



*"WORD
PICTURES
FOR
DYNAMIC
LIVING!"*

*By
Ron G. Christian*

DEDICATION ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript as well as adding illustrations in this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessings to many persons.



Ron G. Christian

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1.

"BRIEF GLIMPSES INTO WISDOM!"

"When you get money, you should think of someone else before yourself, the poor."

"Sometimes, when you care about someone else, you should let them go before your own self."

"If you are thinking about tomorrow, you are not promised tomorrow."

"It is not God's fault if we go to hell. It is called "free will!"

"Satan is the Father of sin. If you sin, you are the son of Satan."

"Beware, evil is all around the world."

"There is an end to everything except in paradise."

"The rapture can happen anytime."

"There is more good than evil."

"Live the simple life."

"You do not have anything if you're not honest."

"There is always something to do, but never something to waste."

"Before you spend money think, do I need this?"

"You hate sin; you love the people who do it."

"Be thankful for all you have."

"Concentrate in all you do."

"Believe, achieve, and receive." (Megan Berrong)

"In all you do, do it for the Lord."

"God wants the best for you."

"If you practice, it will save you from embarrassment."

"You can worship anytime and anywhere."

"Nobody in this world is perfect."

"God loves us no matter what we do."

"Look unto me and be ye saved. - Isaiah 45:22"

"The devil wants you to regret God. Will you? Alternatively, will you follow the One who forgives you for every single sin you do. What will you do?"

"Animals are good, but human life is more important."

"When you say you have not been sick for a while, you will most likely get sick. It is also like taking your eyes off God."

"I've heard people say they have an 'idol', but there is only one idol in the world, God."

"Nobody in this world is perfect."

"God loves us no matter what we do".

"Look unto me and be ye saved". - Isaiah 45:22."

"The devil wants you to regret God. Will you? Or will you follow the One who forgives you for every single sin you do. What will you do?"

"Animals are good, but human life is more important."

"It is fine to have treasures on earth, but you should have even more in heaven."

"Think through your thoughts before you hurt someone."

"If you are in a group that agrees to do evil, you should depart from Satan's trick and follow the One who doesn't trick you, Jesus Christ."

"Do not fear anything if you are a Christian but if you are evil, there is a lot to fear."

"Do not let fear control your life that is God's job."

"If you lie, you will have your place in the lake of fire."

"If you don't give tithe, it's like not giving a birthday present."

"There is a time for everything you do."

"When at church let go of all you think and listen to the One who knows more about the heavenly Master."

Lucas Berrong is the Grandson of Ron Christian, Founder of 'Relevant Christian Cards'. Lucas composed this of Glimpses of Wisdom at the age of 10 years old.

2.

"ARE YOU A 'WISE MAN' OR 'FOOLISH MAN'?"

"Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teachings because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (Matthew 7:24-29)

"WISE MAN"

1. A Fruitful Life
2. Spirit-Centered Life
3. Self-Forgetful Life
4. Life of Confidence
5. Life of Creativity
6. Christ-Centered Worship
7. Life Of Prayer
8. Spiritual Wisdom (Bible)
9. Life of Fellowship (Believers)
10. Growing Abundance
11. Attractive Humility
12. Outgoing Compassion
13. Clear Goal Setting
14. Pure Heart and Clean Motives
15. Genuine Honesty

FOOLISH MAN"

1. A Barren Life
2. Fleshly Life (controlled by passion)
3. Self-Preoccupied Life
4. Life Of Despair
5. Life Of Destruction
6. Worldly-Worship (Many False Gods)
7. Life Of Carelessness
8. Worldly Wisdom (Secularism)
9. Life Of Loneliness (Self-Centered Friends')
10. Increasing Poverty
11. Repulsive Humiliation (Self-ejection)
12. Selfish Preoccupation and Selfish Pursuits
13. Purposeless Wandering
14. Corrupt Heart And Ulterior Motives
15. Deception And Evil Plots And Schemes

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| 16. Clear Conscience | 16. Guilty Conscience |
| 17. Delights In Being Peace-Maker | 17. Delights In Being Trouble-Maker |
| 18. Tells the Truth | 18. Easily Tells Lies |
| 19. Amiable and Approachable | 19. Overly-Sensitive And Easily Offended |
| 20. Patient and Long Suffering | 20. Impatient And Irritable |
| 21. Generous and Uncalculating | 21. Grasping And Greedy |
| 22. Joy-Filled and Thankful | 22. Forlorn And Ungrateful |
| 23. Assurance of Eternal Life | 23. Terror-Stricken In Face Of Death |
| 24. Enjoys Simple Lifestyle | 24. Grasping For More Material Possessions |
| 25. Quiet and Contemplative Spirit | 25. Never-Ceasing Boisterous Noise |
| 26. Discipline of Human Passions | 26. Uncontrolled License To Fleshly Passions |
| 27. Enjoys Humble Service | 27. Seeks Status And Position And Honors |
| 28. Quickly Forgives Offenses In Past | 28. Holds Grudges Against Offenders |
| 29. Made peace with ones wrongs | 29. Plagued With Guilt Regarding One's Past Wrongs |
| 30. Forward - Moving and Optimistic | 30. Backward Looking With Regrets And Remorse |
| 31. Carefree and Happy Life (Laughter) | 31. Worry-Worn And Anxiety-Ridden (Sadness) |
| 32. Humble and Teachable (Desire To Learn) | 32. Proud And Close-Minded |
| 33. Fragrant and Winsome Life | 33. Wretched And Repulsive Life |
| 34. Focuses On 'Good' In Others | 34. Focuses On 'Bad' In Others |
| 35. Delights In Knowledge Of Bible | 35. Ignorant And Indifferent Towards Bible |
| | 36. Gossips And Bears 'False Witness' |

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| 36. Guards Each Man's Reputation | 37. Seldom Or Never Attends Church |
| 37. Worships Often In Church | 38. Self-Reliance In Work |
| 38. God-Reliance in Work | 39. Accepts Praise To Self For Accomplishments |
| 39. Ascribes Praise To God for Accomplishments | 40. Founded On Mere World (Sandy Soil) |
| 40. Founded on Christ (Solid Rock) | 41. Attitude Of Complaints |
| 41. Attitude of Gratitude | |

3.

"AVOID SIN AND SIN'S CONSEQUENCES!"
(Nails and Nail Holes)

The Bible says that God is able, and is willing, to forgive any sin when one's sins are confessed to Him. When there is a true repentance, (i.e., turning one's back upon his former sinful lifestyle). "As far as the East is from the West, so far has God removed our transgressions from us?" When we confess our sins to God, God takes our sins and hides them in the sea of His forgetfulness!

"What happens for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record?" (Psalms 32:1-2; Living Bible)

But, as wonderful as God's forgiveness is, it is also true to say that there are often 'consequences' as a result of one's sinning, consequences that can remain for many years after one is forgiven! It is easy to note some obvious examples of this sad reality. There are many persons who, in their 'alcoholic state', were wonderfully 'saved' (transformed), and they never have taken another 'drink' since the day of their amazing conversion!

However, many of these transformed persons (who can testify that the craving for alcohol disappeared when they were converted), these persons have to acknowledge that these 'scars' (the 'nail holes') are still in their lives. Consequences in terms of deteriorated health for instance, sometimes re-main, long after one's transformation. Early death can come because of abused bodies!

Countless other illustrations could be given to demonstrate these simple 'spiritual' truths'. The nails (sins) can be removed from the wall (the Life of a person), but after the nails (sin) are removed, the nail holes (sin's consequences and scars) remain! Of course, even though (sadly) there are many converts who have nail holes (consequences) that remain in their lives, it is gloriously possible for God to use the nail holes (consequences) to bring benefits to other persons. God won't let anything be wasted — not even nail holes!

4.

"LET US RUN AFTER PEACE!"

The Bible tells us (believers) to *'run after peace' until we finally 'catch' it! And hold on to it! (I Peter 3:11)*

There are only two-types of people on the earth - *'Peace Makers'* whom Jesus said are the *'children of God!'*" (Matthew 5), and *'Trouble Makers'*, (who stir up trouble among people, who are critical, who are negative in their speech, who slander and lie and spread discontent, who divide rather than unite people, who plan schemes with the motive to destroy people, who bear grudges and who sow hate and revenge, who bear false witness regarding the innocent ones). Such persons (troublemakers) are sadly doing the same kind of work that Satan himself does! They are agents of evil and workers of iniquity. They spend their time conceiving plots ('behind the back maneuvers') to 'bring people down', certainly not to build up persons!

In contrast, those who are 'running to find and to hold on to peace' are those who go to 'great lengths' to bring reconciliation between persons who are 'on edge' (at odds) with one another! Putting their own interests aside (unselfishly and self-forgetfully), these noble peace-makers are more interested in the concerns (burdens) of others, than they are in their own concerns and interests. They 'reach out in love' to help others, and they regularly give their ears to listen to the heartaches of others. They find it easy to pray for others, and they have a generous hand to give to help meet the basic physical needs of others around them. They offer a sympathizing tear, openly and unashamedly to the broken-hearted.

On the other hand, without any feeling of jealousy, they 'rejoice with those who rejoice'. They are 'all things unto all men' (adaptable), that they may 'win the lost', 'encourage the downtrodden', 'comfort the sorrowing', 'befriend the lonely', 'and provide wise counsel to the confused'. They 'extend earnest prayer to the spiritually embattled', 'offer friendship to the lonely', 'provide insight to the depressed', 'give food for the hungry', and 'share the 'Good News' of Salvation to the imprisoned', and more.

Yes, the peacemaker is like the 'Prince of Peace' (Jesus Christ). Just as Christ has provided a 'Bridge' by which all persons can come into fellowship with the Living God, so the 'children of peace' have the same goal—to take the hand of the sinner and place it into the 'Hand of God'!

"RECONCILIATION!"

"PEACE!"

5.

"GOOD IMPRESSIONS OR GOOD EXPRESSIONS!"

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing." (James 1:22-25)

Someone truthfully (and cleverly) said, "Impression without Expression Leads to Depression." We must not only think about the 'good' that needs to be done in our own 'little world' (i.e., in our own limited 'circle of influence'), but we must 'act upon our impressions and urges' to 'activate our faith' and to begin doing something - for the good of persons and for the glory of the Father!

Remember, God has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet, any voice, but our voice, no money but our money, any talents, but our talents! If God wants a child to be taught God has to find a teacher. Yes, because God is all-mighty (Sovereign), He obviously could have chosen to accomplish all 'divine things' through His own power and ability alone, without involvements from human beings. However, He chose, instead, to work 'with' and 'through' humans to 'build His eternal Kingdom'. There may be a few times when God works 'for us' (unilaterally), but usually, He chooses to work 'with us' (bilaterally). Without God we humans can do nothing worthwhile (works that have any lasting significance), but (on the other hand) there are many things that God cannot do without us, strange as that might sound! Nevertheless, God wants to use the gifts (talents) He has given us, to accomplish His righteous purposes.

Through this cooperative relationship, both God and man are deeply satisfied. The lost world is wonderfully and fruitfully served! God gives to someone talent and to some two talents, and to some five talents. But all Stewards are called by God to multiply their talents (i.e., to work for the Master to 'touch the lives' of lost and hurting people).

We are saved by grace (God's part), through faith (Man's Part), for Good works (man and God working together to minister to hurting persons, etc.). Someone said, "We are not saved by Good Works, but we cannot be saved without Good Works." Good works are the 'natural results' of a true 'saving Faith'. Christianity involves a devotional life (an attentive waiting alone upon God to discern His will), but Christianity is an 'active Faith', not an 'Isolated Passivity'. Jesus' last commission (before He returned to heaven) was 'GO and make disciples!'"

Go to the world of needy persons - love, heal, preach, teach, and much more! No, do not stay in your own 'closet', being protected from the 'world's attacks'! Therefore, whether you have one, or two, or many talents, you are called to 'invest' them for the Master! Use your talents and your personality to bless your Lord and to benefit your fellowmen! Yes, "your talents may be small, and they may be few, but unto God is due your best, your all." Make your life count for God by developing your abilities for compassionate purposes, for life will soon be over, and eventually (in eternity) God, at His Great Judgment, will evaluate the quality of your life (whether you lived a God-centered or a self-centered life).

Remember: *"Uselessness Invites Disaster!" Be Useful To God and To Others!*

6.

"WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S HOLY LAWS?"

Every person lives in a moral universe, and is created with the capacity (i.e., a 'free will') to choose to do what is 'right' (i.e., what pleases God), and to do what is 'wrong', (i.e., disobedience against God's good and just moral laws).

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and other Laws of God represents by (illustrated) the 'Hot Floor Furnace'! If one does not obey God, and, instead he chooses to violate (break) the Laws of God, such a transgressing person will surely 'get badly burned' morally-speaking, just like a person (physically-speaking) will be 'badly burned' if he/she rejects the warnings, and instead steps on the 'floor furnace'. A person has only himself to blame if he, in defiance of the warnings, steps onto the 'hot floor furnace'.

The Laws of God are given to humans, not to destroy their 'freedom' but, instead, to define their freedom. Just as there is plenty of floor space that one can 'enjoy' (separate from the hot floor furnace), so, spiritually speaking, there is 'plenty of moral and personal freedom' that does not entail breaking any of God's prescribed Laws! The Laws of God were given to give us liberty, not to destroy our liberty. Each of the 10 Commandments (for instance) are Laws (when observed by the sincere follower of Christ) to protect God's creatures from harm and distraction!

To take only one example: God has told us that the sexual experience is beautiful and healthy (for procreation of the race and for communion between a married couple), but God has also told us that sexual perversion (adultery, homosexuality, etc.) brings destruction and misery and shame, etc. To keep God's commandments spells 'life'; to break God's commandments spells 'death'! Commandments tell what is 'off-limits' (to avoid the 'hot floor furnace'), but commandments (when kept) reveal those 'areas' of life that are 'joyous freedom' (the wide stretches of 'freedom' without any prohibitions - like having sex between a caring and a tender married couple)! If you respect the 'hot floor furnace' (divine prohibitions), you will freely enjoy 'the rest of the house' (the rest of your life and activities).

Commandments 'define' freedom, not 'destroy' freedom! There is, of course, no such thing as 'absolute' freedom - but there is glorious (God-given) freedom within that 'prescribed perimeter' of God's Holy Will! When you receive a 'changed heart' from God (conversion), God's commandments become 'delightful' to keep! You increasingly learn to submit your 'will' to God's 'will'. You want to please God and you want to stay away from the 'hot floor furnace'!

"Loving God means doing what He tells us to do, and really, that isn't hard at all; for every child of God can obey him, defeating sin and evil pleasures by trusting Christ to help him." (I John 5:3-4; Living Bible)

7.

*"THE THREE PIES (Branches) CHRISTIANITY!"
'Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox)*

Christian Believers often have a 'definite preference', as to which 'kind of pie' they prefer—that is which kind of 'pie' they like best!

But if you are a believer who prefers 'Cherry Pie' (the Protestant Faith), it is important that you do not criticize and belittle those believers who happen to prefer 'Peach Pie' (Catholic) or 'Apple Pie' (Orthodox)—both 'flavors' of which are every bit as 'good' as 'Cherry Pie' (Protestantism).

All those 'branches' of Christianity are legitimate (right and meaningful) expressions of 'Faith in Christ'. You must never be 'guilty' (in the name of loyalty to your own 'Pie') of attacking another 'branch' of Christianity. The Church of Jesus Christ includes all of those persons who truly love and who truly worship Christ, even though believers have different ways of showing their love and of worshipping the Lord!

Jesus (the Great Shepherd) has many different 'Sheep' who live and who grow in different pastures—but all the sheep belong to the Great Shepherd. Therefore, all the various and many sheep must learn to 'get along' with each other—experiencing true love and deep peace—all to the glory of the great Shepherd! No Division! Total Unity!

So remember the illustration of the 'Three Pies', and don't 'DeChristianize' someone, simply because they think differently, or talk differently or worship differently than the way you think and talk and worship! Jesus is Lord of All Three 'Pies'!

There have been those notable religious leaders throughout Church history, who have strongly abdicated, believers of different religious persons. Sectarian persons have rejected a spirit of unity, love, and acceptance. Without disregarding their own distinctive beliefs, Some Christians open-minded and large-hearted have sought to love on 'common agreements' instead of on strong disagreements (theologically).

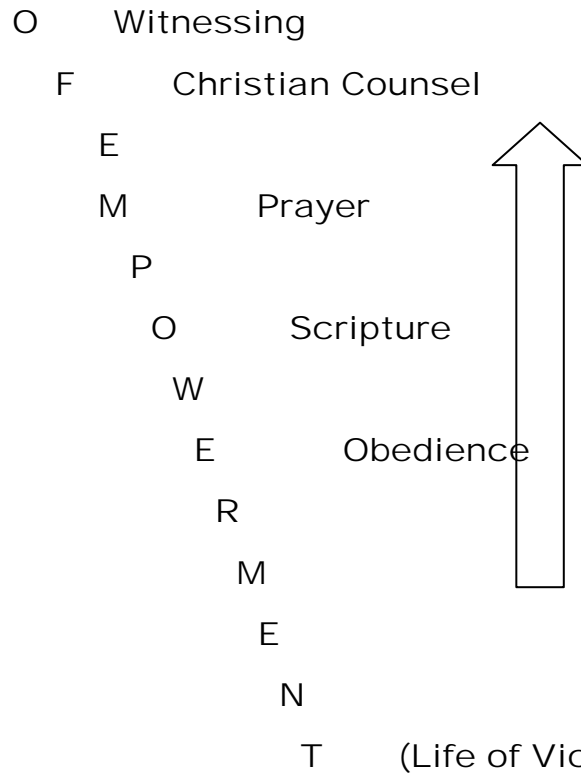
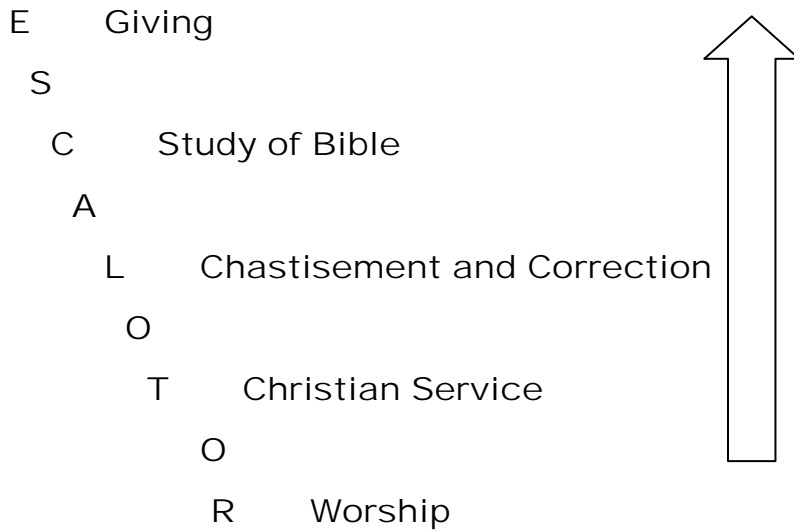
John Wesley, whose mind was brilliant and who contended for certain theological beliefs, (Arminianism instead of Calvinism), nevertheless sought to unit Christians rather than to divide Christians.

Said John Wesley, well-known evangelist of the 18th century, and a fair-indeed man who confronted opposition from contentious believers: "I will not quarrel with you about any opinion. Only see that your heart be right toward God, that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ; that you love your neighbor, and walk as your Master walked. I am sick of opinions: I am weary to hear them. Give me solid and substantial religion; give me an humble, gentle lover of God and man; a man full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; a man laying himself out in the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labor of love. Let my soul be with those Christians. Whosoever they are, and whatsoever opinion they are of."

8.

*"THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE BELIEVER'S POWERFUL
ESCALATOR TO HEAVEN!"*

TOP FLOOR (Ultimate Destiny of Heaven)!



"FULL SURRENDER TO THE SPIRIT'S FULL CONTROL"

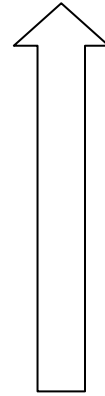
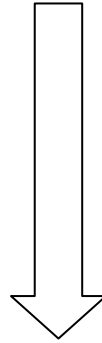
LOW LIFE (Bottom Floor) OF SINNING

Weak

Despairing

Lost

Guilty

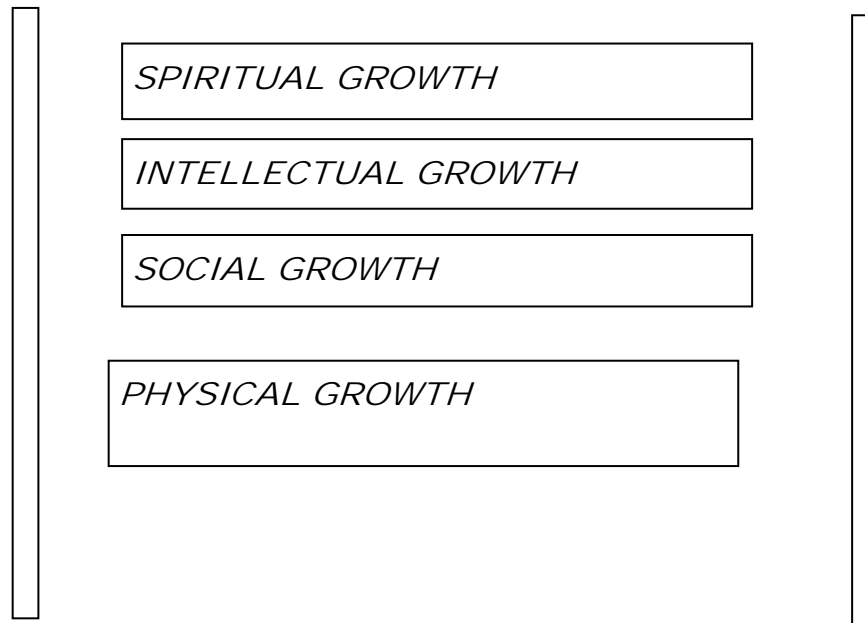


Repeatedly, the Bible teaches humans (who are controlled by Sin) that the only way to victorious (Vital) living is through total surrender to God (Holy Spirit).

Every person (sinner) needs the forgiveness, which Christ offers, followed by the mighty indwelling strength of the Holy Spirit (the strength of a 'Spiritual Escalator')!

9.

*"BALANCED GROWTH IN ONE'S LIFE —
WITH SPIRITUAL PRIORITY AS JESUS!"*



*"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with
God and Man!" (Luke 2:52)*

Jesus (the Son of God and the Son of Man) - fully human and fully divine, combined in one living and visible Person—was, of course, the most 'balanced person' who ever lived! He never sinned, and, thus, He was not impeded (hindered) by the destructive effects of sinning!

He was physically healthy (Strong), socially appropriate with both friends and enemies (No 'peer pressure'), intellectually acute and totally WISE, and always spiritually connected in obedience to His Father!

Worthy Goals for the Believers!

10.

*"POWER OF THE EARTHLY SUN, AND POWER OF
THE SPIRITUAL SON!"*

GOD'S PHYSICAL SUN!

Sufficient To Give Every Person on Earth a 'Sun Tan'!

GOD'S SPIRITUAL SON!

Sufficient To Give Every Person on Earth New Life!

(Universal Call to Repentance)

(Universal Gift of Saving Faith)

(Universal Atoning Grace)

(Universal Offer of Transforming Power)

(Universal Offer of Cleansing Power)

(Universal Offer of Keeping Power)

(Universal Offer of Heavenly Inheritance)

"God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance!" "God longs for all to be saved and to understand this truth: That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, Himself man, is between them to bring them together, by giving His life for ALL MANKIND." (I Timothy 2:4-6; Living Bible)

11.

"CHRIST'S GREAT LOVE FOR HUMANITY IS LIKE 'SWEET - SMELLING PERFUME' TO GOD!"

"God Looks Down Upon His Dear Son as Jesus Died For All Sinners!"

- God Asked His Son To Go To Earth To Rescue A 'Lost Race' Of Humans.
- Jesus Consents to Leave Heaven To Come To A Sin-Cursed Earth (Incarnation).
- Jesus Lives A Sinless Life, Dies A Substitutionary Death, Rises From The Dead.

The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) Loves Each Other Perfectly, and Every Action of The Son on Earth, (to Rescue lost humans) was the action of love (words, action, sacrifice on The Cross, Glorious Resurrection). The actions of Jesus' Love (Perfect Love) were so beautiful in the eyes of the Eternal Father (who requested in eternity that Jesus would become Incarnate), that words could never adequately express the Father's appreciation to the Son. But one 'word picture' that the Bible uses to describe the Father's appreciation for the Son's Love (for humanity) is the word 'Perfume'!

"Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave Himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, for Christ's love for you was like Sweet perfume to him." (Ephesians 5:2; Living Bible)

Obviously, to all bystanders, there was the agonizing 'stench of death' in the air, while Jesus died the fiercest of all deaths on the Cross. No one (including His closest disciples) could see beyond the 'horror of Jesus' death' (even though Jesus had earlier predicted His resurrection, following His death). But, while The Heavenly Father must have felt deep sorrow as His own beloved Son was dying, the truth of the matter is that the act of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross (the greatest possible act of sacrificial and redemptive love) was to the Father the 'Victory of all Victories'!

Because of the nature of Christ's death (a substitution for the death of every human soul—sinner), The Father knew there could never be any other love (in heaven or on earth) that could be compared to Christ's dying (Sacrificial) love for every human being!

Because of Christ's death, no human being need die (be lost eternally) in his own sins. Christ died for all, that all may be saved (if they choose to be saved)! It is no wonder that Christ's love for sinful humans brought such pleasure (delight) to the Father!

Christ's Love for a Lost Race Was Like the
'Sweet-Smelling Perfume' In the 'Nostrils of God'!

12.

"CHRIST IS THE 'SOLID ROCK' UPON WHICH BELIEVERS
MAY STAND!"

"THE SOLID ROCK"

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Refrain:

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.
(Hymn by Edward More)

Christ—the solid rock (For Security). "On Christ, the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand."

"The Lord is a rugged mountain where I hide. He is my Savior, a rock where none can reach me, and a tower of safety." (Psalms 18:2, Living Bible)

"Yes, you (O God) are my Rock and my fortress; Honor your name by leading me out of this Peril." (Psalm 31:3; Living Bible) "Be to me a great protecting Rock, where I am always welcome, safe from all at-

tacks. For you have issued the order to save me." (Psalms 71:3; Living Bible)

Stay away from the 'sinking sands' of life, for there is no lasting security on the 'sinking sands'. There are 'sinking sands' all around you in our world. Only Christ the solid rock is stable and enduring, reliable and 'honest'. The 'sinking sands' are the opposite of these traits. There is the well-known 'sinking sands' of Materialism.

Jesus did not condemn money, for money can be very useful in the work of God's Kingdom. But the 'Love of money' (materialism) is the root of all evil. There is a great limit to money:

- 1) Your laboriously gained riches will soon be inherited by someone else, who did not earn the money.
- (2) Your money can cause you sleepless anxiety.
- (3) Your money can quickly be lost (through investments).
- (4) You can't take your money with you, when you die.
- (5) Money has no ability to satisfy your deep spiritual longings.

There is the 'sinking sand' of Pleasure, for, while God wishes for all to enjoy living, everyone should know that pleasure (not God-given joy) is short-lived, and the world's pleasures cannot satisfy the 'hunger' of man's soul.

There is the 'sinking sand' of Popularity, for the world's fame is subject to the whims of the shallow-minded crowds, which bring disillusionment.

These are three of the pursuits of countless numbers of worldly-minded persons—and they all are 'sinking sand'!

13.

"GUARD YOUR TONGUE FROM SPEAKING EVIL!"

"Anyone who says he is a Christian but doesn't control his sharp tongue is just fooling himself, and his religion isn't worth much." (James 1:26; Living Bible) "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." (Psalms 19:14)

"He who goes about talking (for the purpose of hurting) people, makes secrets known (fails to keep personal information). So do not be with those who talk about others (with those who 'gossip'). If a son talks against his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in the time of darkness." (Proverbs 20:19-20)

"If anyone can control his tongue, it proves that he has perfect control over himself in every other way. The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do." (James 3:3, 4; Living Bible)

'Lips that tell the truth will last forever, but a liar lasts only for a little while. Lying is in the heart of those who plan what is bad, but those who plan peace have joy. The Lord hates lying lips, but those who speak the truth are His joy.' (Proverbs 23:19-22)

"A faithful man who tells what he knows will not lie, but the man who is not faithful will lie." (Proverbs 14:5; Living Bible) "A wise man holds his tongue. Only a fool blurts out everything he knows; that only leads to sorrow and trouble." (Proverbs 10:14; Living Bible) "Self-control means controlling the tongue! A quick retort can ruin everything." (Proverbs 24:3; Living Bible)

It is important for all of us (especially Christian believers) to practice 'Self-Control' - to 'think' before we 'speak', to carefully 'guard' our words, to use carefully chosen words (of kindness) when we do speak.

The Bible says that we are to listen to others, far more than we are to talk to others! *"Dear brothers, don't ever forget that it is best to listen much, speak little, and not become angry." (James 1:19; Living Bible)*

Just as the seeds of a dandelion, when blown, are impossible to retrieve, so it is also true that one's words (helpful or destructive) are difficult (almost impossible) to retrieve!

Warned Jesus, "I tell you this, that you must give account on Judgment Day for every idle word you speak. Your words now reflect your Fate then: either you will be justified by them or you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37: Living Bible) Don't 'release' words carelessly! About The 'Tongue' - Carefully read James 3:2-12)

"For all of us make many mistakes. If someone does not make any mistakes when he speaks, he is perfect and able to control his whole body. Now if we put bits into horses' mouths to make them obey us, we can guide their whole bodies as well. And look at ships! They are so big that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the helmsman directs. In the same way, the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can boast of great achievements. A huge forest can be set on fire by a little flame. The tongue is a fire, a world of evil. Placed among the parts of our bodies, the tongue contaminates the whole body and sets on fire the course of life, and is itself set on fire by hell. For all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be or have been tamed by humans, but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil filled with deadly poison. With it, we bless the Lord and Father, and with it, we curse those who are made in God's likeness. From the same mouth, come blessing and cursing. It should not be like this, my brothers! A spring cannot pour both fresh and brackish water from the same opening, can it? My brothers, a fig tree cannot produce olives, nor a grapevine figs, can it? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water." (Quotations from the Biblical Book of James)

14.

"THE FRUITFUL LIFE FROM THE WATER OF GOD"

The godly man, according to Psalms 1, is the man (or woman) who is "like a tree which is planted by the river of water." Of course, the fresh water represents God Himself (with all of His exhaustless resources of life). The benefits that are derived when a person (Christian) puts his roots into the 'water of life' are described simply as 'Fruit' - The person who abides in God (puts the roots of his life - mind and spirit- into the Water God) "brings forth fruit" in his life.

Naturally and spontaneously and regularly and abundantly and attractively! The Christian Life is not a 'long list of rules' that are impossible to follow; rather, the Christian life is the result of gladly 'tapping into the exhaustless bounty of divinely-given resources' - forgiveness from God, cleansing from God, empowerment from God, guidance from God, wisdom from God, restoration from God when you fall morally, comfort from God when you are weeping, joy from God when you are discouraged, correction from God when you are confused, assurance from God when you are afraid, and more and more and more! Exhaustless resources from God is mighty grace!

The fruit that you bring forth, as a result of your roots (life) drinking in the water (God and His grace), is concisely listed in Galatians 5 (Fruit of the Spirit). The following list contains a summary of these nine-fold fruits! May your life increasingly manifest these wonderful 'Fruits of the Holy Spirit'.

Love - Supreme worship of God and genuine care for your fellowmen.

Joy - Realizing God has forgiven your past sins, and realizing God is actually at work presently in your life to help you do God's will, and anticipating what God is going to do for you in the future when He finally grants you entrance into His eternal Home!

Peace - Total Sense of personal 'wellbeing' (settleness) because of God's forgiveness of your sins, and an inner (calm) sense that God indwells your mind and heart, and an assurance that (regardless of difficult circumstances) God is "in charge of your future life" (dependent upon my obedient cooperation).

Patience - Never 'giving up' your care for people, regardless of the imperfections in saints, or the outright oppositions of sinners.

Kindness - Reaching out a helping hand to meet the practical needs of others.

Goodness - Moral sensitivity in an age of moral relativism, where moral distinctives are blurred, with a declaration of God's absolutes (Moral Laws).

Faithfulness - Remaining True (loyal) to God's call in your life, regardless of 'success' or 'failure', as a result of your earnest efforts in seeking to fulfill God's Call.

Gentleness - Keeping your anger under control, even during times when you are mistreated. When others are mistreated, you are available to express appropriate anger toward perpetrators, in order to defend the oppressed victims.

Self-Control - Control your sexual passions in a way that never exploits others sexually, and in a way that properly ministers love to your marriage partner.

15.

"THE GOOD SHEPHERD (JESUS) LOVES HIS SHEEP!"

Jesus Is the Door for the Sheep – *"I am the door, by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (John 10:9)* Jesus is both the Door and the Shepherd; both the Source and the Sustainer of Life; both the Entrance to God and the Continuing Source of Fellowship and Life!

Jesus Knows His Sheep By Name and Leads Them Gently. *"He calls His Own Sheep By Name and Leads Them Out."* *"When He has brought out all His own, He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice". (vss. 3-4)*

The Good Shepherd never asks the sheep to go where He does not first go. Nothing that you experience but what God knows experientially. We, like sheep, are sometimes fearful and timorous—but Jesus inspires courage!

The Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name. This speaks of the personal feature of God's attention for each person. *"I am the door, by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture".* "He calls His Own Sheep by Name and Leads Them Out."

"When He has brought out all His own, He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice". "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (vss. 9, 10)

It is the intention that each person has a good and fulfilled life. Jesus has not come to destroy, but to save. He has come to heal, to give health. Jesus has come to lighten your burden, to resolve your guilt, to deepen your joy, to fill your void, and to speak peace to your troubled life. The way of the transgressor is hard. The way of the Christian

is comparatively easy. Jesus' burden is our blessing! His yoke is our yearning! (So states E. Stanley Jones) We are made for the Master as the fish is made for the water, as the bird is made for the air, as the bride is made for the bridegroom. Man's stomach is made for food; man's soul is made for the 'Bread of Life'. The sheep are tenderly dealt with. The Shepherd is a 'Good' Shepherd. God is committed to our good, all good comes from God.

How strange that people would not come to Jesus, because of fear that Jesus would do them harm. Jesus is good—not evil! Come to the Good Shepherd!

"The sheep listen for the Shepherd's Voice." (vs. 3, 27) To listen involves patience and willingness not to talk. Listening is more than mere hearing for the moment. Listening denotes a process of waiting upon God.

Know the Shepherd's Voice. (vs. 4, 5) "Sheep literally flee when a strange voice calls for them. The voice of the shepherd is well known to them. There are strange voices today, sounding forth in the world, bidding people to listen to the wolves. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. The wolf attacks the flock and scatters it." (vs. 10, 12) A wolf deceives and destroys. The sheep must avoid the wolf. The wolf destroys confidence and assurance in believers, claiming that believers cannot know if heaven will be their home, until they die. Other wolves are those who destroy the motivation for good works, saying that grace is all that is important, and that works are not important at all to God. There are other wolves who deny any absolute moral standards, claiming that each person must decide for himself what is right and wrong. They say that every man should do that which seems right in his own eyes. Destructive enemies (wolves)!"

Following Christ means obeying Christ and going where Christ wants him to go and doing what Christ wants him to do. This means Action. Recognition of ownership by the Shepherd. (vs. 12) The sheep belong solely to the Shepherd. Christians belong solely to Christ. ***Says Paul, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price".***

Everything the sheep has, comes from the Good Shepherd. So it is true of the believer. In God, we live and move and have our being. *Asks Paul of believers, "What have you that you haven't received?" All one's time, talents, money, personality, and opportunities come from God.*

In the Old Testament, God is pictured as possessing Israel, as a husband possesses a wife. "God is a jealous God and desires men to worship only Him." (Exodus 34:14) Says the believer "I am what I am, by the grace of God!"

16.

"CLIMB THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD!"

"Who may climb the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies. They will receive the Lord's blessing and have a right worship in your relationship with God their Savior. Such people may seek your and presence, O God of Jacob." (Psalms 24:3-6; Living Bible)

Those who have 'pure hands and a pure heart' (Psalms 24), are those who enjoy both inward holiness and outward holiness. They are persons who are forgiven of their outward practices of sinning, and who are also delivered from their inward drives towards selfishness and self-centeredness. Humans are born with a tendency (bent) toward self-centeredness and pride, which results in outward behavior that can be rather 'ugly' (all kinds of sinful actions and schemes). Rebellious attitudes issue forth in rebellious actions—a certain choice to be 'independent' of God and of God's will and commandments. In one word - Disobedience!

Only when such a rebel (running from God) finally 'comes to the end of himself', and realizes the utter futility of life without God, and decides that the wise choice is to 'lay down his arms' and to make a total surrender to the Lordship of Christ—it is only when his stubborn 'will' acknowledges these spiritual realities, can he accept the transformation of his character that only the Almighty God can give to him. Only when he humbles himself in true repentance, can God perform the 'miracle of grace' in his heart and mind .

This act of brokenness and contrition by the sinner is met by the 'touch' of regeneration (new life) by the God of Salvation! The sinner becomes a 'new creation' in Christ Jesus! The 'old life' has passed, and the 'new life' has begun. The man (sinner) of the 'low life of wickedness' is now a 'changed man' (believer) whom God allows to "climb the mountain of the Lord and enter where he lives"! (Psalms 24:3)

No longer in the 'low land' of dreadful sinning, but now on the 'mountain of the Lord' where his perspective in life is altogether different (and gloriously wonderful)!

Over a period of time (the longer he dwells with the Lord on the mountain), this 'new creature in Christ Jesus', sees 'reality' more clearly—more and more like Jesus sees and knows 'reality'. Of course, never as clearly as the all-knowing God sees 'reality'. This person, who is truly 'converted' and who dwells with God on the mountain, is committed to receiving the 'daily cleansing' of the 'blood of Jesus'. Through the work of justification (initial holiness), and the further work of sanctification (deeper 'heart cleansing' of all inward motives), this 'mountain dweller with the Lord' has a 'pure heart' and 'pure hands'! This alone is his passport that allows him to 'ascend to the mountain of the Lord', but he deeply desires to remain with the Lord on that mountain (unpolluted and holy). Therefore, he makes himself available every day to receive the 'cleansing blood of Jesus'. He wants to stay on the mountain!

17.

"GUARD AGAINST THE WORLDLY (Hurtful) DECEPTIONS OF THE 'EVIL ONE!'"

"Put on all of God's Armor so that you will be able to stand safe against all strategies and tricks (wiles) of Satan." (Ephesians 6:11, Living Bible)

There are several times in the Bible where God warns us (believers) to beware of 'false doctrines' (sometimes these teachings are called 'doctrines of demons'). Satan, as the 'Master Deceiver' of mankind, comes to deceive humans in various ways, using his trickery and ploys and schemes and plots. He is a liar, through and through, and, as such he is committed to misleading humans (even believers) with his lying (deceiving) ways. He comes, with the full intent to deceive, to destroy humans. Called "an angel of light". He, who is 'full of darkness', poses as an 'angel of light' - mimicking the role of one of God's radiant angels! He who is 'full of evil' and of 'cruel intent', comes to humans to present his 'plans' of 'goodwill' and 'financial prosperity', but his wicked plot is intended to deceive and to finally destroy the creatures whom God loves the most, and the same creatures whom Satan hates the most! He wants to draw every human being into his evil company, and then to proceed to "sift them like wheat!" He has no pity upon any human; he is the arch enemy of Almighty God and he is the destroyer of God's unique creatures (humans who are made 'in God's image')! Yes, Satan rightly can be called 'The Master Deceiver'. The Bible tells us (Ephesians 6) "...that we must be equipped with the 'full armor' of God, that we might discern the 'wiles' (tricks) of the devil, that we might be enabled to withstand the onslaughts of the Evil One!"

A simple analogy (that appeals to young persons, as well as to some adults) is the analogy of the "Chocolate-Covered Onion"! It might be an 'innocent' prank (trick) for you to offer a 'chocolate-covered onion' to your friend, and give to him the impression that your 'gift' is a 'solid ball of chocolate'! At his expense, you laugh when he bites into an onion (instead of into pure chocolate). He is temporally 'shocked' (surprised), while you have a good laugh!

He turns to you in 'good humor' and he asks why you 'deceived' him! He thought he was going to enjoy a lot of delicious chocolate, but instead he ended up with the bitter taste of onion!

To apply this analogy in the spiritual realm, we know (from experience) that it is most unpleasant (probably even 'tragic') when we bite into the onion of sin! We thought our activity was only an activity of 'chocolate' (something good); the 'Master Deceiver' deceived us!

'Disillusionment' is an accurate word to describe the experience of one ancient king—namely, King Solomon (supposedly the wisest and the wealthiest king of ancient Israel). He was deceived on 'Several Fronts'. By studying the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Old Testament Book that he may have written, it is clear what 'things' (ideas and activities) constituted deception ('Chocolate-covered onions') in his life.

- (1) Materialism (you can't take your money with you when you die; riches can't satisfy your inner longing for meaning).*
- (2) Pleasure (temporary sweetness of sensual pleasure turns to the bitterness of remorse).*
- (3) Popularity and Power Subject to the whims of the shallow-minded crowd; fame is soon forgotten by your generation, and certainly by future generations; fame cannot satisfy the eternal cravings for meaning).*
- (4) Knowledge and Education. Separated from God leads to madness and folly; knowledge must be combined with divine wisdom, if true understanding of the needs of Humanity is to be found and used beneficially.*

CHRIST—the Son of God who is totally 'Honest' - will never deceive anyone! His promises are totally trustworthy. He will never lead anyone astray. He came to destroy the works (tricks and deception) of Satan! Put Your Faith In Christ!

Don't bite into any 'chocolate-covered onions'! To avoid Satan's tricks, know the truth of God (Bible), ask the Holy Spirit for His reliable guidance, and stay close to other caring believers (to whom you are accountable). Enjoy (spiritually speaking) 'The Solid Ball 'of Chocolate!

"PUT YOUR FAITH IN CHRIST!"

18.

*"IS YOUR 'TREE' (Life) PLANTED BY THE STREAMS OF
LIVING WATER (CHRIST)?"*

*"They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do."
(Psalms 1:3)*

Surely you want your life—your one and only 'short life' - to 'count', that is, to be significant and pleasing and 'fruitful' for the good of humanity, for the 'pleasure' of your amazing Creator, and, of course, for your own satisfaction. You know, at your best, that you find it difficult to consistently live a life that is others-oriented rather than self-centered. You want to live a radiant, outgoing, serving life, but there seems to be a 'gravitational pull downward' (an 'inner drag' and obstacle) that hinders you from becoming a loving and self-forgetful and unselfconscious person. You have observed (occasionally) some persons around you, persons who seem 'to have it all altogether' generally in their life and in the way they seem to 'naturally' and 'joyously' reach out in love to others. Their joy is contagious, and you find yourself 'secretly' envying their productive life!

What is the 'secret' to their productive life? The Psalmist concisely answers this important question! Can a person be truly radiant, fruitful, satisfied, and joyous as a product of his own independent human powers?

The 'fruitful' (useful) person can be compared to a 'tree'. *"He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers."
(Psalms 1:3)*

Christ is the 'Living Water'! Jesus declared in John that He was the 'water of Life'! It is Jesus, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of our life—initially through the 'New Birth' (conversion), and continually throughout the life of the believer on this earth. Jesus said, *"Without me ye can do nothing."* In Jesus alone, we "Live, and move, and have our very being"!

Those whose lives (like trees) are planted next to the 'streams of living water' (Christ and His spiritual resources of grace) will discover

that their lives are becoming 'gloriously joyful' and 'abundantly fruitful'! They will discover that they are increasingly becoming more like Christ in their thoughts, emotions, and decisions.

The 'fruit of the Spirit' in them will become more evident (at least to those around them—for truly godly persons are rather unselfconscious of their own holiness). More evident to others, and more lush and attractive!

Those planted by the streams of living water, are those who are nourished by God, and they, therefore, gradually become godlike—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control!

WHAT A PROSPEROUS PERSON!

19.

"AVOID BEING (Useless) CHAFF WHICH THE WIND WILL DRIVE AWAY!" (The Ancient Way of Getting Rid of Useless Chaff!)

*Perhaps you have heard the familiar (thoughtful) saying: "Only one life, it will soon be passed; only what is done for Christ will last!" Someone said, "Uselessness invites disaster!" To not to use your gifts and abilities on earth spells disaster - for time and eternity! Gifts (abilities) tend to 'shrivel up' (dissipate) if they are not used. A muscle that is not exercised will become weak, perhaps even atrophied. God gave us only one short life - to become useful and helpful, both to God and to our fellowman! To bury ones talent is tragic indeed, for the world (who needs the benefit from our talent) is a 'loser' - and God is angry. Remember what God said to the 'unprofitable' (one - talented) steward? ***"Cast him out into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!"****

A terrifying picture of an angry God who will receive no excuses at the end of time, from a selfish and slothful and useless and unenterprising servant (to whom God gave time and meaningful talents)! Not to turn one's potentials into actualities (of service in God's Kingdom), results in the provoking of God's just anger, and the destruction of the useless 'chaff' of his selfish life!

Notes William Barclay (New Testament Scholar): "The chaff (recorded in Psalms 1) gives us the picture of the character and destiny of the evil man. The chaff is empty and worthless, good for nothing. The chaff is impermanent and unstable. The chaff is doomed to separation. The wicked like the chaff are doomed to destruction."

The wicked (described as chaff, which the wind will drive away) - these have no sense of right and wrong, and they have no sense of ultimate accountability before God. They take the way of pleasure and selfish conduct!

Indulgence! They care nothing about others, and they are oblivious to God and to His authority. Irresponsible Conduct!

The wicked have no desire to live pure and holy lives, but they, instead, live lives filled with lust and evil passions. They live by the evil advice they give to others! "If it feels good, do it!"

To follow the wicked, is to take the road that leads to death - 'death' to sound thinking and 'death' to sound conduct! Among the many 'philosophies of the wicked' are the following:

- 1. Hedonism - Worship of pleasure, "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die."*
- 2. Sensualism - Worship of sex.*
- 3. Materialism - Worship of money.*
- 4. Humanism - Worship of man, and man's 'inherent' abilities to solve problems.*
- 5. Scientism - Worship of Science, with belief that Science is the final answer.*
- 6. Secularism - Living life with No Belief in God. (Practical Atheism)*
- 7. Relativism - Belief that there is no 'objective moral standards' in life.*
- 8. Militarism - The rewards 'go to the strongest': 'Might makes Right!'"*

One of the most 'distressing' word pictures of the life and destiny of the 'wicked' is that picture of 'chaff which the wind blows away'. Remember: "Uselessness invites Disaster"! Don't allow yourself to become 'CHAFF'!

20.

"JESUS IS THE 'BREAD OF LIFE' FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD!"

Jesus - the Bread of Life - offers life to those who are dead in their trespasses!

Someone asked a group of students one time: "Is Christianity an offer or a demand?" Only after considerable thought could the group agree that Christianity is primarily an offer.

So it is with too many today. So many see Christianity as a demand—obligations to do or not to do, ethical creeds to live by, standards to uphold, a philosophy to understand or a way of life to strive for. Christianity has demands. Christianity has ethics. Christianity has standards. Christianity has philosophical ideas. But Christianity is not morality, ethics, philosophy. Christianity is not even primarily a religion. Christianity is a relationship—a vital, dynamic love relationship with a Person! The very Person of Christ!

This means that Christianity is an offer—an offer of life and love and power and beauty! Strength for the powerless, purity for the defiled, companionship for the lonely, respect for the despised, comfort for the sorrowing, hope for the despairing, strength for the weak, forgiveness for the guilty!

Said Jesus, "I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10) "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4) "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." (John 4:14) "He that heareth my word...is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24) "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12) "I am the resurrection and the life". (John 11:25) "I am the way, the truth, and the life". (John 14:6)

Life—with all its pulsating, exciting, dynamic, personal qualities—is the theme of John's Gospel. Jesus is the Life. He offers life—real life, eternal life—to all people! That is the most exciting revelation, this side of Heaven! Christianity is primarily an offer, not primarily a demand! Christianity is a Gift to be received by willing hearts!

The essential offer of the Gospel of Christ is newness of life. Not bitterness! A new quality, not a greater quantity! God's own strength, not merely man's improved strength!

Christianity is able to make valid its claim to make bad men good, and to make weak Christians strong. Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven! If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is the essential, without which life could not go on. Real life is based on a relationship with God, and that relationship is only made possible through Christ. "The hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Christ and through Him know God. The restless soul is at rest; the hungry heart is satisfied." (Barclay's John; pg. 217)

Just as food is assimilated into the body to become a part of the very life of the body, so Christ must be taken into the very inner soul of man to form new life in man. Partaking of the flesh and blood represents symbolically the appropriation of the benefits of the death of Jesus. (The 'Lord's Supper')

What benefits are derived through the death of Jesus?

- 1. Atonement. Jesus' blood cleanses the sinner from all unrighteousness.*
- 2. Reconciliation. Jesus destroys the enmity between God and man, and makes possible a new unity and friendship.*
- 3. Peace: No longer does man have fear of a revengeful God, for God's wrath has been appeased and God's justice honored, while, at the same time, man's acceptance by God made possible.*
- 4. Hope. Jesus' death on the cross demonstrated God's love and mercy for man and makes possible the fulfillment of God's promise of eternal life for mankind. The future for man is as bright as the promises of God.*
- 5. Hungers are for significance, belonging, and security are satisfied! Christ the Bread gives man significance, self-respect, and a sense of worthiness. Christ*

the Bread gives man a sense of belonging and acceptance and fellowship. Christ, the Bread, gives man a sense of security, peace, and dependability.

Therefore, we see some of the great benefits of the death of Jesus—Atonement, Reconciliation, Peace, Hope, Satisfaction of man's basic needs. When we assimilate Christ into the very soul of our being, we feed on the Bread of Life

21.

*"THE CULMINATION OF LESSER LIGHTS IN THE PERSON OF
JESUS CHRIST!"*

God—the eternal light for humanity. *John 1:9 declares: "The light that gives light to every man was coming into the world!"*

Jesus is the true or complete light, in contrast to other lesser and incomplete lights previously given to mankind before Jesus' coming. These other lights were imperfect, incomplete, and transitory. Jesus is the true light because He is God's perfect, complete, and eternal light. He is like the noonday sun in contrast to the reflected light of the midnight moon.

Reflected lights from God were shone upon the earth to mankind before the coming of Jesus. These reflected lights revealed the reality of God imperfectly. The reflected lights cast shadows upon the nature and person of God; even though it is true they did partially and imperfectly reflect something of the truth of God's nature.

*What were some of these imperfect and partial 'lights'? The light of nature was one of those imperfect lights. **Psalm 19:** It tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of His hands." Much can be learned about the character of God through nature, but God's revelation through nature is incomplete and imperfect, compared to His revelation of Himself through His Son. We can see the power of God in the thunder and lightning and earthquakes and tornadoes. We can see the order of God in the predictable seasons of each year, in the ebb and flow of the tides, in the unfailing courses of the stars. But, seeing God through nature alone gives one a picture of God as a Being who is orderly and powerful, but one who may not be loving or personal.*

The light of God was imperfectly and partially reflected among men in God's providential activities in historical events. Indeed, the God of Israel is seen as the 'God Who Acts'. The greatest event in history, as far as the Israelites were concerned, was God's miraculous deliverance of the enslaved Israelites from Egyptian bondage, climaxed with God's miraculous parting of the Red Sea! But the light of God revealed to mankind through historical events is still partial and incomplete and

imperfect - like reflection of light from the moon rather than from the sun.

The light of God, as revealed through the great writings of the Hebrew prophets was also another great revelation of God, but the light of this revelation (as great as it was) was still partial, imperfect, and incomplete revelation. The greatest writings of the greatest prophets were only preparatory revelations of the greatest revelation of all—the revelation of God through His Son—Jesus Christ!

As great as was John, the cousin of Jesus and the one who stood close to Jesus, the Gospel writer makes it clear that John himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to that light. *“There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.”* (John 1:-8)

The writer of the Hebrews wrote, *“Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets, telling them little by little about His plans. But now in these days He has spoken to us through His Son to whom He has given everything.”* (Hebrews 1, 2; Living Bible)

There is only one light—God's Light—but God's Light was revealed gradually throughout history in various ways and in various degrees. Christ is the eternal Light of God—the Light which was revealed partially in the wonders of nature, in the writings of the Old Testament Law, in the acts of History, in the writings of the prophets, in the aspirations of the heathen, in the great ethical insights of the non-Christian systems of thought, in the enlightened conscience of seeking minds, in the loving responses of misguided heathen.

For centuries, God was gradually preparing the world for the coming of His Son into the world of sinful people. From the 'throne of heaven' to the 'footstool of earth', Jesus stepped down. Down, down, down—even to the womb of a young Jewish woman, to be born as every child is born—except that this child had a feeding tray as his 'crib'! Jesus (the King of Kings) descended to the lowest place on earth, both in His birth and in His death! A despicable place on earth to be born, and a horrifying place on earth to die a most painful death!

The Incarnation (God becoming a man) encompasses Jesus' total earthly experience (lowly birth, sacrificial life, substitutionary death, glorious resurrection, visible ascension) - all of this done to seek and to save a lost race of humanity. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man (Jesus) lay down His life—for both His 'friends' and for his 'enemies'! Jesus is the Light of God—the greatest revelation of the 'Heart of God' - the Heart of eternal Love!

22.

“RUNNING THE GOOD (Patient) RACE OF LIFE!”

The Christian Marathon Race—Running With Patience!

“They will reject the truth and chase after myths. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4: 4, 8)

“... don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.” (Philippians 3:12-14)

A good athlete eats balanced meals, gets plenty of sleep, daily trains and exercises. Harmful habits have no place in the athlete's life. The Christian too must learn to live a disciplined life. Christ came not to make life easy, but to make men great. There is no place, at all, for complacency or indulgence in the Christian's life. Yes, a place for regular (and needed) rest and relaxation (a 'Sabbath rest'), but a Christian athlete (running for God) must be committed to fulfilling his God-given call in life. He has no time to waste, for he knows that 'the night comes when no man can work' (life will soon be passed, and one has only limited time to fulfill his own 'great commission'). His life (in a legitimate sense of the term) must be at 'full pitch and full effort'.

He cannot 'win the prize' - if he is half-hearted, lukewarm, divided in his loyalties, preoccupied with worldly pursuits, double-minded in his thoughts, impure in his motives, self-centered in his goals. No, he must be committed to his God, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness! His desire is to please his God—to follow the instructions of his coach (the guiding Holy Spirit). Just as a winning runner does not look over his shoulder during a race, so a Christian (as an athlete), keeps his eyes on the future 'mark of his high calling'. His eye is fixed on the goal line—Christ and His Kingdom. He does not

carry extra weight (Hebrews 12) - the needless preoccupations with things of the world around him (even if these 'things' are not necessarily 'wrong' or 'prohibited' to other persons). The Christian runs well, because the runner is not weighed down with the 'things' of this world that would hinder him from concentrating on running the race of life with strength and effectiveness.

Because there is a goal to reach and a prize to win, the runner is willing to endure pain, hardship, and loneliness as he runs his long laps (or as he runs his very long marathon).

*The apostle Paul says that the Crown of the Christian will not fade, wither, or die, but that the crown of reward awaiting the Christian is eternal! Paul says the reward of the Christian is a **"Crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give."** (2 Timothy 4:8)*

At the end of life Paul could say, "I have fought the good fight; I have completed the course; I have kept the faith." How wonderful to be able to say these confident words at the end of one's life!

The downfall of the athlete is over-confidence, and so it is with the Christian. The Christian must realize that he cannot rest on his laurels or be satisfied (proud) with his accomplishments. The Christian must ever be on his guard against sin. The race (of life) is not over until the Christian crosses the 'finish line', when Christ calls us home to heaven. Jesus said, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."

Crown of Life—that is the reward of the athlete of Christ, who is disciplined, single-minded, and never overly-confident! Be an Athlete for Christ!

23.

"THE CHRISTIAN SHARES THE GOOD NEWS!"

"We are Christ's ambassadors. God is using us to speak to you: we beg you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, receive the love he offers you—be reconciled to God." II Corinthians 5:20.

An ambassador is sent by one country, temporarily to reside in the strange country. A Christian is also sent (by God) as an ambassador to the 'country of sinning persons', to declare the 'Good News' of Christ's Salvation.

A Christian is living in two worlds—in the world of physical, temporal existence, and also in the world of spiritual, eternal reality. While the Christian does not sympathize with the world's values, the Christian does carry out his mission with the world of very needy (hurting) persons (with great compassion and mercy). A Christian is chosen and commissioned by God to represent Christ's cause and Christ's person (character). A good ambassador lives not to please himself but rather to serve his beloved country and his own countrymen. Therefore, it is with a true Christian. A Christian is called by God not to live a self-centered life but rather a life of service. He finds his joy in honoring his Master, who has chosen him to be the representative (ambassador) of the Eternal Kingdom. A Christian is called and commissioned to serve and not to draw attention to himself. He seeks only to share the interests (values and gifts) of the Kingdom of God, and, thus, to bring gladness to the King of that Spiritual Kingdom.

A good ambassador believes in his/her country, and stands up for the principles of his/her country. He/she is not swayed or influenced by the pressure to conform to a policy of ignoble quality. A good ambassador can be trusted to clearly communicate (with integrity) every essential policy (or request) that has been 'put in his hands'. Honesty, reliability, predictability, are all vital character traits in the life of a good ambassador.

Therefore, it is essential with the ambassador for Christ—to be accurate and to give a full presentation of the Gospel message! No deviation from the heart of 'saving grace' - God loves all persons, Christ died for all persons. The Holy Spirit reveals the 'light of truth' in one degree or another to all persons. All persons (sinners) are 'savable' because of

God's gift of 'repentance and saving faith' that is made available to every person. Jesus' atoning death is for every person (sinner). God's grace is sufficient (able) to redeem every person and to empower every person for victorious living. God has prepared a place in heaven for every person and God is actively involved 'drawing' every person to his/her final heavenly home. God's powerful love powerfully persuades all persons to take the 'high road' in life, which ultimately heads to heaven. But, in spite of God's loving desires that "all should repent and be saved through faith in Jesus' work on the cross," God (out of profound respect for human beings) will not 'force' any human to accept his 'gift of eternal life'!

Yes, this is the "core message", from the very "heart of our loving God", that a faithful ambassador is to "carry to all the world of sinning humans"! The message of hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, new life through Christ, peace and joy in everyday living, strength for the trials of life, communion with the Loving God, assurance of eternal life ultimately!

24.

"THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST BATTLES THE FORTRESSES
OF EVIL!"

"Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they help you fight well in the Lord's battles! Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences, as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked." (Timothy 1:18-19)

"Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them." (II Timothy 2:3-4)

"A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle, you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:10-17)

The Bible tells us, *"Fight the good fight of the faith."* Because the Christian Campaign is as long as life itself, it is necessary for the Christian to guard against complacency and self-confidence. It has been correctly said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." Every earnest Christian must heed Paul's exhortation: *"Let him who thinks that he stands secure take heed lest he fall."* The Christian (as a soldier) must ever be watchful, vigilant, and careful that he might always guide his footsteps aright. He must build up a strong defense against the soul's enemy (the devil) through earnest prayer and careful alertness.

One danger the soldier of Christ faces is the temptation to underestimate the power and the strength of the enemy. To develop a false sense of security often times leads to devastation and destruction. The Christian Soldier, involved in the many spiritual battles of life, must put on (and keep on) all the God-given pieces of armor (Note Ephesians 6). Another temptation, which the soldier of Christ faces, is the temptation to 'rest on the laurels of one's past achievements'!

Notes well-known scholar, William Barclay: "We will do well to be specially carefully on our guard after every time when life has brought us to the heights, for it is just then that we are in greatest danger of the depths."

Because the quality of the campaign is fine, good, and attractive, the soldier of Christ must be possessed of the qualities of nobility, greatness, beauty. There are no grudging or unwilling draftees in God's army, but only volunteers who are lovely, gracious, and winsome. The Soldier of Christ is a good man, taking part in a fine campaign.

The Christian Soldier seeks to honor his Chief Commander, Jesus Christ, by obeying His commands and by possessing His traits (Character qualities).

Whether a Christian is a 'foot soldier' (private) or an officer (leader) in the Army of God, a soldier serves with gratitude, courage, and obedience. To be a member of a great cause, more than compensates for any hardship or suffering.

*"STAND UP! STAND UP! FOR JESUS,
YE SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS!
LIFT HIGH HIS ROYAL BANNER!"*

25.

*"JESUS IS THE 'WORD' - THE WISDOM, REASON, ORDER,
BEAUTY, AND CREATIVITY OF GOD!"*

*"JESUS IS 'GOD IN HUMAN FLESH' -
COMMUNICATION OF GOD TO HUMANITY!"*

JESUS THE 'WORD' OF GOD!

*In the beginning the Word already existed.
The Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He existed in the beginning with God.
God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him."*

(John 1:1-3)

*"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.
He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all
creation, for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.
He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—
such as thrones, kingdoms,
rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.
Everything was created through him and for him.
He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.*

(Colossians 1:15-17)

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD"! *(John 1:1) Jesus existed before the created order of the Universe. Before time existed, Jesus was with God in eternity. Jesus is not confined to time, space, or matter, but was the agent of God's creation of these elements. The first essential truth about Jesus is that He existed from all eternity.*

"Before the mountains were born you brought forth the earth and the world; from everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Psalms 90:2)

"THE WORD WAS WITH GOD"! (John 1:1) John secondly tells us that Jesus, the Word, was always with God. Jesus always experienced the most intimate fellowship with God. No secrets existed between God and Jesus. No other is able to tell us as much about God as Jesus is. If we want to know about God, we must listen to what Jesus has to say about God. Jesus is our primary source for knowledge about the eternal God of the Universe. Jesus' knowledge of God supersedes all of the accumulated philosophies of the ancient or modern world, and is greater than the greatest insights of the prophets. Jesus came from God, and knows God personally. In Him is the culmination of all wisdom!

When John said (John 1:1) , *"The Word Was God"*, he meant that Jesus possessed the same divine qualities and same character that God Himself possessed. Jesus is identical to God in nature, character, and qualities, but not identical to God in person. God is 'Three in One' - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Wonderful mystery!

Therefore, although Jesus is a separate person, He is equal to God the Father in essence and being and divine qualities. We actually see what God is like when we look at Jesus, for Jesus was also divine.

John wrote concerning the Word, "He was the agent through whom all things were made; and there is not a single thing which exists in this world which came into being without him." (John 1:3, Barclay Translation) When John said, *"...there is not a single thing which exists in this world which came into being without Him"*, He teaches two important truths regarding the creation of the world.

John taught that Jesus, the Word of God, created the world out of nothing! Jesus was the pre-existent Agent of God who flung the moon, sun, and stars into their regular orbits. The Son of the Tri-une God brooded over the formless void and darkness of the earth, and brought form and life. At the word of His voice, light expelled the darkness, the firmament and seas formed, the earth became embedded with vegetable life, the water and sky and earth became the home of the fish and fowl and beast. As the crown of His creation, He made man, in whom He stamped His own image.

The world is God's world, and is therefore beautiful and wonderful to live in! All of nature sings its hymn of praise to the Creator. The majestic mountain and the intricate daffodil, the peaceful lake and the

tempestuous sea, the ancient redwood and the young spruce, the flying squirrel and the creeping turtle, the weaving spider, and roaring tiger, the gentle snowflake, and the cracking thunder, the dazzling sunlight, and the dismal mist, are all manifestations of their Creator's power and beauty.

A little girl, who had lived all her life in a large city, was taken for a day in the country. When she saw the beautiful bluebells in the woods, she asked, "Do you think God would mind if I plucked some of His flowers?" She looked at the world in a sacred way.

"WE SERVE THE TRANSCENDENT IMMANENT GOD!"

"And When You Pray Say 'Our Father!'"

God is both 'transcendent' and 'Immanent' - that is, God is 'high and lifted up', far beyond the comprehension of any person, and God is also 'with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'" (Isaiah 57:15)

There are pagan religions which believe that because their god is so far removed from them, there is no way that their gods can be reached, and no way can their distant gods have any personal interest in human problems. Even before the coming of God to earth (Incarnation), many of the Old Testament prophets declared the personal and loving nature of God. However, when Jesus taught His disciples to call God 'Father', this revelation was transformational! God is a loving Father, with all the 'intimate' and 'loving' and 'personal' and 'trusting' characteristics for that title for God! God is pleased to dwell with His human creatures! God is intimately involved in his world, not detached, not disinterested in mankind. God, in coming to the earth in the person of His Son, has shown forever that He is the God who takes initiative to love everyone (all sinners). He is the God who 'goes', not 'waits'; the aggressive God, not the passive God; the God who loves the unlovely, not the God who takes delight in judging and destroying unworthy persons!

God wants to be the 'loving Father' to everyone! It is only after sinners deliberately and consistently refuses the universal offer of love and forgiveness, that God can no longer be the 'loving Father' to such persons! He then becomes the 'indignant judge' - to execute punishment upon unrepentant rebels of God!

Mercy spurned is judgment earned! God wishes and He wills to be a 'loving Father' to all, but the 'Father-Son relationship' is dependent upon the willingness of the human to enter into that relationship—through 'faith' in the person of Jesus Christ! No human (sinner) is automatically (inherently) a 'Son of GOD'; God accepts 'Sons' only by 'adoption'!

Jesus is the one who taught us to address God as 'Father'! No one dare address God using the intimate title of 'Father' with any attitude other than humility (gratitude) Jesus taught us that this is a friendly universe, run by a friendly (very loving) God. What Jesus was on earth, God always was in eternity—a God whose very nature is love! The God of the Christians is trustworthy, beneficent, and loving. The heathen gods are pitiless, grudging, distant, even hateful! Because Christ was God, God in the person of Jesus has visited mankind. God truly understands the human situation. Because the Christian is serving a God of love (revealed by Christ's life and death), the Christian is enabled to accept even unpleasant things with submission and hope. It is a great comfort to know that God is Father, and a loving Father will never cause His child needless tears (as noted by William Barclay).

However, every loving father sometimes must for the good of his child, administer correction and discipline to his child. And, so it is with our Heavenly Father. When a child of God carelessly leaves the 'path of holiness and obedience', the Heavenly Father must 'wield the rod' of chastisement - and, of course, because the Heavenly Father is driven by Love!

Hebrews 12. "Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up; and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us. Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards; and now he sits in the place of honor by the throne of God. If you want to keep from becoming fainthearted and weary, think about his patience as sinful men did such terrible things to him. After all, you have never yet struggled against sin and temptation until you sweat great drops of blood. And have you quite forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his child? He said, "My son, don't be angry when the Lord punishes you. Don't be discouraged when he has to show you where you are wrong. For when he punishes you, it proves that he loves you. When he whips you, it proves you are really his child." Let God train you, for he is doing what any loving father does for his children. Whoever heard of a son who was never corrected? If God doesn't punish you when you need

it, as other fathers punish their sons, then it means that you aren't really God's son at all—that you don't really belong in his family. Since we respect our fathers here on earth, though they punish us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to God's training so that we can begin really to live? Our earthly fathers trained us for a few brief years, doing the best for us that they knew how, but God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share his holiness. Being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening—it hurts! But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character. So take a new grip with your tired hands, stand firm on your shaky legs, and mark out a straight, smooth path for your feet so that those who follow you, though weak and lame, will not fall and hurt themselves but become strong. Try to stay out of all quarrels, and seek to live a clean and holy life, for one who is not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that not one of you will fail to find God's best blessings. Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives. Watch out that no one becomes involved in sexual sin or becomes careless about God as Esau did: he traded his rights as the oldest son for a single meal. And afterwards, when he wanted those rights back again, it was too late, even though he wept bitter tears of repentance. So remember, and be careful. You have not had to stand face to face with terror, flaming fire, gloom, darkness, and a terrible storm as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai when God gave them his laws. For there was an awesome trumpet blast and a voice with a message so terrible that the people begged God to stop speaking. They staggered back under God's command that if even an animal touched the mountain it must die. Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he shook with terrible fear. But you have come right up into Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the gathering of countless happy angels, and to the church, composed of all those registered in heaven, and to God who is Judge of all, and to the spirits of the redeemed in heaven, already made perfect, and to Jesus himself, who has brought us his wonderful new agreement, and to the sprinkled blood, which graciously forgives instead of crying out for vengeance as the blood of Abel did. So see to it that you obey him who is speaking to you. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, how ter-

rible our danger if we refuse to listen to God who speaks to us from heaven!²⁶ When he spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but, "Next time," he says, "I will not only shake the earth but the heavens too." By this he means that he will sift out everything without solid foundations so that only unshakable things will be left.²⁸ Since we have a Kingdom nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving him with thankful hearts and with holy fear and awe.²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.

27.

"YOU ARE 'CLAY' IN THE HANDS OF THE MASTER POTTER!"

The Potter knows his clay very well! After all, it is the Potter who is involved to a great deal, in order for the Potter to fashion the clay in exactly the way He chooses. We must 'come clean' before God—confessing all our sins. In like manner, the Divine Potter (God Himself) knows very well those whom He is shaping and molding, in order ultimately to form a beautiful 'vessel' (a beautiful character) for His own glory and for His own use in His 'House' (His Kingdom). God spoke of Himself as a 'Great Potter', whose intention was to form a beautiful, God-honoring 'vessel' (nation of Israel as an attractive witness to the pagan nations of the world).

Tragically, there were times when God's people (Israelites) failed to cooperate with God (because of willful disobedience and rebellion). Instead of cooperating with God (i.e., instead of yielding themselves as moldable 'clay' in God's powerful and skilled hands), they resisted God, and they became independent in spirit, and they refused to be vulnerable and open to the Great Potter. Such actions God considered most tragic and most 'stupid' and 'most foolish'.

Says the 'Grand Potter' (God): "Woe to those who try to hide their plans from God, who try to keep him in the dark concerning what they do! 'God can't see us,' they say to themselves. 'He doesn't know what is going on!' How stupid can they be! Isn't he, the Potter, greater than you, the jars He makes? Will you say to Him, 'He didn't make?' Does a machine call its inventor dumb?" (Isaiah 29:15-16; Living Bible)

Above all, as 'clay' in the Master Potter's hand, we must be open and honest before the Potter. Impediments (foreign particles) must be removed from the clay, if the Potter is able to produce a 'work of art' (a beautiful pot)! What are the impediments in our lives which the Grand Potter must 'remove' in our lives, in order for the Potter (God) to mold our lives (slowly, but surely) into a beautiful character? Only each believer (under the control of the 'Master Potter') can adequately answer that question. The first impediment, of course, is our lack of true transparency (honesty) before the Potter.

We must 'come clean' before God—confessing all our sins and rebellion to God. The Holy Spirit is the 'search light' of our lives, and He will 'pinpoint' the specific 'things' (activities and attitudes) which need to be removed from our lives (i.e., from clay upon which God wishes to 'shape and mold')! In order for God to do His work of molding our lives, there are certain 'impediments' which God (Potter) must drastically remove!

*The person who has allowed God to remove the 'impediments' (obstacles) in his life, is the person whom God can effectively 'mold' and 'shape' according to His grand purpose. Such a yielded person (open and transparent and honest and guileless) is ready to say to the 'Potter' - **"O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay and you are the Potter. We are all formed by your hand."** (Isaiah 64:8; Living Bible)*

As you yield yourself to God, as clay is surrendered to the skilled potter, you will be surprised what kind of 'vessel' the Lord will produce—what kind of a beautiful and effective life God will make of you (throughout your entire life). Be moldable 'clay' in the hands of the 'Master Potter'!

28.

"CULTIVATE THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IN YOUR LIFE"!

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

The life of God is the life of love. Love, according to the New Testament, is the distinguishing 'mark' of a true Christian. This truth is expounded explicitly, yet rather concisely, in the small book of I John. John, the author of this book, was at one time (in his early life when he received Christ's call to discipleship), I say, at one time, John apparently was rather impulsive and tempestuous. He was indignant that a certain group of persons refused the call of Jesus to discipleship, and he wanted (with Jesus' permission) to 'call down fire from heaven upon them to consume them on the spot!' Not very loving towards his 'enemies!' Jesus, of course, rebuked him, and told John that his 'spirit of vindictiveness' was not the 'Spirit of Christ', the 'spirit' of love!

The time came, however, after John was long in the 'company of Jesus' in the 'flesh' and (later 'in the Spirit'), that John was deeply in love—not only in love with Jesus and with Jesus' friends, but also in love with Jesus' enemies! Love is a 'gift of the Spirit' (a Spiritual 'fruit' that is given by the Spirit to the receptive heart). Love is the 'crowning virtue' that enables a person to live a supernatural life—life that enables one to live a Christ-centered life rather than a self-centered life. The best description of this kind of divine-like love is found in the 'Love Chapter' (I Corinthians 13). Your willingness (surrender) combined with God's imparted power, allows you to love the unlovely persons—even Your enemies! Those whom you dislike, you can love.

God is Love, and all of His attributes (traits) are simply (and authentically) manifestations of His basic, eternal Nature of Love. And, it is also true that the basic (central) characteristic of a follower of God is God-like love (called AGAPE in the New Testament Greek language).

The 'fruit' in the life of a true Christian (i.e., one who sincerely desires to 'live by the power of the Holy Spirit') - I say, the distinguishing characteristic of a believer is Love. This love, however, is 'multi-dimensional'. Love has many 'angles' (sides) in which it can be viewed (and experienced).

God's love (imparted to the heart and to the mind of a fervent believer) has tremendous depth and width, that is, love has delightful and attractive 'variety'. Some Christians are stronger than some other Christians in the expression of these various 'aspects' of Love . All expressions are due to the enabling presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Love (with its eight manifestations and dimensions) is the 'Fruit of The Spirit'. To cultivate the 'Fruit of The Spirit' (Galatians 5:22-23) is to cultivate a Christlike character! To the extent that a Christian cultivates these nine-fold fruits, to that same extent will he reflect the "likeness of God Himself"!

Pray every day!

"Forgive all my sins, for Jesus' sake!

Cleanse my heart from all self-centeredness!

Fill me with your mighty Holy Spirit.

I surrender my mind, spirit, emotions, will, and body to You!

Shed abroad your Holy love into my heart!

NOW! Thank you!"

29.

"WE ARE TOILERS (Farmers) FOR CHRIST!"

"The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." (2 Timothy 2:6-7)

"Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near". (James 5:7-8)

The Christian is like the farmer, in that both the Christian and the farmer must be willing to work and then to wait patiently for the harvest. One who wants quick or immediate results would not be a successful farmer—or a successful 'soul winner'. After the sowing, there comes a long period of waiting, until the crop is ready (ripe) for harvesting.

It is true that Jesus told His disciples to look out over the 'field of the world of needy people', for Jesus said (with urgency) that the fields are 'white with harvest'. Yes, some souls (like a ripened field) are ready to be 'harvested' (i.e., these souls are ready to be 'saved', ready now to leave their sinful lifestyle and to enter the 'family of God', to enter the 'realm of holy living'). But, we must remember that these 'ripened souls' came to this 'favorable spiritual state' because they much earlier had received the 'light of God's salvation' (probably from some faithful witness), and they did not refuse to 'walk in that light' (i.e., the pre-conversion truth regarding the requirements of repentance and faith (trust) in the only Son of God).

Walking in all the 'light' that they received (from the Holy Spirit through faithful 'sowers of the Word'), these persons are now like a 'whitened farmer's field' - ready to be 'harvested' for the 'Lord of the Harvest'. Only the Spirit of God can convict, convince, reveal, draw, instruct, and 'grow' the seed to the advanced stage of ripening—but the blessed Holy Spirit often uses 'Christ-followers' to do the sowing of the Seed (sharing the truth of Christ's salvation through His Word). Believers can be used of the Spirit in nearly all the various 'phases' of 'spiritual farming'!

There is 'seed preparation' (preparing an authentic witness for sinners, or purchasing the Bibles for distribution in a specific geographic location), and there is the actual planting of the seed (speaking directly to a lost person about the hope-filled 'plan of salvation'), and there is fertilizing the seed (providing 'easy' and 'loving' friendship to the ones to whom you initially shared the 'Gospel'), and there is irrigating the seeds (with your actual 'physical tears', or with the 'inner tears' of your soul, offering many 'prayers of intercession' for the sinners for whom you deeply care), and there is cultivating the soil (by your presence in the life of the sinner for whom you are earnestly praying, seeking to remove all the 'weeds' that are hindering your friend from accepting Christ). With all these 'worthy ministries', only God can give the increase (i.e., only God can actually save—transform—a human soul!)

A farmer plants many seeds, all of which he knows will not germinate and grow. The Christian witness will sow many seeds (i.e., he will witness to many and offer God's offer of salvation to many), but he knows that there will be some who will accept the offer, and others who will reject the offer. The results of his sincere efforts must be left in the hands of the 'Lord of the Harvest'!

According to Jesus, some seeds will fall on 'wayside soil' (no entry of seeds - close-minded), some seeds will fall on 'shallow soil' (temporary emotional response, and short-lived). Some seeds will fall on **thorny soil** (the cares and riches of this life finally 'chock out' the good crop), and some seeds will fall on well-cultivated and 'clean soil' which produces a great and healthy harvest!

God wants each of us to receive the 'Seed' (the good Word of God), and to bring forth a good harvest—a harvest that is honoring to the 'Lord of the Harvest'! It is the desire of that 'Lord' that we each produce a great harvest within our own lives, and that we (in turn) become 'great farmers' in the 'world's fields of many needy souls'!

30.

*"ALLOW CHRIST TO RESCUE YOU FROM THE
QUICKSAND OF SIN!"*

The Bible says that there is 'pleasure in sin for a season'! But the 'pleasure' of sin (the indulgence of the 'flesh') soon gives way to the 'miseries of sin' (physical deterioration, mental confusion, volitional bondage resulting in destruction habits, spiritual paralysis, social alienation, psychological depression, personal loneliness, and more)!

These, and other consequences of sins! It is when a person (with many or fewer sins) comes to the place in his life (in his mind, in his emotions, in his spirit, in his will) when he realizes that he, indeed, is helpless and hopeless—that he is unable to save himself from his condition of spiritual death, that he turns hopefully to God. He feels like he is "sinking in the quicksand of sin"! It is then that this sinner cries out for mercy and for salvation and for rescue. Christ gladly pulls such a despairing person out of sin's 'quicksand', to place him on the 'Rock of Salvation'!

*In loving kindness Jesus came
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame
Through grace He lifted me.*

*He called me long before I heard,
Before my sinful heart was stirred,
But when I took Him at His word,
Forgiven He lifted me.*

Chorus:

*From sinking sand He lifted me,
With tender hand He lifted me,
From shades of night to plains of light,
O praise His name, He lifted me!
By Charles H. Gabriel)*

Jesus is the Great Rescuer—The Rescuer from the devastating power of sin! He rescues us from the guilt of sin, from the power of sin, from

the penalty of sin—and when He takes us to His heavenly Home, we will be rescued from the very presence of sin! Jesus is the Great Rescuer!

He came to earth to 'seek and to save the lost', to give healing to the sin-sick soul, to give strength to the weary in life, to give hope to the discouraged ones, to give companionship to the lonely ones, to give guidance to the confused ones, to give vision to the purposeless ones, to give strength to the discouraged ones, to give assurance to the doubting ones, to give new beginnings to the failed ones, to give integration to the double-minded ones, to bring humility to the arrogant ones, to give chastisement to the disobedient ones, to give rich resources to the depleted ones, to give direction to the confused ones, to give discipline to the complacent ones, to bring purity of heart to the ones who have ulterior motives, to bring harsh and just judgment (punishment) to the stubborn and the unrepentant ones, to reward the humble and the obedient ones who have been faithful to fulfill their divinely - given call for their lives!

Jesus (through the Holy Spirit) is "all things unto all persons", in order that He might bring all persons to the 'foot of the cross' where thorough 'healing' is offered to all persons (specifically to the 'broken and contrite' souls)! Jesus desires to rescue every soul from the 'quicksand of sin'.

REACH UP, TAKE JESUS' HAND OF RESCUE!

31.

"WE REAP WHAT WE SOW IN LIFE'S BEHAVIORS!"

The Bible gives numerous references that expounds the simple (but very important) principle, that "what one sows in life, the same he will reap in life"! The following are only a few verses that describe this principle of life!

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:7-8)

"Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches mankind lack knowledge? The Lord knows all human plans; he knows that they are futile." (Psalms 94:10-11)

"Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life." (Proverbs 22:22-23)

"Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them." (Proverbs 26:27)

The Gospel is good news for the sinner, for the sinner can be forgiven of his sins. Nevertheless, the forgiven sinner may not escape all the consequences of his past sins. However, the forgiven sinner can spend the rest of his life choosing right, and thus getting good results.

Every man is free to do only one thing—to make choices. "We are free to choose, but not free to choose the results or consequences of our choices. They are in hands not our own. Some go through life choosing to surrender to the right person and to submit to the right things, they get results; the sum total of reality is behind them. Surrendering to the wrong person or things—they get consequences; they are up against reality, they are frustrated, in trouble, with themselves and others." (Victory through Surrender; pgs. 124-125)

"SOW SIN - REAP CONSEQUENCES!" Just as there are physical laws, which govern the physical universe, so are there spiritual laws which govern your relationship with God. No one can really break the law of gravity; one can defy the law of gravity and break himself upon that

law. No one can really break the moral law of God. One can deny that moral law and get broken in the process.

"SOW DISOBEDIENCE - REAP SHAME!" Says God, through the prophet Hosea, "Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies." Hosea 10:13

"SOW SPIRITUAL NEGLECT - REAP SPIRITUAL BACKSLIDING!" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Hebrews 2: 3a

"SOW RIGHTEOUSNESS - REAP RESULTS!" I would repeat: "Some people get consequences from life and some people get results. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

"SOW TEARS OF REPENTANCE - REAP JOY OF SALVATION!" "Godly sorrow worketh repentance." "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." (Psalms 126:5)

"SOW RIGHTEOUSNESS—REAP MERCY!" "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rains righteousness upon you." (Hosea 10:12) "Said Jesus, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

"SOW TOTAL SURRENDER—REAP LIFE-TIME FULFILLMENT!" Life itself renders the verdict of the quality of life's choices by the type of harvest produced. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap— "either fulfillment through surrender to Christ or disillusionment through self-centeredness."

"SOW LOVE - REAP LOVE!"

*He who sows seeds of kindness
will reap an abundant harvest of love,
friendship, and understanding.
'Sow a thought reap an act,
Sow an act reap a habit,
Sow a habit reap a character,
Sow a character reaps a destiny.'*

In large measure, we do determine the kind of destiny that we will reap—in time and in eternity. Remember, we are free to choose, but not free to choose the results or consequences of our choices.

32.

"HAVE YOU SUBMITTED YOUR LIFE TO THE 'LORDSHIP OF CHRIST'?"

The person (Christian) who is highly esteemed and honored by God—i.e., the person who is seeking to be truly mature in all his ways—is the person who seeks earnestly to make Christ the Lord of his entire life. As illustrated concretely in the 'Frame' (a word picture at the end of the chapter), this choice person daily attempts (with the Holy Spirit's enablement) to bring all the activities and relationships and involvements of his life "under the umbrella" of Christ's Lordship! He wants all that he says and all that he does, and all the relationships of his life to honor his God and to bring glory to his Savior and Lord! He wants his lips (words) to bring honor to Christ, and he wants his actions and his reactions to exalt Christ and to bring great blessings to his fellowmen. In the ways he works, in the ways he plays, and in the ways he relates to his family and friends and co-workers, he wants to have the 'smile of God's approval resting upon him'!

He believes the words of the motto: "Only one life to live, it will soon be passed, and only what is done for Christ will last." He wants his life to "count for Christ." He knows that someday his life will be judged (evaluated) by the God before whom all things are known (every thought, motive, desire, and deed of every person who has ever lived). Because the 'fear of the Lord' is the beginning of wisdom, he seeks to walk in holy reverence and godly fear before his God! Not a terrorizing fear, but a profound respect before God, with an earnest desire (effort) to keep all the holy laws (will of God) through the Spirit's empowering and loving presence in his life! He "Walks before God, not before men." He "fears God" (wholesomely) so much that he fears the face of men not at all! To have a clear conscience before God, and to experience the Spirit-imparted love of God in his heart—this constitutes his true treasure for time and for eternity. He gladly submits to God's will, and he loves to bow his knee always to his Lord and Master.

Every 'aspect' and 'activity' of a man's multi-dimensional life must contribute in various and meaningful ways, towards the development and the cultivation of a Christlike life (which has eternal significance).

Jesus, rightly, is called, 'Lord', for He is the 'Ruler' over all things (all Kingdoms) in heaven and on earth! All knees shall 'bow' before Him, and all persons will declare that Jesus alone is 'Lord of lords' and 'King of kings'! All the tribes, nations, and ethnic groups of the world will have their 'eyes opened' and they will (willingly or unwillingly) acknowledge that Jesus, indeed, is the one and the only true (eternal) God. All the 'gods' of the world will be seen (revealed) for what they are—the false inventions of man's vile imagination, with no objective or lasting significance. Gross idolatry will all be 'cast away' and the blessed Son of the Living God shall ascend His throne, to rule forevermore. Those who submit to Christ's Lordship (in time or in eternity) will be 'saved', and those who are labeled as 'goats' - will be removed from Christ's holy presence forever!

In 'light' of this discussion, we are reminded again of the importance of every person (husband/wife/child) submitting to the 'Lordship' of Christ— in every single area of one's complex life (relationships and activities). Jesus said that we must "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." Jesus made it clear that if we love anyone more than we love Him, that "we are not worthy to be His disciple!" We must give to Christ, the same place in our human heart that He has always enjoyed in His vast Universe—First Place, the place of 'Lordship'! Does Jesus have 'first place' - the place of Lordship—in your own heart and life?

33.

"SUBMIT TO CHRIST'S LORDSHIP!" YOUR LIFE

(THE FRAME OF LIFE) COUNTRY—NATIONALITY—HOBBIES—PERSONALITY—RELIGION	
"SUBMIT YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST'S LORDSHIP!" (THE FRAME OF LIFE) PARENTS—JOB—SIBLINGS—RACE—GENDER—BACKGROUND—	
• Pursue growth in godly traits! Ephesians 4:17-32; 5:1-9 Colossians 3:5-15; 1 Peter 1:13-16, 22-25; 1 Peter 3:1-3, 17; 1 Peter 3:8-12 • Submit to the leadership of the Spirit! • Die to self-centeredness and selfish indulgence of the flesh! • Allow the Holy Spirit to shed abroad God's love in your heart! • Obey the Holy Laws of God, to glorify God and for personal fulfillment • In all your ways acknowledge God, and He shall direct thy paths! • At all times, praise God (Not For all things, But Through all things), for God makes all things work into a 'pattern' for good to those who truly love God	(THE FRAME OF LIFE) ENTERTAINMENT—ANCESTORS—GOALS—MISSION—SPOUSE—RELATIVES
<u>CHRIST-LIKE (Godly) CHARACTER</u> Is Eternal (outlast Time) (The Goal of Life on Earth is to cultivate Character which prepares one to meet Death triumphantly, and that allows One to enter God's Heaven joyfully)	<u>The Picture of Life!</u> <u>Profile of a Godly Life:</u> Matthew 5:1-12 Romans 12:1-21 I Corinthians 13:1-13 Romans 8:1-39
"When the Holy Spirit controls our lives he will produce this kind of fruit in us: (1) Love, (2) Joy, (3) Peace, (4) Patience,, (5) Kindness, (6) Goodness, (7) Faithfulness, (8) Gentleness, (9) Self-Control." (Galatians 5:22; Living Bible)	
FRIENDS—EDUCATION—MONEY—POSITION—CHERISHED PETS—CAREER—INTELLIGENCE (IQ) (THE FRAME OF LIFE)	

34.

"STORY OF GOOD AND BAD SEEDS!"

Jesus told them another parable: *"The Parable of the Weeds"*. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "An enemy did this," he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' , ' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" In Jesus' parable of the good and bad seeds which grew together side by side, Jesus was referring to a fact in wheat agriculture which every Jew well understood. Tares, a weed called bearded darnel, looked identical to wheat in its early stage of growth. Even an expert farmer could not tell the difference between wheat and darnel at this early stage. After the grain and darnel have headed out, there is a distinct and obvious difference between the two plants. By the time, a farmer can tell the difference between the two plants, the roots of the darnel have so intertwined with the roots of the wheat that the wheat would be pulled out with the darnel if an attempt was made to pull out the darnel. Therefore, the farmer simply waited until harvest time and then cut them together. Because the darnel is slightly poisonous and unpleasant in taste, it needed to be picked out of the wheat grain. This is a tedious but important job performed by the women. The wheat, of course was saved and the darnel was burned. Based on this common but interesting picture, Jesus draws important spiritual lessons. Matthew 13:24-30*

Let us look at this parable in terms of: 1. Sowing the seed; 2. Growth of the seed; and 3. Harvesting of the crop.

Jesus explained the meaning of the parable. He said, *"The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world."* (Matthew 13:37, 38) We notice from the parable itself, that the field was only in-

tended for good seed. The field belonged to the sower of good seed, and obviously, that means that the field, which is the world, belongs to the Son. The Scriptures make it clear that the world belongs to the Son.

"Through the Son God made the whole universe and to the Son he has ordained that all creation shall ultimately belong." (Hebrews 1:2)

"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." (Psalms 24:1)

John wrote, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:3)

Paul said "For by Him (the Son) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him" (Colossians 1:16)

The entire world was created by the Son, and for the Son. It was God's intention that the whole field (or world) be fertile ground for any good seed. God's will is to have all persons be saved. It is not God's will that any in His world be corrupt seed. God made His world to be the dwelling place of His children, whose lives are to be holy, righteousness. The good seed is the sons of God's Kingdom.

Jesus goes on to give the interpretation to the parable. *"The weeds are the children of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil." (Matthew 13:3b-39a)*

Into God's beautiful field an enemy comes and secretly sows seeds of corruption. That enemy is Satan. Someone said, "The devil is a squatter". A squatter is a man who settles on land he has no right to, and works it for his own advantage." (G. Campbell Moran, *Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord*; pg. 51) The Devil has no right to the field. He subtly creeps in and sows seeds of corruption, seeds with the intention of destroying the good seeds.

With great deception and craft, Satan asked Eve, *"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"* Satan still is deceiving men, and through this deception sowing evil seeds. This parable

teaches us to be on our guard against the enemy. There is a devil who seeks to destroy the good, and to advance the evil seeds. Evil men are used of Satan to crowd out good men. *Paul exhorted Christians: "Be not overpowered by evil, but master evil with good." (Romans 12:21)* The scripture tells us that evil companions corrupt good manners. Christians are not to be intimidated with evil, but are to shun evil and to cleave to the good.

It has been pointed out earlier that the wheat and darnel cannot be told apart in their early growth. They look identical although they are very different. This part of the parable points out to us the method of Satan's deception. It is imitation. Satan's evil seed appears to be the same as the good seed. Satan wants to clothe himself in the garments of righteousness and appear to be an "angel of light." "Satan does not want to build a Church and call it 'The First Church of Satan'. He is far too clever for that. He invades the Sunday school, the youth department, the Christian education program, and even the pulpit." (Christianity Today, January 19, 1968)

Through imitation, Satan can deceive man and pull many into his terrible grip. There are so many false religions and false prophets, which are devastatingly dangerous simply because, on the surface, they appear to be genuine. The darnel appears to be genuine wheat and so false doctrine appears to be genuine and true. Satan is the Master Deceiver, and he uses evil men, who appear to be good, in an attempt to destroy the genuinely good seed.

Many false religions use the same terminology as true Christians. Many false teachers refer much to the Bible, but these teachers do not accept the Bible as the only and final word of authority. They accept additional "scriptures" as their source of authority. Many false teachers speak about Jesus but they do not accept Him as the true, divine, and incarnate son of God. Denying the virgin birth, they deny the deity of Jesus. Describing Him only in terms of a great teacher or wonderful humanitarian, they divest Jesus of his uniqueness, as the Divine Son of God. Many acknowledge that Jesus died, but many also consider this death only to be heroic, not meritorious, or redemptive.

Thus, many despise preaching concerning 'the Blood'. In their theology of man they have dressed man in garments of self-righteousness and denied the existence of sin. Man saves himself, they say, by get-

ting on the 'band wagon' of scientific development and social improvement. Man is ever moving upward and onward on the wings of the evolutionary process. Man climbs up to God instead of God climbing down to man (as Christians assert). The false teacher talks much about morals just as the Christian does, but false teachers espouse relative morals while Christians advocate absolute morals. The false teacher bases his system of morals on the question, "What is meaningful to me?" The Christian bases his system of morals on the question "What is right?" Thus, we see that the darnel and the wheat at first appear to be the same. Satan's method of deception is imitation. False teachers imitate true Christians, both in doctrine and in humanitarian endeavors.

As time goes by, the true wheat and the degenerate wheat (darnel) become increasingly different in appearance. Therefore, it is with false and true religion. When one closely and carefully investigates false teachers and doctrines, he learns that the false teaching is very different from the true teaching. The Scriptures exhort Christians to earnestly contend for the true doctrine and faith. Christians are to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith.

Wrote Paul: "Be careful that nobody spoils your faith through intellectualism or high-sounding nonsense. Such stuff is at best founded on men's ideas of the nature of the world, and disregards Christ!" (Colossians 2:8, Phillips) Jesus warned us of false prophets: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Does man gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." (Matthew 7:15-17) When the darnel and the wheat have headed out, there is no mistake then which is wheat and which is darnel. We can know a teaching by the kind of fruit it produces.

Harvest Of The Seed . "The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun,

in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear?"

What did Jesus say about the harvest? *"... and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels". (Matthew 13:39)* This is a description of the fate of the righteous and the wicked. Darnel is good for nothing but to be burned. Jesus made it clear that God alone is qualified to render just punishment and just reward. *"Let them both grow together until the harvest."* (v. 30)

God alone knows the hearts of all men and He alone is 'absolutely' just. The Christian's job is not the job of judgment, but rather it is the job of reconciliation. It is at this point that the illustration from the world of nature breaks down. Once a darnel, always a darnel in the physical realm. In the spiritual realm, through the mysterious power of God, darnel can become wheat! In fact, the Christian's job is to influence the darnel to yield itself unto the power of the Creator who can transform it into wheat. A Christian must grow up side by side with the darnel and seek to overcome the evil with the good. When the servants of the farmer asked if they should pull up the darnel, he replied, "No." When the disciples asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy the disobedient Samaritans, Jesus replied *No and told the disciples that they did not know of what spirit they spoke. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good."* (Romans 12:19-21)

The fact remains, however, that judgment does come eventually and finally. Evil will be punished and good will be rewarded. The punishment of the wicked will be most tragic - fire, weeping, gnashing of teeth. Whatever this means, it is a description of a horrible existence away from the presence of God! Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, as He was speaking of false prophets: *"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."* (Matthew 7:19) John the Revelator wrote, concerning the Judgment of God, *"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."* (Revelations 20:15)

The fate of the righteous is much different. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matthew 13:43a)

Many have testified to the glory of heaven in their dying moments. Jordon Antie: "Eternity Rolls Up Before Me Like A Sea Of Glory." Martha McCrackin: "How Bright The Room"! "How Full Of Angels!" S.B. Bangs: "The Sun In Setting; Mine Is Rising. I Go From This Bed To A Crown. Farewell." (Shoe-Leather Faith, No. 141)

In Jesus' story of the 'Good and Bad Seed', He brings out several important and basic truths:

- (1) There is an evil power called the devil who has 'squatted' on God's territory - the world - and has planted evil seeds - evil men - with an attempt to destroy the good seed - good men;*
- (2) Satan's chief method of deception is imitation - in doctrine and in practice;*
- (3) Christians must carefully guard against evil influence, but must not take the defensive. Rather, Christians need to take the offensive - overcome evil through good and seek the conversion of the wicked.*
- (4) Final Judgment is coming, and Christ the Righteous Judge will punish the wicked with unquenchable fire, and will reward the righteous with eternal life and light.*

35.

"HOW SALTY ARE YOU!"

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste (it's strength, its quality), how can it's saltiness be restored? It is not good for anything any longer but to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men." (Matthew 5:13)

A Christian is like 'salt'. Jesus called Christians 'salt'; therefore we must ask what the function of salt is and try to relate this to the Christian Life!"

The Christian is to be an example of purity within an impure society. A Christian is a non-conformist in worldly society, conforming only to the standards of purity and righteousness. A Christian must not let the world around him squeeze him into its own mold. *"With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him."* (Romans 12:1; Phillips)

Paul wrote to Christians, *"The Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?...Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."* (II Corinthians 6:17)

The Christian is to have a giving hand in contrast to the world's grasping hand. The profit motive is the controlling motive of the world; the motive of service is to be the Christian's dynamic. The worldly person exploits his fellowmen; the Christian loves his fellowmen. The world may be dishonest; the Christian is honest. The world may be indolent in work; the Christian is diligent in work. The world may be slanderous; the Christian guards his tongue.

Paul wrote to young Timothy, *"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."* (I Timothy 4:12) In our sensual society, the Christian must be an example in purity. Amidst the pleasure mania, the Christian is to refute the evil and to cultivate the noble and virtuous things of life.

When Jesus said that the Christian is to be the salt of the earth, He was assuming that the world of men and the world of society tends to become more and more degraded in and of itself, and is therefore in need of a preservative, an element in society that can check its downward trend. People of the ancient world became so wicked that they were not fit to live. *"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually". (Genesis 6:5).* Because there was not enough saltiness in the world, God sent a flood and destroyed the inhabitants. Sodom was destroyed because ten 'salty people' could not be found. The society became so rotten that it could no longer exist.

Paul wrote that Christians are to be happy and radiant people. Even while a prisoner in Rome, Paul wrote the Epistle of Joy - Philippians. Many times in the book, he mentions joy and rejoicing. *"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."* (Philippians 4:4) In I Thessalonians 5:16 Paul wrote, *"Rejoice evermore."* Peter wrote, *"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."* (I Peter 1:8)

Salt is a positive thing that can't be ignored. We immediately know if salt is lacking. Likewise, a true Christian is a positive influence that cannot be ignored. A Christian can be rejected, but he cannot be ignored.

Amidst all this despair, the Christian must show the world that there is hope. The Christian can point to joy instead of regret, peace instead of turmoil, forgiveness instead of guilt, and life instead of death. Life without Christ is tasteless and not worth living.

A young woman wrote the following poem three days after she had attempted to commit suicide. She discovered Christ as the answer to life and this is her testimony:

"DISCOVERING - CHRIST IN ME"

*Discovering daily who God really is.
Thanking Him daily He's mine and I'm His.
Discovering daily God's great love for me;*

*Such mercy, forgiveness, amazingly free.
Discovering daily that He really cares.
Discovering daily He does answer prayers.
Discovering daily what grace really means.
Discovering daily God speaking to me,
Through His Holy Word. Once blind, now I see,
Discovering, discovering each day that I live
That all that I need, He freely will give.
Discovering daily Christ working through me,
Accomplishing daily what never could be.
Discovering daily I can't, but He can.
Thanking Him daily for my place in His plan.
Discovering daily how REAL life can be
When I'm living in Christ, and He's living in me,
Discovering daily a song in my heart,
With anticipation for each day to start.
Delighting and basking in love so divine,
Secure in the knowledge I'm His, and He's mine.
Besides mere contentment; excitement I see;
A daily adventure; Christ living in me.*

*Salt causes one to crave for water. Christianity causes sinners to thirst for spiritual satisfaction. We said earlier in the message that a Christian is to live a pure and separated life. Let it be clearly understood that, while it is true that the Christian is to separate himself from the indulgences of sin, a Christian is not to separate himself from the company of sinners. A Christian does not become involved in the world's practices, but he does become involved in the world's problems. Jesus prayed to His Father, for His disciples, **"I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil."** (John 17:15) A Christian is to live in two worlds - the world of men and the world of spiritual reality.*

Because Christianity is a social religion, it cannot function without contact with men of the world. It is only as a Christian has contact with society will society become thirsty for what Christianity has to offer. Christian character must be lived in the context of worldly society, if society is ever to be converted.

A Christian is to be salt, and salt causes thirst, but before the worldling can become thirsty for Christianity, he must see Christianity demonstrated before Him.

There is a word in the New Testament Greek which vividly describes the character of an effective witness. That word is Kalos. This word describes the goodness of a person who is characterized by beauty, loveliness, graciousness, and winsomeness. The person who is Kalos, has an indestructible and intrinsic loveliness, attraction, and fragrance in his life. A witness who is a Kalos has a character which is lovely and pleasing to the eyes of others.

'Uselessness invites disaster'. The Christian is to make his life useful. If a Christian is not careful to stand for purity, if he is not a preservative in society, if he does not lend flavor and enjoyment to life, and if he does not cause a spiritual thirst in his associates, then he is inviting disaster.

36.

"IS YOUR 'LIGHT' BRIGHTLY SHINING?"

When Jesus said that Christians are the light of the world, He was paying the highest compliment possible to Christians. "It may well be said that this is the greatest compliment that was ever paid to the individual Christian, for in it Jesus commands the Christian to be what He Himself claimed to be." (Barclay's Matthew, pg. 118)

Jesus claimed to be the Light of the World, and we too, as Christians, are to be lights in the world. "You are the light of the world", said Jesus. "It is one of those statements which should always have the effect upon us of making us lift up our heads, causing us to realize once more what a remarkable and glorious thing it is to be a Christian." (Lloyd-Jones)

SOURCE OF LIGHT. Christians reflect borrowed light. Only God alone is light, in and of Himself. God borrows His light from no one. He is Himself the source of all light. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so Christians reflect the light of Christ. The moon's glory is the sun; the Christian's glory is Christ. The moon has no glory of its own, and so Christians have no glory of their own. "The radiance which shines from the Christian is lit by the presence of Christ within the Christian's heart." (Barclay's Matthew, pg. 119) When Paul said, "For me to live is Christ", he could have said, "For me to shine is Christ."

"Two things only are necessary to the lamp - the oil and the wick - and the two things always go together." (Lloyd-Jones, pg. 175) The Holy Spirit is the oil. Without oil a lamp cannot burn. The Christian must be possessed of the Holy Spirit if he is to be a light in the world of darkness. What is the wick? The Christian is the wick. Without a wick there cannot be controlled light in a lamp. God is depending upon Christians to shine forth for Him. God usually works through Christians in bringing sinners to Christ.

*"You are writing a Gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.
Men read what you write - distorted or true;
- - What is the Gospel according to you?" (Ibid, pg. 24)*

If Christians are called light, we should understand the nature of light, at least in its simplest form.

LIGHT SHINES NATURALLY. Christians must manifest spontaneously "love, joy, and peace." To pump up a love, to feign a joy, or to imitate a peace is to be hypocritical and certainly not Christian. The fruit of the Spirit is to grow in the Christian, and fruit grows naturally and spontaneously. So Christians are to be natural and spontaneous in their witness. Each Christian is to be himself and not attempt to change his personality to be someone else. Christ wants to reflect his glory spontaneously and naturally through each personality as He has made it.

LIGHT IS COSTLY. Whether it is the sun constantly burning huge masses of gases or a candle melting wax, there is always a cost involved in having light. Oil is burned and a wick is consumed in an oil lamp. Even though we think electricity is cheap, electricity must be generated somewhere and occasionally we must buy bulbs to replace the burned out ones.

*To be a Christian witness is costly. When Jesus cast the money changers out of the Temple **"His disciples remembered that it was written, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."** (John 2: 17) In other words, Jesus' fervent love for God's house and His consequent jealousy that it be used properly resulted in bringing reproaches and insults upon Him by the unholy and materialistically-minded.*

*Jesus' witness to the world cost Him the loss of comfort and ease. At noonday while Christ witnessed to the woman of Samaria He was likely hungry and tired. After His disciples returned with bread, Jesus said to them **"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish His work."** (John 4:34) On another occasion Jesus said, **"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."** (Matthew 8:20) Oftentimes Jesus was weary with the crowds pressing in upon Him. Far into the night Jesus ministered unto the needy. With Christ there was no vacation from the life of compassion.*

LIGHT IS TO BE SEEN. Light is useless if it cannot be seen. Light is not to be hid. "People do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a lamp stand," says Jesus. The Christian witness is also to be seen. Someone said, "There can be no such thing as secret disciple-

ship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy." (*Barclay's Matthew*, pg. 119)

It is true that profession without possession is a sham, but it is also true that possession without profession is unchristian. What one possesses inwardly must be expressed outwardly. Secret discipleship cannot long exist. It soon becomes a contradiction in terms. Inward faith must issue forth in praises and thanksgivings and in verbal witness.

LIGHT EXPOSES. When light shines in the dark, it exposes everything that is in its path. The Scripture says, *"Whatsoever doth make manifest is light."* Christians are to make manifest the evil works of godless men. The tragic thing is that man runs from the light, and seeks to hide in the darkness. Lady Macbeth hated the light and sought to hide her planned murder of Duncan in the darkness.

Moving a rotting log in the forest causes little creatures to run hither and to, trying to find what they are most accustomed to – the dark. How sad to think that some people have become so accustomed to the dark, that they do not desire the light.

However, it is the Christian's job to warn the sinner of the error of his way. God appointed Ezekiel as a watchman. Every Christian must be a watchman. *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul."* (Ezekiel 3:17-19)

Paul was awakened by the direct light of God. *"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? ...and he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me do?"* (Acts 9:3, 4, 6a)

Felix was awakened through a personal Christian witness: "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and he heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled." (Acts: 24, 25a)

LIGHT IS A GUIDE. Like a beacon light to guide a ship to shore, or like streetlights to mark out the road, so a Christian is a light to point men to the right destination - Christ.

Christians are to be just like their Master. Jesus said that He was the Light of the World and His followers are called lights of the World. What an ennobling title to be given to a Christian.

The Christian's light is a borrowed light. The source of his light is Christ Himself. The Christian must let his light shine before men in order that evil might be exposed, and sinners might be awakened. The Christian is to be a guiding light, lighting the pathway to God. A Christian is to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. Light the world for Jesus - that is what Christians are called to do.

37.

"DOES PRAY OCCUPY YOUR TIME AND EFFORT?"

Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this illustration: "Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You would shout up to him, 'A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit and I've nothing to give him to eat.' He would call down from his bedroom, 'Please don't ask me to get up. The door is locked for the night and we are all in bed. I just can't help you this time.' "But I'll tell you this—though he won't do it as a friend, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you everything you want—just because of your persistence. And so it is with prayer—keep on asking and you will keep on getting; keep on looking and you will keep on finding; knock and the door will be opened. Everyone who asks, receives; all who seek, find; and the door is opened to everyone who knocks. Luke 11:5-10;

Luke 1-8: One day Jesus told his disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must keep praying until the answer comes. "There was a city judge," he said, "a very godless man who had great contempt for everyone. A widow of that city came to him frequently to appeal for justice against a man who had harmed her. The judge ignored her for a while, but eventually she got on his nerves. I fear neither God nor man," he said to himself, "but this woman bothers me. I'm going to see that she gets justice, for she is wearing me out with her constant coming! Then the Lord said, "If even an evil judge can be worn down like that,⁷ don't you think that God will surely give justice to his people who plead with him day and night? Yes! He will answer them quickly! But the question is: When I, the Messiah, return, how many will I find who have faith and are praying?"

The host in Jesus' parable was embarrassed because he did not have enough food to set before his guest. To avoid the heat of the midday sun, travelers usually travelled late in the evening. Late at night, the host went to the house of a friend and knocked on the door. This was obviously a great emergency, for when once a door of a house is shut, it was shut for good. During the day, the door was open all of the time and people could come and go at will, but at night, no householder

wanted to be disturbed. The houses of those days were small and not only did the large families snuggle close together on their mats to keep warm, but also the animals were brought into the house at night. Great inconvenience was caused by having to arise in the middle of the night. However, it was in this situation that the host knocked on his friend's door with shameless persistence. Finally, the householder got up and granted the request to the friend.

The story of the unjust judge reveals truths about prayer also. Some judges during Jesus' day were notorious for fraud and robbery. Some seemed to have no conscience at all but would "pervert justice for a dish of meat." (Barclay's Luke, pg. 231) The poor widow was defenseless and had no hope of receiving justice from the judge. However, simply because of her persistence, she was granted justice.

Let us seek to discover from these two stories, some important truth regarding prayer. The real point in the parables is that God is different than the householder or the judge. Let us see this contrast in two main ways.

When the host knocked on the door, how did the householder respond? "Don't bother me; the door has already been shut and my children are in bed with me; I can't get up and supply you." (Barclay) Only after some persuasion, did the householder finally grant the request. In contrast to this householder, God lovingly grants the requests of His children. If an earthly father grants gifts to his children, how much more will the Heavenly Father grant good gifts to His children - especially the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13)? "If a churlish and unwilling householder can in the end be coerced by a friend's shameless persistence into giving him what he needs, how much more will God who is a loving Father supply all His children's needs?" (Barclay's Luke, pg. 149)

How did the judge respond to the widow's request for justice? "For some time he refused." Afterwards he finally gave into the woman. In contrast to the response of the judge's indifferent delay, God's response to the need of His children will be speedy. "Do you suppose God, patient as he is, will not see justice done for his chosen, who appeal to him day and night? I assure you he will not delay in seeing justice done." (Luke 18:7, 6a, Phillips)

God immediately responds to the prayer's request, although the prayer may not realize it. God has promised to answer: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in troubles, I will deliver him, and honor him." (Psalms 91:15) This verse, just quoted, is the answer to the earnest prayer: "...hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me; in the day when I call answer me speedily." (Psalms 102:2) God does promise to answer speedily: "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Isaiah 65:24)

Some may ask, "If God knows my needs and is willing to supply my needs as well as the needs of others, why pray for myself or for others?" There is at least two answers to that question: (1) "The point of prayer is to get God. Answers are most meaningful when they are thought of least; prayer is most meaningful when God is thought of most." (*Alive To God Through Prayer*, pg. 127) (2) God answers prayer with us, not for us. Thus, prayer is a co-operative endeavor. A person prays to know how he can help answer his own prayers, and while helping to answer his own prayers, he becomes a better person. "The end of the whole process of prayer is not the prayer but the person." (*Abundant Living*, pg. 230)

Thus, God speedily responds to our prayers, but God expects continued cooperation from us in seeing the prayers answered. Above all, God's primary interest in our praying is that we may know God better and become a better and more responsible person.

Why did the householder respond finally to the man who persistently knocked on his door? Simply because: he didn't want to be bothered any longer. Why did the judge finally respond to the widow? "Even though I neither fear God nor respect man, because she bothers me, I will vindicate this widow lest by her constant coming she exhausts me." The action of both the householder and the judge was from selfish motives. They no longer wanted to be bothered by what they considered a nuisance.

God is so different! God never considers man or his prayers a nuisance. He invites us to the throne of grace and mercy. He tells us to come boldly before the throne of grace. "We are not wringing gifts from an unwilling God, but we are going to one who knows our needs

*better than we know them ourselves, and whose heart towards us is the heart of generous love." Barclay's Luke, pg. 149) **Said Jesus, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."** God does not grudgingly give us gifts, but gladly and willingly. God is not cold, calculating, impersonal, and selfish. Rather, God is warm, personal, sympathetic, and self-giving.*

*"Though now ascended up on high,
He bends on earth a brother's eye;
Partaker of the human name,
He knows the frailty of our frame.*

*Our fellow sufferer yet retains
A fellow-feeling of our pains;
And still remembers in the skies
His tears, His agonies, and cries.*

*In every pang that rends the heart
The Man of sorrows has a part;
He sympathizes with our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief."*

(Barclay's Ephesians, pg. 170)

We have noted the contrast between the actions of the householder and judge and the actions of God. Let us now note the similarities between the actions of the host and widow and the actions of the true prayer.

*The host went to the householder and the widow went to the judge out of a sense of desperation. Both experienced an urgent need. Both realized that they needed outside help, that they were helpless and destitute within themselves. So it is in prayer. The motivation of prayer should be a sense of urgency and desperation. **Wrote James, "Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer."** (James 5:16) Earnestness in praying comes about when one realizes his total dependence upon God. "We can only guarantee the reality and sincerity of our desire by the passion with which we pray." (Barclay's Luke, pg. 149)*

Urgency and desperation go into one's prayers when he realizes that he is unable to carry out the Kingdom responsibilities with human ef-

fort alone. "Not by might or by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Human ingenuity or human energy can never alone accomplish God's will. Total dependence on God in prayer is necessary. This realization creates great urgency and desperation in prayer. Said George Whitefield the famous English evangelist, "O Lord, give me souls, or take my soul!" Martin Luther prayed thus on the night preceding his appearance before the Diet of Worms: "Do Thou, my God, stand by me against all the world's wisdom and reason. Oh, do it! Thou must do it. Stand by me, thou true, eternal God!" Each of these men expressed deep earnestness and urgent desperation in their prayers.

There is oftentimes urgency and desperation in prayer during times of personal or national crisis. A classic example of this is Lincoln's urgency in prayer during the Civil War. "During the most hectic days of the Civil War, one of President Lincoln's White House guests had difficulty sleeping. One night, just before the Battle of Bull Run, he heard low tones proceeding from a private room where the President slept. He got up, found the door open, and walked in. There he saw Lincoln kneeling before an open Bible, and he caught the words: 'O Thou God that heard Solomon in the night when he prayed and cried for wisdom, hear me! I cannot lead this people; I cannot guide the affairs of this nation, without Thy help. I am poor and weak and sinful. O God, thou didst hear Solomon when he cried for wisdom - hear me and save this nation!'"

The widow and the host were urgent and desperate in their requests; so must every prayer warrior be in his requests to God. Both the host and the widow went to their respective sources of help - one to the householder friend and the other to the judge. They were not satisfied to become paralyzed with fear or to be overcome with anxiety and self-pity. They went directly, personally, and boldly to the ones who had the ability and the resources to help.

How sad it is that so many do not follow the example of the widow and the host. If the host and widow went boldly to unwilling sources of help, how much more Christians ought to go to the willing and loving source of help, which is God. God's source of help is unlimited and all-powerful. Yet there are still those who will wallow in self-pity, worry, fear, and doubt.

*"O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer."*

Every Christian may go personally and boldly into the Holy of Holies to make his requests known unto God. The energy wasted on worry, should be transferred into prayer energy. Prayer is the key that unlocks the door to God. Use it often! Make prayer a practice of life, both in act and in attitude.

Mostly by implication, we learn from Jesus' parables on prayer some truths regarding conditions in praying. The answers to prayer are controlled according to certain standards and conditions.

*The host persisted so long in his knocking that finally the householder arose and gave him as much as he needed. God answers according to needs - not necessarily luxuries. Paul wrote, **"My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 4:19) Whether our need is physical or material or spiritual, God is willing to supply the need out of His exhaustless storehouse of resources. God, however, gives us what we need, not always what we want.*

PRAYER ANSWERED

*I asked for strength that I might achieve;
He made me weak that I might obey.
I asked for health that I might do greater things;
I was given grace that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.*

*I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I received nothing that I asked for, all that I hoped for,
My prayer was answered.*

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9) Continue to ask, seek, and knock.

"...yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!" (Luke 18:5) "Widow keeps bothering me."

In the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to His Father, "Not my will, but thine be done." That was hard for Jesus to pray, but He prayed it. "God is a Christ-like God; His actions are Christ-like actions; and He can answer prayer only if the thing desired is in accord with Christ. That is what Jesus meant when He said, 'If ye shall ask any thing in my name...' - in my character, according to my spirit. Don't try to get God to do something that isn't Christ-like. He can't, for He can't do something against His own nature." (Abundant Living, pg. 229)

In prayer, we must always submit our wills to God's will. Thomas a Kempis, (1379-1471), said, "Give what Thou wilt and how much Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt. Set me where Thou wilt and deal with me in all things as Thou wilt." Dwight L. Moody prayed, "Use me then, my Savior, for whatever purpose and in whatever way Thou mayest require. Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel; fill it with Thy grace."

A father gives to a child, not always what the child wants, but what is best for the child. Sometimes earthly parents are fallible in this respect, but God never is fallible. "The story is told of a minister who purchased skates for his small golden-haired daughter. He had come home late and found pinned to his pillow a note that touched him deeply: 'Dear Daddy, please, O please buy me a pair of skates.' This was the climax of a long series of requests for skates, and at the moment he went out to look for a pair. Though it was late he finally found a store open, made his purchase, and returned home to put the skates by his sleeping daughter. In the morning she went bounding into her daddy even before he was awake, threw her arms around his neck and expressed her joy. She hurried out of the house to try her new skates. However, an hour or so later, during the father's breakfast, neighbors brought in his little girl, quite dead. She had fallen backwards and had hit her head in such a way as to rob her of life. Can you imagine the pathos in the father's voice when he said, 'If only I had known, if only I

had known, I would never have purchased the skates were she to have pleaded endlessly." (*Alive To God Through Prayer*, pg. 129) God always knows what is best for us. The best of human fathers are fallible!

God sometimes seems slow in answering our prayers. However, God makes a speedy response to the earnest prayer. However, it is the visible answer of the prayer that may seem a long time in coming. This could be for several reasons: (1) "We cannot see from His perspective, nor can we always see how natural law or the disobedience of another has played roles in the final outcome." (*Alive To God Through Prayer*, pg. 125) (2) God may delay in answering our prayers externally and visibly simply in order that we do not become spoiled. "God's 'Yes' may be delayed – delayed in order to put persistence and toughened fiber in us. He often holds us off to deepen our characters, so that we won't be spiritual crybabies if we don't get everything at once." (*Abundant Living*, pg. 231)

God works in His own time. Abraham was 75 years old when he was first given a promise of having a son. Twenty-five years passed before Isaac was born. God prepared Moses for about eighty years before Moses was permitted to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. God's perspective is different from man's perspective. Man tends sometimes to run ahead of God. God will work out His perfect will in a man's life, according to His own timing, even if that timing seems slow to man.

"God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform." When Lazarus died, it seemed that his death could have been avoided if only Christ would have hurried to his sick bed to heal him. Both Mary and Martha declared to Jesus when He finally came to them, "**Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.**" (*John 11:21, 32*). However, Jesus wanted to work a miracle before the eyes of the Jews in order that they might believe in Him. Therefore, Jesus permitted Lazarus to die to give opportunity for a great miracle. What was the result of Lazarus' resurrection? "**Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.**" (*John 11:45*)

Sometimes God refrains from healing a certain person, for He can get more glory to Himself through His 'thorn in the flesh' than from His per-

fectly healthy state. This was true of Paul. *"I will say this: because these experiences I had were so tremendous, God was afraid I might be puffed up by them; so there was given me a sickness which has been a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to hurt and bother me, and prick my pride. Three different times I begged God to make me well again. Each time He said, 'No, but I am with you; that is all you need. My power shows up best in weak people.' Now I am glad to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ's power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite happy about 'the thorn', and about insults and hardships and persecutions; for when I am weak, then I am strong. The less I have, the more I depend on Him."* (II Corinthians 12:7-10)

At the conclusion of the parable of the 'Unjust Judge', Jesus asked the probing question, *"But when the Son of Man comes will He find faith on earth?"* (Luke 18:8) Jesus must have realized the real possibility of Christians to lose heart and prove unfaithful in the test of time. One thing that will keep one from growing weary is a heart-felt declaration in our prayers of 'Thy will be done', according to God's own time and way. In praying, we must follow the example of the widow and the host. Unlike the judge and the householder, we must realize that God is Personal and speedy in response and unselfish.

38.

"THE GREAT DISCOVERY!"

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure a man discovered in a field. In his excitement, he sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field—and get the treasure, too! "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. He discovered a real bargain—a pearl of great value—and sold everything he owned to purchase it! Matthew 44-46.

We have been hearing a lot about the great oil discovery in Alaska. Millions of dollars' worth of oil has been discovered. Those who have invested in the land where the oil is being found are gaining thousands and thousands of dollars from their investments. To some, this discovery is the greatest discovery of their lives. But the greatest discovery is a spiritual discovery – the discovery of Christ!

Jesus told two different parables concerning a great discovery. Let us look at the great discovery each man made in the parables. The first man discovered a treasure which lay hidden in a field. "In the ancient world there were banks, but not banks such as ordinary people could use. People in ordinary everyday practice used the ground as the safest place to keep their most cherished belongings...Although Palestine in the time of Jesus was under the Romans and under Roman law, in the ordinary, small, day to day things it was traditional Jewish law which was used; and in regard to hidden treasure Jewish Rabbinic law is quite clear: 'What finds belong to the finder, and what finds must one cause to be proclaimed? These finds belong to the finder – if a man finds scattered fruit, scattered money...these belong to the finder.'" (Barclay's Matthew, pgs. 94, 95)

The second man was searching hard for a precious pearl. "People desired to possess a lovely pearl, not only for its money value, but for its beauty. They found a pleasure in simply handling it and contemplating it. They found an aesthetic joy in simply possessing and looking at a pearl. The main sources of pearls in those days were the shores of the Red Sea and far off Britain itself; but a merchant would scour the markets of the world to find a pearl which was of surpassing beauty". (Barclay's Matthew, pg. 96)

In looking at these two parables, there stands out two common characteristics in both – great joy in the discovery, and complete sacrifice to purchase the coveted prize. Let us look at these two points from a spiritual viewpoint.

Just as the two experienced inexpressible joy in discovering their treasures, so there will be inexpressible joy in discovering God. "It might well be claimed that the discovery of the use of chloroform saved the world more pain than any other single medical discovery. Once someone asked Sir James Simpson, its discoverer, 'What do you regard as your greatest discovery?' The questioner naturally expected the answer, 'the discovery of chloroform.' But Simpson answered, 'My greatest discovery was when I discovered that Jesus Christ is my Savior.'" (Barclay's Luke, pg. 138)

In the discovery of the two men, we find this one main difference. The man who found the hidden treasure found it all unaware and unexpectantly. The man who found the pearl found it after an intense and long search.

The joy from this type of discovery is just as real as the joy resulting from finding God after a long, hard search. Some have had no background in Christian training and would not know how to conduct a long, intense search for truth. Some are so entangled in falsehood, that truth seems far removed from them, and such may not be able to recognize truth unless someone confronts them directly with it.

There are those who theoretically know the truth, but who have never personally experienced God in a vital relationship. There are those who know much about religion, but who have no personal knowledge of God. Their own notions and misconceptions about religion and God spiritually blind some.

Martin Luther stands out as a classic example of one who sought hard and long for the truth before he found it. In his childhood, he was haunted with the idea of a God who was wrathful and revengeful. As a child, he was filled with horror when he thought of God and was fearful that God would send him to hell. He was raised in a devoutly religious home but he had no peace with God, only fear and trembling.

Luther went into the monastery, thinking that as a monk surely he could gain favor with God. For nineteen years, Luther sought for

peace. He rigidly disciplined himself, thinking that through his religious sacrifice and activity that he could find peace with God.

Said Luther later in life, "I was a good monk and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I might say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his mockery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other works."

When Luther discovered, through the study of Scripture, that God identified with man's sin through the suffering of Christ on the Cross, and that Christ took man's alienation and hell for him, Luther's mind became enlightened with a new conception of God – a God who justifies the ungodly through faith. Luther records this discovery, which resulted in inexpressible joy, "I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven...If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is neither anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face."

Spiritually-speaking, when man discovers God, he must be willing to sacrifice everything to fulfill God's will in his life. Wrote Paul, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1) Jesus spoke of denying self, and taking up the cross to follow him. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, he sought eternal life. But because he was unwilling to surrender all, the young ruler went away sorrowful.

In the parables, the men sacrificed all in order to purchase the treasure. "A man found it, and hid it; and, as a result of his joy, away he goes, and sells everything that he has, and buys the field." (Mat-

threw 13:44) "When he had found a very valuable pearl, he went away and sold everything he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13:46)

The man who desires to purchase the treasure of God's will must throw caution to the wind, and invest all in God. As C.H. Dodd has pointed out, to follow Christ may "mean leaving home and friends, property, and business; it may mean a vagrant life of hardship, with an ignominious death at the end." (The Parables of the Kingdom, pg. 87)

Recall the thousands of missionaries throughout the ages who have met death at the hand of persecutors. Sacrifice in life and in death is required in order to gain the treasure of God's will here and heaven hereafter.

A one-legged schoolteacher from Scotland came to J. Hudson Taylor to offer himself for service in China. 'Why do you, with only one leg, think of going as a missionary?' asked Taylor. 'I do not see those with two legs going, so I must,' replied George Scott. He was accepted."

The paradox is this: the greater the sacrifice for God – even when it causes hardship – the greater the joy. "A rich businessman and a prominent attorney were traveling around the world. They saw many impressive sights, but agreed that something they saw in Korea was most impressive of all. One morning as they walked along a country road in Korea, they saw a boy. It amused the attorney so much that he insisted on taking a picture of the scene with his little pocket camera. Later he showed the picture to a missionary in the next village, remarking about the peculiar spectacle.

'Yes,' said the missionary, 'it seems a very strange way to plow a field, but I happen to know the boy and the old man well. They are very poor. However, when the little Church was built here in the village, they wanted to contribute something. They had no money. They had no grain to spare and winter was coming on, so they sold their ox and gave the money to the Church building fund, and now, minus the valuable animal they have to pull the plow themselves.' The man looked at each other for a moment, and then the attorney said, 'But what a stupendous sacrifice! Why did you allow it?' 'They did not feel that way about it. They regarded it as a great joy that they had an ox to give to the Lord's work.'"

God has not promised ease, but He has promised grace and strength for each task, however difficult. Kagawa wrote the following poem,

which speaks about dedication and sacrifice to Christ's work in a difficult area - a slum.

"Why Go To the Slums"?

*He cannot save himself-
Long ago
The crowds
Reviled a Man
Who Came
To save them.
And I,
Who fain would follow Him,
Am spent.
For I can see
No hope
For the slums
Because that,
First of all,
This thing
Is wrong -
That man
Should crowd
Thus in the dearth,
And dark,
And dirt -
Should crowd and throng...
But oh,
The pity, the pity!
My people
Must stay
In the city;
So this six-foot shack
That shelters me
Is the only place
Where I want to be."*

(Jessie Trout, Kagawa, pgs. 24, 25)

Wrote Paul to the Corinthian Church for which Paul sacrificed so much. *"I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls."* (II Corinthians 12:15) What is the reward of sacrifice? Satisfaction, but that is not all. "When the late Dr. Henry Morrison came home from one of his many travels, he arrived in New York at the same time and on the same ship that brought Teddy Roosevelt from his hunting trip to Africa. Literally thousands swarmed the docks to greet the noted hunter, but not a soul was there to welcome Dr. Morrison. Satan whispered to him, 'Aha, see how they greet the man of the world, and you, one of God's preachers, without a single soul to greet you.' In the loneliness of his heart there could have been place for hurt, but the Spirit sweetly whispered, 'Yes, but Henry, you are not home yet!'" (Entire Sanctification: Studies in Christian Holiness, pg. 100)

What is the greatest discovery of all? To discover God as a personal Friend and your Guide in life; to find God's will here, and heaven hereafter (the Treasure) involves lifetime sacrifice, which, in its turn, brings joy. Are you willing to sacrifice anything to find and to do the will of God? Paul counted all things as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ! You, too, will be wise if you surrender everything in order to find Life's Greatest Treasure - The Lord Jesus Christ!

39.

"WHAT ARE YOUR BUILDING MATERIALS?"

"All who listen to my instructions and follow them are wise, like a man who builds his house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents, and the floods rise and the storm winds beat against his house, it won't collapse, for it is built on rock. "But those who hear my instructions and ignore them are foolish, like a man who builds his house on sand. For when the rains and floods come, and storm winds beat against his house, it will fall with a mighty crash." Matthew 7:24-27.

All of us remember the story of the three pigs, one of whom built his house out of straw, another out of sticks, and the third out of brick. The first and second pigs got their houses quickly built, but the third took great time and effort in building his house. The wolf came and destroyed the house which was made out of straw and the one made out of sticks, but the wolf was unable to move the house made out of bricks. There are many wolves that come to test our lives. Jesus tells a story which reminds me so much of the story of the three pigs. The story of the wise and the foolish man is very interesting.

It is important to understand the geographical circumstances from which this story was drawn. "In Palestine, in summer many of the rivers dried up altogether and left a sandy river bed empty of water. But in winter, after the September rains had come, the empty river bed became a raging torrent. Now many a man, looking for a site for a house, found an inviting stretch of sand and built there only to discover when the winter came that he had built his house in the middle of a raging river which swept the house away. But the wise man reached for rock, where it was much more difficult to build and where it was hard labor to cut out the foundations. But when the wild winter weather came his toil was amply repaid, for his house stood strong and firm and secure." (Barclay's Luke, pg. 81)

Let us look at this story of the wise and foolish man, and seek to understand the lessons for life that should be drawn from it, especially considering all that has gone before in the Sermon on the Mount.

In considering the building of a house, there are two main things to be considered - superstructure and the foundation. Let us look at the ways in which the two men in our story took these into consideration in their building pursuit.

The superstructure is that part of the house which is above ground and which is most obviously and easily seen in a house. There is no mention made in the story that there was any difference in the superstructures of the two houses. A superficial investigation of the two houses would say that the houses were alike.

We can deduce from this that oftentimes the outward appearance of a Christian and a pseudo-Christian is about the same. Both appear in Church, both wear the same clothes, both perform nice deeds, both use religious terminology, both are respectable and clean, both give money to the Church and to charitable organizations. Oftentimes, the pseudo-Christian has the same general desires as the genuine Christian. Both want peace, security, and forgiveness. Both want happiness and satisfaction and fulfillment. Both seek consolation and rest from earth's trials. Both like to sit in the quiet atmosphere of a Church, and both like social involvements within the Church. Both have the community's welfare at heart. Both want guidance in the difficult decisions of life. The pseudo-Christian wants a better life, the same as does the genuine Christian. Many times the pseudo-Christian even wants to see religious demonstrations and excitement. Think of Simon the sorcerer in Samaria (Acts 9) who wanted to perform miracles and have the same spiritual power as Peter and John. So we see that on the outside there is many times little difference between the true Christian and the nominal Christian. (Lloyd-Jones, Sermon on the Mount, pgs. 301, 302)

It is like two fruit trees growing side by side, alike in appearance. Yet one tree is fertile and the other is sterile. One bears fruit, the other doesn't. Regardless of how much they look alike, it is only the fertile, fruit-bearing tree that is worthy of continued existence. The infertile tree will be destroyed. Jesus said that the wheat and the tares grow up together, but when the harvest comes, only the wheat will be saved. The tares will be destroyed, because, however much they look like wheat, they are useless.

The nominal and the genuine Christian have much in common, but there is one thing they don't have in common - a good foundation. On the surface, all may appear the same, but under the surface there is a great difference. One is built on a solid foundation and will last; the other is built on the shifting sand and will collapse in the storm.

Let us then look more carefully at their houses and see what constitutes the great difference between these two builders.

The wise man built his house upon a solid, rock foundation. Who is the man who builds his house upon a solid, rock foundation? He is the man who both listens and who transforms what he hears into action. He both hears and does.

The wise man seriously contemplates the serious demands of Christianity. The one who builds on the solid foundation is one who counts and accepts the cost of being a disciple of Christ. Jesus illustrated this:

"Which of you, if he wishes to build a tower, does not first sit down and reckon up the expense, to see whether he has enough to finish it? This he does lest, when he has laid the foundation and is unable to complete the work, all who see him begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was unable to finish the job'. Or, what king when he is going to engage battle with another king, does not first sit down and take counsel, whether he is able with the thousand men to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he finds he cannot, while he is still distant, he sends an embassy and asks for terms for peace." (Luke 14:28-33)

The wise man is not hasty or compulsive. He does not leap before he looks. He looks seriously at the demands of Christ and then he takes the leap of faith. The wise man not only hears but he transfers what he hears into action. A doctor's orders are only valuable as they are obeyed. The test of good preaching is in terms of what changes it produces. The test of man's stability is determined by the man's obedience or lack of obedience to God's Word.

The wise man is one who puts the Sermon on the Mount into practice, not by his own effort alone, but by realizing his own weakness and sin and thus turning to God in repentance and faith. He not only listens to the beatitudes, which bless the poor in spirit and those that mourn, but he actually humbles himself in repentance and sorrow before God

and hungers for God's righteousness. He daily and patiently seeks God's guidance in living the Christian life. He searches God's Word and applies it to his life. He works out his salvation with fear and trembling and does not give up when the Word is hard to understand and hard to apply. Rather, he keeps on trying and trusting, and he accepts God's chastening, knowing that it is for his own good and spiritual development.

What is life like which is built upon the solid foundation? It is the life that considers the attitude and the motive just as important as the act. It is the life that considers eternal values primarily and temporal values secondarily. It is the life whose pattern is Christ. The building blocks of the foundation are 'righteousness', 'holiness', and 'compassion'.

The foolish man built his house upon the sand. He was impatient and hasty. He saw things in the light of the moment instead of in the light of eternity. He failed to realize that the long view is the right view.

The foolish man was complacent and self-sufficient. He took things into his own hands and refused to consult an expert architect. To consult an architect would cause him much inconvenience and expense, for a good architect would demand that a solid foundation be laid before the house could be built.

The pseudo-Christian does not want to go to the inconvenience and expense of digging a foundation. He is self-sufficient and complacent, not really consulting the Bible in its entirety, but only choosing from it what sounds appealing to him. To obey the Biblical message in its entirety would cause conviction and would lead to the humiliating process of repentance. He does not want to change his life pattern, although he does want a form of religion and respectability. Says Charles Allen: "Today we want God's blessings without the pain of God's purging. We want sermons on how to win friends, how to have peace of mind, and how to forget our fears. But we must remember that Christ came to make men good rather than merely to make men feel good." (God's Psychiatry, pg. 134)

The pseudo-Christian is very ready to build a superstructure for the world to see - display his piety and right the social injustices about him and be a great humanitarian - but he fails to realize that only as he builds a solid foundation on faith and repentance, can his superstruc-

ture of good works last. His superstructure is made up of a variety of pleasing materials - culture, intellect, appearance, success, riches, and honor, but these five materials will be swept away and perish because they have no solid foundation upon which to rest. The foolish man fails to realize that only as he goes down, can he go up. He ignores Peter's advice: **"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."** (I Peter 5:6)

The foolish man is shortsighted, building only for the present, not for the future storms of life! He has only the short view, not the long view. Building only for the moment, not for eternity, when the storm of death and the judgment comes! Every man must ultimately face the storm, in time and in eternity.

God sends the rain upon the just and the unjust, and God also permits the storm to come to the righteous as well as to the unrighteous. The storm may come sooner or later, but the storm will surely come. The storm may be different for every man, but each man must face the storm. Our attention then is not whether or not there shall be storms, but how a man faces the storms.

There is the storm of temptations. Jesus faced the temptation of using His supernatural powers in an illegitimate and selfish manner. We too face the temptation to use our powers, abilities, and influences in a selfish way. The temptation is a storm because the temptation is alluring. It is easy to yield to it; it is hard to resist it. "We are brought suddenly face to face with an inducement to evil that we feel, if we accept, must line our pathway with roses. If we refuse, life will become a desert." (Chappell's Sermon on the Mount, pgs. 222, 223) **"All are tempted and thus all face the storm, but only those whose foundation is laid on Christ, can pass through the storm"**. (Ephesians 6:13)

The storm that faces a man may be in the form of a bitter loss. All lose loved ones, but the way a man faces this storm is the important thing. Some become bitter and blame God. Others say along with Job: **"the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."** The loss may be a loss of one's health. Some become hardened by extended illness. Others become sweeter and reflect their love more beautifully than ever before. Extended illness and physical pain is one of the severest storms that a man can face, but

the severer the test the greater the opportunity to prove the strength of one's foundation. The man whose foundation is laid on Christ can say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

The storm that faces a man may not even appear as a storm. Prosperity is the downfall of many. Israel became prosperous and this led to decline, decay, and final destruction. There is so much truth in the saying, "When a Christian begins to make money, God gains a fortune or loses a man." The greedy and grasping hand is the opposite of the open and giving hand. Money is the test to determine what kind of hand you will have. "There are two ways to be wealthy – one is in the abundance of your possessions, and the other is in fewness of your wants." (E. Stanley Jones, Abundant Living, pg. 300) The tragedy of so many is that they consider the abundance of things the worth of a man, and in their getting to the top materially, they have brought themselves to the bottom spiritually.

The sand beds of time upon which men build their life are many, but all of these sand beds have one common characteristic – none stands the storms of life. The world's sand beds are unstable, temporary, passing. They are subject to the changes of life and to the chances of life. If our foundation is health, the storm of disease can rob us of that. If our foundation is stocks, the storm of depression can dissolve them. If our foundation is beauty, the erosion of time will slowly fade it away. If our foundation is fame, the whining winds of man's whim will suddenly show it to be an illusion. If our foundation is intellect, the slow but sure deteriorating storm of time will let it rot away. For "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God (or builds on the foundation of Christ) abideth forever." The ungodly who builds on the sand beds of time is "like the chaff which the wind driveth away", but the godly who builds on the rock of righteousness is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water" – strong, useful, permanent.

The storms of life will surely cause distress and wreckage to the man who builds on the shifting sands of time, but the worst and more devastating storm of all is the storm of Final Judgment. It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this comes the judgment. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, for they fall into the arms of a wrathful God. "Whosoever is not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire." (Revelations 20:15) "He will bring the

people of the world before Him in judgment, to receive just punishment." (Jude 15, Living Bible)

*The pseudo-Christian, who has had a superficial resemblance to the Christian, and who, as a tare has grown up side by side with the wheat, will in the end be Matthew 13:24-30 harvested with the wheat. Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven²⁵ may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed²⁶ tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the²⁶ wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷ The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An²⁷ enemy has done this!' The slaves *said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' ²⁸ But he *said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.*

"Then the Righteous Judge will say, "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matthew 13:30b) To the pseudo-Christian, the false prophet, the disobedient, Christ will let the storm of his wrath and judgment come upon them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:23) The fury of that storm will last.

Is there any way to pass through that storm? Yes, by building your foundation upon Solid Rock - Christ Jesus. Those who hear and who do what Christ commands will find safety, security, and eternal life. They will hear the Master say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:24)

*Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel
To strike the blow.*

*Knowledge we ask not, knowledge Thou hast lent,
But Lord, the will – there lies our bitter need,
Give us to build above the deep intent
The deed, the deed.*

(Quoted by Barclay in 'And Jesus Said', pg. 222)

40.

"GOD'S EQUAL REWARD TO THE DAY LABORERS!"

"The kingdom from² heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After agreeing to pay the workers one denarius² a day, he sent them into his vineyard.³ When he went out about nine o'clock,⁴ he saw others standing in the marketplace without work. He told them, 'You go into the vineyard, too, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So off they went. He went out again about noon and about three o'clock⁵ and did the same thing. About five o'clock⁶ he went out and found some others standing around. He asked them, 'Why are you standing here all day long without work?' They told him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He told them, 'You go into the vineyard as well.' "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his manager, 'Call the workers, and give them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' Those who were hired at five o'clock⁷ came, and each received a denarius. "When the first came, they thought they would receive more, but each received a denarius as well. When they received it, they began to complain to the landowner, 'These last fellows worked only one hour, but you paid them the same as us, and we've been working all day,⁸ enduring the scorching heat!' But he told one of them, 'Friend, I'm not treating you unfairly. You did agree with me for a denarius, didn't you? Take what is yours and go. I want to give this last man as much as I gave you: I am allowed to do what I want with my own money, am I not? Or are you envious⁹ because I'm generous?' "In the same way, the last will be first, and the first will be last, because many are called, but few are chosen. He that is hired for a day, may demand it all the night, and he that is hired for a night may demand it all the day: he that is hired for hours, may demand it all the night, and all the day; he that is hired for a week, he that is hired for a month, he that is hired for a year, he that is hired for seven, if he goes out in the day, may demand all the day; and if he goes out in the night, he may demand it all the night, and all the day." Mathew 20:1-16.

The story of the laborers in the vineyard teaches some important lessons about God, man, and rewards. According to strict justice, the man who worked twelve hours should have gotten more money than the man who worked only one hour. However, Jesus used this rather shocking story to cause men to listen to the real lessons which the parable seeks to teach.

This parable especially teaches us lessons regarding rewards.

- 1. God's reward is based on grace, not on works;*
- 2. God's reward is based on faithfulness to opportunity.*

Both the man who worked one hour and the man, who worked twelve hours, got one penny. And so it is in the spiritual realm. The man who has labored for an entire lifetime for God, and the man who is a death-bed repentant, each gets heaven as his reward. To each man, heaven will be a place of unsurpassed joy and uncompetitive fellowship. The Scripture does not speak of levels of heaven, with one level given to one man and another level given to another man. All Christians will dwell in blessed fellowship together and forever.

*The scripture says, **"For my grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8, 9, RSV)* Striving to earn God's favor and merit one's salvation leads to pride, and pride and boasting is the root of all sin. Man cannot save himself, for God's favor can only be gained by presenting a perfect life to Him. The only perfect life is Christ; therefore only as man is hid in Christ and clothed with Christ's garments of righteousness, can man gain God's favor and salvation. Furthermore, sin is not ultimately a transgression against law, but a transgression against love. Theoretically speaking, when one breaks a law, he can pay for his transgression by accepting the law's penalty. However, one can never pay for a transgression against love. One who transgresses against love must simply seek the forgiveness of the one against whose love he has sinned. No amount of work can pay the penalty of the sin against love. Grace alone can forgive. And so it is with God. No amount of works can merit God's forgiveness, for it is love that has been sinned against. Grace alone can meet man's need for forgiveness. So man is not saved on the basis of how long he has served God, but on the basis of God's grace. Therefore, the thief on the cross who repented in his dying

hour is just as saved as any of Christ's apostles who served him many years. Said Billy Graham, "When I get to the gates of heaven, I am not going to say 'Let me in for I have preached to large crowds of people,' but I will say, 'Let me in for I have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.'"

John Wesley trod several roads before he found the road that led to peace with God. He tried the road of mysticism and withdrawal. He felt he could find peace with God if he found a place of seclusion from men and society. He therefore went to the American wilderness of Georgia, but he finally came back to England still filled with inner turmoil. John Wesley trod the road of legalism but found no peace. He sought to gain God's favor through a rigorous discipline of his time, money, and interests. He carefully divided his time, gave liberally, and engaged in religious activities such as prayer, reading, and fasting with great zeal. Wesley did not find peace with God through legalism. Wesley also failed to find peace in the ways of ritualism; careful observance of Church rituals and ceremonies or ordinances. Wesley's great mind of reason did not give his questing heart peace either. The ways of reason, as well as the ways of withdrawal, legalism, and ritualism were all ways of human effort – works instead of grace. Wesley learned that it was not by works of righteousness which man performs, but by the sheer grace and mercy of God, that man is saved. He understood well the relationship between faith and works as preached by Paul and James. Man is not saved by works, but only by grace, but the saved man will perform works of love as a demonstration of his faith and as an expression of gratitude to God for salvation.

Paul's letter to Titus (Titus 3:3-7) is a clear description of salvation by grace. "For we too were once senseless, disobedient, misguided, slaves to all kinds of desires and pleasures, living in maliciousness and envy, detestable ourselves, and hating each other. But when the goodness and the love to men of God our Savior appeared, it was not by works wrought in righteousness, which we ourselves had done, but by His own mercy that He saved us. That saving act was made effective to us through that washing, through which there comes to us the rebirth and the renewal which are the work of the Holy Spirit, whom He richly poured out upon us, through Jesus Christ our Savior. And the aim of all this was that we might be put into a right relationship with God through His grace, and so enter into possession of

eternal life, for which we have been taught to hope.” (Barclay, Titus 3:3-7)

We see in this passage that it is God’s initiative – His mercy, goodness, and love – that produces man’s salvation. Salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit – not man’s work – and heaven is God’s reward, given on an equal basis to all who accept God’s grace.

GOD’S REWARD IS BASED ON FAITHFULNESS TO OPPORTUNITY. This parable may also be looked at in terms of reward for service to God. If so it had a special meaning to Jesus’ apostles when it was first spoken. “It is in one sense a warning to the disciples. It is as if Jesus said to them, ‘You have received the great privilege of coming into the Christian Church and fellowship very early and very soon, right at the beginning. The time will come when, in the later days, others will come in. You must not claim a special honor and a special place because you were Christians before they were. All men, no matter when they come are equally precious and valuable to God.’” (Barclay’s Matthew, vs. 2, pgs. 246, 247)

God has no respect to persons. God has no favorites and does not base honor upon seniority. All who come to Christ – be they early-comers or latecomers – are precious to Christ. In fact, the new and latecomers may well have many lessons to teach the early-comers. There is so many times a freshness, vitality, and radiance, about new Christians, which can give life to older Christians who sometimes become too satisfied with status quo. New methods and new ideas oftentimes come from new Christians. The Christian of the eleventh hour has just as great of a reward as the Christian of the first hour if each used his opportunity to the fullest. Reward is based on faithfulness to opportunity. The worker of the eleventh hour did not have the same opportunity that the man of the first hour had. However, the eleventh-hour worker used his opportunity to the full just as the first-hour worker. Both received reward according to their faithfulness in opportunity – a penny, equal reward.

This same principle can be applied to the reward received by a short life lived for Christ in comparison to the reward received by a long life lived for Christ. Should not the person who lives many years for Christ receive a greater reward than the person who lives a few years for Christ? It is true that the Bible teaches a judgment of rewards and

evaluation of works. However, this judgment of rewards will be based on faithfulness to opportunity.

*John and Betty Stam were a young missionary couple who were martyred for Christ by the Communists, only a short time after they had arrived for missionary service in China. After receiving word of the martyrdom, John's younger brother wrote this comforting letter: "Many people would call our loss of Betty and John a terrible tragedy that should fill us with misery and despair. But I do not see it in this way, because I am a Christian and can see God's hand behind it all. Instead of throwing us into despondency, it fills us with greater trust in God, and greater determination to serve Him with our lives. We do not see the meaning of it all, now, but some day we shall understand. In God's work the value of a life lived for Him is measured not by length but by quality of service, and by the fulfillment of His purposes for that life. Surely His purposes were fulfilled in Betty and John, and are being fulfilled: so their service was completed." (Mrs. Howard Taylor, *The Triumph of John and Betty Stam*, pg. 115)*

*This same principle – reward based on faithfulness to opportunity – can be applied in another way. Complete faithfulness in a small context is rewarded just as much as faithfulness in a large context. "He (God) gave to D.L. Moody the opportunity of a waiting nation, of two nations, and when his day's work was done, he had his penny, because he was gloriously faithful to his opportunity. There is a woman somewhere among the hills and mountains, poor, struggling, striving, but she has two children, and she puts her life into the business of training them for God. We do not know her. We never heard of her, not even in the columns of the religious press, but she has gone. Her children have grown up; she has gone on. She got her penny!" (G. C. Morgan, *Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord*, pg. 115)*

Unto whom much is given, much will be required. Unto whom little is given, little will be required. But both, if they have used their opportunities, will receive the same reward. "If I were doing something that I felt was worthwhile, I might feel like going ahead", said a boy who was doing routine work on a small job. An older fellow workman laughed at him. 'Listen, boy', he said, 'in the days when wagons were as common a sight as cars are now, there was an old saying that the little front wheel of a wagon traveled just as far as the big hind wheel, only it had to turn around oftener.' He said, 'That goes for your work, Bob. It may

not look big and important, but its work that needs doing. The shop couldn't do without it, any more than the wagon could do without the little front wheels. Don't you despise your work, boy, nor get discouraged because it isn't bigger. It helps the shop get there with its total output, just the same as the big jobs do', and he nodded as he saw the discontent fade from Bob's face and a smile of satisfaction take its place...The little wheels get there as fast and as well as the big ones." (Rosell, pg. 66) Said Mr. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary, "A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in a little thing is a great thing." "There are no 'little' people or 'big' people in God's Kingdom. There are only people who are faithful or unfaithful to their opportunities. He who is faithful in the little task is just as important to God as he who is faithful in the big tasks. Be faithful to your opportunities. (Mrs. Howard Taylor, The Triumph of John and Betty Stam, pg. 96)

Faithfulness to opportunity - regardless of the opportunity - has its reward. "Our talents may be few, these may be small, but unto him is due our best, our all."

THE MAN WITH THE CONSECRATED CAR

*He couldn't speak before a crowd,
He couldn't teach a class.
But when he came to Sunday School,
He brought the folks 'enmasse'.*

*He couldn't sing to save his life;
In public he couldn't pray.
But always his 'jalopy' was just
Crammed on each Lord's Day.*

*And although he could not sing,
Nor teach, nor lead in prayer,
He listened well, he had a smile, and
He was always there.
With all the others whom he brought,
Who lived both near and far -
And God's work prospered - for he
Had a consecrated car.*

The parable of the workers in the vineyard has important lessons for every Christian. No one dare think that he has a better chance of heaven because he has lived a Christian life longer than another person, or that he will be in a higher level in heaven than others who have been a Christian a shorter time. To think such is to revert back to works, based on calculations. Salvation is by grace based on God's mercy and love. All who accept God's grace will live together in heaven, equally and forever.

Secondly, the parable speaks about reward for service. God's reward for service is based on faithfulness to opportunity. Latecomers to Christianity are just as precious to God as early-comers and will receive their reward, based on faithfulness to their opportunity, received ever so late. Opportunity fully received by a life short lived has as great a reward as the reward received for opportunity fully received by a lifelong lived. Faithfulness in a little thing has as great reward as faithfulness in a big thing. God's reward is based on faithfulness to the opportunities given.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard proclaims the unmerited love of God. That's a source of amazement for some and alarm for others. There are people who find it difficult to believe that God loves them in spite of what they have been or done. But Jesus is very clear in the parable: The wage is the same for all. But what a wage! Life now and forever: abundant, and glorious throughout eternity. The important thing is not when but that we come into the vineyard.

41.

"BIG THINGS HAVE SMALL BEGINNINGS!"

"Here is another of his illustrations: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a tiny mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds but becomes the largest of plants, and grows into a tree where birds can come and find shelter.'" Matthew 13:31-32

Bigness is worshipped in our society. "We live in an age which worships size and numbers." (Barclay's 'And Jesus Said', pg. 54) Big universities are considered better than small private colleges, although in reality small schools many times have a better academic atmosphere. Large supermarkets are considered to be better than the small corner grocery store. Large churches with impressive facilities are considered superior to small churches, although the latter may have as high quality of education, worship, and fellowship. Large cars are considered as more elite than small cars, although the energy crisis is making the American public have second thoughts about big cars. Big corporations are considered better than small businesses, and large ranches are considered superior to the small farms and ranches.

If bigness is worshipped in our society, we can also say that bigness is vulnerable. Why? Because bigness depends upon the labors of individuals. A big corporation is dependent upon a lonely man in a laboratory, doing research. A big supermarket is dependent upon the satisfaction of its individual customers. A big Church is dependent upon the faithfulness and love of its individual members, many of whom must fill volunteer positions. A big nation depends upon the strength of its individuals families. It is still true that a big chain is dependent upon the strength of its individual small links.

There is nothing inherently wrong with bigness. Many things are big because they were first good, and because they were good, they became big. But neither is a small thing automatically inferior. Usually something must be small before it can be big. In fact, most big things have a small beginning. Also, weak things many times have powerful potentials! Jesus taught these simple truths through the simple parable of the small mustard seed.

This principle is illustrated in countless ways. "On December 11th, 1620, a ship called 'The Mayflower' set sail from England to America because the people in her could not find the religious liberty they desired. On that ship there were only 101 people, and she herself was but a tiny thing. Yet the plain fact of history is that that voyage from Plymouth in 1620 by that little ship and that little group did more to change the world than any of the voyages of the great liners in the centuries to come." (Barclay's 'And He Said', pg. 54)

The nation of Israel started with one individual - Abraham, who was faithful and obedient to God's call. "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. So from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore." (Hebrews 11:11, 12)

The Christian Church started with single individuals who responded to Christ's call to follow Him. "It is all personal and individual. 'Follow me', "Follow me', and Matthew leaves his tax-table standing in the street; and the sons of Zebedee pull hastily in over the blue water to give themselves to the Master, who had called them from the shore. And what came next? Why, the most natural thing in the entire world, - that which must always come when single men believe the same truth, or are driven on by the same impulse. When did a host of scholars ever sit at the same teacher's feet and not become a school? When did a host of separate soldiers go each to fight the same enemy and not be drawn into an army? All the individual believers in and followers of Christ, become one in their common loyalty and love. And so out of the crowd of disciples comes the Church." (The Light of the World, Phillips Brooks, pgs. 178, 179)

As tiny mustard seed, which grows into the biggest of herbs, big enough to have birds nest in the tree-like bush, so with Christianity! It started small and has now encircled the globe!

"He (Jesus) was born in 6 B.C., of a young woman not married, in an out-of-the-way place called Bethlehem; He grew up in an insanitary village named Nazareth. With no known distinction of birth, belonging to a despised people, denied the best education of His day and race, He was trained as a carpenter. At about thirty years of age, He laid aside

the tools of His trade and began to teach and preach and heal. Although the common people heard him gladly, He never touched world affairs in any obvious way. His whole life was lived in one obscure province of the Roman Empire, and His travels were limited to an area half the size of Wales. After three years of ministry, He was arrested on suspicion of leading a popular revolt, and was executed by crucifixion. The life, which began in shadowed obscurity, ended in public shame. But not very public as the whole matter seemed beneath the interest of 'people of quality'. His name was so unimportant that it wasn't even mentioned in any official document which has ever come to light.

"Two thousand years have passed by. Nearly a third of the world worships Him. It is a safe guess to say that another third holds Him (as Mr. Gandhi did) in enormous respect. He has inspired the mightiest music and the greatest art the world has ever known. People have died for Him in every generation since He himself suffered. Multitudes would die for Him today. Indeed, some who deny belief in all religion consider that His rule of love would save the world.

"Who was this strange peerless Person? The Christian Church is built on the conviction that He was God Himself." (Sangster's Daily Readings, pg. 54)

Christianity was a despised group of people bitterly persecuted and killed by Rome. But "there was a day when Christianity overcame its rivals and invaded the Empire itself. The mustard seed becomes a tree!" (James Kennedy, The Parables, pg. 87)

The Kingdom of God started with a lowly Nazarene - Jesus. The Kingdom of God, which started like a small mustard seed is now a growing tree, spreading its branches around the world! The Kingdom of God shall someday be universal and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Never despise little things. "For, little is much if God is in it!" Like mustard seed, the little will become much. Big things have small beginnings!

"A great blow is struck against slavery when a man named Paul writes to a Christian friend (Philemon) concerning his runaway slave

(Onesimus) and refers to the slave as a Christian brother." (Kennedy, pg. 81)

"On the one hundredth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, John T. McCutcheon drew a famous cartoon. He showed two Kentucky backwoods men standing at the edge of a wood in the winter. The snow was on the ground and the trees were bare. One of the men asked the other, 'Anything new?' The other man replies, 'Nothing much, Oh, there's a new baby over at Tom Lincoln's.'" Nothing ever happens around here, nothing except the birth of America's greatest man!" (Ibid, pg. 82)

The smallest of herb seeds grows into the largest of herbs. Mustard seed "was universally used as the type of anything that was infinitesimally small." (Barclay, Ibid, pg. 52) We dare not judge anything by its size.

Never forget that weak things have powerful potential! "There is an experiment which shows the effect of small forces on great masses. It can be performed in two ways. One is to suspend from the ceiling a block of iron weighing more than a hundredweight and to suspend beside it a cork which weighs less than an ounce. The cork is then swung against the iron in little blows. It seems impossible that the gentle tap of the cork will ever have any effect on the mass of iron and indeed at first nothing seems to happen. But after a while the iron begins to tremble; then to move; and finally it is swinging in a wide arc as a result of the continuous tapping of the cork." (Barclay, pg. 55)

Says the great preacher William Sangster, "the power of even one man or woman with God is immensely potent." (Daily Readings, pg. 50) In Taiwan, there is the Church of the Lepers, a work among rejected people which was begun by a great lady named Lillian Dixon. "It's called the Mustard Seed Ministry. An infinitesimally small seed of trust has unleashed the infinite power of God. Lillian believed that God had called her to begin the work. She trusted Him completely. Money began coming in from all over the world. The work expanded. Now the results tower like a great mustard tree. She was tempted often to give up. The Lord wanted to amaze the world with what He could do with a little lady who had a grain of faith. The glory is now given to Him." (Ogilvie, Autobiography of God, pg. 92)

Throughout history, God has chosen weak men through whom He performed mighty works! **"For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."** (I Corinthians 1:26-29)

"Christianity (in its early days) made people who were things into real men and women, more, into sons and daughters of God; it gave those who had no respect, their self-respect; it gave those who had no life, life eternal; it told men that, even if they did not matter to other men, they still mattered intensely to God. It told men who, in the eyes of the world were worthless, that, in the eyes of God they were worth the death of his only Son. Christianity was, and still is, the most uplifting thing in the whole universe." (Barclay's Corinthians, pg. 22)

God chose what seemed weak to the world - a little Jewish maid - to be the mother of the Christ! God chose a slow student, one who on one occasion was called a very slow student, to become one of the world's greatest Bible commentators - Adam Clarke!

*God today chooses weak, faltering people to be His children. Through these ordinary people - people who have no special credentials like the disciples - to do a mighty work of love in His world. Some of God's greatest people, saints, have had weak beginnings. There is no limit to what God's power, released into weak people, can do! The weakest Christian on his knees is stronger than the strongest man on his feet without God! Remember, **"The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results."** (James 5:16, Living Bible) 'More is wrought through prayer, than the world dreams of!'*

"He (God) begins with the smallest of mustard seed beginnings. Our faltering confession of belief in Him starts a recreative, regenerating process that never stops. We look back on that first prayer of commitment and are amazed at what the Lord has done with our character and personality." (Ogilvie, pg. 92)

Our spiritual growth seems slow, and many times we are very conscious of our weaknesses. But remember, a little mustard seed has great potential. And a little faith in a great God works great miracles.

"The issue is not the size of your faith any more than the light switch is electricity. Our only task is to flip the switch." (Ogilvie, pg. 92)

What makes the little mustard seed so powerful is the fact that it is placed in the soil, which nourishes it into a great bush. What makes our little faith valuable is the fact that it is placed in God, the soil of our faith, which nourishes our faith into a life of great love and fruitful works. The object of one's faith determines the value of one's faith. It is not the greatness of the faith, but the greatness of the one in whom we place our faith. A little mustard seed of faith is sufficient to produce a great life, a life that is like a tree, with many branches and much fruit.

*"When we are tempted to be discouraged, we need to remember that it's not the size of our faith, but the immensity of God's power that makes the difference." (Ogilvie, pg. 91) **"And I am sure that he (God) who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."** (Philippians 1:6, RSV)*

Jesus gave this parable to encourage people who were tempted to 'throw in the towel'. Jesus' disciples were discouraged. The disciples were bewildered and discouraged. "They had hoped for so much and so little had happened. It seemed in fact that even the little that had happened was in serious danger of being engulfed by the growing waves of opposition to Jesus...The crowds abandoned Him (Christ), and it was already clear that the mission of Jesus which had started with such promise was likely to issue in failure and disaster. They had begun with such high hopes and these hopes were now apparently to be disappointed. So Jesus told this parable to help them see that the beginning might seem small but no man knew to what they would yet grow." (Barclay, pg. 53)

The future is brimming with possibilities for the person who plants a mustard seed in the soil of God's love and power. Before you give up, remember the Parable of the Mustard Seed! Remember, big things have small beginnings and also remember, weak things have powerful potentials!

42.

"LET US RUN AFTER PEACE!"

The Bible tells us (believers) to "...'run after peace' until we finally 'catch' it! And hold on to it!" (I Peter 3:11) There are only two-types of people on the earth - 'Peace Makers' whom Jesus said are the 'children of God'. (Matthew 5) and 'Trouble Makers' (enemies of peace)!

Trouble Makers are ones that stir up trouble among people, ones that are critical. Ones who are negative in their speech, who slander, lie, and spread discontent. One who plans schemes with the motives to destroy people or bear grudges. They sow hate, revenge, and bear false witness regarding the innocent ones. Such persons (troublemakers) are sadly doing the same kind of work that Satan himself does! They are agents of evil and workers of iniquity. They spend their time conceiving plots ('behind the back maneuvers') to bring people down, certainly not to build up persons!

In contrast, those who are 'running to find and to hold on to peace' are those who go to 'great lengths' to bring reconciliation between persons who are 'on edge' (at odds) with one another! Putting their own interests aside (unselfishly and self-forgetfully), these noble peacemakers are more interested in the concerns (burdens) of others, than they are in their own concerns and interests. They 'reach out in love' to help others, and they regularly give their ears to listen to the heartaches of others. They find it easy to pray for others, and they have a generous hand to give to help meet the basic physical needs of others around them. They offer a sympathizing tear, openly and unashamedly to the broken-hearted. On the other hand, without any feeling of jealousy, they 'rejoice with those who rejoice'. They are 'all things unto all men' (adaptable). They seek to 'win the lost', 'encourage the down-trodden', 'comfort the sorrowing', 'befriend the lonely', 'provide wise counsel to the confused', 'extend earnest prayer to the spiritually embattled', 'offer friendship to the lonely', 'provide insight to the depressed', g Give 'food for the hungry', share the 'Good News' of Salvation to the imprisoned', and more.

Yes, the peacemaker is like the 'Prince of Peace' (Jesus Christ). Just as Christ has provided a 'Bridge' by which all persons can come into

fellowship with the Living God, so the 'Children of Peace' have the same goal. Take the hand of a sinner and place it into the 'Hand of God'! That creates 'Reconciliation and Peace'!

43.

"BE SURE TO COUNT THE COST!"

Great crowds were following him. He turned around and addressed them as follows: "Anyone who wants to be my follower must love me far more than he does his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—yes, more than his own life—otherwise he cannot be my disciple. And no one can be my disciple who does not carry his own cross and follow me. "But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if he has enough money to pay the bills? Otherwise he might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh! "See that fellow there?" they would mock. 'He started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!' "Or what king would ever dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counselors and discussing whether his army of 10,000 is strong enough to defeat the 20,000 men who are marching against him? "If the decision is negative, then while the enemy troops are still far away, he will send a truce team to discuss terms of peace. So no one can become my disciple unless he first sits down and counts his blessings—and then renounces them all for me. Luke 14:25-33

When Jesus told these parables, He was on His way to Jerusalem to suffer on the Cross. The multitudes thought He was on His way to establish an empire – a kingdom on the rubble heap of defeated Roman armies. Jesus realized how very wrong the Jewish multitudes were in their conception of the Messianic kingdom. Jesus must show them that His way was the way of sacrifice, suffering, and death! The glory of Jesus' way was found in a cross, not in an earthly crown. The sentimental, emotional followers of Jesus must be set straight. They must realize that to be a follower of Jesus meant serious life commitment – commitment to a Way that spelled death to self-centered and selfish interest.

Jesus used the picture of a tower builder who emotionally involved himself in a building project without figuring out beforehand the expense of the project. Realize the cost of building materials before starting to build, or if you don't, you will have a half-built building and

thus become the object of ridicule and mockery. Jesus also used the picture of an army which is facing an enemy whose army is twice its size. It is mere folly to go out into battle against an enemy twice your size without considering seriously the strength of your manpower and the effectiveness of your plans and strategy. To go out unprepared and uncommitted would merely spell utter defeat.

Through these stories, Jesus is warning the zealous, patriotic, emotional followers of Himself to count the cost of true discipleship. Not to count the cost is to begin to follow Jesus but never to carry through. It is to become the object of the world's mockery. Don't start following Christ until you realize the seriousness of your commitment. Jesus is telling us, just as He told the multitudes in His day, "Count the cost of discipleship in terms of personal sacrifice and in terms of steadfastness."

What did Jesus mean when he said, **"If any man comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own life too, he cannot be my disciple"**? Of course He did not mean literal hate of relatives. "He means that no love in life can compare with the love we must bear to him." (*Barclay's Luke*, pg. 203)

On another occasion, Jesus was confronted with a would-be follower who said, "Lord, I will follow you; but let me first say good-bye to the folk at home." Jesus said to him, **"No man who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is the right kind of man for the Kingdom of God."** There is nothing wrong with having close family ties, but when these rob the loyalty of one's heart from God, then it becomes sin. He who looks over his shoulder to the tender ties of former relationships and wishes to retreat from God's work to re-establish these ties, is not worthy of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is saying, **"I want those who are willing to renounce home-ties, who will not be distracted by sentimental relatives, who will put me above everyone else in their lives."** (*McDonald, True Discipleship*, pg. 19)

Spurgeon one time wrote the following noble message to his son: "I should not like you, if meant by God to be a missionary, to die a millionaire. I should not like it, were you fitted to be a missionary, that you should drivel down to a king. What are all your kings, all your nobles, all you diadems, when you put them together, compared with the

dignity of winning souls to Christ, with the special honor of building for Christ, not on another man's foundation, but preaching Christ's gospel in regions far beyond?" (True Discipleship, pgs. 45, 46)

Jesus continued to lay down the terms of personal sacrifice: "Whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27) The cross reminds one of death, and that is what Jesus meant when He said we must bear our cross - death to self-centeredness and selfish interests.

The follower of Christ must be willing to make any sacrifice, in light of the supreme sacrifice, which Jesus made. One would-be disciple said to Jesus, rather light-heartedly: "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "...the foxes have dens; the birds of the air have places to roost; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." To follow Jesus may mean a surrender of personal comforts and conveniences.

One who is crucified with Christ has died to greed and has come alive to the Christ-like spirit of giving and sharing. This includes the use of our money. Can a true disciple of Christ selfishly hold on to surplus funds when souls are perishing for physical bread and spiritual bread? The true disciple must stretch out his hand to be crucified with Christ. Only then can he be effectively used. Jim Elliot, who was one of the martyred missionaries to the Auca Indians in South America, wrote in his diary at one time, "Father, let me be weak that I might lose my clutch on everything temporal. My life, my reputation, my possessions, Lord, let me loose the tensions of the grasping hand. Even, Father, would I lose the love of fondling. How often I have released a grasp only to retain what I prized by 'harmless' longing, the fondling touch. Rather, open my hand to receive the nail of Calvary, as Christ's was opened - that I, releasing all, might be released, unleashed from all that binds me now. He thought Heaven, yea, equality with God, not a thing to be clutched at. So let me release my grasp.

Do you have a grasping hand or a giving hand? If you are a true disciple, you will have a giving hand. He who gives all to God and man, will receive all. He who loses his life will find it. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose," wrote Jim Elliot.

A true disciple is not detracted by the glitter of gold, for he is committed to the glory of God. When President Coolidge asked the well-

known missionary statesman, John Mott, if he would serve as ambassador to Japan, Mott replied, "Mr. President, since God called me to be an ambassador of His, my ears have been deaf to all other calls."

"When Standard Oil Company was looking in the Far East for a man, they chose a missionary to be their representative. They offered him ten thousand, and he turned it down; twenty-five thousand, and he turned it down; fifty thousand, and he turned it down. They said, 'what's wrong?' He said, 'Your price is all right, but your job is too small. God has called me to be a missionary.'"

Before Jesus died on the cross, he cried, **"Let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine be done."** The cross means a surrender of one's all to do God's will: a surrender of one's time, talents, possessions, and influence. I have been redeemed, therefore I am not my own. I belong to another. I belong to the one who purchased me - Christ. Therefore, my most important discovery is God's will for my life. He who accepts God's will for his life, shall abide forever. He who squanders his life in self-centered pursuits shall be sadly disappointed.

"There were two boys in the Taylor family. The older said he must make a name for the family, and so turned his face toward Parliament and fame. The younger decided to give his life to the service of Christ and so turned his face toward China and duty. Hudson Taylor, the missionary, died, beloved and known on every continent. 'but when I looked in the Encyclopedia to see what the other son had done, said one, 'I found these words, " the brother of Hudson Taylor.'"

The cross is a sign of death, and to follow Christ may mean surrendering our physical lives for His cause. At one time Jim Elliot wrote, "Father, take my life, yea, my blood if Thou wilt, and consume it with Thine enveloping fire. I would not save it for it is not mine to save. Have it, Lord, have it all. Pour out my life as an oblation for the world. Blood is only of value as it flows before Thine altar." (True Discipleship, pg. 59) Jim Eliot literally poured out his life's blood for the cause of Christ. He died a martyr's death because he took the way of the cross, but he shall abide forever. His tower was not half-built but completed, for he first counted the cost, then committed his all to Christ, and accepted the consequences of his commitment - in this case, physical martyrdom for the sake of Christ.

Jesus is still saying through this parable, "...count the cost in terms of personal sacrifice." Jesus teaches in this parable the importance of counting the cost in terms of steadfastness or continuing with the job. The builder of the tower was mocked because he went only part way. He didn't complete the job.

"A critical world is watching. By some strange instinct, it realizes that the Christian life deserves everything or nothing. When it sees an out-and-out Christian, it may sneer, and scoff and ridicule – yet inwardly, it has deep respect for the man who recklessly abandons himself to Christ. But when it sees a half-hearted Christian, it has nothing but contempt. It begins to mock him, saying 'this man began to build, and was not able to finish. He made a big commotion when he was converted, but now he's very much like the rest of us. He started out at high speed, but now he's spinning his wheels'." (True Discipleship, pg. 56)

The price of discipleship is persistence, perseverance, commitment. Jesus warns us against starting to build the Christian life and failing to complete it. There are many good starts but too few finishes. Paul wrote, "Don't be weary in well-doing, for in due season, if we faint not, we shall reap." Jesus set the example of consistent dedication when he declared, "I must always be about my Father's business." God's business – God's way of Life – was Jesus' meat and drink, His life sustenance. Of Jesus it was said, "the zeal for thine House hath eaten me up." God's cause was Jesus' passion; Jesus was consumed in God's work. No half-heartedness with Him. No consideration of turning back from going to the cross to fulfill the plan of God through Him.

Apathy (indifference) is a terrible sin: "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds, you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!" (Revelations 3:1, 15) ; Solution to apathy: "those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent." (Revelations 3:19). Apathy is shown by lack of consistent Church attendance, Bible Reading, Witnessing, etc. (giving). Remember: "Therefore, my dear brothers,

stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (I Corinthians 15:58)

There were those who were followers, but not disciples. They followed Christ for personal advantage – for bread, etc. When they saw the full demands of discipleship, many turned away and left Christ. It was then that Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "Will you also go away and leave me?" They answered, "To whom else can we go, thou hast the words of eternal life!" How very true! The tower cannot be built – the Christian way cannot be walked – without the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The unfinished tower is the produce of self-effort without tapping God's resources. "For the achievements which matter are beyond our human ability to attain." (Kennedy, Parables, pg. 159)

Some say, "I will not become a Christian because I'm afraid I could not live the life that a Christian should live." The person who says that is right concerning his inability to live the Christian life on his own. He can't! But he can if God lives His own life through a frail human. Said Hudson Taylor, that great missionary, "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them." (True Discipleship, ph. 30) The Scripture says "It is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for his own chosen purpose." (Philippians 2:13, NEB) God works within us to bring to completion what he has begun in us – that is, if we trust and obey God daily. If we don't continue to trust God, then the tower will never be completely built. The world will mock us as quitters, cowards, and hypocrites.

Building the tower cannot be completed over night; it takes much time and patience. Neither can the Christian life be built overnight. It always takes much time and effort. The Scriptures speak much about growth in grace: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue and then knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience and to patience godliness; to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." (II Peter 1:5, 6, 7)

Adding means progress, and progress means going forward. Have you ever noticed that there is no Christian armor for the back regions of the body, as described in Ephesians 6? Perhaps this suggests that there is no place for retreating from the Enemy. There is only one direction the Christian must go - 'Forward'. He must build until his tower is completed! To go forward means dedication - dedication of all to Christ. Only then can the tower of life be completed.

Be sure to count the cost. Realize the cost of following Christ in terms of personal sacrifice, and in terms of steadfastness and faithfulness and earnest follow-through. The cost of following Christ is high - total self-surrender, but can anyone afford not to follow Christ?

44.

"PLAYING RELIGION!"

"What can I say about such men?" Jesus asked. "With what shall I compare them?"³² They are like a group of children who complain to their friends, 'You don't like it if we play "wedding" and you don't like it if we play "funeral"!' ³³ For John the Baptist used to go without food and never took a drop of liquor all his life, and you said, 'He must be crazy!' ³⁴ But I eat my food and drink my wine, and you say, 'What a glutton Jesus is! And he drinks! And has the lowest sort of friends!' ³⁵ But I am sure you can always justify your inconsistencies." Luke 7:31-35.

Four children are together on a hot summer afternoon. They are bored. The mother of the household suggests that they play a game.

"But what game?" one of the children asks.

"I want to play 'Old Maid', says one of the children. "Never", replies another. "That game is old-fashioned, and besides it is too simple."

"I want to play 'Chess'", says another child. "No!" replies one of the children. "That game is too complicated, and besides, four can't play that game!"

"Let's play 'Monopoly'", says another child. "I don't like 'Monopoly' because it takes too long to play, and I usually get beat!" replies another child.

"Let's go outside and 'play house'", says the fourth child. "No", replies the boys in the group. "That's too sissy, and besides it's too hot outside!"

Therefore, we have a problem on our hands. All games suggested are too simple, or too complicated, too long, or too sissy! Four children, each one suggests a different game to play, but none of whom are willing to cooperate. Sulking, bored, argumentative, and fickle, children! These are the immature characteristics of childhood which Jesus depicts in this parable.

Jesus made a distinction between childlikeness and childishness. When Jesus said, **"Except you become as a little child, you cannot**

enter the Kingdom of God," He was thinking about the honest, enthusiastic response of faith which children in their best moments express towards adults and other children.

But in this parable of the children at play in the marketplace, Jesus is depicting, not childlike faith, but childish trifling and fickleness. The bored, spoiled child is like the person who has never found his purpose for living, the person who is playing religion.

Look at Luke 7:28-30: "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John." This tells us that the religious leaders of Jesus' day failed to find the purpose of God for them. Instead of living purposeful and productive lives, they were playing at religion. They had a form of religion, but they had no power in their religion.

Why didn't they find the purpose for their lives? They had not received the baptism of John the Baptist. What did the baptism of John the Baptist symbolize? It symbolized repentance. The baptism of John was the baptism of repentance. The Pharisees refused to repent, and because they refused to repent, they failed to find God's purpose for their lives! Repentance is always the condition for healing and life.

Repentance assumes that there is an honest recognition of sin in one's life. Sin is not only breaking God's laws (the Ten Commandments), but sin is also breaking God's heart. Sin is not only a violation of a law, but it is also the breaking of a relationship. To break laws is to break the heart of the Lawgiver.

There can be no repentance without first recognizing the fact of sin and the seriousness of sin. There can be no treatment of a disease without diagnosis of the disease. There can be no healing without acknowledgment of the hurt. There can be no conversion without conviction of sin. No treating of sin as a plaything, but as a serious problem. Then Jesus told him, "I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that

they are blind." Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, "Are you saying we're blind?" "If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "But you remain guilty because you claim you can see." (John 9:39-41, Living Bible)

Repentance is not only recognizing the fact of sin and the seriousness of sin, but repentance is also recognizing one's inability to save himself from the consequences of sin.

The consequences of sin is death, both spiritual death and eternal death. The Bible talks about being "...dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. (Ephesians 2:1, 2) Sin causes one to be dead to life's purpose and plan. Sin blinds one to the meaning of life. As long as one practices sin in his life, he cannot understand the purpose for which he was created. The consequences of sin are not only spiritual death but also eternal death. Eternal death is separation from God forever.

To have a true spirit of repentance is to recognize that one cannot save himself from sin's consequence, which is spiritual and eternal death. One must acknowledge his personal helplessness before he is ready to receive God's help. One must realize he is a great sinner before he is ready to receive a great Savior.

*"Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill thy law's demands.
Thou must save,
And thou alone."*

Next, repentance involves confession of sin to God. Confession means, "Agree with". One must agree with God's evaluation of sin and God's provision for sin. Repentance means rejecting man-made solutions for salvation, and acceptance of God's sole solution for salvation. One must "Agree with" God's viewpoints and disagree with his own self-centered attitudes. One must agree that God is right and just, and that man is wrong and unjust.

"If we confess (agree with God regarding) our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9) Repentance means a moral 'U-turn' - Turning

your back on your old way of life, turning your face towards God, and determining, with God's help, to follow the way of righteousness.

Repentance involves a change of mind, from an attitude of embracing sin to an attitude of forsaking sin. Repentance also involves a change in actions, from a life of practicing sin to a life of practicing righteousness. Repentance does not mean perfection in performance, but rather a new direction of life.

Repentance should always be inseparably coupled with faith. Repentance and faith are two sides of one coin, or two halves of one whole. Repentance is forsaking sin, and faith is turning to the Savior. The moment one forsakes sin, he must turn to the Savior, for sin can only lose its grip on one's life when one surrenders himself to the stronger hold of the Savior.

One is saved by faith. Faith is a transfer of trust from one's self to one's Savior. Saving faith is always accompanied by genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin. Faith is a change of attitude toward the Savior, from one of rejection to one of acceptance of the Savior.

He who experiences saving faith is he who finds life's purpose. He who fails to repent of his sin is he who is living a shallow life, devoid of purpose and power. And because man is incurably religious, man, without repentance, will play religion!

The Pharisees of Jesus' day failed to repent of their sins, and they failed to accept the Savior. So their religion became a thing of play-acting. Jesus called them hypocrites, for they were experts of religious role-playing. They played religion. Like trifling, fickle, bored children, playing in the marketplace, the Pharisees lacked the loving, cooperative spirit of the honest child.

Why do people play religion? Because they have never had a real and personal experience of God. They have never discovered the purpose for their existence. Without repentance, people don't take God seriously. Those who take God seriously repent of their sins and discover the meaning of life! Such serious, God-centered persons are not 'play-

ing religion'. They are genuine, God-loving, obedient followers of the living Christ! 'True blue' persons!)

What traits characterize children in the marketplace? The children Jesus describes in this parable are indecisive, uncooperative, and critical. People who have no sense of ultimate or unique purpose for their lives are also indecisive, uncooperative, and critical. Let us now in turn, look at each of these three childish, immature traits.

Said Jesus, "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another, 'we piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.'" (Luke 7:31, 32)

"Every one of His listeners had observed children restlessly trying to find a game to play on a long, hot afternoon. Some wanted to play 'Weddings' and others wanted to play 'Funerals' - the division of desires separated the group in the marketplace. They taunted each other with pique and petulance. One group cried, 'We wanted to play wedding and you wouldn't play our game!' The other responded with the chant, 'But we wanted to play funeral and you wouldn't do what we wanted.' They couldn't get together to enjoy a make-believe drama. Each wanted his own way. The children didn't know what they wanted. They ended up enjoying neither game." (Ogilvie, Autobiography of God, pgs. 128-129)

The person who lacks repentance in life also lacks commitment to Christ. Indecision is characteristic of the person who is living on the surface. Joshua said to indecisive Israelites, "Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!" Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me!" "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back!" (Christian chorus)

The three Hebrew children whose lives were threatened by the Chaldean king, replied, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden

image that you have set up." (Daniel 3:17, 18) Unconditional commitment, even if that commitment means death!

God's purpose for us is to "...become full-grown in the Lord - yes, to the point of being filled full with Christ. Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different, or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth." (Ephesians 4:13, 14, Living Bible) The immature and childish are never firmly established in doctrine, but, like the changing wind, are constantly changing their ideas.

The Pharisees and Lawyers refused to accept the preaching of John the Baptist, for his preaching called for repentance and serious life commitment. John aimed at the whole man; mind, emotions, and will. John called for nothing less than total life commitment, total reverse in the direction and pattern of life.

*This was too much for the Pharisees and Lawyers, and so they refused. Their refusal resulted in the rejection of God's purpose for their lives. **"But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. (Luke 7:30)***

It is God's purpose that every man's life be changed and transformed. This change is brought about by genuine repentance and earnest commitment to God. This change involves the whole of man - change of mind (rational), change of heart (emotional), change of will (volitional). There are still those who are like the Pharisees and Lawyers - experts in religious theories and conversers of religious speculations and moralisms - but failing to respond to the Gospel of repentance. If they respond at all to the Gospel, it is merely an emotional response. There is a lack of serious and total commitment to God.

What are these people like who make only an emotional response to the Gospel? They are like flighty children playing at one game after another, complaining over every game and not seriously committed to any one game. Indecisive people! "In the old days, such people were always getting saved every time a new evangelist came to town, but

today they drift from one Church to another or from one strange sect to an even stranger one." (Kennedy's Parables, pg. 63)

Jesus likened those who responded only emotionally to seed which fell on stony ground "...who when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended." (Mark 4:16, 17) Those who respond with mere emotions have no deep roots. They are unstable, unsure, wavering, unfaithful, flighty, and often unpredictable. They base all on feelings, and because feelings are sporadic and changing, they are sporadic and changing.

There are those who lack a serious commitment of the mind and the will to Christ. They are those who, like the Pharisees, consider real Gospel preaching to be too narrow, too confining, too exacting, too strict, too personal, too drastic, and too intolerant. They are those who don't want the confinements and the disciplines of a Church, but who skip around from Church to Church, shopping for religion like one would shop for meat. They get a big game out of comparing services, speakers, and weighing the assets of the various churches. They are those who want a 'tolerant' Church with no demands and no standards. They quickly leave a Church if it offends them. As I was preaching one morning several years ago, I noticed one man in the congregation who was fidgety and nervous, looking at the clock periodically as if he could hardly wait for the service to be over. As I greeted him at the door after the service, I sought to find out a little bit about him, but he coldly replied, "We are just making the rounds." Obviously, there was no serious life commitment to God or to a particular Church.

How different is the truly committed person. Such a person attends all the Church services, if at all possible. He always accepts his responsibilities of service within the Church, and works for the Lord and the Church. He regularly, sacrificially, and cheerfully gives of his time, ability, and money to help his fellowmen. He is optimistic, adaptable, and cooperative and yet individualistic. He is able to disagree when necessary and yet he doesn't take personal offense when he disagrees with the decision that was made. He is like a cooperative, happy child

who throws himself into a game and plays fairly. The thought of leaving the game (in this case, the local Church) never enters his mind.

Jesus depicts a child at his worst, while he is playing in the marketplace. None of the children wanted to play the game that someone else suggested. Self-centered, unyielding, stubborn – these are traits of the immature child in the marketplace. People can be the same way today – even adults. "If it's my idea, great, but if it's someone else's idea, no go!" Even when someone else's idea is a good idea! The childish attitude of the sulky, self-centered child in the marketplace! There are too many such people in the marketplace of life today.

As there are children, who stubbornly refuse to cooperate in playing someone else's game, so there are childish persons who refuse to cooperate with others whose ideas differ from theirs. Says one minister: "The issue is our relationship to Christ and our surrender to His guidance, and his direction. Church boards can be like a marketplace with opposing factions childishly complaining. 'You weren't for my motion, so I won't be for yours.' All because the Lord was disregarded and denied complete control." (Ogilvie, pgs. 133, 134)

To play someone else's game (or to accept someone else's ideas, plans, and suggestions) means that one must be willing to surrender and to receive. The cooperative spirit is the teachable spirit, the spirit which is willing to receive as well as to give. The disciple of Jesus disciplines his own personal desires to conform to the higher desires of the group. The cooperative spirit is the servant spirit, willing to serve the needs of others, willing to 'give in' to the wishes of others (that is, willing to play their game).

There is too often an uncooperative spirit among Christians in various churches. Recently I talked to a Christian gentleman, a member of an independent Baptist Church. He jokingly referred to the lack of a baptistery in our Church. I replied, "Yes, we need a baptistery in our Church. We Methodists have a lot to learn from our good Baptist friends." And then he replied, "We independent Baptists are beginning to wake up to the fact that we have been too independent. We have a lot to learn from others too!" I enjoyed this warm exchange, a mutual

acknowledgement that there is much to learn from other churches, and always a need for a cooperative spirit.

There is a sectarian spirit among some Christians, an attitude of un-cooperativeness. It is possible for even a Church to be childish, refusing to cooperate with any other Church. Some churches, like individual Christians, will only be involved in that project which they have originated or organized or planned. What a pity and how childish! Like children in a marketplace who refuse to play someone else's game!

As a Church, let's have our distinctive programs and ideas, but let us also always be willing to share our 'games' with others. Let us also be willing to play the 'games' which we have not originated. Personally, I have gained much wisdom from other Christians and other churches and organizations – organizations like Child Evangelism, Campus Crusade, Youth For Christ, Navigators, etc., etc.

"For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'" But wisdom is proved right by all her children." (Luke 7:33-35)

The Pharisees rejected Jesus because He was too positive: they rejected John the Baptist because he was too negative. (Note the Humorous Illustration of "the Ideal Preacher", on the page following this message. Resistance of spiritual leaders is really a concealed but determined resistance of God! "A religion of rules and regulations had become their diminutive God." (Ogilvie)

The Pharisees were law-oriented, not love-oriented. They became rigid in their external observance of man-made laws. Their criticism became judgmentalism, and their judgmentalism became ostracism. The Pharisees and scribes prided themselves in observance of rituals and participation in religious ceremonies, while all the time despising the common people of the land, whom they considered untouchable. They became preoccupied with minor details and failed to show compassion and love. "Majoring on Minors"! Religious, very religious – but love-

less, very loveless! 'Straining at gnats and swallowing camels!' cold and calculating!

There is the power of the positive focus in the life, and there is also the destructive power of the critical focus in life. The Pharisees destroyed people in the name of religion because of their negative and critical attitudes. All law and no love! All criticism and no praise! Pride and no humility! All external force and no internal compassion! "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with their finger...Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in." (Matthew 23:4, 13)

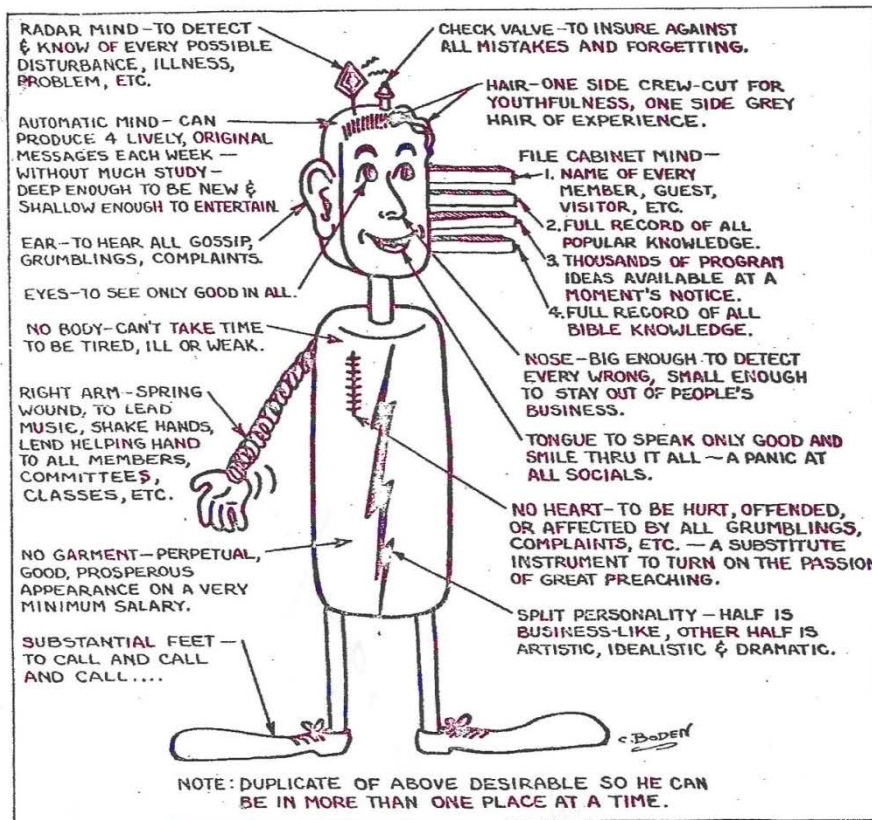
Says Lloyd Ogilvie: "I talked with a Church officer in a Midwest Church recently who had drifted from earnestness to equivocation. He said 'I am sure about what I don't want, but I don't know what I want. I'm against about everything that's proposed, but I am at a loss when challenged to make a positive suggestion for what we should be doing. I fuss over insignificant details of Church administration and have become critical of almost everyone and everything.' What a pitiful condition. Be sure of this: if we don't know where we are going, we will be negative and critical of where others want to go."

Why was this parable given to us? To teach us the folly of playing religion and the importance of being earnest about God. Are you an earnest Christian? Said one man to his minister, "Lloyd, something happened to me in Church last week. I felt the presence of the Lord as I sat in the pew. When you said, 'the living Lord is here!' I said to myself, 'That's really true.' I had come to worship not really expecting to either meet Him or sense His special touch on my life. But as the service proceeded, I was made aware of all the areas of my life that had never been brought under the guidance and control of the Lord. That's why I'm here today. I want to take the Lord seriously."

*Are you taking the Lord seriously? Or are you playing religion? God is earnest. Jesus was earnest. And you and I must be earnest about life and about God! The earnest Lord of all says, **"For I know the plans***

that I have for you...plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13) God is not a plaything, so don't play with religion! Be serious about God. Don't be like shallow children in a marketplace.

BLUEPRINT* FOR THE IDEAL PREACHER



* AVAILABLE TO CHURCHES WHO PREFER TO BUILD THEIR OWN PREACHER, ALTHOUGH AT THE PRESENT TIME, IT SEEMS TO BE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN NECESSARY PARTS.

45.

"JESUS IS THE WAY!"

"I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE!"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Jesus is totally adequate for every need which man has. He strengthens the Will, He answers the questions of the Mind; He speaks assurance to the Heart.

I AM THE WAY (Gives Power to the Will) Jesus Saves From Life Of Sin. Man cannot convert himself, as much as he needs or desires conversion. But what man is unable to do because of a weak or corrupted will, The Mighty Christ Can Do!

Jesus Breaks Harmful Habits. Only Christ can empower the weakened will of man, to enable man to break harmful habits. The fact that God can make bad men good, is evidence of the power of Christianity.

Jesus Empowers For Service. Jesus can strengthen the will of the Christians to enable them to accomplish great tasks for the Master. Said Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) "For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what He wants". (Philippians 2:13)

Wrote Paul, "This is my work, and I can do it only because Christ's mighty energy is at work within me. (Colossians 1:29) Jesus gives the daily renewal and physical and spiritual vitality to continue to follow Him throughout an entire lifetime. Jesus is the Way to a lifetime of fruitful, faithful service.

I Am The Truth (Gives Answers To The Mind). John 14:17, 26, speaks of The Spirit of truth. "The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you"; "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Fa-

ther will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

Jesus Answers Man's Questions Regarding Life and Death. Jesus does not want our hearts to be troubled about the hereafter. The solution is to believe in Jesus who gives us inside knowledge of God. Jesus is the Son, so everything Jesus was, God has always been. Jesus is preparing Heaven for man's dwelling place forever. In Jesus, you are safe in life and in death.

Jesus Answers Man's Questions Regarding Salvation and Acceptance by God. No man can come to the Father except through the Son. To see and to know Jesus is to see and to know God the Father. The truth concealed became the Truth Revealed. Jesus is the Truth Personified, who stepped out of the very bosom of God to reveal the truth about reality. He who accepts Jesus accepts Truth and accepts God. It is in the Incarnate Son that man finds salvation and acceptance by God. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me". (vs. 6b)

Jesus, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, comforts and assures the human heart. "And I will pray to the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever...I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you". (vs. 16, 18)

Jesus Gives Assurance During Man's Fears. There is fear regarding the unknown future. We see the future as if we were looking through a glass darkly, but Jesus assures us of His continuing companionship, and His future promises. "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. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know...Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (vs. 3, 4, 27)

There is fear regarding death. Jesus' reassuring words are these: "Because I live, ye shall live also". (vs. 19) There is an angel who will lead the faithful gently home.

Jesus Gives Assurance During Man's Loneliness. Because the Christian is never alone, he need never feel lonely. The intimate compan-

ionship and indwelling of Jesus through the Holy Spirit is the guarantee against loneliness.

"At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love Me, he will keep my words: And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and we will make our abode with him." (vs. 20, 21, 23)

Do you need new strength? Jesus is the Way to strength and power! Do you need the answers to life's mysteries? Jesus is the Truth who has come directly from God's bosoms to reveal reality! Do you need assurance in the face of Life's Fears and life's loneliness? Jesus is the Life, and He will bring comfort to your troubled heart!

COME TO JESUS!

46.

"YOU ARE A 'FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM!'"

John replied, "God in heaven appoints each man's work. My work is to prepare the way for that man so that everyone will go to him. You yourselves know how plainly I told you that I am not the Messiah. I am here to prepare the way for him—that is all. The crowds will naturally go to the main attraction—the bride will go where the bridegroom is! A bridegroom's friends rejoice with him. I am the Bridegroom's friend, and I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. "He has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. I am of the earth, and my understanding is limited to the things of earth."³² He tells what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! Those who believe him discover that God is a fountain of truth. For this one—sent by God—speaks God's words, for God's Spirit is upon him without measure or limit. The Father loves this man because he is his Son, and God has given him everything there is. And all who trust him—God's Son—to save them have eternal life; those who don't believe and obey him shall never see heaven, but the wrath of God remains upon them." John 3:27-36

John the Baptist felt himself to be small as he looked at himself in light of the person and work of Christ. He saw Jesus as eternal and saw himself as finite and transitory. He saw Jesus as the center figure on the stage of human history, and saw himself as a minor, supportive figure on that stage. Jesus is the Master; John feels that he is not even worthy to be considered a disciple of the Master, but feels that his role is that of a mere slave, one that is not worthy even to untie the shoes of the Master! Jesus is like the Bridegroom, the center of action and attention; John is only the friend of the Bridegroom, one who is in the background, in the shadows, one who fulfills a humble and supportive role in bringing the Bride and the Bridegroom together.

Yes, John feels humbled in the presence of the Savior. But, while he rightly feels small in the presence of Jesus, he did not feel humiliated and shamed in the presence of Jesus. It is possible to feel small without feeling insignificant, and it is possible to feel humility, without feeling humiliation. John felt humility as he looked at himself, but he

felt pride as he looked at his Savior, and this sense of pride in the Savior saved John from the feelings of humiliation and shame. Dignity is found, not in claiming to be something we are not, but in accepting the humble, yet important role, which is ours because of our relationship to Jesus!

What is our relationship to Jesus - a relationship that both keep us humble, and yet which gives us a sense of dignity and importance! It is the relationship of Message and Messenger. Note John 1:23, "John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" Jesus is the Message, and as believers we, like John, are the messengers, sounding forth the declaration of repentance and faith. We are the voices which call out to people to turn from their wicked ways and to turn to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (vs. 29)

Our place in life may be small, but it is never insignificant! To be a voice for God is a most significant role in life, the very role that will give each of us a sense of dignity, esteem, and importance!

To be a voice for God is important, but it is no basis for selfish pride. It is not who we are that is important, but it is what we say that really matters. We are a voice for God. This gives us both confidence and humility. "If ever our witness begins to be to ourselves or to make ourselves very prominent something is going wrong with it...It is not ourselves but our witness to Him for which we want to claim attention. Never mind who or what I am; but do listen when I speak to you of Christ." (Readings in St. John's, William Gospel Temple; pgs. 21-22)

To bring Christ and a sinner together is the greatest privilege that can be given to a human being. Only Christ is the Bridegroom, only Christ is the center of attention, but to be the friend of the Bridegroom is the greatest privilege known to man. Trying to take the place of the Bridegroom constitutes the grossest of sins, and is the epitome of pride. There is no place for pride, trying to be something we are not meant to be. But if there is no place for pride, there is also no need for humiliation in the Christian life. "It is the Bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his

vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."

What is the basis for dignity in the Christian life, realizing the importance of the role of the messenger of the disciple, or as the friend of the Bridegroom. These roles give us dignity, a sense of importance, a sense of significance. We are not wonders, claiming to be something we are not (claiming to be the Message, claiming to be the Master, claiming to be the Bridegroom). No, to claim these positions of uniqueness, or acting as if we were the Message, or the Master, or the Bridegroom is to claim positions that belong to God Himself. This is the epitome of pride, and pride is the grossest of sins, for it is the sin of presuming to be what God alone is inherently!

Pride is the worst of all sins, for it is the sin that blindly claims inherently to be something we are not. We are not the Message, we are not the Master, and we are not the Bridegroom. Those positions are solely and uniquely Christ's! Therefore, those who claim to be something they are not will be brought down. Say the Scriptures about the proud or haughty men: **"God saves the humble but brings low those whose eyes are haughty."** (Psalms 18:27)

What is the **'sin for which the Lamb of God came to die in order to take it away? (vs. 29)** "For there is only one sin, and it is characteristic of the whole world. It is the self-will which prefers 'my' way to God's - which puts 'me' in the Centre where only God is in place." (Temple pg. 24)

Pride is the will of man centering on the self, rather than on the Savior! Humility says, "Glory to God in the highest"; not "Glory to man in the highest." Christ alone is the Message! Christ alone is the Master! Christ alone is the Bridegroom! He alone is the Wonder of God!

However, if we are not Wonders, neither are we Worms! If there is no place for pride, there is also no need for humiliation! Humility - Yes! Humiliation - No!

There is a basis for dignity! We are the messengers, preparing the way for the coming of Christ into people's lives. With greatest humility, and

yet with greatest dignity, we can say, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'." (John 1:23)

There is a basis for dignity! We are the disciples of Jesus. We may not feel worthy to even stoop down to untie the shoestrings in the shoes of our Master; nevertheless, we are disciples of Jesus. We are not the Master, but we are the servants, and to be a servant of the Master is a great privilege, a privilege that gives esteem, and dignity, and significance to our lowly lives! To serve the Master - what greater role can a human fulfill!

There is a basis for dignity! We are not the bridegroom, but we are the friend of the Bridegroom. The role of the friend is to bring the Bride and the Bridegroom together. The role of every believer is to bring the sinner and God together. We are ministers of reconciliation, bringing unholy men and the holy God together. To serve as a liaison between man and God is the great privilege possible. Knowing that we are a friend of the Bridegroom should give us a sense of importance, esteem, value, significance, and dignity, but no place for selfish pride. No place for carnal pride, but a wonderful place for dignity and self-esteem.

It is not WHO we are, but WHOSE we are, that gives us a basis for dignity. We are nothing within ourselves; therefore, there is no basis for haughty pride. We are something significant within Christ; therefore, there is a solid basis for healthy self-esteem and dignity. We belong to Christ, and Christ is the Eternal One - and holy - and Christ is also the incarnate one - immanent and identified with mankind's sins because He is the Lamb of God. Knowing whom we serve gives us at one and the same time, a sense of profound humility and a sense of profound dignity!

Let us continue to see Christ for who He really is - the Eternal Son of God (transcendent) and the Suffering Servant and Lamb of God (immanent), and let us continue to see ourselves for who we really are - messengers declaring the Message, disciples following the Master, and friends of the Bridegroom. Seeing ourselves for who we truly are, in light of who Christ truly is, will make us both humble in our dignity,

and dignified in our humility! This is what it means to be a humble servant of God!

47.

"CHRIST IS THE LIFE AND LIGHT!"

Light pierces the darkness and illuminates everything in its path. Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the World'. Jesus claimed to be the only true and complete source of truth and enlightenment. Enlightenment regarding God's nature and work, enlightenment regarding the Son's relationship to the Father, enlightenment regarding the nature of man's problems, enlightenment regarding the way of man's restoration and fulfillment.

Jesus, the Light, reveals the true understanding regarding the four basic subjects of life – God, Man, Sin, Jesus Christ. Each of these four subjects is dealt with in John 8.

*Jesus' Unique Relationship with The Father. Jesus claims the ability to give life and light to all who come to Him. **Said Jesus, "I am the light of the World. Whosoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** (vs. 12)*

Such a claim is only valid if Jesus had a unique relationship with God. Jesus claimed such a special relationship with the Father God, and He believed that His Source of Power was derived from His Father

Jesus not only claimed a unique relationship with the Father, but Jesus also claimed unique power – the power of Deity!

1. *"I Am the Light of the World." (vs. 12)*
2. *"Before Abraham Was, I Am." (vs. 58)*

Jesus offers Himself as the Source of solving man's problems. Jesus' promises are backed by His power. Jesus has a special relationship with the Father, since Jesus came directly from the Father. Therefore, He has the resources to deal with the problems one can of man.

However, before apply Christ's resources, there must be an accurate analysis of the nature of man. Only as one thinks realistically about man's problem, can one wholeheartedly appropriate Christ's solution.

- (1) Ignorance of Jesus' Identity - *"You have no idea where I come from or where I am going."* (vs. 14b)
- (2) Worldly system of Judgment - *"You judge by human standards."* (vs. 15a)
- (3) Lack of Personal Experience - *"You do not know me or my Father."* (vs. 19a)
- (4) Controlled by Worldly Values - *"You are from below... You are of the World."* (vs. 23)
- (5) Slave To Habitual Sinning - *"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin."* (vs. 34)
- (6) Preoccupation with Selfish Interests - *"No room for my word."* (vs. 37)
- (7) Satanic Source of Evil Actions - *"You belong to your father the Devil."* (vs. 44)
- (8) Prospect of Spiritual Death - *"If you do not believe that I am (the one I claim to be), you will indeed die in your sins."* (vs. 21, 24)

In gazing at the serious problem of man, we have been occasionally glancing at the glorious solution to that problem. The solution is surrender to the claims of Christ.

"Many put their Faith in Him." (vs. 30) True Faith means personal surrender to Christ, as a result of recognition of personal spiritual bankruptcy. Knowing that one cannot deliver himself from the slavery of sin, such a person trusts Christ alone for deliverance and life.

"Hold to my teachings." (v.32); "Follow the Son." (vs. 12) Those who begin must follow through with Christ. To obtain life is wonderful, to maintain life is even more wonderful. To hold to Christ's teaching means listening, learning, researching, and obeying Christ.

When man responds to God's offer of light and love, then man is filled with God's presence and power, and life becomes something of a romance. The fulfillment, which the believer experiences, is most wonderful.

"Never walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (vs. 12) To walk in darkness is to walk in a strange land; to walk in the light is to walk in one's native land. Man is not meant to dwell in darkness; he is

made to live in the light of God's love. To become known is to find one's self.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (vs. 32)

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (vs. 36)

"If a man keeps my word, he will never see death." (vs. 51) Death, for the believer, is like a sunrise, not a sunset! A new and glorious beginning, not an end! A victory, not a calamity! Physical life here is precious to the believer, but 'to die' is to gain heaven. "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain"!

Have you come in faith to Jesus? Are you willing to hold to His teachings? Will you closely follow Christ the rest of your life? If so, you will wonderfully experience - 'The Light of the World'!

48.

"THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES!"

"I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He lops off every branch that doesn't produce. And he prunes those branches that bear fruit for even larger crops. He has already tended you by pruning you back for greater strength and usefulness by means of the commands I gave you. Take care to live in me, and let me live in you. For a branch can't produce fruit when severed from the vine. Nor can you be fruitful apart from me. "Yes, I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in me and I in him shall produce a large crop of fruit. For apart from me you can't do a thing. If anyone separates from me, he is thrown away like a useless branch, withers, and is gathered into a pile with all the others and burned. But if you stay in me and obey my commands, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! My true disciples produce bountiful harvests. This brings great glory to my Father. John 15: 1-8.

Man is built for eternity. There is within every man a 'God-shaped vacuum' which seeks to be filled with God. Man cannot live by bread alone, but must live by the eternal word of the eternal God. Man is restless until he finds his rest in God. Man is overbuilt for time - he is built for eternity.

*"And here at last we find
Strict diagnosis of our malady,
Which is, in short, that man is heaven-starved -
Men are born thirsting for infinity."*

Provision Of Life. Said Jesus to God His Father, *"For you have given Him authority over every man and woman in all the earth. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him". (John 17:2)* God desires to save all, to give life to all. Jesus said, *"I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly. I am the way, the truth, and the life, said Jesus. "Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind." (John 1:4) "The Father has life in himself, and has granted His Son to have life in Himself." (John 5:26) "Jesus told her, I am the one who raises the dead and gives them life*

again. Anyone who believes in me, even though he dies like anyone else, shall live again." (John 11:26)

Christ is the very essence of Life. When you have Christ, you have life and are enabled to live to the full. Without Christ, one merely exists.

Process of Life. (Methods by Which Spiritual Life Is Appropriated) The Vine is Jesus, who possesses Life and maintains it as a right of His unique Sonship. The branches have life inasmuch as they are vitally attached (grafted) to the Vine.

By Abiding. "Whoever continues to eat my flesh and drink my blood continues to live in union with Me and Me in union with him. Just as the living Father has sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever keeps on eating me will live because of me." John 6:56, 57 (Williams Translation)

The important question is this: "How do I maintain this living relationship with Christ?"

Obedience To Commands - "And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us." (John 15:10)

Love Of Brethren - "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35); "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

Unity Among Brethren - "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20-21)

Sanctified In The Truth - "Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth." (John 17:17)

By Pruning. (vss. 2b, 3) "...To be a Christian who is well-informed and eager to be at his best for the Master, the usual question will not be 'What is wrong with this?'. But rather, 'Will this help make me

more Christ-like, more useful in His kingdom?' To the person intent on being 'well-pleasing in his sight' many 'good' things will be 'pruned' to make room for the 'best'. (Gospel of John; Turner; pgs. 299, 300)

Perils of Life because of failure to attend upon God (or wait upon God). To be kept vitally attached to the Vine, "it will mean arranging life, arranging prayer, and arranging silence in such a way that there is never a day when we give ourselves a chance to forget Him." (Barclay's John; pg. 205)

Because Of Failure To Trust And Obey God Alone. Are we bearing fruit? No amount of ascetic discipline or devotional fervor is a substitute for the practical obedience which alone is 'fruit'.

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away". (vs. 2a)
"Apart from Him, I can do nothing, all fruit that I ever bear or can bear come wholly from His life within me. No particle of it is mine as distinct from His. Whatever has its ultimate origin in myself is sin." (William Temple; Readings in St. John's Gospel; pg. 251)

Because Of a Cooling of Love Towards God Or Towards One's Fellowman. The one, who persists in carrying a grudge towards others, eventually severs himself from the Vine. One cannot love God and at the same time hate his fellowman. "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (I John 4:7, 8); "If anyone says, 'I Love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." (John 4:20-21)

49.

"THE DRAGNET AND THE FISH!"

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. He discovered a real bargain—a pearl of great value—and sold everything he owned to purchase it! "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by a fisherman—he casts a net into the water and gathers in fish of every kind, valuable and worthless. When the net is full, he drags it up onto the beach and sits down and sorts out the edible ones into crates and throws the others away. That is the way it will be at the end of the world—the angels will come and separate the wicked people from the godly, casting the wicked into the fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 13:45-50.

Barclay clearly explains the manner of fishing described in this parable, which obviously had an appeal to the fishermen of Jesus' day. "The seine net was a great square net with cords at each corner, and weighted so that, at rest, it hung, as it were, upright in the water. Then when the boat began to move the net was drawn into the shape of a great cone and into the cone, all kinds of fish were swept. The net was then drawn to land, and the catch was separated. The useless material was flung away; the good material was put into containers." (*Barclay's Matthew*, pg. 99)

Two things stand out about this parable: Indiscriminate gathering of the fish, and the final separation of the good and bad fish. We may see a spiritual application in this parable. The net stands for the Kingdom's influence as represented by the Church; the sea represents restless, moving humanity; the fish represent all sorts and kinds of humanity, which have come under the influence of the Gospel; and then final separation of the fish represents the Final Judgment in which God will separate good men from wicked men.

Let us then look at this parable in terms of two main ideas - Indiscriminate appeal of the Gospel, Final Separation of Humanity. One thing is very clear in the parable: No discrimination is made in the fish that are gathered into the dragnet. Likewise, there is to be no discrimination in presenting the Gospel of the Kingdom to humanity.

The Gospel is good news because it breaks down all dividing walls of hostilities between groups of humanity. The Gospel has an universal appeal to all men. In Christ, "...there is no distinction between Greek and Hebrew, Jew or Gentile, foreigner or savage, slave, or free man. Christ is all that matters, for Christ lives in them all." (Colossians 3:11, Phillips)

Barclay points out, "the ancient world was full of barriers. The Greek looked down on the barbarian; and to the Greek any man who did not speak Greek was a barbarian, which literally means a man who says 'bar-bar'. The Greek was the aristocrat of the ancient world and he knew it. The Jew looked down on every other nation. He belonged to God's chosen people, and the other nations were fit only to be fuel for the fires of hell. The Scythian was notorious as the lowest of the barbarians, more barbarian than the barbarians, the Greeks called him; little short of being a wild beast, Josephus calls him. He was proverbially the savage, who terrorized the civilized world with his bestial atrocities. The slave was not even classified in ancient law as a human being; he was merely a human and a living tool, with no rights of his own. His master could thrash or brand or maim or even kill him at his caprice. There could be no fellowship in the ancient world between a slave and a free man." (Barclay's Colossians, pg. 186)

True Christianity does not look upon one race of people as being superior to another race of people. The idea, for instance, that the Negro race is an inferior race has no place in Christian theology, and anyone who claims it does is only displaying his ignorance and prejudice. It is believed that Moses married an Ethiopian woman who would obviously be dark-skinned. There is no place for discrimination, snobbery or rejection in the eyes of Christianity, when it comes to races.

I am a 5th generation Free Methodist (a descendant of the Biblical teachings of the great John Wesley.) The Free Methodist Church from the beginning was against slavery, and, while slavery as such is no longer a live issue in America, discrimination is a live issue. The members of the Free Methodist Church pledge to cleanse themselves of all prejudice, and they claim the dignity of all men as something to be cherished. Men of all races are welcomed on an equal basis in this Church. The Gospel excludes none, and neither can the Church, which preaches that Gospel, exclude any. Red and Yellow, Black and White and Brown – they are all welcome!

In the early days, Christianity destroyed the barrier between the sophisticated, aristocratic Greek and the despised, pagan barbarian. So Christianity must always extend its arms of love to cultured and uncultured, literate and illiterate, honored and despised. Methodism in its earliest days ministered to both the honored and to the outcast, to the learned and to the ignorant. While many churches were appealing only to the learned and elite, Methodism ministered much to the despised and outcast.

One who was a member of the Holy Club with Wesley wrote that "nothing was so much disliked as their charitable work." (Blueprint For a Christian World, pg. 35) This charitable work included ministry to the prisoners. They were "friends of publicans and sinners" and sat "down upon the level with them." (Ibid, 35) As a result the members of the Holy Club were despised. Wesley was even excluded from many pulpits because he preached a gospel of love which included all men.

Mary Alice Tenney spoke about the early Methodists: "Early Methodists really loved men. They did not sign a check for Community Chest Drives; they went into dirty garrets and nursed sick old women. Even noblemen did that sort of thing, denying themselves luxuries in order to do it. It got right down among the needy, the evil, even the criminals, and showed them what real friendship and compassion are." (Living In Two Worlds, pg. 112)

Christianity has no sympathy whatever for putting class labels on men. There is no lower, middle, and upper classes among true Christians. In the early Church it was not uncommon for the slave to lead the Church service while the master sat humbly in the congregation listening and learning. The Wesleyan revival was out to destroy all class discrimination and to create one new man in Christ Jesus. "Wesley proposed to bring all classes together in the common cause of Kingdom-building. He found no provisions in the Kingdom plan for social or economic distinctions and he made none in his plan for the Societies. A class leader was as likely to be a blacksmith as a banker. A local preacher was chosen more for his natural gifts of spiritual insight than for his degree of education, and never for his bank account." (Blueprint For a Christian World, pg. 235) All men kneel on level ground before the cross.

Methodism lost its power as a movement when it began to develop class distinctions and favor the middle and upper classes. Fashiona-

ble dress and beautiful pews became the signs of the elite to which the Church bowed. It was because class distinctions were made in the Church, that the Salvation Army movement was started. "One day William Booth arrived at the door of a fine, newly built London Church with a group of ragged people from the slums and was told to take them to their proper place at the back. The very people to whom Methodism had first come were thus discriminated against. As a consequence, Booth, driven by the same compassion as had stirred Wesley, organized the East London Revival Society, and later became known as the Salvation Army." (*Living In Two Worlds*, pgs. 104, 105)

Wrote James, "...the brother who is poor may be glad because God has called him to the true riches. The rich may be glad that God has shown him his spiritual poverty." (James 1:9, 10, Phillips) There is a leveling off process in Christianity, which results in making no distinctions between the rich and the poor. The Gospel appeals to the king and also to the pauper. Again, many churches have bowed to the rich and noble and have neglected the poor. The genius of early Methodism was its care for both the rich and the poor.

"In Wesley's correspondence with Miss March, one of the well-to-do Methodists, he advises her not to confine her 'conversation to genteel and elegant people.' He urges her to 'converse more, abundantly more, with the poorest of the people.' 'Creep in among these in spite of dirt and a hundred disgusting circumstances, and thus put off the gentlewoman.'" (*Blueprint*, pg. 234)

Originally, Methodism appealed strongly to the Poor, in much part due to the emphasis on Perfect Love, which leveled all distinctions. However, the Methodist Church lost this appeal to the Poor when it began to bow to convention for the sake of incorporating wealth into its treasuries.

Notes William Sweet, the great historian of American Methodism: "Once it was proud to be called the poor man's Church; now it boasts of its colleges and universities, its great endowments and tremendous corporate owner. As their churches tended to become increasingly costly and luxurious, the inevitable result was that the people no longer felt at ease in worshiping with their more fortunate brethren. Nor did the college and seminary trained minister stress the poor man's

doctrines, such as 'holiness' and 'second blessing'...for the stressing of these doctrines caused the prosperous to feel uncomfortable."

From its beginning, the Free Methodist Church has sought to be indiscriminatory in regards to the rich and the poor. The Church has sought to reach the man on both the right and the wrong sides of the track. In providing free pews to both rich and poor on an equal basis, the Free Methodist Church has sought to obey James' injunction:

"Don't ever attempt, my brothers, to combine snobbery with faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ! Suppose one man comes into your meeting well dressed and with a gold ring on his finger, and another man, obviously poor, arrives in shabby clothes. If you pay special attention to the well-dressed man by saying "Please sit here - it's an excellent seat," and say to the poor man, 'you stand over there, please, or if you must sit, sit on the floor, doesn't that prove that you are making class distinctions in your mind, and setting yourselves up to assess a man's quality? - a very bad thing. For do notice, my brothers, that God chose poor men, whose only wealth was their faith, and made them heirs to the kingdom promised to those who love him. And if you behave as I have suggested, it is the poor man that you are insulting." (James 2:1-5, Phillips)

Thus, we have seen that the Gospel is Good News because it appeals to all men - black and white, cultured and uncultured, elite and despised, rich and poor. Just as the dragnet takes in all sorts of fish, so the appeal of the Gospel is indiscriminate. Its influence goes out to all sorts and kinds of men.

What happened to the dragnet when it was pulled to shore? *"When it was full, they hauled it up on to the shore, and sat down, and collected the good contents into containers, but threw the useless contents away." (Matthew 13:48)* Then the spiritual application of the parable is given: *"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come, and they will separate the evil from the righteous, and they will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there." (Matthew 13:49, 50)* That is the sobering picture of the destiny of the good and bad fish - of good and wicked men. As Jesus said many times: *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

It is true that the Gospel indiscriminately appeals to all men in its message. It leaves out no man or group of men. It universally offers salvation to all men. God is not willing that any should perish. No race, or class, or culture of people. However, inevitably there will be discrimination – at the end time, at the Great Judgment. The basis for discrimination will not be race, color, culture, or class, but it will be on the basis of acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. He is the great Divider of all men. He divides all men into one of two classes – good men or bad men, God-lovers or God-haters. To some, Jesus will be a source of great offense. To others, Jesus will be a source of great comfort.

Let us note specific ones to whom Jesus is a great offense, and, by implication, ones to whom Jesus is a great comfort.

*A bigot is simply one who is extremely opinionated, one who thinks his opinion is right and all other opinions are wrong. Jesus comes as an offense, for Jesus said, **“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”** He has gumption enough to say in the face of the bigot, “Your opinion is wrong, I am the only Way.”*

*A ritualistic person is one who puts excessive importance upon religious externals and form. Christ knows the hearts of all men, even the hear of the religious hypocrite. Attitudes of the heart and the motive itself are more important than external form. To the religious Pharisee of Jesus’ day, He said, **“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”** (Matthew 23:27) To the same group of ritualists and legalists, Jesus said, **“Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearths: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”** (Luke 16:15)*

Secular morality is human attainment; Christian morality is God-given attainment. There are many who value the ethical teachings of Christianity and who seek to cultivate respectable traits within their lives. There are those – humanists – who sentimentally talk about the great value of serving humanity. Many social movements have their rootage

in the vague and general ideal of serving humanity, and yet many who advocate such service do not personally have the power of love described in 1 Corinthians 13.

*The secular moralist fails to see that it is God's will to have new men, not simply better men. “Know thyself, accept thyself, develop thyself – that is pagan. Surrender thyself, discipline thyself, obey Another Self – the Spirit of God – that is Christian.” (E.S. Jones; quoted by Dr. Tenney in Blueprint, pg. 60). The way to become a new man is through repentance and faith. **Said Jesus: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3)** Repentance – that is a hard word. It means confession of sin, a moral U-turn in life from self to Christ. That is not satisfying to the ego of the moral secularist who wants to credit himself for moral development. Jesus did not preach reformation – self-improvement – but transformation - God-wrought change.*

*Who are the rich? Those who have made things their god. Men are more expert in gadgets than they are of God. The greedy and grasping hand has replaced the open and giving hand. **“The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”, calls for the expenditure of extravagant sums of money, only to leave man's soul dulled and nagging. Said Jesus, “Watch and guard yourself against the spirit which is always wanting more; for even if a man has an abundance his life does not come from his possessions.” (Luke 12:15, Barclay)** The rich young ruler went away sorrowfully because he was not willing completely to release his grip on things.*

*Jesus did not trick any man into following Him. He made it clear that total self-denial and cross bearing were essential in following Him. He did not promise ease and fortune. Jesus said to one who told Christ that he would follow Him wherever Christ would go: **“... the foxes have dens, the birds of the air have places to roost, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Luke 9:68, Barclay)** Jesus wanted a potential follower seriously to consider the high cost of discipleship. After considering the high cost and choosing to follow Christ, he must throw caution and comfort to the winds.*

***“He (Jesus) said to another man, ‘Follow Me!’ ‘Lord’, I he said, ‘let me go first and bury my father.’ He said to him, ‘Let the dead bury the dead. But do you go and tell abroad the news of the Kingdom of God.’” (Luke 9:59, 60)** What the answer of the man probably means*

is this: "I will not follow you until my father is dead." It was oftentimes the custom for a young man to remain at home to care for his father and eventually bury his father. Jesus is an offense to many because He calls for immediate decision, which involves an inconvenient break with one's present circumstances and seeming commitments.

Many want someday to follow Christ - at a more convenient season - but not now. "The point that Jesus was making is that in everything there is a crucial moment; if that moment is missed the thing most likely will never be done at all." (*Barclay's Luke*, pg. 133) It is said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Decisions are hard to make. It is easy to procrastinate. Christ demands a decision, and therefore He offends.

Jesus' command is an Upward - Onward command. One man said to Jesus, "Lord, I will follow you, but let me first say good-bye to the folk at home." Jesus said to him, "No man who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is the right kind of man for the Kingdom of God." (Luke 9:61, 62)

Jesus demands that we live ever in the present - in our testimonies, in our hope, in our methods. No ploughman can plow a straight furrow unless he keeps his eyes on the goal. So, a Christian must keep his eyes on the future goal. He dare not look over his shoulder or live in the past or sit upon the laurels of past achievements. Jesus' call is not to complacency but to greater commitment.

Jesus made it clear that those fish which are useless, offensive, and bad will be cast out. Jesus wills to save all men, but those who refuse to follow Christ, bring judgment upon themselves. "He that believeth on him (Christ) is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18)

Not only as a God-rejecter condemned in this life because of his refusal of Life, but he will be eternally rejected - separated from the presence of God hereafter. "The angels will come, and they will separate the evil from the righteous, and they will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there." (Matthew 13:50)

Prepare to meet thy God! Repent of your sins, confess them to God, and seek forgiveness. Believe from your heart in Christ, which means commitment to Him. Receive Him into your heart and let Him become the Lord of your life!

50.

"THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW WAY!"

*"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."
(Matthew 7:13)*

Life is made up of many choices – some important choices and some rather insignificant choices. Without exception, the most important choice is the choice which road one will travel in life. Each man comes to the crossroads of life, where he is forced to take one road or the other. One way leads ever upward and upward, while the other way leads ever downward and downward. One road is broad and well-travelled, while the other road appears narrow and sparsely travelled. Each road bids for the attention of every man. Every man must make his decision as to the road he will travel. Moses said to Israel, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil...Therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed may live." (Deuteronomy 30:15-29) Joshua presented Israel with the same choice. "Choose you this day whom you will serve." (Joshua 24:15) Jeremiah heard God say, "Unto this people shalt thou say, Thus saith the Lord: Behold I have set before you the way of life and the way of death." (Jeremiah 21:8)

It is hard to enter the narrow gate because man is by nature a sinner. There is a natural inclination to do wrong, to be disobedient and rebellious. There is a natural bent to sinning. When a rod of Iron has been twisted and bent, it is difficult to bend it back to good shape.

It is hard for man to do good and easy for him to do wickedness, because he has been twisted by the fall. Man has a strike against him when he comes into the world. He is a sinner by nature. Man feels the gravitational pull of sin downward, and it is hard for him to overcome this downward pull.

Few have entered the narrow gate, and fewer yet have successfully walked the narrow way. Why is this? There are several reasons. It is hard to walk the narrow way because it involves separation from self-

centeredness. Self too oftentimes gets in the way of successfully living the Christian life. **Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, and heart purity"** means singleness in devotion, affection, and allegiance.

It is hard to walk the narrow way because it is patterned after the greatest of all lives. To walk the narrow way one must walk like Christ. Christ loved His enemies, and the Christian, too, must love His enemies.

It is hard to walk the narrow way because it involves persecution and suffering. Jesus never said that to be His disciple would be easy. Jesus said to His disciples, "If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you...Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you!" (John 15: 18, 20)

Listen to Jesus' frightening statement: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at." (Matthew 7:13) Why are there many who enter the broad gate and many who are travelling the 'Broad Way'? The Broad Gate is the same as the Gate of Sin, and there are many ways of sinning. The act of sin and the attitude of sin are both gates to destruction. Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. In other words, our righteousness must go beyond the outward appearance of respectability and religiosity. The act of killing is sinful, but the attitude of hate is also sinful. The act of adultery is sinful, but the attitude of lust is also sinful. Words of profanity are sinful, but the profane attitude is also sinful. Seeking vengeance is sinful, but the desire to seek vengeance is also sinful. Refraining to give alms or refraining to pray or fast is sinful, but giving alms or praying or fasting to display piety is also sinful. There are many ways of entering the broad gate. Few there are who escape from entering the broad gate which leads to destruction.

Many are on the broad way because the narrow way is hard. It has often been said that a dead fish can easily float downstream, but that it takes a live, strong fish to swim upstream. It is relatively easy to go with the current of secular society, but it takes strength and courage to go against the popular mood of worldliness. The secular standard

for success is to lay up treasures upon earth, but the Christian must avoid this temptation. In fact, in the midst of a grasping, materialistic society, the Christian is not even to worry about material provision, but he is to trust God completely.

Many are on the broad way because the narrow way is long. Many want quick results, but there are no quick returns to the Christian life. There are many who can run and not become weary, but there are few who can patiently walk and not faint. In the hour of great crisis, many can manifest great courage, but far too few are faithful in the normal and unexciting routine.

Many are on the broad way because the narrow way involves discipline. "No one ever reached any eminence, and no one having reached it ever maintained it, without discipline." (Barclay's Matthew, pg. 285)

So it is with the Christian walk. It involves discipline. One cannot go about it haphazardly or randomly. One must exercise diligence, carefulness, prayerfulness, and much planning. The Christian must ever keep his eye on the goal which is Christ, and he must strain and strive to reach the goal of knowing God's eternal presence. Discipline is made up of the ingredient of simplicity, single-mindedness, and sincerity.

Walking the narrow way involves repentance, separation from self-centeredness, persecution and suffering. It is the hard, long road that requires much daily discipline, but the dividends of walking the narrow way are great. Few there are who find the narrow road, but to each man is given the choice - the broad way or the narrow way, the way of life or the way of death.

Because of God's grace (mercy and power and love) it is possible for every human being to find the 'narrow way'. And to walk steadily on that 'narrow way' until he/she reached the 'heavenly home'! the welcome (invitation) is given by the God of Love to every person! Jesus said that this is the 'Way' to abundant living (the 'arrow way') which leads to 'eternal'. 'None need miss the 'Narrow Way'!

51.

"BECOMING LIKE A CHILD!"

"About that time the disciples came to Jesus to ask which of them would be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven! Jesus called a small child over to him and set the little fellow down among them, and said, "Unless you turn to God from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore anyone who humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And any of you who welcomes a little child like this because you are mine is welcoming me and caring for me." Matthew 18:1-5.

Jesus made it very clear that there is only one way to enter the Kingdom of God, and that way is the way of childlike simplicity. Those qualities, which are found in a child, are the same qualities that must be found in every person who enters the Kingdom. Jesus is not commending childishness but childlikeness. There is a difference. No man is asked to revert to childish actions. Paul said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (I Corinthians 13:11) What then did Jesus mean when He said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"?

Jesus said that, just as a small child is humble, so a person must be humble if he is to enter the kingdom. This was an important lesson to the disciples of Jesus, for they were anything but humble. Their concern was not humility but greatness. "Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" In this question can be seen the true motives and desires of the disciples. They were not concerned who could serve the most, but who could be served the most. They were not concerned in honoring each other, but in being honored. Their desire was prestige, honor, and power; not humble and self-forgetful service. In their question can be seen the ugly materialism, vain striving, tough competitiveness, bitter jealousy, and gross selfishness - all of which Jesus so dramatically condemned.

"Jesus called a little child and made him stand in the middle of them, and said, 'This is the truth I tell you - unless you turn and become as children, you will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven'." These were hard words for the disciples to hear, but healing words if heeded.

What attitude found in a child must we also practice in our life? Whoever humbles himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Humility is found in a small child. A small child doesn't seek prominence but is satisfied to be in obscurity. A member of the Kingdom must not seek for prominence but rather he satisfied to serve in obscurity.

"... the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (I Peter 5:5); "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." (Romans 12:3); "Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips." (Proverbs 27:2)

Jesus told His disciples that they must become as children. What is a child like? A child has total dependence upon his mother and father. So it is with a person who would become a member of the Kingdom. He must rely completely upon God. This quality of inherent trust, which is found in a child, must also be found in the person who seeks entrance into the Kingdom.

Blessed is the man who trusts in God, he will surely enter the Kingdom. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5)

Trust in God for salvation. Man dare not trust in his own righteousness to gain God's approval.. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." (Isaiah 64:6); "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23); To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: (Luke 18:9); "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—

and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Trust in God for provisions – material and spiritual. A child assumes that his parents are going to take care of him, so he doesn't worry and fret. It was Jesus' knowledge of this common and inherent trust of a child that caused Jesus to liken the relationship between a believer and God to the relationship between a child and a father. “So don't worry and don't keep saying, ‘what shall we eat, what shall we drink, or what shall we wear?’ That is what pagans are always looking for; your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your heart on His Kingdom and His goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course. Don't worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself! One day's trouble is enough for one day.” (Matthew 6:31-40)

*If God is concerned about our physical needs, how much more is he concerned about our spiritual needs, needs such as assurance, cleansing, peace, **joy, power, and keeping**. “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19) That includes everything.*

God has promised assurance for the future: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (I John 5:13)

God promises constant cleansing in our lives: “But if we (really) are living and walking in the Light as He (Himself) is the Light, we have (true, unbroken) fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses (removes) us from all sin and guilt - keeps us cleansed from sin in all its forms and manifestation. (I John 1:7)

God promises peace to the trusting heart: “Peace I leave with you; my (own) peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid - stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful, intimidated, cowardly, and unsettled.” (John 14:27)

God promises fullness of joy to the trusting heart: “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11);

God promises power to live effectively, even in critical times: "Men will arrest you and persecute you, handing you over to synagogues or prison, or bring you before kings and governors, and for my names sake. This will be your chance to witness for me. So make up your minds not to think out your defense beforehand. I will give you such eloquence and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict it." (Luke 1:12-15);

God promises to keep the believer from falling into sin and apostasy: "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 24, 25)

Childlikeness means humility and simple trust. This is the way into the Kingdom. What Jesus said to His disciples, He says to all of us today, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 18:3)

52.

*"YOU ARE A CHILD AND A MEMBER OF VERY
LARGE FAMILY!"*

"Pray along these lines: 'Our Father in heaven, we honor your holy name. Matthew 6:9.

To Call God 'Father' Gives Us A Right Relationship With The Unseen World. Jesus came to tell us that this universe is essentially a friendly universe. Jesus showed us that God is love. What Jesus is, God has always been. That means that God has always been a God of Love.

Christ came to show us what God is and always has been – a God of Love. Christ showed man how great God's love is. Christ showed man that God's love is so great that He can be called 'Father'. That means that God is not far removed and unconcerned for man. Because God's heart is a Father's heart, you can approach Him in confidence and love.

How different is the Christian's God from the myriad of heathen gods. The God of the Christians is trustworthy, beneficent, and loving. The heathen gods are pitiless, grudging, and hateful. It is oftentimes a great relief for a pagan worshipper to learn that there is only one true God who is not wrathful and grudging, but who is loving and caring. Jesus came to show us that the unseen world which is controlled by God is not against us but that it is for us.

To Call God 'Father' Gives Us A Right Relationship with the Seen World! Not only has Jesus shown us that we are living in a friendly universe, but Jesus has shown us that the Christian is living in a friendly world. How is this possible? It is because Jesus has shown us that all circumstances can be used for God's glory and man's good.

Realizing that God is love will enable one to meet the circumstances of life – even those that are unexplainable – with confidence and optimism. Such faith in a Heavenly Father will save one from cynicism, and despair. It is a great comfort to know that God is Father, and a loving father will never cause his child a needless tear.

When we pray, 'Our Father', we are reminded that we are members of a family and that we have brothers and sisters to love. We are reminded that life consists in serving others and not in being served.

It is true that a Christian can never advocate solitary religion. No Christian desires to go to heaven without taking others with him. We cannot be interested in God without being interested in our fellowmen. We cannot love the invisible God without truly loving our visible brothers. "It is this command that we have from Him, that he who loves God loves his brother also." (1 John 4:21) In fact, we actually find God through doing service to others.

Sorrow can be good, since it can draw us nearer to God. One who has experienced sorrow is better equipped truly to sympathize with his fellowmen. After one man told how his mother had lost her dearest son, he says, "That is where my mother got her soft eyes and why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child." (Barclay's Corinthians; pg. 191)

Someone once asked Dr. Karl Menninger what he would advise a person to do if he felt a nervous breakdown coming on. His answer was surprising to some, but very sound: "If you feel a nervous breakdown coming on, lock up your house, go across the railway tracks and find someone in need and do something for him." (Prayer and Life's Highest; pg. 55) Involvement in other people's problems oftentimes offers therapeutic cure to one's own needs.

When Kagawa was young, he was told that he would die, but the doctors were wrong. He lived past seventy, and the explanation for his extended life lies in his involvement in other people's problems. Says Kagawa, "When I suffered from tuberculosis I thought I was dying so I decided to do some good before I died. That is the reason I entered the slums. I thought if I went to heaven and confessed that I was lazy on the earth, God would say to me, 'No place for you.'...In the slums, I had no door. I had the 'open-air cure'. And it cured me of tuberculosis. It is interesting that because I lived in the slums I was cured of my sickness. I had improvement of health and I am here tonight. This way of cure I always recommend to my friends in Japan who are suffering from tuberculosis." (Trout; Kagawa, Japanese Prophet' pgs. 51, 52) Healing sometimes comes through involvement. To pray 'Our Fa-

ther' should remind us that we are our brothers' keeper. To render service to others enables us to find God and enables us to find ourselves.

To pray 'Our Father' means that we are acknowledging God's love and also acknowledging God's family. This reminds us of God's Fatherhood and reminds us of man's brotherhood.

Because God is 'Father' His children can be confident that they live in a friendly universe and also in a friendly world. The Beneficent Father wills only good for His children, even if that good is found in circumstances that appear to be unexplainable.

Membership in God's family assumes responsibility and involvement in the needs of one's fellow brothers and sisters. We find God and we find ourselves through involvement and service to others.

53.

"BUILDING A 'STRONG HOUSE' FOR ETERNITY!"

Building The House the Superstructure is that part of the house which is above ground and which is most obviously and easily seen in a house. There is no mention made in the story that there was any difference in the superstructures of the two houses. A superficial investigation of the two houses would say that the houses were alike.

We can deduct from this that oftentimes the outward appearance of a Christian and a pseudo-Christian is about the same. The nominal and the genuine Christian have much in common, but there is one thing they don't have in common - a good foundation. On the surface, all may appear the same, but under the surface there is a great difference. One is built on a solid foundation and will last; the other is built on the shifting sand and will collapse in the storm.

The wise man built his house upon a solid rock foundation. He is the man who both listens and who transforms what he hears into action. He both hears and does.

The wise man seriously contemplates the serious demands of Christianity. The one who builds on the solid foundation is one who counts and accepts the cost of being a disciple of Christ.

What is life like which is built upon the solid foundation? It is the life that considers the attitude and the motive just as important as the act. It is the life that considers eternal values primarily and temporal values. Secondly, it is the life whose pattern is Christ. The building blocks of the foundation are righteousness, holiness, and compassion.

The foolish man built his house upon the sand. He was impatient and hasty. He saw things in the light of the moment instead of in the light of eternity. He failed to realize that the long view is the right view. The foolish man is shortsighted, building only for the present, not for the future storms of life! He has only the short view, not the long view. Building only for the moment, not for eternity, when the storm of death and the judgment comes!

54.

"MAN'S DEPENDENCE UPON CHRIST!"

Man's Total Dependence Upon Almighty God. (Bases for Humanity)

<i>MAN</i>	<i>GOD</i>
<i>Beloved</i>	<i>Favoring Humans</i>
<i>Lost Sinner</i>	<i>Forgiving Savior</i>
<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Good Shepherd</i>
<i>Redeemed</i>	<i>Redeemer</i>
<i>Finite</i>	<i>Infinite</i>
<i>Material</i>	<i>Spiritual</i>
<i>Time-bound</i>	<i>Eternal</i>
<i>Limited on Knowledge</i>	<i>All-Knowing</i>
<i>Sinful</i>	<i>Sinless</i>
<i>Clay</i>	<i>Potter</i>
<i>Prodigal Child</i>	<i>Accepting Father</i>
<i>Confused Wanderer</i>	<i>Wise Guide</i>
<i>Lonely Refugee</i>	<i>Welcoming Companion</i>
<i>Broken Reject</i>	<i>Healing Redeemer</i>
<i>Vulnerable Lost Soul</i>	<i>Rock of Ages For Safety</i>
<i>Elusive Happiness</i>	<i>Permanent Joy</i>
<i>Vulnerable to Attacks of Evil</i>	<i>High Tower of Peace and Security</i>
<i>Bride (Church)</i>	<i>Bridegroom (Christ)</i>
<i>Son (child) - Sometimes Unruly</i>	<i>Father (Exercises Discipline)</i>
<i>Branch</i>	<i>Vine</i>
<i>Stone</i>	<i>Cornerstone</i>
<i>Subject</i>	<i>King</i>
<i>Cell in Body</i>	<i>Head of Body</i>
<i>Creature</i>	<i>Creator</i>

<i>Mortal</i>	<i>Immortal</i>
<i>Temporal</i>	<i>Eternal</i>
<i>Runner</i>	<i>Trainer</i>
<i>Soldier</i>	<i>Captain of the Host</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Teacher</i>
<i>Servant</i>	<i>Master</i>
<i>Thirsty One</i>	<i>Fountain of Life</i>
<i>Hungry One</i>	<i>Bread of Life</i>
<i>Polluted One</i>	<i>Sanctifier (Cleanser)</i>
<i>Cultivated Field</i>	<i>Farmer</i>
<i>I'll One</i>	<i>Great Physician</i>
<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Deliverer</i>
<i>Anguished One</i>	<i>Giver of Peace</i>
<i>Grief Stricken One</i>	<i>Bosom of Comfort</i>
<i>Fear-Tossed One</i>	<i>Reassuring Divine Presence</i>
<i>Despair-Filled One</i>	<i>Hope-Giving Lord</i>
<i>Inevitable Death</i>	<i>Assurance of Eternal Life</i>
<i>Subject</i>	<i>Lord</i>
<i>Feels Unloved and Unlovable</i>	<i>Unconditional Love of Mankind</i>
<i>Misunderstood and Alone and Forgiven</i>	<i>Accepted and Cherished with Unceasing Care</i>
<i>Unholy (Full of Corruption and Forsaken)</i>	<i>Holy (unable to look upon my evil) "Jesus Is The Way!"</i>
<i>Guilty and Morally Undone</i>	<i>Rich in Mercy and Ready to Forgive</i>
<i>Lonely and Insignificant</i>	<i>Breathes Value Into Every Person</i>
<i>Alienated from the Crea-</i>	<i>Reconciled By the Creator</i>

<i>tor</i>	
<i>Weary, Warn, Restless Ex- istence</i>	<i>Life More Abundant With Purpose</i>

55.

"THE TEN COMMANDMENTS!"

Deuteronomy 5:

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them.

The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.

The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.

The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire,

(I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount,) saying,

I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have none other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,

And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him, guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.

Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work:

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates, that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.

Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Neither shalt thou commit adultery.

Neither shalt thou steal.

Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbor's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbor's.

These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.

And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders;

And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth.

Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die.

For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?

Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it, and do it.

And the LORD heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me, and the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!

Go say to them; Get you into your tents again.

But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it.

Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.

King James Version (KJV)

