, blessed Christ, for the privilege of exalting You! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

May our dear Lord (the greatest Witness) give you a 'passion' to witness to those who are without a relationship with Christ.

Always remember: The whole movement in witnessing is a movement that is outward, not inward. Forward moving not backward looking. Extroverted, not introverted. Aggressive not passive. Experiential not theoretical. Concrete, not abstract. Contagious, not drab. Persuasive, not coercive, or universal, not exclusive.

2.

"SHOULD I BELIEVE THAT THE INFINITE GOD COULD BECOME A HUMAN BEING?"

Considering the size of the Universe, by way of comparison, our own planet Earth is smaller than a piece of dust in this room (compared to the space of the entire room)!

I find myself 'lost in wonder' that the Creator God could ever or would ever come and live in a human body on this planet! But, remember, God is Creator of the Universe, and, as such, He is separate from this universe.

It is hard to imagine that God—the One who is omnipresent (able to be everywhere at one time) - could confine himself to one human body for over three decades!

Jesus is God focused, God scaled-down, and yet, while it is true that He is God limited, He is nevertheless authentically God!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The story of Christmas is the story of the omnipotent (all-powerful) God becoming a

man—a man who was subject to human limitations and weaknesses. A man who became weary with work, who needed like all humans to sleep, to eat, and to clothe himself. A man who wept with the weeping, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

Jesus was fully God, but Jesus was too fully Man. A man who needed others, a man who longed for companionship, a man who suffered being tempted, a man who was moved with compassion as He looked upon the multitudes, a man who was acutely aware of physical pain as the nails were driven into His quivering flesh on the rugged cross—the very cross that was so heavy that he fell beneath its load on his long journey up Calvary's Mountain!

How amazing that He who is so far above and far removed from man, could Himself become a Man!

Wonder of wonders that this God would bow so low as to become one of us! The transcendent One is now the immanent One—the One who is closer to us than hands or feet or breathing!

The amazing news in the Christmas Sto-

ry is that God is in our world, that He is not far removed, but that He is totally personal and personable.

It is a great thing to know that God loves the human race—corporately yes, but more amazingly individually.

God loves you as if you were 'an only child'! If you had been the only one who would have ever lived, Jesus would have died for you! That is how much He Loves You!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZE PRAYER!

"O God, to the unbeliever (the worldly man), God at best is an abstract force or an impersonal entity, far removed from the world in general, and far removed from the concerns of mankind. Specifically to him, 'God' (whatever that term means) is totally unapproachable and far removed and uninvolved in the affairs and the problems of mankind.

O God, the Incarnation (celebrated at Christmas Time) teaches me that God, far from being detached and disinterested in man, is instead the God who has taken the initiative in seeking and saving mankind!

The fact that the eternal God condescended to embody himself in a human mortal 'frame' is far more than my 'mere mind' can comprehend! How amazing to think that He (Jesus) who made the sun would be so weak and so helpless as a babe in a lowly manger, that he would, on the day of his birth, need the warmth of swaddling clothes and the warmth of a nearby ox!

At the request of His Heavenly Father, Jesus voluntarily came to a sin-cursed earth, to live a spotless (sinless) life—amidst terrible sinners and amidst multiple temptations—and to die a substitutionary death on a cross, and to rise victoriously; all this to save a 'lost race'! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

The person and actions of Jesus reveals the greatest of all great miracles of God in the Universe—indeed, in all reality! Jesus is the 'wonder of all wonders', as demonstrated in the 'Incarnation'! Glory in who Jesus is, and in what He accomplished when He came to earth! Jesus is God focused, God approachable, God knowable, God touchable, God seeable, in short 'God Domesticated'!

3.

"HOW CAN I POSSIBLY COMPREHEND
GOD'S DESCENT FROM HEAVEN TO
EARTH?"

JESUS, THE SECOND PERSON OF THE HOLY TRINITY, WAS THE CREATOR OF EVERYTHING. "Christ himself is the Creator who made everything in heaven and earth, the things we can see and the things we can't, the spirit world with its kings and kingdoms, its rulers and authorities, all were made by Christ for his own use and glory." (Colossians 1:16; Living Bible)

How amazing, that He for whom all riches in creation were made, left all those riches to be reduced to earth's poverty. No room even in the inn, born in a stable where animals live.

Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to accept the poorness of humanity! If he lived as the wealthiest King on earth, that status would still be lowly, compared to His place of royalty that He enjoyed in heaven, but he did not live like a King. Instead, he lived in poverty. Not out of self-pity, but merely to state the nature of His incarnate state, Jesus once said, "Foxes

have dens and birds have nests, but I, the Messiah, have no home of my own, no place to lay my head." (Matthew 8:20; Living Bible)

If Jesus was God, why was He not recognized as God when He was on earth? Because He stripped Himself of all his divine prerogatives—save one, love - when He became man.

Jesus was born in obscurity. He lived in obscurity, as a common laborer, until he was 30 years old. During his 3-year public ministry, and during which time He drew many followers to Himself, Jesus was not without His enemies. His popularity waned, and finally through intrigue and evil plotting, He received the sentence of death by crucifixion!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

It is amazing that He who was so glorified, occupying the center of attention in the universe and in Heaven itself, should become on earth an object of cruel scorn and heartless rejection eventuating in crucifixion!

He gave up the glory of heaven to receive the shame of earth—all because He

loved a lost race! "Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like men. And he humbled himself even further, going so far as to actually die a criminal's death on a cross."
(Philippians 2:5-8, Living Bible)

There is enough evidence to make the contention that Jesus, in His resurrected form, bore in His resurrection body the marks of his humanity, and that He ascended to heaven where He continues forever to bear those marks of identification with the human race. After his resurrection, he showed his doubting disciple, Thomas, the wounds from his crucifixion that he still had in his hands and in his side. Is it not conceivable (and likely) that Jesus maintained those wounds in his body when he ascended to the right hand of His Heavenly Father, following the forty days after the Resurrection?

It is easy to believe that Christ is immediately identifiable to the heavenly saints, among other reasons, because of the visible wounds in his resurrected body!

Jesus is eternally identified with the human race! He forever bears the marks of his crucifixion for mankind! Jesus has permanently been 'colored' (as it were) because of his 'dive' into the depths of the 'sea' to recover the precious object of his greatest longing—lost mankind that lay at the bottom of the ocean of sin and corruption!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

*"O God, your Son came to live a sinless life, to live a substitutionary death, and to demonstrate the victory which His atoning death accomplished by rising from the dead (resurrection) - thus providing a means for human salvation and an assurance of victory over man's last enemy (death)! But you, O Father, have taught me (in the Bible) that, after Jesus ascended to You, following His resurrection, Jesus is very 'active' in His loving ministry towards mankind. The following are most exciting 'realities': It is the consistent belief of the New Testament that Jesus ascended to heaven to make intercession for us. It is Christ who is at the right hand of God who indeed intercedes for us: **"Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No! For he is***

the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven." (Romans 8:34).

He always lives to make intercession for us: *"He is able to save completely all who come to God through him. Since he will live forever, he will always be there to remind God that he has paid for their sins with his blood".* (Hebrews 7:25)

He appears in the presence of God on our behalf: *"For Christ has entered into heaven itself to appear now before God as our Friend. It was not in the earthly place of worship that he did this, for that was merely a copy of the real temple in heaven".* (Hebrews 9:24).

In Him we have an advocate in the presence of God: *"My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely"* (1 John 2:1).

"But Christ, as a Minister in heaven, has been rewarded with a far more important work than those who serve under

the old laws because the new agreement that he passes on to us from God contains far more wonderful promises"; "He is the mediator who stands between man and God to bring man and God together, and He continues that mediating work in the presence of God". (Hebrews 8:6; 12:24.

"Here are my directions: Pray much for others; plead for God's mercy upon them; give thanks for all he is going to do for them. That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together". 1 Timothy 2:1, 5).

God condescended to save a lost race! Jesus (as victor over sin, death, hell, the grave, and Satan) ascended to heaven, having completed His saving earthly mission! He now has an additional mission for mankind! Now His mission is mediation and intercession, and, through the Spirit, to comfort, to guide, to instruct, to empower, and to guard His people against all evil forces! Thank You, Lord! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Stand amazed at the glory of the Incarnate One—the Lover and the Rescuer of Lost Mankind!

*"Out of the ivory palaces
Into a world of woe,
Only His great eternal love...
Made my Savior go."*

4.

"WHAT SHOULD BE MY RESPONSE DURING AUTHENTIC WORSHIP?"

"Entering the house where the baby and Mary his mother were, they threw themselves down before him, worshipping. Then they opened their presents and gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh."
(Matthew 2:11)

A. *Frankincense Is The Gift For A Priest (Jesus is Priest) !*

Frankincense is the gift for a Priest. Christ came to be the Perfect High Priest, of which the gift of frankincense was but a symbol. Jesus, the Perfect High Priest, became a bridge to God by which man can personally encounter God.

Christ, as 'Bridge-builder' (i.e., Priest) provides a means by which the sinner can have access to God. The great 'gulf of sin' has been bridged by Christ.

Wrote Paul, "This is good and pleases God our Savior, for he longs for all to be saved and to understand this truth; That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself

man, is between them to bring them together, by giving his life for all mankind." (1 Timothy 2:3-5; Living Bible)

Properly to respond to Christ, is to recognize Him as my Priest, and boldly (though humbly) to come to Christ to become reconciled to Almighty God. My sins no longer need bar me from God! I no longer need feel isolated, alone, and separated from God

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

B. Myrrh Is The Gift For One Who Is To Die! (Jesus is Savior) Christ died for the sins of the world. The gift of myrrh symbolized Christ's death. To stop with the Babe of Bethlehem, without considering the Christ of the Cross, is to miss the meaning of the Incarnation. Christ was born into the world to transform individuals, to make bad men good.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. The gift of myrrh symbolized Christ's death. His Savior-hood.

Properly to respond to Christ means that I affirm the fact and accept the reality that Jesus has died for my sins. His death spells life for me! His suffering spells heal-

ing for me! He shed his blood in my place. This means that I cannot merit His forgiveness; I can only humbly receive it as a free gift of His grace. I am not worthy of the least of His favor, but He nevertheless accepts me and forgives me. Such love 'DEMANDS' that I give him the praise and worship of my total being!

C. Gold Is The Gift For A King! (Jesus is King) Gold is the gift for a King. Jesus is the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords, and as such, I must surrender my all to His Kingship! I must look to Jesus as my King. Because He is my King, I must submit to His Kingly Reign! What is His Reign? His reign is the reign of LOVE. Therefore, to make room for King Jesus' reign in my life, is to make room for the King's Love!

Have you made room for Jesus' Kingly deliverance in your life? Have you allowed Jesus to deliver you from your personal hang-ups, from a foul temper, or from foul words, or from foul attitudes, or from foul habits? Remember, Jesus is King, and "He is able to deliver thee."

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Lord Jesus, Frankincense is the gift of a 'PRIEST'! Thank you for 'building a bridge' for me, by which I am able to find access to the Father! You, Jesus, have spanned the 'gulf of my sins' and you have made it possible, through your atoning sacrifice, for me to come into the Father's presence without terrible condemnation and guilt. As Priest, you, loving Christ, make intercession before the Father, in behalf of me and all other needy persons!

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die! You came to die for the sins of all the world! It is your precious (sinless) blood alone that can speak forgiveness to my sinful soul, and that can bring relief to my burdened soul, and can deliver freedom to my enslaved soul!

Gold Is The Gift For A King! Yes, Jesus, you deserve the total worship of my soul, because you are my access to the Father, you are my atoning sacrifice for my sins, and you are also the rightful King of my Life! You own me, because you made me, and because you purchased my salvation through the costly shedding of Your Blood! I am not my own! I legitimately belong to You!

Help me to worship you truly—with my mind with its thoughts, with my heart and affections with their feelings, with my will with its decisions, with my body with its various members, with my job with its ability to earn money, with my relationships with their capacity for influence! Teach me daily to be authentic in worship for I know that they, who worship you, must worship you 'in spirit and in truth'! Thank You! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

The 'worth' of Jesus is far beyond all calculations! No one compares with the Almighty Christ! I encourage you to give Jesus the same place in your life that He already possesses in His universe - Lord of All! Worship Him by both Your Life and Your Lips!

5.

"HOW CAN I MORE APPROPRIATELY WORSHIP THE SON OF GOD?"

"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told." (Luke 2:20)

"On coming to the house, they (the wise men) saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him." (Matthew 2:11a)

What does it mean to worship God? To worship God is to declare God's worth. The angel declared the worth of Jesus when he declared to the shepherds: *"Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord."* (Luke 2:11)

The Kings from the East followed the star to Bethlehem, and they went into the house and saw the Christ Child before whom they bowed down and worshiped. They recognized Jesus as the 'King of the Jews'. *"Where is the newborn King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in far-off eastern lands and have come to worship him.";* *Entering the house where the baby*

and Mary, his mother, were, they threw themselves down before him, worshiping. Then they opened their presents and gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:2, 11).

Simeon recognized Jesus as God's instrument of salvation, God's light from heaven as a gift, not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. "Lord," he said, "now I can die content! For I have seen him as you promised me I would. I have seen the Savior you have given to the world. 32 He is the Light that will shine upon the nations, and he will be the glory of your people Israel!" (Luke 2:29-32).

To Anna, the elderly prophetess, Jesus was the One whom she and all of Israel had anticipated—the long-awaited-for Messiah. "She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she also began thanking God and telling everyone in Jerusalem who had been awaiting the coming of the Savior that the Messiah had finally arrived." (Luke 2:38).

Jesus is worthy for many reasons. Because of who He is and because of what He can do! He is declared in those several Christmas-related Scriptures, to be the Savior, the Lord, the Messiah, the Redeem-

er, the Reconciler, the Light of Hearts, the Source of Joy and Salvation.

It was appropriate that the shepherds and the Wise Men from the East, and Simeon and Anna should all respond in worship of the newborn babe—the Babe of Bethlehem!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

As one considers the various responses of the various persons surrounding the Christ Child—the shepherds, the Wise Men, Simeon, and Anna—there is a 'common denominator' in their response. All in their various ways responded in worship of the Babe of Bethlehem. From these worshipers, we may learn better the meaning of true worship.

Someone rightly pointed out that all persons are incurably 'religious'. In other words, everyone everywhere worships someone or something. However, the object of one's worship determines the value of one's worship!

Why did the shepherds (in Luke 2:10-14) worship Jesus? "...but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you the most joyful news ever an-

nounced, and it is for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem! How will you recognize him? You will find a baby wrapped in a blanket, lying in a manger!"

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven," they sang, "and peace on earth for all those pleasing him." Because God revealed to them, through the angels, that Jesus was UNIQUE and SPECIAL and WORTHY of Worship!

The basis of true worship is recognition of Jesus' identity. When people, like the shepherds, are shown who Jesus really is, they are instinctively drawn to Jesus and find themselves on their faces before HIM!

Why is Jesus worthy of Worship? Because He is the Savior, i.e., He came to seek and to save the lost! There is no one more worthy of praise and worship than Jesus, for Jesus gives hope for the despairing, life for the dying, forgiveness for the guilty, joy for the sorrowing, friendship for the lonely. He is everything that your soul

ever hoped for—the Bread of Life, the Water of Life, the Way of Life, and the Truth of Life!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Lord, I want to have my 'spiritual eyes' opened, that I might move clearly see 'reality'! I want to see that this world is the object of your love, the footstool where you 'work out' your providential designs, the place where (through your children) your glory is manifested—who you are, what you think, and what you plan to do in the future! Yes, dear Father, your Son came voluntarily to earth, to give His life as a ransom for a lost race of people (including me)!

Your Son is altogether worthy of my worship, for Jesus has infinite, eternal worth. Jesus alone provides the means by which sinful men can become reconciled to God. God, it is not your condemnation that rests on humankind; rather, it is your peace and your favor that rests on humanity! You are not against, but for, the human race! It is not strict justice, but it is tender mercy, that you are offering to each person (including me)! Not what we deserve—justice and punishment - but what we desperately

need—mercy and forgiveness and acceptance into the embrace of a loving Savior! Yes, in light of all you are, and in light of all you have done—it is both my privilege and duty to 'fall on my knees' in contrition (repentance) for my sinful life, and to 'bow at your feet' with utterance of continual praise for your unspeakably great love and compassion and acceptance of me! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Do you know what the greatest of all of God's acts? God's act of becoming a Man! And Jesus' earthly mission was a loving and saving mission! Hear Jesus' words: "I have come not to condemn but to save!" "I have come that ye might have life, and have it more abundantly!" "I have come to seek and to save the lost."

6.

"WHEN I SHARE WITH MY FRIENDS, WHAT SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF MY WITNESSING?"

What is the message or content of Effective witnessing? It is rather simple, yet profound, in its results! It is the message of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14)

When the shepherds spread the word to others, they did not focus on the beauty of the angels (the messengers), nor did they focus their attention on a description of the nighttime surroundings (the context and the immediate circumstances in which the message was revealed to them).

Neither did the shepherds focus on their personal feelings of fright as a result of seeing the angelic host (i.e., their personal emotions that came as a result of their own spiritual encounter and experience). Rather, they "...spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." (v. 7)

It is important to focus only on Jesus when we are witnessing to others. There

may be special persons whom God used to lead you to Christ - like an evangelist or a pastor or a friend or a relative. But it is not the messenger that we focus on in our witness to another, even if that messenger (as in the case of the shepherds) happens to be most unusual—like a miraculous event) - that God used to bring you to Christ. Rather, focus on Christ!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The shepherds did not focus on the host of angels; neither did they focus on their immediate surroundings and make a memorial out of the specific hilltop where God revealed his message on that memorable night.

The content of our witness should never focus on the messenger whom God used to reveal Himself to us. Neither should the content of our witness focus on the specific circumstances or location or context of our personal conversion. And, further, the content of our witness should never focus on our own personal experience—i.e., our own emotional responses at the time of our encounter with the supernatural realm.

The shepherds did not make a 'big deal' over the angelic host (as wonderful as this was), nor did they make a 'big deal' over the location where this unique experience took place (the hilltop outside of Bethlehem), nor did they talk about their own personal experience at the time of the miraculous encounter (i.e., their response of fear and awe). These things—the messenger, the location of the spiritual encounter, the personal emotional response from the encounter—are all significant, but they are all secondary. When you witness to another, never focus on the specific circumstances that accompanied your spiritual encounter with God.

The shepherds did not spend time describing the beautiful hilltop topography—the location where they received their revelation from heaven! It is true that a certain altar of prayer or a certain room or a certain Church or a certain stadium may be a sacred place to you, for it was in that locality that you met Christ. Perhaps you found Christ in a special Church, with a special pastor who served in a special denomination. Fine and good that you mention these circumstances in your witness, but for you to focus on the circumstances

and situations that accompanied your conversion or your unique spiritual experience, is about as ridiculous as the shepherds focusing on the topography of the hilltop where they happened to receive their spiritual revelation!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Lord God, you have filled your world with a vast variety of animal and plant species—all of which are evidences of your marvelous creation and your mysterious imagination! But mankind is the 'crown of your creation', the 'masterpiece' of your love. 'Fallen' though we are, you have not abandoned us. Wicked though we are (turning our 'back' against the 'light of truth'), you still love us, and you still tenaciously and tirelessly go after the 'one lost sheep'! No human mind can comprehend your divine love—the love that offers salvation to a 'lost and undone and perverted' humanity! Why such love? Because Your very 'Nature' is love, and all your 'acts' are 'acts' of love! You are the 'Hound of Heaven' - pursuing mankind that is foolishly 'running from divine love'! O God, you are the One who has always taken the initiative in your relationship with 'fallen humanity' - when

you stepped down from heaven to become a man, when you took the abuses of evil men and went voluntarily to a cruel cross.

When you sent the Holy Spirit to convince men of their need for a Savior! O God, you are the 'Great Witness' to every sinner! As I follow you, empower me by your Spirit to become a witness to many, through the words I speak and through the acts I perform! Focused all on you, dear Jesus, not on me! Pointing all to the matchless Savior, never pointing anyone to me, the fallible witness! In Jesus' Name. Amen"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

What is primary in one's witness? Testimony regarding the person and the work of Jesus Christ! The good News of Jesus Christ is the focal point of authentic witness: "A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rest.'" (Luke 2:11-14)

7.

*"CAN I LIVE A LIFE WITH SPECIAL FAVOR
WITH GOD?"*

It was while Mary was confused and ‘greatly troubled’ that God’s angel spoke to her: “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30) Amidst human confusion, divine comfort is offered. Human confusion soon gives way to human amazement, at the announcement of the divine message! When God catches your attention dramatically, He has a dramatic message to share with you. Again, let it be emphasized that God, for the most part, reveals Himself to His people in what might be called the regular and routine and commonplace ways. Never minimize these regular revelations to you—revelations through the beauties of nature, through the warm affirmation of a friend, through the moving stanzas of a musical, through the smile of a child, through the exhortations of a sermon, through the inspirational paragraph from a Christian book, through the challenging impact of a Scriptural passage, and on and on.

Yes, God reveals Himself to us in so-called commonplace events, but there may be times, as in the case of Mary, when the Lord shall come to us in rather shocking ways. You probably will be just as confused as Mary was when the Lord

comes to you in special and unexpected ways. Just remember: The Lord never comes to you in order to baffle you, but in order to bless you! Your confusion will give way to comfort if you hold steady and listen for God's message! "You have found favor with God." God comes to you because He loves you and wants to bless your life, not because you are perfect or sinless.

Mary was a devout young Jewish girl, perhaps in her late teens, a girl whose affections were fixed on the living God. Any person, young or old, whose life is centered in God, whose daily devotions are filled with delight, whose desires are godly is greatly favored of the Lord. Not that we can earn God's favor, but only he whose life is open to God can be filled with God. If you seek God in your daily life consistently, you can expect God to reveal Himself to you someday dramatically.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Someone said that the soul gets on by a series of crises. There is a day-by-day walking with God, sometimes with little feeling and with seemingly slow progress. And then suddenly and expectantly a new vision or revelation will come to you from God. A sudden turn of events, or a new miracle, or a new insight into God's Word,

or a new decision which has lifetime results, or a new call into Christian service—these are the revelations which come to God's people which show that they "have found favor with God". (Luke 1:30)

No woman has been more favored than Mary. She was given the honor of carrying and giving birth to the Son of God! Mary was chosen to become a tool for God's great saving purpose. God's special revelations to us are all concerned with God's saving purposes which He desires to accomplish in our world, using us as His instruments to accomplish those redemptive purposes.

So, anyone who claims to have a special revelation from God which is characterized by selfishness can be quickly 'set straight'. God never reveals anything to anyone that is contradictory to His saving purposes, purposes which are clearly outlined in His Holy Word—the BIBLE!

God may have a special revelation to give to you as He did to Mary, but the content of that revelation will always be the content of salvation—perhaps a special call to take the Gospel to a certain obscure area of the world, or a call to start a Christian Day School, or a call to communicate

the Gospel by setting up home Bible studies with unsaved friends, or some other kind of saving purpose.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

Dearest Lord, I thank you for the obedient, young virgin (Mary) whom You chose as your special 'instrument' to bring your Son into this world of sin and woe! Yes, no woman has been more favored than Mary, but I thank you that you have a special call and purpose for every person! Help me, like Mary, to be prepared to hear and to obey your call. I realize that if I spent my entire lifetime trying carefully to obey your call for my life, that I likely will be known by very few people on earth, and that I will die in obscurity (like most people), and that I will be soon forgotten by future generations. Swiftly will I live my life, and quickly will be gone from the memory of my descendants! Your word often reminds me of the brevity of human life. "Dust I am, and to dust I will return!" the facts of human life! But, lest I despair because of my passing mortality, as a believer in Christ, I know that you, O God, have a special reason for my existence! I have a small (but significant) part to 'play' in your over-all 'Master

Plan' for your world. It is not my 'excellent performance', and it is not 'the coveted praise of men' that determine my significance in life! It is my obedience to your call in my life - to live a life of love to God and to my fellowmen. This is what measures the true 'success' of my brief human life! To find 'favor' with you, to have 'the smile of your approval'! How wonderful! Like Mary! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFIRMATION!

God loves all persons (saints and sinners) unconditionally and equally but Scripture teaches that He especially 'favors' those human beings who are earnest in their quest for God, who obey His commands, who loves God Deeply!

8.

*"WITH WHAT MOTIVATION AM I TO SERVE
THE LIVING GOD?"*

There is rescue from real and false guilt. There is rescue from terrorizing fears—fears like the fear of the unknown, the fear of failure, the fear of death.

There is rescue from inferiority complexes, which erode away the basic human need for wholesome self-esteem.

There is rescue from the destructive passions of jealousy, which threaten to destroy human relationships.

There is also rescue from other destructive enemies — enemies like negativism, worry, greed, anger, doubt, and self-centeredness.

There is victory in Jesus Christ, the one who has come to give us "...salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies." (Luke 1:71, 74a)

We are saved from our enemies in order to serve, not ourselves, but to serve God. We are to surrender our lives entirely to Christ, giving Him everything, we have and

everything we are. This includes our time, our talents, our possessions and money, our influence. We are not our own. We are brought with the price of Jesus' blood. Therefore, we are to serve Christ all of our lives.

We are never to serve our own selfish interest, but we are to serve the living Christ, giving ourselves for the advancement of the cause of Christ's Kingdom!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

What is the motivation for serving Christ? The love of Christ, not terrorizing fear of God! The motivation is found in this statement: "...to enable us to serve him without fear." (v. 74a)

It is true that reverential fear is the 'beginning of wisdom'. We are to respect God as a God of holiness, and judgment who will judge every man according to what he hath done in the body. We are to be thankful to God and to worship God "... acceptably with reverence and awe, for God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28)

However, while reverence and awe are appropriate motivations for serving God (in

light of man's final accountability before God at the Judgment), terrorizing and paralyzing fear is not a motivation for serving the Living God!

The drawing love of God is the strongest of all motivations for serving God. To see God as a close Friend with whom you can share your deepest thoughts and desires is to be motivated to serve God wholeheartedly. To see God as a loving Father whose wisdom is perfect is to be motivated to obey Him explicitly. To see God as a Savior whose life was poured out for undeserving sinners is to be motivated to worship God in 'wonder, love, and praise'!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Dear Lord, sometimes I find myself becoming 'duty-oriented', rather than 'love-oriented' - in my service for you. I know that I cannot be saved (from my sins) by my own performance (of 'good deeds'), or by my own efforts (in an attempt to keep all the good 'moral laws'). Alternatively by my intellectual successes and in an attempt to gain the world's vast knowledge and excellent skills of great variety. These cannot save me!

By my 'connection' to a fine church, in an attempt to regularly observe the many rituals and ceremonies. Lord, I know the above 'good acts' are not to be despised, but neither can anyone depend on these fine 'things' to give anyone a 'passport' to heaven! I want to have a life, filled with service, good deeds, loving acts, but I want my 'motivation' to be the 'motivation of God-imparted love' - the love that goes far beyond mere 'human love'!

The love that is shed abroad in my heart by the blessed and mighty Holy Spirit. "Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." (Romans 5:5).

Then, by the impetus of the Spirit, I shall serve others, and serve them in a self-forgetful, humble, caring, and practical way—a little like Jesus served people! Grant me this kind of motivation, dearest Lord! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

In coming to earth, Jesus showed man

the nature of the true God. What Jesus was on earth—perfect love—God has always been! Love is the magnet of God which strongly draws man to serve Him!"

9.

*"IN MY PRESENCE, DO PERSONS AROUND
ME LEAP WITH JOY?"*

*"And Mary said, my soul doth magnify
the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in
God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47)*

To attempt to be really happy at Christmas Time without personal knowledge of the Christ of Christmas is about like a hungry man attempting to be satisfied by looking at the menu in a fine restaurant without partaking of the food, which the restaurant's menu describes.

The presence of Mary (who was pregnant with the Christ child) was the source of Elizabeth's rejoicing. The presence of Christ in our lives will be an unspeakably great blessing to those lives that surround us. Christ spiritually in us is the source of blessing to others, just as Christ physically in Mary was the source of blessing to Elizabeth.

Mary was the bearer of the Christ; we as believers are the bearers of the Christ, for Christ lives in us. One of the great evidences of Christ's presence within us is the

manifest joy, which we bring to others who feel Christ's wonderful presence when they are in our presence

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Christians, by their very presence, should bring peace where there is discord, joy where there is sorrow, calm where there is crisis, hope where there is despair. Do other Christians, like Elizabeth, leap with inner joy when they are in your presence?

Do you bring sunshine where there is darkness? Do others seek out your presence? Are you a healing salve to others when they are with you?

Do others, when they are in your presence sense in you the spirit of Christ, the spirit of joy, the spirit of positive faith?

Do others feel good about themselves when they are in your presence? Do you bring out the best in others when they are with you? Is there in others, like as in the case of Elizabeth, a spontaneous and joyous response of gratitude, when they are in your presence?

Do others feel favored to be in your company? When others are with you do they feel like exclaiming in a loud voice,

"Blessed are you among mankind, and blessed is the joy and peace and hope and love which you bear in your soul and which you share from your heart"!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Living Lord, I open my life in a new way today! Come into my total life—into my mind with its thoughts, into my heart with its emotions, into my inner spirit with its need to worship, into my will with its power to make decisions.

Into my body organs that they may be restored to health, into my complex human relationships that they may become reconciled, into my finances that they may become an 'instrument' of blessing to needy persons, into my plans that they may become unselfish and Christ-serving! O God, transform me, make me a new and whole person, with new aspirations, cleansed motives, clear and love-driven goals, productive work for 'God's Kingdom', as a result of my realized potential! I no longer want to live a tiresome, self-centered, indulgent lifestyle. I surrender myself to you!

Daily help me to deny myself, to take up

my 'cross' and to follow YOU, my Lord and God!

Let others around me 'leap with joy' because they observe the living Christ within me—producing the traits of true godliness within me! Many others 'leap for joy' when they see me? Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

May the joy of the Lord, which you experience because of the saving peace of the Lord that you know through conversion, radiant in your countenance, project in your voice, and be demonstrated in your care of others!

10.

*"SHOULD I BELIEVE THAT CHRISTIANITY
IS THE GREAT LEVELER IN SOCIETY?"*

*"He has brought down rulers from their
thrones, but has lifted up the humble."
(Luke: 52)*

Not only does Jesus right the wrongs within the moral arenas of life, but Jesus also levels all social and class distinctions. The obscure are elevated to importance and the powerful are reduced to humility. The wealthy and poor are treated with equal justice. Labels of distinction are removed and badges of honor are disregarded.

This is not to say that leadership is dismissed as unimportant. Nor is it to say that the reality of racial and class differences is ignored. But it is to say that, because Christ died for all, all persons (regardless of race or class or age or status) are equally important to God. While there will be wide differences in intellectual, social, and economic achievements, there is no caste system in God's Kingdom!

"In this new life one's nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant: such things mean nothing. Whether a person has Christ is what matters, and he is equally available to all."
(Colossians 3:11; Living Bible)

Christians have a basis for rejoicing because Christ loves and accepts all persons, regardless of social status!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

"He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."
(Luke 1:63)

All are to work if they are able to work, in order to provide, not only for their own needs, but also for the needs of others. *"If anyone is stealing he must stop it and begin using those hands of his for honest work so he can give to others in need."*
(Ephesians 4:28; Living Bible)

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, concerning their call to aid the financially depressed believers in the Jerusalem Church: *"Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality."*

At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: 'He that gathered much did not have too much and he that gathered little did not have too little.'" (2 Corinthians 8:13-15; NIV)

"He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:53)

The greedy will be emptied; the giving will be filled! This is the law of economics in the Kingdom of God. He who tries to save his wealth will lose his wealth; he who gives will receive. If you give, you will get!

"Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use to give—large or small - will be used to measure what is given back to you." (Luke 6:38; Living Bible):

"One man gives freely yet gains more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." (Proverbs 22:24-25)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Loving, Incarnate Lord Jesus, thank you for revealing your worldwide redemptive plan! To your humble servant girl (Mary) you unfolded your plan to save me personally, and to save the entire world of which I am a very small (but significant) part. Here is what (from your Word) you teach me (just as you taught the millions before I came into this world): Christ dwelt in our midst for some 33 years, living a sacrificial life, dying a substitutionary death, and rising victoriously from the grave! He is still in the world, in the power of His Holy Spirit! He seeks to indwell every human being. He is coming to each today! We must make room for Him! We must gladly invite Him in! He is able to transform each life personally. Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

John Wesley summarized the economic viewpoint of Christianity when he laid down a simple formula for financial stewardship: "Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

11.

*"CAN I FIND THE SECRET TO A LIFE THAT
IS MOST FRUITFUL?"*

If the motivation for serving God is love—not terrorizing fear—then what is the mode in which one serves God.

We are to serve God without fear "in holiness and righteousness."

Holiness means separation from outward sinful practices and from inward sinful attitudes. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (II Corinthians 6:17, 18)

Holiness means separation from worldly practices. It also means separation or cleansing from carnal attitudes. Holy attitudes are attitudes characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, forbearance, forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:31, 32 summarizes well the life of outward and inward holiness: "Stop being mean, bad-tempered and angry.

Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in your lives. Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ." (Living Bible)

We are to serve God without fear, in holiness and in righteousness. 'Righteousness' refers to a right standing with God. That is, a relationship characterized by trust and commitment to Christ, and issuing forth in a life of good works. We are justified or made right with God through an exercise of positive faith in Christ. We are put in a right relationship with God the moment we place our total trust in Christ as our Savior. After we are put in the right relationship, we are to spend the rest of our lives doing good works for God.

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

What is the measure of service? We are to serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

"In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days." (Luke 1:75)

This means that the sooner a human being in his life begins to serve God, the better!

Samuel, in the Old Testament, was dedicated to the Lord before his birth. Every husband and wife who is anticipating becoming parents should dedicate their unborn child to the Lord. Urge your youngest children to make a wholehearted commitment of their lives to Christ.

It is wonderful to be saved out of sinful living, but it is much better to be saved in youngest childhood before one has indulged in sinful living. Every person has been called to serve Christ all his days—and this means the days of his childhood, his adolescence, his young adulthood, his middle years, and his later years. I have never yet heard anyone tell me that they regretted that they became a Christian so soon in life, but many have expressed regrets for waiting so long before they surrendered to Christ.

There is forgiveness from God at any stage of life, but "nothing can deliver us from certain consequences of our sins; the clock cannot be put back." (William Barclay)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Lord God, you are a 'Holy God' - a God who is Creator of your world, but who is separate and independent of it! You continue to be involved greatly with your world—guiding it physically, and controlling it providentially—but you are separate from and not dependent upon your world! You are altogether pure in motives, doing nothing out of deception, but rather doing everything out of great love for humanity—a humanity that has 'fallen' deeply into sin, but a humanity that is the 'object' of your redeeming love (because of the sending of your Son to earth to 'do' His mighty works of redemption!). All of this because You (by nature) are a God of 'Holy Love'! Lord God, is it possible for me (even me) to become (like you) a 'holy person'? I know you are 'perfect' and (at my best) I will always be 'imperfect' (fallible and subject to temptation and sin)!

But, you commanded me to 'be holy for the Lord God is holy!' If 'holiness' means 'separation' (first) and 'purity' (second), I ask you to enable me to be 'separated' from the practice of all worldly things (works of my evil desires), and I ask you also to make me 'pure' in my inner 'motives' and 'Intentions'! Make me 'sincere' and 'single-minded' and 'whole-hearted' and 'love-filled'."

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Lead your children into a strong intimate relationship with Christ while your children are very young. Tell your children and your teens that God has called them to serve God "without fear in holiness and righteousness" all their days!

12.

"HOW SHOULD I REACT WHEN INJUSTICE
TOWARDS ME GOES UNPUNISHED?"

"He has performed mighty deeds with his arms; he has scattered those who are proud in their inner most thoughts."
(Luke 1:51)

What is one cause of dismay and discouragement in the lives of believers? When wrong seems to go unpunished and right seems to go unrewarded.

God is the great leveler! The proud shall be brought low and the humble ones shall be exalted. *"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."*
(Proverbs 16:18)

"Fret not yourself because of evil doers. Be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb." (Psalms 37:1, 2; NASB) *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* (James 4:6); *"You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* (1 Peter 5:5)

When the proud man prospers and the humble man suffers adversity, justice seems to have been destroyed. When inequities abound and evil prevails, the godly can take heart, for the mightiest acts of the proud and violent will seem as naught when the Lord has "scattered those who are proud in their innermost thoughts."

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

We live in a moral universe, and therefore immorality cannot prevail. Wrong will be punished and right will be rewarded. The Bible says, "Be sure your sins will find you out!"

The Great White Throne Judgment in the hereafter will be the final place of reckoning, but, because we live in a moral universe, this present life is the place of moral reckoning as well. "Blessed are the meek (the humble) for they shall inherit the earth."

The earth belongs to the morally right! Those who live for God have a good life both here and hereafter. Those who live proud lives of disobedience and sin have a miserable life both here and hereafter. Therefore, the godly person is a winner,

both in time and in eternity. The evil person is a loser, both in time and in eternity. Life renders its own verdict, either for good or for bad, depending upon one's response to the living God!

God sets Himself against the proud, but He exalts the humble. God has the final word in the moral realms of corporate life!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Lord God, in this 'fallen world', I have become the 'target' for unjust and even cruel treatment! As the Psalmist of old, I too notice these godless ones: "Therefore his people return to this place, and waters of abundance are drunk by them. They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth." (Psalms 73:9-10)

O God, I am so distressed, and I am sometimes in actual anguish, when I think of the wicked who seem to be so indifferent as they go about their 'business' of deceitful schemes (plots) against me! My utter destruction is their goal! They hate me when I 'speak the truth in love' to them! However, dear Lord, I know that justice will

someday be 'vindicated'.

Nothing is hidden from you! You read the thoughts of all persons. What is done in secret will be 'shouted from the house-top'. Someday the 'right will be rewarded, and the wrong will be punished'! O God, I believe you are authentic and trustworthy.

Your Word declares 'Their present life is only a dream that is gone when they awake. When you arise, O Lord, you will make them (the wicked) vanish from this life'. "But as for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff! My feet were slipping and I was almost gone." (Psalms 73:2)

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

When you live for the Lord, your living is never 'in vain', for God closely watches over His children, and He honors their 'pure motives' and their 'righteous acts'! In a 'moral universe', justice will be vindicated.

13.

"IN MY WEAKNESS, HOW CAN I RECEIVE GOD'S OVERWHELMING ASSIGNMENTS?"

When the content of God's special revelation is shown to us, the inevitable human response will be amazement, for we know that the assignment cannot be fulfilled, short of a divine miracle! It was when Mary was filled with amazement and unbelief that God's angel gave reassurance to Mary.

"The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.'" (Luke 1:35-37)

It is the Holy Spirit who is the source of power to accomplish the otherwise unaccomplishable! Just as the Holy Spirit empowered Mary and overshadowed her, so the Holy Spirit will do the same for us when God calls us to work for Him!

The Holy Spirit accomplishes the miracle, in this case the miraculous conception

of Jesus whose life and ministry would be holy. The miracles that God accomplishes through our obedient cooperation will also be wonderful. The results will be holy and sacred. The impossible is possible with God! The weak are strong in God's strength! That which is foolish in the eyes of men is wise in the eyes of God!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

God is always ready to reassure our hearts, to strengthen our wills, to quieting our fears, to still our doubts. One way in which God chooses to reassure our hearts, when we are tempted to doubt His power or are tempted to center on our inadequacies, is to direct our attention to persons in whose lives He is working similar miracles, as the miracle He wishes to accomplish in our own lives.

As a part of His reassurance to Mary, God's angel directed Mary's attention to Elizabeth. "And behold, you kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible!" (Luke 1:36-37)

What a great encouragement it is to us, when we are struggling to believe God for a new and great miracle in our lives, to look at another person who is a living illustration of God's miraculous power in action.

The miracle God wishes to accomplish in my life will be unique from that in any other person's life, but to get my eyes on God's miracles in any form gives a great impetus to my ability to believe God for the special miracle He wishes to work in my own life.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Loving God, you are not a passive, detached, impersonal, indifferent God living somewhere in the heaven lies, unreachable by man, and unfeeling regarding man's sufferings! Rather, you are the opposite of all these dreadful descriptions. You are active, caring, greatly involved in the 'hurts' of mankind! You always give a listening ear to the cries of broken people! You know all about the poverty of the poor, and the oppression of the abused and neglected! You take up the cause of those who are the objects of gross injustice! You know the thoughts, intentions, and motives of all persons, and you will someday re-

ward the godly and punish the unrepentant wicked! You are not confined to the so-called 'laws of nature', but, because the laws are created by You, You can choose to transcend those 'natural laws' and interject a supernatural event (like the virgin birth of Jesus)! You are the God who quietly (but gloriously) communicates your love and power in the so-called 'commonplace' events of life. I want, O God, to be more sensitive to your permeating presence in everyday life and in human relationships, but please enable me to have faith and expectation that there may come a time in my life when I may receive one or more special 'revelations' (and personal assignments) from you! Like Mary! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Experience God's miracles in your life—this will expand your faith and deepen your belief immeasurably! That is what Christmas is all about! Experiencing God in commonplace and daily events of your life will someday result in your experiencing God in some unusual way!

14.

**"SHOULD I BELIEVE THAT JESUS' COMING
WAS FOR HUMAN SALVATION?"**

Jesus said that he came into the world to seek and to save the lost, to give his life as a ransom for sinners. Jesus was called a "Friend of publicans and sinners." Jesus pictured Himself as the Shepherd in search of the lost sheep!

Said Jesus, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17) Even before Jesus was born, the angel spoke to Joseph about Jesus' birth and his mission: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

If Jesus was born to die, if Jesus came into the world to redeem His people, if Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, this means that Christmas is for sinners—for those who are helpless, hurt, lost, and wicked!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1, demonstrates Jesus' identification with sinners.

Jesus has some 'black sheep' in his family tree. He did not try to hide this fact. Tamar was an adulteress!

Bathsheba was the woman whom David seduced and took deceitfully from Uriah and with whom he committed adultery! Rahab was the harlot of Jericho! All of these women were sinners and yet they were part of Jesus' ancestry! The inclusion of these sinners in Jesus' genealogy shows Jesus' mission of redemption! (Note Matthew 1)

*The gift of myrrh, which one of the Wise Men from the East presented to the Christ child, is a strange gift to give to an infant. Myrrh is used to embalm dead bodies. Giving this gift to Jesus symbolizes the fact that Jesus was born to die—to die as Savior for Sinners! **"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."** (John 3:17)*

Jesus' identification with sinners was at the deepest level—even to the point of dying on a cross for sin. Jesus became humanity's 'sin bearer' when he died on the cross. So much did He identify with humanity's problems (sins) that God turned

His face away from Jesus while Jesus died on the cross. Jesus became the 'personification of sin' and, because God is so holy that He cannot even look at sin, Jesus felt terrible rejection even by God. Jesus cried out from the Cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!"

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, I know that you looked down on a helpless and hopeless human race ruined by sin, because of the 'original sin' of our first parents, and because of our individual 'wrong choices'! Can we save ourselves from the terrible 'clutches of evil'? We cannot save ourselves by our efforts to keep the 'Ten Commandments'!

We have often broken your Holy Laws! Our mere 'flesh' is far too weak, and our heart is far too polluted to obey those good and holy precepts! Our 'good works' are far too few and far too corrupted to 'outweigh' our multitude of 'bad works'! When you scrutinize (examine) our character, you find that our character is deeply flawed with selfishness and rebellion! No, there is no way that we humans are independently capable of saving ourselves!

We are weighed in the moral scales, and 'found wanting!' Wanting of what? Lacking moral and godly character (love, joy, peace, patience, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, self-control, and more).

'In my hand I find no salvation except, O God, in the lifeblood (atoning sacrifice) of your altogether holy and altogether loving Son! I bow in lowly humility and gratitude at the feet of Jesus, and I humbly, just now, ask forgiveness of all my sins, and acceptance into the great Family of God! Thank You!" Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

If Christmas is for sinners, and then Christmas is not for you if you explain no need for forgiveness for your sins!

Jesus said that he came into the world to seek and to save the lost, to give his life as a ransom for sinners. Jesus was called a "Friend of publicans and sinners". Jesus pictured Himself as the Shepherd in search of the lost sheep!

Said Jesus, " It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

(Mark 2:17) Even before Jesus was born, the angel spoke to Joseph about Jesus' birth and his mission: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

If Jesus was born to die, if Jesus came into the world to redeem His people, if Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, this means that Christmas is for sinners—for those who are helpless, hurt, lost, and wicked!

15.

"HOW CAN I BEST UNDERSTAND THE
CHARACTER OF JESUS?"

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The Incarnate Word was fully God. Paul declared, *"For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."* (Colossians 2:9)

Jesus' disciples, who knew Him most intimately in various circumstances, declared Christ as sinless. Peter wrote that Jesus *"Did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."* (1 Peter 2:22) John declared that *"in him is no sin."* (1 John 3:5) It is very significant for a Jew to declare a man as sinless. Basic to Jewish thought and theology is the doctrine of the universality of sin. Jesus stood the test of the critical Jewish eye, and was declared as uniquely sinless.

The Incarnate Word was fully man. Paul wrote that Jesus *"...took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."* (Philippians 2:7) The writer of the Hebrews vividly described the

purpose of the Incarnation.

"Forasmuch then as the children (humans) are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death that is the devil. And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.

Since we, God's children, are human beings—made of flesh and blood—he became flesh and blood too by being born in human form; for only as a human being could he die and in dying break the power of the devil who had the power of death.¹⁵ Only in that way could he deliver those who through fear of death have been living all their lives as slaves to constant dread.

"We all know he did not come as an angel but as a human being—yes, a Jew. And it was necessary for Jesus to be like us, his brothers, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God, a Priest who would be both merciful to us and faithful to God in dealing with the sins of the people. For since he himself has now been through suffering and temptation, he knows what it is like when we suffer and are tempted, and he is wonderfully able to help us". (Hebrews 2:14-18)

"You know how full of love and kindness our Lord was: though He was so very rich yet to help you, he became so very poor, so that by being poor He could make you rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9; Living Bible)

Jesus came from the Ivory Palaces into a world of woe—all because of His great love for a fallen race of people! He who was invested with the full powers of divinity, He who was co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Spirit—this powerful, eternal Christ became a lowly human!

The story is told of a naturalist who viewed a procession of ants carrying peb-

bles to build an anthill.

To the naturalist, the ants seemed to be moving to and fro in great confusion, with little organization. With keen interest, the observer watched and wished that he could communicate to the ants so that they would know how to move in an organized method to carry their pebbles. Wishing that he could alleviate them of their confusion, the naturalist suddenly realized that he could communicate to the ants only if he himself would become an ant.

God looked down and viewed man's rebellion, moral depravity, confusion, and ignorance, and realized that He could only save humanity if He became a man!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, the miracle of all miracles is seen in the coming of your Son to this sin-caused earth, to live a sinless life, to die a substitutionary death, and to demonstrate victory over all evil by rising from the tomb! How could the eternal God step out of the 'Ivory Towers of Heaven', to come to one small planet, to rescue and to save a sinful race of people? How could the Eternal Son of God clothe Himself in human flesh, to endure the sufferings of a 'broken race' of

sinful humans?

Coming from the glories of heaven to the corruptions of earth, not because He had to, but because He wanted to? All because His great love for sinners 'compelled' Him to come! Such incomprehensibly great love! I am 'lost in wonder, love, and praise' when I contemplate the love that You have for me (and everyone)! 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son' - to rescue a 'fallen race' from the terrible lostness which sin brings into the life of everyone! "Thank you for the Christ of Christmas!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

It is tragic that so many people "Miss the Christ"! Even at Christmas Time, when everyone should be especially conscious of the coming of God to planet Earth, so many are preoccupied with the temporary and shallow concerns of "Holiday Celebrations" - filled with material pursuits and self-seeking pleasures.

16.

*"WHY MUST I MAKE A PERSONAL
DECISION REGARDING JESUS CHRIST?"*

Herod the king represents all those who react to Christ with hatred and hostility. The chief priests and scribes represent all those who react to Christ with complete indifference. The Wise Men represent all those who react to Christ with adoring worship.

*Herod Represents Those Who React
With Hatred And Hostility!*

Men are hostile to Christ and seek to destroy him because Christ exposes the secret and wicked areas of man's life. Men hate Christ because Christ will not let them have their own way.

With hatred for Christ and Christianity, many people have tried to silence the voice of conscience, and have pronounced it as a burden imposed by society's moral laws and standards. Conscience is a creation of society and must be relieved of society's impositions and limitations. Anxiety comes when the repressed desires of sex and hostility clamor for attention and expression,

but must be denied because of an overly sensitive conscience.

Conscience then is pictured as the cruel tyrant, and source of all problems. Relax the conscience of its strict role of accuser and give free expression to the deeply suppressed desires, and all will be well.

The conscience poses as the Voice of God and when the conscience is repressed or offended or denied, then anxiety arises and guilt results. One who offends his conscience or his sense of moral oughtness, many times reacts with hatred and hostility to God, for God is the Voice of Conscience.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The Chief Priests And Scribes Represent Those Who React With Indifference!

An indecision to follow Christ and an attempted neutrality, automatically becomes a decision against Christ. Said Jesus: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." (Matthew 12:30); "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye

cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24)

The Wise Men Represent All Who React To Christ With Adoring Worship!

The wise men only found Christ after they diligently sought for Him. "Where," they asked Herod, "is the newly born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in its rising and we have come to worship Him." (Matthew 2:2)

Centuries before, God spoke through Jeremiah and said, "Ye shall seek me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13)

Our seeking must be genuine; our asking must be sincere; our knocking must be persistent. God will only be found when we seek him with our whole heart. One cannot be pretentious, proud, or half-hearted, and expect to find Christ. The Wise Men were not satisfied until they found the Christ-child. Their searching was in earnest. To find the Child was their only concern.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, someone wisely said, 'There is no razor edge upon which you can balance

yourself precariously! Everyone must decide for you or against you, O God! There can be no neutrality! I must make a choice to follow You into the ways of truth and life, or choose the way of sin into the paths of falsehood and death! The Christ who came (at Christmas) came to 'seek and to save the lost ones' (the entire human race). There is none that is righteous, no not one! Everyone has gone his own willful, wayward way! All are 'undone' and 'unclean'! All are without hope and healing, apart from the 'Christ of Christmas'!

Christ (the Son of God who descended from heaven to a sin-cursed earth) is the 'hope of the nations', and He is my personal hope for forgiveness and healing and eternal life! As the old hymn says; "On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand!" O, 'Rock of Ages', I want to build my life on you alone! When the 'Storms of life' assail, and when 'death' comes knocking on my own door, I want to be secure in time and in eternity! 'When all around my soul gives way, Christ then is all my hope and stay'! I accept the 'Christ of Christmas', not sentimentally and temporarily, but earnestly and continuously—for all time, and gloriously in heaven! Thank

You! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

All persons who confront Christ must react in one of three different ways. One's reaction to Christ will be hostile, indifferent, or adoring! Adoration to Christ spells 'Life'!

17.

"WHY IS CHRISTMAS RELEVANT FOR MY
PERSONAL LIFE?"

The purpose for which Christ came *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."* (Luke 5:32), and the central message of the Gospel, *"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;..."* (Acts 3:19).

All men must repent and turn to God if they are to live. God's absolute requirement for salvation is Repentance. God commandeth all men everywhere to repent! *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,..."* (Acts 17:30b)

To repent is to change one's mind regarding sin, from one of clinging to sin to one of abhorring sin. A change of mind regarding sin results in a change of direction, from one of following evil ways to one of pursuing godly ways. Repentance is a moral U-turn, turning ones back on sin, and turning one's face toward the Savior.

Turning to Christ is the essence of Biblical Faith and is the positive result of genuine repentance. Repentance and faith must work together if true conversion is to result. Repentance is the proper attitude toward your sin, and faith is the proper attitude toward your Redeemer.

Faith is putting yourself in the care of Christ who is able to change your life. Faith is a transfer of trust for salvation from yourself to Christ, who alone can save you!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

But you may say, "I am a Christian and you are saying that Christmas is for sinners. Does that mean that Christmas is not for me, a Christian?"

I would answer first that it is great that you are a Christian. A Christian is one who is saved from his sins. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1)

If one habitually and willfully sins, it is true that he is not a Christian. (1 John 3)

But even if you are a Christian, you can identify with your need for daily forgiveness of willful isolated sins, and sins of ignorance, and sins of omission. Repent-

ance is not a once-and-for-all experience, but repentance is a life-time attitude towards all sin (willful or ignorant).

Because Christmas is for sinners, and because all of us need forgiveness every day, we can all identify with the purpose of Christmas—Christians and non-Christians alike.

We are not to become preoccupied with sin and self, but we are to become preoccupied with the Savior, with His power to cleanse from all sin. It is true that we must be aware of our sins—our sins of commission, our sins of omission, our sins of ignorance—but we must not fix our attention on our sins.

We must glance at our sins, but we must gaze at our Savior.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

God, why should you care for a sinner such as I? Throughout my life, I have often broken the 'Ten Commandments'. I have 'cuddled' evil thoughts of lust, resentment, revenge, jealousy, covetousness, and even hate! And I have long turned a 'deaf ear' to the voice of godly counsel and instruction! I have rebelled against the Laws of God! I have not responded in compassion to the

cries of the weak and oppressed and imprisoned! I have selfishly spent my money on things which I thought would satisfy my own indulgent desires. I have resisted all calls to repentance, and I have continued my head-long pursuits after happiness (which I have described as 'wine, women song') - total indulgence of my flesh!

For so long I have been a 'lover of money', thinking that life consisted in the abundance of things which a man possesses! How miserable I have become, as I have travelled on so many 'dead-end roads'. I see now, O God, that Jesus is the 'Way', the 'Truth', and the 'Life'! As I repent just now of my sinful lifestyle, will you receive me into Your great Family? Christmas means that God came to earth to seek and to save sinners, just like me! Jesus came to save His people from their sins, not in their sins! Save me—body, mind, emotions, spirit, will! A thorough Salvation! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Be grateful that those 'sinners' who visit our churches twice a year (Christmas and Easter) at least instinctively recognize the fact that Christmas is for sinners—sinners like themselves!

18.

*"WHAT MUST I DO TO SPIRITUALLY SEE
JESUS?"*

When we wait upon God patiently and expectantly, and continue to claim God's promises, we will 'see Jesus' and we will understand the true nature of Jesus' saving mission.

The person of Jesus and the purposes of Jesus will be known to us more than ever before.

Is there any greater revelation to us than that of 'seeing' with the eyes of faith the Lord Jesus - seeing His 'person' and seeing His saving purpose?

To see Jesus is to see everything else, for everything in life centers on Jesus. To see Jesus clearly is to see everything else rightly! Failure to see Jesus results in everything else in life becoming hazy! If one does not see Jesus clearly, one cannot correctly see God, one cannot correctly see himself, one cannot correctly see others! To see Jesus clearly is to see everything else concretely!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Jesus will reveal Himself to you in new ways if you learn to wait upon Him! Do you have your Quiet Times daily? Do you wait upon Him daily in prayer, training your ears to listen for God's 'small, still voice'? Have you trained your mind to meditate upon God's Word each day? Do you have a mood of expectation and anticipation as you long for the fulfillment of God's promises in your personal life? Are you learning to wait patiently and persistently upon God?

Are you prepared to 'see' God in the way God wishes to reveal Himself to you? I ask this question because many overlooked the presence of Jesus when He came the first time. Simeon, Anna, and only a few others recognized Jesus when He came. Why? Because Jesus' coming was in such a common way! He was born as other babies are born, and He was presented in the Temple for the rite of circumcision and purification like any other Jewish male baby. Nothing out of the ordinary, and yet Simeon, in the most ordinary of circumstances, recognized Jesus!

Why do the multitudes today not recognize Jesus' presence? Because their hearts are not prepared to see Jesus among the commonplace things of life! Jesus can only be seen by humble people, humble folks like Simeon and Anna, whose preparation was sufficient to receive God's revelation of His Son. God reveals Jesus among the simple, routine things of life—things like the smile of a friend, a loving letter from a relative, a hymn in the Church service, the hug of a child, the kiss of a companion, the tug on your heart during your daily devotions, the testimony of a new Christian, the kind act of an employer, the sermon of God's minister, the exquisite sunset after a long day, the 'still small voice' during worship service.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, each day of my life, help me to be like Simeon and Anna! Simeon's waiting and praying was all worthwhile, for, when others failed to see the saving mission of Jesus, Simeon and Anna were among the very few to whom the saving mission was revealed. When Jesus came, Simeon and Anna were prepared to see and to recog-

nize the Savior of the world! Why? Because they had long prepared for this important day. Their eyes were opened to behold the Savior, because for long years their ears had been opened to God's voice in prayer and their hearts had been opened to God's thoughts through quiet meditation. No one can 'see' Jesus or 'see' His saving work today with any depth unless his heart is prepared through long prayer and meditation.

Jesus was only revealed to prepare people—people like Simeon and Anna who had long waited, prayed, and fasted in the Temple. Give me personally, a greater desire to seek Jesus—the altogether beautiful One, the Son of God and Friend of Mankind! My Savior, my Master. The 'King of Kings' and 'Lord of Lords', the 'Prince of Peace' and the 'Defender of the Weak'. The 'Mighty Conqueror' over Sin, Death, and the Devil! Heavenly Father, even though I will rightly 'tremble in His presence' with awe and reverence, I want to see the most beautiful One in the Universe—Jesus the Messiah! For all eternity I want to worship and praise Him—Jesus on His Heavenly Throne where the redeemed of all ages will adore and magnify Him! Let me on earth be like

Simeon and Anna! Thank You! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

One who waits upon God comes to understand the purposes and plans of God. For a mere mortal to be 'let in' on God's master plans, is to be given the greatest privilege of all! What a gift—to be given the plans of the Master Architect of the Universe!

19.

"WHAT SHOULD BE MY MOTIVATION FOR WITNESSING FOR CHRIST?"

"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." (Luke 2:17)

How should we celebrate Christmas? If you want to celebrate Christmas authentically, follow the example of the shepherds. The shepherds were motivated to witness (vs. 17). "They were overcome with a sense of wonder and amazement, and they evoked a sense of wonder and amazement in the lives of those to whom they witnessed (vs. 18), "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken unto them." (vs. 20)

The mandate for witnessing is given to all. Everyone is called to witness. A non-witnessing Christian is a contradiction in terms. Every Christian is 'born to reproduce'. Even those who feel inadequate, untrained, or unworthy are called to witness. Never forget the shepherds were the most unlikely group of people to witness.

Laypersons who witness to other laypersons are the most effective witnesses! The vast majority of persons, who come to Church and eventually to Christ, come because of a friend's witness and invitation. It is not great ability that God is looking for; it is great availability.

A person with a simple testimony and a sincere faith and a great love for people is the kind of person that God is looking for. Not great intellect, formal theological education, or persuasive oratorical skills. Everyone can be a witness for Jesus—the high and the low, the young and the old, the educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor. If God can use shepherds, He can use anyone to 'spread abroad His message'! Every Christian is called to witness!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The true motivation for witnessing comes from one's firsthand encounter with God! Just like the shepherds, we must hear from God. They heard the angels' voices and they saw the glory of God for themselves. It was not secondhand. It was firsthand!

What motivates a person to tell another person about Jesus? Nothing less than a firsthand experience of Jesus! There is a little song that says, "I was there when it happened, and I ought to know." No guessing, no mere hoping, No wishful thinking, or illusions of the mind. No speculations! No, none of these!

These shepherds heard with their own ears and they saw with their own eyes! When a person, like the shepherds, personally experiences the presence of God and personally feels the tug of God on his heart, and personally hears the voice of God and the heavenly music of the angels, he can never be the same again! What he has seen, he can never unseen! His new experience forever puts him on a higher plane of reality, and he cannot keep his newfound message to himself! If we are not spreading the Word of God to others, it is probably because we have not personally heard the voice of God!

It is easy to tell others about a new discovery, a new promotion, a new gift, or a new experience. Spontaneity in witnessing is the result of natural excitement, which is experienced because we have seen Jesus!

If you are having a hard time being motivated to witness, it might be good to evaluate the quality of your personal devotional life. He who has a vital devotional life with God is the same one who has a winsome and compelling witness to men. We can only touch others after God has first touched us! When God whispers into our spiritual ears the wonders of his love, then we desire to shout with our physical lips the glories of his message!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Lord, if I discovered an earthly treasure I would tell my friends and even my acquaintances. If I was given a great promotion on my job, I could not keep my mouth shut—I would express my elation with others! If I suddenly (through surgery) was delivered from a dreadful and deadly disease (like cancer), I would doubtless shout my excitement and joy from 'the housetop'!

If I finally earned a graduate degree in a chosen 'field of study', I would not keep it a 'secret'; I would desire (with gratitude) to have my friends attend my graduation! If I purchased a new house (after I made considerable financial sacrifice), I surely would

let my friends (and even my rather distant extended family) know about my beautiful new purchase (that the 'bank' and I owned)!

Why are some professing Christians so closed-mouthed about Jesus, and paralyzed by fear in the presence of sinners? If we are not spreading the Word of God to others, it is probably because we have not personally heard the voice of God! O' God, could it be that the lack of motivation in the lives of many of us would-be witnesses is because we possess only a dead 'body of orthodox beliefs' rather than a living encounter with Christ, to share with others? Help us to hear your voice, to feel in our hearts the heartbeat of your love for lost and dying people, and give us the strong and even spontaneous motivation to 'reach out in love'. Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Remember, there is no greater privilege known to a human being than the privilege of being 'used' by God (the Creator) to help carry out His divine purposes of 'reconciliation' of a sinner to Himself. To be the 'voice' of God, the 'hands' of God, the 'feet'

"The Big Question!" - Effective Christian Living" Series

of God, the very 'channel' of God - what a glorious honor that God has given to you!

20.

*"HOW CAN I SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS TO
THOSE AROUND ME?"*

*HOW CAN WE SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS TO
THOSE AROUND US, FAR AND WIDE?*

*First, by being radiant persons in our very being, because we have seen and have heard the Lord in a vital and real way ourselves - like the shepherds whose very countenances must have been changed after they heard the angels announce the **'...good news of great joy that will be for all people!'** (vs. 10)*

Second, by taking the initiative to share Christ verbally with those who are in the 'circle of our own influence?' (vs. 17)

*Third, by the action of good works. Jesus said, **"Let your light shine before men, and that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."** (Matthew 5:16)*

When you fall in love with Jesus, your love for Jesus and your excitement about the saving message of Jesus, will compel you to 'spread the word' to others. "Don't misunderstand why I have come—it isn't to

cancel the laws of Moses and the warnings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them and to make them all come true." (vs. 17)

Because of your transformed character, your personal testimony, and your compassionate deeds, there will be many who will surrender their lives also to Christ the Lord, the Babe of Bethlehem, who transformed the lives and the words of those first shepherds long ago!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

What is witnessing? Someone said that witnessing is simply taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Spirit and leaving the results with God. Your job, as a believer, is simply to witness, i.e., to tell others what you know about Jesus, because of a firsthand contact with Him.

After the shepherds actually saw the Christ Child and after they earlier had heard from God regarding the identity and mission of this special child through angel messengers on the lighted hillside, they could never be the same! Their lives were transformed and other transformed persons were strongly motivated to share their authentic Christian witness with their non-Christian friends.

No hearsay, not second-hand reports, not theological speculations! Firsthand experience, filled with the vitality of one who has personally seen Jesus! What results can one anticipate in the lives of those who listen to such an authentic witness? Perhaps conversion, but at least amazement, in the lives of those who take time to hear the testimony of genuine believers. "And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them." (Luke 2:8)

Amazement leads to further inquiry, which can eventually lead to personal conversion to Christ. Pray that you, as a believer, will have such a real and personal encounter with Jesus (during your devotional times) that when you share your testimony with unbelievers, they will be amazed and astonished! To awaken a sense of amazement in the lives of sinners will oftentimes result in a personal quest for spiritual reality that in turn can lead them to the feet of the Savior!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, what you revealed to the shepherds regarding the mission of Jesus is wonderful! What had you told them regard-

ing this Bethlehem Babe? That He is the Savior, that He is Christ the Lord (i.e., that He is the Messiah who is in charge of all of life), that He is the One through whom God is glorified and sinners are reconciled. Jesus the Messiah (the Anointed ONE of God), the ONE who can save from sin, the ONE who can rule the Hearts and lives of people, the ONE who can speak peace to troubled hearts and who can reconcile alienated souls to God! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Be a witness for Jesus—by your Changed Personality, by your Clear Words, and by your Good Deeds!

21.

*"WHY SHOULD MY HEART BE FULL OF
PRAISE TO GOD?"*

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people." (Luke 1:68)

Have you ever asked yourself the all-important question of life: 'What is my ultimate purpose for living?'

Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, recognized the fact that John, his newborn child, was to fulfill a very important purpose in life. "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." (Luke 1:76-79)

Later, it was to be the same John who would see Jesus coming to him one day

and he would declare, "Behold! The Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world!"

Zechariah was taking note of the Savior who was soon to be born to Mary, and he was so overwhelmed with a sense of God's saving purposes to be fulfilled in Jesus, that he declares in a song the glories of that salvation. "And his father Zecharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people; And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of his servant David." ((Luke 1:67-69)

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

God is the Author of salvation and, therefore, God is to be praised. Jesus is the Agent of salvation. He is the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming of God's Anointed One whose mission to earth is a saving mission. Jesus is the believer's protector, rescuing man from all his enemies. Jesus is the believer's enabler, enabling believers to serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all their days! "Praise be the Lord,

the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people." (Luke 1:68)

Salvation is always the subject of praise, for salvation is the work of God alone. No man can save himself. Man is bound in sin until God takes the initiative to loose him from that bondage. God's 'address' is praise. God inhabits the praises of His people! Men ought always to praise the Lord, for God is the God of salvation.

His purposes are all saving purposes. It is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. *"He isn't really being slow about his promised return, even though it sometimes seems that way. But he is waiting, for the good reason that he is not willing that any should perish, and he is giving more time for sinners to repent."* (2 Peter 3:9).

"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time." (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

God has mercy on all men. (Romans 11:32) Jesus is the Bread of Life, sent by God to earth. Said Jesus about himself: "If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Almighty God, I see now, as never before, that the purpose for which Christ came was not primarily to offer the world great teachings, and not to demonstrate His power to perform great miracles, and not to offer the world the 'picture' of a model character.

However, the primary purpose for Christ's coming was to provide the sinful world a dying and resurrected Savior—to make it possible for every person to be saved from sin and saved for heaven! All about Salvation! As stated in the following (concisely), I now cherish Jesus' Saving Mission! The coming of Jesus with His worldwide mission of salvation is the fulfillment of God's promise made to Abraham. Indeed, all people on the earth are blessed through the greatest descendant of Abraham—the Lord Jesus Christ!

The universal offer of salvation is extended to the human race—a blessing that is all-inclusive. Only those who exclude themselves from the Kingdom of God through deliberate rejection and unbelief, miss the blessing of salvation, intended for the entire human race. All who exercise saving faith—the same kind of faith that Abraham exercised when He believed God and took God at His word—is included in the Kingdom of God and is considered true sons of Abraham. Thank you, God, for your wonderful salvation!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Learn to praise your Lord, both in sad times and in glad times, both in times when you 'feel' God's presence near you, and in those times when God 'feels' distant from you! "Let everything that lives sing praises to the Lord! Praise The Lord!"

22.

"AMIDST MY ROUTINE LIFE, CAN I EXPECT ANY SPECIAL DIVINE REVELATIONS?"

"In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:26-28)

Have you ever wished that God would come close to you, would reveal Himself to you in intimate and wonderful ways?

God meets us in the common things of life. A minister tells of a time when he went to view outdoor fireworks with some friends. While the fireworks went off, the minister was fascinated with a most glorious sunset, and he sought to draw the attention of his friends to the exquisite sight. But the friends were so preoccupied with the view of the manufactured fireworks that they did not once turn around to view the God-made sunset. They were so fascinated with man's manufactured beauty that they failed to meet God that night in the

commonplace things of life—things like an evening sunset!

Do you wish to meet God and as a result become a man of greater faith, full of belief? Then meet God in your daily Quiet Time. Meet Him in the routine of mundane duties. Meet Him in the beauties of nature. Meet Him in the struggles of life, common to all men. See Him in a sunrise or a sunset. Hear Him speak to you in a grand sweep of music, or in the chirping of a bird, or in the coo of an infant. God will come to you in the round of daily events and speak to you in the commonplace things of life.

God meets us in the commonplace events of life most of the time, but there likely will be a few times in our lives when God reveals Himself in rather dramatic and unexpected ways, all for the purpose of deepening our faith in God and increasing our love for God!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

"God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth." These Words reveal the kind of God we serve. God is always the God who acts. God is not passive; He is active. God is not complacent; He is caring. God always

takes the first step towards humanity. God always acts according to His divine purpose. God does not simply wind the clock and then let the clock (the world) run on its own. He, the Winder of the clock (the Creator of the world), is intimately involved in the running of the clock.

It is when you least expect God's call that God's call may come to you—when you are preoccupied with your own affairs and plans, when you feel least qualified to carry out the task God assigns to you.

"This is what the Lord says, he who made earth, the Lord who formed it and established it—the Lord is his name: 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'" (Jeremiah 33:2, 3)

While you are calling upon the Lord in your prayers, daily and routinely, nothing may seem to be happening. But one day, unexpectedly (like as in the case of Mary), the Lord will come to you in an unusual way to reveal Himself to you, all for the purpose of blessing you and deepening your faith in the Living God.

Do you lack faith and belief? Then just keep praying, keep walking in all the 'light'

of truth you presently have, and the day will come (like it did to Mary) when the Lord God will reveal Himself wonderfully and surprisingly to you!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O Lord my God, you are a gracious God—a Lover of mankind, in spite of the fact that we humans (without exception) have tragically 'turned our backs' on You. Our sins have blinded us to reality! We have been more concerned in 'making a living' than in 'making a life'.

We are so involved in the physical world, that we have become dulled to the 'realities' and the 'glories' of the spiritual and eternal world! We are foolishly living by our five physical senses, and we are scarcely aware of the invisible world, which can be enjoyed only when we exercise our spiritual senses of faith, hope, love, compassion, and obedience to Thy Holy Word! Forgive me, O God! I have been for too long a member of the dulled and blinded mass of humanity.

Today, I commit myself to You! Be My Savior! Be My Guide! Enlighten me to the

eternal truths! Quicken my mind! Sensitize my inner spirit, that I might be alive to fellowship with you! Take the load of all my sins, and please speak forgiveness to my mind and heart! Give me strength to serve you—above the 'world', the 'flesh', and the 'devil'! Make me victorious in life—to serve my fellowmen! And, in my daily routine, teach me to be aware of your 'coming to me'! Also, as you desire, please occasionally come to me in beautiful and dramatic (unexpected) ways. Like you did to your servant Mary! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

If you take 'one step' towards God in sincere seeking for God's will for your life, you can be sure that God will take a 'thousand steps' towards you, to reveal His love and His holy will for you. If you are faithful to God during your 'routine' life, God will reveal Himself to you 'where you live', and occasionally give unusual revelations to You! Wonderful!

23.

*"IF I ADOPT CHRISTIANITY WILL MY
PERSONAL LIFE BE ELEVATED OR
RESTRICTED?"*

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CHRISTMAS MAKE?

It makes all the difference in the world! Christmas celebrates the fact of Incarnation, that is, God entered the womb of a virgin to be born and to live among human-kind. This planet is a visited planet—visited by the Creator of the Universe!

What a profound thought and an unreasonable thought—but a thought, which reflects a fact! The fact that God could take upon himself human flesh shows God's estimate of human experience and human flesh. God becoming man forever exalts humanity. This is in contrast to the pagan's despicable attitude regarding human flesh!

Since God took upon Himself human flesh, we have no right to despise, debase, or abuse our human form. Some religions despise human flesh and declare it profane, useless, and evil. The human body and

human life, into which our Lord was born, is sacred. In becoming a Man, Jesus has forever sanctified, purified, and ennobled human relationships. Perhaps the most important verse of the New Testament is John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

The greatest fact of history is the fact that God became a man, embodying himself in human flesh. This fact alone forever establishes the truth of the sacredness of human flesh and human existence. The human form, the result of God's special creation according to Genesis, is the very form that God chose to live in for 33 years. The human form has deity stamped upon it, and should never be degraded or abused. Let us not destroy what God has created. Let us not abuse what God cherishes!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

When Jesus enters men's lives, a 'radiance streams in upon them.' Life becomes radiant, filled with mystery, majesty, and glory.

Jesus touched the common things of life and made them uncommonly beautiful. Jesus elevated all of life by His presence. The mundane and routine become exciting and meaningful when Jesus is around.

Jesus' followers knew Him to be one who loved to dine with sinners, loved to go to weddings, and loved to eat. Sinners called Him a friend, but His enemies called him a 'winebibber'.

Jesus' followers also will fall in love with life. The secular becomes the sacred. The common becomes the uncommon. The ordinary becomes the extraordinary. The grays become bright colors. When Jesus enters one's life, all things become transformed. When we turn to Jesus, it is true that we begin to live for two worlds—the world of time and the world of eternity. Moreover, the world of time, in comparison to the world of eternity, must grow strangely dim in the light of heaven's glory and God's grace!

However, is it not also true that when Christ enters into human life that 'the things of earth grow strangely bright and beautiful'?

When John wrote, *"Love not the world, neither the things in the world"* he defined 'world' to mean the 'present evil system of things which is in opposition to the will of God.' He did not mean the world of nature and the world of human relationships. Jesus loved nature and He loved people!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, thou art a loving, laughing, compassionate, caring God, a God who loved the human race so much that You sent Your Son to earth to live and to die and to rise victoriously from the grave! Such Love! Such Love! For Jesus to leave the 'ivory towers' to step down on the little 'footstool' called earth to live unselfishly, to die unselfishly, to ascend to the Father's Throne unselfishly in order that He might intercede for a fallen race of people! Such Love! Such Love!

O God, when your Son came to earth, He came to redeem lost sinners! No greater 'life' has humanity received than the 'life' which Jesus brought to despairing mankind!

Up from the depths of sin's degradation, to the heights of salvation and purpose and reconciliation! Jesus is the 'great elevator' of life! From sadness to gladness! From misery to health! From the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge and wisdom and understanding and discernment!

The man who is a Christian is the man, of all men, who should be the man of joy. Why? Because of the reality of the Incarnation. God has entered human life, elevating all of human existence. Thank you! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

He who is living for two worlds should enjoy the first world far more than the man who is living only for the first world!

24.

*"HOW COULD GOD BEST COMMUNICATE
TO ME?"*

As good and as helpful as God's methods of communication are through the wonders of Nature, through the dictates of conscience, through the commands of the Old Testament Laws, and through the ethical teachings of the Old Testament prophets, we must acknowledge that all of these forms of divine communication are less than adequate.

These forms of communication are rather like the communication of 'Body Language' between two persons of different races, neither of whom understands the verbal language of the other person! 'Body Language' is helpful, but 'Body Language' without verbal communication is inadequate and sometimes misleading!

How could God communicate best to mankind? If God could come to earth and use mankind's verbal language!

A daring idea! How could God possibly 'speak' man's language? Only if God could become a real human and learn to speak

real human language! That is what God did!

"Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets (in visions, dreams, and even face to face), telling them little by little about his plans.

"But now in these days He has spoken to us through His Son, to whom He has given everything, and through whom He made the world and everything there is. God's Son shines out with God's Glory, and all that God's Son is and does mark Him as God."

*Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets, in visions, dreams, and even face to face, telling them little by little about his plans. But now in these days he has spoken to us through his Son to whom he has given everything and through whom he made the world and everything there is. God's Son shines out with God's glory, and all that God's Son is and does marks him as God. He regulates the universe by the mighty power of his command. He is the one who died to cleanse us and clear our record of all sin, and then sat down in highest honor beside the great God of heaven. ***In the****

past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:1-3; Living Bible)

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

"Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God." (Colossians 1:15a; Living Bible)
Just as a verbal word gives expression to a person's thought, so Jesus is God's thoughts, purposes, plans, and will. Jesus is God's clearest communication to mankind, for Jesus is God's Very Word!

God no longer has to communicate through so-called 'body language' i.e., through Nature and through Conscience and through the Law and through the Prophets. Jesus has come, and Jesus is

God's direct communication to mankind!

Not only did Jesus—God's direct communication to mankind—make clear to a sinful race that God loves them in spite of their sin, but Jesus made it possible for mankind to be reconciled to God!

"For God wanted all of himself to be in his Son. It was through what His Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to Him—all things in heaven and on earth—for Christ's death on the Cross has made peace with God for all by His blood." (Colossians 1:19-20, Living Bible)

John proclaimed that "the true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as the only Son from the Father." (John 1:9, 14)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, I know that your thoughts and your ways are higher than man's thoughts and ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth. How can you—the Infinite and

Eternal God—communicate with Mankind—the Finite and Fallen creatures? Yes, there are various ways, O God that You sought to communicate with humanity (darkened and sinful though they were for centuries).

To some extent, through the sights and sounds and amazing order in Nature, you communicated to humanity. "The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of his craftsmanship. Day and night, they keep on telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world. The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it..." (Psalms 19:1-4)

Through man's conscience, you communicated that there is an objective moral order, a universal 'moral oughtness'. You displayed your power, and you clearly defined your moral expectations, when you delivered The Ten Commandments on top of the Holy Mount. God, you further sought to communicate Your holy ways and will through the God-inspired words and personalities of the Old Testament Prophets.

However, Almighty God, as wonderful as all these kinds of communication are none of these communications was powerful enough to save lost sinners. All of these were simply preparations for the culmination of all previous messages from You. In the fullness of time (the proper time), You sent your very own Son as Your supreme communication to Mankind communication from heaven to earth, but Jesus alone (through His death) could 'seek and save the lost'! Christmas means Salvation! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

He, who was so rich, became so poor, that He might make you so rich! He gave up His throne in heaven (His rightful position) to come down to a sin-cursed earth, to lift you out of sin, to give you a productive life, and to take You to heaven! Such Great Love!

25.

"WHAT MAY HAPPEN TO ME IF I EXPERIENCE A DIVINE-HUMAN ENCOUNTER?"

When the Wise Men of Old saw the 'Star in the East', they believed that a supernatural event was in 'the making'.

They believed God was giving to them a 'sign' that a newborn king was born into the world. Knowing very little about the 'particulars' (i.e., specific and detailed revelation), they nevertheless followed the light of the heavens! Indeed, a great adventure of faith, for these so-called 'wise men' did not have the advantage of having thorough theological training in the best Jewish theological schools. No, their knowledge was quite limited, but their determination to 'follow the light' from heaven was intense! They were men of great faith whom God could entrust with a great privilege—the privilege of finding the Christ child!

Do we today have the kind of determined faith that will walk persistently in all the light of truth that God grants to us—be it

much or little light!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The Wise Men of old found the Christ Child, after they diligently sought for Him! Christ is not the kind of God who is 'hard to find', but, on the other hand, Christ will never be found by the casual, lukewarm, double-minded, rather indifferent person!

God (in one of the Old Testament prophets) said that He would be found only by those who really want to find God, only by those who hunger for Him (spiritually) like a starving man is seeking for physical food.

Only by those, whose thirst for God (spiritually) is like the thirst of a man who is without water and is near to death!

Only when a person (sinner) is desperate for God (as the three Wise Men were desperate), can he/she discover God, and when that discovery is made, present the gift of himself to Christ (who deserves the entire devotion of humans).

It was Christ Jesus who gave the high standards for discipleship. He said that if a person loved anyone more than he loved Jesus, that such a person (with misplaced loves) is not worthy to be His disciple! Full

surrender is the only attitude that is worthy of Jesus Christ!

The Wise Man diligently sought, gloriously found, and humbly worshipped the Christ Child!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, Christmas teaches me that You can become my Lord, my Bride-builder, my living Savior! O God, the three gifts of the Wise Men speak of the person of Jesus Christ!

Gold is the gift for a King! Yes, Jesus had a humble life, never travelling but a rather short distance from His birthplace. The ancient world knew little or nothing about Him. He died a horrible, agonizing death, with only a handful of His followers nearby.

However, the days of deception (by which Jesus was crucified) did not last for long, for on the first day of the week, the Kingship of Jesus was demonstrated when Jesus arose victoriously from the grave. The righteousness of Jesus was vindicated, and Satan's plans of evil were crushed! A might victor and conquering King is Jesus, forevermore!

Frankincense is the gift for a Priest! Yes, a priest takes the sins of the people to the God of Mercy—and Jesus forever serves as the intercessor (bridge-builder) between sinful man and the Holy God. Jesus 'pleads our case' before the Holy Father, and Jesus (as priest) presents His own precious atoning blood as the basis for sinful man's forgiveness and reconciliation.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die! The purpose (from the very time of Jesus' birth) of Jesus' time on earth was to offer Himself as the perfect (sinless) sacrifice for the sins of the entire world! The Innocent One laid down His life in sacrifice for a guilty race—to rescue every human (who is willing) from total loss! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Give unto Jesus the same place that He already enjoys in the Universe—'Lord of All!' Remember, God prospers your fellow-man, and you yourself greatly prosper when you make a full commitment to Christ! Full Surrender Leads To Total Fulfillment!

26.

"IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO BE DECEIVED REGARDING JESUS' PERSONHOOD?"

It is a strange characteristic of sin to reverse values and to change moral standards until right can be called evil and evil goodness.

It is a realistic commentary on the deceitfulness of man's heart, that the Jews who performed the most religious practices in Jesus' day were the same Jews who defamed and rejected the very Son of God!

It was the Jewish religious leaders who accused Jesus of keeping bad company with publicans and sinners. "The Pharisees were indignant. "Why does your teacher associate with men like that?" (Matthew 9:11)

It was the religious leaders who accused Jesus of gluttony and intemperance. "And I, the Messiah, feast and drink, and you complain that I am 'a glutton and a drinking man, and hang around with the worst sort of sinners!' But brilliant

men like you can justify your every inconsistency!" (Matthew 11:19)

It was the Jewish High Priest who accused Jesus of blasphemy. *"Judas, too, had asked him, "Rabbi, am I the one?" And Jesus had told him, "Yes."* (Matthew 26:65)

Jesus' own family on one occasion accused Jesus of insanity. When his friends heard what was happening, they came to try to take him home with them. *"He's out of his mind," they said.*" Mark 3:21

The spiritually blinded Jewish leaders even accused Jesus of being possessed with devils. The crowd replied, *"You're out of your mind! Who's trying to kill you?"* (John 7:20)

The hardened calloused Jewish legalists accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. Some of them said, *"Then this fellow Jesus is not from God because he is working on the Sabbath."* Others said, *"But how could an ordinary sinner do such miracles?"* So there was a deep division of opinion among them. (John 9:16)

The spotless Son of God was accused of treason. Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders told him, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar's. Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar." (John 19:12)

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Who would dare say to His fellowman, as Jesus said, "Which of you convinceth me of sin"? Jesus was sinless and to men he declared His sinlessness without giving any evidence of pride. Only the Son of God could do this.

Jesus' disciples spent many months with Jesus under all circumstances. They saw Jesus when He was overcome with weariness or hunger, when the crowds pressed upon Him and the diseased people thronged around him, when the repentant ones cried out to Him, and when the hypocritical challenged Him with subtle questions.

The disciples saw Jesus when He was filled with sorrow, following the beheading of John the Baptist. They saw Him when He was sore pressed in His spirit and when He experienced the agony of the Garden. And yet those who knew Christ best de-

clared that He was sinless and pure.

Peter, a devout Jew who believed with all Jews in the universality of sin, declared that Christ "...did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth". (1 Peter 2:22)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Father, your Son of righteousness shines more brightly than the noon day sun. No sooner can sinful man deny the righteousness of the Son than can man quench the flames of the sun with the waters of earth. His righteousness is from everlasting to everlasting." Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Just as Christ's righteousness was demonstrated conclusively through the Resurrection, make sure that you allow the mighty Holy Spirit to demonstrate Christ's righteousness through your own God-given New Life!

27.

"WITH MY DEEP FEELINGS OF ALIENATION, IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO BE RECONCILED TO GOD?"

"How true it is, and how I long that everyone should know it, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." (1 Timothy 1:15)

Soon we will be engulfed in the Christmas rush—buying presents, decorating our homes, serving company meals, playing Christmas carols, window shopping, writing Christmas cards to old and new friends, attending Christmas programs, making candy, and perhaps going to the mountains to pick out that special tree, and many, many more activities.

Christmas time is a time when many hearts are opened to give, when those same hearts are seemingly closed the rest of the time of the year. It is a time of glee, anticipation, surprises, gifts, and gladness—and rightfully it should be! Christmas brings happiness to many unfortunate children who are often overlooked most of the time. Perhaps there will be more giving at Christmas time than at any other time

during the year, even by people who are usually greedy and grasping.

Amidst all of the activity of Christmas season, there is always the possibility of getting our eyes on the glitter instead of on the grace, to get our eyes on gadgets instead of on God, to get our eyes on the commercialization instead of on Christ! We can only truly understand the meaning of Christmas as it is inseparably connected with Easter.

*The Christ of the manger is the same Christ of the Cross and the Empty Tomb, and to understand Christmas, one must understand the reason for which God came to be born as the Christ of the Manger. **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."** Thus, the true meaning of Christmas is found in the word 'Reconciliation'.*

Christ came to reconcile sinners to Himself, and if we are to enter into the true spirit of Christmas, we must enter into the Spirit of Reconciliation with God and Man!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Man was created in God's own image, and as such was made only for greatness and fellowship.

MAN had blessed communion with his Creator. He was meant to enjoy God's presence forever. Innocence, uprightness, strength, and obedience characterized man's beginning. God gave man superior intelligence, and permitted him to subdue the earth.

MAN'S body was strong, his mind superb, his spirit unblemished. However, man lost his greatness.

MAN fell from splendor to despair, from the beauty of perfection to the vileness of distortion, from the joy of fellowship to the anguish of separation, from the freedom of innocence to the bondage of guilt, from health to weakness, from life to death.

Man is estranged, haunted by loneliness and paralyzed by fear. He is alienated from God, from his fellow man, and from himself!

Paul taught that all of humanity indulged in sin and that the blanket wrath of God covered humanity. Says Paul, "We all...followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else." (Ephesians 2:3; Phillips)

Christ's coming and His eventual death made possible man's reconciliation to God. *"...and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Colossians 1:20-23; Living Bible)*

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, I realize that I must face the fact of my sin! As a member of a 'fallen race', I acknowledge that I am a sinner by 'nature' (i.e., I was born with a propensity to live a self-cantered life). In addition, I acknowledge that I am a sinner by choice

(i.e., I have often deliberately chosen to disobey your Holy Laws). I thank you that Christmas spells hope for the human race! Why? Because it is at this time that we celebrate the coming of God to Earth, in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. Christ came to seek and to save 'the lost' - including even me! O God, I thank you that the object of my faith is Christ, who objectively accomplished my personal reconciliation on the Cross.

The way of the Cross involves my repentance of sin, and my sincere faith (trust) in the merits of Christ's work on the Cross. I realize that the meaning of my repentance lies in my outright denial at attempts of self-reconciliation, and my genuine sorrow for my sin. Yes, I clearly see that the 'Spirit of Christmas' is the Spirit of Reconciliation—Man With God, and also man with man. I see, O God that one cannot truly enjoy the Spirit of Christmas and at the same time have ill will toward his fellow man. Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Have you repented and accepted Christ's offer of reconciliation? Remember,

"All who trust him—God's Son—to save them have eternal life; those who don't believe and obey him shall never see heaven, but the wrath of God remains upon them." (John 3:36; Living Bible)

28.

*"CAN I BE ASSURED THAT I WILL
RECEIVE GOD'S MERCY?"*

What was the basis for Mary's exultant joy and uninhibited praise?

God's mercy which extended to her—is the same mercy that is extended to all those who fear Him. "His mercy goes on from generation to generation, to all who reverence him." (Luke 1:50) in every generation.

How did God manifest His mercy to Mary? By Him being mindful of her humble state. "For He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:48)

To be mindful of someone is to take notice of that person and to do something for him. God looked upon Mary's state of humiliation and obscurity and did something about her state.

God's pitiful feelings of mercy issued forth in powerful actions. "For the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His name." (Luke 1:49)

God's mercy is not deserved or earned, but given as a free gift to undeserving sinners. God favored Mary not because of her unusual spirituality, although I believe Mary was in a spiritually sensitive and humbly receptive condition—a condition conducive for the Spirit's special work in her life.

It is true that there are human conditions, which must be met if divine mercy can be received. "His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation." Luke 1:50)

To experience God's mercy is to know God's transforming power. The Mighty One will do great things for him! "For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; And holy is his name." (vs. 49) Those who have no reverential respect for the living God cannot experience God's mercy.

Mary's basis for rejoicing was her personal, spiritual transformation—wrought by the Power of God!

When you humble yourself before God and allow God to express his mercy toward you, you will see the Mighty One doing great things for you.

*"For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.
(Luke 1:49)*

29.

*"DARE I BELIEVE THAT CHRIST CAN HEAL
GREAT SPIRITUAL BROKENNESS?"*

Man fell from the height of splendor to the depth of despair. From the beauty of perfection to the vileness of distortion from the joy of fellowship to the anguish of separation.

From the freedom of innocence to the bondage of guilt; from the strength of health to the weakness of disease; from the glory of life to the corruption of death; from the richness of an heir to the poorness of an outcast; from the fullness of knowledge to the shamefulnes of ignorance.

Man is an estranged creature, haunted by loneliness and paralyzed by fear; Man is alienated from God, from his fellowman, and from himself; Man was made for greatness, but is wallowing in despair; Man was made for communion, but is plagued by feelings of separation and rejection.

Man was made to only enjoy peace, but hears constantly the clamor of disharmony;

Man was made for love, but is too often a creature of hate; Man was made to be integrated, but is a bundle of frayed nerves; Man was made for God, but is a rebel in rebellion against God's perfect will. When man rebelled against God's commandments, man died.

Man's sensitivity to fellowship became annulled by sin. Man's innocence became blemished by guilt and his capacity for nobility became shriveled by self-centeredness.

Man's nature is corrupted by sin. Every area of man's activity feels the pollution of sin; Man's will is rendered so weak that he is unable to subdue the passions of his flesh; Man's knowledge is so inadequate that he is unable to discover and pursue the pathway which leads to righteousness; Man's nature is warped, twisted, and corrupted!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Christ is merciful and full of grace, and therefore seeks to make the undeserving child of hell a child of heaven. Christ came to seek and to save the lost. He came to

rescue the perishing, to restore the down-trodden, to befriend the lonely, and to heal the sick in soul.

He came not to condemn, but instead to save. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) He came to "save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

The Just One died for unjust, fallen humanity, that He might make man righteous. Christ came to make an integrated life out of a shattered life, to make a strong character out of a shallow life, to make a confident and radiant life out of a guilt-ridden life.

Through Christ, man can come once again to know greatness: Christ takes the despised woman of Samaria and makes her an honored messenger of love; Christ takes a demon-possessed outcast, and makes him a respectable citizen; Christ takes a high-browed Pharisee and makes him a humble and faithful follower; Christ takes a doubting Thomas and makes him a flaming evangelist.

Christ takes a thieving Ones Imus and makes him a faithful servant; Christ takes an adulterous outcast and makes her a pure and respectable lady; Christ takes the dying thief and makes him a son of paradise. He takes the guilt-ridden publican and makes him a free and justified believer; Christ restores a wandering prodigal to the stature of full sonship; Christ breaks the shackles of sin and sets the prisoner free; Christ seeks and finds the lost sheep. He applies his healing salve to the sores of sin, and restores the downtrodden to wholeness and health.

Christ came to seek and to save the lost. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."
(John 3:17)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O blessed Christ; there is no one like you! As the Son of God, you are unique! You are truly God, but you are also fully man, excepting that you are sinless.

You are the hope of the world—hope for human transformation, hope for comfort

during heartbreaking sorrow. Hope for reconciliation between warring factions, hope for renewed joy after extensive grief and loneliness. Hope for deliverance from the bondage of cruel habits, hope for the restoration of the long-departed 'prodigal' in the far country and hope that the corrupt human heart can be made pure.

You are hope that the closed mind can be enlightened, the deadened spirit can be enlivened, and the weakened will can be strengthened. The damaged emotions can be healed, and the dark outlook can become the bright outlook!

Yes, I thank you, dearest Jesus, for Your power—to change human life, to forgive all sins, to bring peace with the Father through your shed blood on Calvary! 'There is wonder working power in the blood of Jesus!' 'Christ receiveth sinful men, even me with all my sins!' Thank You! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

There is no 'sin stain' so deep, but what the Blood of Jesus goes deeper yet! There is no sinner so corrupt, but what Christ is able to transform!

*Booklet Titles Of
"Effective Christian Living" Series!"*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Titles</i>
1.	<i>THE POWER OF PRAYER!</i>
2.	<i>THE CROSS OF JESUS!</i>
3.	<i>THE CHRIST OF EASTER!</i>
4.	<i>PREPARING FOR DEATH!</i>
5.	<i>CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO OTHERS!</i>
6.	<i>LIFE IN THE CHURCH!</i>
7.	<i>GOD FOR ALL HOLIDAYS!</i>
8.	<i>THE SPIRIT FILLED LIFE!</i>
9.	<i>PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE!</i>
10.	<i>OUR ETERNAL HOME – HEAVEN!</i>
11.	<i>CULTIVATING CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER!</i>
12.	<i>CONFRONTING LIFE'S COMPLEXITIES!</i>
13.	<i>LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE!</i>
14.	<i>CONQUERING THE ENEMIES WITHIN!</i>
15.	<i>GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION!</i>
16.	<i>THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS!</i>
17.	<i>COPING WITH LIFE'S HARDSHIPS!</i>