

"Go into all the world
& preach
the good news
to all creation"

"LET MY PRAISE BE HEARD!"

By

Ron G. Christian

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Ron G. Christian

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	2
GOD'S COMMANDS.....	7
THE TRAGEDY OF LIVING A LIFE OF INGRATITUDE!.....	7
DOES 'GRATITUDE' DESCRIBE YOUR 'WAY OF LIFE'?.....	10
UPON WHAT 'FOUNDATION' IS THE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF GRATITUDE BUILT?.....	11
WHY DOES GOD 'FAVOR' CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS?.....	12
HOW CAN YOU MAINTAIN 'EQUILIBRIUM' AMIDST LIFE'S MANY CHANGES?.....	13
HOW CAN A BELIEVER REJECT 'BITTERNESS' AND EMBRACE TRUE GRATITUDE?.....	16
BECAUSE GOD IS THE 'GREAT TRANSFORMER' YOU CAN LIVE GRATEFULLY!.....	16
FROM WHENCE COMES THE 'POWER' TO LIVE A LIFE	18
OF GRATITUDE?.....	18
CAN YOU BE 'GRATEFUL' DURING TIMES OF UNEXPLAINABLY SUFFERING?.....	19
YOU CAN HAVE LOSS WITHOUT BITTERNESS, AND GAIN WITHOUT PRIDE!.....	20
DO NOT TURN LEGITIMATE PURSUITS INTO ILLEGITIMATE OBSESSIONS!.....	21
IS GRATITUDE THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC OF YOUR WORDS AND ACTIONS?	22
IS YOURS A 'PORTRAIT' OF GRATITUDE?.....	23
PRAISE GOD FOR THE WONDER OF GOD'S CREATION!	26
I PRAISE GOD FOR A FAITHFUL, HARD WORKING, AND CREATIVE WIFE!.....	30
CAN YOU AND I 'GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THINGS'?.....	45
HATING THE 'EVIL DEED' WHILE STILL 'LOVING' THE	46
EVIL DOER!.....	46
CAN I BE 'GRATEFUL' DURING TIMES OF GREAT INJUSTICE?.....	46

<i>WILL GOD'S JUSTICE BE VINDICATED AND HIS</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>RIGHTEOUSNESS BE EXALTED?</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO LOVE THOSE WHO</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>DESPITEFULLY USE ME?</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>MUST I 'LIKE' EVERYONE, OR AM I COMMANDED ONLY TO 'LOVE'</i> <i>EVERYONE?</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>DID JESUS, WHO LOVED EVERYONE, ALSO 'LIKED' EVERYONE WHOM</i> <i>HE KNEW?</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>JESUS INTENSELY LOVED THE SINNERS, BUT HE INTENSELY HATED</i> <i>THEIR SINS!</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>AM I COMMANDED TO BECOME A 'FRIEND' TO MY FORMER 'ENEMY'?</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>DOES GOD TAKE THE 'INITIATIVE' TO REACH MY 'ENEMY' WITH HIS</i> <i>LOVE?</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>WITH 'LITTLE' OR WITH 'MUCH' IN YOUR LIFE, GOD DESERVES YOUR</i> <i>PRAISE!</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A 'GRATEFUL LIFE'?</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF LOW IN</i> <i>GRATITUDE?</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR MY LOVING, DISCERNING, DEVOTED,</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>CARING MOTHER!</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR A HARD-WORKING AND PROVIDING FATHER!</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR TWO BEAUTIFUL, TALENTED DAUGHTERS!</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR MY HARD-WORKING, ADMINISTRATIVE-TYPE</i> <i>BROTHER!</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR A BEAUTIFUL, HARD-WORKING</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>OLDER SISTER!</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR A SECOND SISTER WHO WAS VERY AFFECTIONATE</i> <i>AND JOYOUS</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITY OF LEAVING A GOOD LEGACY</i> <i>TO CHILDREN!</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR THE BENEFIT OF RUNNING THROUGHOUT MY</i> <i>ENTIRE LIFETIME!</i>	<i>123</i>

<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PRESENCE AND HIS POWER DURING PERSONAL CRISIS!.....</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>HEAD-ON COLLISION WITH ANOTHER BIKE!.....</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>TWO DIFFERENT 'TUMBLES' ON JOGGING TRAILS!.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>RESCUE ON TOP OF LONG'S PEAK.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>HEALING FROM A DEADLY CANCER!.....</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>GOD'S FREQUENT INTERVENTION DURING TIMES OF CRISIS!.....</i>	<i>138</i>
<i>MIRACLES OF INTERVENTION DURING UNSPEAKABLE.....</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>TRAGEDY!</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>HAS GOD OFTEN MERCIFULLY INTERVENED TO SAVE MY LIFE?... </i>	<i>143</i>
<i>A FRIGHTENING FALL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.....</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>FEAR SEIZED ME BUT GOD WAS WITH ME!</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>GOD RESCUED MY DAUGHTER 'IN THE NICK OF TIME '!.....</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>RESCUE FROM THE BLAST OF SHATTERED GLASS!.....</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR MY FRIENDSHIP WITH SEVERAL DELIGHTFUL ONES DURING LIFE!.....</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR MY FRIENDSHIP WITH AN OLD GODLY KOREAN 'SAINT'</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR THE AMAZING CHANGES THAT HUMANS CAN EXPERIENCE!.....</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN SOMEDAY!.....</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>I THANK GOD FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GOD-GIVEN.....</i>	<i>194</i>
<i>'SPIRITUAL GIFT'!</i>	<i>194</i>
<i>EXTENSIVE WRITINGS TRANSLATED INTO NUMEROUS BOOKS BY A DILIGENT LADY.....</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>"THOUSANDS OF STEPS TO DELIVER THOUSANDS OF DEVOTIONAL BOOKLETS"</i>	<i>198</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR MANY SOUL-WINNING OPPORTUNITIES! ...</i>	<i>202</i>
<i>I PRAISE GOD FOR MY SEVERAL LOVED ONES AND DEAR RELATIVES!.....</i>	<i>204</i>

I PRAISE GOD FOR MANY SOUL-WINNING OPPORTUNITIES!.....203

I PRAISE GOD FOR MY SEVERAL LOVED ONES AND DEAR RELATIVES!206

GOD'S COMMANDS

According to the scriptures, God actually commands that we 'give thanks in all things' (for this is the will of God concerning us believers)! This attitude of gratitude is the attitude of the person who is truly God-like in character, of the person who is living a life of holiness! Of course, God is not requiring us to thank God FOR everything (like the untimely and premature death of one of our loved ones), but God does require us to thank God IN everything that happens.

We have confidence that our all-loving and all-wise and all-powerful God is 'sovereign'- that is, He has total charge of earth's events and of our own personal events. He is the great transforming God, that is, He is the God who can make everything that happens to us, to fit into a plan for our ultimate good. Every stumbling stone can become a stepping stone to further spiritual growth!

Not everything that happens to us is good (obviously), but God is able to transform even our 'bad' experiences, to use them to accomplish some kind of good in our lives. God alone can see the 'big picture', and He knows how every 'piece' in our life fits into the 'big picture'. God knows what is 'best' for each of us (He is all-wise). God wants to give to each of us what is best for us (He is all-loving). God has the ability to do what is best for each of us (God is all-powerful).

Based on the foundation of the character of Almighty God, we can rest assured - with great gratitude - that the final outcome of our life will be 'good'! If we base our life in God - in the self-revealed God, we will ultimately make heaven our eternal home! God is faithful (beyond doubt), so we can be grateful towards God!

THE TRAGEDY OF LIVING A LIFE OF INGRATITUDE!

I have not (sadly) always been a truly thankful person. I have found that ingratitude spells unhappiness, not only for the person who is expressing ingratitude, but also for the persons who happen to be around the ungrateful person! Ingratitude is a great sin, for the ungrateful person fails to recognize (and fails to declare) the source of all his earthly gifts and blessings.

The ungrateful person does not reach up to God in worship, nor does the ungrateful person reach out in love and service to his fellow men. The ungrateful person is the calculating person - the person who thinks he deserves more from life than what he has received. He is the jealous person who looks upon his fellow men with competitive feelings, thinking that he ought to have what others have, instead of being content with what God has generously granted to him.

The ungrateful person is a self-centered person, the person who is constantly 'taking his own pulse' to determine his own 'lot in life'! The ungrateful person constantly seeks his own selfish advantage. He is the person who is basically negative in his reactions to other persons! The ungrateful person is oblivious to the kindness and love of God - the kindness and love of God which has been constantly been poured out upon him as a creature who is made in the image of God.

Such a person is (sadly) blinded to the abundance of 'common blessings' which he receives every day of his life- food, clothing, shelter, fresh air to breath, a degree of physical health, daily compassionate actions from his fellow men, freedom to live and to work and to prosper in ways that are meant to bring a sense of well-being, love of children, the pursuit of some personal interests and hobbies, the exquisite beauty of nature, availability of the holy scriptures and the open door of a church, and so much more!

Ingratitude scars life, cheapens life, ruins relationships, stunts personalities, shortens life, dishonors Almighty God, destroys the soul, trashes divinely-given gifts! The person who is ungrateful (oblivious to God's gifts of grace) is the person who is destined to a life of misery and insignificance - for such a person is not fulfilling the very purpose for which he was created.

We humans are created to walk humbly before our God, but we can't walk humbly before our God if we proudly contend that life should be giving us more (fame, fortune, authority, etc.) than what we are experiencing in our life.

We are meant to be awestruck by God's goodness in our life, but when we are ungrateful (i.e., complaining because of our particular

'lot ' in life); we certainly will not be awestruck by God's goodness! The ungrateful person cannot be 'lost in wonder, love, and praise', rather the ungrateful person will be filled with words of complaints and bitterness and envy towards those who are getting more out of life than he is!

The ungrateful person does not see other persons as persons to be 'served'. Rather, the ungrateful person sees other persons as persons to be envied and despised and rejected! Rather than being satisfied with what God has allotted to him, the ungrateful person is bitter towards God for the particular 'lot' that God has assigned to him, and the ungrateful person is in competition towards his fellow men whom he believes have unfairly been given more than he has been given.

The ungrateful person, far from being compassionate and complimentary to his fellow men, is, instead, competitive and jealous and comparative and contentious. He is not happy when his fellow men succeed in anything. When his fellow men fail in some endeavor, he is delighted, for their failure makes it easier for him to climb closer to the top of the mountain of success.

Far from being compassionate, this type of despicable person is filled with jealousy and contempt for fellow human beings! What a miserable and uncomfortable man for a person to be around. All because this jealous-ridden man has not 'fallen in love' with the God who knows all and who cares for all and who is able to work for all persons. Because he had no 'focus' on God, he has no understanding of himself, and he certainly has no compassion for his fellow human beings!

When one knows something about the God who is perfect love and perfect wisdom and perfect power - then, such a person with this kind of experiential knowledge of God will learn to be a grateful person, a person who worships God in awe, and a person who serves other human beings in a self-forgetful and compassionate way.

Gratitude is the product of knowing the God of Grace - the God who loves all, the God who knows all, the God who is able to give good gifts to all. Love, power, wisdom- fixing your mind and your heart upon these characteristics of God will change you from being an ungrateful person into being a grateful person! Knowing God ever more

deeply solves the problem of ingratitude!

DOES 'GRATITUDE' DESCRIBE YOUR 'WAY OF LIFE'?

Unfortunately, during my own long life, I have manifested the spirit of ingratitude (in word and in action) countless times, and I have, thus, grieved the God whom I love! I thank God for His gift of forgiving grace and restoration!

Sadly, the sin of grumbling (complaining) which is condemned in scripture has sometimes been evident in my life just ask my wife, and she will confirm this reality!). In spite of my failure (in speech and in activity), I want to increasingly be a more thankful and a more grateful person- a person who spends time in thought and in word and in deed, praising the God of all grace and graciousness, praising the God from whom all blessings come, praising the God who gives us humans all things richly to enjoy, praising the God who is always on the 'giving end' in terms of 'gift giving'!

God is never 'in debt' to me, but I am always 'in debt' to God! What I give to Him, He greatly appreciates my gift, even though my gift is so very small! The degree and the kind of giving on my 'end of the transaction' cannot be compared to the degree and the kind of giving that God imparts to me on His 'end of the transaction'! "God giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!"

The storehouse of God's resources is limitless! How could I ever repay God for the number of breaths that He gives to me, during my lifetime, or the number of heartbeats that He gives to me during my long life of 70 years? How could I repay God for the number of light rays that He allows to reach my eyes, to allow me to behold the beautiful mountains (and the millions of others images in God's world)?

I am indebted to God for the growth and the harvesting of the corn and the wheat and the soy and the sugar beets and the scores of other crops - all of which I am the recipient - to feed my stomach and to nourish my entire body! When there are crop failures, because of inclement weather, we suddenly begin to be grateful for the dynamic relationship between adequate water and needed sunshine and proper cultivation. When there is a shortage of food, all of a sudden we

become more humble and more grateful people!

UPON WHAT 'FOUNDATION' IS THE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF GRATITUDE BUILT?

Humility is one of the necessary 'foundation stones' for the superstructure of gratitude. It is the proud and the self-sufficient person who is ungrateful to God for the provisions and benefits of life. The proud (arrogant) person looks to himself as the source of all good things. He fails to recognize that God alone is the source of all good and beautiful things in this world! "In God we live and move and have our very being!"

Those are the biblical assertions of 'reality', and they are the words that come from the lips of the truly humble and God-dependent and grateful person. To the proud Corinthian believers, Paul asked: "What have you that you have not received? If then you received all things from God, why do you boast as if you received these things on your own?"

There is no attitude that more quickly destroys the spirit of gratitude, than the attitude of self-sufficiency and the attitude of carnal pride! God hates pride, not only because pride fails to recognize that God is the author of all good things (the source of all earthly blessings), but because the spirit of pride is the spirit that ultimately destroys the one who practices pride, that is, it is the spirit that ultimately dehumanizes the person who practices pride.

"Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall!" We humans are not created to pose as our own little 'god', but we are made to serve the true God- the God from whom all blessings are derived! God is a good God, and because of His 'nature of grace', He wants to pour out His blessings upon His creatures (His creation), but if the 'lid of our life' is closed, by pride and self-sufficiency, we humans are unable to receive the 'full benefit' of God's blessings.

Ingratitude is the 'dam' that blocks the mighty flow of God's blessings into our lives. God wants to give us all things richly to enjoy, but the recipient (humans) must be willing to receive God's rich and abundant gifts of grace.

God is the Giver of all good things, but there must be a willing and humble and grateful recipient, if the gifts are ever to be received and ever to be enjoyed during this earthly existence. God has a rich endowment of gifts (of all kinds), but it is only the willing and the open person (recipient) who can actually receive those abundant gifts from the hand of a loving God!

God, through the 'saving work' of Christ, is reconciled (objectively) to the entire (fallen) human race, but what God offers (the gift of salvation and all other lesser gifts) can only be received by those who (through repentance and faith) have accepted - humbly and gratefully - the reconciliation that God (in grace) has already obtained!

The grateful person (sinner) is the only type of person who is able gladly to receive the gift of God's accomplished 'work in Christ'- namely, the freely offered reconciliation with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The 'chief gift', of course, is salvation, but the 'bundle of salvation' contains countless other rich and wonderful and life-giving gifts! The quality and the quantity of these divinely-purchased gifts cannot even be described, and these gifts from our loving God are enjoyed both in time and in eternity!

WHY DOES GOD 'FAVOR' CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS?

We say that God has 'no favorites', and this statement truly describes the God of justice and equality. But, while it is biblically-taught that God has 'no fear or favor of men' (that is, the plan of salvation is offered to all persons, and God has a place prepared in heaven for all persons), it is also true to say that God, indeed, does 'favor' those humans who have most opened their lives to the love and to the grace and to the offered benefits of God.

God loves all persons equally, Jesus died for all persons equally, the Holy Spirit desires to give Himself to all persons equally- these basic truths declare that God is not a God of arbitrary 'selection'- regarding His offered gift of abundant life on earth and His eternal life in heaven.

But, after contemplating all of the biblically-taught truths regarding the universal aspects regarding God's love for all mankind, there is

also the biblically-based truth regarding God's 'divine selectivity' (based on a man's right choosing). When a person freely chooses to follow the living Christ, God brings a special blessing into that person's life!

The grace-oriented person (who desires to humbly follow Christ and to obey Christ and Christ's teaching) is the person who increasingly becomes lost in wonder and lost in love and lost in praise of the mighty Savior!

This is one way to describe a 'grateful person'- a person who humbly praises his God, a person who realizes that he is not worthy of the least of God's favor, a person who increasingly realizes that he is the recipient of all of God's undeserved rich and wonderful gifts.

God is not a 'God of arbitrary favoritism', for God loves all persons and God, through Christ, offers salvation freely to every person. However, it can't be denied (from a study of the Bible and from an observation of life in our world as it really is), I say, it can't be denied that some persons (namely, the truly grateful persons) are unusually 'favored' by God, in many ways!

Not an arbitrary 'favoritism' (which would be a denial of God's 'basic justice'), but, nevertheless, a divinely-given 'favoritism' - a favoritism based upon the believer's humble and grateful relationship with the God of all grace! Humble and obedient and grateful submission to the 'God of grace' brings God's special blessings and benefits and 'favor' to this kind of person!

HOW CAN YOU MAINTAIN 'EQUILIBRIUM' AMIDST LIFE'S MANY CHANGES?

Maintaining an attitude of thanksgiving and gratitude, amidst all the 'changes and the chances of daily life', requires a strong commitment on the part of a person (believer), for it is too easy for one to become proud during times of so-called 'success', and to become (on the other hand) discouraged and despondent and negative and bitter during times of hardship and loss and grief and unexplained suffering.

The Holy Spirit, however, who is the Divine Helper, is able to empower us (believers) to maintain our 'balance' and our 'stability' and our

'equilibrium' during the changing seasons and during the changing emotions that are integral to the experience of every human being.

The Spirit can enable us (during both the times of success and of failure, during the times of both joy and sorrow) to keep our eyes on the 'pilot of our little boat', as we sail through both the waves of sorrow and the smooth waters of joy, during our life's long voyage.

The Spirit rescues us, during the vast changes of our lives, from both the bitterness of spirit during life's many losses, and also from the spirit of pride during life's many successes.

Both the spirit of bitterness and the spirit of pride are used by the 'enemy of our soul' to topple the 'little boat of our life', making it impossible for 'our little boat' to make it safely to the harbor of heaven's shores! It is only the spirit of gratitude (praise and thanksgiving), based on our trust and reliance and faith in the goodness of God, that will enable us to live peacefully and serenely and effectively until we reach 'heaven's beautiful shores'!

Of course, the believer, who possesses the God-given capacity to experience a wide range of emotions (and emotional expressions), will sometimes weep over his heart-breaking losses. It is understandable that the believer will be moved to the depths of his spirit when he loses someone dear to his heart (like the loss of a spouse or the loss of a dear friend or the loss of loved ones), but, instead of falling into the 'pit of despair' or the 'pit of bitterness', a sorrow-filled believer will raise his head to the 'hills from whence comes his help'!

When my God-loving brother lost his 15 year old daughter, in a tragic accident, he obviously was grief-stricken to the core of his being, but this man - a man of gratitude and positive faith - did not become bitter towards his God. He did not despair and give up on his life.

Amidst his sorrows and amidst the flow of his tears and amidst the crushing of his heart, my brother, nevertheless, 'looked to the hills from whence came his help' - that is, he looked to the God of all comfort who comforted him in all his distress. Not only during the initial crisis, but for many years to come when he was 'low of spirit', he found that God was, indeed, a Helper in his every time of need.

Only my brother - a man who was 'close' to the God of wisdom and

the God of love and the God of power - only he, a man of gratitude, could affirm, amidst his horrible crisis, that God was, indeed, a good God!

Almost immediately after he learned about the death of his daughter, my brother declared: "God makes no mistakes!" By this statement, he was not suggesting that God was responsible for the tragedy. No, he was simply declaring that God, who is sovereign (in control of all things), is the only One who could understand the 'mystery of human suffering' (why a 15 year old, godly daughter would die).

IS GRATITUDE THE UNDERGIRDING POWER OF YOUR LIFE?

Romans 8:28, considered by most Christians to be among the greatest verse in the Bible, excitedly declare that God can use all of life's experiences (good, bad, indifferent experiences) to benefit the character-building of God's people. "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans." (Romans 8:28 Living Bible)

As expounded previously (in this book), God is the Great Compensator. Why did my brother's 15 years old (godly) daughter have to die when she was verily getting started in her life? No one will ever know, but we do know that God is a God of perfect love, perfect wisdom, and perfect power. Why the God of love and wisdom did not exercise His limitless power to rescue my brother's daughter from the death of an accident, we will never know.

We are sure of one thing: God did not cause this young person's death, and God did not will (desire) her death. A force, other than God's force, was responsible for my niece's death! God wept as much when my brother wept, the night (Aug. 14, 1981) of Sharla's death. Sharla is safely home (in heaven), and she is in perfect health, where she will grow in the knowledge of her Savior forever, where she will love the saints of the ages forever! She, of course, will never again experience the trials and temptations and troubles of this earthly life. She is safe forevermore, worshiping at the feet of her blessed Savior.

For several decades now she has been hugged by countless heavenly saints, and she, in turn, has greatly enjoyed loving the heavenly saints. She awaits the arrival of her dear father and mother, and so

many other earthly inhabitants. But, of course, the recitation of these blessed 'facts' about the 'heavenly life', while these facts are so helpful, these declarations regarding the joys of heaven do not permanently remove the sorrow and the grief from the hearts of those who were left behind after Sharla suddenly died (when she was only 15 years old).

HOW CAN A BELIEVER REJECT 'BITTERNESS' AND EMBRACE TRUE GRATITUDE?

How can a believer win the victory over despair and bitterness, and maintain a spirit of gratitude, when he/she losses a daughter when she is only 15 (or experiences many other types of losses in life)?

In the midst of unexplainable losses in life, the child of God must remember that the God he serves is (1) all-knowing (all-wise), (2) all-loving (all-caring), (3) all-powerful (all-controlling). Not all of one's questions (regarding human suffering) will be answered on this earth, but, amidst great losses in life, the believing soul can affirm that God will use every experience of life (good, bad, indifferent) to accomplish ultimate good in the life of the suffering soul!

God is not the author of suffering! There is not a pang of suffering that you experience, but what God also feels that pang of suffering. Your 'sympathizing Jesus' is also greatly pained when you are greatly pained. There is no one who understands better what you are going through, than the 'sympathizing Jesus'. No human being has suffered as greatly as Jesus Christ!

BECAUSE GOD IS THE 'GREAT TRANSFORMER' YOU CAN LIVE GRATEFULLY!

God is the Great Transformer who is able to bring good out of evil, comfort out of suffering, hope out of despondency, understanding out of confusion, strength out of weakness, meaning out of purposelessness, healing out of illness, companionship out of loneliness, activity out of listlessness, and interest out of boredom.

God is the great Compensator - both on this planet and in eternity (heaven). God does not want any of our adversities (caused by our own self, or caused by other hurtful persons) to be wasted. He wants

to use every adversity as His 'tool' to teach us life's lessons - especially the lesson that the one who suffers greatly is the very one who is best equipped to comfort other fellow sufferers greatly.

If the suffering we go through results in giving us a more tender heart towards other persons, and if it results in enlarging the capacity of gratitude in our heart towards our God, then adversity will have served a most noble cause. Adversity, wrongly handled, tragically results in the sufferer becoming bitter towards God, and indifferent (or angry) towards the sufferer's fellow men!

Suffering should increase our gratitude, both toward the God of grace (gifts) and towards the fellow sufferers who need to receive the same type of comfort which we (the sufferer) have received from God.

A tender heart, and a teachable mind, and a reverent spirit (like the Holy Trinity) are the 'trinity of godly traits' which produces the offspring of gratitude! Without the presence of these 'holy qualities' in a person's life, there can be no manifested life of 'gratitude'!

When a believer's heart becomes tender (through the Holy Spirit's presence), when a believer's mind becomes renewed (through the Holy Spirit's presence), when a believer's inner spirit becomes worshipful (through the Holy Spirit's presence) - then the kind of person that the 'world has on its hands' is a person who overflows with gratitude to the God who is altogether 'good'! Gratitude, Praise, Thanksgiving - all centered in God! All because God is sovereign, God is the self-revealed God who has made Himself known in the life and words and sacrificial actions of Jesus Christ!

How do we know that God is a 'good' God? Because Jesus was a 'good man' (the Son of Man who went about doing much good, and whose supreme love for mankind was conclusively demonstrated on Mt. Calvary)! "God commends his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!"

The love of God (for sinners) is so great, that no man can comprehend that magnificent love! The God of love - revealed once and for all in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus - is the 'foundation' for man's lifetime expressions of 'gratitude'!

"Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his

friends (and enemies)!" Take a careful look at the Cross (even daily), and you will be lost in wonder, love, and praise! And all of those words are different ways of 'spelling' Gratitude!

God, who is the Great Compensator, will 'make it up' to Sharla, because she had to die prematurely! God is a 'debtor' to no man (or child or teen). What a person lost, by dying prematurely, that person will gain in eternity! And always remember: "God is a debtor to no man!"

FROM WHENCE COMES THE 'POWER' TO LIVE A LIFE OF GRATITUDE?

The ideas, just shared in the previous paragraphs, are the 'background' (the context) for understanding the 'touching beauty' of the spirit of gratitude. The grateful person (like my brother), during life's losses and grief's, may be tom up in his/her emotions, during times of great sorrow. But we must always remember the 'classic statement': "There is an expulsive power in a new affection!"

The power of 'gratitude' is able eventually to expel the weaker power of despair and heart-breaking grief. Grief is an emotion that comes (understandably) to a person, during life's periodic losses, but gratitude is a perpetual attitude that a believer practices throughout his entire life.

The spirit of gratitude (based on the knowledge of God's unconditional love) is the spirit that can confront and can powerfully overcome any other negatively-oriented attitude and emotion. Other emotions will 'come and go', but the spirit of gratitude is the stable and abiding and permanent attitude in the life of the Spirit-controlled Christian! There is great 'expelling power' in the spirit of gratitude - power to force out any spirit which is destructive and negative and God-dishonoring!

Gratitude, as has been shown previously, is not a mere 'human attainment'; rather, it is a 'divinely- given gift'. A gift whose source is the Holy Spirit, and a gift that, through the Spirit's enablement, must, nevertheless, be activated and practiced by fallible humans.

It is when we (weak) believers fail to 'tap into the divine resources'

that are resident within us, that we begin to live 'fleshly-driven' lives, instead of Spirit-motivated lives. And the results? Many possible negative results, but one of the sad results of not 'walking in the Spirit' is a life that is characterized by discontent and complaining and criticism and self-centeredness and, yes, ingratitude!

Only Spirit-motivated Christians have the power to consistently live a life of Gratitude! Christians, of course, must cooperate with the indwelling Spirit, but it is only the Spirit who is able to empower a believer to live a life of Gratitude - a life in which a believer expresses thanksgiving during loss (grief), and humility during gains (successes). The Spirit is the great stabilizer, the great balancer, the great Helper in all times of need.

CAN YOU BE 'GRATEFUL' DURING TIMES OF UNEXPLAINABLY SUFFERING?

My great aunt (a godly lady, and a mother of many children) experienced soul-shattering grief when she learned (at the end of World War II) that her youngest son (a navigator on a fighter plane) came up 'missing in action'. The body of this young soldier (I received part of his name, just a few days before his 'missing' was announced), I say, the body of this young soldier was never recovered. It was thought that his war plane was shot down, perhaps over the North Sea.

The mother of this young soldier who was killed - it was hard for her to ever fully recover from the shock of this horrible loss. I was told that her grief left such an indelible mark on her mind (brain) that, when a door in her house would be slammed loudly, she would be shaken greatly.

Apparently, loud noises reminded her of the loud noises of war bombs (perhaps even causing her to imagine what the noises must have been like when her son's war plane was hit by enemy fire). I was told that she could not bear to attend patriotic parades, for these parades caused her to think about her departed son! Apparently, the music (as beautiful as it was) brought overwhelming sadness to her heart!

This woman suffered physical and mental and emotional damage for many years - probably until the day of her death. But, in spite of these traumas in her life (traumas that continued for decades after the ini-

tial tragic loss), I knew this woman to be a consistently loving and compassionate and grateful woman. She was submissive to her Lord even though she, of course, never understood the 'reason' for her son's death.

I knew her to be a very committed and faithful Christian lady. I always admired her, during the years of my upbringing. She loved her church, she witnessed to her large family about Christ, she even had lots of wit, and she could laugh joyfully with people.

She (along with her crippled sister and her other sister- my grandmother), greatly impacted my life. In many ways, I wanted to imitate her faith! As I child and teen, I sat in church with her and with a handful of other believers, every Sunday at my local church. I admired her and I loved her and I found pleasure when occasionally she would express her wit and her good humor.

No, I don't think she ever fully recovered from the 'great sorrow of her life' (loss of her soldier/son), but I found her to be a very sane, healthy, balanced, joyous and, yes, grateful person. Sorrow over her great loss, questions perhaps as to the reasons for her son's premature death, but I never witnessed (in her) a spirit of bitterness or anger or resentment or despair. With the deep scar on her heart, she, nevertheless, lived a radiant and loving and faithful and caring and, yes, grateful life!

**YOU CAN HAVE LOSS WITHOUT BITTERNESS, AND GAIN
WITHOUT PRIDE!**

There can be (as in her 'case') the coexistence of grief and gratitude. It is 'natural' (human) to experience grief, but it is not human (or godly) to succumb to bitterness and vindictiveness and resentment and carnal anger. The former emotion can lead you closer to God, while the latter emotion will certainly drive you away from God!

We must avoid bitterness (the opposite of gratitude) at all costs, for bitterness (according to Hebrews 12) not only 'defiles' the spirit of the one who is bitter, but bitterness will defile everyone who surrounds the person who is bitter!

On the other end of the scale (opposite to despair) is the spirit of

pride (self-sufficiency). This is an equally harmful attitude. If bitterness defiles the human spirit, so it is also true to say that pride equally defiles the human spirit. Both are equally harmful (and sinful)! If grief can lead to bitterness, so success can lead to pride!

If one person is bitter against God because of life's losses, another person - a successful person may be proud because of his achievements. The one who is self-sufficient (that is, the one who believes that his successes are due to his own inherent abilities), this person's successes can result in driving him further away from God.

The successful person (in terms of money, fame, power) can become a man who feels he does not need God in his life - that he does not need to pray for guidance, that he does not need to read the Bible for nurture, that he does not need the insights which the preached word can give, that he does not need to reach out to the poor whom (he thinks) have only themselves to blame for their plight (poverty).

The self-reliant (highly gifted) man may not sense his need for divine enablement or for divine guidance. He is 'on his own' and he is proud to be a 'self-made man'. God resists the 'proud man', but the proud man does not know about this divine indictment! The proud man is on very 'shaky ground'! God's judgment of this self-sufficient 'fool' is impending, but he is oblivious (spiritually blind) to his eventual and terrible fate!

DO NOT TURN LEGITIMATE PURSUITS INTO ILLEGITIMATE OBSESSIONS!

His successes (riches, popularity, power, position) have become his 'ladder to destruction'. Of course, God never condemned the four above-listed aspects of human living (as such or inherently).

What God condemns is the turning of legitimate 'things' into illegitimate pursuits (pursuits that become 'gods'). What constitutes sin (against God and against one's fellow man) is the turning of some legitimate pursuits into illegitimate 'patterns' of life - to turn God-allowed pursuits into godless 'obsessions'!

A person (i.e., an honest person/believer) can readily discern when his legitimate pursuit has become a 'wrong' (sinful) pursuit - when he

has become obsessed with the 'things of this world' to the exclusion of a 'taste for holy matters'!

How can a person determine what is his priorities in his life? By his checking of the nature of the passions that consume his time and energy and attention and resources. Do the investment of these various 'elements' of life, bring respect to one's fellow men, and praise and honor to the 'Lord of Life'?

Anything to which we give our primary allegiance (or even our sole allegiance), becomes our god! Jesus said that we cannot serve two gods at the same time - we cannot serve the true God and, at the same time, serve mammon (money)! "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." This was Joshua's challenge to ancient Israel!

IS GRATITUDE THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC OF YOUR WORDS AND ACTIONS?

The grateful person is the person who serves God - whether he is experiencing the sorrow that accompanies great loss and grief, or whether he is experiencing the joy and pleasure and satisfaction that accompany great financial growth and intellectual growth and social recognition and personal power! The spirit of gratitude is the stabilizing power in the life of a true believer. Amidst the changes and the chances of one's life, gratitude is the balancing, stabilizing power!

My wife said that she was permanently and positively affected when she (as a young person) witnessed the positive reaction of her rancher father, when he (materially-speaking) lost several of his cattle (including expensive 'bulls') - as a result of an electric storm!

This God-loving rancher, obviously, was saddened and he was shocked when he discovered several of his dead herd animals, but, my wife (his daughter) said this humble and godly rancher never became angry. He (like Job) simply said, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away! "It is only a 'grateful' man (a man who trusts the Lord fully with his life) who can declare, amidst great loss, that God is in charge, and, therefore, 'all is well'!

The grateful man (believer) does not deny either the losses of his life

nor the successes of his life. The grateful man is not an unfeeling person - a person who has no stirring of his feelings, no sorrow during his grief or, on the other hand, no elation during his successes. However, through the Spirit's enabling, the grateful man does not succumb to either bitterness during losses or to pride and smugness and presumption during achievements and successes!

The Spirit-enabled believer remains humble and grateful, amidst all the changing circumstances of his life - whether his circumstances are 'stormy' or whether they are 'sunny'!

Gratitude defines the character of the life of a godly man, regardless of the changing happenings of his life. A God-loving man knows that, in all the changing circumstances of his life, God works for his good and for his growth.

The indwelling Spirit provides stability and balance and equilibrium to his life. Whether it is smooth sailing or rough sailing, the Spirit who is aboard with the believer is strongly and reliably guiding the 'little boat of his life'.

The Spirit is the unseen Guide on the 'little boat of his life'. Of course, the Spirit does not 'take over', but the Spirit, nevertheless, is wonderfully present to give wisdom and direction to the believer, amidst the storms of life and also amidst the times of smooth sailing!

The Spirit nurtures and cultivates the spirit of gratitude in the heart of the believer - during both the stormy sailing and during the smooth sailing - enabling the believer to avoid both the spirit of bitterness and the spirit of pride (presumption)!

Gratitude (praise and thanksgiving) is the only worthy attitude in the life of the believer, and the Spirit is constantly enabling the sincere believer to have and to maintain that God-given characteristic!

IS YOURS A 'PORTRAIT' OF GRATITUDE?

I have a personal friend (presently 62 years old, an African-American friend). His name is Bill. I have regular contact with him, in more than one setting. I have known him for several years, probably nearly 10 years. Once a month, he and I partner to go to three different small nursing homes, where we conduct a short praise service. The 'heart'

of these monthly services (where a handful of beautiful elderly ones meet) is music.

Bill is an accomplished musician - a musician who plays several musical instruments. His 'specialty' in musical expertise is the violin. I have never heard more beautiful music than the music of Bill's violin. He makes his musical talent available to a large number of persons, in a variety of contexts. He plays in formal settings, and he also plays in very informal settings (such as when he plays gladly and joyously for the few elderly ones, each month).

I exalt in his musical skills every time I hear him play, but, more important than his musical expertise is his loving and humble and joyous and, yes, grateful spirit. Every time he plays, he plays for the glory of God, and for the edification of those around him. As you can imagine, there are scores of persons who speak highly of his playing (his skill and his talent).

Time after time, instead of even thanking his praising 'fans', Bill will immediately respond by saying, "Praise God. Give God all the glory. Without Him, I could not do anything!" Bill is a man who is full of Gratitude - a man who ascribes all the praise to his wonderful Lord! He never takes credit to himself, for his amazing accomplishments!

It is often said that "God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform! "It was through a great adversity that God opened the door of opportunity for Bill, to become an accomplished musician! When he was a rather small (grade school) child, a growth on his arm proved to be a cancerous growth!

This was shock enough to his parents, but that shock was multiplied when Bill's doctor declared that, to keep the cancer from spreading, the arm would have to be amputated! A shock of all shocks, for a person of any age, but especially for a child!

Bill's father refused to follow the prescription of the doctor. Instead, several believers in the child's church, laid hands on the young Bill and they asked, obviously, for physical healing. Instead of removing the arm, the doctor made a large indentation in the arm, as a result of the less-severe surgery. Of course, the young child's arm was greatly weakened as a result of the surgery.

Bill's father and Bill's physician agreed that something needed to be done, to strengthen the arm of Bill. Bill's large family (siblings and other relatives) were quite musical. Perhaps it was this obvious reality that caused Bill's father and Bill's physician to come up with an idea!

They both believed that, if young Bill would take violin lessons, that the movement of the arms, involved in playing this delicate instrument, just might strengthen the muscles that were left very weak as a result of the cancer surgery.

The rest is history! Young Bill practiced diligently, not only to become proficient with the violin, but with several other instruments. He became a professor of music, and Bill Johnson, for decades, has played his violin before hundreds of persons (in many churches and in secular settings - and also before a handful of elderly folks). He cares not if he is playing before a large group or a tiny group - all he wants to do is to let his light shine for his Lord, whom he dearly loves and whom he serves.

He wants to be in 'the shadow of the cross'! He is very careful not to draw attention to himself. He wants all the 'focuses' of his audience to be on Christ alone! Hidden from the applause of men, in order that he may exalt the name and the cause of Jesus Christ! That describes the life of Bill!

I know this to be true, for I have often seen him, and I have known Bill Johnson in various settings. He not only makes beautiful music with his instrument, but, more importantly, he makes beautiful music with his humble and generous and loving and prayerful and, yes, grateful life! As a grateful man, I know him to be a man who entrusts his entire life with the Spirit.

I have seen him during his 'down times' (adversity), and I have seen him during his 'exuberant times' (joy and satisfaction). Amidst all these changes and chances of his life, I have seen my friend to be a man who remains steadfast in his faith, and who remains grateful to God for all God's good gifts to him!

He has some health issues, he never had the joy of being married, he often 'pinches pennies' financially, he sometimes is misunderstood

because of a few of his eccentric mannerisms, his pool of friends has sometimes become somewhat drained because of the relocation of his friends or because of the death of his friends, he sometimes has difficulty sleeping, as a minority person he has a few barriers to get over!

Yes, these are some of the 'challenges' that my friend has faced, and that, by God's grace, he has had to learn to overcome. But, amidst his unique adversities, my friend remains steadfast in his loyalty to his God, and he continues to remain loving and joyous in his fellowship with his fellow believers!

In addition to his faithfulness to his Lord, and in addition to his maintained fellowship with his fellow men, Bill has been involved in intentional witnessing to non-believers (including his weekly witness to inmates in the county jail).

God has graciously given my friend the gift of music (violin), and wherever he goes, often the violin goes with him! Heavenly music that honors God and that blesses fellow human beings! Bill Johnson's entire lifestyle is definitely the lifestyle of 'Gratitude'!

He is grateful that God spared his arm from amputation. He is grateful that God providentially worked through his father and his doctor, to encourage him (require him?) to start playing the violin!

He is grateful for the talent that God gave to him. He is grateful for the countless opportunities that God has given to him, to bless the ears and the hearts and the souls of persons (far and wide), for many years! Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude - these are among the 'vivid colors' that would be used to 'paint the portrait' of my special friend. When I am around him, he influences me to be a more 'grateful person' (the kind of person that God is glad to bless!).

PRAISE GOD FOR THE WONDER OF GOD'S CREATION!

Even though the Fall of Man has 'marred', in some ways perhaps not quickly discerned, the original beauty of God's magnificent world, nevertheless, the world, even after that tragic historic 'Fall of Man', is filled with the splendor of God's beauty. The breath-taking beauty of this creation witnesses to the fact that the Creator of beauty is Himself beautiful beyond description!

When one beholds the order of our world, and of the universe, it is easy to conclude that the God who is behind this orderly world is Himself an orderly God. Scientists, more than anyone else, can speak about - witness to - the astounding precision in the movement of the planets around our sun, in the Milky Way Galaxy, 'as a starter', before talking about the order in the vastness of the incomprehensibly big universe which God 'spoke into existence.'

Future 'events' in the movements of planets, hundreds of years from now, can be 'calculated' accurately, all because the Creator is a 'God of Order', not a God of carelessness and chaos.

As shown by the manifest forces (power) of Nature, we can conclude that our God is a God of unlimited power! For instance, one example (among countless other examples), think about the power of electricity.

The electrical power (electricity) in one large flash of lightning, not only frightens humankind, but this degree of electrical power (electricity) is so great that it could light an entire city (if that electrical power could be harnessed).

Think of the vastness and the magnitude of Nature. Our world's tall mountains, and our giant trees, and our vast prairies, and our expansive oceans, and our huge canyons like the Grand Canyon - these features of our created world are wonderful and they are awesome! The vastness of the world and, especially the vastness of the universe, are faint reminders of the 'vastness' of our majestic God!

Next, when considering the majesty of Nature, think about the amazing variety in Nature. Even the casual observer of Nature, and certainly the serious student of Nature, will readily testify to the fact that everywhere he looks, he is overwhelmed with the vast number of species in the animal world, the plant world, the world of trees and grasses and vegetation of all kinds! Go to a "Botanical Gardens" and witness the vast variety of flowers.

Go to a 'Tropical Forest' and walk through it (if you can) and notice the different kinds of trees - both small and large trees. You will also doubtless see a large variety of bugs and reptiles and primates and other lower forms of animals. If God created our world, and if this

world is full of variety in plants, animals, trees, prairies, fish, then God must be a Creator who obviously values and who likes variety.

*For the wonder of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light:*

Christ our God, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

(For The Beauty of the Earth, by Folliott S. Pierpoint)

Unlike my dear brother, who has walked thousands of miles on many mountain trails (especially in Rocky Mountain National Park), I have not been a 'lover of nature'. Nevertheless, as I have jogged many miles, on a limited number of city trails, I have observed the little squirrels in the trees, and the scampering bunnies darting across my paths, and I have been entertained by the sweet (heavenly) sounds of the various flying birds above my head!

I have been fascinated by the hundreds of willows that stick up their fuzzy heads along my jogging paths. Occasionally I have been awed when I have caught a glimpse of the beautiful deer that find their home among the thick trees, not far from where I regularly take my early morning jogs.

There have been numerous mornings when, after I have started jogging in the near dark, I am taken aback when I suddenly view the entire eastern horizon lite up with bright colors, as the sun peaks up on the eastern horizon.

I am so grateful that our loving and beautiful God created colors for His creatures to enjoy. Black and white are meaningful colors, of course, but there is something about multi-colors that causes me to be prostrate before my great Creator. If color is wonderful here on earth, how much more wonderful will color be in that glorious Home above!

It is true that this earth is not our home, and that we (believers) are only 'pilgrims passing through' this temporary dwelling, but, nevertheless, God has promised to give us (His followers) all things (on this earth) 'richly to enjoy'. And the splendor of His creation is one of those 'things' that is intended to give us (believers) 'great pleasure

and great delight'. Of course, we do not 'worship nature', but we are permitted (even encouraged) to enjoy the 'works of God's hands' (Nature)!

The Scriptures often exalt the works of God, as seen in Nature! "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 and moves out across the skies as radiant as a bridegroom going to his wedding or as joyous as an athlete looking forward to a race! The sun crosses the heaven from end to end, and nothing can hide from its heat." (Psalms 19:1-6 Living Bible)

One day I was with an elderly (godly) woman, while she was taking a short wheelchair ride around a couple blocks, near our home. This woman lived in our home, and nearly every morning (if the weather permitted) this dear woman wanted to get outside and to breathe in the fresh air and to enjoy some of the delights of Nature.

On this particular morning, as she was 'drinking in the beauty of nature', she suddenly said to me, "Just think, Ron, all of this, and heaven too!" To her, the beauty of nature on that special morning was simply a foretaste of the beauty of heaven.

This woman was a 'double winner', for she (as a believer) was well aware of the One who created the beauty of that particular morning, and she was also well aware (by faith) of the beauty of heaven that someday she would enjoy in God's presence! She was confident that the One who was giving her the 'gift' of physical beauty, on that particular morning, would someday grant her the greater 'gift' of heavenly beauty, when God called her to her mansion above!

Her life was lived with a sense of gratitude for the present gifts of God, but she also lived with a constant anticipation of the wonderful beauty of God that she would enjoy some day in God's nearer presence in heaven! "Just think, all of this, and heaven too!"

This precious woman knew that soon she would enjoy the beauty of heaven in a much more full and wonderful way! She loved the beauty of this earth, but she knew there would be much greater beauty when

she entered the portals of heaven!

God's gift of beauty on this earth was very wonderful to her, but soon she would experience God's expanded and perfected beauty over there (in heaven)! Indeed, she was a double winner! Abundant life on earth and eventually eternal life in heaven! (It was only a few weeks, after that exciting morning, when she departed this earthly life, to become enraptured with the beauty of her heavenly home)!

I PRAISE GOD FOR A FAITHFUL, HARD WORKING, AND CREATIVE WIFE!

One time, recently, 'out of the blue', my wife said something to me that rather surprised me! Not in anger, but, nevertheless, very emphatically, she declared: "You don't really know me! There is so much about me that you don't know! In fact, there is a lot about myself that I don't know! I don't think I even know myself!"

I sometimes think that, after my marriage to her so long ago (47 years, as of this writing), I should know her quite well, but I know that there are many things about her that are still a 'mystery' to me. I have said to her, at times, that I realize (rightly so) that there is an inner citadel in her soul that is reserved only for her God. God alone knows the inner thoughts and hidden motivations and undisclosed 'hurts' that are inside of a human life.

No person, including a husband, dare attempt to invade that inner 'holy of holies' where God alone resides! A wife 'belongs' first and foremost to her Creator and to her Redeemer, and only secondarily to her husband. 'Belong' to her husband only in the sense of her deep communion and her loving partnership with her husband, not in the lower (evil) sense of possessiveness and servility to her husband!

I praise God for the wonderful woman that my wife is! She is a 'fascinating' (though, admittedly, somewhat complex) person - full of life and full of love and full of faith and full of kindness! She is smart, experienced, versatile in abilities, creative in everything she touches, a talented artist (painter and sketcher), an excellent cook, a home decorator, a remarkable mother, an understanding and faithful wife through the changes and the chances of our long life together, most importantly she is a devoted follower of Christ, a rational think-

er, a good debater, and a consistent 'problem-solver'!

It is true that others (around us) know only a 'fraction' of what 'fully defines and describes' us! And it is, likewise, true that none of us truly knows even ourselves in any 'complete' sense of the term! Even though I believe that I know my wife quite well, I humbly acknowledge that it is only the One who created her who knows her perfectly.

I have 'lived' with my wife for nearly a half century, and I think I 'know' her, but, the truth of the matter is, I only 'know' her 'in part'. There is a 'profundity' (profoundness and mystery) about every one of us human beings. God made each of us in His 'own image', and, therefore, because God is 'beyond comprehension', human beings who are made in God's 'image' are, obviously, (in some ways) 'beyond comprehension'!

Yes, I think I know a 'lot about' my wife (her mannerisms, her tastes and preferences, her personality, her strengths and weaknesses, her hopes and dreams, her accomplishments, her relationships, a small portion of her inner spiritual life, her frustrations, her dashed hopes, her spiritual gifting (administration and wisdom), her parenting style, her communication style with all and particularly with her grandchildren)!

Indeed, after living with Venita for nearly 50 years, I have a pretty good idea of the kind of person she is! I am aware of her friendships, her rural background, her artistic and creative nature, her homemaking skills, her artistic abilities, her domestic skills of cooking and home decorating, her business skills and personal budgeting skills, her compassionate involvements with children at one time in her life (daycare business) and with elderly ones at another time in her life (elderly care business), her unique communication style with me (advice, correction, insight, teasing). And other mannerisms and characteristics not here named!

A truly insightful and mature and godly woman is she! She is a high quality lady, the greatest 'gift' of my life whom God granted to me as His great 'grace gift' ('grace' means the 'unmerited favor' of God to me). Outside of God's gift to me of Jesus Christ (in a totally different and unique 'category'), Venita is the greatest 'gift' God gave to me!

Even though (according to scripture) I will not be given the privilege of enjoying her in heaven as my 'wife' (for there is no marriage in heaven), I look forward to continued 'growth' in spiritual matters with her in heaven. Surely, if not my wife, she will (if God wills) be a very close friend (hopefully my best friend) in heaven!

After I listed many of the obvious (well-known) 'aspects' (characteristics) of my wife, I have not 'told the half'! She is God's child, created in God's image. God has willed for me to live with this delightful and godly lady, for a few decades. But she came from God (at her birth) and she will return to God (at her death).

I am most privileged to cherish her as my beloved wife (companion and fellow worker in God's kingdom) for a few sacred years. As is true of all of us earthly creatures, from the hand of God we have 'come', and unto God we will 'return'. The Lord gave, and the Lord will take away.

We are on this earth to be God's stewards to be stewards of everything God gives to us - our body, our relationships (especially our marriage), our children and grandchildren, our talents and gifts, our material properties, our relationships (friends and strangers), our job (employer and fellow employees), our church, our world (ecology), our government (authorities), our poor and needy associates (call for compassion and generosity)!

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can take nothing with us when we finally die! Nothing except our 'naked soul', nothing but our 'bare character', nothing but our 'relationship with our God'!

When we depart this earthly life, we shall (at some future time in God's eternal scheme of things) give an account before God regarding the 'quality and the quantity' of our personal earthly 'stewardship'.

God will evaluate the life that we have lived - what we did with what we were given by God during our earthly pilgrimage! To what extent did we use our talents and gifts and abilities, in the service of our fellow human beings? Did we live a God-centered life, or, instead, a self-centered life? Was our life motivated by God's love, or was our life

motivated by 'love of self?

Even though there is much that I do know about my wife, I am not qualified to be her 'evaluator' in eternity! Only God, who knows her perfectly, can give a 'perfect evaluation' of her life! But, if God would ever 'need' a witness to come forth in eternity to witness in behalf of Venita Ann (White) Christian, I would gladly step forth as the 'first witness' in her behalf. It would be very easy for me to give my God a long litany (long list) of godly qualities that I observed when she lived with me for so very long on planet earth!

I, of course, am engaging in 'total speculation' (imagination) when I suggest that God might 'need' a witness to stand up in 'defense' of the godly life that Venita lived on earth. We all know that God - the all-knowing God - certainly will not 'need' any help (from humans) when the 'Day Of Evaluation' (Judgment of Works) arrives in heaven!

God knows each human being perfectly, and God will (mercifully) take everything 'into consideration', when He makes his 'final evaluation' of each person, in eternity. This 'judgment' is the 'judgment of works' (only for believers), not the terrifying 'judgment' of damnation (only for the cursed wicked human beings). Believers will never be condemned (judged) for their sins, for (through confession of sins and faith in Jesus) the sins of believers have already (on earth) been 'cast into the sea of God's forgetfulness'! In eternity, those sins will never be recalled by the 'Lord of Heaven'!

He (the Creator) who knows my wife intimately is the One who loves her perfectly (unconditionally). Venita is 'not her own' - she is created by God and is redeemed (on the cross) by Christ! 'By right of creation' and 'by right of redemption', Venita belongs to God!

My wife is 'loaned' to me (for a few decades) by God, but, of course, my wife is owned by the Creator/Redeemer forever! Before I met her on earth, and after I no longer will be able to enjoy her as my earthly companion, God possesses her 'as His very own'! She belonged to God before she was born, she belongs to God during her earthly pilgrimage, and, after she physically dies, she will continue to belong to God!

For time and for eternity, this woman, whom I have called my wife for

nearly a half century, belongs alone to her Creator/Redeemer! I enjoy her on this earth for a relatively short period of 'time', but she belongs to God forever.

It is only because of God's grace, I have been allowed to enjoy her as my wife (on earth), and, by God's grace, I anticipate enjoying her in the relationship of a heavenly citizen (not as my wife, for there is no such thing as 'marriage' in heaven)!

If this reality was more vividly and daily impressed on my brain, I would manifest a greater 'cherishing' in my relationship with my wife. I would not 'take her for granted', and I would be more tender towards her, and I would learn better to 'number my days with her'.

If I reminded myself daily of the special relationship that she has with her 'Creator/Redeemer', I would do a better job of 'serving' her - 'serving' her, not only because of her unique relationship with me, but 'serving' her better because of my recognition that she is a special chosen and holy 'vessel of the living God'!

I know that my wife loves God supremely - with all her heart and soul and mind! Jesus - first and foremost in her life! She calls Jesus 'Lord', not casually, but most seriously! Christ is 'Lord' of her life, and Christ will be 'Lord' when she takes her 'last breath'!

I have often told my wife that if I had 'searched all over the world for a wife', I could not have found a 'better wife'. Oh, of course, my wife is definitely 'human'. She may be, at times, 'angelic' in her appearance, but, the truth of the matter is, my wife is definitely not an 'angel'. As is 'true' of all of us, she has her faults - but not very many of them! She is so mature, because she is so Christian in her attitudes and in her actions and in her motives!

Like everyone else, she is a member of a fallen race, and she needs, daily (like everyone else) the application of the precious blood of Jesus to her heart and mind and spirit. She, like everyone else, has her weaknesses and her faults and her failures, but, nevertheless, she is a quality woman, and, most importantly, she is a very godly woman!

My two daughters greatly admire their mother for many reasons, but mostly because they know that she has consistently lived a godly life before them! They have observed their mother in many different situ-

ations of life, and they know that their mother has always sought to live a life that is worthy of the reputation of the living Lord whom she deeply loves.

They know that their mother is a very talented and intelligent woman, highly gifted as a problem-solver (administrator), and, as a follower of Christ, a woman who also is endowed with the 'gift of wisdom'. They highly value her insights which she lovingly offers when they, as daughters, are facing serious challenges in their own lives.

They know that their mother is a source of wisdom and of comfort and of encouragement, during the times of their own trials of life. Both of these daughters have, for many years, felt very 'close' to their mother, and they feel 'free' to confide in their mother during the different episodes of their own growing life.

When my oldest daughter recently (in my presence) told her mother that she was 'amazing' and that 'she could do anything', I 'chimed in' and I said that I agreed. I said that anything I could do, her mother could do better! And then I jokingly said, "Well, there is one thing that I can do better than your mother can do - I am a better runner!" (I have run consistently - almost daily - since I was young, and Venita has hardly ever run! Ha!)

Venita is a good 'problem-solver'. She likes to face and to solve many different and difficult kinds of 'challenges' (including many business challenges). Venita's ability to resolve problems is amazing, and her ability to 'talk to business persons' on the phone is remarkable. She has told me that she 'loves' to talk to various persons on the phone, concerning business matters. Because of this desire, obviously, Venita has made my own life 'much easier'! Frankly, I don't personally care to talk on the phone, except to my family members.

After many years of talking to business persons on the phone, Venita has developed considerable 'skills' - skills in 'getting to the heart' of a problem by asking the right questions and by equipping herself to understand the nature of a particular business problem - sometimes a rather complex, business issue. It may take her considerable time to find a solution to a particular problem, but usually the solution will finally be forthcoming!

Another (similar) manifestation of her gift of administration is her enjoyment (passion?) to 'tackle projects' of many different kinds. She has told me (more than once) that, even when she was a child she had to be involved in the pursuit of some kind of specific 'project'.

As evidenced by the fact that she has a melancholic temperament - an 'artistic temperament' - she sometimes finds herself dealing with 'emotional low feelings'. She told me that, when she experienced rather 'low feelings', she (as a child) would pursue some 'project'- rearranging her bedroom or mowing her large lawn or trimming the scrubs. She said that when she would 'lose herself' in some kind of concrete 'project', that she would experience a new surge of enthusiasm in place of her 'low emotional feelings'. Venita said that throughout her adult life she knows that she 'needs' to be involved (at all times) in one or more 'projects'.

It is through this creative involvement in some type of project (small or large project) that she finds herself maintaining a 'good feeling' inside of herself. She enjoys (to some extent) leisure and recreation and socializing with friends, but these activities do not 'sustain' her over a long period of time!

What brings meaning to Venita is the facing of significant 'challenges'- 'challenges' which give her the opportunity (through the use of her God-given talents) to find meaningful solutions to dilemmas and to difficulties!

This dominant characteristic of my wife is rather easy to identify in concrete situations in which she is involved. During the many years that Venita served as a pastor's wife, she involved herself in countless projects - all of which contributed directly or indirectly to the edification of many persons. As the children's director in our local church, it seemed like she was always rearranging class rooms, or recruiting scores of volunteers to teach classes, or ordering curriculum, or making curtains to divide rooms, or a hundred other projects.

Recruitment of students and teachers, not only for Sunday school classes, and 'Children's Classes', and 'Nursery Classes', and 'Vacation Bible School' programs, - not only for these 'regular programs' - but also for special programs, like midweek children's programs and 'Summer Camps'. Venita had that 'magic touch' when it

came to recruitment of scores of adults to teach classes in many different contexts.

She was 'persuasive', but not coercive, in her recruitment of volunteers in the local church. Scores of adults (with a variety of talents and experience) readily answered her 'call' to commitment! There were hardly any adults who 'refused' Venita's challenge to be involved in the total children's program at the church! Venita 'juggled the balls' for many years - that is, she coordinated multiple children's programs in our local church.

Venita worked as hard as anyone that I knew. She had a clear vision for growth (numerically and spiritually), and it seemed that nothing could stop her in her pursuits for excellence in the labors of love and Christian service! Venita's many adult recruits (volunteers for the children's programs) greatly respected Venita and they loved to work with her.

Venita had high expectations for the volunteers, but the volunteers knew that Venita cherished each of them and that Venita would do everything she could to make their job (in teaching) successful and meaningful. They knew (instinctively, if not consciously) that they, as volunteers, were primarily working for the 'Lord of the Church', and only secondarily for the 'Children's Director' (Venita)!

It is no wonder that God blessed the intensive efforts of Venita (and the labors of the many volunteers)! So many children grew in every way, in their lives! The Lord Jesus Christ, when He traveled the dusty roads of Galilee, loved to take children upon his lap, to teach the children, and to laugh with the children! Jesus said that anyone who accepts the 'little ones' (children), accepts Him!

During the several years (I think seven years) that Venita looked after pre-school children, in her 'Home Day Care', she, again, was doing the work that Jesus strongly commends! She lovingly cared for these 'little ones', in her well-organized, artistically-appealing, creatively-run 'day care'. Again, Venita's desire to be involved in the challenge of 'recruitment' (of persuaded parents with their challenging children) was fulfilled during those several years. Not an easy job, but, nevertheless, a rewarding job.

Each succeeding job that Venita received (from her Lord) seemed to be more 'challenging' and more 'difficult' than any previous jobs that she had! When Venita accepted the job as administrator of the new Christian Day School, this challenge was, indeed, rather difficult, even overwhelming, in terms of responsibilities and requirements! But Venita arose to the occasion, to the challenge, and to the 'opportunity' (as she perceived it)!

She did not have a degree in school administration, and her learning curve was 'sharp'. She learned fast, and she soon realized that, in spite of many obstacles that she faced because of a 'new beginning', she greatly loved her job - the job of recruiting literally hundreds of students for the school.

Within the first five years of the existence of the school, the enrollment grew from 11 students (kindergarten only) to 225 students (all 13 grades). This was a miracle, but a miracle that God produced as a result of intense effort (outreach) by Venita.

Almost single-handedly, Venita recruited the hundreds of students who became proud enrollees of Choice City Christian School! During those 8 years (the foundational years of the school), Venita 'wore several hats' - even involving herself in the task of personally purchasing school desks at an auction.

When Venita accepted the position as administrator of the Christian School, she accepted a 'challenge' that taxed her skills and her energy and her personal resources to their very 'limits'! In spite of (or was it 'because of'?) all the 'challenges' that Venita faced during those eight years that she was 'head' of the School, Venita grew in her faith in the Lord, and in her love for many people, and in her knowledge of administration and leadership.

God enabled her (in spite of her lack of formal training) to be an outstanding administrator of the School. She was widely respected, and she was well liked by students and by teachers and by parents and by school board members.

Her creative instincts served her well during those years, for she had often to be innovative in addressing multiple problems (curriculum development, recruitment of hundreds of students, facility availabil-

ity, financing, discipline of students on occasion, extracurricular activities (like location of facilities for sports programs).

Even with all her intense labors and her untiring devotion to the school, Venita knew that (as the Bible notes) "unless the Lord builds the house, they that labor, labor in vain!" She knew, in other words, that, unless the Lord supported and promoted the Christian School, her own labors and her own attempts at recruitments and fund raising - these would all be purposeless and fruitless!

She prayed often for the School, and many others prayed for the success of the School. God wonderfully answered the prayers of those who cared for the welfare of the School. The School did prosper, and so many (both teachers and students) did experience great growth in their lives!

The growth of the School was 'God's doing', first and foremost, and only, secondarily, because of the prayers and the gifts and the teaching of many committed persons, and because of the aggressive outreach by Venita in recruitment of students! It was God who motivated Venita to work so hard and to sacrifice so freely (sacrifice of her time and talents and money)!

God enabled Venita to embrace the many different challenges which were integral to the operating of a new School. Venita had to learn to 'reach out' in many different directions and to many different persons (whose interests in the School were varied in kind and in intensity).

Venita loved the financial challenges, she loved the personnel challenges, she loved the student recruitment challenges, she loved the challenges of maximizing the limited spaces for classrooms, she loved the school board challenges, she loved the challenges involved in the locating of adequate spaces and facilities to 'house' the many different sports, she loved the challenges of communications with school parents!

She loved the challenge connected with student disciplinarian problems, she loved the challenge of 'tapping' financial sources for student tuition grants, she loved the challenge of maintaining good relations with other Christian Day Schools (both in her community and in other communities outside of her city), she loved the challenge of keeping in

'good graces' with the community leadership and with the 'legal' entities of the city and the State.

Her 'hands were full' when she was the leader (head master) of the Christian School. She 'made do' with rather 'limited resources' (money and facilities, etc.)! God blessed Venita's efforts and God answered the prayers of many who regularly 'committed the school to God's enablement!' God prospered 'Choice City Christian School' in amazing ways! Among a multitude of 'praise notes', this is another 'praise note'! "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!"

Venita has faced challenge after challenge during the many years of her life's journey - all starting when she was quite young. As mentioned earlier, Venita has always enjoyed 'tackling projects'! Whether it was the 'project' of Venita rearranging her bedroom (when she was a child), or whether it was the challenge of 'starting' and 'growing' and 'developing' a Christian School, Venita 'thrives on solving problems', she 'loves to make things happen', she loves to put the many 'pieces of the puzzle' together when it comes to solving mind-stretching problems (administratively or ecclesiastically or financially or spiritually).

God is the 'God of all wisdom'. If any man (or woman) lacks wisdom, let him/her ask of God, and it shall be given to him/her - if he or she asks in faith! (James 1) Countless times, in prayer and in meditation, when problems seemed tough to handle, Venita turned in humility to the God whom she deeply loves. The result? Sometimes miracles happened - and all to the glory of God!

Her 'spiritual gifting' of wisdom (along with her gift of administration) easily (naturally) led her, throughout her long lifetime, to share insights, to gently give advice, to give 'direction', to solve problems, and even to make 'corrections' in delicate situations.

Of course, as my wife, Venita has (for many years) exercised all of these 'manifestations' of her 'spiritual gifting' (of wisdom and of administration), in her daily relationships with me (her husband), and she has done so very freely and very openly and (most of the time) most productively!

Another important illustration as to how Venita has used her 'gift of administration' is seen in her competent 'running' of a home elderly

care business. Of course, each time there is a family who contacts Venita regarding the possibility of placing their elderly mother in her home, Venita must honestly and humbly, yet very confidently, 'sell' these family members (sons and daughters of an elderly person) on the 'quality' of her home - on the quality of the various 'offerings' which she has for the care of an older person. Venita has a near perfect record, in terms of the effectiveness of her 'sales presentation' (of the quality of care presented) to the relatives of the elderly one.

Almost everyone who inquires, quite quickly enrolls to come to her home! To put it humorously, almost all who 'look' end up 'leaping' into our home! Of course, even though many of the elderly ones are not mentally able to make rational decisions (regarding their moving to our house to live), Venita, nevertheless, has always treated every elderly one with dignity and with respect.

Before these loved ones (who are seeking a place for their elderly mother) make a decision to make our home the home for their mother, it is vitally important that they have objective facts as a basis for their decision.

Venita is most skilled (as an administrator and as a problem-solver) to communicate with the relatives (of the elderly one), and, with an honest appeal (not an appeal involving 'pressure') Venita 'sells' our place as a comfortable and nurturing place to live!

Almost without exception, the loved ones (of the elderly ones) choose Venita's elderly care home as the place where they wish for their dear mother to live. Venita's skill, as an excellent administrator, has been demonstrated, time and time again. Of course, this God-given skill (administration) has been used countless times, during the last nearly 20 years, in the problem-solving needs of the daily operation of her elderly care business. Each of the residents has different kinds of aging needs, and, thus, Venita has to apply great wisdom in the personalized care of each of the several elderly folks.

Venita has applied great discernment and patience and compassion, as she has awaited the death of most of these ladies, and as she has tenderly cared for various older ones as they have breathed their last breath! Of course, the mental and the physical (mobility) capabilities of the various residents are unique to each lady (there have been no

men), and, again, Venita soon learned, in doing this type of unique work, to be very adaptable and flexible to each lady.

Venita, as driven and as goal-oriented as she is, had to 'get into low gear' as she worked with most of these ladies. In order for Venita to be able to minister to these precious ladies (several demented), Venita was required to develop considerable patience. They were slow with almost everything in their life (and, of course, they could not help this).

Understandably, Venita had considerable 'adjustments' to be made, when she first started to 'relate' to these ladies (ancient ladies), many in their 90's! Each lady, obviously, had a different 'temperament'. Some ladies were 'quiet' (hardly talking). Some ladies were rather 'bright' and alert mentally (definitely in the 'minority', however).

The brightest lady whom we enjoyed for only one year before she died- this lady wanted me to take her on walks regularly in the out-of-doors, and she once recited Shakespeare at our table, and she regularly shared recipes with Venita that she would like prepared as meals!

Most ladies, on the other end of the scale, were so demented that Venita and I could hardly understand their attempted verbalizing! One lady was with us for 11 years, before she died at nearly 104! Both of our mothers passed away in our upper bedroom, just a few feet apart, and almost exactly one year apart!

I have shared these few details about the elderly care business, to demonstrate that God used Venita's 'gift of administration' in the ministry of caring for elderly folks. God also used this wonderful 'gift' in the ministry to pre-school children and in the ministry to children in our local church, and in the ministry to both children and teenagers at the Christian School. Obviously, Venita used her 'gift' to minister to many adults as well, through her involvement in multiple, adult-related programs in the local church.

It is true that a spiritual gift will likely be 'established' and be 'fixed' in the life of a believer, but it is also true that a spiritual gift may find expression in its application in many different ministries, and in many various contexts, and with several different 'age groups'. Everything I just stated is true of Venita.

Many different ministries, many different contexts, several different 'age groups' (infants, children, teens, adults, elderly citizens). During Venita's long life and by means of her varied ministries, God has allowed Venita to exercise her 'spiritual gifts' (administration and wisdom) in a manner such that lives were 'touched' and were 'blessed' in many different places, through many different situations, to all the various age groups!

What a fulfilling way for Venita to use her 'spiritual gifts!' Venita will only know the extent of the effectiveness of her administrative ministries, when she hears the words of her Loving Master: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Enter the joys of thy Lord! Thank you, dear servant of mine, for loving my people, for using your 'gift' to minister to my people so faithfully! Come, now, into the kingdom which I have prepared for you, and now help me to administer the affairs of my vast kingdom! You can use your 'gift of administration' forever in my kingdom!"

I asked an older lady, when I was a teenager, if she would pray that someday God would lead me to a quality woman, to be my wife. God answered the prayer of that godly 'saint', when I met and when I dated and when I finally married Venita! I sincerely believe that God 'hand-picked' the lady that I was to cherish as my life-time companion.

She has been the best woman as a wife for me that I could ever have imagined! Admittedly, the 'road' that we have traveled together for nearly five decades, has not always been a 'smooth' road. We have experienced some rough dips, even some 'pot holes', along our joint pathway. There have been far too many times that (impulsive as I am) I have needed to 'humble myself' before her to 'plead her forgiveness'. I have not always been the easiest person to live with.

I don't think she has ever questioned my deep love for her, but, nevertheless, my humanity (faults and failings) have brought great challenges to her. There are countless virtues that make Venita a truly 'great lady', but among the greatest virtues is her willingness and her ability to quickly grant me 'total forgiveness' when I have miserably failed!

Thank God, Venita has not held 'grudges' against me, as a result of my 'infliction of wounds', and as a result of my insensitive words and inexcusable expressions of anger. She has quickly forgiven me (of my

faults and failures - which have been many), and she has always quickly restored our offended relationship!

She has always been determined that we as a couple 'move forward', to 'forget any of our past offenses.' Why can she do this? Because she long ago made a commitment that our marriage would be 'solid' and 'lasting' and 'God-honoring'!

I have been totally faithful (morally-speaking) to my wife (thank God!), so I am not referring to 'moral breakdowns' in our marriage. Venita is totally trustworthy! I trust her at any time, and at any place, and with any person! She is a woman of absolute moral integrity and inner and outer purity!

I am 'proud' that there have been a few (godly) men in our local church who have found it 'natural' to give her a 'hug'. Venita, for some reason, was able, particularly, to 'relate' to men in our church (men who are like 'Christian brothers' to her).

By way of contrast, the following is a list of virtues that I think concisely describes the character of my wife. Incomplete, admittedly, but the following list of her virtues serves as my attempt to offer a 'tribute' to the person who means everything to me, to the person who has left an indelible mark on my life (during a half century).

Venita is realistic, not idealistic; practical, not theoretical; personal, not impersonal; active, not passive; optimistic, not pessimistic; good actions, not good intentions; concrete, not abstract; direct, not complex; transparent, not scheming; open, not hidden; approachable, not distant; good-humored, not somber; honest, not deceptive; present-oriented, not future-oriented; moderate, not extreme; balanced, not fanatical!

Venita is rational, not simplistic; affirms basic beliefs, not abstract theology; discerning, not naive; serious-minded, not shallow-minded; artistic, not mundane; forgiving, not grudge-bearing; industrious, not lazy; thoughtful, not impulsive; confident, not self-effacing; patient, not restless; humble, not arrogant!

Venita is others-oriented, not self-preoccupied; Christ-centered, not self-centered; diligent, not slothful; wise, not foolish; generous in giving, not stingy in giving; prayerful, not careless; reverent, not profane;

resilient, not defeated; inclusive of people, not exclusive of people; confrontational, not cowardly!

Venita is trusting, not suspicious; insightful of mind, not dense of mind; hospitable, not impolite; attentive to God, not close-minded to God; loyal in church attendance, not sporadic in church attendance; peace-loving, not argumentative; conciliatory, not adversarial; humorous, not frivolous.

These many 'traits' describe the noble woman whom I married so long ago! During the last several decades, my wife has 'grown in grace and in the knowledge of her Lord Jesus Christ'! Slow growth, at times, but, nevertheless, steady growth in the ways of her dear Lord! She, like every other believer, is simply a 'Christian in the making', a 'Christian under construction', and a person who is reflecting, more and more, the 'image' of Christ!

'Cultivating Christ-like character' is what life on this earth is all about! To develop that kind of character takes a believer plenty of time and plenty of effort and discipline - but, of all things that are 'worthwhile', this is definitely the most 'worthwhile' goal of life!

What else can any of us take out of this world when we die - but our character? Everything else is 'left behind'! Who we serve in our life determines where we go after our earthly life is spent! We only take our 'character' with us - a righteous character or an unrighteous character!

Venita is becoming more and more like the One whom she deeply loves! Therefore, the beauty of her personality is more and more revealed to those around her! The many 'traits' (listed above) are some of the 'traits' that reveal a Christlike character! I thank God very much that He gave to me a Christlike wife - a wife who has blessed my own life more than she will ever know!

CAN YOU AND I 'GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THINGS'?

I want increasingly to be a more thankful and grateful person - a person who practices praising God for who He is and for what He is doing, for His ability to make all things work into a pattern for my good and for God's ultimate glory! A little chorus that I learned when I was a college student: "Anyone can sing when the sun is shining, but it takes

a song in the night."

The Bible does not command us (believers) to give thanks to God 'For' everything, but rather 'In' everything. I certainly am not to praise God 'for' sin and for sinful actions by wicked persons. But I am to praise God that He will 'use' evil events ultimately (perhaps mysteriously) for His glory and for the good of 'righteous sufferers.'

John the Baptist was not thankful for the evil works of his time, and he, indeed, even blasted the evil ways of evil men! John the Baptist called these evil persons to repent of their evil ways, and also to make proper 'restitution' ('right their wrongs').

Jesus too blasted the evil ways of evil persons. Just read the many 'woe unto you' passages! Jesus loved the religious leaders, but Jesus, nevertheless, hated the hypocritical and legalistic ways of these religious leaders!

However, while John the Baptist and Jesus Himself confronted evil ways, neither of these men hated the souls of evil men! Believers, following their example, must never cross the line from properly hating the evil deeds, to hating the evildoer!

HATING THE 'EVIL DEED' WHILE STILL 'LOVING' THE EVIL DOER!

I have found that, during those times when I am raging against the sin (betrayal and deception) of a sinful person, I am soon tempted to express 'hatred' towards the evildoer himself! I am permitted to confront evil actions (and even to express great hatred towards the evil and destructive actions), but, if I remain a follower of Jesus, I am not permitted to hold the sinner in contempt and in hatred!

I know, from personal experience, how easily this transfer (from hating sin to hating the sinner) can take place - especially when someone, who was once 'close' to me, has turned against me and against my loved ones!

CAN I BE 'GRATEFUL' DURING TIMES OF GREAT INJUSTICE?

The temptation is great to fall into bitter (angry) attacks toward the offending person (who was one time my friend). It hurts greatly (deeply)

when someone betrays me, and it is terribly difficult (during that heart-broken time) to spend my time "rejoicing in all things." During the times when I am attacked (when I am betrayed and I am slandered and I am even 'falsely accused in court'), it is sadly far too easy for me to 'complain' to God and to 'defend' myself against aggressive evil slanders and against evil persons!

Is it ever 'right' for me to 'complain' to God and to 'defend' myself? Can I have these responses against evil circumstances, and, at the same time, have an attitude of 'rejoicing in the Lord', an attitude of 'thanking God in all things'? I am not sure if these sentiments can co-exist at the same time.

Is there not a time for Christians to stand up and to 'fight' against evil, to 'defend justice'? After all, the apostle Paul, when he was treated unjustly, appealed to the supreme court of Rome (to the emperor), where he sought justice for the way he was treated by evil men!

Believers are commanded to 'rejoice in all things'. Perhaps this means that believers are to be grateful (with a sense of 'joy') that God's will is going to be ultimately fulfilled, in spite of the wretched circumstances (from evil) that they are presently experiencing.

Surely, God does not expect me to 'laugh' and to act 'hilariously' when I am being attacked by the devil! As a normal human being, I will likely be feeling lousy (sorrowful) when I am in the 'heat of the spiritual battle'.

If I were following more closely in the 'footsteps' of Jesus, and if I were more closely following the example of the greatest of all Christians (the apostle Paul), I would find myself 'rejoicing' during my trials rather than feeling 'lousy' during my trials.

To the glory of God, I must witness to the fact that I have, indeed, at times felt the peace of God attending to my worried soul, during times of duress and affliction and hardship and grief (as when I was in a court setting because of false accusations, and as when I was told that my 'case' of melanoma (skin cancer) could be 'very serious' and possibly even fatal)!

In both of these 'situations' (among many other difficult situations), I felt the 'hand of God' upon my trembling heart and upon my confused

mind! At a time when I was embarrassed (somewhat angry and fearful) - as during the somber court scene - or at a time when I had to face the reality of the pathology report that indicated the presence of cancer in my aging body, I sensed the 'undergirding hand' of the divine Comforter!

It was very difficult (in terms of the actual scene and in terms of my personal emotions) in both of these fairly recent 'situations', but God 'delivered' on His promise to me (as one of His many and unworthy children), namely, the promise that He would be with me when I went 'through the flood of adversity'!

Jesus gave the 'promise of all promises' to His children, namely, the promise that He would 'never leave us nor forsake us'! Through joy and through sorrow, through gain and through loss, through honor and through dishonor, through success and through failure, through confidence and through fear - Jesus promised that He would never leave us, that He would give us His 'sufficient grace' to meet every trial and to confront every loss and to endure every heartbreaking sorrow!

He promised to rejoice with us when we rejoice, and to weep with us when we weep. Jesus laughs with us when we laugh, and Jesus sheds tears with us when we shed tears. Jesus feels more deeply for the human race than we could ever image!

The Spirit is beside the sincere believer when he is honored (to keep him from falling into the 'pit of pride'), and the Spirit also is beside the harassed believer who is undergoing cruel persecution (to encourage him and to steady him and to empower him while his very life is at stake).

Only the indwelling Holy Spirit has the power and the resources to empower a believer to be 'thankful' during his times of 'success' and 'achievement' (to check a believer's tendency towards 'pride'), and the Spirit is also present during the periods of 'personal loss and outward persecution' (to check a believer's tendency towards discouragement').

The temptations of both pride and discouragement are 'real' and 'ever present' temptations, and to yield to these temptations is to destroy

the 'attitude of gratitude' in a believer's life. When the 'sun' is shining in a believer's life, there is a tendency to be proud and 'self-sufficient' and 'overly-confident' (to think more highly of one's self that he ought to think). When the 'sky is overcast and it is raining' in a believer's life, there is a tendency to be discouraged and forlorn and negative and even critical and bitter in spirit!

In both (contrasting) situations, a believer needs the stabilizing 'force' of the Holy Spirit. The believer needs the 'gift' of gratitude - a sense of thanksgiving for all that God has provided in one's life - thanksgiving and praise that God is the 'giver of all good and perfect gifts' of success and of honor and of achievements (a recognition that without God there could be no 'real' and 'lasting' success, and that, therefore, all the glory for advancements in one's life belongs to the Creator of all 'gifting')!

Learning to praise God when the 'sun' is shining is important, and, indeed, is a requirement for the sincere follower of Christ! On the other hand, when it is 'raining' (presence of hardships and losses), there needs also to be thanksgiving and praise! Why? Because God is the 'keeper of the soul of every man', because God has allowed all hardships and all losses and all persecutions and all sufferings in the life of every believer!

Why rejoice and praise God during my times of hardship and loss, during the times when it is 'raining'. Because the entrance (presence) of all 'reverses' (sufferings and grief's) in a believer's life is for a 'redemptive purpose' - for the purpose of strengthening and perfecting the 'character' of the believer.

Because God has nothing but 'good' in mind for His children, therefore, in spite of my personal emotional eruptions during adversities, I (a follower of Christ) can actually 'be thankful', I can actually 'praise God' for His loving oversight of my life (with both the 'sun' and the 'rain')! With these 'truths' in mind, I can (gradually) learn to 'give thanks at all times', to 'praise God in all circumstances'.

Praise is not always an expression of my heart (of my 'feelings'), but praise, instead, is an 'act of my will'! I 'will' to praise God, regardless of my feelings of joy or of my feelings of sadness, because God is worthy and He is deserving of my praise during all of life's experiences,

amidst all the changes and the chances of my life!

God 'inhabits the praises of His people!' God is pleased when I praise Him! I praise God because of the inherent worth of the character of the Mighty God and Creator!

Why shouldn't a mere creature praise the One who created him? It is 'right' and it is 'proper' to praise God, for God is the One who alone is absolutely 'good' in the entire universe! He is righteous and just and totally honest (integrity) and absolutely holy (pure and without any defilement) and peaceful (committed to reconciliation of His Body) and loving (motivated in action only by divine love).

In other words, it is the 'right thing' for me to praise my Lord and Savior! He saved my soul, forgave my sins, cleansed my heart (and continues to cleanse my heart), comforted me in my many distresses throughout my long life, given me guidance, intervened in the sparing of my life, given me multiple answers to prayer, provided for my every need (and given me many gifts beyond my basic needs), given me a wife and daughters and grandchildren to love and to cherish, given me an extended family to cherish, given me gifts to use in the 'work of building God's kingdom', and so much more!

Unfortunately, I am always 'behind in my praises' to God! God has always given me far more 'sunshine' than I have thanked and praised Him for!

Have I learned to quickly thank God when I feel satisfaction for a goal that I have reached? Have I, on the other hand, thanked and praised God for some 'loss' or 'disappointment' or outright 'tragedy' or 'grief' that I have experienced?

Praise should be the 'heartbeat' of my life, based on the fact that I serve a 'good God' - a God who will never deceive me, a God who will always look after me (even during a time when I must lay down my physical life, in loyalty to my God)! During both the 'sun' and the 'rain', God has pledged (promised) to be with me. Jesus said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake you!"

Of course, the development of any relationship depends upon mutual

loyalty. "Abide in me, and I will abide in you!" The condition that Jesus laid down for a continuing lifetime relationship. "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life!" A wonderful promise that will be fulfilled in my life, if I remain faithful to my Lord, until I die.

I intensely 'hated' the deceitful actions of the schemer (plotter) who took me to court (on totally false charges), and, even though I won the court case, the initiator of the court 'case' remains 'on the loose' (supposedly living a 'normal life'). I wish him nothing but the 'best' in his life, and I pray for a spiritual transformation to happen in his life.

In the court case, while I loved the perpetrator (false accuser), I hated the 'evil' that he was plotting towards me. In the case of the cancer cells, I prayed (with many others) that the cancer cells would be destroyed! From all indications (as reported by the pathology report, and as confirmed by two doctors) the cancer (in some way) was totally 'killed' (removed) from my right upper arm (and the cancer was not found on any of the arm or in the lymph nodes as the doctors expected!).

I prayed, in one case, that the false accusations would be 'killed' in court (when the evidence was presented). I prayed, in the other very different situation, that the cancer cells ('enemies' against me in a different way) would be 'killed'! Both the false accusation and the attacking cancer cells were 'killed' (destroyed)! All to the 'glory of God', for it was God who rescued me from both the two different kinds of 'enemies'!

When Paul was alone in a Roman prison, awaiting his trial, I am sure that he (as a servant of God) was 'rejoicing' that God was taking care of him, that God would have the 'final word' regarding the outcome of his trial in Rome.

The amazing thing is this: Paul, who finally was executed as a martyr at the hand of wicked Nero, was able to 'rejoice in the Lord's goodness' even during the most difficult of circumstances of his life! God enabled Paul to 'rejoice evermore' both during his times of joy and during his times of great sorrow!

Nevertheless, the account reveals that Paul experienced, at times, some loneliness and some sorrow, while he was in prison, awaiting his

verdict. Paul rejoiced in Christ, in spite of his heart-breaks and losses and unjust treatments! Even though Paul was a 'spiritual giant', he was, nevertheless, 'human' like everyone else, and he had 'natural feelings' like every other person who has feelings.

'Rejoicing at all times' perhaps means that we (as believers) are to be 'happy' that our God has everything 'under control', confident that 'though the wrong seems very strong, God is the Ruler yet.' Whether we live or whether we die, we can 'rejoice' that we are in the 'hollow of God's hand', that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

WILL GOD'S JUSTICE BE VINDICATED AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS BE EXALTED?

I am commanded to 'rejoice evermore'! The fulfillment of this 'high command' from God is possible only because I believe that God has control over the tragedies of my life (the injustices and inequities of my life). I can 'rejoice evermore' if I truly believe that God desires good for me, at all times and in all circumstances - even when my heart is breaking because of the schemes of evil men who have brought me nothing but great distress and threatened destruction!

I must learn to forgive those who do me wrong. I must remember that, though God hates evil and though God will bring eventual just punishment to the evildoer, nevertheless, God loves all persons, and God wills that none should perish but that all should come to repentance. Both God's justice and God's mercy will be demonstrated (eventually) in the life of every sinner (including the sinner who has chosen to greatly trouble me).

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO LOVE THOSE WHO DESPITEFULLY USE ME?

If God loves evil persons (which He does), then I, too, must love evil persons! Of course, it is not within my own ability to love those mean persons who plot evil against me! But, through the enabling Spirit within me, the 'miracle of all miracles' can happen within my heart - I can supernaturally love my 'enemies'!

When the love of God is shed abroad in my heart, through the power of

the Holy Spirit, I can actually love the unlovely person who hates me; I can wish (will) nothing but the best for the man who wishes nothing but the worst for me!

This is the supernatural love of God - a love that I 'obtain' from the Spirit, not a love that I 'attain' through my own efforts and abilities! If Jesus said that I am to return good for evil, and that I am to pray for those who spitefully use me, then, by God's grace, I must take the 'high road' of forgiveness and love and compassion towards wretched persons! Even though I have personally been 'hurt' by others, I must continue to express loving actions towards those who have hurt me!

**MUST I 'LIKE' EVERYONE, OR AM I COMMANDED ONLY TO
'LOVE' EVERYONE?**

I am not called to 'like' these wretched persons, but I am called to love them (for Jesus' sake)! The time may come, or the time may not come, when God will enable me to actually 'like' these troublesome persons, as well as (by God's grace) to love them. God commands me to love sinners (my persecutors), but God does not command me (universally) to 'like' all sinners.

After my persecutors have sought my forgiveness (and after I have granted forgiveness to them), I may develop a 'close' relationship with these persons (my former 'enemies'), but (on the other hand) after I have granted forgiveness to these one-time troublesome persons, I may not find myself personally 'attracted' to them.

Psychologically and socially and intellectually, I might (amazingly) find a basis for compatibility with my one-time 'enemies! Remarkably, a friendship with these former 'enemies' might be (gradually) developed! On the other hand, after I am reconciled with my 'enemies', I might want to simply 'wish them Godspeed' and tell them that I will be praying for them. I may sense in my inner spirit that there is no 'basis' for an immediate (or future) friendship with my former 'enemies'.

Even though (by God's grace) I have honestly reconciled with my former 'enemy', I may soon recognize that I have no 'inner drawing' in my heart to become one of his friends. When I see him (perhaps occasionally), I will 'treat him kindly' (I will be courteous to him), but - unless the Lord directs otherwise - I will not seek him out to develop a friend-

ship with him.

The act of 'loving' is an act of the human will (choice), whereas 'liking' is an emotional response of the heart. Through the Spirit's enabling power, I can choose to love everyone. Supernatural loving is the product of the supernatural indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It is impossible for me to 'love' my enemies, unless the Spirit makes this 'loving' possible, unless the Spirit changes the desires and the motivations of my inner nature. (Romans 5:5)

How could Jesus love His enemies, love the ones who crucified Him? It was because Jesus was committed to always obey His Father, because Jesus was committed to demonstrate, once and for all, the 'nature of God' which is the 'nature of Love'! "Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down to earth!" For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to come to a sin-cursed earth, to die for lost mankind!

DID JESUS, WHO LOVED EVERYONE, ALSO 'LIKED' EVERYONE WHOM HE KNEW?

There are only certain persons to whom I am emotionally and socially attracted. Jesus loved everyone, but there were only certain persons (when He traveled earth's landscape) to whom Jesus was attracted! To a much greater extent than is true of me (or that is true of even the greatest 'saints' on earth - including Paul who, for a few years, did not see the potential in 'young Mark'), I say, that more than any other person, Jesus saw 'possibilities' and 'potential' in human lives - especially in human lives that were 'wrecked' by sin's ravages.

Think of the 'rough band' of Jesus' disciples! Wonderfully, Jesus wants, not only to 'save' sinners (all sinners), but Jesus wants to make 'saints' out of persons who are, because of the ravages of sin, 'wretches'. Jesus wants to be the friend of 'sinners', and He wants to enjoy the 'company' of converted sinners - and Jesus calls these transformed persons His 'friends'.

If Jesus desires to convert His 'enemies' and then to turn His enemies into His friends, should I not be willing to develop a 'friendship' with my former 'enemies' (even though I have no personal 'attraction' to my 'now-reconciled' enemy?

Even if I have a residue of 'distrust' of my former 'enemy' (because of his former life of deception and plotting against me), God can restore a spirit of trust in me! But, in noting the amazing trust that Jesus placed in His former 'enemies' (and as much as I admire this quality in the Son of God), I do not believe that I am commanded to 'like' everyone, even though (assuredly and definitely) I am commanded to love every single person on the face of the earth!

***JESUS INTENSELY LOVED THE SINNERS, BUT HE INTENSELY
HATED THEIR SINS!***

Who did Jesus love? Jesus loved everyone, including the great sinners (even the hypocritical Jewish leaders whose fury against Jesus finally resulted in Jesus' crucifixion). Even from the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do!" While it is true that Jesus loved all persons universally (without exception), there were persons whose attitudes and whose lifestyle Jesus despised (those who perverted the Gospel message through legalism and ritualism and hollow religious ceremonies)!

Jesus did not 'like' certain religious leaders - leaders with whom Jesus (in no way) could 'form warm friendships'! At times, Jesus confronted these vicious 'enemies' (those who were plotting His destruction), but there were other times when Jesus intentionally avoided all contact with these 'enemies against the truth'!

Jesus loved these 'wretched (religious) sinners and He sought to bring them to the 'light of truth', but, there was no 'affinity' (no common ground for friendship). While Jesus loved His enemies, He certainly did not 'like' them (their lifestyle and their goals and their motives and their value system).

While He (God's Lover sent from heaven) showed nothing but love to all (including His enemies), Jesus, on the other hand, hated their horrible sins (religious sins of mere ceremony and legalism and ritualism), and there was nothing in their lives that drew the heart of Jesus to them.

These religious bigots (religious leaders) were not 'attractive' to Jesus. Contrast Jesus' dislike of these kinds of persons, to the great (human) attraction that Jesus had for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (sib-

lings whom Jesus considered to be among His very closest 'friends'). Even Jesus, while He loved the entire human race, had a 'circle of persons' with whom He spent quality time and for whom He had a great affection, and with whom He had a great 'affinity'.

Jesus loved everyone without exception (including the hypocritical Jewish leaders who plotted His death), but there was only a handful of persons whom Jesus considered to be His closest friends! While it is true that Jesus loved the entire world (including even those who were plotting Jesus' death), it is also true that there were a few persons (like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) with whom Jesus loved to be in their 'comfortable company'! The Bible says that there was a handful of 'women' for whom Jesus expressed gratitude, because of their hospitality in supplying some of Jesus' basic material needs!

**AM I COMMANDED TO BECOME A 'FRIEND' TO MY FORMER
'ENEMY'?**

I suppose that a 'case' could be made that, to the extent that a Christian is 'mature in the faith', to that same extent will he 'widen his circle of friendships' to include his former enemies! Someone might declare that, to the extent that a Christian has had sufficient maturity to forgive his 'enemies' and to reconcile himself with those 'enemies', to that same extent should he be able to include in his 'circle of friends' his former enemies!

However, if a student in human behavior (including a student in the study of the meaning of Christian Maturity) makes the above assertions (correlations), it is very important that he/she not be quick to judge a fellow Christian if that fellow Christian chooses 'not' to pursue the development of a friendship with a former enemy.

Wonderful if a Christian has a desire to include his former 'enemies' within his own personal 'circle of friendship', but there is no biblical command that a believer must 'like' everyone (including his former 'enemy'). If a Christian can both 'love' and 'like' a fellow human being, that is 'ideal', but the 'ideal' life is not always possible in this world that contains complex situations and complex personalities! The Spirit is sent to enable us (believers) to love everyone, not to 'like' everyone!

DOES GOD TAKE THE 'INITIATIVE' TO REACH MY 'ENEMY' WITH HIS LOVE?

During my difficult times, I am called to 'commit my ways unto the Lord'. Also, not only am I to rejoice in the Lord, when I am the object of another's scorn and hurt, I am to rejoice that God continues to love my enemies and that God, in His own timing, will bring my 'enemies' to a place of repentance and faith in Christ. I can rejoice in the Lord that 'vengeance towards my enemies belongs to the Lord'. God will bring just punishment to those who (from God's perspective) 'deserve' punishment.

God is not vindictive in His judgment of evil persecutors, but He, nevertheless, is the Judge of all persons. Through several methods (like chastening and like imposition of great loss to the sinner, etc.), our merciful God is intent on humbling a proud or a deceitful sinner - to incite 'godly sorrow' deep within his heart and mind! Repeatedly stated (and very important): "God is not willing that any person should perish, but that all persons should come to repentance!"

I must look beyond the 'hurt' that my persecutors inflict on me, and, instead of falling into self-pity or into a vengeful 'rage', I must (as Jesus) see the pitiful (sin-causing) condition of my 'enemy', and (in a spirit of forgiveness and compassion) earnestly pray for my 'enemy's' wonderful forgiveness and healing and transformation to a new life in Christ! I ought to look at him, not as what he presently is, but for what he can be through Christ Jesus!

If God can change a wicked John Newton (slave trader), God can change anyone! Then when God has made the 'bad man' into a 'good man', this transformed sinner can join John Newton in singing "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see!"

When I feel the 'blows' of the persecutor's 'whip' (literally or figuratively), I must remember that 'there go I, but for the grace of God.' If sin had its way in my life, there is no telling what a 'wretch' I would have become. I am what I am (goodness, righteousness, integrity, compassion, peace, love, holiness) - 'only by the grace of God.'

If it were not for the grace of God that has touched my life, I probably

would be the 'persecutor' rather than the 'persecuted'! What I just noted, is exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul. He was the persecuting one (seeking to kill Christians), but when the 'great light of heaven' reached him (in conversion), Paul became the object of brutal persecution! His conversion 'turned the tables', from the persecuting one to the persecuted one! All because Paul obeyed the 'call' to follow Christ for the remainder of his days!

In closely observing the life of the apostle Paul, and the life of John Newton, I must renew my faith in God's transforming power, that is, God can make a bad man good! I must focus on the vision that God has for the lost soul (the soul who is so 'out of sorts' with himself, that he chooses to be 'out of sorts' with his surrounding human beings).

When one of the 'out-of-sorts' souls chooses to aim his sharp arrows of persecution at me (for no 'good reason'), I must see beyond his cruel behavior, and realize that this 'enemy' of mine needs not my retaliation but my compassion and understanding and forgiveness.

I must remind myself (even though my unjust treatment is hurtful) that this persecutor is deeply loved by God, just as Saul the killer of Christians, was greatly loved by God, and, indeed, was pursued by God! As God miraculously changed a killer of Christians into a lover of Christians, so God is certainly able and willing to change my God-rejecter into a God-lover! And when this miracle happens on a vertical scale, there will automatically be an effect on the horizontal scale.

In other words, when there is reconciliation between a sinner and God, there will (soon or eventually) be reconciliation between the sinner and his fellow human beings (even between him - as my 'enemy' - and myself)!

I must rejoice in the Lord that God will use the suffering that I experience (at the hands of wretched persons), to perfect my own character. I also must rejoice in the Lord that He will render the just judgment that is necessary to bring a sinner to the 'foot of the cross'! Rejoicing because of God's loving treatment of me (during great adversity), and rejoicing because of God's just and merciful treatment of my persecutors.

**WITH 'LITTLE' OR WITH 'MUCH' IN YOUR LIFE, GOD DESERVES
YOUR PRAISE!**

My ability to 'rejoice evermore' is based upon my solid belief in the 'sovereignty' of God (i.e., that God's control of the world is the out-growth of God's love, power, and wisdom). If God is righteous, just, honest, holy, peaceful, and loving, then I can 'rejoice evermore', regardless of the nature of the present outward circumstances of my little life!

Whether I have little or whether I have much of this 'world's goods' (or power, or achievements, or recognition), I can 'rejoice evermore', because God is the 'Giver of all gifts' and He is the all-wise One who knows just what gifts I need and when I need His 'gifts'.

He is the 'dispenser' of all of His abundant gifts. He has promised to supply all of my needs, according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus! Little or much, I can be satisfied, for God is 'no Respector of persons'. He loves all persons equally, and He does not 'arbitrarily favor' one person over another person!

If I have God in my heart, I have everything that I truly need! God is all things unto all persons, according to their respective needs. If I have food and clothing and a simple shelter, with these basic needs, I ought to be content. With little or with much in my life, God deserves my praise and my thanksgiving! He is the 'Giver of all good things'! "In God, I live and move and have my very being!" Praise His holy name! He cares, He loves, He provides!

'Rejoicing evermore' - a 'high command from God' and a command that, sadly, I have not always obeyed, throughout my long life! I have not always felt like 'rejoicing' when I was being 'hit' with the evil schemes of evil persons!

I am learning (gradually) that it is my responsibility, not to ever condone (justify) sin, but, instead, simply to love the sinner (offender), and daily to pray for him, to desire nothing but 'good' for him. Not to desire his 'just destruction', but, rather, to desire his salvation and his healing which is the 'foundation' for his future good life.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A 'GRATEFUL LIFE'?

Gratitude pleases God! Gratitude blesses and heals me! Gratitude blesses and encourages the brethren in Christ! Gratitude enables me to love sinners, and gratitude enables me to learn to love even wretched persons. Gratitude that God's cleansing work within my bitter heart is able to give me victory over the crippling disease called 'bitterness'! Gratitude that God is working effectively in the lives of wayward sinners, grateful that God's transforming power is able to change 'bad' persons into 'good' persons!

I must recognize anew that God commands me to be grateful - to be full of gratitude! "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you."

A very high order from God, an order that only can be fulfilled in my life through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who 'sheds abroad the love of God' in my faulty heart! God can turn my 'cold' heart into a heart that is 'aglow with the love and compassion of Jesus'!

There is nothing too hard for the God of the Universe, for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the God who, in the power of the Spirit, can convict and convince and convert and cleanse and counsel and challenge and comfort the souls of human beings!

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF LOW IN GRATITUDE?

It is said that 'confession is good for the soul!' I have failed many times in my past life to be a 'child of gratitude'. I have, too many times, taken 'things' (circumstances) into my own 'weak hands'. Of course, when I have been a 'complainer' (gripping about the 'lousy' and 'unfair situations'), I have not taken my place with the heavenly angels, in praise of the Lord on High!

During these difficult times, my vision has been clouded, my ears have been stopped, my lips of praise have been replaced with lips of complaint, and my mind has been beclouded with doubts and fears and even anger!

When I fail, as often I have, God is merciful to me, because He is a forgiving God. When I fall, I have learned that I must get up, I must confess my failure (sin), and then I must continue to travel on my 'journey of faith'!

There is much in the living of the Christian life that deserves my 'practice', but probably the greatest need that I have in my living of the Christian life is the 'practice of expressing gratitude' towards my gracious and loving and grace-filled God! I am always behind in my 'praise to the Lord'.

The blessings from God are abundantly poured out on my life (and relationships), and I am behind in the giving of thanks for those abundant blessings. Of course, in heaven, I will not only be more aware of the number of blessings and the nature of God's earthly blessings, but I will be more adequate in my ability wholeheartedly and quickly to offer my thanks to the God of all praise!

Praise the Lord, ye heavens, adore him; Praise him, angels in the height, Sun and moon, rejoice before him, Praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise the Lord, for he hath spoken, Worlds his mighty voice obeyed. Laws which never shall be broken for their guidance he hath made.

Praise the Lord, for he is glorious, never shall his promise fail. God hath made his saints victorious; Sin and death shall not prevail. Praise the God of our salvation, Hosts on high, his power proclaim; Heaven and earth and all creation, Laud and magnify his Name.

Worship, honor, glory, blessings, Lord, we offer unto thee, Young and old, thy praise expressing, In glad homage bend the knee. All the saints in heaven adore thee, we would bow before thy throne: As thine angels serve before thee, So on earth thy will be done.

(Praise the Lord: Ye Heavens, Adore Him by Combined writers)

***I PRAISE GOD FOR MY LOVING, DISCERNING, DEVOTED,
CARING MOTHER!***

Paul wrote that he was 'a debtor to all men'! I, too, am indebted to so many persons - persons whom I can never 'repay' for all the 'good' they have given to me, in terms of their godly influence, their loving coun-

sel, their insightful teaching, their generous help, their prayers, their gentle correction, their comforting presence!

The person to whom I am most indebted is my beloved mother! The older I become, the more I think about her and her unlimited contributions to my life. She did so much for me!

I had the privilege of being with her for the last 5 (difficult) years of her life. She lived with me and my wife, during those years, most of which were years when she was bedfast. My wife (whose job during many recent years has been to care for elderly ones, in the comfort of our home), I say, my wife tenderly and lovingly took care of my mother until the day she died.

There is so very much that I could write about my dear mother, but the following is a 'list' of character qualities and activities that meant so much to me - brief descriptions of some of the outstanding 'ways' of my mother, as these 'ways' related to me:

- 1. She bore me in her womb for nine months!*
- 2. She fed me at her breast during my infancy!*
- 3. She 'potty trained' me when I was a year old!*
- 4. She disciplined me when I was 'unruly'!*
- 5. She served me her delicious food for many years!*
- 6. She bought me clothes with her hard-earned money!*
- 7. She read Bible stories to me each night before I fell asleep!*
- 8. She took me to Sunday school and to Church each Sunday Morning!*
- 9. She taught me how to diagram sentences when I was in junior high!*
- 10. She listened to me recite my memorized Bible verses!*
- 11. She rejoiced with me when I won races in track!*
- 12. She sympathized with me when I shed tears during my*

high school years!

- 13. She shared prayers with me when we together knelt at her bedside!*
- 14. She wrote letters to me during my loneliness at college!*
- 15. She embraced my decision to become a Christian!*
- 16. She affirmed me when I shared a new insight from my Bible studies!*
- 17. She affirmed my decision to marry a special girl whom she learned to love!*
- 18. She supported me at all times during my long, and sometimes difficult, pastorate!*
- 19. She gave me financial gifts when I was struggling financially during my pastorate!*
- 20. She comforted me when I experienced my long and debilitating 'depression'!*
- 21. She 'breathed' confidence into me when I sometimes felt 'low in my spirits'!*
- 22. She laughed with me when events suddenly turned 'humorous'!*
- 23. She reflected on my 'godly heritage' with me!*
- 24. She cooperated with me when I told her she needed to move from her home, to come to our home to live.*
- 25. She, when I was a youngster, took me to my grandmother's home and presence (where I spent much time when I was young).*
- 26. When I was quite young, she took me on the 'Trail Ways Bus' to Colorado Springs, where we had fun shopping and eating out!*

27. *She kept her refrigerator full of delicious food, accessible to me at any time!*

I PRAISE GOD FOR A HARD-WORKING AND PROVIDING FATHER!

I am the youngest of four children, born to Robert (Bob) and Helen Christian, both of whom lived in the quaint little town of Fountain, Colorado all of their lives. My dad's ancestors and my mother's ancestors (who knew each other) were some of the first inhabitants of this small community (back in the later 1800's). My father, the oldest of five children, was born in 1898, and he was a graduate of the Fountain High School. He was the only boy, along with four girls, to enjoy that distinction as a high school graduate.

I have viewed the picture, taken at that graduation ceremony, and it is beyond dispute that my dad was one of the most handsome young men that anyone could lay their eyes upon! He was awesomely handsome, and he had the look of dignity and intelligence on his countenance! That was a time when he had a 'full head of hair', a few years before he began to lose most of his hair! In the early years of the 20th century, it was not customary for high school graduates to enter college for a higher degree. Most male graduates entered the job market, and most female graduates soon became wives. Many women became mothers when they were verily 20 years old!

Even though my father, somewhat scholarly in orientation (a man who loved to learn), could have done well in college, he, instead, entered the 'job market' rather soon after his graduation. He became a butcher in a local grocery store, and before too long he ended up purchasing and owning a grocery store on the main street of Fountain. He ran that store for many years, and he was a 'favorite' of his many customers.

During the War years (W.W.II) my dad had a great concern for the soldiers who were stationed at Fort Carson (about 10 miles west of his small community). Long before the time of supermarkets which opened at all hours, Dad kept his store open until midnight, to accommodate the needs of the soldiers (who could not shop during the day hours).

Dad's compassionate 'nature' was demonstrated in countless ways, throughout his long life. Dad had a tender heart, and, even though he

tried to conceal his tears on certain occasions, I could see them! He had some noble qualities in his life, and compassion was one of those qualities.

My father found it easy to be positive, outgoing, friendly, gracious, self-giving, generous! Consequently, it is no wonder that people (including his hundreds of store customers) 'swarmed' around him. Scores of persons loved his friendly, sunshiny personality. He was upbeat in his words to his customer (in his small grocery store where 'service to his customers' was the 'rule of his business life')! My dad, for decades, enjoyed the 'food business', and he was particular that his customers got the 'choice cuts of beef'!

The humorous phrase he used when he was having 'fun' visiting with his customers was 'shooting the breeze'! This meant that he was simply talking about a 'little of nothing' with his customers, sharing a number of unimportant topics which were of interest to his customers. If something was of interest to his customers, then dad made sure that he gave these customers a 'listening ear' (even if the particular topic had little personal interest to him).

In other words, my dad was extremely 'accommodating' with everyone with whom he had contact. He was patient to listen, and he showed persons around him that they (customers) were important (not just for his business advantage, but because he genuinely cared for others). Again, I say, it is no wonder that my dad was a 'favorite' with lots of persons!

Even though my father was positive in his speech and accommodating in his actions when he was with people (in the 'public'), my father experienced (endured) considerable 'pain' throughout his long life. My dad shared very little with me regarding his pain, but I knew that he was in frequent (constant?) pain! I never knew the details, but it was my understanding (as I was growing up) that dad suffered some kind of injury to his feet when he was quite young.

It was my understanding that the 'terrible fall' jumping off a bridge, 'broke his arches' in his feet! He suffered considerable pain in his feet, and when I watched him walk down the alley to see his folks (a few

blocks from our house), he was trying to walk fast, but he had (what looked like) a painful limp with every step he took! (When I saw him from a distance, I wanted to 'cry')!

In spite of all that he had to face in his life (physically and otherwise), my dad determined that he would not be a 'complainer'. Even during times when he obviously was battling with 'pain' and with 'distress', when someone would ask him how he felt, he would quickly respond 'Fine and dandy'! One of the most determined, forward-moving, goal-oriented, kind-hearted, generous, hard-working persons I have ever known!

He was the most involved person, in terms of caring for his elderly parents! He also cared a lot for his one sister and for his three brothers. He was exceptionally 'loyal' to his parents and to his siblings (all of whom lived quite close to him). As a grocery man and butcher, he regularly brought meat (including steaks) to his siblings and to his parents.

My mother, who was a great cook, always (it seemed to me) to have her cupboards filled with all kinds of groceries, and she always had the best of meats. Dad's immediate family and his extended family never lacked for delicious food, thanks to our kind and generous and hard-working father!

My dad had a special place in his heart for poor persons. My dad never believed in doing any 'good work' for the 'praise of others'. He was a person who showed his compassion for 'needy persons' without 'fanfare' and in 'secret' if possible. My older brother remembers going with our dad to deliver groceries to poor persons.

I was told (not by my dad) that our dad provided a simple house (a house that dad owned, one of his several older rentals) for a certain older (poor) widow that dad regarded as one of his 'unique friends' understand that dad provided her with groceries, and that dad paid for all of her funeral expenses after she died. (It was important to dad that his relatives and his friends be buried with dignity). Dad had a very compassionate 'nature', but dad never wanted the 'limelight' when he did acts of charity!

It is interesting that my dad's last name was 'Christian'! My dad was,

indeed, very 'Christian' in the words he spoke, and in the deeds he performed! But, strangely, with all of his wonderful qualities and his virtues, my dad never openly 'confessed' his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! I believe dad honored the Lord Jesus, in many ways, even though my dad did not recognize that the motivation for his loving actions came from Jesus Himself!

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 indicates that there are many persons who perform acts of compassion, who, at the same time, have little knowledge of theology! Yet, these persons who have little intellectual knowledge of the basic truths of Christianity (like the truth about the 'second birth'), perform the compassionate acts of Jesus Himself! Jesus indicates that 'inasmuch as ye have done these acts of compassion to the least of these my brethren, ye have done those loving acts for me!' Jesus indicates that 'Compassion' is the 'passport' to heaven.

There will be those persons (compassionate persons who had little knowledge of theological truths while they lived on earth) who will find themselves (with surprise) in heaven! These persons (like my dad) who did the compassionate works of Christ (like caring for the poor and the widows) will find themselves in the same place where the most compassionate Person of the universe lives!

Where did my dad's compassionate motivation to care for needy persons come from? Certainly not from his human nature, not from the self-preoccupied part of his nature! One cannot perform compassionate deeds (and perform these deeds throughout one's entire lifetime) unless there is a God-implanted motivation in one's heart!

I, of course, acknowledge that there were possibly less-than-desirable motivations (at times) in my dad's life, and I further acknowledge that only God could fully discern the 'inner motions' of my dad's heart! Yes, I acknowledge these two important facts - facts that cannot be revealed to the eye of any observer (including me). However, it is important (after acknowledging the above two 'facts') that Jesus said that 'by their fruits ye shall know them.'

Among the 'visible fruits' that were in my dad's life was (as I have previously stated) the 'fruit of compassion'! According to Jesus, it is the practice of 'compassion' in a person's life that will give him entrance into Heaven itself! According to Matthew 25, there will be many per-

sons in heaven who will be 'surprised' that they are there!

According to Matthew 25, the ones who make it through the pearly gates are those who lived a life of compassion - persons who stopped along the dusty road of life to anoint the open wounds of the suffering pilgrim (or who made the effort to care for the soldiers from Ft. Carson, or who gave time and money and housing to a decrepit, old, forsaken widow)!

I believe that, in spite of the fact that dad was rather 'unconventional' in his approach to life (religiously-speaking), dad's heart was tender, dad's will was committed to helping the 'overlooked' persons in his life, dad's billfold with limited financial resources nevertheless was opened, to fork out some 'bills' to give extensive care to an old widow!

My dad was honest, compassionate, kind, generous, friendly, and respectful. Even though he never attended church services, my dad was very respectful towards the ministers of the local church where my mother (and I) attended. It was easy for him to be gracious in the giving of some of his material resources to them. When his own father died, he called mother's minister, and that minister was with dad very speedily (on an early Sunday morning)!

There are so many miscellaneous qualities in the life of my dad that deserve admiration! Dad appreciated the beauties of nature. He loved to fix his eyes on a full moon. He loved to work in our yard - raking leaves and doing other yard work. A clean and well-kept yard meant a lot to him. He loved pets, especially the collie dog that was like a companion to dad... When that dog finally died, my dad was sad! He wrote in his diary 'Lost a good friend today!'

Dad hid his emotional expressions (tears) from others, but I knew that dad was a very tender-hearted person! His tender heart was made revealed by the numerous compassionate acts that were an integral part of dad's daily life! Dad was admired by so many persons, especially by his younger siblings. Whether or not his siblings ever told dad (and they probably did not), it was obvious that all of dad's siblings 'looked up' to dad as a type of leader to them!

None of us four children ever wanted to 'rebel' against Dad's authority.

Dad had a 'commanding authority', even though his words to us children (regarding 'right' and 'wrong') were rather sparse. For some reason (almost a 'mysterious reason') none of us four children dared to 'talk back' in defiance or in rebellion to our dad. We wanted to obey dad, for we deeply respected him. We knew, in spite of the faults we saw in our dad, that dad 'knew best', that dad was truly a man of integrity!

The qualities of dad's life (hard-working, suffering without complaint, generosity in his provision of food and simple shelter, etc.) - these qualities 'spoke' to our hearts! We loved both mother and father, and we wanted to follow their example. We children, as much as we deeply loved our mother, nevertheless, respected our dad as the leader and 'decider' in our home. He was a hard-working 'bread winner' in our home!

Admittedly, there were a few 'codes of expectation' among the 'Christian clan', and we kids knew that we must 'conform' to that 'code' of conduct! Dad believed that each of us children could do well in life, that we each had potential to be developed, that we had a certain 'reputation' to be maintained and that we must not 'destroy' that reputation!

We children must 'hold up our heads', be thankful for who we are, be our 'own person' and not try to 'copy' someone else, keep an open mind to new knowledge, avoid wrongdoing (dishonesty), be friendly and positive and outgoing, be compassionate towards the 'underdogs'!

Of course, when mother had her input in the lives of us children, she would emphasize the importance of loving and serving Christ and of following the ways of righteousness! Of course, our mother would emphasize the importance of regular church attendance! (Even though dad never attended church, thankfully, the four of us children all accepted Christ, and we all chose church!

Perhaps my 'mind' is not 'serving me adequately', but I honestly do not remember that my father ever gave me a 'spanking'! My mother, the loving disciplinarian that she was, gave me some 'spankings' (that I deserved) when I was a small child. As stated above, dad had a mysterious quality about him - a quality of a strong and yet loving authority. I never desired to disobey my dad. I never wanted to disappoint my dad.

I wanted to follow dad's example as a man of hard work and as a man of genuine compassion.

As I carefully observed my father, I decided that I (like him) wanted to speak in positive ways! I (like my father) wanted to be outgoing and friendly and 'contagious' in personality. I wanted to be 'magnetic' in the presence of people - drawing people to my side where I could encourage them in their everyday walk of life!

I knew that my father was not without his faults and he was not without his weaknesses, but, as I carefully observed the kind of man that my dad was in his daily life (throughout my childhood and my youth), I found that he had notable 'virtues' in his life that I desired to (slowly) cultivate in my own life!

One of the greatest qualities of my dad is this: He was affirming rather than critical in his speech. Never once did my dad say a hurtful or a discouraging word towards me, during the years that I was growing up in his home! I am deeply indebted to my father that he never crushed my 'spirit' (never belittled me or downgraded me).

He lifted me up, he seldom directly bragged on me, he 'placed a crown above my head and he watched me gradually grow into it'! Of course, dad was glad when I made 'good grades' in school, but dad never focused on my 'grades'. I did not have to make all 'A's' to please dad. He used to say (wisely), "The grades are not that important; what is important is what you learn!"

My dad loved (nightly) to read the Daily Newspaper. He enjoyed reading a good book (particularly history books which were his 'favorites'). Dad told my brother something that my brother still recalls (after 50 years): "Learn one new fact every day!"

My dad, just four years before he died, prayed the 'Sinner's Prayer', when he was in the hospital recovering from a heart attack. My dear older brother led him to Christ. What dad knew as a virtue (practice) throughout his life, namely, compassion, dad came to know the Source of that compassion, namely, the Compassionate Christ!

Beyond the manifestation of the 'hidden Christ' in his life (compas-

sionate deeds), dad now was introduced to the Source of all good things (including compassionate deeds)! From the deeds of compassion to the Person from whom all compassion flows! On that hospital bed, dad was introduced to the One for whom he (ignorantly) was longing all the days of his life!

The One who motivated my dad to do works of compassion (to so many during his long lifetime) is the One who said to dad (at the gates of heaven): 'Inasmuch as ye have done it (compassion) unto the least of these my brethren (forgotten old widow), ye have done it (compassion) unto me!'

In other words, when you fed and sheltered and loved that 'widow' (and bought a casket for her after she died), I was there, and I was 'that widow'! "Come through the gate into heaven. Enjoy the glories of my eternal kingdom", on the authority of the King of Heaven. Only compassionate persons receive heaven as their eternal home! Dad was very compassionate!

Now thank we all our God With heart and hands and voices, Who wondrous things hath done, In whom his world rejoices, Who, from our mothers' arms, Hath blessed us on our way With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.

*O may this bounteous God,
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us,
And keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.
All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns with them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.
(Now Thank We all Our God by Martin Rinkart)*

I PRAISE GOD FOR TWO BEAUTIFUL, TALENTED DAUGHTERS!

My oldest daughter, Darlene Ann (Christian) Berrong, was born June 9, 1968. As the firstborn, she, of course, was the one who first brought great joy to her mother and to father. As her parents, we soon discovered that Darlene was an 'active' child, a child who was curious to try

new things, a child who loved to swing from the backyard bars, a child who loved to laugh, a child who was 'eager to please others'. More of a follower than a leader, she, nevertheless, found herself in the middle of a tag football game, mainly 'filled' with boys!

Darlene, from her earlier years, proved herself to be 'mild and meek and amiable'. To this day, as an adult (in her later 40's), Darlene is seen as a person who is very easy to get along with. Even though, throughout her lifetime, she has demonstrated a tendency towards shyness and quietness, people find it a delight to be with her and to visit with her. She is flexible and tolerant and adaptable and conciliatory, in terms of her obvious personality 'traits' (virtues).

Darlene, as a follower of Christ, is a person with whom others find it easy to share their hurts. She knows how to patiently 'lend an ear' of understanding, and, usually, without her offering a lot of advice to hurting persons, these burdened friends indicate to Darlene that she has been a 'real' help to them.

Darlene is very 'accepting' of persons (including the 'underdogs'), and she is very slow in judging other persons (including those persons who differ from her in their 'convictions' and 'lifestyle'). While she holds (Christian) convictions very strongly (and though she is committed to integrity in all situations), she, nevertheless, is loving towards those persons who espouse ideas that she would consider non-Christian!

Darlene is very 'loyal' to her family and to her friends- amidst the changes and the chances of the passing years. Once a friend, always a friend - that is what she believes, and the longevity of some of her relationships proves this commitment! One of her long-time friends (probably her closest friends) has endured since Darlene was 3 years old (when Darlene first met this friend).

Darlene is deeply committed to being a good mother. She has two children (presently teenagers), and Darlene communicates with them, through the 'thick and thin' of their difficult adolescent years! Not always easy, but most important, that she keeps up the 'lines of communication' with them! These two (growing) children often tell their mother how much they love her! As a result of Darlene's divorce (not her choice) a few years ago, Darlene's normal challenge in being a mother of teenagers, has at least 'doubled'!

Regardless of the complexities that result in communication because of a divorce, Darlene is learning (more and more) to 'cast her burdens upon the Lord, for the Lord cares for her' (in times of crisis)! Through prayer, Darlene will increasingly become a better communicator with her teenage (precious) children.

No one said that it would be 'easy' to go through the teenage years, and no one said that it would be easy to be a mother of teenagers (especially when the normal challenges become much greater challenges when a 'divorce' is in the 'picture')! But, Darlene (and her parents and other relatives) must remember what Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient!" For all times and for all situations - even when children grow up to be teens!

Darlene has proven to be a most delightful daughter to my wife and to me! Because she lives in the same city as we do, we get to see Darlene frequently. She is very open in her communication with my wife and with me (especially with my wife who has, with great wisdom, counseled her during the last five very difficult years of dealing with the aftermath of a difficult divorce).

Darlene beautifully decorates her comfortable house. It seems (to me) that she knows just where to place her furniture (some of which is antique furniture, given to her by family members). Darlene loves the stories that are 'behind' each piece of antique piece of furniture. For instance, her large dining room table (with many 'leaves') dates back more than a hundred years ago!

She seems (to me) to know just what large picture to hang on her walls, and just where to tastefully (artistically) hang the pictures (in relationship with all the other pictures). Because of the manner in which she decorated her living room, I have a sense of 'warmth' (coziness) when I enter her living room. Each room has its own unique features and 'appeal'. It is obvious that Darlene has been 'gifted' with unusual artistic abilities!

Darlene graduated from Greenville College (Greenville, Illinois) with a degree in 'Early Elementary Education'. For several years, Darlene has been privileged to be an elementary teacher. She taught at 'Choice

City Christian School' for a few years. Then she spent six years as a home school teacher (at which time, of course, she taught her own two children).

Presently, Darlene is teaching a group of 20 four year old children. She is 'cut out' for this job. These young children are 'growing by leaps and bounds', and their perception of various concepts literally amazes Darlene. Because Darlene is a 'semi-professional' cartoonist (an amazingly skilled artist), she, of course, is able to 'use' her cartooning skills to a 'great advantage' in her teaching!

When I observe her artistic productions (her small and large drawings), I stand back with a sense of 'awe and wonderment'! I wonder how any human being could produce something that is so 'striking' and so awesome and so beautiful and so 'moving'! Certainly Darlene did not receive this skill from her father! Ashamedly, I must confess that I probably don't even know what the 'primary colors' are!

Of course, Darlene's gift came from the great Creator Himself, but, humanly-speaking, I know that Darlene received her mother's 'artistic genes'! Darlene's mother, like Darlene, is very artistic. I have a portrait painting of a young African girl, hanging in my office painted by Venita, when she was a mere teenager! A most beautiful portrait!

This painting was done by Venita when she was probably 16 years old! It is magnificent - an artistic accomplishment that is most rare! Throughout Venita's long life, she has profitably used her artistic skills, in various settings and for many different (practical) purposes (especially in the work of the local church).

Since the divorce (about six years ago), Darlene has had many rough roads to travel. Without going into any detail, suffice it to say that, if it were not for the grace of God which worked in Darlene's life, Darlene may have 'sunk in the mire of despair'!

Changing the analogies, Darlene (through all the conflicts and heart-breaks) has become a more mature Christian. Though tempted many times to take the 'low road' of bitterness, she has, instead, chosen to take the 'high road' of surrender to God and forgiveness for those who have despitely used her. I told her, the day she found out that she would be divorced, that during the next few years she would become

'gold tried in fire'.

A hard way to become 'refined gold' in her character, but that is what she presently is - 'refined gold'. The 'fire of adversity' still burns (trials still abound), but I believe that God shall continue to enable Darlene to develop a godly character - as a result of the trials! Obviously, God did not send these 'terrible trials' (divorce), but God is able to turn the 'bad things' into the 'good things'!

Darlene continues to be her 'beautiful self' (not only physically, but spiritually as well). She still is reaching out to 'hurting persons' (partly because she herself, firsthand, knows what it is to really suffer). She continues to engage with others, and she continues to be genuinely interested in the concerns of others.

She continues to be eager to learn (and she especially enjoys history and current affairs, and she loves to watch news programs). She continues to enjoy laughter, and she is able to see the 'funny side' of situations. She continues to enjoy good sermons each Sunday, and she enjoys talking about the messages, following the church services.

She continues to be rather 'perceptive' in her ability to 'read' the thoughts and the feelings of some persons around her - particularly those persons whom she cherishes as her loved ones. She is very concerned for the welfare of those around her. She demonstrates considerable unselfishness, in the words she speaks and in the relationships she cherishes.

Loyalty and faithfulness are her hallmarks! She continues to 'reach out in love' to her (hurting) children - who have been emotionally damaged because of the divorce. She continues to be 'baffled' by the complex problems of teenagers, made more complex because of the division in her home, and caused by divorce. (It is easy to understand why God intensely 'hates' divorce, as noted in Malachi 2).

Darlene loves (occasionally) to talk about her ancestors (persons who deeply loved the Lord in the past). This probably is a manifestation of her general interest in 'history'. The day will come, the Lord willing, when my young adult daughter (Darlene) will herself be old, and, then, at that time, her grandchildren will be inquiring about her life (interests, viewpoints, personal faith, talents, etc.).

It is my prayer that this firstborn daughter will so live that, when she is old, she will be able to look back on her long life, and she will be able to lift her hands in worship and praise to her God. Yes, Darlene (through hard adversity) has become 'refined gold'. I hope that, through all the future changes and chances of her life, she will continue to be 'refined gold' (fit for the 'Master's use')!

My youngest daughter, Rhonda Kaye (Christian) Dodge, was born August 28, 1970, in Fort Collins, Colorado. Along with her older sister (Darlene), Rhonda has been the source of great joy to her parents (as well as to countless other relatives and friends). It was soon apparent to me and to her mother that Rhonda was a beautiful child and a gifted child.

Her outgoing and vivacious personality was soon manifested, as seen by the fact that she loved to be with her peers - talking and acting and planning and innovating. Rhonda was an initiator, taking the leadership role in almost everything she did. This early revealed trait became so apparent, not only during her early informal activities with her playmates, but later when she started her formal education. Her social orientation was evident during the many years of her formal education (from kindergarten thru college years).

One vivid illustration of her ability to initiate a 'plan of action' was seen when she was quite young, probably when she was 4 years old. Since her grandparents from Nebraska were visiting in our home, on the date of Rhonda's birthday, Venita and I decided that it would not be necessary to plan a regular birthday party for Rhonda. We thought that, since it was rare to have Rhonda's grandparents with us on Rhonda's birthday (at which time they were going to present Rhonda with a beautiful bike), it would not be necessary to invite Rhonda's friends to her party.

This was a big mistake for us (as Rhonda's parents) to assume that the presence of grandparents was sufficient to make Rhonda's party 'complete'! While we were 'doing the final touches' in preparation for the birthday party, Rhonda (this four year old child) had her 'own plans'! Since she was very young, Rhonda had shown herself to be extroverted in her personality and an initiator in planning projects. Surprise of surprises, who would be at the kitchen door but Rhonda, and not Rhonda by herself.

Standing beside Rhonda were three or four other children, and they had been recruited by Rhonda to come to her birthday party! Rhonda had quickly gone to the doors of a few of her neighborhood friends (children the same age as Rhonda), and Rhonda had invited them to her party! Of course, little (petite) Rhonda made it clear to these neighborhood children (her peers) that they must bring a birthday gift with them to the party!

Can you imagine the surprise that we felt when we saw Rhonda and her friends standing at the kitchen door, all ready to enjoy an exciting party! Whether or not we laughed out loud, I am sure that I and Venita and Venita's folks were chuckling within! Needless to say, the adults and the handful of children all enjoyed the festivities on that memorable day -the day Rhonda partly planned her own birthday party! In my mind's eye, I can still envision the scene, during the party, when Rhonda used both of her little arms to raise some of her gifts above her head, and when she got on her little bike (with training wheels).

Shortly after the party had concluded, there was an anti-climactic event. Rhonda, as aggressive as she was in her actions, decided that she would show us (parents) her ability in riding her new bike (a beautiful little bike with training wheels). I can still (in my mind's eye) see her bravely getting on the bike and taking off with considerable speed, all by herself (no help from an adult)! Behind our house (parsonage), there was a spacious blacktopped area (the church parking lot). Rhonda started peddling her bike, and she rode it with lots of confidence!

She rode across the blacktop with precision (as a new rider), and all seemed to be going well. But, eventually Rhonda's bike came to the end of the parking lot, and at the edge of the parking lot was a tall board fence (a fence that divided the church property from the adjacent property). As Venita and I looked on, we could see 'what was coming', but there was nothing we could do about it! Rhonda, independent as she was by temperament, needed an adult with her during this 'childhood crises!

Traveling at a rather fast speed (for a 4 year old child), Rhonda's bike had a 'head-on collision' with the tall fence! Of course, Rhonda was jolted painfully and she was immediately thrown off her little bike. And, as would be expected, her screams were loud and her tears were many! She came running to us for understanding and for comfort. As

parents, we too, of course, felt grief that this had happened to our precious little daughter!

As courageous as this youngest daughter of ours was, Rhonda could not find any pleasure in her bike for probably another year. I don't think Rhonda even got near her bike for at least another year. She apparently thought that if her bike was going to treat her in such a 'brutal manner', she wanted nothing to do with that birthday bike (even if her grandparents had brought that bike, all the way from Nebraska)!

From her youngest childhood until the present time, Rhonda has been very socially-oriented, that is, Rhonda has enjoyed being in social company with friends and family. In junior high, Rhonda demonstrated her excellent skills in track (the 100 yard dash and other events). In high school Rhonda demonstrated skill in 'cheer leading'.

Rhonda found it easy to develop meaningful relationships with her peers. As a fun-loving person, so many teachers and fellow students were attracted to Rhonda. Throughout the nearly 10 years of her education (both in public school and in college), Rhonda enjoyed the company of quite a few boyfriends. Of course, when she ended up 'breaking her relationship' with some of her boyfriends, she had to learn to wipe away a lot of tears!

Academically, both in public school and at the Christian college where she attended, Rhonda made good grades. Along with all the socializing that she enjoyed with her many friends, she made a serious effort to prepare herself for a future profession.

After graduating from college, she spent nearly three years educating herself to become a 'physical therapist'. She had used her graduate degree fruitfully, for she has treated hundreds of patients, during the last several years. She presently practices physical therapy in a clinic near her home in Denver.

Rhonda knows the 'extremes' of both unbounded joy and excruciating sorrow! Joy because she has been able to help many suffering patients, joy because God has given her delightful and loving children (a boy and a girl), joy because God has opened the door for her to fellowship with hundreds of folks in her church (and to serve her church in many different ways as a lay leader).

Joy because of other reasons, as well! But, with all the unbounded joys that she has experienced, Rhonda has also experienced excruciating sorrow because of tragic events that have transpired during the last several years. It is ironic that both of my daughters, during the same month (July 2008), found out that their respective husbands signaled a desire that their respective marriages be terminated! Both of my daughters were devastated during this 'dark month!'

The marriage counseling that took place for about one entire year, was of no avail, and soon the last papers for the divorce were signed by both Rhonda and her husband (now her 'former husband'). Needless to say, the aftermath of the divorce was not short lived - the tragic events from that divorce are ongoing!

Although Rhonda has experienced great 'pain' during the last several years, all because of the breaking of the marriage vows, it appears that Rhonda has 'adjusted' to her new life, remarkably well! Rhonda has chosen to extend forgiveness to those who have hurt her, for she knows that the way of bitterness is the way that leads to misery and ultimately to destruction!

Rhonda loves her Episcopalian Church ('Christ Church') in Denver, where she has worshiped and served for the last several years. Rhonda's leadership talents and her gift of wisdom (discernment) have suited her to assume various tasks and roles in her church.

She has served on the church's official board which makes important decisions that affect the life and the ministry of the entire local church. For the last six years Rhonda gave leadership to the committee that was responsible for planning the annual church retreat (in the mountains). These retreats have been very successful.

Rhonda had the privilege to travel to three or four countries (South America and England, etc.), where she was involved in discipleship training. Regularly she meets in her home with several serious-minded persons, with whom she and her friends study the Word and have 'fun' and fellowship together.

Rhonda, as busy as she is and as preoccupied as she is with the complex problems that are a part of the aftermath of her divorce, neverthe-

less, keeps in contact with her family members (sibling, parents, aunts and uncles)!

It is easy for Rhonda to express her love to her family. It is easy for her to extend her broad arms to give big hugs to those whom she cherishes! Rhonda has been a 'bright and shining light' to those around her. She 'warms' the atmosphere of a room where she is visiting. Rhonda loves to visit and to share and to 'reach out in love' to those who are in her company!

As is equally true of Darlene (my oldest daughter), Rhonda has always (in my eyes) been a beautiful person - beautiful in every way! Beautiful as seen by the fact that she has always been 'fun-loving', smart, physically attractive, personable, warm-hearted, perceptive in insight, wise and discerning! Yes, both of my daughters meet these descriptions.

I praise God for a lot of things, but 'high on my list' of praise-worthy 'things' in my life, is my thanksgiving to God that He allowed me to be the father of two beautiful, godly daughters!

*For the beauty of the earth, For the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth Over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the wonder of each hour Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon, and stars of light, Lord of all,
to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the joy of ear and eye, For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony Linking sense to sound and sight,
Lord of all, to thee we raise This our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the joy of human love, Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above,
For all gentle thoughts and mild,
Lord of all, to thee we raise This our hymn of grateful praise.*

***I PRAISE GOD FOR MY HARD-WORKING, ADMINISTRATIVE-
TYPE BROTHER!***

My beloved, older brother - Jerry Christian - was born July 24, 1939 (born at the beginning of World War II). At the time of this writing, Jerry is 75 years old. He has not been any stranger to suffering and pain and loss and grief, but, nevertheless, Jerry (from my perspective) has lived a very fulfilling and effective and joyous life (in so many ways). Along with the heartbreaks and setbacks and pains in his life, he has experienced notable and recognizable successes at various times and in various contexts.

Obviously, only the Lord of his life (and he is a committed Christian), I say, only the Lord of his life is fully capable to evaluate 'his uprisings and his down sittings' throughout the many different 'chapters' of his life. As a brother, my perspective of his life is limited and incomplete and probably even 'inadequate', but, nevertheless, for the purpose of this book (namely, to praise my God for a few of the most significant persons in my life), I want to share a few highlights regarding the great person whom I am privileged to call my 'brother'!

Regarding some of the 'suffering' that Jerry experienced in his life, Jerry was acquainted with considerable suffering when he was a rather young child. During the 8th year of his life, Jerry was attacked by the cruel disease of polio!

In the 1950's, this disease was rampant in the United States. In spite of the fact that Jerry suffered greatly during this young age, with the innovative treatment of a particular (unusual) German doctor, and with the 'aid' of 'hot packs' that were administered by Jerry's devoted and loving mother, Jerry finally 'came through' this terrible 'chapter' of his life. Jerry was forced to remain at his home, but his caring 3rd grade teacher allowed him to continue his education from his home.

Jerry, for the remainder of his life, has carried the scars (weakened muscles and bones) as a result of this crippling disease! However, because of the insights of the doctor and the daily (painful) applications of the 'hot packs' by Jerry's mother, he had a considerable degree of recovery.

As was the case of many polio patients, Jerry could have ended up in a

wheelchair for the remainder of his long life! Jerry endured a painful (corrective) surgery when he was in high school! The surgery itself and the aftermath from the surgery were so unpleasant that Jerry vowed that he would never have another corrective surgery.

Through the many years since that dreadful time (when he was eight years old), Jerry has experienced much discomfort, as a result of his bout with polio, but, nevertheless, it is amazing the tasks that Jerry has undertaken in his professional career and in his recreational endeavors (he has hiked thousands of miles on many mountain trails)!

The Bible declares that God 'bottles up the tears' that we shed! No one, of course, knows fully what is meant by this rather mysterious reference, but, for certain, we can say that the God we serve is a God of deepest sympathy and love and understanding. There is not a grief that we experience but what the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) feels that grief with us!

Even when I shed tears (rightly so) because of my own moral failures (when I sin against God's commandments), God bottles up my repentant tears! Of course, the Spirit does not condone my sinful behavior, but, nevertheless, the Spirit weeps with me when I am weeping (the tears of remorse and repentance) because of my sins. The Spirit wants to lift me up into the 'arms of a loving and forgiving Savior', so that I can receive restoration from God.

When my brother experienced the heartbreak of divorce (the result of the breakdown of a human relationship that is incredibly complex), God was present to 'bottle up his tears'. There are few experiences that are more difficult or more painful to 'go through' than the experience of divorce!

It is impossible to 'rate' the differing degrees of pain that a person goes through, for each painful experience has its own unique elements. Is the pain of going through a difficult divorce more difficult than the pain of losing a close loved one?

Without attempting to give an answer to the presently-stated question, it is, however, significant to realize that when you lose a loved one, you know that your loved one died with love in his/her heart for you. You are lonely without that loved one, but at least you know that

he/she left you with love on his lips for you! The pain of separation is hard to endure, but at least mutual love was present at the time of your loved one's death.

Tragically, the pain of separation, resulting from divorce, is not accompanied with 'mutual love' (but with just the opposite - mutual discord and maybe even mutual despising)! It is 'good' when the couple who divorces can be, at least, civil to one another, and, hopefully, be even respectful towards each other. Regardless of what the nature of the 'feelings' are which the divorced couple feel for each other (hostility, hatred, indifference), one thing that can be said about the consequence of divorce - there is always the feeling of 'rejection' (not love) that is deeply felt in the heart of both persons in the divorce!

In some ways, the pain which results from a divorce is 'worse' than the pain which results from the death of a loved one! Without in any way minimizing the searing pain that Jerry experienced when he suddenly lost his 15 year old daughter (Sharla), at least Jerry found solace and comfort in the fact that Sharla had a deep love for her father when she suddenly died (and, as noted earlier in this book, Sharla returned to earth in her heavenly form to express her deep love for her father).

The rather obvious reality when anyone goes through a divorce, the loneliness of separation is not accompanied with a sense of love, but, instead, with a sense of 'rejection'! Perhaps losing a spouse through divorce is more painful than losing a dear loved one in death!

Jerry knows, firsthand, the pain that accompanies divorce, and the pain also that accompanies the loss of several loved ones, but especially the pain of losing a young daughter. Pain and more pain (grief and more grief) in both situations!

Not just the pain (the physical pain) of contracting polio (at a young age), but the pain of divorce, and one precious daughter (in a tragic death). God only fully knows the kinds of pain and the degree of pain that my beloved and courageous brother has gone through.

In addition to these significant events (which brought untold suffering), Jerry has had to deal with much 'ongoing' physical pain. Before he (thank God) was able to discover an unusual 'back doctor' (an amazing surgeon), for a few years his back pain was almost beyond his

ability to 'endure'! That surgery (a few years) rescued Jerry from much pain!

In recent years, Jerry continues to experience pain in his lower extremities (feet, etc.), but, in spite of this physical limitation, Jerry continues to do mountain hiking! Frankly, I don't see how Jerry has hiked, considering the challenges of his painful feet! But, no one can keep Jerry away from those mountain trails - where Jerry says his spirits are constantly uplifted when he sees the wildlife and the majestic mountains!

Now, a few words about some of his 'successes' in his life. I say 'some', for there are too many for me to remember, or to recount!

I do not claim to be a 'keen observer' of human life, particularly the life of those whom I cherish as my own family! My knowledge of the details of my brother's life is relatively small. He, of course, has carried on his own life, and I have carried on my life, so my detailed knowledge of his life is, obviously, limited. But, in making that 'disclaimer', I do, however, believe that there are some obvious 'facts' that I can state regarding my brother.

From the very beginning (of my life with my brother, who is six years old than I am), it was obvious to me that Jerry was born to be 'a natural leader'. I do not, personally, claim to be a 'natural leader'. I am more of a 'follower' than I am a 'leader' (even though I was a pastor for a long time). Jerry assumes the responsibility of a 'leader' (without promoting himself) in whatever context he finds himself in. It is not long until his peers recognize that he should be the 'leader' in the group that he finds himself in.

This quality (of natural leadership) manifested itself at several times and in various settings through the several different 'chapters' of his long life.

Jerry turned his 'liability' (his physical limitation because of his polio experience), I say, he turned this 'liability' into an 'asset'. When he was in junior high, the school custodian chose Jerry to be his after school custodial 'teen helper'. Amazing, Jerry 'landed a job' when he was only in junior high!

Because of his physical 'challenges', Jerry knew that he could not

compete in school sports, but, instead of bewailing his circumstances, Jerry became a 'good worker' (learning responsibility) as he worked beside a knowledgeable custodian (learning some skills), and, of course, Jerry earned some money. Jerry (in contrast to his younger brother!) earned lots of money, and it was not long until (as a 16 year old) he bought a car (1955 Chevy! - an important model!)

Jerry told me that, before he was old enough to drive a car, he - along with his girlfriend - traveled to Colorado Springs to view a movie. He said he made sure that he had enough money to pay for him and for his girlfriend to travel on the Trail Ways Bus, and enough money to pay for the movie and to get popcorn for him and his girlfriend, and then he said he had to make sure that he had enough money for the bus fare to get him and his girlfriend back home to Fountain!

Yes, as a junior high kid, Jerry learned to be responsible, so responsible that he, a working kid, could take care of his girlfriend! I talked to him recently, and I noted that he was rather young to have a girlfriend. I noted that it was quite amazing that he traveled by himself to Colorado Springs, with a girlfriend! He responded, "Oh, Ronnie, I had a girlfriend when I was in 2nd grade!" Yes, from an early age, my brother was a 'take-charge person!' Ha!

Jerry demonstrated his leadership skills often and in different settings. He was elected the student body president of his high school student body; again, he was elected the president of his class when he attended Central College, McPherson, Kansas. After he enjoyed being an elementary teacher in the Greeley School District, for a few years, he was given the opportunity to become a principal of one of the grade schools in Greeley. He became a principal when he was only 28 years old. He spent several decades in the Greeley School District, and he was assigned the principalship of at least six grade schools, during his educational career.

When Jerry was the administrator (principal) of several elementary schools (I believe it was six different schools, over a period of many years), Jerry was not only an excellent organizer and overseer of his schools (in terms of excellent administration), but Jerry was also known as a very warm and personable and friendly gentleman - a gentleman/leader who took unusual interest in and concern for his teaching staff!

Jerry had high standards of performance for his teachers, but he, nevertheless, maintained a special reasonableness and good communication with each of his teachers. Jerry discerned the strengths and the weaknesses of each of his scores of teacher. Jerry sought to encourage each of his teachers to do his/her best in the classroom, and also outside of the classroom (in terms of communication with parents).

To borrow an analogy, Jerry 'put a crown above the head of each of his teachers, and he joyfully watched each of his teachers grow into that crown!' That is, Jerry raised the expectations for each of his teachers! Jerry required his teachers to develop their own individual 'plan for growth and advancement', and then he was the 'coach' for his teachers to facilitate each of them as they worked towards new and greater achievements!

It is no wonder that Jerry (a warm-hearted 'Christian', both in last name and by profession of faith) was such a 'favorite' among his many teachers, for decades! Jerry, throughout his long life, has shown himself to be an administrator par excellence!

After he retired from public education, his administrative abilities were discovered by an organization called 'Bee Hives'. This small organization was founded for the purpose of caring for elderly folks, within the context of several smaller homes, with about 10 elderly residents in each home.

Many elderly persons need the attention and the care that smaller homes can provide. Jerry's management skills soon became known to the owner of this care facility, and, based upon the owner's knowledge of Jerry's long-time experience in administration, Jerry was appointed as the 'president' of the entire organization!

As is typical of Jerry, he worked very hard, and oftentimes he invested long hours in this small company. Not only did Jerry involve himself with the ordinary duties of staffing and recruiting of residents, but Jerry even got involved in the 'ground level' work of actually building some of the facilities (with the help of professionals, of course).

After heading this organization for many years, the owner chose to sell all of the several 'homes', and, therefore, Jerry had to be heavily involved in making all the necessary contacts that were necessary to

sell the homes. Since Jerry's administration of six different public schools resulted in his involvement of many long hours and the exercise of special management skills, he was definitely prepared for his presidency of 'Bee Hive' organization - a company that he led for more than 15 years!

The multiple duties (with long hours and with considerable 'pressures') probably equaled the duties and the 'felt pressures' that he experienced during the time he served as principal of several elementary schools! The rules and the regulations which the State imposes upon the operation of an elderly care home are many, and these (sometimes unreasonable rules) are very difficult to deal with. God surely gifted Jerry with great wisdom and sound judgment, equipping him for his effective 'running' of a worthy (but difficult) type of business.

Jerry not only performed well administratively (obeying the rules and regulations, and communicating to his many staff members), but Jerry had (at times) the satisfaction of enjoying the many elderly folks who were residents in his several different facilities. Jerry is gifted with a 'tough mind' (intellectual perception), but he is also gifted with a 'tender heart' of compassion.

As the president of his company, Jerry really cared for the persons surrounding him! He cared, not only for the staff who did the 'day-to-day' running of the various 'homes', but Jerry also really cared for the suffering ones (disabled ones) who lived in his several homes!

Jerry is an excellent communicator - both in professional 'circles', and in informal settings (in his several 'Bee Hive Homes') where he simply listened to the heart cries of aging persons (as a part of his 'job' as president of 'Bee Hive' organization).

Jerry, at times, was given the responsibility of doing all the 'foot work' in the initial stages for the building of the 'Bee Hive Homes' (working with architects and contractors, etc.). The building of the 'Homes', the running of the 'Homes' (direct administration), and finally (when a decision was finally made by the owner to liquidate) the selling of the Homes! Jerry's administrative experience is, thus, very broad and very interesting (and sometimes very 'challenging' and somewhat 'difficult')!

Long ago Jerry dedicated his head to the Lord, his heart to the Lord, and his hands to the Lord! A man, who makes this kind of sincere dedication to God, is a man who is destined for 'success' in God's world. Jerry certainly has been greatly used by his Creator/Savior! For many years Jerry served in leadership roles in his local church. He has loved the pastors under whom he has ministered in various local churches, during the last several decades!

Jerry conscientiously keeps his daily 'appointments' (quiet times) with His Lord. During the shared years of our adulthood, I have known Jerry to be a 'perfect gentleman', respectful of all people around him, and deeply reverent towards Almighty God! Jerry loves to read the Bible, devotional literature, and many other books that focus on a wide variety of subjects. Jerry's mature 'walk with God' has been manifest by Jerry's outward conduct. His godliness is seen by the way he lives, and by the manner in which he treats persons around him. He is unusually wise and discerning in his understanding of persons with whom he works. He is humble, gracious, kind, thoughtful, loving, courteous, dignified, and affirming (among many other Christian 'virtues').

Even though Jerry did not major in 'business' (but education, instead), he has long had a 'keen interest in business affairs'. As the 'president' of the 'Bee Hive' organization (elderly care business), he obviously had to be involved in countless 'business transactions' (small and big). Recruiting elderly folks for his several 'Homes' (I think 11 'Homes' at one time) involved a lot of 'business actions'.

The 'day-to-day' business involvements (in the running of the several 'Homes') composed his routine activities. Such involvements (with occasional 'crisis situations') became 'second nature' (normal expectations) for Jerry. Aside from all the business affairs of his normal day-to-day operations, Jerry found it delightful (as an enjoyable 'outlet' and 'diversion') to 'rub shoulders' with many business men whom he came to know (through types of 'business associations'). He met with some of these business men (and other community leaders) on a regular basis (weekly or monthly). Jerry loved to attend various kinds of business seminars, where we could pick up new ideas to be incorporated into his own life as a business man.

When Jerry was young, his dad gave him some good advice: "Learn something new every day of your life!" Jerry took that simple piece of

advice very seriously. Even though Jerry has a great formal education (accumulation of lots of knowledge and information), Jerry has had a quest (thirst) for knowledge all during his adult years (till his present age of 75). Because of his unusual curiosity and drive to learn more of the vast storehouse of knowledge, Jerry will probably continue to read and to study and to explore until he can no longer see to read!

Throughout his long life, Jerry has been very faithful in the use of this gift! Jerry has been kind and thoughtful and humble and personable, as shown in his outward conduct, and, therefore, it is no wonder that the various people (staffs) with whom Jerry has worked, have loved to work with Jerry. Jerry holds the standards high for his staff (employees), and he tries to help each staff person to realize his/her potential! Jerry's employees highly respect the fact that Jerry is open to their needs, that he is non-threatening in his approach to his subordinates.

For many decades, the love of God has shown forth in Jerry's life. Jerry is very empathetic to his employees (teachers, etc.), that is, he sympathizes with their needs and with their hurts. During the many times that Jerry has exercised strong leadership, he has reminded himself that his own leadership is subject to the ultimate leadership of Christ! Humility and kindness have been the 'hallmarks' of Jerry's life and of his work (as an administrator)!

I, along with so many other folks, love Jerry for many reasons. Perhaps the strongest reason that I love my brother the way I do, is found in the simple (but profound) fact that Jerry has long lived a genuine and honest and caring life. Jerry has served Christ for many decades, and, at age 75, I believe Jerry's love for Christ is greater than it has ever been before. It is true that (like all of us), Jerry has traveled a 'path' that has not always been 'smooth'. Jerry has known what the depth of sorrows is like, as well as what the mountaintop of joy feels like.

He has known both extremes, in terms of life's experiences and in terms of the variations in emotional expressions! In spite of (or is it because of?) life's 'changes and chances', Jerry has remained 'steadfast, unmovable, and has always abounded in love' for His Master. There is no greater virtue that can be noted than the virtue of 'faithfulness'!

Jerry's lifelong delight and recreational 'outlet' has been hiking on nu-

merous mountain trails, especially the beautiful hiking trails in Rocky Mountain National Park. Regularly, for decades, Jerry has found himself on one of the many trails in that Park that is so familiar to Jerry. He has a special attachment to this Park, located about one hour from his home in Greeley, Colorado.

Because his profession (administrating several elementary schools), which kept him under the roof of a building (little opportunity to breathe the air outside), Jerry has long capitalized on the opportunity to be in the National Park, almost every Sunday (as an Adventist, Jerry worships on Saturday).

To hear him describe some of his hikes in the Park, is to become excited along with him, as he talks about the wild animal life (deer, moose, elk, squirrels, chip monks, and more)! I am amazed, over and over, with the stamina and the determination that Jerry has, to hike thousands of miles over rough trails, and all of these lifetime accomplishments, in spite of the fact that he has compromised ankles and feet and legs, due to the lifetime consequences from his childhood polio!

He experiences frequent pain in his feet and in his ankles, while he is hiking (and he now uses hiking sticks for support), and yet he continues, time after time, to take his mountain hikes! He, obviously, has a 'high level of pain endurance'!

During his lifetime 'career' in Rocky Mountain National Park, Jerry actually hiked to the top of Long's Peak - not once, not two times, not three times - but, incredibly, eight times! I, myself, ascended that majestic mountain two times, and, even though it was not a 'technical' climb, I found the climb to the top of this Peak to be difficult and wearing (exhausting) and somewhat dangerous!

And, my brother, who has 'challenged' joints and muscles, made it to the top multiple times! This fact demonstrates the kind of determined and disciplined person that Jerry is! He has overcome numerous 'challenges' (problems) during his long life, and in face of his many trials and troubles!

A very optimistic man, it is rare to hear a negative word come from Jerry's lips. Of course, Jerry's commitment to live a positive life (in

spite of the many 'blows' which he has received) has been coupled with his strong faith in the Living God, whom he has faithfully served for several decades!

He has not been any stranger to sorrow, but he, nevertheless, has 'cast his cares on the Lord', for he knows that God cares for him through all the 'ups and downs' of his long life! He truly is one of the most mature and most godly persons whom I have known. Since my childhood (until the present time) Jerry has been one of my 'main mentors'.

He has demonstrated to me what true and responsible manhood means, and his quiet trust in his 'Divine Guide' has been exemplary! God could not have given me a more wonderful person, to be my brother! I have often observed how he has faced adversity (many adversities), and his trust in God through all of these 'dark days' has greatly moved my own heart, and has given me an example to follow!

Jerry has been faithful 'through the thick and the thin' of life (through all the 'ups and downs' of life)! That is why I know that he is one of the greatest persons whom I have ever known! Not only a great brother (who has been my 'mentor' ever since I was a child), but (most importantly) a great servant of the Lord Jesus Christ!

I would be amiss if I did not remark that I believe that God gave my brother a great woman to be his devoted wife. Margaret is her name. She is one of those special ladies from Oklahoma! She is all the 'best' that comes to your mind when you have those 'warm feelings' about Oklahoma! She has plenty of 'dignity' in her mannerism and in her outlook on life, but Margaret also has the ability to 'touch' you with her hands and with her voice and with her smiles!

In other words, Margaret is a 'warm' personality, 'down-to-earth', sincere, good humored (with a joyful laughter), earnest in her endeavors, skilled in the work that she performs, adoring in her devotion to her husband, accessible to her three wonderful children and her several grandchildren, and, most importantly, she has long been a devoted follower of her Lord. She and Jerry are loyal members and leaders in the church where they, for years, have served in various capacities.

It is my joy to mention that Jerry cherishes his talented son and his

gifted daughter (and her husband).

These two children have long admired their devoted father. Both of these children are followers of Jesus, and that fact makes the heart of Jerry quiver with praise to the living Lord! No greater gift can children give to their parents than the gift of a 'strong faith in Jesus'. A heritage can only be 'great' if that heritage is peopled with 'godly' persons!

Each of us parents must someday entrust our 'spiritual gifts' (teachings, convictions, goals) to the next generation. What if the next generation is not willing to receive our 'spiritual heritage'? What if our children have no desire to 'run the next lap' in the generational race of life? That would be the greatest of all great 'spiritual tragedies'!

Each child must decide for himself/herself whether or not he/she will be the next 'spiritual link' for the future, upcoming generation! Jerry's children (Greg and Marsha), thankfully, desire to a 'strong link' for the next, upcoming generation - to advance the cause of Christ to their future generations!

Come, ye thankful people come, Raise the song of harvest-home, all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin;

*God, our Maker, doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home.*

*All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto his praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;*

*First the blade, and then the ear,
Then the full com shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.
For the Lord our God shall come,
And shall take his harvest home;
Gather thou thy people in,*

Free from sorrow, free from sin;

*There, forever purified,
In thy presence to abide;
Come, with all thine angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest-home.*

(Come, Ye Thankful People, Come by Henry Alford)

***I PRAISE GOD FOR A BEAUTIFUL, HARD-WORKING
OLDER SISTER!***

My mother was married when she was only 19 years old, and she was 21 years old when she gave birth to her first child - a beautiful baby daughter who was given the name of Margaret. Margaret was the first grandchild in the 'Christian clan', and, as such, she was 'watched like a hawk' by her rather 'possessive' grandmother (her father's mother). Because of the grandmother's overly-protective stance, in regards to this firstborn grandchild, Margaret's mother experienced some undue 'pressures' and unwelcome 'advice' from the lips of this well-intention, but overbearing, grandmother.

In spite of the misplaced and unwelcome oversight by the grandmother, Margaret was highly valued and she was cherished by both grandparents! Because she was the only grandchild for a short time, Margaret was the object of lots of attention and she was the recipient of certain gifts.

Someone wisely said that it is possible for parents to 'spoil' a child, but that it is impossible for a grandparent to 'spoil' a child! Perhaps that statement is 'true', but, irrespective, it was a 'fact' that Margaret (the first grandchild) was the 'pride and joy' of her grandparents.

This overly-possessive attitude of the grandmother towards Margaret was never completely 'shed'! I suppose that the grandmother reasoned that, since I love my granddaughter so very much, I will 'keep my eye on her', throughout all the years of her 'growing up'. It is my understanding (as reported to me by my own mother) that grandma Christian ('bless her heart') positioned herself as Margaret's 'watchdog' during Margaret's teen years, and that she carefully 'observed' the 'whereabouts' of Margaret, and the 'identity' of her boyfriends.

To what extent this supposed phenomenon is true, I do not know, but this is what I remember my mother telling me about Grandma Christian. To what degree grandmother Christian manifested her 'possessive tendencies', I do not know, but I do know that Margaret (as she was growing up) was the 'pride and joy' of her beloved grandparents.

Margaret was born in the late 1920's, at a time when the world moved at a much slower pace, than what is true today! Of course, an old-fashioned radio was then enjoyed, but this was a time before the television was even conceived. At that early time in the century, there were many cars, but there were some folks (like my own father) who chose not to drive, but, instead, to ride on buses or on trains.

My older sister (18 years older than myself) could have been chosen as 'Miss America' (if there had been such contests during the time she was young). She was stunning in her beauty, but, more importantly, Margaret had an attractive and magnetic and beautiful personality. She was well-liked by her school teacher and by her peers. She attended a small high school, but she was number one in her graduating class, academically, and she was an accomplished cheer leader!

Her father's grocery store was located across the street from the high school, a convenient location for Margaret to slip away from her last class at the end of the school day, in order for her to enter the back door of her father's store, where she fulfilled her daily 'work assignment' (duties at her father's store).

Margaret (as a teenager) early learned the 'value of work' - and she became a hard worker for the many decades of her future adult life! Margaret told me that, when she completed her assigned tasks for her dad (at the store), she would do her 'home work' in the 'back room of the store'!

Dad had an unusual 'servant spirit', and because he served the public so nobly and sometimes so sacrificially, I think my dear mother (who saw dad so infrequently at our home) felt, at times, that the people (customers) almost 'owned' dad!

Dad, above all, wanted his many customers to be 'pleased' with his service. Besides owning the grocery business, and besides waiting on

his customers so diligently, Dad took pride in his ability to deliver 'fine cuts of meat' to his customers. Probably Dad's favorite place to be in his store was 'behind the meat counter'.

I can see dad yet (in my mind's eye) with his shiny white bib draping down his chubby stomach, as he was wrapping up a large choice cut of meat for his happy customer! Dad had a cheery countenance, and it is no wonder that his appreciative customers (friends) regularly returned to dad's store and to dad's butcher's counter.

Many of dad's customers returned to his store, not only to purchase their weekly supply of groceries, but also in order to have a 'little chat' with their special friend! Dad loved to 'shut the breeze' with his customers, many of whom (through the passing of time) became some of dad's choice friends!

Margaret, in and of herself, had an outgoing personality. She was, by nature, a positive-speaking and extroverted person, but, probably the fact that Margaret spent so much time in dad's grocery store (with all the happy conversations of the customers who loved to talk to Dad), this fact probably contributed to Margaret's ability to relate to various kinds of persons. Margaret, starting when she was rather young, developed amazing 'people skills'.

Margaret, throughout her long working career (51 years in the 'work force'!) found herself in many different 'social and work situations'! She was a most attractive and winsome person, as she related to multitudes of persons (many different kinds of persons) in various contexts in which she found herself. She was very well liked by her several bosses, and also by her fellow employees!

She got a good 'start' (in terms of her abilities to relate socially) when, as a teenager, she worked for dad in the grocery store (where socializing was a common feature). She learned a lot about social relationships (how to meet 'the public') when she was young! The lessons she learned in the store, served her so well for the remainder of her life!

From the example of both of her parents, Margaret learned the meaning of 'servanthood' (that is, she learned the importance of caring for the needs of those around her). Our father practiced the 'art of serving people', during the many years that he sold groceries and cut meat for

the 'public'. It seemed that everyone 'liked' (even 'admired') Bob Christian.

Our dad (as demonstrated in an earlier part of this book) had a special interest in the 'elderly ones' (especially in widows). During those 'far-away-times', Dad provided a 'special service' to some of the 'shut-ins' (elderly folks). Because these folks could not make their way from their house to dad's store to shop for groceries, dad would take their grocery orders, over the phone, and then, of course, he would 'fill' their order, and finally dad would deliver their groceries to their home! An amazing 'service' for these elderly folks!

Dad did not drive a car (why, I don't know), so the mode of transportation by which the groceries were delivered to the 'shut-ins' was a big, strong bike! Yes, dad assigned the job of delivering groceries to the homes of elderly ones, to his two teenage daughters (Margaret and Bobbie who was only 19 months younger than her sister).

The 'delivery bike' had a 'large basket' attached to the front handle bars- a basket just made for the carrying of a rather large 'order of groceries' to shut-ins! This is just another way that Margaret (and her younger sister) learned 'obedience' to their father and 'compassionate service' to needy older folks! Our dad taught his daughters the meaning of the 'work ethic' in a variety of 'settings' (including the use of their bike for useful and loving purposes)!

It is evident that our dad had a lot of confidence in his oldest daughter (Margaret) when dad entrusted all his earned income into the care and custody of Margaret! Why can such a startling statement be made? An amazing fact: Each week, Margaret boarded a Bus at an established location in Fountain, and she traveled to Colorado Springs to make a deposit in a certain bank (where dad did business)! At that time, Fountain did not have a bank.

Just think of the degree of responsibility which was in the hands of a teenager - all of dad's earned money from his grocery business! All his weekly earnings from his grocery business, in the hands of his teenage daughter! In the hands of a teenager - a teenager who traveled weekly on a public Bus to Colorado Springs! Getting off the Bus in Colorado Springs, and then walking to the designate Bank to make a deposit (of all her dad's hard-earned money)!

The risk of being robbed, during the hundreds of trips to another city - apparently this possibility did not 'cross the mind of my father! Dad, of course, never questioned his teenage daughter, in terms of her personal integrity! Dad trusted her fully, for Margaret had many times (during her teen years) proved herself to be trustworthy! Seldom has a father entrusted so much to a relatively young (teen) daughter!

Margaret knew that this weekly journey to Colorado Springs was her entrusted assignment by her beloved father, so Margaret thoughtfully, and routinely, obeyed her father's instructions (requirements) and she fulfilled her weekly duties! This transaction says a lot about both Dad and Daughter - a beautiful cooperation and loving submission by a daughter, and an unquestioning trust by a father towards a daughter!

Because I came into the world (1945) shortly before my oldest sister (Margaret) was married, obviously, I did not spend time with Margaret, in the relationship of brother-sister relationship. In fact, Margaret's first of her three sons is less than 2 years younger than I am! When I was growing up in Fountain, Margaret's three sons were more like my 'brothers' than they were as my 'nephews'. All three of Margaret's sons are fairly close to me in age. I enjoyed all three of them, during the years that we were all four growing up together.

I will not take the time or the space to profile these three sons of Margaret (for where would I 'end' up if I attempted to profile all my relatives, including all of my nephews and nieces?), but I would briefly note (at this point in the book) that these three sons grew up to be responsible, hard-working, conscientious, compassionate adults. All three of Margaret's sons became involved in land and residential (and commercial) developments, in building homes, and in the financing business. Their father was a successful land developer, among his many other financial endeavors.

When recently (by phone) my dear older sister (now 87 years old) briefly 'touched on' the highlights of her very long 'work history', I, of course, was rather amazed! Margaret attended a 'business college', and her competency in business affairs was shown, time and time again, by the fact that she easily 'landed' several different business-oriented jobs, when she lived in Colorado Springs! She was an excellent secretary, and she was an accomplished typist. She also was an excellent (well-liked) receptionist. Clients and customers were drawn

to her, like a 'filing is drawn to a magnet!'

She had a beautiful countenance, she was warm and friendly to her customers, she lent a listening ear to troubled individuals, she exuded laughter at appropriate times, and she always manifested a servant attitude, both to her bosses and to her customers! These are some of Margaret's characteristics which made her so attractive to those around her!

She told me, thankfully, that every time she submitted an application for a job, she got the very job she applied for! Her several bosses loved her, as a person, but they also loved her because she was such a competent worker - a very competent worker, a very conscientious and hard-working person! One boss (a Jewish man), who was so fond of Margaret, gave Margaret additional work to do (working in his warehouse, on Saturdays), simply because he knew that Margaret needed extra work and extra income!

After working in Colorado Springs for many years (and 'holding down' four different jobs), Margaret decided to move to South Carolina (where her husband was working). She was successfully employed there for about 7 years, after which time, fortunately, she 'landed' a 'dream job' with Hallmark Card Company, in Kansas City! She spent about 30 years working for 'Hallmark Card Company'.

It is not surprising that she greatly prospered when she worked for this notable card company! During some of the years that she worked for this company, she spent her 'lunch hours' working on the records and 'books' for her son's personal construction company. (Of course, she got the proper permission from her boss, to spend her lunch period, working on the company records for her oldest son).

Although it entailed lots of work, Margaret enjoyed providing her expertise (business knowledge) to her son, by keeping the proper records that were necessary for his construction of scores of beautiful homes. This cooperative relationship between Margaret and her oldest son (Bob) continued for about 15 years.

Margaret said that the total number of years that she worked (in a professional way) was 51 years! And, in addition to that immense number of 'work years', she spent another 15 years (at her noon 'breaks' and

during her evening hours) keeping all the business books for her son!

I have often said that I have never known anyone who has worked harder and who had worked more years, than my oldest sister - Margaret (Christian) Gilliland! From the time she was rather young (in the grocery store) until she finally retired from the 'work force', Margaret enthusiastically 'threw herself into her work!'

At the present age of 88, when I periodically visit with her on the phone, Margaret sounds so 'upbeat' and so 'excited' to be alive! She says that she loves the out-of-doors! She loves to breathe the fresh air! She loves to rake the leaves in her large yard! She loves to garden! She loves to view the roaming deer in the forest behind her gorgeous house - a large house which her son (Bob) built for her several years ago! She loves often to call her several relatives in Colorado, to 'check up on them!'

Margaret has long been an outgoing, unselfish, loving person, interested in the welfare of all her family members (including her family members who have long lived in Colorado - including myself).

She loves to read devotional books, and especially the Bible. Margaret, from her childhood, has loved to read. Our father would bring home a lot of fresh fruit. Margaret said that one of the delightful times of her youth was the times when she would curl up in a chair, with a good book, and with a bowl full of fresh fruit!

She loves to listen to choice television ministers. She loves to pray, and she believes in the reality of the heavenly realm. Along with all the other books which she has enjoyed reading, Margaret has enjoyed her reading on the subject of the afterlife (heaven).

While it certainly is a fact that Margaret (during her long job career) spent long hours on her 'job', she, fortunately, knew how also to spend a little time relaxing with her several friends. Through the many years of her life (several decades), Margaret developed considerable skill in the 'playing of bridge' (a challenging, mind-stretching game). Regularly (perhaps weekly) Margaret entertained a group of ladies who came to her house, for socializing, but also to involve themselves in the challenging game of 'bridge'!

A while before Margaret retired from 'Hallmark' Company, Margaret went to Hawaii. She rented a house there, where, for one month, her friends (a few at a time) came to vacation with Margaret. A very thoughtful and creative way to spend an extended vacation (opportunity to share 'fun' with your friends)!

A few years later (after she retired), she did the same thing- but it was her relatives who took time to be with her (for a few days) on the sunny island! My mother (at this time, a long time widow) went with my other sister (and her husband) to vacation with Margaret. Mother greatly enjoyed this time in Hawaii, for my mother (when my dad was living) took hardly any vacations.

When I occasionally visit with my oldest sister (Margaret), her voice sounds like the voice of a woman much younger than the typical voice of an 87 year old woman. When I talk to her on the phone, her voice does not quiver, but her voice is strong and clear and cheerful. Regardless of the hardships that have happened in her life (and she surely is not a 'stranger to sorrow and loss'), Margaret has long determined to think 'positively', to act 'positively', and to believe 'positively'!

She refuses to spend time 'graveling' in the sad things that have happening in her life, or in the life of her immediate family! By saying this (about positive living), I dare not convey the idea that Margaret is unsympathetic regarding the hurts and losses and griefs of those around her.

As the family's leader, Margaret keeps herself abreast of the needs and the hardships of her extended family members. She is not only positive in her thinking, but she is also tender-hearted and caring in her heart. She is both 'tough-minded and tenderhearted' because she is a loyal follower of her Lord!

It is true that every human being is 'one of a kind' (in terms of the uniqueness of their special and individual creation) - but in a narrower sense of the statement - I believe that Margaret is truly 'One of a Kind!' Yes, most persons (who observe her) would agree that she is a truly beautiful 'specimen' of humanity. She has a beautiful face and she has a beautiful figure.

Yes, in my opinion, she should have been designated the 'Miss

America' (when she was young). Physical beauty is to be cherished and is to be recognized and is to be honored, but the beauty that lasts (the beauty that is not diminished because of the passing of time) - that beauty that goes beyond the beauty of the physical frame - is spiritual beauty, the beauty of inward character.

Margaret well knows what the 'rough and tumble' of life is all about (the struggles and losses and suffering of life), but, through all the changes and the chances of her passing life, Margaret has developed the strength of a godly character!

I know Margaret to be one of the most positive-minded and outgoing and loving and kind and hopeful persons whom I have ever known. When I tend to be 'negative' in my words and in my actions, my wife suggests to me that I learn to be 'positive like your sister Margaret!'

Margaret is amiable (easy to get along with), flexible (adaptable rather than rigid and unyielding), personable (warm and friendly rather than aloof), forgiving (refusing to live with bitterness, with a determination to forgive others and to 'put the past behind her').

Margaret, for her age (presently 88) is amazingly 'youthful' in her approach to life. From all indications, she is healthy in her body, and she is 'alert' in her mind, and she is progressive in her outlook on life, and she is reverent in her spirit!

Margaret has loved to read ever since she was a child, and she continues to love to read, now that she is at the end of her 9th decade of living! She loves to read Christian devotional books, and she cherishes the opportunity to read the Holy Bible. She believes in the power of prayer, and she often talks to her loving Lord.

In terms of 'recreation' (outlet), she loves to be in the out-of-doors as much as possible. She loves to care for her large lawn, and she enjoys (with her son) to be involved in growing vegetables! She has often shared with me that racking leaves and mowing lawns (at her age!) definitely 'invigorates' her (in her body and in her mind). God has blessed her with both a healthy body and a 'alive' mind.

Margaret intends to remain 'active' in the lives of her dear family (immediate family and extended family)! Margaret has a lot of love to share!

Margaret intends to remain 'active' in the joys of her outdoor work. Margaret told me that, since her childhood when she raked leaves for her dad (the large lawns of her childhood home), she has always loved to be in the out-of-doors. Of course, this presently means even more to Margaret, since her 51 year long career in business did not allow her to be outdoors. During all those years she sat behind a desk! She loved her long career in business (where she was successful), but for the last many years (since her retirement) she has been outside as much as possible.

She enjoys her home, and she decorates her large home very beautifully, but she believes her place is to be in God's outdoors where she delights in God's amazing creation! As is true of all of us, Margaret is not without her challenges, but Margaret seldom (if ever) lets a 'negative word' leave her lips! She is a most delightful person!

Even though they pursued their own 'way of life', and even though they lived far from one another, my two sisters (Margaret and Bobbie) enjoyed a type of 'closeness' with each other throughout their long respective lives. Bobbie lived in Colorado Springs and Margaret lived in Kansas City (for many years), but almost every evening (night) they visited by phone with each other. (Neither of these dear women, who were of the 'old school', owned nor used modem phones, even though, ironically, Bobbie dealt with phones for 40 years, as a telephone operator). Nightly, Bobbie and Margaret enjoyed visiting with one another, and getting up to date on the current 'news' of the families and of friends.

The night before Bobbie was found dead in her home (August 6, 2011), Margaret had talked to Bobbie - as usual! What shock to be informed the next day that her beloved sister (her lifetime friend) was 'gone'! The sister with whom she had shared so much of her life! The sister who was only 19 months younger than herself.

How could this sister relationship (cherished for decades) so suddenly come to an end? No warning whatever! No indication that Bobbie was ill - except for the last words that Bobbie had shared with Margaret, namely, "I feel so very tired! I think I will go to bed earlier tonight!"

Every one of us would have to admit that the passing years take their 'toll' upon every human body (with no exceptions)! Every one of us, if we celebrate lots of birthdays, will indeed become an old person. The effects of old age will become apparent in one way or another upon our physical 'frame'. That is to be expected, and that inevitable reality is not to be despised! The only option to growing old is to die young!

The ultimate 'exit' of death, simply ushers us into the 'nearer presence of God'! Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!" Death (because of our faith in Christ) is our 'friend', not our enemy!

My sister is not young (in terms of the calendar days of her life), but, nevertheless, most observers would gladly acknowledge that Margaret (Christian) Gilliland still is very beautiful, that she still is very youthful in her attitudes (forward-moving and positive and interested in people around her, and still enjoying so many 'projects' in her house and in her yard).

Yes, Margaret has retained her physical beauty, but, far more importantly, Margaret is beautiful in her personality, in her attitudes toward people, in her relationship to the God who made her!

When she returns to the God who gave life and breath and all good things to her, Margaret will shine brighter and more beautiful than the stars of the sky! Her beauty in heaven will far outshine the beauty that she enjoyed on this material planet!

I praise God that He gave me a most beautiful and godly older sister - a sister who has enriched my life more than she will ever know!

*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,
To his feet thy tribute bring,
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who, like me, his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!*

*Praise the Everlasting King! Praise him for his grace and favor
To our fathers in distress; Praise him, still the same forever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless. Praise him! Praise him!
Praise him! Praise him!*

*Glorious in his faithfulness! Father like, he tends and spares us,
Well our feeble frame he knows, In his hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes. Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Praise him!*

*Widely as his mercy flows! Angels, help us to adore him
Ye behold him face to face; Sun and moon, bow down before him;
Dwellers all in time and space, Praise him! Praise him!
Praise him! Praise him! Praise with us the God of grace!*

I PRAISE GOD FOR A SECOND SISTER WHO WAS VERY AFFECTIONATE AND JOYOUS

Probably the most 'shocking morning' of my life was on August 6, 2011. Her voice on the other end of the phone line was 'steady' (not hysterical), but, nevertheless, rather sober! It was the voice of my beloved niece - a niece who was the oldest child of my second sister. Because she was only 7 years younger than myself, she and I spent lots of time playing together as we grew up together.

I knew her to be one of the sweetest and most mature and most godly persons that I could know among my rather large extended family. Even though, in the past, we had seen each other quite often, as a result of her growing up and marrying a great 'guy' and having her own family, she and I saw each other very seldom (usually on a Thanksgiving family celebration). She and her three siblings had all 'married well' and all of them seemed to be happy and mature and earnest in the living of their own lives.

Debbie and her siblings and their beautiful families were all professed Christians. I respected all of them, and I especially held their mother (my sister) in highest esteem and respect. My sister (Bobbie) and Bobbie's husband and the four children and their families were 'close knit' - an amazing generation of loving and joyous Christians.

I always looked up to my sister and to her rather large family as exemplary persons - persons who were earnest in their 'faith' and 'joyous' in their daily lifestyle. They, of course, were not 'perfect' in everything they said or did, but their mutual care for one another and their outgoing love for persons around them - these qualities were, in my mind,

to be 'envied'!

No divorces among the extended family (Bobbie and her four children), and the nine grandchildren who were committed to their parents and to the ways of Christianity - what an example to be envied! Bobbie and her family seemed to 'have it all together'! Bobbie deeply loved her husband (to whom she was married for over 50 years), and Bobbie's way of 'pouring on the love and visible affection' to all her family members - how could anyone not love and cherish Bobbie!

Bobbie's affectionate expressions - her overflowing and uninhibited expressions of affections - were shown to nearly everyone who was around her. It was not uncommon for Bobbie to give a 'hug' to her loved ones, as well as to many of her friends and fellow members at her church (including her long-time pastor).

Her hugs, of course, were the expression of her heart-felt love for persons, and not with any other motives. She was pure in her motives, and desirous to let others know that she sincerely cared for her fellow human beings. I have never known a person who was more sincere in the expression of her love for people, and more visible in her expression of her deeply-felt love.

On the fateful (dreadful) morning of August 6, 2011, I was not prepared to hear the message that my niece had to deliver to me (her uncle). She simply told me that her mother (my sister) was found dead earlier that morning. She died in the big chair where she often slept (when she couldn't get comfortable in her regular bed)!

I was shocked beyond words! I could not believe what I was hearing! My beloved sister dead? How could this be? I just talked on the phone to her two days previous to this morning! She sounded as normal and as healthy as she always did! Her cheerful voice and her warm exchanges!

She, at that time, called me to request my prayers for one of her husband's brothers! She had expressed interest in my oldest daughter (who was still adjusting to the aftermath of her horrible divorce). Bobbie was an unusual prayer warrior, and she carried the 'burdens' of persons who were 'hurting'.

She was constantly 'overflowing' in her love for so many! These were

my conscious, as well as subconscious, thoughts when Debbie (Bobbie's oldest daughter) 'broke the sad news' to me! I was 'shaken' inside me!

I could not believe that, for the coming years, I would not have the presence and the prayers of my loving and joyous and laughing older sister. I would never hear again her loving and her special words of affection to me! No one ever called me (an adult man) 'My baby doll!' (And other endearing words).

There was only one person in our family who could be so uninhibited in the expression of affection. If Bobbie felt like 'hugging' someone, she hugged them! She had to 'be herself'. She seemed to be so 'comfortable' with who she was. Of course, she was appropriate in physical expressions, but she had her own definition of what is 'appropriate'.

She did not care what other persons thought about her, for she knew her own heart (her own motives and her own intentions), and, in the 'name of God's love' (which she felt deep within her heart), she was intent in letting the 'love of God flow through her physical body' (lips and hugs).

When Debbie 'broke' the 'heart-crushing news' to me on that August morning, I was nearly speechless in my response. I was struggling within myself and I was bundling in my words to express sympathy to this precious niece (and firstborn of Bobbie). I had the utmost confidence in the degree of godliness that I knew resided in Debbie, and my confidence in Debbie was proven to be authentic. I was amazed with Debbie's composure, as Debbie spent some time explaining some of the details surrounding her mother's death.

Of course, it did not take long before all the extended family members became aware of Bobbie's sudden and unexpected death. What caused her death? The four children did not choose to find out. Their mother was 'gone', so why find out! Every family has its own way of dealing with this matter.

In my own mind, there are two possibilities. One, I think the cause of her death might have been 'blood clots' (for Bobbie, as a result of multiple surgeries during the 10 previous years, had some challenges with

blood clots). Or perhaps the more immediate (possible) cause of her death could have been infection' (for Bobbie was in the middle of an extensive dental procedure).

Bobbie's funeral (not surprisingly) was a 'celebration' of her life. The funeral was held in the very sanctuary where Bobbie (and her husband) had worshiped for nearly 60 years! If there ever is an example of 'faithfulness to one's church' (in terms of attendance and in terms of service) it is found in the 'faithfulness' of Bobbie to her local church (and to her local pastors, of which there were only three during her long-time attendance at her church).

The youngest of the four children (Brian Lancaster) - true to his unusual speaking abilities - offered a 'family tribute'. It was moving and it was most amazing! He has a way with words, and he has an unusual ability to 'connect' with his audience! His message (tribute) 'gripped' the heart of all in the audience, and it, at times, some words from his message brought laughter to everyone (he has unusual humor)!

A few persons (friends and neighbors) in the congregation stood to their feet to share stories from the life of Bobbie! The finishing message, delivered by Bobbie's beloved pastor, was accented by many words of love and appreciation for the noble woman that Bobbie was, and he expressed great appreciation for the great service that Bobbie gave during the decades that Bobbie enjoyed as a member of the church. Bobbie was one of the several women leaders in the church.

The pastor said that Bobbie had made plans to take him and his wife to a luncheon (on the very day that Bobbie passed away)! The pastor mentioned (in his message) that Bobbie was an amazing encourager to him. One time, while he was preaching, he said that he happened to look across the congregation, and he spotted Bobbie looking intently at him. Bobbie (in her own loving and embracing way) 'winked' at him - a 'wink' of approval and a 'wink' of encouragement. Bobbie had her own unique ways of communicating her love to people!

On another 'crucial' day (a Sunday morning) when Bobbie was ready to greet the pastor, as she was ready to exit through the sanctuary door, she said to the pastor, "You can't leave our church! You have been here so long! We all need you right here! We want you to stay!"

The pastor said that this word of affirmation to him (that he was still needed in this church, even after having served as pastor for many years), was one of the 'key deciding factors' that helped make up his mind that he would 'turn down' an offer to go to another city to pastor.

Bobbie had a special way of communication! Bobbie's communication was a communication, not so much of the 'reason of the mind', but rather a communication of the 'love of the heart' (with outward expressions of her inner love)! Bobbie's persuasive power was the persuasive power of love - a love that wrapped itself around the persons with whom she was communicating.

She may have had her times of temptations toward resentment, but, if she did have those times in her life, I was not aware of those times. During the decades of time that I knew her, my sister always was aglow with the love of God - the love of God that was powerful to heal the ills of her own life, and powerful enough to bring healing (through the indwelling Spirit) to those who were in the fortunate company of my dear (godly) sister!

One of the several persons (friends) who were impacted by Bobbie's life, was a lady who (many years before) had worked at the telephone company with Bobbie. This lady, at the time, was a new mother. She was not a Christian believer, but, nevertheless, Bobbie felt comfortable to speak to her about spiritual matters.

Bobbie lovingly (but straightforwardly) said to her (something like this): "Raising a child is a big responsibility. You need to get into a Bible study group. There is a group that I am involved in, called 'Bible Study Fellowship'. It would be good if you could get into it."

This particular Bible Study is a very detailed study (involving many years of serious study). The lady took Bobbie's advice, and, as a result of this involvement in studying the Word of God, this lady became a serious follower of Christ. She, on that day of the funeral, gave honor to Bobbie for leading her to a life of spiritual meaning! Bobbie, in a loving way, witnessed to many persons during her lifetime!

One of the obvious and predominant characteristics of Bobbie's life is her commitment to persons and to places that Bobbie considered to be important. Bobbie's 'loyalty' to certain priorities in her life was

amazing to behold! Stability, faithfulness, perseverance, longevity, undying loyalty, unwavering commitment - these are a few words that vividly describe the character of Bobbie!

Using these descriptive words, consider how Bobbie 'fleshed out' her various commitments. First and foremost, Bobbie was committed to her Lord. She became a Christian, early in her life, and she remained a steadfast follower of Christ, until the day that she died.

She studied the Word faithfully and she prayed earnestly and consistently. She had a special place in her house which was her 'prayer chapel' (I think a certain chair where she daily met her Lord)! Her personal relationship with her Savior spanned several decades.

She loved 'baby Christians' and she sought to encourage these 'beginning Christians' (these immature believers)! However, she herself was definitely not a 'baby Christian'! Rather, she was a 'mature Christian', a believer who sought to walk in the Spirit, a believer who sought consistently to be motivated by the love of God! She possessed lots of wisdom and discernment and understanding, regarding the 'ways of God'!

Secondly, she made a serious commitment to her beloved husband! She was married to Everett for well over 50 years, and she and Everett had a good (not perfect) marriage. They knew how to communicate with one another, and, even though Bobbie was very persuasive in the views she presented to her husband (who was more 'quiet' by personality), Bobbie respected the leadership of her husband.

They together made their children their priority, and that was demonstrated by countless trips which Bobbie and Everett arranged for their family to enjoy together. Bobbie and Everett considered their activities which they did with their children to be all-important. Is it any wonder that Bobbie and Everett 'produced' such amazing children (all believers with great spouses and with nine wonderful grandchildren)?

Thirdly, Bobbie (along with her husband) chose to remain as citizens of one city, for their entire married life! Bobbie and Everett loved to live in Colorado Springs, and even though the city grew astronomically during the five decades when Bobbie and Everett lived there, they chose to remain in their original house and in the very city where they were

married!

A popular city, with multiple 'sites' which attracted tourists from far and wide! Garden of the Gods, Seven Falls, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Cave of the Winds, Pikes Peak, Air Force Academy, and more! Beautiful parks for picnics scattered throughout the beautiful city!

Bobbie and Everett loved their surroundings! They knew their way around the city, and they loved their favorite places to eat! They had plenty of friends who brought them great delight, as they ate and chatted and laughed together with these friends!

Fourth, Bobbie was committed to her job (as a telephone operator). A few days after she graduated from high school, providentially (through God's guidance) Bobbie 'landed' a good job with the telephone company in Colorado Springs. This was a steady job, a job that paid fairly well, and a job with good retirement benefits! Bobbie could have been advanced (higher job level), but she chose not to accept the offer (for advancement and higher pay).

Bobbie did not wish to assume greater responsibilities and to assume longer hours of work. Bobbie's priority was her children, and she did not want anything to take away from her time with her children!

She was very competent as a telephone operator, but she had no desire to 'climb the ladder' to a more advanced position (with greater pay). Family, to her, came before a bigger pay check! I believe God rewarded Bobbie (many times over) for the decision she made to spend more time with her four children!

Fifth, Bobbie was strongly committed to her local church. Shortly after she and Everett were married, Bobbie and Everett chose to attend a small church (what some would call a 'church plant'). She became a member of that small Presbyterian Church, and it was in this very church where she and her husband attended for over 50 years!

Bobbie's funeral service was held in the very sanctuary where Bobbie had worshiped thousands of times, for over five decades! It was this local church that sponsored the founding of a Christian Day School (kindergarten thru 12th grade).

Bobbie and Everett enrolled all four of their children in this School. All of their children attended some or all of the grades during a long period of time. After one of the daughters (Diana) graduated from a Christian College in Tennessee, she returned to the Springs to teach (elementary classes) for about 15 years - in the very School where she attended for many years as a student!

Bobbie and Everett were served by this Church/School for several decades, and their children were all deeply influenced by these worship and education ministries, at this particular Presbyterian Church/School! To this day, the surviving members of the Lancaster family (that is, the four children) feel a keen sense of indebtedness to this particular Presbyterian (small) church and Christian School!

Bobbie and Everett were blessed with four outstanding children, all of whom married in their 30's. Bobbie and Everett waited a considerable amount of time before they got to see their children 'tie the knot' in holy matrimony.

These four children, by God's grace, married well! Each of these four children and their respective spouses are believers in Christ Jesus, and they all have great churches where they are involved, in one manner or another.

Again, Bobbie and Everett waited patiently (upon God) until they got to be the joyful recipients of nine grandchildren. I have had little contact with Bobbie's grandchildren, but (as far as I know) they all are serious about spiritual matters, and they all are 'on a certain path' towards reaching a professional goal (work).

Within the societal context of numerous divorces in our broken world, it is encouraging that Bobbie's sizeable family is still 'intact' and is 'solid' and is 'God-centered'! A great tribute, of course, to the grace of God, but also a tribute to the godly training which these four children received.

Even though they never 'advertised' it, I am aware that the earnest prayers of these children (and the earnest prayers of Bobbie herself) had a deciding influence in the children carefully choosing their life-time mates!

The legacy of Bobbie Lancaster (my beloved sister) is the legacy of

love - a legacy of God's love which effectively and powerfully was 'channeled' through the life of one of God's humble and willing servants!

Only in eternity will the full impact of the life of Bobbie Lancaster, as she lived that life on earth, be known! Love never fails! She being dead, she still speaks - speaks to the hearts of those who are open to God's love! Her mind, her motives, her movements, her motivations were all driven by God's love!

If heaven is a place that is full of love, then Bobbie Lancaster will feel 'right at home' in heaven! If people (heavenly citizens) do any hugging in heaven, then Bobbie will be at the 'front of the line', ready to 'hug' and 'hug' and 'hug' and 'hug'! And everyone will love her hugs! Everyone in heaven, whom she touches, will immediately know that they are being touched by a 'supernatural lover' of redeemed human beings! If there is a heavenly citizen who, while on earth, never knew the joy of receiving a 'hug', that heavenly citizen will quickly know the joy of a hug, when my sister Bobbie approaches him/her!

Now thank we all our God, With heart and hands and voices, Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices; Who from our mother's arms Hath blessed us on our way With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

*O may this bounteous God, through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts, And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills In this world and the next.
All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,
The Son and Him who reigns With them in highest heaven;
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, And shall be evermore.*

Amen.

(Now Thank We All Our God, by Martin Rinkart)

**I PRAISE GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITY OF LEAVING A GOOD
LEGACY TO CHILDREN!**

Here is a very important question: "What will be the 'gift of your legacy' which you will leave to your children and to your grandchildren?" None of us lives on an 'island', all to himself/herself! Each of us possesses the 'power of influence' - an influence for either 'good' or for 'bad', a positive influence or a negative influence, an influence that brings 'hurt' to others or an influence that brings 'help' to others, an influence the memory of which will call up attractive thoughts or repulsive thoughts!

There is no such thing as a 'neutral' presence in our world. By the decisions we make and by the life we live (godly or godless), we leave our 'mark' on this world!

Each of us is simply a 'link' in the long chain of life, and we are either a strong link or a weak link in that chain in which we inevitably 'fit'. We will leave this world 'better off' or 'worse off', as a result of our having lived in this big world for a few decades.

People (especially our children and our grandchildren) will remember us as being a kind person or as being a cruel person, as being a thoughtful person or as being a selfish person, as being a giving person or as being a grasping person, as being an understanding person or as being a close-minded person, as being a tender-hearted person or as being a calloused person!

Our descendants will remember us as being an amiable person or as being a stubborn person, as being a person who was adaptable or as being a person who was rigid and unyielding, as being a person who was forgiving or as being a person who was bitter and vengeful, as being a person who followed the Lord Jesus Christ or as being a person who was pagan in words and in thoughts and in actions!

What kind of influence are you presently having in your daily life? When people (honestly) think about you, what do they think? Does your loving (godly) character attract persons to you, or do people (in their moments of discernment regarding you) discern that you are not 'for real' (that you are double-minded and manipulative and ulterior in your motives)?

Do people love to be with you, because you are sincere in your motives (guileless in your motives), because you are trustworthy in your com-

mitments, because you are compassionate in your mission?

Who you really are will eventually be known to the people around you! You cannot forever 'hide' your inner motivations and your secret intentions and your hidden thoughts! The masks (of deception) eventually will be removed, and you will be exposed before your peers for the person that you really are!

Most of us (even believers) have to be honest, and we have to acknowledge that there is a 'gap' between who we 'profess' to be, and what we (in our 'daily life') really are! We all come short of the 'glory of God'! We (believers) all are painfully aware that we fall short in attaining all of our 'goals', in terms of our living a consistent 'holy life'. But, the person (believer) who is striving to be more consistent in his daily (Christian) life - this person is not condemned by either his God or by his 'close' friends!

It is one thing to sincerely strive to live a holy life, and (in the process) come short of the full attainments of a 'holy lifestyle', and, it is another thing to profess that one is 'holy' when such a person is actually and deceptively 'using religion' as a 'mask' to advance his own selfish agenda!

One is not a hypocrite if he admits that, in spite of his good intentions, he comes short of his attainments in living a consistent holy life, but, on the other hand, one is definitely a hypocrite if he deceptively professes something that he knows he does not experience, and that he has no intention to experience, namely, a personal relationship with the Living Christ! Friends who 'look on' will respect the former person (one who is authentic in his humble 'confessions'), but they will despise the latter person (one who has an insincere and deceptive 'profession' of religious connection, for his own ulterior purposes).

People love authentic (genuine) persons, but people scorn those who are 'play-actors' (hypocrites)! The former (who acknowledges his personal 'faults' and his 'weaknesses'), but who, nevertheless, exudes a positive and loving influence to those around him - such a sincere (authentic) person will leave a positive 'legacy' to his descendants. The latter person (insincere and inauthentic and deceptive) may, for a time, appear to be 'good' and 'helpful', but, eventually, his 'true colors' will be revealed, and such a person will finally be despised (as in the

case of the hypocritical Pharisees of Jesus' time)!

The memory of such a person will be negative in the minds of his descendants. The descendants of the first person (the godly person) will 'rise up and call him blessed'. The descendants of the second person (the hypocritical, the double-minded person) will 'rise up and call him cursed'!

In the future, long after you are dead, your descendants will remember you as a 'good' person, or as a 'bad' person, as a noble person or as an ignoble person, as a loving person or as an indifferent person, as a charitable person or as a self-centered person, as a joyous person or as a forlorn person, as a good-humored person or as a forbidding person, as an approachable person or as an aloft person, as a generous person or as a stingy person!

Your descendants will remember you as a rational person or as a close-minded person, as a gentle person or as a harsh person, as an arrogant person or as a humble person, as a fun-loving person or as an overly-sensitive person, as a praying person or as an indifferent person, as an innovative person or as a dull-minded person, as a person who read the Bible or as a person who neglected the Bible, as a charitable person or as a person who was judgmental towards others!

Your descendants will remember you as a person who quickly forgave others or as a person who held grudges towards others, as a person who was outgoing towards others or as a person who was withdrawn and isolated from others, as a person who loved to attend the house of God or as a person who seldom 'darkened a church door'!

Your influence, after you are dead, will live on for at least one future generation - and perhaps for more generations! Only God knows how long your influence - for good or for ill - will live on! Those who come after us will be 'helped' or they will be 'hindered', as a result of the fact that we lived on this planet.

There is no narrow-edged fence upon which we may balance precariously - we have to come down on one side of the fence or on the other side of the fence! We have to decide to either live an authentic life or to live an inauthentic life - to live either a life that reverences the living God or to live a life that chooses to reject the living God. "Choose

ye this day whom ye will serve! As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" So said Joshua of long ago!

We will leave either a godly legacy or we will leave an ungodly legacy, depending upon which 'side of the fence we come down on!' Either for or against God! Jesus said that if you are not for Him, then you are automatically against Him!

No neutrality! You and I will leave either a 'godly legacy' or an 'ungodly legacy'. It all depends upon what 'side of the fence we come down on!' There is no such thing as a life that 'balances precariously' on that narrow edge of the fence!

During the time you are contemplating the 'decision', God permits you to 'balance yourself precariously on that narrow edge of the fence', but you (like Joshua) must soon 'choose ye this day whom you will serve' - will you serve the true God or will you serve the Baal (paganism)?

Whom (or what) you choose to serve will determine, not only the quality of the life that you will live on this planet, but it will determine also the quality of the legacy that you will leave for your descendants (children and future generations)!

Will you leave behind a 'godly' legacy, or will you leave behind a 'godless' legacy? You have the choice of living a noble life or an ignoble life! You have the choice of giving your children a noble legacy or an ignoble legacy!

What will your children and your grandchildren and your great grandchildren be saying about you during the next decades, even the next hundred years? Will their words about you be uplifting words or despicable words, honorable words or dishonorable words?

The choices that you and I make today, will inevitably determine the kind of legacy that we leave our children and our grandchildren! We all exercise great influence in the lives of many people with whom we 'rub shoulders'- people with whom we eat and drink and play and laugh and sleep, people with whom we have business transactions, people with whom we sing and pray and worship!

We do not 'live to ourselves', we do not live in a 'bubble', we do not live in isolation, and we do not live alone on a desert island! We live in so-

ciety!

We speak many thousands of words during our lifetime! We make countless decisions (small and large) during the three score and ten years while we dwell on this terrestrial plane! Hundreds of fellow humans see what we do, and hundreds of fellow humans hear what we speak, and hundreds of fellow humans make judgments regarding the decisions that we make!

We may not like the reality that we find ourselves in - the reality that we are in a type of 'fish bowl'! That is the price of being a human being - a human being who is destined to live 'in society'. We (humans) may try to hide from other people what we really are! We may temporarily succeed in our schemes of deception, but the truth about who we really are will someday be known and be recognized. The Bible says that what is hidden in secret will eventually be 'shouted from the housetop'!

We do not 'live to ourselves', and we do not 'die to ourselves'! Of course, in the 'name of being transparent', I do not need to 'hang out my dirty clothes' (my personal sins) for everyone to see and to behold! If my sins are truly (according to the Bible) 'hidden in the sea of God's forgetfulness', then I have no need and I have no desire to go 'fishing' for my sins (in God's sea of forgetfulness)!

Yes, the Bible says that I am to confess my sins to the brethren (fellow believers), so that, through this humbling act, I can enjoy forgiveness from my God! After I have confessed my sins to my God and after I have confessed my sins to my 'accountability group' of believers, then I need not (I should not) talk about my sins ever again!

If God has forgiven my sins, and if God has even forgotten my sins, then I have no right to withhold forgiveness for my sins from myself (I must forgive myself of my sins). I may never really 'forget' the sins I committed in my past, but I, nevertheless, must not recall my sins to myself - I must not spend any time groveling in remorse and in regrets regarding my past 'wrongs'!

For the sake of Christ (because of His 'finished work' for me on His cross), I must follow the perfect example of God (the God who totally forgives me, and who wipes my sins from His divine mind)!

God wants me to have a clear conscience (free of guilt), and God wants me to have a pure heart (pure motives), and God wants me to have a surrendered will (to follow Christ's will), and God wants me to have a reverent spirit (to enable me rightly to worship the Savior).

When I have these God-enabled 'gifts' in my inner soul, I will find that I am living a life that is pleasing to my God, a life that is fruitful in good works, a life that is influential in witnessing to everyone around me (impacting lives around me with God's saving love). Living such a fruitful life will eventually bring me to the culmination of my earthly life!

A fruitful life will naturally prepare me for a fruitful death. And the 'bonus' (additional reward) for the person who has experienced a 'fruitful life' and a 'fruitful death' is a 'fruitful legacy'. One of the greatest rewards that God can give to anyone is the reward of having a lasting and loving and powerful legacy!

How we live and how we die will determine the quality (good or bad) of the legacy which we leave to our children! Our children, obviously, do not expect us to leave them a legacy which is perfect or which is spotless (free of mistakes and sins).

All that our children desire that we leave to them is the memory of a life that was 'well lived' - a life that was genuine and authentic and free from hypocritical 'pretentiousness'! Our children, by the way we live and by the way we die, want to receive a legacy from us that is characterized by 'genuineness' (authenticity).

They want to remember us as persons who imperfectly, but sincerely, sought to live in a God-honoring manner, sought to glorify the resurrected Christ, sought to honor and to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. Our children want to remember us as a person, who, when he failed his God, he quickly and humbly confessed his sin to a merciful God, and who, when he failed his fellow men, he quickly sought reconciliation with his offended Christian Brother (or non-Christian fellow man).

Our children want to remember us as a man who pursued peace at all times, with his God and with his fellow human beings! A peaceful man rather than a 'warlike' person. A man who was always conciliatory rather than adversarial in his relationships with his fellow human beings!

This briefly describes the kind of attitudes which our children desire to

see displayed in our lives (as fathers)! In terms of 'godly character', this is the kind of 'legacy' which our children deeply desire to receive from us - the kind of legacy that they can cherish, long after we have exited this 'stage of action' (this temporary dwelling place)!

In terms of the legacy that we parents leave behind for our children, it is important to realize that what children most observe in the life of their parents is 'integrity' or lack of 'integrity'. If we say one thing and, instead, do something else, our children can 'smell that odor' of hypocrisy a mile away!

If we profess that we are 'honest', but our daily lifestyle demonstrates that we are 'shady' in our business dealings, or that we do not 'keep our word', or that we dishonestly 'stretch the truth' about our neighbors (because we are envious of them) - or if we demonstrate a pattern of dishonesty in other ways - then we can expect our children to turn against us.

They will declare that we are dishonest, that we are deceptive in our way of life! We inevitably will leave a 'legacy' to our children. It is not a matter of 'If we leave a legacy. It is a matter of 'What' will be the type of legacy which our children will inherit from us!

A financial legacy (financial inheritance) may or may not be beneficial to your children. Of course, leaving too much money to your children can be detrimental to them (for rather obvious reasons). The legacy of a godly character is a truly great and wonderful and lasting legacy! You have the opportunity of leaving a legacy, the benefits of which cannot be calculated!

After you are dead, you will continue to speak to your children and to your grandchildren - through the example of your Christ like character! Your positive influence will live on and on! Only God knows how far-reaching will be your influence! Your legacy will benefit more persons than you can imagine!

Unless you are a very famous person, it is not likely that you will be 'remembered' one hundred years from now (except, unless perhaps your name is recalled by someone who researches his/her genealogy). But, even though you may not be personally recognized among future

generations, it is almost certain that the 'legacy of your influence' (i.e., your enduring values which 'define your entire life') - this influence will 'live on' in the lives of your future generations.

While the 'depth' and the 'breadth' of your influence is hard to evaluate with any kind of 'precision', the effects of your words, and the choices (good and bad) that you make, and the 'projection of your personality' (introverted or extroverted), and the 'religious commitments' that you unashamedly reveal (honesty or deception), and the material lifestyle that you practice (simple or extravagant) - these aspects (and other aspects) of your total personhood all exercise a powerful influence, in the lives of many persons who 'come after you.'

Even though (rightly) I have given attention - in a general way - to the concept of 'legacy' as it applies to persons in the 'wider audience' of the human population, it is proper for me (briefly) to give notice to a part of my own 'legacy'!

It is likely that everyone would 'blush' if others became aware of certain (less-than-noble) persons who are a part of our ancestry! We all consider our 'legacy' in parts, not in one large whole. That is to say, there are certain ancestors in whom we take great 'pride', and, of course there are certain other ancestors that we prefer to 'forget' that they even existed! In other words, there are some persons in our genealogy that we know to be noble (godly) persons, and there are some other persons in our genealogy that we know to be ignoble (wicked)!

Even the Bible (particularly the book of Proverbs) speaks of these two distinct types of persons - those who, because of their love for God, will long be remembered, and those who, because of their wicked life, will soon be forgotten! "The memory of one who lived with integrity brings joy, but the legacy of a wrongdoer will rot away." (Proverbs 10:7, The Voice Bible) Just think of what the Bible says about 'legacy'! The memory of the godly person will last, but the memory (legacy) of a wrongdoer will 'rot away'!

I had first-hand knowledge of a few of my several aunts and uncles (all of whom were alive at the same time that I, for several years, was alive). On my father's 'side of the family' I have little knowledge of my ancestors. I cherished my father's parents and my father's siblings, but beyond that generation, I have scant knowledge.

From personal contact and from brief (very brief) accounts, I have some knowledge concerning my legacy, from my mother's 'side of the family'.

My mother - a godly woman - left me a great legacy! Faithfulness to God and faithfulness to God's Church is something I was taught all throughout my childhood and my youth. Although I have a humble ancestry, I am rich with a heritage of godly forefathers who were faithful to Christ and to Christ's Church.

There is much which I value in my heritage, but nothing do I value more than the many lessons I learned in loyalty and faithfulness' only pray for God's grace to help me to pass on such a heritage to my children.

As a child, I regularly went with my mother to Wednesday night prayer meetings in our little white-framed Free Methodist Church in Fountain, Colorado. My mother rarely missed attending those prayer meetings, even though she was often weary (from her hard work), and many times she was plagued with headaches. She believed in faithfulness and she practiced it throughout my childhood. She was faithful to teach me the Bible and to pray with me daily in my home.

My grandmother (my mother's mother) was equally faithful to her Lord and to her Church. It was her godly life, along with the influence of my own mother, that strongly drew me (motivated me) to become a Christian.

My great grandmother (who died in 1950) was at one time named as the oldest woman in El Paso County (Colorado Springs)! I verily remember her, for I was only 5 years old when she died. She gave birth to seven children! She was a faithful, godly woman, seldom missing the Church services, held in the same little church where all my ancestors attended. It was in this little church (founded in the 1880's) where I received much of my own early training in the 'basics of Christianity'!

My great grandfather was a humble, but faithful, man of God. In an old family album was found his obituary. "Joseph E. Benedict, was born at Brownville, Nebraska, May 12, 1857, and he departed this life at his

home at Fountain, Colorado, October 8, 1928. Early in life he united with the Free Methodist Church and was a very active, faithful member and sacrificed greatly for the work of God. Though for many years a cripple, he was always faithful. He would hobble to Church or prayer meeting even when others thought the weather too bad or they were too weary."

My great, great grandfather was born in 1821 and died in Fountain, Colorado, in 1909. His pastor, who wrote his obituary, noted the following: "When the Free Methodist Church was organized in Fountain, he and his wife became charter members. He loved the means of grace and often, even in the last months of his life, he walked with trembling steps to the house of God."

My great grandmother (mentioned above) was born in 1860 in a 'covered wagon' (near to Fountain, Colorado). She was left without a mother, for her mother died when she was giving birth to my great grandmother (Irene). I was told (by someone who did the 'research') that this newborn's father was an atheist.

Providentially (and most importantly) God 'moved' the mind of this atheist/father to decide to 'give away' this newborn baby! He did not want to keep the baby, perhaps because he did not have a wife/mother to care for the baby. For whatever the reason, he placed the newborn baby (my great grandmother) into the arms of a husband/wife who were thrilled to have the baby! No adoption agency (in those times)! The couple, into whose arms the baby was placed, 'happened' to be a Christian couple!

What would have happened if the atheist father would have raised my great grandmother? I shudder to think of what devastating affects the influence of an atheist father might have had on that child (my great grandmother). Because she was raised by godly parents, her future children and grandchildren and great grandchildren (including me) were taught the ways of Christ!

What will be written about you in your obituary? More importantly, what will your descendants write about you a few decades from the time that you die? Will they say about you that you were a 'faithful servant' of God - that you faithfully attended church services, that you faithfully read the Bible and that you faithfully interceded in prayer for

others, that you generously gave your money to care for the poor and the distressed, that you faithfully kept your marriage vows with strictest integrity, that you faithfully served your family with a sacrificial spirit, that you faithfully fulfilled your business obligations, that you lived justly and compassionately, that you faithfully kept the commandments of God, that you humbly walked before your God all the days of your life?

I PRAISE GOD FOR THE BENEFIT OF RUNNING THROUGHOUT MY ENTIRE LIFETIME!

By 'nature' and by 'practice' I am not a basically 'athletic-type' person. I am not proficient in any 'sport' (basketball, baseball, soccer, or any other of the multitude of sports). That statement is 'true', with one exception! Ever since I was a child, playing at recess during grade school years, I have consistently shown myself to be a rather fast runner!

When there were 'running games' during the school recess time, I usually did very well, sometimes taking 'first place' in running competition. I competed in running events, during my junior high and senior high years. Those six years were accented with competitive running, and during the few months each of these six years (when I participated in 'track'), I was one of the several 'star' runners.

Of course, my 'times' for the events that I competed in, did not measure as high as the times of those very good runners who participated in the track teams from the 'big' Denver Schools. During those six years of public schooling, I worked hard during 'track season', and the 'times' I had in my events (440 yard dash, one mile relay, low and high hurdles) were good enough to 'earn' me several awards (several first place 'blue' ribbons and other awards).

The 'ribbons', of course, were of little value, but what those ribbons (and metals) stood for, meant a lot to me! They represented 'supreme' effort and physical stamina and concentrated discipline and team cooperation, and more!

The benefits of running go far beyond the satisfaction of winning a race. Learning to cooperate with fellow runners, obedience and submission to a caring and demanding coach, learning to do my best dur-

ing a race and then accepting the 'results' (win or lose) with a good attitude, learning to remain humble and not be self-centered when I 'basked in the sunshine' of victory, enjoying the vitality of my body becoming strong and healthy as a result of breathing in the fresh air and as a result of training my muscles to cooperate during times I raced, thanking God for my body which is the product of God's amazing creation, and learning to commit my body as a 'tool' for God to use for beneficial purposes! There was so much I learned from my running, far beyond the satisfaction of winning a race!

During my college years (at Central College and Greenville College) I continued to use my 'gift' of running, for the glory of God and for my own health benefits. I was intensely involved in my studies during those years (and my courtship with the lady I eventually married took considerable time), so my involvement in 'track' was probably not as intense as it was during my public school years. But, nevertheless, I have precious memories of the times I 'burned the track' in my running 'career' during college years.

When I became a pastor (1967), at the age of 22, I soon found myself in 'need' of regular running. It did not take too long until I learned about the competitive 'races' that various organizations in Ft. Collins sponsored. For the next several years (actually several decades) I participated in competitive races in my community.

I did not take the time to involve myself in 'special training' for these races. Based on my consistent (usually daily) running (sometimes 4 miles per day), I appeared (with my special running shirt and with my assigned number that was pinned on my shirt), and I listened for the 'starting gun', and 'off I ran'!

Even though running has never been a 'piece of cake' for me, I greatly enjoyed 'telling my body what to do' (sometimes dashing and sometimes 'coasting' during a race), and having the satisfaction of finally 'crossing the finish line'! I intentionally 'saved some energy' for the last hundred yards of a race, to provide me enough 'stamina' to finish my race with considerable 'speed'!

I ran numerous races (almost always 5K races, only 3.1 miles), at various locations in Ft. Collins. The 'classic race' (for me, for several years) was the 'Firecracker Five' Race - held on July 4th. The race

was filled with challenges. It was 5 miles in distance. It started at the south end of the Horsetooth Reservoir (west of Ft. Collins), and the finish line was located in the CSU stadium. It was a challenging race, with contrast between high inclines and sharp declines!

Through the years, I accumulated (earned) several rewards, as a result of my races! I have a collection of about 12 trophies and ribbons and engraved plates and medals, all clustered tightly together on top of my file cabinet, in my simple office! I am rather (humbly) 'proud' of those several awards from my many years of running! Each one of those awards represents the investment of my energy and diligent training and supreme effort.

Running is never 'easy' (for me at least), but my running represents my victory over laziness and indolence and indifference! The metaphor of 'running' is used in the Bible! Towards the end of his long and difficult (and persecuted) life, the apostle Paul declared with joy that he had 'run a good race' (for Christ), and that soon he would be 'crossing the finish line' of his life, and that (because of his perseverance in running the spiritual race) he would be 'crowned with the crown of righteousness and joy'!

Soon he would be able to rest from his 'rigorous race' - rest forever in heaven where the Lord of his life would welcome him! This teaches me that, just as I exercise great discipline in running a race with my body, I must be even more diligent in running the spiritual race of life (in other words, I must discipline myself to read the Bible, to pray, to witness, to attend church, to give money to God's cause, to meditate, to listen for the voice of the Spirit for guidance regarding the projects I am to be involved in, to give a listening ear to the hurting ones around me)!

As it was in the case of Paul, it must also be in my 'case' - I must realize that the Christian life is not primarily characterized by 'sheer discipline' but, rather, by the indwelling and empowering presence of the blessed Holy Spirit. I must realize that, while God cannot run the 'race of life' for me, God will energize me and empower me to run the race!

Jesus said that without Him, we can do nothing! He is the energizing force and motivation of my life! However, Jesus can only energize a

person if that person has committed himself to 'get on the track field 'and surrender himself to that 'track field' (to the life that must be lived, to the mission that must be pursued).

God does not do the running for me, but He does do the running with me! He is my coach who guides me all along life 's way, while I am 'running' the race of life! I must have His guidance and His energizing presence, along every yard of the long race of my life!

Even though I am certainly not an 'athlete' (in the traditional sense of the term), I praise God for allowing me to have one 'athletic-type' gift - that of running. I presently am near to being 70 years old, and I continue to run - casually, not competitively. I ran competitively (in a race) when I was 56, and since that time I simply run (jog) for the purpose of relaxation and for enjoyment. And, of course, for the health benefits!

While I am running, I love to meditate on God's ways, and I love to pray, and I love to think creatively about present and future projects, and I love to drink in the beauty of beauty around me, and, most importantly, I love to worship and to praise my God who has saved my soul and who has healed me countless times!

My ability to run (now only about 2 miles each day) is a gift of God! Running (from the time I was very young and throughout my entire lifetime) has benefitted me tremendously! I don't know for sure, but I am (of course) hopeful that, as a result of my consistent (almost daily) involvement in running, this physical activity has given me 'better thinking', increased 'physical stamina', enlarged 'spiritual vision'!

Concerning the benefits of better thinking and clearer spiritual vision, I recall one morning (a few years ago), just as I was completing my daily running regime, I had a sense of the beauty of God's amazing out-of-doors. Five different 'aspects' regarding nature came forcefully to my 'mind'. Elements of nature, like magnitude, beauty, variety, power!

I was only a block from my home, when this 'flood' of thoughts (regarding Nature) came to my mind. I quickly went home, and I wrote down the five words. It was not long until I found myself writing about each one of those five elements (features of nature). I devel-

oped a small booklet entitled 'Seeing God Through Nature' (which is available on my web site CLMBOOKS.ORG - along with dozens of other free books that I have written). This is but one example of how my spiritual vision was expanded, while I was jogging in the early morning!

Every person needs some 'outlet' (some form of physical exercise and recreation) which will bring 'renewal' to both body and mind (and even to spirit)! I praise God that He gifted me with the ability to 'run'! A lifetime involvement and enjoyment! Running - a great 'gift' from the God of all 'grace'!

***I PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PRESENCE AND HIS POWER DURING
PERSONAL CRISIS!***

I think there are 'unseen angels' (messengers) whom God often sends to guard and to protect His people! How many serious car wrecks have each of us been spared of (and possibly death from those accidents), all because of the protective 'intervention' of those 'heavenly spirits'. How many times have angels come to the rescue of a child who is vulnerable to the attack of some animal, perhaps a mad dog!

Time without number, in countless circumstances, there have been angels who have intervened during a crisis! Many lives have been saved, all because of the loving ministry of one of God's assigned angels - assigned to guard and to protect and to comfort persons who are at serious 'risk' of being hurt or even being killed!

I feel totally inadequate to offer the kind of praise that God richly deserves, for all the times He (through His ministering angels) has come to my 'aid', to protect me against dangers of all kinds. God has blessed me, more times than I know, and, because His help has been given in ways that were verily discernable, I (unfortunately) have too many times been insensitive to His wonderful presence and 'intervention'!

Perhaps, from the viewpoint of eternity (heaven), we all will 'look back' on our earthly life, and we will be absolutely 'amazed' to realize that we all were the 'objects' of God's special love and His powerful protection!

None of us persons ('sinners, saved by grace') are worthy of the 'least of His favor', but we all, as redeemed persons, can learn to 'speak His praises' more often. We are taught in the Bible that all things - good or bad - work into a pattern for our own benefit and for our ultimate 'profit'! Therefore, we can (perhaps gradually) learn to thank our God for 'all things'- things that are favorable and things that are (from our perspective) unfavorable!

We 'finite, frail, fallible creatures of clay' cannot see the 'overall pattern' for the world, and we, individually and specifically, have a difficult time discerning God's will for our life! God knows best, and God desires to give us the best - the best that life has to offer!

What about all the 'inequities' and 'injustices' and 'mysteries' that are a real part of human living? Because we (finite beings) have very limited knowledge and understanding regarding life's mysteries, 'wisdom dictates' that we should humble ourselves before the God of all wisdom and knowledge and understanding!

We can (and should) search for some 'answers' and some 'understanding' regarding the difficult issues of life, but, in that searching we must realize that, at best, we will only discern 'total reality' in the same way that a man discerns the reality of another human being who is on the other side of a 'hazy window'!

Why do some persons (agnostics and Christ-rejecters) escape all injury from the tornado that 'visited' their city, and other persons (dedicated followers of Jesus) meet their certain 'death' at the hand of the same tornado? On the other side of the 'ledger', I just read about a committed Christian who expressed a type of 'guilt', because he escaped all injury from a train wreck, while several other persons were killed! He talked about God's mercy (which spared him), but he felt sorry for those who were killed! He could not understand why he was spared, and others were not spared! At the time the train accident happened, this Christian man was reading his Bible! Is that why God spared his life? No human alive can answer that question.

Life seems (at times) to be filled with 'accidents of fate' (accidents without any 'sense' - without any 'rhyme or reason'), but, in spite of

our mental confusion regarding the seeming injustice of our world, we must put our trust in a God of infinite love and tender compassion!

It is tempting to think that God is arbitrary in His actions, that God chooses to bless some persons and chooses to condemn other persons to misery and to agony and to great 'loss' (loss of property in storms, loss of sons and daughter in war, and other losses). However, we must remember that, when God acts, He acts with purpose and with precision. Every action of God is an action of love!

God permits the evil actions of evil men to be on the rampage (seemingly 'out of control' and reckless and totally destructive), but, we must remember that 'though the wrong seems often so strong, God is Ruler yet!' Good will ultimately win, and wrong will ultimately be judged by a just and holy God!

Evil may have its 'way' for a long time, and, because of that evil, many persons may be harmed, but, in the end of time, 'the beast' will be destroyed! Satan will finally be cast into the lake of fire! The godly ones, who have been unjustly treated, will eventually be rewarded!

Those Christians (like the 48 year old man who slid off a roof a few months ago, to his almost immediate death) will be 'compensated' in eternity! Why the protecting angels did not guard this godly man from falling to his pre-mature death, no one will ever know! He was an outstanding Christian leader, and he was deeply loved by so many persons! The large church could not hold everyone who came for his funeral service!

Why? Why? did this tragedy happen? Only God knows the reason, but God (in spite of outward appearances) is not arbitrary in His actions! 'It rains on the just and on the unjust' Tragic accidents happen to both the just and to the unjust! God's will is past knowing! We can pray for protection, and thank God when we are protected (by angels?), but, in spite of our praying, sometimes believers are injured or they are killed in car accidents!

Those who pray (for protection) may be the very ones who die in accidents, and those who are careless and indifferent to prayer, may be the ones who never get sick and who may live to be very old! God's ways are higher than our ways, as high as the heavens are above the

earth, so are His thoughts compared to our thoughts! You can never understand the ways and the thoughts of the infinite and holy God!

Regardless of the confusion of your mind (doubts), you can, nevertheless, have faith with your heart in the all-compassing love of God. God's thoughts and His movements are all the thoughts and the movements of 'holy love'! There is no action or reaction of God that is not the action or the reaction of 'holy love'!

In spite of what seems to be the hurtful actions of God toward us, we must remember that God cannot act in any manner other than the manner of 'holy love' (unconditional love, personable love, healing love, redeeming love)!

Even though we dare not 'demand' anything of God (even our personal protection), it is right and it is proper that we daily pray that God will protect us from all 'harm' (physical illness and injury)! The Bible is full of promises regarding the protecting 'shield' of God - the 'shield' against physical harm and against destruction, and the 'shield' also against spiritual danger and evil forces!

God will always answer the latter prayer (protection against evil forces), but God may not always answer the request in the former prayer (protection against physical ill). The physical body is definitely subject to aging, and (because of the 'Fall of Man') the body is vulnerable to an assortment of diseases and illnesses and accidents.

With the above rather detailed 'discussion' in mind, it is my desire to praise God for His presence and His power, manifest to me during my several physical 'challenges', and during the several 'challenges' which my dear wife has encountered during the last several years!

Of course, I do not deserve the 'least of God's favor', but, nevertheless, our God of grace has protected me, over and over, during my life's pilgrimage! I want to recount (again) some of God's 'acts of mercy' to me - that is, God's protection and sustenance and deliverance and healing!

HEAD-ON COLLISION WITH ANOTHER BIKE!

When I foolishly rode my bike on the wrong side of the road (late at night), and, consequently, hit another bike in a head-on collision, I

could have been thrown off my bike and into the oncoming car traffic. If that would have happened, I probably would have been killed. As it was, I sustained a cracked jaw bone, but this was relatively minor compared to what could have been my 'fate'.

I could have broken my neck (the condition that the ambulance driver supposed), and, if that would have happened, I could have become a paralyzed man for the rest of my life! In spite of my own foolish mistake on that dreadful night, God (angels?) protected me from long-term injuries!

TWO DIFFERENT 'TUMBLES' ON JOGGING TRAILS!

On two different occasions (separated by several years), I had a tumble onto the concrete jogging trail. The first tumble was the result of me tripping over my own long shoe lace, and the second tumble (rather recently) was the result of the stubbing my running shoe on a small (almost invisible) tree trunk.

On both occasions, I came down very hard on the concrete jogging path! But thanks to my protecting God (angels?), I fell on my knees - and not on my face! A fall on the face can be most devastating - even destructive, especially when you have (like I have) a mouth full of carefully constructed teeth (connected to implants that have been placed in my mouth bones over a period of 6 years).

If I would have fallen on my face (either of those occasions), my cherished (artificial) teeth could have been destroyed. The dental work that took many years could have been destroyed. A hurtful loss and a very expensive loss! Years of multiple surgeries all for naught! Again, even though I did not deserve God's favor (during those two mornings when I took a hard fall), I am so very grateful for God's favor (His protection against serious harm)!

RESCUE ON TOP OF LONG'S PEAK

Many years ago, when I was still a young man, I and two other men took many hours to climb a tall mountain in Rocky Mountain National Park. The mountain was Long's Peak, a peak that is over 13,000 feet in altitude. We three men (all pastors) enjoyed each other's company, and we were thrilled with the sheer beauty of this venture. It was, of

course, not a 'technical climb', but, nevertheless, this climb did challenge our endurance and our stamina!

The weather was quite comfortable on this particular day, but, as usual, the air felt crisp, and the wind was somewhat shrill. When the three of us finally scaled the top of this famous mountain, we, of course, decided to sit down and to enjoy the breathtaking view from the top! We were excited that we had finally met our hours-long goal of making it to the very 'top of the world'!

However, one of those friends (a rather experienced out-doors-man) noticed something that was not 'quite right'! He noticed that I was not acting quite 'normal'! It did not take his 'trained eye' very long to notice that I had all the signs of 'hypothermia'!

I (an inexperienced mountain hiker) had failed to dress appropriately for the cold weather of the high mountain environment! Of course, with my vigorous climbing (hiking) for many hours, I had been losing a lot of 'body heat', and, also without enough warm clothes on, my body temperature had been going down gradually.

I was at a critical juncture, and if my body would have continued to chill, my body would not have been able to recover, in terms of regaining proper body temperature. I knew my body was shivering with an obvious coldness, as I was sitting on the ground at the top of the mountain, but I did not realize the extent of the seriousness of my 'condition'.

Again (as has happened on other occasions in my life), the God of mercy and intervention, rescued me from probable certain death! There have been a multitude of persons who have died on mountains from 'hypothermia' (supposedly the biggest 'killer' of mountain climbers!). My perceptive friend saw what was happening to me - saw that, indeed, 'hypothermia' was threatening to bring havoc to my body - and he quickly took some of his own 'garb' and wrapped it around my shivering body!

After a few minutes, my body began to 'settle down', and I began to regain some badly needed body heat. I developed a throbbing headache (a condition I hardly ever experienced), and I knew that, without

hazarding my life, I needed to 'make speed' to get off this mountain. Of course, most of the time I had to carefully walk the mountain trails, but, whenever it was possible, I jogged the mountain trails! I was feeling 'lousy' (in my head) and my body (as a whole) felt tired, but I was determined - with more clothes now on my body - to bring up my body heat by jogging the trails.

As a young man, it had been my daily habit to jog, so I was in rather good physical condition! At the bottom of the long trail, I waited for my good friends (fellow pastors). Of course, I thanked my more experienced friend for his discernment of my physical condition (at the top of the majestic mountain). He probably knew, better than I knew, that he 'saved my life' - on the top of Long's Peak! Of course, it is more accurate to say that God (in mercy) saved my life - through one of His choice and compassionate servants!

God of mercy, God of grace, God of intervention - how can I ever praise you enough! I do not deserve the least of your favor, but, nevertheless, I wish to thank you for your preservation of my human life! I could have died at a much younger age, but, for some reason known only to you, O God, you have chosen to allow me to live for many years. You, O God, have chosen three score and ten years to be the 'Normal length' of a human's life, but, for reasons known only to you, some of your human subjects live to be only 15 (like my niece), and others to live to be nearly 104 years old (like one of the women for whom my wife cared in our home). I am (as I write this - December 2013) nearly 69 years old. I have been faced with experiences that could have brought devastation (injury) to my physical body, or even death to me!

Dear God, because of your mercy and your grace, you have chosen to preserve my life, to the point of nearly three score and ten years (the normal Biblically-stated time for a human's earthly existence). Will I live one more year (to age 70)? Will I, like my father, live to be 73 years and 8 months? Will I, like my mother, live to the 'ripe old age' of 94 years and 7 months?

Only God knows the answers to my inquiries (curiosity). But, soon or late, I will die, and to die well I hope (by God's grace and by God's power)! But, regardless of what the future 'holds', I must learn to live one day at a time, to praise my God for the breath that He choos-

es to give to me for this very day (for this very moment)! "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!"

HEALING FROM A DEADLY CANCER!

In April 2013 I was diagnosed with a type of cancer (melanoma). Both my family physician and the specialist who agreed to do rather extensive surgery on my arm and my lymph node - both of these men of science (and both of whom are Christians) - were quite 'concerned' about my 'condition'.

Before the surgery took place (April 17, 2013), they both believed that it was highly 'likely' that the cancer cells had spread to my lymph system! When once cancer starts to circulate throughout the lymph system, the chances of 'survival' are greatly reduced. Melanoma is a serious cancer - a death dealing cancer, if not 'caught' in its early stages!

After the kind-hearted, but honest-speaking, surgeon told me that, after studying the pathologist report, he was 'troubled' (his words); I left his office with considerable 'soberness'! I immediately felt God's presence, very real and near, but I, nevertheless, had a new awareness of the brevity and the uncertainty of human life (in general) and of my own life (in particular). I frankly was somewhat confused in my mind.

I had often thanked my God for the gift of my life, and I had thanked Him for the consistent health that I had long enjoyed. I had hardly any illnesses during my lifetime, and I had hardly any acquaintance (experience) with 'pain'. Of course, I had experienced discomfort and some pain, during (and a short time afterwards) when I underwent multiple dental procedures (surgeries) during the last 6 years (but, as unpleasant as these many dental procedures were, I recovered quite quickly from all of these procedures with my dentists). But now, as indicated by the surgeon, I might be at the 'entrance' of a long 'battle' with a deadly form of cancer!

For two weeks, following the pathology report until the day of my scheduled surgery (for the melanoma), I experienced the wonderful peace of God, admittedly mixed with some fears, in light of the possibility that I would soon be dead. (One man, whom my brother knew

about, died within two months after he was diagnosed with melanoma!). Many thoughts came to my mind, regarding the love that I had for my wife and daughters and grandchildren and siblings, and friends.

I thought, also, of the small group of friends and relatives that were already rejoicing in heaven. I thought of the unsurpassed joy I would experience when I first bowed at the feet of my Savior (whom I would serve forever), and when I would see my parents and so many, many more persons whom I loved on earth and whom I would now be able to express gratitude to, for the unique contribution each made in my life!

Humorous-speaking, since I tend (at times) to be a 'messy' (rather than a 'cleaney'), my office is not 'too presentable' to outsiders! Frankly, I thought that (after I am no longer 'around'), I don't want anyone to come into my office (the way it looks just now)!

My office serves me well, but, frankly, it sometimes looks like a tornado has hit it. I know where my own important 'papers' are placed (underneath a tall 'stack' of other papers), but my papers certainly don't look at all organized to anyone 'looking on'!

During those two weeks of waiting, I gave some time to more carefully arranging my many books - books that are stored in my garage (hundreds and hundreds of books)! I knew that I could never be as 'neat and organized and ordered' as my dear (perfectionist) brother, but I wanted to 'save some of my personal dignity' (when my family and my beloved brother took a walk through my 'belongings' - after I was 'no more')! After all, I did not want to 'look down from the towers of heaven' - and be really embarrassed, as my brother took his stroll through my messy office, the week after my body was laid in the ground! Ha!

During those two 'suspenseful' weeks, my mind was flooded with a variety of thoughts - how much and how long will I have to 'suffer' before my demise? What is the chance for survival, and what will be the 'price' that I will have to pay, if I survive? If I die, how will my dear wife and my children (and others) 'get along' without me? I knew that Venita is a confident and independent and intelligent woman, and I knew that 'business-wise' she would have no problems

'getting along without me'.

As a husband and wife, we are very 'close' to each other, and I had reason to believe that (socially and spiritually) she would greatly miss me! I and my daughters have a significant love relationship, and I believed that they too would truly miss me!

And I thought about the 'card company' that I was soon to 'launch' on the internet - I believed that God wanted me to launch this project, and if I died, would my wife 'carry through' with this project that I (and others) had diligently worked on for the last several months? I had written numerous books (placed on the internet- web), but I had several other written projects (books, etc.) that had not yet come to fruition.

When I thought about all of the above listed persons and projects, I lifted my heart to God in a prayer of 'request'. I knew that for me to 'die' would be a great gain (heaven, as God's gift of sheer grace)! In spite of all the wonderful thoughts I had regarding heaven (during that two week period in April 2013), I, nevertheless, asked God to please let me live on His earth for a while longer! In fact, I got so bold in my prayer to God that I asked Him to allow me to live for another 20 years (or longer).

However, with my request to God for longevity of my life, I also asked Him to allow me to have mental alertness and spiritual sensitivity (to the Spirit) and physical health and a fruitful ministry of love to my fellow human beings - for the remainder of my life!

This was, indeed, a bold request, but the Bible says that we humans 'have not, because we ask not!' Of course, every prayer to God (every bold request) must be enshrined (controlled) by the 'blanket prayer' - "Not my will, but thine be done, O God!" God knows us, knows what is 'best' for our overall spiritual prosperity! We must never 'force' our own 'little will' (desire) upon our Heavenly Father, but, instead, we must surrender our 'body and soul and heart and desires' to the Living and Loving God!

For some reason, known only to God, God either directly 'wills' or God indirectly 'allows' the death of some of His choicest servants (at

a time when, to us 'fallible human beings', seems premature and even 'senseless')! God knows best and God will give what is best - in terms of circumstances and in terms of 'timing' - to His blessed children! Blessed is the death of His servants - even when the death occurs to some of His children when they are only 15 years old (as was the 'case' of my niece).

To those who die prematurely (in a deadly accident which God allows), God, the altogether just God, will surely 'compensate', for God is a debtor to no man, and God will 'redress' the injustices of earth's tragedies (car accidents and war victims, aborted babies, martyrs, victims of 'natural disasters, melanoma victims, etc.).

I asked the loving Lord to allow me further time to develop my newest 'project', namely, the distribution of 270 Christian Cards (17 categories and 45 sets with six cards in each set). I had diligently worked to produce the cards (that is, to write them), and my typist (Shirley Ruiz) had diligently (for several months) worked to type these hundreds of cards, and also my printer had worked hard to produce them in their 'final beautiful form'!

So much work had gone into the writing and typing and design and printing of these cards (with 45 additional 'bonus cards' that I composed - to be given as a 'gift' in each 'set' when people, far and wide' ordered these cards)! Would my 'current project' (formation of a Christian Card Company) come to 'naught' (be suddenly terminated), because I had to suddenly 'give way' to a stronger force than my body - the 'last enemy of mankind' - Death?

God, as a result of the prayers of scores of persons, and as the result of God's 'direct hand', healed me from this dreadful disease! The removal of much of the skin on my right (under) arm, and the surgery that removed one of the lymph nodes in my right arm pit - this rather extensive surgery (in an attempt to remove anticipated cancer cells)- this extensive, hospital surgery, in fact, removed not one single cancer cell!

The pathology report (a scientific report that is objective - that does not 'lie') indicated that I was totally 'clean' from the presence of all cancer! I was both amazed and very grateful to the loving God!

This was an answer to prayer! Many, far and wide, had been praying for my healing. Some persons (whom I had never met) had others to place their 'hands' upon them (representing my own head). A Catholic priest (who was a friend of my sister-in-law in Seattle) did this very 'thing'. He is a man of prayer, a loving person, and a person who rejoiced greatly when he got the 'good news', later, regarding my total healing! The same can be said of my youngest daughter's Episcopal church. Prayer warriors claimed healing for me, and, of course, I have never met these brothers and sisters in Christ!

My oldest daughter (a lady who had gone through severe trials, in the aftermath of her divorce) told me that, during the two suspenseful weeks before I knew the outcome of the surgery, she had an unusual peace' and an assurance that her dad was going to be 'alright', that I was not going to die!

A few days, following the communication of the 'good news' (that I was 'cancer free'), my family physician (whom I have known for 30 years) made a special telephone call to me. My doctor is a 'man of faith' (a sweet and gentle man, very personable), but, nevertheless, he is a Christian doctor who has never been very 'open' (verbally) with his witness for Christ. When he called me, on that morning, he forthrightly said, "Ron, your healing is the result of prayer. Frankly, I thought the cancer had likely spread throughout your arm, and also into the lymph system!"

My family doctor had performed the initial (minor) surgery, in his office, to remove the quarter-size growth (which turned out, to his surprise, to be cancerous - melanoma)! I responded to my doctor's excitement (regarding the good report), by thanking him for the surgery that he had done (about 3 weeks before). I told him that my healing was due to his surgery and to God! He quickly responded: "Ron, it was God!"

GOD'S FREQUENT INTERVENTION DURING TIMES OF CRISIS!

Time after time, God has intervened in our life, to guard us from evil, to guide us aright and to keep us from the snares of falsehood, to protect us from physical harm, and so much more! Most times we are not aware of the unseen 'hand of God' that 'pushes back the hand of evil', that awakens us to swerving car in from of our car, that de-

stroys a cancer cell that is on its way to destroy our healthy cells, and so much more! In the presence of our 'enemies', God prepares a nourishing table, and sits us down at that table of plenty!

Why God does not perform these kind and gracious and merciful acts for every believer (but, instead, lets them die in a head-on car crash, or lets them die in a Oklahoma tornado, or, or, or. No one is allowed (by the all-wise God) to know! We must leave our unanswered questions and our unsolved mysteries in the hands of God - in the hands of a God who always knows 'best' for every person! Maybe we will know the answers to these troubling questions in eternity (heaven), and maybe we will not know even at that time! It is for an all-wise and an all-loving God to decide!

MIRACLES OF INTERVENTION DURING UNSPEAKABLE TRAGEDY!

Concretely-speaking (with the above thoughts 'in mind'), I wonder why a most beautiful woman (on her 17th anniversary) was shot to death by her own husband (August 1992)! Valerie Miller was only 39 years old when she was murdered, and she left behind three wonderful children (two teen daughters and one small son). Valerie Miller, a multi-talented lady, tried to be a good wife to her jealous-ridden husband, and she probably 'spoiled' him for several years! She tried hard to adapt to his every need, but, finally, she could no longer tolerate her husband's immature ways (emotional abuse, etc.).

She separated herself from him (very briefly), and shortly after that separation, John began to 'stalk' his wife! Valerie had a male friend, and John could not 'stand' this! The Sunday morning, after she had been gone from him for only a short time, John virtually pulled his wife out of a worship service, and then argued with her briefly in the church hall, and then John demanded that his wife go outside.

Some in the worship service, including a uniformed police officer (who, ironically, happened to be a friend of John's) made his way out onto the church parking lot, and he saw that John was standing beside his wife, carrying on a 'heated argument'. There were about 10 other persons (all friends of this arguing couple), as well as myself, who left the church sanctuary to gather together on the parking lot of the church, close to the back door of the church building.

There were three or four close friends to this couple - friends who pled for a reconciliation and understanding between John and Valerie. But those few persons, who pled with this very angry man, did not prevail! In a matter of seconds, as Valerie walked away from John, with her back to John, this angry husband (on his 17th wedding anniversary) pulled a concealed weapon from his clothing, and, with the aim of a trained marksman, he shot Valerie in her heart!

Perhaps the most horrible and unforgettable sight of my life, I saw Valerie gasp for her last breaths. Then her body showed the limpness of death! This most beautiful and vivacious young Christian lady, now lay motionless in the paleness and horror of death - death at the very hands of her jealous-ridden husband!

Almost immediately after she died, I stood near the back of the church wall, and there I witnessed a most horrifying exchange of fire between two men (friends). The police officer, upon seeing John's murder of his wife, went immediately into 'action'! The police officer pulled his gun, and he fired at John, with the intention to kill him (a murderer), and, interestingly enough, John (who just murdered his wife) began to fire at Mike (the police officer), with the intention to kill him!

I stood a short distance away, horrified as I heard the sound of bullets being simultaneously exchanged between these two men, each of whom was intent on killing the other man!

Men who worshiped in the same church for several years! Men whose daughters were the 'best of friends' (teens)! Men who considered each other as friends with whom they could share hearty laughs at a church party! Men who respected each other's particular skills and intellectual acumen! Men who now, because of a terrifying circumstance, had to view each other as an 'enemy'!

How could such a horrible thing happen to persons, all of whom had attended many Sunday school classes together, to men who had often, through the passing years, sat in the same sanctuary where they intently listened to the preached word! The two families, represented by these two intelligent and talented men, had been friends for several years!

For reasons, known only to God, John had allowed his heart to be opened to the presence of evil, to the 'demon' of jealousy and to the 'demon' of bitterness! Bitterness, according to the Bible, defiles the bitter person (and defiles those persons surrounding the bitter person). John had succumbed to the 'demon' of bitterness and to the 'demon' of jealousy! The horrible consequence of a jealous-driven man who murdered his beautiful wife!

Both men were very skilled in the use of guns (especially when their own life, respectively, was 'at risk'). Both men were 'down', as a result of each man hitting the other man! A sight that was worse than the viewing of any murder mystery on television! Mike's wife (trained in medical intervention) immediately started the giving of 'medical emergency aid' to her husband, and John lay on the parking lot, a few yards away.

I was told that one of the bullets 'glanced off a thumb nail' (or some such object) of Mike, and I was told that if that strange thing had not happened, Mike would have been killed! As it was, this bullet almost took his life! It took this police officer several days in the hospital emergency unit, and several more days in the hospital, before he was released to go to his home. A fragment of the bullet, that nearly ended Mike's life, was never removed from Mike's body!

As for John (the murderer of his wife), as he lay on the blacktop, near the corner of the church building, it was obvious that he was in the process of dying. The gun that he used to kill his wife, and with which he tried to kill the police officer, that gun lay a short distance from where John lay dying. John, at this point, was still conscious enough that he reached for his gun. Toxie Dearman (another friend of John's) stood over John, and Toxie kicked away the gun (out of the reach of John)!

What if John had taken hold of his gun? Would he (in his insane state of mind) have aimed at several of the people (probably ten persons, all of whom had had a long-time relationship with John)? Would several other persons (besides Valerie) have been murdered on that Sunday morning?

No one knows the answer to that frightening question, but, personally, I believe that God, not only spared the life of Mike (who exchanged

'fire' with John) - all because the bullet was diverted from hitting a vital part of Mike's body - but that God possibly spared the lives of several others (who witnessed everything), because Toxie was near enough to John at just the right time to kick away his gun!

Mike had a 'close call' with death (as he attempted to destroy a very threatening shooter/murdered), and Toxie's action (of kicking away John's gun) possibly saved the lives of several other persons (including myself) from being killed!

If that police officer had not been on the parking lot, at the time John pulled a gun to kill Valerie, the small group of persons who were gathered around (or near) John - pleading with John to be 'reasonable' in his conflict with his wife - several vulnerable persons (obviously unarmed persons) could have been killed, along with Valerie, on that particular August Sunday morning!

God was active in His action of 'intervention' on that August morning (1992)! Why did Mike come to that particular worship service (the second of three worship services)? Usually Mike attended a different worship service! Why this particular service? And why was Mike in full uniform on this particular Sunday (equipped with his gun)? Mike was not even at his 'job', and yet he was in the kind of 'garb' that was characteristic of his regular 'work day'!

Why did Mike suspect that there was a serious enough problem, to compel him to leave the worship service, to go outside, where he discovered that John was exceedingly 'angry' with his recently estranged wife? Not only was he, through his police training, a sensitized police officer (sensitized to the presence of domestic problems), but he, fundamentally, was sensitized because Mike was a dedicated believer - a believer who often listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit!

Simply put, God amazingly used Mike Swihart (loving and humble and bold servant of God) to intervene in a most dangerous crisis! He suffered greatly (and he came close to losing his very life), in order to be an 'instrument' in the hand of God - to possibly save the life of a dozen persons, on that fateful August morning, 1992!

**HAS GOD OFTEN MERCIFULLY INTERVENED TO SAVE MY
LIFE?**

I am not worthy of the least of God's 'favor', but, my life is not based on my 'worthiness', but on God's unmerited favor (God's grace)! God gives me, not what I deserve justice), but, instead, God gives me what I desperately need (mercy and forgiveness).

God's favor is expressed to some persons when God 'takes them home' (heaven) - at a time that appears to be premature in timing! For some good reason, God decides to 'take home' a very young Christian (through disease or through an accident), while God decides to let other believers live a very long life (90 or more years)!

God's ways are past finding out, for our finite minds cannot comprehend the wisdom and the understanding and the knowledge of the infinite mind of God! I could have, for instance, died when I was a young man (in my 20's) at the top of Long's Peak (from hypothermia). I could have died, as a result of my head-on collision of my bike with another bike. I could have been a victim of a bullet that was fired by the man who chose to kill his wife (on the church parking lot, August 1992). I could have died from melanoma!

I could have been killed while I drove thousands of miles to Denver, to fill my many dental appointments, for the last several years. During the numerous dental surgeries (and procedures) which I have undergone during the last 7 years, I could have died (although not likely) while I was 'put under' by certain drugs!

There are, of course, many times I could have died, during the long course of my earthly life (so far, about 69 years). Traveling on the interstate (at 75 miles per hour) could be a 'death trap'. It only takes one 'slip-up' by myself or by some other fast-moving vehicle - and my life would be over! Two vehicles which are traveling at fast speeds can collide with each other, so quickly! The human body cannot sustain much pressure (such impacts) until it gives way to death!

Why do some Christians get killed on the highway, or by means of 'terrorist bombs', in contrast to other Christians who escape all such outside attacks (whether it is the direct attack of evil men, or whether it is the attack of 'nature' - tornadoes, etc.)? That is a question

that defies any understandable answer! I certainly have no special 'claims' on God's mercy and on God's protection from physical harm!

There have been a countless number of believers - believers who have lived 'closer' to God than I have lived - who, in spite of their deep spirituality, have died! Why have they, who are more 'worthy' than I, died (as martyrs or as victims of accidents, or as victims of tornadoes, or as victims of cancer), and I have been spared (time after time) from dying?

Thus far in my life, and in the life of my dear wife, the intervening power of God has been often experienced! What the future holds, in terms of God's protection of our lives, I, of course, do not know. My mother used to say, "We do not know what a day will bring forth!" Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!" I have no guarantee that I will live past today. I am only one heart-beat away from eternity. In God I live and move and have my being, and every day I live is a 'gift' from my Creator!

The young may die, and the old must die - a short life or a long life, we all will someday meet our Maker! The Bible often speaks of the brevity of human life! But, we must remember that it is not all of life to live, nor is it all of death to die - but after death comes the Day of Judgment (Judgment of Damnation for sinners, and Judgment of Evaluation for believers).

We will all be judged by a merciful God and a just God, and only God knows how He will 'blend' those two divine attributes when each human being will 'stand before Him' at the end of human existence!

When each of us stands before God (alone), at the end of our human existence, we can be grateful that God's mercy triumphs over God's justice! God's mercy does not eliminate (demolish) God's justice, but, nevertheless, God's justice is always 'moderated' and 'conditioned' and strongly 'influenced' by God's tender mercy.

God - the all-knowing God - will 'take everything into consideration' when He determines the final destiny of each human being! Any human being (regardless of his seeming low moral condition) when he comes to the point of death has hope at the end of his life that heaven will be his final home! God forgives sinners, even on their 'death

beds'!

Even though I want to make heaven my eternal home (as surely as everyone does), I must admit that I would like to have several more years to live on this planet - to love and to laugh and to work and to create and to develop!

Of course, character building comes through learning of God's love, through the experience of personal 'suffering' (of many kinds). No one (in his right mind) invites suffering into his/her life, but God faithfully sends or He allows just the right kind of suffering and the right degree of suffering - all for the purpose of character building, to further prepare one for his/her entrance into heaven!

The kinds and the degree of suffering which both Venita and I have experienced has helped draw us closer to our blessed Lord - to increase our appreciation for God's tender mercy in our life!

Many times I and Venita have experienced the 'hand of God's intervention' in our life! Physically - speaking, both Venita and I could have sustained terrible injuries and even death, if it had not been for the intervention (protection) of our Lord!

A FRIGHTENING FALL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

In the middle of the night, as Venita was descending a long staircase in our house (to check on one of her older persons who lived in our house), Venita thought she was at the end of the staircase, but, instead, Venita was four steps short of the end of those stairs.

In the darkness of the night, Venita flew through the air, and she took a terrible landing on the kitchen hardwood floor! Her fall caused great pain, and she sustained two cracked bones! Following her time at the hospital, Venita then underwent therapy for several months. A very painful recovery, but she did finally and fully recover, after several months.

I believe that, in spite of the painful aftermath of this terrible 'fall', this fall could have had much worse consequences! I believe that God protected Venita from falling on her neck, resulting in a broken neck, and possibly resulting in permanent paralysis of large parts of her body. She could have ended up in a wheel chair, for the rest of

her life! And, worse yet, she could have fallen on her head, resulting in life-long brain injuries (impairment of her ability to think)! God mercifully intervened on that terrifying night, to prevent Venita from sustaining life-long injuries!

FEAR SEIZED ME BUT GOD WAS WITH ME!

I was surprised and I was shocked beyond words, when, while I was carrying on a normal conversation with her, Venita suddenly fainted and she fell to the kitchen hardware floor. I could not believe my eyes. One moment she and I were enjoying a visit together, and the next moment she fainted, and she fell backward (stiff as a board). She, of course, hit her head with a sickening 'thud' against the hardwood floor!

In spite of the fact that I was "truly rattled" in my mind and troubled in my emotions, and, in spite of the fact that I honestly contemplated the possibility that Venita could suddenly die (and, thus, leave me to be a widower, for the remainder of my life), I say, in spite of these 'facts', God intervened throughout the entire heart-moving episode, and God wonderfully 'imparted' His peace to my troubled heart on July 4, 2011!

I learned that, while I dare not minimize the crisis nature of this situation, I could, nevertheless, experience the 'peace of God that passes understanding'! How could I experience 'peace' during a crisis like this? Only because of the grace and the mercy and the intervening power of the Holy Spirit!

God was faithful to come to me in my greatest time of need! I knew that I might suddenly 'lose' the person who was nearest and dearest to me, but, I also knew (during those crisis moments of uncertainty) that my loving God (my Heavenly Father) would never leave me! Jesus promised: "Behold, I am with thee, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. I will be with thee, unto the end of the world!" No more comforting words could be spoken to me by my Lord!

How loving and how merciful and how faithful is the God whom I (imperfectly) serve! I am thankful, from the 'depths of my heart', that I did not feel like a lonely orphan during that 'scary evening'. My unseen, but very present, Lord took my hand, and He led me through

that very troubling night.

I had to resign myself to the possibility of becoming a 'widower' on that night, but, I was given assurance by God that His grace is very adequate (sufficient) for widowers (if that was to be my new 'lot in life')! I appreciate my wife, more than ever before, as a result of her 'escaping death'!

As was true in the former situation (when Venita fell down the stairs), so it is true regarding Venita's terrible fall in our kitchen (on July 4, 2011). In both situations (terrible falls), Venita could have 'fallen the wrong way', resulting in lifelong injuries!

As bad as her 'fall' was, in the kitchen (when she fainted), I believe God actually intervened (i.e., actually 'guided' the direction of Venita's fall). Venita landed on the floor - the only open space - just between the kitchen table and the broad window ledge! If Venita's head had hit, either the hard surface of the table or the hard surface of the window ledge, she likely (probably) would have broken her neck!

I believe the 'God of intervention' guided the place (location) of her 'landing'! Yes, she landed on a hard surface, which caused some internal bleeding in her brain, but (after her stay in a Denver hospital for three days - with extensive 'tests', all of which proved to be 'clear', Venita returned home where, within a few days, she fully recovered! And, in spite of the seriousness of the accident, Venita was soon on her 'feet', and she was ready to assume all of her normal activities.

Without God's merciful intervention, Venita could have sustained injuries that are frightening now to even imagine! God (or perhaps the 'guardian angel') controlled the direction of Venita's body, at a time when Venita (because she had fainted) had absolutely no control over her own body! What a merciful and kind and protective God we serve!

GOD RESCUED MY DAUGHTER 'IN THE NICK OF TIME'!

On April 30, 1997, the night that my oldest grandson was born, could have been the same night that my oldest daughter (Darlene) had lost her life - in childbirth! In the middle of the night, while Darlene was in the process of giving birth to her first child (Lucas), serious complica-

tions developed in the birth process! Such serious complications (while the baby was in the process of being born) that Darlene's doctor was not, according to the level of his training, able to intervene in this particular difficult set of circumstances.

Darlene's doctor (a fine Christian man) had cared for Darlene during her pregnancy, but he was not prepared to deal with the type of unexpected complications that he was now faced with! What would he do now, during a crisis time, when timely intervention was crucial? Darlene was, obviously, in a pathetic condition (great pain and bleeding), ready to 'pass out' and wondering what was to be done for her. Time was of the 'essence', and there was no time to waste. What would this very competent, but presently unprepared, doctor do!

Darlene's family doctor became aware that a highly trained 'specialist' (well-respected doctor) just 'happened' to be at the hospital on that particular night! The very doctor who was known for his skills in intervention (for difficult child births!). How could the family doctor be so 'lucky' to find out that this highly trained (esteemed and experienced) doctor would be in the hospital - during the middle of the night!

Was this 'mere luck' or was it 'divine providence' that this particular specialist was in the hospital, at a time when his skills were desperately needed - and needed quickly? Was God's intervention being amazingly manifest, at the right time and at right place and through the right (qualified) doctor? I choose to believe that, as is so often the 'case', it was God who came to this crisis situation - to rescue one of His children from a 'messy problem' - a problem that could have (without divine intervention) issued forth in death!

In just the 'nick of time', God came with the rescue that Darlene so desperately needed! The baby was (miraculously) delivered, and that baby is now a handsome and loving and caring and intelligent 17 year old teenager - a teenager who is profoundly grateful that God brought him into His beautiful world. And Darlene?

She is the beautiful and kind-hearted and godly woman who is the delight of her father and her mother! And a delight to many other persons (including a sizeable number of 4 year old children whom she teaches each day)! Darlene could have died on April 30, 1997, but,

instead, God raised her up to serve and to love His people! I thank God for His merciful intervention - time and time again! How merciful can God be?

Many women (past and present), throughout the world, do make an 'exit' from this earth, during the difficult time of giving birth to a child. As one human being is coming into God's world, another human being (the mother) is leaving God's world (because of complications that could not be solved, during the birth process!)

My great, great grandmother was one such woman! She died during child birth! My daughter lived through a difficult child birth (due to the skills of modern medicine). There are many ways that God chooses to 'intervene' (to save lives), and one of those wonderful ways is through the amazing skills which modern science has made possible! The 'hand of God' often is seen through the 'hand of compassionate and knowledgeable physicians!

RESCUE FROM THE BLAST OF SHATTERED GLASS!

Probably the most 'dramatic' of God's interventions that I am aware of (in the life of my own family members) took place on December 1, 2013, four days ago from the time I am presently writing. The 'strange' (weird) happening of this last Sunday morning could have resulted in my wife being seriously injured or (horrible to think about) even in her sudden death!

When I came into the front door of our house, following my attendance of the first worship service (about 10:15 a.m.), my wife was upstairs, and she yelled to me, "Watch your steps, there is glass all over the floor of the kitchen!" What a strange message to me! My wife immediately came down the stairs, and she began to explain what had happened.

She had been preparing some food for our lunch. She had placed a 'meat loaf within a large glass container (as she usually had done on countless other occasions). She had placed the glass container on top of the stove, and, an hour later (during the time that she was attending the second worship service), it was my 'assignment' to put the container of meat loaf in the oven for baking!

Venita also had laid 5 potatoes aside, to be placed in the microwave, a few minutes before lunch time, a couple hours later. Because she was planning to invite our daughter and our grandson to join us for lunch, a few minutes before I came into the front door, Venita decided that it would be 'wise' to go to our garage (where the sack of potatoes was stored) to retrieve a couple more potatoes for the noon meal.

This latter 'move' (of going to the garage for a few seconds to get two more potatoes) saved Venita from what could have been her tragic death (or at least her serious injury)! I am sure that God Himself (or at least God's guardian angel) put in her mind that she needed to go to the garage (to get out of the kitchen)!

While Venita was in the garage, for a few seconds, the kitchen became the 'zone' for the explosion of a veritable 'bomb'! What happened in the kitchen reminded me of what happens in a 'war zone'! During the few seconds, when Venita was retrieving a couple of potatoes from the potato sack, the glass dish which contained the meat loaf, literally exploded, sending hundreds of jagged pieces of glass in every direction, throughout the entire kitchen area!

There were small marble-sized pieces of sharp glass, everywhere I could look! Jagged pieces of glass covered the top of the stove, and glass pieces were on the sink and on the window sill and all over the kitchen counter. Glass was strewn over the kitchen floor. Some sharp pieces of glass were even found behind the table, located quite a distance away from where the explosion originated.

When I came into the house (only a few minutes after the explosion happened), and when Venita warned me to 'watch my step', I caught sight of a piece of glass in our living room (a considerable distance from the kitchen stove, where the fierce explosion originated)!

Venita, shocked as she was, left the kitchen area, and she was upstairs when I had entered the house. The explosion had just happened, probably 10 minutes before I entered the 'scene' - a scene so startling that it reminded me of what it must look like when a bomb explodes! Jagged glass everywhere!

Some larger pieces, and some smaller pieces - but all 'death-

dealing' pieces, if those pieces pierced your body with explosive power! I did not realize that the explosion of a glass bowl could be so shattered, and that the exploded pieces of a glass bowl could travel so far - all across the kitchen, as if bullets went off in a hundred different directions!

Venita verily escaped being targeted by those hundreds of glass bullets - sharp glass bullets that had a force that could easily penetrate 'human flesh', and possibly even penetrate 'human organs'! When one thinks about it - the human body, unlike an animal with a crusted shell, is very vulnerable to injury and to death!

Venita probably would not have had a 'chance' (at survival) if many fast-moving 'razor sharp' pieces of jagged glass had pierced and had penetrated the front of her body. If pieces of glass, traveling at a fast speed, find vital organs as their 'target', the wound to those vital organs (accompanied with profuse bleeding) would soon give way to physical death!

When that explosion happened, the kitchen area was suddenly turned into a veritable 'death trap'! A possibility, so frightening, that I shiver inside of me, to even think of what could have happened to Venita if she had not gone to the garage to find a couple potatoes in the potato sack! She escaped serious injuries (and possibly even death) by only a few seconds!

Venita, as she had done hundreds of times before, sat the prepared dish of meat loaf on top of the stove. At a certain time (probably an hour from the time Venita left for the second worship service) I was to place the meat loaf dish inside the oven, at a set temperature, to allow it (of course) to bake - in preparation for our noon meal! Nothing out of the ordinary - prepare the dish, place it on the top of the oven, and I was to place the prepared meat loaf dish inside the oven and turn on the oven at a specified temperature.

Venita was ready to go out the door, as soon as I came in the door (because of our caring for the elderly ones, someone, of course, had always to be in our house).

Without giving any special attention, as to where she placed the glass bowl (which contained the meat loaf), Venita placed the dish

on the left (front) burner - a burner that she supposed was 'off' and 'cold'! The problem was that the burner was not 'off' and the burner, therefore, was not 'cold'! This particular burner on the stove had been giving us 'trouble' for the last month. When we thought the burner was off, it was, instead, a burner that emitted a slight amount of 'heat'! It was this very burner that became the culprit - the igniting center that caused the terrible explosion!

The ingredients (favorable 'factors') for an explosion were present - namely, grease from the meat (fuel), the glass bowl (the ammunition), and the necessary heat underneath the bowl from the lite burner (the ignition)! Grease, heat, glass bowl (coming together) resulted in an explosion that was powerful and that could even be 'deadly'!

It was only the 'intervention' of God that saved Venita's body from becoming the 'target' for the 'bullets of glass' - the bullets that were far stronger than Venita's flesh and blood and bones! There is no doubt that, if Venita had remained in the kitchen about 20 seconds longer (before walking to the garage to pick out a couple more potatoes), she would have been in the middle of a veritable 'war zone' - a 'war zone' of flying glass - sharp pieces of glass that were flying at a speed that was breathtakingly fast and lethal!

If Venita had been in the 'close' range or in the 'closest' range of the origin of the explosion (stove top), she would have sustained multiple wounds to her body (probably very deep wounds). The jagged glass, impeded in her flesh, would have almost certainly caused massive bleeding. Some of the jagged glass could have found its way into the vulnerable (frontal) organs of her body! Some of the pieces could very possibly hit her eyes, causing her blindness!

As I contemplate what possibly could have happen (as a result of this horrible explosion), I inwardly shake with a type of 'fear'! The worse possible 'picture' in my imagination caused me to think that, if Venita had been 'attacked' by all that flying glass, she could end up on the floor where I would have found her, bleeding to death! What a horrendous sight that would have been, just as I entered my front door (following worship service)!

Of course, it is easy for me to let my 'imagination to run wild with me', but this (just mentioned 'picture of my imagination') could have

been a 'reality'! If her physical body had been cruelly attacked (by flying glass), she could have lost her life on that December Sunday morning! As her body lay in blood (a most horrible 'thought'), her spirit would have 'winged itself to worlds unknown, to behold God on His throne'!

Thank God, Venita's life was spared - for, hopefully many more years of productive living! God definitely spared Venita from the attack of 'flying glass' (which would, without doubt, have caused multiple and bloody wounds)! God possibly spared Venita from 'certain death'! No one can be in the same room (kitchen) where there are hundreds of pieces of jagged glass - flying in every direction - and he/she not be injured by those 'bullets of jagged glass'! Venita escaped that 'fate', within a 20 second period of time!

Two important concluding questions: First, what made Venita go out into the garage, to retrieve couple more potatoes? After all, Venita had already placed 5 potatoes on the counter, ready to be put in the microwave, a few minutes before the noon meal was to be served! For the few persons who were to have that meal together, surely five sizeable potatoes were sufficient!

In reflecting upon the frightening happenings of that fateful Sunday morning, Venita believes that it was 'God' who placed the 'idea' in her mind that she should pick out a couple more potatoes (stored in the garage). What if the potato bag had been stored in a kitchen cupboard? Of course, if that were the case, Venita would not have been in the garage, when the explosion happened!

The second question: Why did Venita (who has a 'keen' sense of smell) not smell the burning burner, and why (even more amazingly) did Venita not smell the hot grease in the glass pan that contained the meat? Venita (in contrast to myself) has an unusual 'smeller'. She can 'pick up' aromas or a variety of 'smells' a 'mile away'! Why didn't she go to the dish of meat loaf, as a result of the distinct smell of the grease on the meat loaf, and why didn't she smell the burner that was heating?

The most frightening thought is this: What if Venita ('true' to her unusual ability to smell) had gone (as she usually would) to the stove, and then noticed that the 'faulty left burner' was actually 'on' (when,

of course, she thought it was 'cold')? What if (after she realized that the glass pan was placed on the faulty burner), she would have proceeded to gently move the glass container (with meat in it) to the back of the stove?

There probably would have been a death-dealing explosion, and Venita would have been the close-up target for that explosion. Hundreds of pieces of jagged pieces of glass would have entered her body, and possibly those sharp pieces of glass would have penetrated some of her vulnerable organs (stomach, etc.)! God protected her from the blast of a type of bomb!

God - the intervening God - definitely kept Venita out of the kitchen (through the retrieval of the potatoes)! God kept Venita from doing what she (and any other woman) would naturally do - namely, move the large glass container from off the heated burner. I believe that God 'blocked' Venita's ability to 'smell' the heated grease from the meat loaf. God was intervening in several different ways, during that death-threatening (terrifying) morning! Venita has an unusually keen sense of smell!

Why didn't she smell the heated grease? If she had smelled that grease, she, obviously, would have gone to the stove, to remove the meat loaf. It is likely that, in the process of Venita moving that glass container, the explosion would have happened! Venita would have gotten the 'close up' force of the explosion. There is no doubt that she would have incurred serious injuries (including the destruction of her eyes), and, if she was close to the glass container when it exploded, the power from that explosion jagged glass pieces) probably would have deeply penetrated her vulnerable body!

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" I praise God for His intervention - for His protection of Venita! Thank God that He often controls the thoughts of the human mind - "I need two more potatoes for my meal, even though I already have 5 potatoes. I must right now - this very minute - go to the garage to retrieve a couple more potatoes!" "My meat loaf dish is placed in a safe place. I have no need to check the glass container where my nicely prepared meat loaf remains until my husband places it in the oven, while I am at the second worship service! I certainly don't smell anything at all! I have no reason to check my meat loaf". God controlled the 'thoughts' of

Venita's mind (I need 2 more potatoes, even though I have already retrieved 5 potatoes). God blocked Venita's ability to smell on that particular morning (I don't smell any heated grease, and I don't smell the heat from the faulty burner).

God is in control of all of our human senses! God can heighten any of the human senses, or God can block any of the human senses, to protect us from certain harm, or even from certain death! What a merciful God we serve - the God who Intervenes in 'human affairs' - even in the 'affairs' of Venita Christian (on December 1, 2013) to preserve her from injury and from possible death!

I PRAISE GOD FOR MY FRIENDSHIP WITH SEVERAL DELIGHTFUL ONES DURING LIFE!

Although I would enjoy offering a 'biographical sketch' of my many friends (like I did with my immediate family members), I am not able to undertake such a mammoth task. Where would I start and, more importantly, where would I finish - if I undertook to present a brief profile of all my extended family, as well as of all my many friends?

I certainly do not have sufficient words to adequately express my deep appreciation to the countless friends (far and near, close and distant) who have 'touched my life' with the impact of their love and kindness and understanding and generosity and compassion and wisdom, and so much more.

Each friend (young and older), whom I have enjoyed, has left his/her 'mark' of influence on my own life. Some have seen me at my 'best' (healthy and vibrant and spiritual), and some have seen me at my worst (sick in mind and in body, depressed, unhappy, unproductive).

I talked just recently to a friend who, some 20 years ago, comforted me with his friendship and with his wise counsel, when I was walking for so long through the 'tunnel of depression'. My dear friend lives now in a distant State, but occasionally I talk to him on the phone. Just recently (on the phone) I reminded him that he had been a dear friend to me, for about 25 years.

I implied to him (he caught the mood in my voice) that it must have been a lot of 'labor' on his part for him to be and to remain my friend

through the 'ups and downs' of my life. I have thanked him (during several phone conversations) for 'coming along beside me' during the darkest days (years) of my life (during my 3 yearlong depression). He told me that when he was someone's friend, he was that person's friend forever!

He never boasts, he never flaunts, and he never focuses on my dark days! Instead, he expresses his love for me, and he allows me (occasionally) to 'see behind the curtain' of his own period of deep depression (he is a fine tuned artist - musician and florist)! Through the many years that I have known this godly gentleman (and during the occasional conversations with him on the phone), this unusually brilliant and kind-hearted and compassionate-oriented man has been my 'minister of encouragement'!

I have a great indebtedness to this special friend, an understanding Christian friend - Neil Brownwood! He has an empathetic, listening 'ear', and he also has wise and loving words of wisdom to share with me.

He is unusually talented (musician, carpenter, floral designer, rancher), but he never flaunts his many abilities and skills. He is a man of prayer, a man who loves the Bible, a man who enjoys 'holiness writings', a man who loves to ride his bike, and a man who (as a single person) lives with his parents and who cares for them in their elderly years! He has a special mission of compassion to a particular middle-aged man whose health has deteriorated!

I have, just now, offered a very brief 'profile' of one of my cherished friends - a friend who has been loyal to me, through all the changes and the chances of my own life. When I mentioned to my friend (recently on the phone) that we had known each other a long time, I think he perceived that I thought that this fact was amazing (considering all the 'trouble' I had caused him, as a result of my 'dark night of the soul' through which he agonized with me, in the distant past)! He simply said to me (in so many words): "When I am a friend to someone, I am a friend for life!"

Even though I have cherished the friendship of several persons during the last many years, I would be the first one to admit that my knowledge of these persons is rather limited and incomplete. I ob-

served some of the outward movements of these precious friends, and I would be equipped to record a few facts regarding some of those easy-to-observe movements (actions and reactions), but my recording of those outward movements would certainly be limited and incomplete. And what about the inner life motives, motivations, and desires, of these friends? Of course, my knowledge of the inner life of these friends would be very incomplete.

When I undertook to write a brief profile of my immediate family members I realized that my brief profile of even these loved ones is quite 'sketchy' (incomplete). How much more 'sketchy' would be my profile of those persons whom I considered 'friends' (at various times throughout my long life).

It is true that my attempt to give a brief account of my many friends, would be a worthwhile attempt, but, the nature of this book would not permit me to invest my time and my effort in such an attempted 'project'.

In another book, entitled 'In Memory', I briefly profiled the lives of 45 different persons, and, with the 'biographical sketch' of each of these persons, I printed the actual sermon that I gave at the funeral service for each of these persons. Of course, the nature (purpose) of that book is totally different than the nature (purpose) of this present book.

I PRAISE GOD FOR MY FRIENDSHIP WITH AN OLD GODLY KOREAN 'SAINT'

With the aforementioned 'rationale' given (for not attempting to profile the lives of several of my friends), I do, however, wish to offer a brief profile of one of my friends - an old friend whom I met when she was, at the time, very old - a Korean woman who came to live with her daughter and son-in-law in Fort Collins, Colorado.

She attended the church where I was the pastor, at the time- the Free Methodist Church. She was unique, in many ways, and she was one of the godliest women that I ever 'knew'! When I use the word 'knew', I use that word with some qualifications.

This old lady - a lady whose face was full of wrinkles, beautiful wrin-

kles which accented the fact that she had 'traveled many hard miles' in her life's pilgrimage - this old lady had a 'special communication' with heaven itself! Her radiant smile, behind the wrinkles, would 'win the heart' of anyone who was at all open to the God whom she served with great fervor!

This woman of God found her greatest joy when she had her 'hands on' in full involvement in the works of compassion! This choice lady not only spoke her native Korean language, but she also clearly spoke the 'language of heaven'! If someone had their doubts about this assertion, all they would have had to do is to carefully open their ears to her as she prayed! Even though she prayed only in her native tongue, I had never been more 'moved' and more 'touched' by any prayers like her prayers.

When I occasionally visited her (in the home of her daughter), this very healthy and very vibrant and very forceful little lady of God, always prayed for me, before I left her home. I could not, of course, understand a word of her lengthy prayers, but I knew that this 'saint of God' had a 'direct line' to heaven, to the God whom she had served all of her dramatic and action-filled life (a life accented with numerous miracles in her native country).

I counted it a privilege to be in the presence of one who had the radiance of heaven on her face, who had the driving force of holy love in her heart, who knew the power of prayer as a result of her lifetime experiences of facing evil and of overcoming evil in this demon-troubling world! I felt that I was in the presence of a woman who lived and who moved in the power of the Holy Ghost!

She was never 'forbidding' or 'judgmental' in her responses to people; instead, she was the epitome of holy love and tender kindness and genuine caring for everyone around her! She was like a 'magnet' to me, drawing me close to her, and drawing me closer to the God whom she knew so well! Even though we could not verbally communicate with one another, Mrs. Lee overflowed with her love! I felt that I was being 'washed' and being 'refreshed' by one of the streams from her overflowing love!

I felt that I was in the presence of one of the world's greatest saints! A holy woman of God whose life was constantly overflowing with holy love - a love that anyone could 'feel' if they allowed themselves to get near to her! Because Mrs. Lee regularly attended the worship services, where, of course, I regularly preached (even though she could not understand a word I preached), she 'took to me' with affection and with genuine interest - because I was a fellow believer, but especially because I was her English-speaking pastor. She prayed that the day would come that our church would offer three worship services. Eventually her prayer was answered!

In the privacy of her home, she regularly prayed for me! I seldom knew anyone, during my time as a pastor, who prayed more consistently and more fervently for me (and for the church) than this little Korean lady! She was one of the world's great 'prayer warriors'! (Of course, the believers in South Korea are known as some of the most fervent prayer warriors that can be found anywhere).

When I think of Mrs. Lee (the little woman who spent almost all of her life in the country of her birth - Korea), I think of a woman of God who experienced many trials throughout her long life, but I think also of a woman who often 'connected' with her God, and, as a result, saw an abundance of miracles in her life!

During the 103 years that she lived on this earth, she was often 'tried in the fire' of adversity, and, time after time, she came forth as 'gold tried in the fire' - the 'gold' of a perfected character, a character that increasingly reflected the character of her precious Lord!

No one who knew Mrs. Lee would deny that she was "steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of God". She was very faithful in accepting and in fulfilling the 'assignments' which her God gave to her! She was tenacious and determined in pursuing the 'goals' that she believed were worthy of the cause of Christ!

Whether it was 'building a local church', or whether it was visiting a 'fellow farmer' who lived near her and her former husband, she was a conscientious 'servant of the Lord'! She wanted to spread the 'love of God', wherever she went and with whomever she met! Wherever she found herself, this noble lady used her 'gift of healing' to bring restoration and deliverance to many folks, in her beloved home of

South Korea!

As I mentioned previously, I found Mrs. Lee to be very supportive of me, her pastor, during the last decade of her long life. Even though I could not understand a single word of her native language, when she prayed for me (rather long prayers) I felt that she was truly 'touching heaven' in my behalf! I felt that she was 'bringing heaven down to earth', that she was 'touching the hem of Christ's garment', that she had the 'full attention of her blessed Savior'!

She, a woman in her late 90's, desired to kneel with me, when she prayed with me, always at the end of my 'visit' with her! I have never known anyone (at her advanced age) who was so nimble and agile and flexible in the movement of her body! She enjoyed rather good health in her body, until the Lord decided on one glorious day to deliver her from that ancient body, to give her the gift of a brand new (heavenly) body! If she had aches and pains or stiffness of joints (or some other more serious physical ailments), I never once heard her talk about it.

She had been a hard-working farmer's wife for many decades, in her beloved country. She had been a widow for many years, and so she naturally became quite 'independent' in her lifestyle. Even though she was not privileged to receive much formal education, she was a woman who was amazingly 'educated by the Spirit of the living God'! She was a spiritually-minded woman, a woman who was full of godly wisdom and of sound judgment!

She definitely was a 'seasoned saint of God', but she did not arrive at that spiritual 'status' overnight! It took years of growth and careful obedience to the Spirit of God for her to become that type of a choice and rare person!

You might say that (borrowing a few words from the scriptures) she was 'wise as a serpent' (very discerning of the motives of people), 'harmless as a dove' (guileless and pure in motives), 'strong as an ox' (tremendous in perseverance), and 'bold as a lion' (fearless in her outreach to all kinds of persons - receptive and unreceptive persons).

For many reasons, Mrs. Lee was a truly 'unique person'. She was glo-

riously 'different' from any person I ever met. Even though we could not get over the language barrier (except through the translating skills of her brilliant daughter - who was a Korean pastor), we, nevertheless, 'communicated' to one another in our own 'unique manner'.

We communicated through our 'body language', through our 'facial expressions', through our 'mutual hugs', through our 'shared prayers', and through the profound 'mystery of our physical presence'! Every time I left the home of this 'aged saint' (this little Korean lady), my heart was warmed and my spirit was encouraged!

Every friend I have ever enjoyed has impacted my life in ways that were hard to describe! Each friend has left his/her 'mark of influence' on my life. I am indebted, of course, to each one of my friends (and relatives) for the lessons they have taught me, and for the godly example they have provided to me.

I can never repay a single one of these precious persons - persons who gave me far more than I ever gave to them. Yes, I am indebted to them, for time and for eternity. Some persons (from an outside objective viewpoint) might consider that some of my friends were a little 'odd' or even 'strange', but, instead of using those rather negative words, I would simply declare that all my friends were 'unique' or 'special' or 'interesting'!

During the decade of time that I associated with Mrs. Lee (and served as her pastor), I will say that she was to me a cherished friend (and also a spiritual 'mentor')! In describing her (as a friend) I would gladly (and most respectfully) use the words which I just wrote - 'unique' and 'special' and 'interesting'! Mrs. Lee was unique and special and interesting in countless ways!

When I first met Mrs. Lee, she was well-advanced in her age. It was easy for me to discern that, when I was in her presence, I was in the presence of a woman who had weathered the spiritual storms of life, a woman who had come through her harsh storms of life - and come through those storms with her 'head' held high and with her heart still tender with the love of God!

She had not allowed the adversities of her life to harden her heart (in

bitterness), and she had not allowed the unexplained grief's of her life to overwhelm her mind with doubts! It was obvious to me, when I was in her presence, that she was overflowing with the love of God, and that she was also overflowing with the joy of the Lord which provided her great strength for every day's living!

She was a woman that exuded health in every dimension of her life - spiritually and physically and socially and mentally! Indeed, Mrs. Lee was one of the most 'unique' and 'special' and 'interesting' Christians that I have ever met!

Thankfully, I have enjoyed some other friends in my life who have been 'unique' and 'special' and 'interesting', but I doubt that I will ever have a friend who will fit the description of these three words, quite like Mrs. Lee 'fit' this description! In a usual way this little Korean lady was 'unique' and 'special' and 'interesting'!

Ever since I was in the presence of this 'unique' and 'special' and 'interesting' lady (for an entire decade), I have never quite been the 'same'! I am inspired by her example, and, at the same time, convicted, when I realize how 'small of stature' (spiritually-speaking) I am, in contrast to the 'largeness of stature' that I beheld when I was in her presence! Yes, it is true that she was very short of stature (physically-speaking), but she was a 'giant in height' (spiritually-speaking).

Whenever I was with her, and when I became the object of her love and kindness and compassion, and when I heard her pray - yes, I had two responses. I was so appreciative for her expressions of love, and secondly, I was humbled and convicted because of my 'small stature' (my slow growth in spiritual matters). I felt that I was not worthy for her to lovingly call me 'pastor', for I easily and honestly knew that she was far, far ahead of me in 'spiritual matters'!

Many descriptive words could easily be used to describe the kind of person that Mrs. Lee was. One such word (an often-used Biblical term) is the familiar word that believers 'mouth' often - perseverance! Mrs. Lee consistently and enthusiastically ran the spiritual race of life. She was not a 'quitter' in the race of life. Instead, she persevered until the very end of her human life.

The spiritual race for her was not a short 'hundred yard dash', but, instead, her spiritual race was a lifetime 'marathon'. Her race in life was very long, and sometimes her race was very difficult, wrought with many trials, tests, and temptations to despair. She never gave up. She maintained her faith in Christ, and she finally crossed the 'finish line' of her long and arduous race. She was triumphant and she was, in the end, victorious!

She became a follower of Christ when she was 24 years of age. That means that she traveled the Christian 'course of life' for nearly 80 years! Through all the 'ups and downs' of life, amidst all the 'changes and the chances' of life - for nearly 80 years! Amidst the successes and the failures of life, amidst the loses and the gains of life, Mrs. Lee maintained a steadfast purpose and a deep commitment of her whole soul to Christ her Lord!

She was faithful 'in season and out of season', when it was easy and when it was difficult to live the Christian life, in sorrow and in joy, in the company of many fellow believers and when she had to 'standalone' for Christ, during times of peace and during times of great conflicts and spiritual persecutions! Her life and her faith in Christ stood the 'test of time'! She was 'faithful to the very end' of her very long life (of 103 years)! The Lord said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

With only seven other people, Mrs. Lee started a Methodist Church in her own home. Her faith was strong, and her determination to work hard for 'kingdom growth' (church growth) was exemplary! Gradually, that miniature 'house church' grew to become an impressively large local church.

The 'house church' that started in her own home with only 7 persons, in a few years, became a church that numbered more than 1000 persons! A miracle indeed, but a miracle that happened only because of strong faith and hard work. God honored Mrs. Lee, and other fellow workers with her!

Mrs. Lee was given the 'gift of healing' a gift that she often put into practice! It was my understanding that, when many persons were healed (as a result of Mrs. Lee's prayers and her anointing of folks for their healing), there were several folks from her home town who de-

cided to attend the church that Mrs. Lee started. Probably for multiple reasons, there were many different folks who chose to join this growing church!

As previously mentioned, Mrs. Lee had very little formal education. She worked hard, as a farmer's wife, most of her adult life. Mrs. Lee wanted her gifted daughter (Martha) to receive a good (formal) education. Martha did receive a fine education, in her own homeland, and Martha's education included even seminary training. Martha, a humble servant of God, was both a 'tough minded' and a 'tenderhearted' person, and she, later in her life, served as a pastor of a Korean church in America (in fact, in Fort Collins, Colorado).

God gifted Martha with a 'good mind', in fact a 'brilliant mind'! She was a strong Methodist in denominational preference. She studied intensely, and she preached with liberty and with joy! Her knowledge of various languages was rather mind-boggling! She either spoke or she understood several notable languages (some of them Biblical languages): Japanese, Chinese, Hebrew, Greek, English, and Korean!

Mrs. Lee prayed in general for many persons (for the blessing of God to rest on the life of persons), but Mrs. Lee had a special God-given 'gift' and she had a special God-ordained 'ministry'. She often went to hospitals and to shut-ins at their private residence, to pray for these folks! Specifically, she went to these needy persons to 'anoint' them with oil and to pray for their healing!

During her long-time ministry in Korea, she prayed for the ill and for the downtrodden ones who were all around her. Amazingly, as a farmer's wife, Mrs. Lee would respond to the requests of farmers, to come to farms and specifically to pray for the recovery of their sick animals! This idea seems 'way out' to us Americans (unreasonable and strange), but, nevertheless, God honored Mrs. Lee's faith, and, as a result, miracles often took place among the poor farmers and their valued animals!

Remarkably, in addition to everything that God miraculously did 'in' and 'through' the life of Mrs. Lee, God gave another special gift to Mrs. Lee- namely, the gift of 'spiritual exorcism' - the authority to cast out evil spirits from demon-possessed persons!

On one memorable occasion, I was with Mrs. Lee and with her daughter and with her son-in-law (Richard and Martha Sloan - dear friends of mine), when Mrs. Lee and her daughter prayed over the ill body of a young lady (mother of several children)! Mrs. Lee also anointed the body of this young lady who was suffering from a blockage, a painful blockage caused by kidney stones.

Before praying, Mrs. Lee, Martha, and Richard spent considerable time in the home of this young mother - singing some hymns and praising the Lord, and focusing on worship, all of which strengthened their personal faith in God's healing power.

Then, after about an hour of 'spiritual preparation', Mrs. Lee, with her daughter and her son-in-law, prayed earnestly and intently for this young lady's healing! A few days later, after this extended evening of prayer, Janine's body eliminated the kidney stones! An avoidance of a possible serious surgery!

Our God is a 'healing God'! There is 'power in prayer'! "If anyone is ill, let him call for the elders of the church, and let the elders pray over the ill, and let the elders anoint the ill ones, in the name of the Lord - and the ill ones will be healed!" (Paraphrase of James 5)

Mrs. Lee was a woman who was very sensitive to the person and the work of the mighty Holy Spirit. She, indeed, was a truly Spirit-filled and Spirit-anointed lady of God!

Throughout her long and productive life, she remained humble, prayerful, and obedient, and she continued to the end of her earthly life to cultivate the fruits of the Holy Spirit in her character. "When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Those who belong to Christ have nailed their natural evil desires to his cross and crucified them there. If we are living now by the Holy Spirit's power, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." (Galatians 5:22-25; Living Bible)

To those who observed her daily lifestyle, it was obvious that Mrs. Lee did not live a self-centered life, but, rather, a Christ-centered life and an others-oriented life! She lived to meet the needs of other per-

sons, and she sought to meet those needs through her prayer life, through her works of charity, and through her special gift of 'healing'! Her 'old self was crucified and she was resurrected to the 'new self which she received through her total surrender to the Lordship of Christ!

This was the supreme desire of Mrs. Lee - to follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of her life. Her life was overflowing with Love for everyone around her! Why? Because she was deeply in love with her God whom she worshiped wholeheartedly, as a result of her faith in Jesus as her Lord and her Master!

She manifested a beautiful smile on her radiant face, and her positive, joyous outlook on life was so contagious. She was magnetic in personality, drawing so many around her to her Savior whom she worshiped so naturally and spontaneously!

She, indeed, had a glow with the countenance of holy love, and every wrinkle on her aging face was a mark of holy wisdom and beauty! Her face was the face of kindness and compassion, and her face reminded me of the kind face of her Master whose likeness she mirrored! She walked and she talked with her Lord for so long, and, therefore, she began to look like her divine Master! What a holy representative for Christ on earth was Mrs. Lee.

Throughout her long life, Mrs. Lee sought to witness for her Lord. She wanted everyone that she met to come into a personal relationship with her Christ. Even when she was beginning to 'feel' the effects of her advanced aging, Mrs. Lee still wanted in some way to witness for her Lord.

She discovered a 'unique' way to do just that! For several years, her son-in-law gave leadership to a special outreach project - an outreach project that was launched by the Fort Collins Free Methodist Church. A very simple project that found its purpose in the distribution of Christian literature in the far reaches of the community of Ft. Collins.

Richard Sloan (the son-in-law of Mrs. Lee - the son-in-law who was so gracious to invite Mrs. Lee into his home to live) - this dear and dedicated man (a quiet-spoken and gentle-hearted servant of God) in-

volved himself as the lay leader who 'made it all happen'!

The commitment of Richard (and the commitment of Richard's team of nearly 20 other lay volunteers) was to distribute (door-to-door) about 3000 little devotional booklets (called 'Our Daily Bread' - popular booklet). The address of the local (sponsoring) church needed to be 'stamped' on the back cover of each booklet. Then, after this enormous job was completed, each booklet needed to be inserted into a little plastic bag (and some church promotional pamphlets were placed in each of the 3000 plastic bags).

Each of the several team volunteers received two or three hundred of the booklets (enclosed in the bags), and then the volunteers proceeded to go to their designated locations (neighborhoods) - with a map which Richard had prepared for each volunteer. This 'literature distribution ministry' - this witnessing outreach project to many neighborhoods - lasted for many years (every quarter), through the fine leadership of Richard Sloan. He was a most dedicated servant of the Lord!

For most of the years that this ministry proceeded, Mrs. Lee was vitally involved in helping with the process of 'stamping' the church address on the back cover of every one of the little booklets! Mind you, this little Korean lady was in her upper 90's when she handled thousands of booklets, each of which had to have an address 'stamp' affixed to the back cover of the booklets!

Her son-in-law was immensely grateful to his mother-in-law, for her significant contribution, in the preparation of these thousands of booklets, for distribution to thousands of homes!

Because Mrs. Lee had no acquaintance with the English language (or with English letters), her daughter and her son-in-law, of course, carefully instructed her as to how to use the 'address stamp'. She, of course, was told how to 'handle' the stamp, how to position the stamp, to assure the proper placement of the stamp on the back cover of these booklets. It was, of course, important that she did not affix the address upside down, rather than right side up!

She, of course, did her job (affixing the address on the booklets) in her own home (the home of Richard and Martha Sloan). Mrs. Lee, as

old as she was, but as agile as she was, 'squatted down on her floor', from which body position she stamped hundreds of little (witnessing) booklets! How could any woman (in her late 90's) kneel down (sit down), and then 'keep that position' for a long time on the floor - all because she had a passion to 'spread the good news of Christ' to the community!?

As a love-filled and a Spirit-controlled servant of God, Mrs. Lee was one of the most hospitable and warm-hearted persons whom I have ever known! When I occasionally visited in the home of her daughter and her son-in-law, the home that became her own home during the last 10- 15 years of her life, Mrs. Lee was very concerned that I (her pastor) was getting enough hot tea and delicious cookies, that I was comfortably seated, and that I was enjoying myself in her home. Even though I could not communicate verbally with this dear woman, at times I talked with her, with her daughter translating my English into her native Korean language.

Then, before I left her home, I would ask her to pray for me and for my local church. Her prayers were fervent and they were very spirited! Giving her a good-bye hug, I would then go to my car. But where was Mrs. Lee? Not in her home! As her native Korean custom dictated (and, more importantly, as an expression of her own warm Christian hospitality), Mrs. Lee followed me to my car, and then she stood on the curb and she continued to wave to me until I rounded the corner where I could no longer see her waving and waving, from my rear-view car mirror. What a dignified, beautiful, and loving servant this woman was! Mrs. Lee manifested great respect for those persons whom she considered to be spiritual leaders, like pastors!

Martha Sloan, the daughter of Mrs. Lee, shared with me that her 103 year old mother was showing signs that her departure from this earthly life was imminent. She asked me to come to her home, to serve the 'Communion' to her mother. It turned out that Mrs. Lee was only one week away from the date of her death. However, amazingly, Mrs. Lee was still very mentally alert, during the time that I was in her home, to share the Communion with her.

If there was ever a person who was ready to face death, and to face

the Creator, it was Mrs. Lee, a woman who had long served her Lord, in the loving and caring for the inhabitants of earth! But the time had come for the Lord to call her to her heavenly home! Soon she would leave her rugged, aged body on this earth, to return to dust, and she would then have her glorious 'home going' to her heavenly home!

I knew this reality very well when I made my last visit to the home of Mrs. Lee. I knew I would never again hear her fervent prayers, and I would never again be the object of her tender expressions of love (hot tea and delicious cookies). I would never again see her enthusiastic good-bye 'waves', as I pulled away from the curb of her home! I would never again see her wrinkled face and her exuberant and friendly smiles! I would never again hear the melodious sounds of her Korean tongue, as she intently attempted to communicate with me (and then observe the expressions on my face after her brilliant daughter translated the words to me that she had just spoken).

I would never again be able to see her quietly and reverently sitting in our church pew, during worship services (year after year), sitting so respectfully, even though she was unable to understand a single word of my sermons! I knew that, although she could not be a mental responder to my sermons, she was surely a spiritual responder, since she was praying earnestly for me, during the time I was preaching.

I would no longer be able to cherish her as one of my main 'prayer warriors'. Yes, for many reasons, I would miss Mrs. Lee, the little lady from Korea! And, obviously, her daughter and her son-in-law (Richard and Marsha Sloan, who loved her so deeply) would greatly miss her after she died. But God had (for several months) been 'preparing' them for her peaceful 'departure' to heaven!

After I served the Communion to this 'dying saint', I sensed that God would have me to read a well-known portion of Scripture. The theme is on the glory of the heavenly life, following the happy anticipation of physical death. I read to Mrs. Lee (and her children) II Corinthians 4:14-5:10.

"We know that the same God who brought the Lord Jesus back from death will also bring us back to life again with Jesus, and present us to him along with you. These sufferings of ours are for your benefit. And the more of you who are won to Christ, the more there are to

thank him for his great kindness, and the more the Lord is glorified.

"This is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all quite small and won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever!

"So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

"For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down-when we die and leave these bodies - we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself, and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies which we shall put on like new clothes. For we shall not be merely spirits without bodies.

"These earthly bodies make us groan and sigh, but we wouldn't like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life.

"This is what God has prepared for us and, as a guarantee; he has given us his Holy Spirit. Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus. We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing.

"And we are not afraid, but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with him in heaven. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and have our lives lain bare - before him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body." (Living Bible)

After I read this exciting and heart-warming portion of scripture to Mrs. Lee and to her beloved children, I shared a few words of my heart-felt appreciation and my love to this dying woman ('saint of God'). After I poured out my heart in thanksgiving to her - thanksgiving for the godly life that she had lived for so long, and thanksgiving for my personal indebtedness to her for her amazing impact of her life on my life - after these simple acts and words of love (on my part), I did an act of love that might seem 'strange' to many people.

On that particular day, my heart quivered with praise to my God and with thanksgiving for my 'little Korean friend' - and, as a final act of praise to God and of thanksgiving to Mrs. Lee, I bent my body down to where she was sitting, and I gave this sainted woman ten 'holy kisses of love' on her forehead - before I left her presence for the last time! I told her - my last words to her - that I hoped that God would grant me the great privilege, through His grace, of living near to her in heaven!

Occasionally, there is a 'rare' and 'beautiful' and 'saintly' person whom God brings into a person's life! A little, aged woman - a woman from Korea (a hard-working farmer's wife) was the 'rare' and 'beautiful' and 'saintly' woman whom God chose to bring into my life!

I shall always be grateful that God 'graced' my little life (for a few years) with the friendship of a 'giant in the faith!' I will always feel the 'impact' of her godly life on my life, for the remainder of my time on earth, and, I feel sure, I will also feel her impact on my life, throughout eternity!

Perhaps, I will then sit at her feet, where she will teach me the 'lessons of heaven'! Then I will be able to understand every word she speaks - for her language and my language will be the same - heavenly language which every soul in heaven knows well! Forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus. We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing.

"And we are not afraid, but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this

body and with him in heaven. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and have our lives laid bare - before him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body." (Living Bible)

No longer will there be any barriers in heaven! Perfect communication and perfect communion - forever! It will be so wonderful that neither tongue nor pen will be able to describe that glorious dwelling place! Glory! Glory! "It has not entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him!" Mrs. Lee is a 'double winner!' Abundant life on earth and now eternal life in heaven!

Mrs. Lee's death was not a time for sadness and for darkness! Rather, her death was a time of gladness and of brightness! Following her passing, Richard and Martha Sloan sang some hymns, and then they prayed, and then they praised their Lord in thanksgiving for their mother. They expressed their gratitude to their Lord for taking their mother to her heaven home!

No longer a pilgrim on earth, but now a first-rate citizen of heaven itself! Richard and Martha knew that the last breath she breathed on this earth introduced her to her first breath of 'celestial air' in heaven!

Mrs. Lee died one early Sunday morning. How significant that God chose this particular day of the week as the day in which the doors of heaven were opened to this 'old saint of God!' The first day of the week in which every week Christians from around the world (yes, millions of Christians also in Korea) celebrate the glorious resurrection of Jesus!

When Jesus arose from the dead, He vanquished death forever! God chose the first day of the week to raise His Son from the dead! God chose to deliver mankind the victory over man's enemy - death - on the first day of the week! Symbolically, the fact that Mrs. Lee died on the first day of the week early on resurrection day demonstrates that, although her physical body died on that Sunday, her spirit winged itself to the 'realms of glory' on the same day that her body died! Her spirit (now separate from her old body) will surely receive a new body (patterned after the resurrected body of Jesus Himself!).

***I PRAISE GOD FOR THE AMAZING CHANGES THAT HUMANS
CAN EXPERIENCE!***

Someone said that the greatest evidence of the validity of Christianity is that Christianity can make a 'bad' man 'good'. The transformation of a human character is the greatest evidence - practically speaking - that Christianity has a power beyond any human power. Christianity, based on a relationship with the Living Christ, teaches that any human being can change 'for the better'!

Christianity teaches that, because of the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, 'old things' can pass away – sin - and 'new things' can become a reality - right and holy living! The New Testament is 'packed' with the teaching that describes, in one way or another, divinely-wrought 'transformation' of human character. Based on God's grace, not based on human effort, the New Testament teaches that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven, and no sinner that cannot be made into a beautiful and loving believer!

There are many teachers and ministers and evangelists (both past and present) who could give a hearty 'Amen' to the above-stated affirmations! Some of the above-mentioned Christian leaders have been the personal 'witness' to the conversion of literally thousands of sinners! I am personally thankful that God allowed me, a pastor of a small church, over a period of about 20 years, to witness the conversion of many scores of sinners (almost all of these conversions, around the dining room table of their home)!

I was privileged to be God's 'tool' (channel or 'mouthpiece'), when I presented the 'plan of salvation' to many precious folks! After these persons sincerely met the 'conditions' for salvation, they began to grow dynamically in their newfound 'faith'. After I led them to Christ, I, of course, sought to help these new believers to develop and to progress in the 'fleshing out' of their newfound faith (in many different ways). I stood back in observation of the life of these new believers, and I was thrilled and I was amazed at their growth!

As is true of all of us (believers), these new Christians had a lot to learn. They, like all of us, experienced some 'advances' and some 'retreats' in the living of the Christian life, but the majority of these precious new believers became responsible and loving servants of

our God! Some, eventually, even assumed leadership positions within the local church!

Today, many years since their conversion, there are those one-time-baby Christians who are now strong and stalwart leaders in the work of God (including the local church)! God is a transforming God - a God who loves to change every one of us, a God who wants us to be strong in the things of God, a God who wants us to reach out in love to everyone around us!

There are many and varied ways in which God's change in the heart and life of a person can be described. One of the most meaningful ways to describe divinely-wrought 'change' in the human life is to make 'contrasts'. This is what I was 'before' I was converted (or before I made a fuller surrender of my life to God), and (in contrast) this is what I have become since I yielded my life to the transforming God! Even though the contrasting list is rather detailed, I encourage you too thoughtfully to envision what the miracle-performing God truly accomplishes!

God has power to turn a 'stumbling block' into a 'stepping stone', to turn a mess into a message, to turn a hard adversity into a tender empathy, to turn a hope into a reality, to turn a tear-stained face into a radiant face, to turn a tragedy into a triumph, to turn a sorrow into a comfort, to turn a broken heart into a healed heart, to turn confusion into understanding, to turn loneliness into companionship, to turn a loss into a gain, to turn humiliation into dignity.

God has the power to turn failure into success, to turn retreat into advancement, to turn depravity into purity, to turn a life of transgression into a life of obedience, to turn moral weakness into moral strength, to turn an evil habit into a righteous habit, to turn moral chaos into moral order, to turn a slave of sin into a slave of righteousness, to turn an irrational mind into a rational mind, to deliver one from a false religion and introduce him to the true religion, to turn one from self-centeredness to a life of Christ-centeredness!

God has power to truly transform any and all human beings! The mission of Christ is to turn each of us around - to make a 180 degree turn in the life of each and every one of us! The call of God is the 'call of repentance'- the call to leave our 'old way of life' and to embrace

the 'new way of life' - the life of righteousness, the life of integrity, the life of justice, the life of holiness, the life of peace, the life of holy love! Our call is the call to become a 'new creature' - a person who is 'centered in Christ's person', rather than a person who is centered in himself!

God has power to change every one of us - to change us initially at the time of 'conversion', and to change us progressively through God's call to pursue and to realize (imperfectly) the holy life, patterned after the holiness of Christ Himself

Of course, we (believers) are not totally 'changed' (morally and spiritually and intellectually and socially) during the time that we are alive on this terrestrial ball! The Christian life is a life of 'constant growth', becoming more and more like the Christ of the Ages, but, of course, never attaining the 'full stature' of Christ.

We (as sincere, growing) believers know that often we 'come short' of being the persons we could be and that we ought to be (in terms of developing Christ-like character), but, nevertheless, we (believers) keep trying (in spite of our moral failures), and we (believers) keep praying (sometimes intensely and sometime sparsely), and we (believers) keep reading our Bible (sometimes intently and sometime lazily)!

We (believers) keep attending our local church services (sometimes we listen attentively and sometimes we fall asleep when the preacher is fervently declaring the 'truth' from the Bible), and we (believers) keep giving money to the church and to charities (sometimes enthusiastically and sometimes reluctantly), and we (believers) keep resisting the devil (sometimes zealously and sometimes negligently)!

We (believers) keep trying to witness to non-believers (sometimes boldly and sometimes timidly), and we (believers) know that we are to return good for evil to those who spitefully use us (and sometimes we have the strength wholeheartedly to forgive our enemies, and sometimes we forgive our enemies very slowly and sometimes very reluctantly)!

We (believers) are called 'believers' because we honestly believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we honestly believe that Jesus is the Way

and the Truth and the Life (the only One through whom our sins are forgiven, and the only One by whom we can gain 'entrance' into heaven, after we die)!

We want to be the 'true blue' - the authentic person, the true follower of Christ, the One to whom we give our sole allegiance and loyalty. It is our desire, amidst the hardships we experience and the temptations that befall us, to be 'true and faithful' to Christ, throughout our life, until we breathe our very last breath!

We honestly desire that God's progressive sanctification (the impartation of divine love in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit's empowerment) - that this progressive perfecting of our lives will continually be at 'work' in the heart and in the mind of each one of us! But, as briefly described above, we (believers) must admit that sometimes we come 'short' of God's expectations for us believers!

We (believers) are becoming aware (in light of our many shortcomings) that 'repentance' is not a once-and-for-all experience, which takes place at the time of our conversion! We (believers) now acknowledge that 'repentance' is an ongoing 'attitude' that must endure throughout our entire 'faith walk' (till death releases us from our human body)!

Every day we (believers) need to 'confess' our failures and our shortcomings and our 'sins' (even the unintentional 'sins) to a loving and a forgiving God! We (believers) recognize that, as wonderful as the initial 'change' is at the time of our conversion (John 3), all of the Christian life is subject to ongoing and greatly needed 'changes'!

We (believers) humbly acknowledge that, if we are serious about following a 'Transforming God', we must be subject to the 'transformations' (changes) which God desires to bring about in our life (as believers)!

Think further of the wonderful changes which God is able to bring in the life of a human being!

God is able to turn revengeful bitterness into loving forgiveness, to turn overly-sensitive reactions into properly-sensitive responses, to

turn introspective grief into socially-building projects!

God is able to turn cold isolation into warm fellowship, to turn hurtful deprivation into healthful prosperity, to turn negative criticism into positive affirmation, to turn dark depression into joyous health, to turn boredom into engrossing work, to turn religious dogmatism into tolerant acceptance!

God is able to turn a worldly-minded person into a biblically-minded person, to turn a foolish person into a wise person, to turn a disappointed person into a gladsome person, to turn a duplicitous person into a transparent person, to change a deceptive person into guileless person, to change a slanderous person into a charitable person!

God is able to change a double-minded person into a single-minded person, to change a lazy person into an industrious person, to change a half-hearted person into a whole-hearted person, to change a dishonest person into an honest person, to change a trouble-maker into a peace-maker, to change a drunk person into a sober person, to change a self-centered person into an others-oriented person, to change a self-pitying person into a self-giving person!

Transformation! That is what Christianity is all about! God is able to take a 'bad man' and turn him into a 'good man'! "I once was lost, but now I am found. I once was blind, but now I can see!"

Change, change, wonderful change! The power of the cross and the power of the resurrection - the wonder-working means by which God alone can change a sinner into a saint!

The kind of change which is demonstrated in the amazing creation of the beautiful butterfly! From an ugly cocoon (the ugliness of the sinful life) to the emergence of the exquisite butterfly (the wonder of divine transformation).

Divine transformation, not mere human reformation! Human reformation cannot transform the human heart (that is, human reformation cannot change the inner 'carnal nature')! Only God, through His unlimited power, can change a person from the 'inside out'.

Change originates in the human heart! It is the human heart (inner motivations) that God 'changes' (transforms), and when that miracle

takes place, then the outward behavior changes (suddenly or gradually)!

If any person be in Christ Jesus, that person is a new creation! Old things are passed away, and, behold, all things (goals and motivations and projects) are become new!

That change, which begins at the point of conversion, continues daily, for the rest of one's life. If a believer yields (obediently) to the Holy Spirit, he/she can expect to experience some kind of 'change' to happen regularly (sometimes even 'daily')!

The 'joy of becoming' is the greatest joy that there is! Becoming (little by little, and more and more) like the Person whom we (as believers) worship!

We (believers), in our honest thoughts, know that we are not everything that we desire to be! We admit that there is always a 'gap' (small or large) between what we 'profess' and what we 'possess' (in terms of practical, every day, living of the Christian life)!

We try, with God's help, to be the kind of person (privately and in public) that God desires us to be. But, we often fail to live the kind of life that we desire to live, and that God desires us to live. So, what do we do, as we face this dilemma?

We exercise more personal discipline (in terms of the development of 'holy habits '), we pray more honestly and diligently, we make ourselves subject to the counsel of other believers, we make deeper surrenders of our heart to the Holy Spirit, we saturate our minds with biblical truths, and we wait in silence daily for the Spirit to work in our surrendered heart and will. We confess any known sin in our life, and we refuse to go on a guilt trip because of our failures. We learn to accept God's forgiveness, and we learn to forgive our self of our failures.

We keep on keeping on, in our forward movement for God. We learn anew the meaning of God's grace. We affirm the glorious fact that God loves us unconditionally! We are not 'easy' on our self, when we fail, but, on the other hand, we accept God's forgiveness! We recognize that it is vitally important that we keep our self away from the obvious traps of temptation! We march forward in joy and in peace!

We know that in time and in eternity, Christ will be the perfect 'standard' by which we will measure our personal progress in our spiritual life. We (believers), in spite of our desires and our earnest efforts, know that when we come to the 'end of the road' on this earth, we will have to confess that the development of our character (towards the standard of Christlikeness), is still incomplete.

But, we will take comfort (as we are dying) that we are saved by grace, not by our own (worthy) moral and spiritual accomplishments. We will further take comfort in the fact, that, where we 'left off' (in terms of our personal development) when we die, we will continue with that same spiritual development when we enter the portals of heaven!

Because there is so much to learn in heaven (that we never learned when we lived on earth), it is almost certain that there will be eternal growth (development in character) in that place where expansion of our personality is limitless!

***I PRAISE GOD FOR THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN
SOMEDAY!***

Heaven - described as a glorious city, a place that is likened to pure gold and clear glass. Heaven - God's dwelling place which is prepared for those earthlings who love and who serve the living Christ. Heaven - a place whose environment is filled with God's holiness, and God's beauty, and God's unity, and God's perfection, and God's unspeakable joy!

Heaven - a place where there are no tears of sorrow or grief, a place where there is no sickness or pain or death. No funerals in heaven! And no aging and no growing old and decrepit! A place where there is no sun and no moon, for Christ Himself is the source of all light! In heaven, there is no night!

There are no arguments between family members 'up there' in 'glory land'! No separations from those we love. No marriage, it is true, but the love relationship enjoyed between spouses on earth will be greatly enhanced in heaven! Heaven - a place where the focus of all will be

on Christ alone! Heaven is a place where there is no competition and no comparisons between jealous-ridden persons.

Heaven is a place where all serve each other with holy love and with gladness. Heaven is a place of perfect harmony and unity, where 'all is for each, and each is for all.' Serving each other without the physical imitations of a human body.

Heaven - a place of joyful singing and happy serving and constant learning. A place where all the saints will learn from one another, and all will learn forever from the 'Master Teacher' Himself - the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven - a place where each will become more like God forever - without, of course, ever actually becoming gods.

The excitement of eternal growth in knowledge and in holy wisdom and understanding! No longer seeing reality as if peering through a hazy glass, but, instead, seeing reality with our spiritual eyes as a result of being given a 'spiritual body'. Heaven - a place where we will no longer walk by faith, but a place where we shall behold Christ, face to face in all His glory!

Death for the believer is like going from the basement of the house to the top story of the house. When a person is 'saved', he receives (according to scripture) 'eternal life' - the very moment when Christ comes into his heart. Therefore, death does not introduce a believer to any other type of life, than the life which the believer is already enjoying on this 'earthly plain'!

Death simply introduces a believer to a closer relationship with Christ, to the same type of life that the believer has been enjoying, from the very moment the believer (the repentant sinner) accepted Christ into his life.

Christ within the believer is nothing less than 'eternal life' within the heart of a believer! When a believer is 'ushered into the presence of Christ in heaven' (when he dies), a believer enjoys a closer and a more intimate relationship with Christ!

When he leaves this 'earthly temple', and when he enters the 'portals of heaven', the believer continues (on a 'higher level') to enjoy the same quality of life that he had been enjoying, all along on earth.

He simply goes from the lower floor of the house (the earthly level, which has a high quality of life) to the top floor of the house (where that earthly life with Christ is continued and is enjoyed to a much greater degree in heaven)!

Death allows the Christian to reach his destination! Death for the Christian is like crossing the 'finish line' after a long marathon run. Death signals the end to all of the tests and trials and temptations that accompanied the long and hard 'race of life'!

Death signals the end of all the stresses and hardships of life, and is the gateway to peace and rest and health! "When I have gone the last mile of the way, I will rest at the end of the day. And I know there are joys that await me, when I have gone the last mile of the way!"

Death is not a loss for the believer; death, instead, is the way into eternal life in heaven. Paul wrote, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!" Christians are only pilgrims on this planet. Dying allows the believer to 'go home'!

Jesus promised to give a beautiful home to His followers, when they die! "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

When you place your faith in the Deathless One - Jesus Christ - you shall never die! Of course, your earthly body will die, your corruptible body will return to dust! But, the 'real you' - your spirit - will never die!

Jesus said, "If a man keeps my saying he shall never see death." (John 8:5) "Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." (John 11:16) Notes J.B. Phillips, "It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the meaning that Christ intended to convey was that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of the eternal quality."

When we believe in Jesus - truly believe - our sorrows are soothed, our broken hearts are mended, and our void of loneliness is filled.

Throughout our long spiritual pilgrimage on earth, God is preparing us for the last mile of our way, when our journey will finally be completed!

The imperfections (from our earthly pilgrimage) that remain with us, when we go through the 'Gates of Heaven', these imperfections will all be eliminated in heaven (perhaps through a 'purging process', sometime in heaven, and probably accomplished by the kindly administration of our merciful Heavenly Father).

Relationships that were broken on earth will likely (and even necessarily) be mended and be reconciled in that heavenly dwelling place. Perfect peace and genuine understanding and wholehearted love - these are the 'natural ingredients' of Christ's heavenly home! Anything that is contrary to these qualities (in the character of a believer) must be rectified (reconciled) some time, if not on earth before the believer's death, then in heaven!

The Bible says that in heaven, 'all tears will be wiped away from our eyes'! Truly! But, contrary to the belief that many have, I think that there is reason to believe that the tears in the eyes of some believers will only be wiped away 'in' heaven, only after the needed reconciliation with other (discordant) believers takes place!

What can be said about the alienation that some believers have, with their fellow believers (on this earth) - an alienation that was not resolved before the time of the believer's death? Will this same alienation automatically be 'removed' (resolved) at the moment of an alienated believer's physical death - or, on the other hand, will the unresolved differences between believers need to be resolved (after they die) in the heavenly home?

The process of reconciliation (by the nature of the concept) means that the two persons who are 'at odds' with one another, must humbly confess their sins to one another, must humbly ask for forgiveness, and must humbly seek understanding with the opposing party.

If the process of reconciliation is not entered into by the alienated (opposing) persons, on this earth, where else can that process of reconciliation take place, other than in heaven?

God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of all heavenly citizens, but does God do this 'wiping away' at the point of the believer's death, or at the point when alienated believers (alienated because of misunderstandings on earth), are hugging each other in heaven, as a result of their finally reconciling differences which were never resolved on earth!

Whatever the 'correct' answer is to the above thought-provoking discussion (regarding the location for the resolution of differences between believers), the scriptures do indicate that heaven will be so wonderful that no human can describe its full splendor! "Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man, what God has prepared for those who love Him!"

Heaven is a place where we feel 'at home', never alone, and never lonely! When we are in heaven, it will be awesome, most glorious, but, even though we will be 'awestruck' with amazement because of the beauty of heaven, we, nevertheless, will not feel like a 'stranger'

We will never feel 'out of place'. Rather, though we feel unworthy, we will feel that we are where we are supposed to be, were we truly 'belong'! We will not 'feel ill at ease'. We will feel 'comfortable', feel like we are in a place where 'we belong!'

Even though we will sense that we are not 'worthy' to be in this indescribably beautiful place, and even though we will be 'lost in wonder, love, and praise', we, nevertheless, will feel 'right at home'.

Even though we will recognize that there are 'giants of the faith' (famous saints of the ages) in this dwelling place (and sometimes those saints may walk rather close to us), we, nevertheless, will not be intimidated by these 'giant Christians'!

In fact, we will desire to meet these unusual servants of Christ, and we will desire to thank these great leaders of the 'faith', for their amazing contributions to the cause of Christ, while they ministered so effectively on planet earth. We will likely wish some time to sit at the feet of these 'giant saints', to learn spiritual truths from their lips, truths that will help us in our continuing growth in our heavenly dwelling place.

Heaven is a place where there will be growth and more growth. Eter-

nal growth! Progressively and joyously, we will become more and more like the One whom all heaven adores and magnifies - the Lord Jesus Christ!

Perhaps Christ (the Master Teacher) will assign a large number of teachers to us - to teach us, a little at a time, regarding the abundance of 'truths'! The greatest truths of all will be the truths (mysteries) regarding the Holy Trinity! Truth about the character of our triune God will occupy our thoughts for all eternity!

There are mansions in heaven, especially suited to each of us. There is no lack in heaven. Our every need will be supplied, our every desire will be fulfilled, and our every capacity will be developed. There is no overcrowding in heaven, and there is a special room that God has ready for each of the earth's inhabitants.

There is neither positioning nor deprivation in heaven! There will be perfect enjoyment of each other, and no one will get on another's person's 'nerves'. We will never get tired of each other! We will spend some of our 'time' exploring the mysteries and the wonders of each other's personality, and each other's amazing gifts and talents and abilities!

No jealousy as we are absorbed in learning about each other! Total dignity and no shame in the feelings that we have of ourselves and of one another. No class consciousness and no racial discrimination. "All for each and each for all!"

Absolutely no self-absorption and no self-centeredness, but total self-giving and others-orientation. Humility without humiliation, and dignity without pride! Total fellowship and total communion and total pre-occupation with the worship of the King of kings - the Lord Jesus Christ! Singing with the holy angels the chorus of eternal praise to the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed for the redemption of the fallen world!

All heavenly citizens will well know that they are not worthy of the least of God's favor! That they are in heaven, only because of the 'finished work of Christ!' None will feel worthy of Christ's favor, but all will glory in the wonder of Christ's favor!

None will ever be able to praise Christ adequately for His willingness

to shed His blood for the redemption of mankind! There is strong evidence that the five wounds of Christ (which He received on the cross) will be visible on Christ's heavenly (resurrected) body!

The eyes of all the saints in heaven will be fixed on those wounds - the wounds that speak of Christ's sacrificial love for every human being! "Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down!" Love that went to the cross, to die for a race of lost and unworthy sinners!

Holy Scripture (John 14) seems to teach that heaven is a localized place, a place where all persons will be known and recognized, a place of sweet and conscious fellowship, a place where redeemed spirits are embodied with a new and resurrected body, like as to the body of their resurrected Lord!

A place also where there is unspeakable joy, restful relaxation from all of earth's labors and stresses, total deliverance from all of earth's illnesses (total health), and (surprising to some) a place where the heavenly saints will enjoy delightful laughter!

We must remember that Jesus (while He was a man on earth) had a joyful 'sense of humor' (as recognized in some of His parables)! Since we are created in the divine image, why wouldn't we (as redeemed persons) express, at times, humor and laughter in heaven? As God-like creatures, we too, like Jesus, will surely hang back our heads and open our mouths and resound with hearty laughter - in heaven!

Laugh because Jesus won the victory (over Satan) when Jesus died and when Jesus arose from the dead! Laugh because you (along with the multitude of saints around you) made the right decision when (on earth) you repented of your sins and when you believed that Jesus was the Savior of the world, and, consequently, you got your name written in the 'Book of Life'!

Laugh because you are in a place where you will enjoy both 'eternal rest' and 'eternal labors' - all 'in the name of Jesus' and all for the 'glory of God'! There are many reasons why you should 'laugh' when you find yourself in the most glorious place that can be found in the entire universe!

Even the angels in heaven (the angels who have never known the meaning of redemption) will 'envy' your position in God's vast universe! Why wouldn't you 'laugh' with a 'holy laugh' when you arrive (by grace) in a place that cannot be invaded by any type of 'evil', in a place from which no one can 'kidnap' you, in a place where you will love others and where you will be loved by others forever, in a place without competition and without comparisons and without jealousies and without boredom and without weariness.

Total worship of the King, total involvement of your creative service to everyone around you, total confidence and wholesome self-esteem with no selfish pride and with no self-absorption, total self-acceptance with no self-consciousness and no self-advancement, total teachableness and progressive growth in learning about the glorious mystery of God's holy trinity!

In heaven, the redeemed saints will have spiritual, localized, and recognizable (concrete) bodies - bodies that are similar, if not identical, to the body of the resurrected Lord! Heaven has a local habitation. Heaven is an actual place in the great universe of God, not a mere 'state of the mind'!

The spiritual (resurrected) body in heaven will surely be more 'real' than the body that exists on earth! How? Of course, we must wait to 'find out' when we enjoy our new body in that 'fair and wonderful dwelling place'!

After Jesus arose from the dead (and when He spent 40 days on this earth, before His ascension), Jesus appeared to be like He was, before He died! It is true that Jesus could go from one physical location to another location, without the normal necessity of walking. He could suddenly appear at one location, and then suddenly be at another location! Jesus' 'resurrected body' obviously had a marvelous 'power' (capacity) that His mere physical body did not have.

On the other hand, the resurrected Jesus told 'doubting Thomas' (when He appeared to Thomas after the resurrection) to touch the wounds in His body. If Jesus was some kind of ethereal (hazy and undetermined) essence, rather than a 'concrete body', Thomas would not have been able to 'touch' Jesus! It seemed that Jesus' body, though concrete in essence (touchable and seeable), was, neverthe-

less, of a spiritual essence (beyond the physical 'material' of a lowly, confined earthly body).

Jesus died once (for mankind's redemption), and, as the resurrected Lord, He shall never die again. Humans, embodied in a corruptible body, will - if they are redeemed by Christ - die only once, and, like their resurrected Lord, they will never die again!

Like the Lord whom they serve, they will live forever! Just as Jesus, in heaven, has a 'glorified human body' (with the five wounds from His crucifixion visibly apparent), the redeemed souls of earth will appear in heaven with their glorified (human) bodies. As we were identified by our unique 'features' in our human body on earth, so we will (in some way) be readily identified by our unique 'features' in heaven!

If God loved 'uniqueness' (variety) when He created the earth, don't you think that God will love (enjoy) great variety in the unique 'features' of His heavenly creatures (citizens) in heaven?

Obviously, no one can clearly define what 'form' uniqueness will 'take' in heaven, but we can be assured that God's varied 'assignments' in heaven (to every heavenly citizen) will be one manifestation of 'heaven's variety' (uniqueness).

How will you and I be quickly 'identified' in heaven? Will there be an immediate communication spirit to spirit - between the heavenly citizens? Will the same physical marks (that set us apart from one another on earth) be immediately recognized, when we dwell with each other, in that vast heavenly City?

If I die (as a bald-headed man, as I will), will I continue to be a bald-headed man in heaven? Surely, on one hand, the blemishes and the imperfections of my earthly body will be removed, when I receive my 'perfect, resurrected body', but, on the other hand, surely the distinguishing 'characteristics' of my human body will 'remain' as the 'characteristics' of my new and glorified body!

Whatever are the actual circumstances in that heavenly dwelling place, we can be sure of one thing, namely, "we shall know and we shall be known"! We shall spend eternity (in heaven) coming to know all the heavenly citizens, and, in turn, all the heavenly citizens will progressively come to know us!

The joy of knowing others (with all the excitement of what that 'discovery' of persons entails), and the joy of knowing ourselves - without any shame and without any embarrassment - will be a joy, indeed, that will be unspeakable and full of glory!

The glorious 'uncovering' of the true and the mysterious identity of other heavenly citizens, will bring joy and awe and wonderment to both the discovering one (yourself), and to the discovered one (yourself)!

The greatest of all wonderment will be the wonderment of gradually discovering (throughout eternity) the 'mystery of the holy trinity'! The gradual unfolding of this 'mystery' will be the greatest excitement of every heavenly citizen!

Sharing new knowledge with each other - with full openness to the truth and with all the 'barriers' to learning destroyed! The joy of discovering new knowledge, which, in turn, leads heavenly citizens to the discovery of more and more new knowledge - and forever learning and learning!

The joy of becoming more and more like God, without, of course, ever becoming 'little gods'. Of course, we shall forever (in heaven) remain 'redeemed humans' (clothed with a new, resurrected body), but, as redeemed humans, we are, nevertheless, in a 'glorified' (permanent) 'state'! Eternal fellowship and eternal happiness!

And the great truth is this: In heaven, all the happy dwellers know that they forever will serve a great God: A God who loves all and who wills to 'save' all, the Jesus who died for all, a God whose human creatures (sinners) are savable (capable of being 'saved'), a God who has sent the Holy Spirit to all persons to call all persons to repentance and to new life, a God who has prepared a place in heaven for every human being, and a God who is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all persons should come to repentance, and, thus, at death, be 'ushered into heaven'!

God loves the human race, including the 'least', the 'last', the overlooked, the 'most unworthy'. God loves the high and the low, the most gifted and the least gifted, the wealthy and the poor, the beautiful and the ugly! God loves the powerful ones and the weak ones, the

high profile ones and the obscure ones, the highly educated ones and the most illiterate ones.

God loves the positioned ones and the most overlooked ones, the very beautiful ones and the outrightly repulsive ones! God loves the young adults and He also loves the decrepit (aging) ones, the up-and-out moralistic sinners and the down-and-out sinners (the immoral and 'raw' sinners)!

If God would have His own way, there would not be a single person who would die in his/her unrepentant sin! If God had His way (that is, if God's 'perfect will' were carried out) there would be universal, spiritual health, as the result of the forgiveness of every sin of every person!

Christ died so that all persons could be forgiven of his/her sins, and the Spirit calls all persons to repentance, and a place is prepared for every person in heaven - therefore, there is no reason why any human being should be without hope and without salvation!

What more can God do, other than what He has done - to make it possible for everyone to enjoy the glories of heaven forever! If God - the loving and merciful and forgiving God - had His way in the affairs of men, and regarding the destiny of men - every soul would be forgiven on earth, and every soul would have his/her name written in the 'Lamb's Book of Life' (assuring him/her a place in the eternal kingdom)!

Hell was prepared for the devil and for his fallen angels (demons) - NOT for human beings! God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance! God is doing everything in His power (short of coercion) to keep every soul out of hell, and to take every human being to heaven! But, God cannot (will not) take any human being to heaven, against his/her own 'will' and 'desire'!

One's eternal destiny depends upon one thing and one thing only - the kind of 'heart response' that a person gives to God's revelation of the Light that God gives to a person (even if that 'Light' comes in a diminished form of 'General Revelation' and not 'Special Revelation').

Those only will be in heaven who have, honestly and positively, re-

sponded in their heart to God's revelation of "light" (whether it is response to the "Concealed Christ" or response to the "Known Christ")!

It is encouraging for us members of a "fallen Race" to know that God did not abandon us when, through our Race's Representative (Adam), the entire human race miserably 'fell into sin!' Through a rather long and complex plan (over a period of many centuries), God finally brought His Son into the world to accomplish His plan for 'world redemption'.

No human can fully understand the 'mystery of iniquity' (sin), or the 'mystery of divinely-accomplished redemption through the cross and resurrection', or the 'mystery of the human free will' - but, great as these mysteries are, - God, nevertheless, mightily 'works his miracles' of human transformation!

There are millions of persons today, throughout the world in probably every country, who are 'openly acknowledging and serving Christ', and, doubtless, (because of the universal 'work of the Holy Spirit') there are, doubtless, also many more persons throughout the entire world whose hearts are presently turned toward the Living God! These latter (many) persons are presently seeking the 'concealed' Christ, as best as they know, with their very limited knowledge and with their narrow opportunities, spiritually-speaking!

All persons will be in heaven who on earth 'walked in the light of truth' as God gave them 'light'! Some persons will enter heaven, possessing so much more knowledge of Jesus than other persons - other (less fortunate) persons who received so much less light on earth, persons who possessed little knowledge regarding the true identity of Jesus.

What God will judge, in the end of human existence, is not the accuracy of one's mental knowledge about God, and about Man, and about Sin, and about Jesus Christ, and about the complexities of the plan of salvation (atonement, justification, regeneration, sanctification).

Instead of the mental knowledge of Christian Doctrine, it will be the response of the human heart to the revealed truth of God, given in abundant measure to some persons, and given in very small measure to some other person.

God will judge the 'condition of one's heart', not the fullness of one's mental comprehension of Christian Doctrines! It will be the condition of the human heart (i.e., the receptivity to the Holy Spirit's multiple works of enlightenment, conviction, offer of forgiveness and new life, etc.) that will determine the final outcome of one's eternal destiny!

If a person's heart is right with God (and only God can fully and accurately determine this), then that person will be welcomed into God's eternal kingdom - to enjoy the glories of heaven, along with the saints who early in their life responded to the 'revealed Christ' of 'special revelation'!

Both the 'privileged ones', and the 'much less privileged ones', will be together in holy fellowship in heaven - those who responded to the lesser 'light' of general revelation, and those who responded to the greater 'light' of special revelation!

According to the famous passage in Matthew 25, it seems quite apparent that Jesus, as the Judge of all men, at the End of human existence, will applaud each person's HEART RESPONSE to the needs of one's fellow men, even if some of the compassionate-oriented persons do not have a so-called 'evangelical conversion'! Jesus said of the compassionate person (who does all kinds of good deeds) that 'inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

All they know is that they desire to help people, to alleviate their terrible sufferings, to befriend the lonely, to give a listening ear to the troubled words of persons, to give a generous portion of their money to help the poor, to visit those who are grief-stricken, to share their presence with those in prison, to give away their talents to bless the troubled ones, and so much more.

You may respond to these compassion-oriented persons that they could not do all these 'acts of charity' unless they are 'born-again Christians.' Precisely! These 'fruits of godliness' come not from mere 'sentimental inclinations'.

The one who is humbly compassionate is the same one who is a 'child of God - truly 'born again'. Such a person has surrendered his heart and his will to others - to serve, to care, to empathize, and to be

an instrument of healing to others.

Such a person (and there are multitudes of these kinds of persons, among all classes and all races and all religious affiliations throughout the world), I say, such a person whose life is largely defined by voluntary works of charity, would be dumbfounded if you asked him if he had been 'born again'.

Because such persons cannot 'pinpoint' a time of personal conversion, and because they cannot intelligently describe the meaning of 'repentance', 'awakening', 'confession', 'justification', and 'regeneration', and all the other difficult theological (salvation) terms, does NOT mean that these persons are unconverted (or that they are not in God's family).

Based upon the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25, I think that it is likely that there will be a multitude of persons in heaven who, while they lived on earth, did not profess a deep and a personal relationship with Christ, but who will, nevertheless, be in heaven (apparently to their own surprise, according to the kind of response that these certain people will give to Jesus, in eternity)!

These citizens of heaven (who are surprised at the wonderful outcome of their compassionate life, surprised that the Master gave them 'entrance' into heaven), I say, these surprised citizens of heaven 'walked in all the light of truth' that they received on earth, namely, the 'LIGHT OF TRUE COMPASSION' towards their fellow men on earth.

They did not realize, while they carried on their active life of compassion on earth, that the very origin (fountainhead) of their compassion was nothing less than the very 'compassionate heart' of Jesus Himself!

Such persons responded to the 'saving grace' of Jesus rather ignorantly, at the very time that they sincerely committed (surrendered) their entire life and energies and talents and skills and training and motivations to the caring for the imprisoned and the starving and the weak and the oppressed and the widow and the poor and the injured persons around them!

They manifested the 'fruits of Christlikeness', so, indeed, they surely

possessed the very person of Christ! Even though, today, these compassionate persons are unaware of it, while they are gladly and joyously and sacrificially caring out their 'works of charity', the motivation for their labors of compassion was the indwelling Holy Spirit!

There is a multitude of medical doctors, throughout the world, who are 'doing the work of Christ' and some of them do not even realize that their works are motivated by Christ's Spirit! Their compassionate works have the 'smile of God's approval' resting upon them!

It would be much better if all (unenlightened) doctors (ignorant of the motivation for their genuine works of medical intervention), would have their 'eyes opened' to the reality of the Christ who stands beside them while they perform delicate surgeries, and while they are bringing comfort to their dying patients.

Whether or not these physicians are aware of the divinely-imparted strength within them, to enable them to perform their medical procedures, it is, nevertheless, true that it is the 'unseen Christ' who is the 'Author' of all healing. No doctor, of course, can heal a human body, but Christ (the Healer) has chosen (in most situations) to 'use' human 'instruments' (like surgeons and psychiatrists) to 'achieve' the healing of the human body and mind.

The point is simple: Some medical doctors are serving the 'concealed Christ' (unknown to the doctor, but, nevertheless the Christ who is intervening in any work of compassion, including the work of 'spiritually-blinded' physicians)!

Some other medical doctors (committed believers) are serving the 'openly revealed Christ' (the Christ, who is openly confessed by the doctor who humbly and constantly depends upon the Spirit for His enablement for every medical procedure - and the doctor who unashamedly gives God the glory for all medical 'success').

The doctor who is sincerely 'walking in the lesser light' of truth is serving the 'concealed Christ', and such a doctor is a 'servant of God', even though this doctor has not (yet) discovered the 'fuller light' of Jesus Christ (revealed in the Gospels).

Many persons in this world (including many 'non-Christian' doctors, as in India and other countries), are 'walking in all the light of truth' that they know (and such compassionate persons - doctors, for instance - have not yet received the 'fuller light', centered in the incarnate Christ)!

As long as these doctors are sincerely walking in the light of truth, that has been given to them, even if the 'light' is a 'lesser light', such compassionate persons - doctors, for instance, with limited knowledge of 'truth' - will, nevertheless, be accepted by our Lord!

"Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art! Jesus, those persons who manifest your type of compassion, must they not surely belong to you? Compassion, motivated by unselfish love, is the practical and the 'visible' manifestation of 'God's love on the earth!'"

"Jesus, if compassion is the concrete expression of divine-like love, then surely all persons who have compassion in their heart will gain a glorious entrance into the 'Heaven of Love'! With or without much 'knowledge' of you on earth, will all persons whose heart is moved by compassion, be welcomed someday into your eternal kingdom?"

"Jesus, if your heart is the heart of overflowing compassion, won't those who possess your kind of compassion (on earth) be eventually 'gathered into your arms of compassion', after they have lived their earthly life? Won't the 'worker of compassion' be someday gathered into the merciful arms of the 'Master and Motivator of compassion'?"

"Jesus, won't those who are most compassionate on earth, feel most at 'home' in a place that is 'full of compassionate saints'? Jesus, my head and my heart both accept your 'answer' to my important questions! My head and my heart agree that the answer surely must be YES! Jesus, thank you for your heart of compassion!"

**I THANK GOD FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GOD-GIVEN
'SPIRITUAL GIFT'!**

After my 'forced retirement' from my pastorate (as a result of my long-term depression), God allowed me (once again) to be 'healthy' - that is, to think rationally, to feel much more 'settled' in my emotions, to

worship more meaningfully and fervently, and also to begin writing again (my writing 'talent' had become dormant during my time of depression). The return of my 'health' was also demonstrated (wonderfully) by my joyful return to my daily 'running'!

**EXTENSIVE WRITINGS TRANSLATED INTO NUMEROUS BOOKS
BY A DILIGENT LADY**

Of course, following my retirement from the pastorate, I was no longer involved in the exacting 'practice' of sermon preparation (which involved so much of my time for about 25 years). I believe that, a few months after I left my church, God initiated an idea in my mind, namely, to found a new non-profit organization, the main purpose to be to distribute Christian literature (primarily, the Christian literature that I myself had written over a long period of time). I had been actively writing ever since I became a pastor, when I was still in my early 20's.

A friend of mine (a dedicated Christian lady) had taken a special interest in my writings, and, as a result, many of my sermons had been bound together, to form devotional books. I envisioned this newly-formed organization (called 'Christian Living Ministries') to be the 'vehicle' for the distribution of my several books.

A Christian lawyer did all the legal work, and soon this new (small) organization was in 'operation'. I asked three different men (including the lawyer) to compose the 'board' for 'Christian Living Ministries', and, as a result of my appeal for 'supporting donors', I received positive response from a 'handful' of 'glad financial supporters'.

During the next 15 years (during which time this small organization existed), I distributed - free of cost to everyone - several hundreds of my books, to friends and family members and fellow pastors and associates! Several of these recipients sent me 'notes of appreciation' for my books. I trust that, in some way, God was able to use these carefully written books (my sermons and other writings), for the benefit of spiritual growth and personal inspiration.

After I left the pastorate, in 1994 (nearly 20 years ago, at the time of this writing), I found myself involved in additional writing, beyond the writing of sermons which I did during my time when I was active in the pastorate. In fact, to date (2014), I presently have several dozen

books and booklets (that I have either authored or compiled) available for anyone who wishes to enjoy them, and most of these books and booklets are presently available (for viewing or for downloading) on my Web site (CLMBOOKS.ORG).

None of these books and booklets (freely available) would be available, without the unusual dedication of an unusual lady, Shirley Ruiz. This lady, many years ago, volunteered (without any pay) to type all my material, to design the pages very attractively, and to neatly present all these pages (perhaps 10,000 pages!!) to the printer for 'production'.

Words, of course, are inadequate to express my appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, for her 'labors of love' and her untiring dedication to my 'Writing projects'. Obviously (as I have told her several times), the widespread distribution of these many books (including the distribution on the Web), would never have been possible without her faithful and persistent dedication, during the last 30 years. If it were not for her, my writings (as helpful as they might be) would be 'gathering dust' in some 'box ' somewhere in my 'garage'!

I owe whatever 'success' I have had, in the distribution of the 'Good News' of Jesus, through the medium of 'Christian Books', entirely to this godly and gracious and tenacious lady! She has tirelessly and faithfully and most cheerfully performed this 'service' of 'transferring' my (sometimes) almost illegible writing, into a beautiful document (that will become a handsome-looking book)!

During the 30 years that I have worked so 'comfortably' with her, she had not manifested any spirit, other than the 'spirit of enthusiasm' and 'gladness' and 'excitement'. She has offered many 'good suggestions' regarding 'format' and 'design' and 'approach to better appeal in terms of layout', and those suggestions (most times) are 'excellent' and readily accepted by me!

During the last several years, Shirley has received some monthly financial compensation for her faithful work. However, it is not likely that I will ever be able to 'repay her' (financially or otherwise) for her unusual devotion to this work. I have thanked her on many occasions for her loving devotion to God and for her faithful partnership with me.

She has never been calculating in the work that she does for me. In fact, she has asked for more and more work (typing and designing) to do. When she has completed the typing (designing) of one book, she asks for another book to type! It seems that she cannot get enough work to do! The volume of work that she has done (the thousands of pages she has typed) is mind-boggling! The spirit of enthusiasm and zeal that she manifests in this work is most amazing and most rare!

When I think that I have given this lady (who just had her 80th birthday) 'too much work', she actually requests that I give her more 'books to type'! She has told me, many times, that this work that she does, gives her a lot of 'joy', that the material that she types 'blesses her' and gives her 'insights'! Certainly, without 'question', this lady is 'one in a million'. I have never worked with anyone who has been more faithful 'in the Lord's work', than this lady.

She has been an example and an inspiration to me - her joyful spirit, her persistence in labor (about 30 years in this 'work' of helping to produce many books), her cooperative 'spirit' of 'teamwork', and, most importantly, her deep love for her Master (for whom she has primarily worked, all of these decades). I have told her (several times): "Shirley, I thank you for what you have done for me, for so very long, but I know that you are really working for your Savior, whom you love so very much.

"Shirley, I am in great 'debt' to you, and I know that many other persons are in 'debt' to you! I know that many persons on this earth are being blessed through these books, and all because of your labors of love. I know that you will have to wait until you get to heaven, before you will get your 'true reward for everything you have done on earth. I know that you are primarily working, of course, for Christ, and only secondarily for me. I can't imagine how you could type 10,000 pages (approximately), but God has given you unusual hands and fingers! I am amazed by your talents and especially by your remarkable spirit! Thank you! Thank you Shirley!"

The ministry, just briefly described, began in April 1995, just a few weeks before Venita received her 'open door' communication from God regarding the founding of her elderly care business. A few months, after I believed that God wanted me to form a new non-profit organization (Christian Living Ministries), I had another 'moving of

the Spirit'!

I sensed that I should be involved in a further 'thrust' in getting the Word of God distributed in my community. This new (informal) endeavor could be seen as a further extension of the ministry of 'Christian Living Ministries' (a literature distribution ministry).

"THOUSANDS OF STEPS TO DELIVER THOUSANDS OF DEVOTIONAL BOOKLETS"

In December 1995 just seven months after Christian Living Ministries began), I began to do what nearly anyone could do. A very simple ministry of systematic distribution of Christian devotional literature – a ministry that nearly anyone could choose to do, but nevertheless, a ministry that entailed a lot of discipline and a lot of physical energy. I remember that my local church (under the leadership of a 'key' layman - conscientious and dedicated and organized), distributed thousands of the little daily devotional booklets (Our Daily Bread) - every quarter for several years.

When I was the pastor of that local Free Methodist Church, I expressed many times to that 'key lay person', my deep appreciation for the 'quiet and consistent' work that he did. I was grateful for the fact that he had recruited dozens of 'helpers' to make that ministry possible. Thousands of homes were 'touched', as a result of those devotional booklets being placed in the door or screen of those many houses.

With the memory of that simple but effective ministry of 'literature distribution' through the 'channels' of my former church, I decided that the same 'ministry' could (and should) be carried out, in my own neighborhood. Why couldn't I do the 'foot work'? Just like the lay persons did, some years before, while I was their pastor? So, without much thought as to what it would mean for me to be the 'footman', each quarter (year after year), I ordered several boxes of the devotional booklet. I saturated my neighborhood (and others) with the message of God's love (through the devotional booklet)! Lots of foot work!

For about 55 quarters I passed out the devotional booklet (Our Daily Bread). That means for 14 years (with missing only one quarter, be-

cause of inclement weather), I went up and down thousands of steps, to reach the front door of hundreds of homes, to deposit the 'truth of God' (in the form of a little God-centered booklet).

There were many persons who expressed thanks to me, for my efforts, and for the great help (spiritually) that they received from reading the 'Christ-honoring' booklet. Occasionally (but very seldom) did I receive a 'negative response' from persons to whom I gave the booklet. On one occasion, after I had gone to the next door my fast walking in a neighborhood, a young man found the booklet on his front door, and he took the booklet and he slung the booklet across his yard, where it landed in a curb in front of his house. He, of course, yelled at me, and I gently responded with loving words.

God surely must have a 'sense of humor', for the next thing that happened, brought a sense of shame to the young man. The young man's medium-sized dog got loose from the young man, and guess where his dog ended up? Yes, right at my feet! The young man who had just yelled at me (and who had tossed the devotional book), came over to the next yard to get his dog that was (as I said) right at my feet!

The young man was 'very ashamed' for the way he had acted towards me, and he apologized to me. He said that he was 'fed up' with the various 'political brochures' that were at this door and admitted that his negative action towards me was 'wrong'. Of course, I accepted his apology, but (wisely) I did not go back to his door to give him another devotional booklet, and I certainly did not (unwisely) try to retrieve the devotional booklet that he had tossed into the curb in front of his house!

On one other (rare) occasion, after I had left a devotional booklet in the door of a certain house, and as I was crossing the street in front of this house, to walk my well-used 'route' to continue my 'mission', a lady came out of her house, trotting across the street where I was walking, and she yelled at me 'from the top of her lungs', letting me know 'in no uncertain terms' that she did not want that 'booklet'!

Frankly, this unexpected invasion into my quiet thoughts that particular morning, as I was 'going about my worthy mission', frightened me (almost scared me!). She looked like a 'wild woman' dashing across

the street (close to where I was walking). Maybe she was that type of woman. I don't know, but (as the Lord taught us), I did not 'yell back' - even though I might have wanted to, as a result of my sometimes 'unsanctified emotions'!

Lest I develop a 'martyr complex', or become 'self-righteous' in my attitude when I think about this 'yelling woman' (this woman who hated the emotional booklet so badly that she was bold enough to follow me onto the street), I must humbly and I must shamefully acknowledge that (according to my wife's evaluation) I have sometimes raised my voice (apparently 'yelled') far too much in my life's ventures, when I am discussing 'controversial subjects" (of many kinds). Venita (unfortunately) has had sometimes to 'calm me' and she has had to tell me to 'lower my voice' during 'heated' discussions! She has (unfortunately) had to remind me that 'there are neighbors' nearby who don't need to hear me 'yelling'! I, of course, generally defend myself, and I tell her that I have emotions that are going to 'show' when I am talking about a 'subject that is near to my heart' (like abortion or humanism in our public schools, or 'sheep stealing' among local churches, and a dozen other hot topics).

Since I am a 'yeller' at times, I guess I had better not 'criticize' a woman who found it necessary (because of her own 'set of beliefs') to come after me and to 'act like a crazy woman'. My experience of being 'yelled' at on a pleasant, sunny morning is 'nothing' compared to the experiences of the 'persecuted church' in other lands! Nevertheless, I must admit that, in the quietness of that morning, I was a 'little unnerved' by her aggressive actions and by her 'harsh yelling'!

This (rare) experience gave me an appreciation for the 'redeeming Gospel' which this desperate lady needed. I prayed that someone somewhere would 'get through to this needy soul'! During the 14 years (about 55 quarters) that I carried on this literature distribution ministry, I was told countless times how much the devotional booklet meant to the recipients.

Once, while I was quite a distance from the house where I had just left the booklet, a lady came to her front porch, and she shouted in a loud voice from across the street, "I love the devotional book".

"It is wonderful!" (I guess that affirmation makes up for the yelling

by the 'crazy lady'). I, of course, don't remember any sequence to the various occasions when I received either positive or negative responses, I do know, for certain, that the number of positive responses far, far outweighed the negative responses.

It took me lots of hours to accomplish my 'mission' (of door-to-door distribution), each quarter, but, even though I grew tired, it was 'worth it'. I planned to continue the 'mission' beyond the 14 years but, frankly, I was ready to 'call it quits' after this number of years.

One practical reason for discontinuing this literature ministry, was that I noticed as I, (obviously), I was getting older - about 65 at the time. I noticed that my knees were developing 'aches' and 'pains' (I think as a result of my ascending and descending thousands of front steps of hundreds of homes). Even though I believed that, because I had been a 'steady runner', I was rather strong in my legs, I did not 'want to take the chance' of developing additional knee problems.

After delivering this little devotional booklet ("Our Daily Bread") door-to-door in my neighborhood for 14 years (approximately 55 quarters), I decided (rather decisively) that it was time for me to discontinue this meaningful ministry. All 'good things' (even ministries) must eventually come to an 'end'.

It had long been my desire to 'saturate' my immediate community (about 400 homes) with the 'Gospel of Christ' (the message of God's love)! As a result of my consistent distribution of this excellent booklet, I believed that my long-time ministry to these neighborhood homes was accomplished. In terms of spirited 'harvest', I must leave the 'results' completely in the hands of God. Jesus said there are four different 'soils'!

One day, after I had gone to a lot of homes, I decided to take a brief rest in my car. While I was resting, a lady came up to the window of my car. She rather startled me but I was quite sure that she was an 'ally' and not an 'adversary' to my cause. She quickly asked me, "Are you the one who is bringing these devotional booklets to the houses?" When I simply answered in the 'affirmative' "She said to me, "You are an angel"! (I replied, "I know that I am"! Just kidding) I said, "Thank you! I am glad that you like the devotional booklets. I

have been doing this for quite some time." She mentioned that the booklet had blessed her so much!

I PRAISE GOD FOR MANY SOUL-WINNING OPPORTUNITIES!

One of the most important 'cross-road' events of my life occurred when I was a very young pastor. I met a pastor/evangelist, who successfully pastored a sizeable Church in the state of Washington. Arrangements were made by my conference superintendent, Glenn Williamson, for this well-known, seasoned pastor, Rev. George Delamarter, to spend a couple of days with me in Fort Collins, Colorado, where I was the new pastor of a struggling, small Free Methodist Church.

Spending those two days with this 'towering soul-winner' (well-known throughout our entire denomination), literally changed the direction of my entire pastoral life, activities, and priorities. This aggressive, 'in your face' man, a man with multiple talents, including music, but whose primary focus was personal evangelism – rather intimidated me, but he also attracted me! Even though his personality and my personality were considerably different, I found myself wishing that I, too, could become an outgoing soul-winner! Because he had (along with his other remarkable talents) the talent of art, George Delamarter prepared a most impressive, colorful 'flip chart', which greatly enhanced his presentation of the plan of salvation, which he often gave in the homes of unbelievers, homes of receptive persons, and many of whom had visited his church service.

To make a 'long story shorter', after George Delamarter, this fruitful and creative soul-winner, left my home, I (as a young pastor) decided that – by God's grace and enabling strength – I would make myself available to the 'Lord of the harvest' to be a 'harvester' for souls! I wanted to 'reach out in love' to lost and dying souls. I wanted to find courage and zeal from God to take initiative to make 'appointments' in the homes of sinners, to go to those homes and present the 'plan of salvation' and to invite couples to accept Christ as Savior. A simple, direct, deliberate and intentional plan to win a few, (or maybe even many) souls, to Christ.

With no experience (of course), I decided to follow the 'example' of the very mature soul-winner, namely, the famous George Delamarter!

I knew I could never be him or do everything in the exact way he did 'things'. But, I believed that God could use even me, with my limited gifts, talents, my more quiet personality. I ordered the 'flip chart', which I would find to be a helpful 'aid' in my presentation of the 'plan of salvation'.

Admittedly, it took a lot of courage and determination (on my part) to contact unbelievers by phone or in person, and to explain to them that I would count it a privilege to come to their homes and to present a simple Bible study, a study that helps to explain the meaning of life, and a study which helps people to 'deepen' their assurance of eternal life. Of course, my wording was slightly different each time I gave an 'explanation' for my coming to their home, according to the specific needs and personality of each person. Even though I sought to be 'honest' in my appeal to each person, wisdom and discernment dictated that I not forthrightly tell the 'sinner contact' that I wanted to come to their house to share with them that they were 'terrible sinners', lost and undone.

Sometimes it was rather 'easy' for me to make appointments with homes (unsaved homes), but usually I found that it took me considerable determination, and prayer, to get on the phone and to seek another 'appointment'. But during the approximately 20 years, that I carried on this outreach of personal evangelism ministry, there were hundreds of adults, teens, and children, (about 300 to 350 persons) who accepted Christ as Savior, and who prayed the 'sinner's prayer'.

During those 20 years of outreach to lost persons (during which time I spent many nights around the living room tables of seeking souls), I seldom was able to enjoy the warm comforts of my home, with my dear wife and our two growing daughters. My wife tried to explain to our young daughters why I was not at home with them, night after night. Just as fathers who sell insurance policies, and have to be gone at night, so their father was out in homes sharing Jesus to those who don't know Jesus. They understood, I believe! Venita was most understanding. She waited for me to return home with abounding joy, to report that the angels were rejoicing because another soul is now in the 'Kingdom'!

These 'Salvation By Appointments', the name given by Delamarter, preoccupied much of my thinking, although obviously, I had to be in-

volved in a large number of other programs, within the overall dimension of my pastoral work. I, however, kept evangelism, outreach, and specifically soul-winning, as a priority 'high on my list'. Slowly, but persistently, I continued to 'make appointments' in the homes of the unsaved persons, and I found abounding joy when I witnessed sinner after sinner, couple after couple, hold hands with me, and pray the 'Sinner's Prayer'.

Immediately after the couples, or persons, prayed to receive Christ, we all rejoiced, of course. Then I shared with the new converts, usually couples, the need and opportunity for a three months 'follow-up', learning the 'basics' of living the Christian life. They, of course, were excited to have another couple, a 'Timothy Couple', come to their home once a week for 13 weeks, to share the 'basic how tos' of the Christian life.

The follow-up program was vitally important, as a means of encouraging new believers in the 'new-found walk' with Christ. Understandably, the 'bonding' between the new Christian couple and the 'Timothy couple' became rather strong, after sharing was experienced over the 3 month period. It is easy to understand that long-time friendship was enjoyed with new believers and the Timothy couple, long after the 3 month period of 'follow-up' was completed. There were several lay couples in my church who gladly accepted the 'Timothy' ministry as their primary 'calling'.

For obvious reasons, it would not have been 'wise' for me, as their pastor, to serve as a 'Timothy' teacher. The Lay couples did that 'job' very well, very effectively. It was very important for new believers to become 'bonded' with 'fellow lay persons'. There was much about the pastoral ministry that I greatly enjoyed, but the joy I experienced, time and time again over about 20 years, when I witnessed sinners finding Jesus as their Savior, was an unsurpassed joy. The greatest privilege in the entire world is the privilege of being a soul-winner!

I PRAISE GOD FOR MY SEVERAL LOVED ONES AND DEAR RELATIVES!

Lack of knowledge prevents me from giving detailed profiles of my loved ones, beyond my own immediate family. Nevertheless, it is

proper and significant that I should at least recognize some of my loved ones, for the great persons that they are or were. I have enjoyed each one of those persons to one degree or another, and at one time or another, throughout my long life of presently nearly 70 years. I have geographically lived near a few of them. And I am close in age to some of them, and some of them are older or younger than I am. That, of course, is the nature of a 'family clan'.

I will only mention some of those relatives by name, and attempt to note only very briefly, what they do or what they did in the case of a few of my deceased loved ones.

First, I will start with my nephews and nieces. Starting with the oldest, Bob Gilliland, who built many houses; Rod, was involved in home financing and a broker. Doug, is a land developer and financial investor. They are my sister Margaret's sons.

Debbie Farrington, an elementary school teacher; Diana Sobotka, also an elementary school teacher; Mark Lancaster, works for an airline company; Brian Lancaster works for an insurance company. Those are my sister Bobbie's children. My sister Bobbie passed away about 3 years ago.

My brother Jerry lost his 15 year old daughter Sharla, as a result of a seizure which happened while riding on a roller coaster in Denver in 1981. Jerry also has a son Greg, who is very much at ease on computers that he has used for many years. Jerry's daughter Marsha, has for 10 years done lots of record keeping for a company who specializes in expensive registered horses.

Then there are my 2 daughters Darlene and Rhonda. Darlene, who is my eldest, enjoys her oldest son, Lucas, who is talented in the use of modern technology, smart phones, computer knowledge, etc., and he has recently discovered that God has gifted him with amazing writing skills. Darlene's daughter Megan loves pets, and she has inherited some of her mother's artistic skills.

My youngest daughter, Rhonda, has a son and a daughter. Madeleine, who can talk fast and can think quickly, similar to her mother, and she makes good grades, and she loves to read. Rhonda's son William can assemble 'Legos' better than anyone that I know. His

mechanical skills, since his young childhood, have amazed me! Among his skills, is his skill as a competitive swimmer and excellent diver.

In very brief summary is the above listing of the names of all my nephews and nieces, with a short description of some of their interests and skills, – plus a noting of my two daughters and my four grandchildren.

I wish briefly to note that God gave me, in addition to my wonderful wife, my wife's two wonderful sisters and respective husbands. Venita's elder sister of 10 years, is Jean, and she has a degree in music and she has taught piano lessons to many children for several years. Her husband Kay, was a long-time school counsellor in Seattle. They devotedly loved two adopted children, Marianne and Donald, both of whom enjoy living in dwelling places, near Seattle. Venita's other sister, Myrt, 7 years older than Venita, lived with her husband Bob in Bellevue, Nebraska, nearly all of their married life. Both of them taught elementary children for more than three decades. Because they were not blessed with any children, Bob and Myrt reached out in love to countless children and teenagers, all of their lives. Even though they lived many miles apart from our two daughters, they, nevertheless, kept in close contact by mail with our daughters. They, without fail, attended all of the important events in which our daughters had involvement, such as several graduations, weddings, and even birthdays. Bob and Myrt lavished our daughters with various kinds of gifts. Their letters, especially Bob's letters, were long and descriptive and most affirming. Bob and Myrt, the closest ones to Darlene and Rhonda, were almost like 'second parents' to our daughters. Our daughters spent lots of time talking, listening, and writing to their favorite aunt and uncle.

It is 'strange', though not important, to note that Bob Bailey and Kay Joy (my two brothers-in-law) each died when they were the same age – 69 years old! Four years after Bob died, Bob's widow (Myrt) was united in holy matrimony to a special man (a widower who had lost his wife a year before) – Sam Hamblen, a resident of Fort Collins for about 50 years, and a successful builder and contractor. Sam and Myrt are presently very happily married.

Only God knows the heart of each person, whom I have listed, but

from my limited perspective I believe that every one of the above listed persons is a Christian believer! Each one is precious to God, and each one of these above-listed persons has, to one extent or another, been a blessing and encouragement to me! I have not listed the names of the spouses of my nephews and nieces, but I could easily speak very highly of them as well.!

*Booklets From
"Biblical Foundation for the Sanctity Of Human Life!"*

WHO CARES FOR THE UNBORN BABY!

*Part I - "Biblical Foundation for The Sanctity Of
Human Life!"*

Part II - "Exposing Our Nation's Silent Holocaust!"

LET MY PRAISES BE HEARD!

LET MY TEARS FLOW!

LET MY LAUGHTER RESOUND!

DOES GOD LOVE ALL OR ONLY SOME?

BATTLE AGAINST HUMANISM!