

My wife has told me (through the years of our marriage) that she likes my bald head. Most of our marriage life, I was self-conscious regarding the fact that one of my front teeth was slightly crooked. But my wife, gracious as she is, has told me (time and time again) that she did not even 'notice' that slight imperfection. And, visa versa, I have not made an 'issue' regarding my wife's 'hearing problem' (which was wonderfully dealt with, through her hearing aids).

### WHAT IS THE 'SECRET' TO DEVELOPING A GREAT MARRIAGE?

Marriage partners must always build up each other, never degrade or belittle or criticize each other. If marriage partners are intended to be each other's 'best friend', then marriage partners should treat each other as 'best friends'! Humor or jesting or teasing or laughing should never be used as 'cruel tools' to destroy marriage partners!

Partners in marriage are not to be in competition with each other. "In honor preferring each other"- this is to be the attitude that is manifested in a good marriage relationship! Only when the love of God is 'shed abroad' in the heart of each marriage partner, can each partner put the other partner before himself or before herself!

When each partner in the marriage is focused on pleasing Christ, then each marriage partner has the strong motivation and the deep desire to serve his or her marriage partner.

Loving God supremely enables the marriage partners to take delight in serving each other in the spirit of genuine love! Each partner becomes a 'beautiful channel' through which the divine-type love (agape) flows to the other partner. This is the 'secret' to developing a truly 'great marriage'.

Without the 'flow' of that divine-type love, from each partner to the other partner, the marriage partners will be in selfish competition with one another, and, at worst, the marriage partners will become very self-centered (and often these selfish-driven individuals will divorce).

### IS IT TIME FOR YOU AND YOUR MARRIAGE PARTNER TO START LAUGHING?

We must always see the 'funny side of life', in general society, but particularly in our marriage. I have done some things right, but Venita has done a whole lot of things right - as evidenced by the fact that we still live together and we still love each other truly, even though we have been together many thousands of days (in fact, almost a half century)!

Why cry, when we should be laughing together? We have borne the burden of the day- we have worked hard, we have shed many tears because of our heart-breaking trials, we have experienced many losses in relationships and in ministries that were once dear to us, because we are advancing in age we now have added limitations, we sometimes experience a sense of loneliness because some of our friends and our loved ones are dead, we ourselves are quickly approaching the end of our physical life- yes, these are realities which could make us weep and weep!

Even though (scripturally-speaking) there is a time for weeping, there is also (scripturally-speaking) a time for wiping away our tears, a time for looking anew to the God of all hope and healing and joy

and restoration!

There is a time for rejoicing and for praising and even for 'laughing'! The Bible says that, after the weeping of the night, there is 'joy in the morning'! Remember: the couple who prays together, stays together! Is it going too far to say that the couple who regularly laughs together, stays together? If God laughs (and I think He does), why shouldn't a marriage couple laugh together?

"I THINK I AM GOING TO MAKE IT!"

As is true of many pastors, I was accustomed to working 'hard and long hours'. I was, at the time of this particular incident, rather young, and I was full of enthusiasm and zeal to 'advance the work of the Lord'. Up until the time of the following incident, I had spent many nights in the home of many couples, presenting to them the 'plan of salvation'.

I did many other 'things' in my pastorate, but the winning of souls (through the presentation of the 'plan' on a one-to-one basis)- this activity, though it required lots of time and energy (and boldness)- was the 'meat and potatoes' of my ministry.

I loved to see sinners converted (in their home, right before my very eyes). Seldom did I spend time with my wife and my growing daughters in the evenings. I was out in the neighborhoods, evangelizing the lost ones, with the homes of sinners as the context for evangelism, and with my handy 'flip chart' as my helpful 'visual aid' as I presented God's wonderful salvation 'plan'!

As previously shared, it was not unusual for me to be in some sinner's home, for a 'salvation by appointment' bible study. What was unusual on the particular night that is the present 'focus' for this account, is the fact that I was presenting the 'plan' to a couple, using my own church office as the context for the 'salvation by appointment' bible study.

Admittedly, I was a 'little' tired, after a long day of work, but, nevertheless, I was thankful that God gave me another opportunity to share the plan of salvation with another couple.

It was rather late (probably near 10 p.m.) when the couple finally left my office. I called my wife and I told her that soon I would be home.

For some reason, I used my old Schwinn bike as my means of transportation for that evening. Occasionally, I enjoyed riding my old (one gear) bike, rather than using my car for transportation. I lived about two miles from the Free Methodist Church (and my church office).

From a conscientious viewpoint (and possibly from a legal viewpoint), I had 'no business' riding my bike during night time hours. I had no idea, when I started out on my bike, from my office, that I would soon be involved in what could have been a fatal accident. In spite of my own failure (in riding my bike at night, with no lights), I believe that God (perhaps His protecting angel) was watching over me on that particular night.

Even though I was relatively young in age, I was rather tired in body, and I was anxious to get to my

home in the shortest time possible. When I came to a main highway (about one mile from my home), I violated one of the most 'basic rules' of biking! Instead of crossing the highway, and riding on a large sidewalk that paralleled the highway - on the right side of the highway - I decided that I would take, what to me, was a shortcut. I rode on the left side of the highway (where there was no wide sidewalk). This mistake (this breaking the law) gave me a 'serious consequence' (and it gave some other human being also a 'serious consequence')!

It was a 'dark night', and I (foolishly) rode my old (solid) bike, on the wrong side of the highway. The traffic (of cars) was 'heavy' that particular night. All I could see as I continued to ride on that opposite side of the road (opposite from where I should have been riding), I say, all that I could see were the blinding and bright car headlights.

After riding my bike about 50 yards (on the wrong side of the highway), I collided, head on, with another biker. This biker, traveling quite fast on a multi-speed bike, properly had lights on his bike. Because he was riding on the proper side of the highway, he had full 'right-of-way'.

He was totally 'right' in everything he did (how he rode), and I was totally 'wrong' in everything I did (no lights on my bike, and riding on the wrong side of the highway). (When I considered the fact that I was so 'wrong'- breaking the 'law'- I am grateful that I serve a 'God of mercy', not simply a 'God of justice').

As a result of this 'head-on collision', I was knocked out, and the man whom I hit was also knocked out! Strangely, and providentially, an off-duty police officer came upon the scene of the accident. Both I and the man I hit were lying, unconscious, at the side of the road.

I could have been dead, for when I hit the other bike, I could have been thrown into the heavy traffic, buzzing back and forth just a few feet from where I hit the other bike. Instead, God allowed for my body and for the body of the other man to land away from the ongoing traffic!

This off-duty police officer 'happened' to be live just a few doors from my home! I knew him, as a neighbor. He was a believer. He, of course, arranged for an ambulance to come to the scene of the accident. He knew that this might be a serious accident.

The first thing that I remember hearing, when I began to gain consciousness, was the interchange conversation between the ambulance attendants. One attendant said to another (regarding me): "Be careful not to move his neck. **It** may be broken!"

The off-duty police officer, after he called for an ambulance, made his way to the front door of my home, to inform my wife (and daughters) of the accident. I must say (at this point) that I believe there may be times (perhaps many times) when God (Holy Spirit) moves and directs and protects and communicates- 'below the visible surface' of a particular event.

What I next report, 'sends a chill down my spine'. Venita said that, when she heard the loud siren of the ambulance, a short time before, she knew that I had been involved in an accident!

Of course, I did not know at the scene of the accident, but I learned later that (logically) both myself and the other man whom I injured, were brought to the same hospital (obviously), in the same ambulance! I learned that both he and I sustained the same type of injury- namely, a cracked jaw!

It was clear (after knowing all the details regarding the accident) that I was totally 'at fault' for the accident. I felt sorry because of the discomfort (injury) that the other man sustained. I never met him, but I understood that he worked at King's Soopers Grocery Store (not too far from my home).

I often wondered if I saw this man at the store, without knowing of his unique identity. My Home Owner's Policy took care of the needed financial settlements. I am thankful that I was not personally sued, because of my 'stupid' (impulsive) actions!

When my wife and teenage daughters got to the emergency room, I was a little 'unsteady' in my speech and mannerisms. The first question that my wife asked me was: "How are you doing?" Then, in a deep voice, tinged with a little 'humor', I replied: 'I THINK I AM GOING TO MAKE IT!'

Thank God, I did make it through that harrowing experience! The doctor wanted to 'wire shut my mouth', to allow the cracked jaw bone more quickly to heal. I responded, 'Nothing doing. I want to eat food, and I need my mouth to enable me to preacher!' The doctor did not insist, and before long I was healed totally! God, again, was very merciful to me!

God enabled me to express a little 'humor', even during the time when I had verily arrived at the hospital emergency room. "I think I am going to make it" was a response to my wife, salted with a tinge of humor!

Many times since that long-ago event, when I have been asked by my wife, during a difficulty I am facing (physical illness or a different kind of challenge that is not morally charged or physically endangering), I say, when I have been asked by my wife about my welfare, I will respond 'I think I am going to make it!'

'I think I am going to make it!' -that has been my 'standard reply', and my wife and I have enjoyed the 'humor' that is inherent in the statement (all because of my time in the emergency room).

### "WHO IS IN THE WHEELCHAIR?"

It was a beautiful night, but a dark night with only the faint light from the overhead street light. For some reason, I was standing on my front sidewalk. I happened to glance down the street, towards the west. I could hardly see the object that was coming towards me, but I finally recognized that the object was a wheelchair!

I wondered why an older person, in a wheelchair, would be taking a stroll at this time of night! I could hardly see the wheelchair that was approaching me, but I continued to gaze at this rather strange sight! Whoever was in the wheelchair must be rather courageous to be out alone, at night! Maybe I soon would be able to see and to greet this rather unusual person!

And then 'surprise of surprises!' I could hardly 'believe my own eyes!' The wheelchair that had been steadily approaching me, down the middle of the street, had no one in it! And, strangely enough, not only was the wheelchair 'empty', but the wheelchair was in a folded position!

I was 'surprised', and I felt 'foolish' when the 'folded wheelchair' rolled right up to my feet, as I was standing at my curb side! What I thought was an older person taking an evening stroll in a wheelchair - taking an evening stroll down my street - turned out to be a folded wheelchair!

One of the strangest sights that you can imagine - the folded wheelchair was rolling on its own, right towards me! I had anticipated a 'chat' with an older person, and all I ended up seeing was an empty wheelchair! I had a 'creepy feeling' come over me!

How could a wheelchair 'travel' such a 'straight' course? How could a folded wheelchair be so 'deliberate' in its movement down my street? How could this folded wheelchair maintain its balance and have a steadfast direction that imitated the presence of a human being in it? I shook my head in disbelief!

When have I ever seen an inanimate object appear to be 'so human' in its movement? The wheelchair slowly moved down the street, and then came towards me, as if the wheelchair contained a person - contained a person who got a glimpse of me, and who intended, in the 'name of neighborliness', to stop near me to visit a little with me! When I saw an empty wheelchair (a folded wheelchair), I gasped with surprise and with great astonishment!

When I saw the folded wheelchair, it did not take long for me to recognize that this wheelchair belonged to us (to my wife and to me). During the last nearly 20 years, we have cared for a few elderly ones, in our home. Strangely, I realized what had happened was odd and unusual. Of course, if we have an extra wheelchair stored in our garage, it is, obviously, stored with the wheelchair in a folded position.

It is hard to imagine, but the folded wheelchair rolled out of our garage, down the driveway, over the curb, on to the front street, and then the folded wheelchair made a sharp turn, and it continued to roll down the center of the street for about 15 yards!

Amazingly, the folded wheelchair made a U-turn at that point in the middle of the street! Then the folded wheelchair proceeded to roll back to where I was standing! It is hard to believe, but the folded wheelchair never fell over, during its remarkable 'journey'! That fact itself is phenomenal! Traveling down the driveway and over the curb and turning on to the street and then, after traveling several yards, turning around and traveling back!

This 'well-trained' folded wheelchair reminds me of a well-trained dog. Except the movements of this inanimate object (with no soul and with no determining 'will'), is more remarkable than the movements of a dog (which has the capability of being trained).

The movement of this folded wheelchair was so 'startling' and so 'amazing' for more than one reason. I found the movement of the folded wheelchair to be (as I mentioned) somewhat like the

movement of a dog that is well-trained by its 'master'. If I didn't know better, I would think that the folded wheelchair, which took a 'little journey' down my street, knew that it was to 'come back home', so it 'decided' simply to make a U-turn in the middle of the street, so it could come back 'home' (where it belonged)!

With my personal reflection, and with the passage of a few years, my reaction to this 'strange' event is amazement and astonishment. And, of course, I have also expressed some 'laughter' -laughter that something so 'weird' and so 'odd' could happen to me!

I took the folded wheelchair back into our garage, after it came to a 'stop', right at my feet. But before I deposited the 'trickster wheelchair' to the place where it belonged, I stood at the curb side, contemplating this 'weird' event!

Can you imagine how very 'foolish' I felt when I saw an empty wheelchair, rolling up to my feet! I felt 'foolish' when I realized that an inanimate object could 'pull a trick' on me, an intelligent human being (a creature that is made 'in God's own image')! Wonder of wonders, to realize that this folded wheelchair could 'pull' a 'deceptive trick' on me!

Shame on you, folded wheelchair! I thought I was going to have a 'chat' with a fine older person, and all you presented to me was an 'empty wheelchair'! At least your 'trick' startled me, it totally surprised me, it made me gasp in amazement! At least you broke the routine of my day! At least you gave me the 'gift of laughter'- and, in that way, you served not only my needs, but I think you brought a 'smile' to God Himself!

I must say, folded wheelchair, with your kind of skill, you ought to sign up for the circus.

But, remember, you must ask my permission before you leave your home! You need to stay home, when it is dark!

"DON'T LOOK...DON'T LOOK!"

Many years ago, when my wife and I were in our middle 30's, after some contemplation and consideration, we decided to make an investment in real estate. Through the last three (and more) decades we have had many pleasant relationships with a lot of tenants. Of course, our experiences with tenants have not always 'worked out', but, for the most part, our experiences have been pleasant with tenants.

As is true of all landlords, there have been times when it was not very easy to find good tenants. Vacancy is, obviously, not what a landlord desires, but, worse yet, a landlord finds it difficult to deal with an irresponsible tenant (one who does not pay his rent on time, or one who is reckless in the use of the property).

On one of many other similar occasions, I was having a difficult time finding a good tenant for a certain property (duplex property). Venita and I believed that the property we were attempting to rent, was a 'good' property. Not a new property, but, nevertheless, a 'clean' and comfortable unit- a unit that we believed would 'suit' the need of some good tenant.

But, try as I did, I was not yet successful in 'landing' a good tenant! I think I had 'shown' the property to a few potential tenants, but no one yet was interested.

Then I got a call on the phone from a woman - a middle-age, single woman - and I arranged to meet her at the particular property. I showed her the inside of the property, and she seemed to be impressed with what she saw. She asked a certain question, the answer to which I gave with a spirit of confidence. She asked me if the neighborhood was a 'safe' neighborhood. Of course, I answered in the affirmative!

We walked outside, and she and I had a pleasant conversation. I was confident that, finally, I would have a person who would 'sign up' to rent the duplex apartment. I was so hopeful that I would no longer have to 'search' for a good tenant. I thought that this woman was going to be, not only our new tenant, but, possibly, a new friend (for we enjoyed it when some of the tenants became our casual friends).

We stood together on the sidewalk, in front of the duplex. We were standing, at a slight angle. My head was facing the duplex. Her head was facing the street. As I recall, this woman needed reassurance that this neighborhood was, indeed, a 'safe' neighborhood! Of course, I reassured her that this neighborhood was a 'safe' neighborhood!

The longer I live, the more I have noticed that our personal life experiences, from time to time, have some 'sharp curves', even some unexpected 'pit falls'! As this woman and I were carrying on a pleasant visit (a specific visit about the virtues of this duplex, in which she showed some interest in renting), I say, while this woman and I were carrying on a pleasant visit, a 'shock of shocks' happened!

Suddenly, and 'out of the blue', this woman shouted to me, 'DON'T LOOK! DON'T LOOK!' I had no idea why this woman, with great emotional exclamation, was telling me 'not to look'!

Obviously, from where she was standing, she was seeing something that I was not seeing! I couldn't understand why she was so excited and so troubled! Of course, the very thing that she told me not to do, I did. I looked in her direction! I wanted to see whatever it was that she was seeing! What in the world was giving her such discomfort, such distress, such alarm?

When she cried out with such alarm and with such distress, I quickly turned in her direction! I then realized why she was deeply distressed, why her pleasant conversation with me had suddenly turned to words of total distress.

Along with her, I viewed a sight that, indeed, was distressing and very troubling! Across the street (and two houses down) there this 'proper lady' and I had our eyes fixed on the figure of a man who was exposing his totally nude body, in front of a large picture window.

This man, from a distance, of perhaps 30 yards from our position, appeared to be a large man, very muscular in build, very 'hairy' (like an ape, in my opinion). He was defiantly looking at this woman, and he was swaying back and forth with his entire body, with no shame at all in his demeanor. He,

obviously, wanted to shock this woman, and, of course, he succeeded in his devious plot. He smiled at us, as he continued his shameful behavior!

Everything I confidently enunciated to my potential tenant, regarding a 'safe' neighborhood, 'went out the window'. The sight of this evil man- this licentious man- destroyed every 'case' that I made, regarding this being a 'good' neighborhood!

I could say nothing to this woman, to persuade her that, obviously, the antics of this 'hairy' man- this man who 'got his kicks' from swaying in front of a window 'in his birthday suit' -was a 'strange rarity'! It would do me no good to tell this prospective tenant that nothing like this had ever happened before, during all the previous years since I purchased this 'fine duplex'!

After she saw this 'trickster' - this nude man who swayed in front of a picture window - I had no chance to convince this woman that (in spite of this shocking sight), the neighborhood was, indeed, 'safe'! No chance for any further conversation. Our talk was over! I might as well 'save my breath'!

As soon as she and I laid our eyes upon this 'gross man' for a few seconds, she quickly got in her car, and off she went! I lost a potentially 'good tenant', all because the 'timing in life was lousy'! Why did that 'ape-looking' man have to appear, just when I was ready to 'make a deal' -to finally find a good tenant?

Because of a set of 'unbelievable' circumstances (the intrusion of a 'licentious act'), I lost another possible tenant! All my efforts with this woman (showing the duplex, talking with her) was 'down the drain'. As a believer, I knew that I had to 'forgive' this 'evil dude' from across the street, and I knew that, in spite of this shocking event, I had to 'pick myself up' as a landlord, and I knew that I must continue to seek the right tenant!

Is it possible to 'laugh' when our earnest efforts (on a legitimate project) 'go south' (when they fail)? We, of course, never condone acts of evil (like the appearance of a nude man), but, nevertheless, I think it is possible to discover a 'layer of humor' even when events (like this strange one) are not 'righteous', in and of themselves.

Even though, obviously, the potential tenant (the woman) saw nothing but 'horror' in the sight of the nude man, I (as a man) saw beyond the obvious ingredients of evil in the event, and I could not help but be amused with the sight of this swaying, nude man.

Amusement sometimes comes when one views sight and sounds that are beyond the 'pale of decency' (events that are odd and strange and 'unexpected' and 'out of place' and 'out of order' and 'unnatural' and 'foolish looking' and 'childish' and 'uncomely' and 'unappealing').

Without, in the least approving his behavior, I do think that his tragic behavior, matches most (perhaps all) of the above descriptions. And, in that sense, even though he is a pathetic man (who needs our prayers), he is, in some ways, a 'laughable person'!

With needed reflection on this strange scene, I found myself 'humored' (with even some laughter)

because of the horror that the woman suddenly demonstrated when she saw this totally unexpected sight! She, doubtless, had never seen such a stark sight of a brazen and bold and shameless (naked) man!

The way she communicated to me ('Don't look!') was her way of shielding me from a sight that was repulsive and unbelievable and most embarrassing! As if I would not look! She probably knew (as a 'proper lady') that she would be further embarrassed if I (standing beside her) would look at this nude man!

'Implicit laughter' is laughter that comes as a result of discovering the deeper layers of laughter that are hidden in one of the elements (details) in any particular 'event'. No, we believers should never find humor (laughter) in the 'evil' in any event, but, nevertheless, there may be hidden layers of laughter, even within an event which is basically evil in nature. Sometimes, there is to be found some elements of humor (even laughter) in what would be considered an 'evil event'.

I find myself enjoying a little 'laughter' (in some elements) of the event that probably will never be repeated during my lifetime -the distress of a potential tenant, the shocking appearance of an 'ape-like', naked man, swaying back and forth in front of a picture window, smiling all the time that he is doing this, shamelessly exposing himself for the pleasure he is receiving from his antics, doing everything he can to embarrass and to shock a strange (respectable) woman who happens to be standing beside me!

Of course, the above description is the description of a man who, obviously, does not have a strong drive in his life to please his Creator! But, when one combines the 'shock reaction of the woman' with the antics of the ape-like man, with the 'blowing away' of my chance to rent the duplex, with the quick 'shattering' of my argument that the neighborhood was 'safe', with the immediate departure of the woman in her car- these are 'unexpected reversals' that make this 'strange event' pregnant with 'humor' and 'laughter'!

#### HILARIOUS MISTAKE IN THE 'DARK OF NIGHT'!

The sun had long ago 'gone down', and there was no 'full moon' to reflect some light on the street. I was in another city, in an unfamiliar place in this large city. I was a 'stranger', and I felt like a 'stranger' on that particular night!

I had never been on this particular street before. I was there on a 'small mission'- to get my teenager daughter to her hotel, where she would spend the night, just before she would meet several other teens, all of whom would travel together to their destination to another city.

In that other city, there would be gathered together hundreds of teenagers, from across the nation, to enjoy a great 'youth convention'. The over-all mission was good- spiritual and social growth among hundreds of teenagers, and my 'small mission'- getting my daughter to her Denver hotel- was worthy of my time and my efforts and my driving in a 'not-familiar' location in a large city.

On that long-ago night, I remember sensing my confusion as to my specific location. As I drove on a

better known street, I decided to take a 'side street' which I thought would bring me closer to my daughter's hotel. As I mentioned earlier, the night was dark, with not even a glimmer of light from a heart-warming moon!

After I turned on to the rather broad side street, in my mind I figured that I needed to make a turn off of this broad street- that is, I felt strongly, because this street was only one long block, I needed to get into the right hand turn lane in order to turn back west (where I thought the hotel was located).

I was very intent in making that right hand turn. Even though it was dark, and, therefore, it was hard to distinguish many details regarding the nature of the 'right hand turn lane', I was thankful that the 'right hand turn lane' was 'wide and smooth' and easy to 'navigate'.

Strangely enough, I noticed when I turned my steering wheel of my car to the right, to get onto the 'right hand turn lane', that there was a rather 'rough jolt'! At this time, I thought that it was a rather strange phenomenon! Why would there be a 'jolt' - a raised place - that divided the regular side road and the right hand turn lane? At all times before when I approached a right hand turn lane, I never remember experiencing a 'jolt'! What is going on?

It was not long until I found out - from my wife who was sitting beside me, and from my two teenage daughters and from their teenage friend- I was not driving on a right hand turn lane! Instead, I was driving on a long, wide sidewalk!

There was a deadening silence - a type of fright by everyone in my car! After they all informed me regarding my 'crazy' action- my 'stupid mistake'- my hands on the steering wheel seemed to 'freeze'! This broad sidewalk had the appearance to me of a driving lane - it had the appearance of a broad right hand turn lane!

I couldn't believe what was happening! Not only was the sidewalk very broad, but the length of the sidewalk seemed never to come to an end. When, I thought, will I ever get off this sidewalk? For some reason, it seemed that my car was 'attached' (fixed) on that sidewalk.

When I once got on that long sidewalk, I somehow (strangely) felt that I had to continue to drive on that long sidewalk until I came to the end of the street and to the end of the sidewalk.

In the darkness of the night, with a carload of people startled until they became speechless, I was embarrassed that I could 'pull such a stunt' - that I could do something so 'stupid' in front of my wife and in front of three teenagers! During the darkness of that night it seemed that the sidewalk was a mile long! I wondered when I would ever get to the end of the sidewalk, in order that I might make a 'proper right hand turn' on to a 'regular street'.

Fortunately, I and everyone in my car on that dark night had a 'good sense of humor'. After I got out of my predicament- after I finally got off of that long and broad sidewalk- we all 'laughed' and 'laughed'. And, on a more 'serious note', we all breathed a 'sigh of relief' that no one was walking on that sidewalk, in the darkness of that night!

God's protecting angels might have been 'on guard'- to 'guard' over a man who was rather 'crazy' that night, to 'guide' a man whose perception on a dark night was far from perfect!

Lesson to be learned from that 'strange night', so long ago:

"If you don't like my driving, stay off the sidewalk!" (Ha! Ha!)

"OH GOD, HAVE MERCY!"

I have been a consistent 'jogger' throughout most of my long life. I participated in track in my junior high and in my high school and during my college years. During the many years (nearly 50 years) that I have lived in Fort Collins, 'jogging' has been my 'constant companion'.

I have jogged literally thousands of miles, during my teen years and my young adult life and during the last several decades of my senior adulthood. I did competitive running for many years, but since my last competitive race when I was 56 years old, I have merely jogged for the enjoyment of it (and, of course, for health reasons). Jogging makes me feel better, I believe I think better, and I maintain continuing fellowship with my Creator when I am running.

While I am jogging, I often breathe a few prayers to the Lord of Life. I spend some time, of course, simply meditating upon life and upon life's plans. Jogging provides a time for me to lift my heart in praise to the One who made all good things. Jogging time has also been, for me, a time to allow the Spirit to communicate to me - plans to follow, people to pray for, corrections that I need to make in my life (attitudes), and confessions of sins that I need to make to the Savior.

I have been told that, while jogging, the heart muscle is expanded and the lungs are purified, and the general tone of the body is increased. A chemical that is released from the brain (what is its name?) tends to give the jogger a general sense of 'well-being'! Well, I am a human being that needs all the 'help' (mentally and physically and psychologically) I can get.

I love to jog through the magnificent park which is located near to our home. I spent countless mornings in that park, jogging on the winding trail, surrounded by large overhanging trees and small bushes. Jogging that particular trail is like going through a 'wonderland' of various kinds of trees, lush undergrowths, and scampering creatures, with the chirping and colorful birds flying above, to provide the morning music!

There is nothing so refreshing as being in God's great out-of-doors in the early morning! The air is so clean and crisp, the moving shadows cast by the tall trees reflect the sunlight in ever changing moods - these changing shadows add to the mystical feeling of the early morning!

As is true of most joggers (runners), I occasionally have to 'clear my throat' of any extra saliva (mucous) that tends to 'build up' as a result of 'pushing my body' to run faster and faster. 'Clearing the throat' is nature's way of making sure that the air passage to the lungs is open, in order to continue to breathe correctly. Jogging (running) involves the proper movement of the muscles and the joints. Of

course, jogging involves the proper functioning of all the 'breathing apparatus' of the human body.

I say all of the above (obvious facts about the human body) to say that it has never been unusual for me to 'clear my throat' when I am running. And, while I am concentrating on intense running, I sometimes 'clear my throat' rather loudly. I need to, for I must clear my air passage. Otherwise, I could not continue to run!

On the trail, I often come up behind a jogger, and, obviously, I pass some joggers who are enjoying a slower pace. Of course, the opposite is also true: there are many joggers who are more 'fit' or who are considerably younger than I am. In those 'cases', I am the one who is often 'left in the dust', as I watch these faster joggers 'take off' ahead of me!

On one particular morning- what I considered to be a normal morning- I was jogging at a regular pace. While I was jogging, I was greatly enjoying the sights and the smells of the early morning atmosphere. I noticed a jogger - a lady whose jogging pace was rather slow - and, of course, because I had a much faster pace, I came up behind her rather quickly. As I mentioned previously, when I am running rather fast, I often need to 'clear my throat' and to 'remove extra saliva' from my mouth!

The timing for this young lady was not very good! Just as I approached her (from her back side), I very loudly 'cleared my throat'! My noise- very loud noise- which she heard, but from a 'source' she did not know- this 'frightened' her - actually 'terrified' her!

Without looking over her shoulder to discern the source of the 'angry sound', this lady jogger left her course on the trail altogether. She left the trail, and she went into the brush beside the trail. And as she quickly moved off the trail, she stopped everything, and she cried out: "O GOD, HAVE MERCY!"

If it is possible to experience two opposite emotions, at the same time, then I must admit that I had two different emotions that were co-existing in me, when this lady made her exclamation on that morning. On one hand, of course, I felt bad that I had unintentionally frightened this woman so badly (with the sound I made by clearing my throat) that she left her course on the trail. When I passed this lady, I expressed my sadness to her, and I simply said (as I passed her on the trail)- 'I am sorry!'

As I proceeded with my jogging, I chuckled. How could my 'clearing of the throat' cause this precious lady that amount of surprise and distress? As I reflected back on that 'strange incident', I began to wonder why the noise that I made, caused her such distress. Did she think I was a 'kidnapper'? Another 'theory' popped into my head!

Maybe she thought that a 'bear' was chasing her! Why do I think that this might be a possible 'reason'? Sighting bears is a rarity, anywhere, but, a smaller bear was actually spotted in the top of a tree, not far from where this incident took place! Maybe she thought I and the 'gross sounds' I uttered was the presence of a bear!

"YOU BLEW ALL OF OUR PROFIT!"

Even though the church I came to pastor, when I was only 22 years of age, was a small church, with limited financial resources, I will gladly declare that the members of that church, saw to it that I

received my weekly salary. Even when the 'church dollars' were hard to 'stretch', to meet all the obligations, the church board made the paying of the pastor's salary a priority.

With my words of gratitude to this small church, for all this church did for me and for my wife (and two young daughters), I must be honest to state that my family budget was small and it was squeezed at times to a great degree. That is to say, my wife (amazing in budgeting) knew how to 'cut comers' to save our money.

Admittedly, there were times that she 'splurged'- for instance, she often purchased new Easter dresses for our two daughter. Also, usually, our family enjoyed an occasional 'root beer' at a 'root beer stand' or a 'dairy queen' at a 'dairy queen stand'. We sometimes enjoyed a cafeteria meal together.

Venita became a skilled gardener. Her home cooked meals were 'out of this world'. She developed great skills in cooking, which served her well when she often hosted in our home. When I look back at those early years in the pastorate, I am amazed that Venita could be 'all things to all people'! She worked hard in the local church, and she was involved in a variety of tasks and projects and programs. But, with all this work, she found time to do gardening and canning!

She mentioned recently that, one year, she canned 400 quarts of food. Her canning skills is what supplemented our food budget! When anyone would give us any type of fruit or vegetables, we were thrilled. Even though canning and freezing of fruits and vegetables involved a lot of time and effort, Venita thought it was worthwhile! After all, free fruit (like apples) or vegetables (like sweet com) saved on our regular food budget!

There was one particular couple - rather eccentric and very special folks - who were not members of my church, but who were my personal friends. I don't think that they had ever attended my church services during the (perhaps) 15 years that I knew them.

They were related to some folks (members) of my church, and through these members, I became acquainted with this special older couple. I know it is hard to believe, but it is true: This older couple expected me to come to their simple home, once a month, to collect their 'tithe'! Yes, I said 'tithe'! Consistently, without fail, they had their 'tithe' ready for me, when I knocked on their door.

Their house was a rather 'humble' and 'modest' and 'old-fashioned' dwelling, but I always felt 'at home' in their 'cozy dwelling'. They liked me a lot, and they were always so friendly to me. They were 'old-fashioned', but, on the other hand, they were 'up-to-date' in many things. They had five grown children, and I had acquaintance with three of those children - very bright children!

This outgoing (conversant) older couple was very generous in their lifestyle. They not only were faithful in tithing, but they were glad when they could give other things to their friends and their relatives.

Their modest house- old-fashioned house- was located in an older part of the city, and the lot their house was set upon included about an acre of land. In back of their house was a small forest of apple

trees - old trees but trees, nevertheless, that produced abundance of apples. Most of the apple trees were very tall, and, to pick those lush apples at the top of these trees, involved climbing with the use of a tall ladder.

This couple, more than one year, in the beauty of their Fall backyard, told me to 'help myself' to as many apples as I could use. Of course, I would have to 'work' for the apples, for most of the apples (still unpicked) were at the top of those trees!

I accepted the 'challenge' of picking these beautiful apples, and I thanked them for their generosity in allowing me to have the apples at no cost to me. Of course, it took a considerable amount of time to complete this 'worthy task'. I felt so free when I was at the top of the apple trees, and I was so excited that my dear wife would have additional fruit - boxes of free apples - to can or to freeze and to use to make her delicious apple pies!

But the 'balloon of my excitement' was soon to be busted! My excitement in getting 'free apples' was soon to turn to disappointment and even to 'anger'! And it would all be my 'fault'!

As I was traveling along on that main road that is just north of the house where this couple lived, I soon came to the 'school district zone' (close to a public school), and soon I found a car behind me that, when I looked at my 'rear view mirror', was not a welcome sight. The policeman had a 'right' to stop me, for I was going beyond the speed limit, in that particular school zone! I was given a 'ticket' (for speeding), and I think it was (for that long-ago time) a rather 'steep fine'!

When I arrived at my home, and when I displayed the abundance of freshly-picked apples - apples and more apples - beautiful apples and more beautiful apples - my wife was so delighted! Such generosity on the part of my older friends! And I worked so hard to retrieve those lush apples at the top of those tall trees! How excited my wife was that, now, she had many apples which would fill many quart jars!

Everyone knows (or should know) that the 'canning process' takes lots of time, and is lots of work! But it is all worthwhile, especially when it is 'free apples' that are going into the jars! These apples would be the 'pride and joy' of my wife, when she would soon view these apples after they had been canned in beautiful quart jars - for use during a long winter!

How can excitement be turned to disappointment 'at the drop of a hat', or, should I say, at the heaviness of a gas pedal in a car! I dreaded to tell my wife that, because of my thoughtless driving, just a short distance from the home of my older friends, I took away all the profit that would have come from enjoying (canning) these free apples! I (and my wife) had to face the harsh reality- what we 'gained' in having the 'free apples', we suddenly 'lost' in the cost of the traffic ticket!

As my wife was canning those 'beautiful apples', she was realizing that she was not 'gaining' anything- even though the apples were given to us! Also, I had to realize that the excitement I experienced while I was working hard to retrieve the apples at the top of the trees, that that excitement was suddenly turned to disappointment! So much for free apples, when I was (Gustly) stopped by a patrolman - a patrolman who was carefully watching for thoughtless drivers just like me!

Is this episode - free apples, a traffic ticket, canning the apples with both gratitude and with disappointment- I say, is this episode worthy of disappointment or of laughter? Or of both? Can 'implicit laughter' be found within the 'elements' (details) of this event?

### A GRAND SURPRISE FOR A NEWCOMER!

I suppose it is 'common knowledge' that the numerical growth in a small local church is slow and painstaking. Occasionally there is a person (believer or non-believer) who actually 'seeks out' a small local church to attend. Some persons like the atmosphere and the 'closeness' and the familiarity which a small church has to offer.

There are some persons who don't want to 'be lost in the crowd' in a large church. They want to be seen and to be recognized by the 'handful of parishioners' in a small church. They want to be greeted by several persons in a smaller church, right from the time they first enter the church's front door. They want to be seen by the pastor (not just by the greeters), and they want to be known and appreciated by the pastor in a more personable manner; in other words, they don't want to be a mere 'statistic' (a person to be 'counted').

In a small church, it is 'easy' for the pastor to 'spot' the newcomer, and it is usually quite 'easy' for the pastor to 'seek out' the newcomer to have a meaningful visit with him/her.. Pastors of small churches tend to 'value' a newcomer very much, for there are not many newcomers who choose to attend a small church. Growth usually comes slowly in a small church, because most newcomers to a community tend to be drawn to a large church, where there are many established programs.

In smaller churches, when a newcomer enters the front door, there is a tendency for several members of the small church to 'gang up' on the newcomer! The members of the small church are so desirous to 'find new persons' to become a 'part' of their church, that they express their excitement in seeing a newcomer, in exuberant ways. Members quickly 'gravitate' towards the newcomer, and the newcomer sometimes finds himself 'overwhelmed' by the expressions of 'welcome'!

When I was a young pastor of a small local church, many years ago, I oftentimes would stand near the church front door (along with the head greeter), to 'reach out in love and friendliness' to the church members, as they entered the church foyer. I enjoyed having a short 'chat' with several persons, and sometimes I would even exchange a gentle hug with a few folks ('the hugging types').

It did not happen often, but occasionally I would 'spot' a newcomer, and, of course, when that happened, I immediately experienced some inner excitement! Perhaps our church would soon be encouraged to welcome a newcomer as a 'regular' new member of our congregation! The Lord knows, we need some new parishioners - parishioners who are committed and talented and spiritual and loving. Parishioners who would bring 'fresh ideas' and 'fresh zeal and enthusiasm' to our church 'family'! And, even though I did not like to admit it, I wanted new parishioners who would put money in the offering plate! Parishioners who would love 'our people', and who would quickly become incorporated into the 'body of Christ'!

I am quite sure that it was not only I, but also several of our church leaders, who entertained these

above-mentioned 'sentiments'- regarding the 'value' of meeting newcomers and of (hopefully) incorporating them into our small and struggling local church.

On one particular Sunday morning (so long ago, when I was a young 'eager, beaver pastor'), a single young man entered the front door of our small church. I was standing in the foyer, and I had already greeted several of our 'regular members'. One young man (a leader in our church) was standing beside me. Of course, I immediately recognized this well-dressed young man (a man probably in his middle 30's) as a 'newcomer' (that is, a man who had never attended our church services).

As usual, I was exuberant when I saw a 'new face'- a newcomer that had found his way to our church to attend a service! I approached him with all the 'warmth of friendliness' that I possibly possessed. I told him how glad we were to have him attend our service this Sunday morning!

As it was my 'custom', I reached out my hand, to shake his hand! Shock of all shocks, when I clasped his hand, I also 'got a hold of his necktie' -and, as I shock his hand, I pulled his 'clip on necktie' off of him! When my handshake was completed, I had his necktie in my hand! I could not believe it! Of course, he was embarrassed, and I was embarrassed, and my friend (who loves to tease) was also embarrassed!

How could I pull such a 'stunt'? A newcomer, of all things! I knew then, after this embarrassing fiasco, that this newcomer would not have a favorable impression of me (a pastor) or of the small church where he chose to attend for one service!

I would not have been surprised if the newcomer would have turned around, after that 'stunt', and would have made his way out of the church, and never returned! It is true that he never returned to visit our church again, after that memorable Sunday.

To his credit, this newcomer did 'recover from his embarrassment', sufficiently, to enable him to go into the sanctuary to 'worship' that particular morning. He probably was so 'shook up' from this incident, that he had a challenge to keep his mind on the sermon, on that particular unusual Sunday morning.

When I got my hand tangled with his tie, at least it was a 'clip-on tie'. When I unawares pulled down on his tie, at least the tie 'came off. If it had been a 'regular tie', my jerking on the tie might have left a 'red spot' on his neck! I might have been 'sued' for 'tie damage'! What a morning!

"I'LL TAKE ANOTHER SERVING! AND ANOTHER SERVING! AND ONE MORE DISH!"

Are there certain 'foods' (dishes) that you like- that you crave- that you can't get enough of? There may be several such dishes that would make the 'top of your list' that you cannot resist!

There are several such 'dishes' that are on the 'top' my list- dishes that have a special appeal, dishes that greatly satisfy my 'taste buds' and that bring delight to my personal palate! Whether this is because of one's particular DNA (inheritance), or because of acquiring a 'taste' when one is an infant or a child, or because of one's discovering a taste through exposure to certain foods as an adult!

Who really knows why there are certain foods that have a strong appeal to certain persons! Of course, the food (dish) that appeals to me, may be the very food that repulses you! Why are some persons 'in love' with certain foods, and other persons 'couldn't care less' for those foods, or even despise those very foods that you love to eat? We humans, of course, are all different, not only in the taste for food, but different in every other way (interests, hobbies, attractions, designs, colors, etc.).

My mother was always a great cook, and she prepared delicious and varied dishes (common food) when I was growing up in her home. It would take too much time (and too much recall of my brain) to list many of the tasty dishes that my mother prepared during my childhood and teen years. Not 'fancy dishes', but very tasty dishes!

Occasionally my mother would prepare a large kettle of 'battered beans'! What a treat to sit down at her simple table, and consume a large plate full of 'battered beans'! Perhaps corn bread would accompany those 'battered beans'! As I think back to my teen years, I probably would have to admit that I was close to becoming 'addicted' to 'battered beans'!

Mother, who worked as a school cook for 15 years (during my growing-up years) was an excellent cook, and she knew how to season those 'battered beans' (flavored with a little ham and salt and pepper and butter)!

After I was married, my wife (who became a great cook) occasionally presented to me, to my delight, a big bowl of 'battered beans'. She honored my mother, and she honored her husband, by prepared some of the same 'dishes' that I enjoyed when I lived in Fountain, Colorado (when I was a kid).

I don't remember the specific year when the following event took place, but I think I was still a rather young pastor. It was on a late Saturday afternoon. My dear wife, so very involved in multiple ministries in our church, nevertheless, took the time and made the effort to cook a large pot of 'battered beans'! This dish was not a 'regular dish' in our home, but Venita desired (at times) to prepare dishes that I particularly enjoyed (relished)!

I ate battered beans and I ate more battered beans. I could not get enough of those battered beans. They tasted so good. I relished every bite of the battered beans! What a delightful meal! The problem is: I lost all 'common sense', all sense of a mature perspective, all admittance that the human stomach has its limits! I gorged myself on battered beans! I lost track of how many battered beans I had eaten! One bowl of battered beans called for another bowl of battered beans!

If a little is good, then a lot is better! I went 'crazy' that afternoon on battered beans! I acted like a man who was 'high' on some drug, like a man who had lost all control of his will power! That afternoon I ate like a man who was starving! Indeed, I had lost all self-control (which is a 'fruit of the Spirit'). While consuming those battered beans, I apparently rejected my inner sense of 'moral guiltiness' ("Ron, you are guilty of overeating! Stop now!")

What I already knew (having been a preacher for several years), I now realized personally. There are consequences for 'wrong choices'! I chose to overeat, so I would have to bear the hurtful consequences. My stomach became terribly bloated, until I almost felt sick! As is typical of the

property of 'beans', my stomach was filled, not only with 'tons' of beans, but also with the emission of a lot of 'gases'! I felt like my stomach was going to explode!

With the misery I was feeling, I asked myself how I could be so 'stupid'- so 'stupid' to allow myself to be guided by my physical appetite instead of by my 'objective reason'! Any reasonable person would realize that, in spite of his abounding appetite for a particular 'dish', the 'brakes must be put on' -the will must be activated to say 'no' to any further bowls of 'battered beans'. I realized that I played the part of a 'foolish, stomach-driven' man, a man who let his appetite 'run away with him'!

The consequence of my 'hoggish appetite' was being magnified by the time the sun went down and Saturday night was approaching! I realized that, with Sunday responsibilities soon facing me, I had a big problem on my hands! I knew that I would not dare to see my small congregation, in the shape that I was in!

A bloated stomach, with 'gas' being discharged from more than one part of my body, I dare not 'go to church' and make a 'fool' of myself! What am I going to do? I am in a pathetic condition- all because of my lack of discipline in eating my battered beans! Why did I allow the battered beans (which I 'love' so much) to 'get the best of me', to 'pin me in a corner'!

As usual, I had prepared a 'good sermon' to deliver to my people. But I was unable to stand behind my pulpit to 'share the Good News'! What should I do? Who could fill in for me, at the last minute? After all, this is Saturday night, just a few hours before Sunday morning!

In my heart, I believed that I had only one person that I could call on, to help me in my predicament. He was like a 'right hand man' to me. He is so amiable and flexible and responsible. He has taught a lot of Sunday School classes. Surely, Bill Hoffman (a loyal friend) will help me, and get me 'out of my scrape'!

Late on Saturday, I called Bill, and (true to his character and availability), he consented to take the Sunday morning service!

This was not the first 'stupid' mistake that I made, and (unfortunately) it was not the last 'stupid' mistake that I made!

The apostle Paul, in writing to one of his churches, warns these believers to beware of a certain heretical group! Among the heresies of this group is their unusual appetite for food- gluttony! He writes, "whose god is their stomach."

That is a stunning indictment to me, for sadly (on that particular Saturday afternoon) I allowed my 'stomach' to be in control of my better reason! All that I could think about on that long-ago occasion, was my battered beans, and my stomach became the servant of those beans.

This gluttonous experience (stuffing myself with battered beans) made me realize how easy it is to rationalize and to invite sin into my life! The activity of eating a certain food seemed to be so 'innocent' and 'acceptable' and 'agreeable'.

It is well said that 'sin is simply a perversion of a legitimate desire'. Obviously it is good to eat buttered beans, but it is wrong (it becomes a sin) when one 'crosses the line' and he eats too many buttered beans!

"Abstinence in some things (like consuming no alcoholic drinks), and modesty in many things (like eating some buttered beans, but not 'tons' of buttered beans).

What Jesus (in the Gospel accounts) was accused, namely, of gluttony, He was not guilty of! Jesus loved parties, but He never indulged Himself during those joyful occasions. He definitely was not a glutton, like His enemies accused Him of being! In contrast (as one of Jesus' very fallible servants), I was not accused by anyone of being a glutton, but I, indeed, was in actuality a 'glutton', as a result of getting myself 'sick' by eating 'tons' of buttered beans!

Destroying our body through alcoholic consumption, and by overeating (gluttony) are only two manifestations of sin against the human body' (called the 'temple of the Holy Spirit).

Gluttony (overeating) is classified as a sin that is grouped with the sin of drunkenness. "O my son, be wise and stay in God's paths; don't carouse with drunkards and gluttons, for they are on their way to poverty." (Proverbs 23:21 Living Bible)

When I reflect back (a few decades ago) upon that Saturday afternoon, I wonder now why I would let my appetite 'get away from me'. Why didn't I use a little 'common sense', and why didn't I simply suggest to myself that 'enough of a good thing is enough!' The buttered beans are so delicious, but I can wait until tomorrow and I can wait until the day after tomorrow, to enjoy this delicious dish (moderation- 'a little at a time').

Moderation in eating has seldom been easy for me - at that particular time (so long ago), and since that time! When I am relishing a good 'dish', it is hard for me to say 'no' to a 'second helping of food'! Moderation in many areas of daily activities is required! I know that, only through the indwelling Holy Spirit, will I be able to 'conquer my appetite' for delicious food!

God created all things for the enjoyment of His creatures, but that which is intended for legitimate enjoyment (pleasure) can be misused (abused)! When that happens, sin enters the picture! Always remember: 'sin is a perversion of a legitimate desire'! Eating is good, but eating too much becomes gluttony (a serious sin which is listed in the Bible).

In spite of my failure (my gluttony) on that long-ago Saturday afternoon, I can't help react to that 'event' with a smile, with a chuckle, and even with a little laughter! In my 'mind's eye', I can see my 'bloated belly' (the result of my unearthly consumption of buttered beans)!

I can see myself (in my 'mind's eye') as appearing as 'fat as a balloon' -a 'balloon' that needed to release a lot of 'gas', but a 'balloon' that knows that it's 'gas' has to be released privately! Also, 'in my mind's eye', I can see myself 'crowded into a corner in a predicament' feeling a certain amount of 'panic' regarding the upcoming Sunday morning service! The mere 'stupidity' of my actions brings a smile to my face!

An illustration of 'implicit laughter', once again!

### PRANKS, PRANKS, AND MORE PRANKS!

In the early part of this book, I shared in some detail the great influence that a certain minister had on me when I was in my teen years. Rev. Edgar Holmes Humphreys was the pastor of the Free Methodist Church at Fountain, Colorado, during my teen years, and it was this man who 'took me under his wings', to disciple me in the truths of Christianity. I spent much time with his son, Art, whom I considered to be my 'best friend' during my difficult adolescent years.

Art was a rather impulsive, high strung teen, but he was a 'real companion' to me. In fact, he was the only 'close friend' that I enjoyed during those years of my life- years in which my own emotional life was sometimes far from 'stable'.

Art seemed to really enjoy me, and I really enjoyed him. He was a 'real pal' to me. He was 'fun-loving', spiritually-minded, talented, and a loyal friend to me. He was a 'leader type' person, so I tended to listen to his many suggestions and his creative ideas.

He, like most teens, could demonstrate, at times, unstable behavior, but, nevertheless, Art had a commitment to Christ, and a commitment to a life of integrity. Art admired his minister father, and he, along with myself, often 'sat at the feet' of his father, to listen and to learn from the lips of a mature man (a man who was scholarly, yet practical, in his approach to the 'way of holiness'). I loved to spend a lot of time in Art's home, and I cherished Art's dear parents.

It is true that Art was a serious-minded Christian teenager. He and I talked, at times, about the things of the 'Christian Faith'. We prayed together, and he and I and a few other teens prepared 'creative programs', to 'present' to the small Sunday evening congregation at our small local church. Art (along with his two sisters) was very musical. He had a great voice, and he sang heart-moving solos, occasionally. I loved to hear him sing.

Even though I did not consider myself to be a 'singer', Art encouraged me (persuaded me) to sing duets with him! I didn't really 'know music', but finally I consented to sing (in public) a certain song with him. I only knew how to sing the 'lead' part, but (believe it or not) we two sounded 'quite professional' together! (Ha!) "I Heard An Old, Old Story" was the song that we found enjoyment in singing together!

When today I hear someone sing that particular (old) song, my mind goes back a half century to the little white church on the corner, near downtown Fountain, Colorado, where Art and I blended our teenage voices, to tell of the wonders of God's grace (highlighted in that song)!

So many years have come and have gone, since those heart-warming days- days when I found great pleasure in the home of a godly minister and his family! A period of time - approximately six years - when I spent much time with my loving, though impulsive, friend! "Precious memories, how they linger, how they ever flood my soul." Years of great spiritual growth, years of intellectual stimulation, years of friendship!

I really loved my 'close friend' (Art), and I know that he, more than any other teen, influenced me during my growing up years (as a teenager). Art was warm and personable and friendly and affectionate (he was the 'touchy type' person).

He expressed a lot of affection towards me. He naturally 'touched' persons (on their shoulders) when he talked to them. It was easy for him to 'hug' persons, as an expression of his love and affection and admiration for others. He was popular with some persons, for he was overwhelming in the affirming words that he verbalized to his friends and to his relatives.

He was an outgoing, extroverted type of person. He sometimes was both the 'laughing' and the 'laughable' person in a group setting. He felt comfortable in social settings, and sometimes he liked to take 'center stage' in social gatherings. It was natural for him to laugh at his own jokes, or to laugh at the jokes of others.

Along with all the positive qualities in him (and there were many), Art could, at times, be mischievous and a little 'too playful'! He tended to be so spontaneous in his approach to life, that he found it difficult to be disciplined in the pursuit of worthy goals. He was very 'smart', but he tended to leave things to the 'last minute', rather than properly to plan for the future. He loved to have a 'good time', and he loved to be a 'jokester'.

He was compassionate towards people, but he tended 'to ride on the wave of pleasure and joviality'. He loved a good joke, and he loved to laugh and laugh. He sometimes had a hard time finding a 'balance' between the serious pursuits of life (like studying) and the lighter moments of life (like fun and entertainment).

I, who was a serious-minded person, enjoyed being around him (for the most part), for he brought a certain 'lightness to my spirit' and a well-needed laughter to my lips. However, there were times that I felt he went 'overboard' on the 'light side' of life, to the exclusion of the more 'serious side' of life!

Art was one year behind me, in schooling. When I graduated from high school in 1962, I enrolled as a freshman at Central College, McPherson, Kansas (earlier in this book, I focused a lot on my life at Central College). When Art graduated from high school the next year (1963), he expressed a desire to attend Central College, and he requested that he become my college roommate. That sounded 'fine' to me, so I consented.

Little did I know what I was 'getting into' when Art became my roommate! Art had the intellectual ability to excel academically at Central College. But, it seemed that often, during his first year at college, Art's 'playful side' overtook his 'serious side'.

Of course, even though I had been his friend during our junior high and senior high years, I knew that I could not 'probe' into his personal academic life. But, from my limited perspective as his roommate, it was quite obvious that Art lacked the kind of discipline that he needed, if he were to succeed academically. I think he nearly 'flunked' some of his courses!

I knew that Art enjoyed playing 'pranks' on his friends, so I was not very surprised when I (his

roommate) became, on occasion, the 'brunt of his jokes'. Some jokes that were played on me may have been originated by other students. Even though I was only 17-18 years old at the time, I was assigned the responsibility, as third floor dorm assistant, to 'check in' all the fellow students on my third floor.

This included, not only the several college students who were approximately my age, but also the handful of high school students who also were members of the student body enrollment. (For several years, there was a small high school on campus that coexisted with the college student body).

Several of those high school boys happened to live on my dorm floor. I think some of these students were 'troubled students' whose frustrated parents decided to send them away from their home, to a place where their teens might be reformed.

The very nature of my somewhat disciplinarian role as a 'watchdog' of all the students (making sure that all the students on my entire floor were in their room by 10:00 p.m. every week-day night)- I say, my 'role' as an overseer and disciplinarian, obviously, 'drew some fire' from my fellow students on my third floor! A few students (especially a few rebellious high school students) gave me some 'hassles' (resistance), but, most of the students cooperated with me, and I enjoyed a good relationship with almost everyone!

However, since I was the dorm floor assistant, I was a 'ready-made target' for a few 'creative pranks'!

Because I was his long-time friend (and presently his college roommate), Art had to 'join in on the fun' - 'at my expense'! Art (the fun-loving person that he was) could not 'resist the temptation' to 'deliver a few pranks' to me! I never knew who the 'culprit' was when I surprisingly became the recipient of some of the pranks.

I won't accuse my roommate as the 'culprit' for all the my pranks, for I am sure that other students on my floor were in on some of the 'tricks'. However, Art liked to be identified as the 'trickster', when it came to the pranks he 'played' on me. At least a couple of the pranks were readily identified as the 'work of my roommate'. Art loved to laugh when I was 'caught' in the midst of a prank- a prank that he had skillfully 'pulled off'. Art's creative brain worked to my disadvantage! Ha!

I knew that Art liked me (actually, I think he loved me), so I 'went along with his fun' (at my expense). Thank God, I never got angry or distressed when I became the object of some person's pranks! I took the pranks 'in graceful style', and I joined the laughter of the prankster! Yes, I took the pranks gracefully, although some of the pranks brought some discomfort to me!

One evening, Art and I were relaxing in our dorm room, carrying on a casual conversation. Posing as the very 'innocent' and hospitable and generous person, Art offered me a sandwich. I thought that gesture on his part was a gesture of kindness, so I gladly accepted his 'gift of a sandwich'.

My first bite into the sandwich soon revealed that he was playing a prank on me! Instead of the sandwich containing salad dressing (a delicious spread), the sandwich was layered with soap! The taste was horrible! Immediately, as I spit out the bite, Art laughed and laughed! Of course, I soon

entered into his 'jovial spirit'. He thought it was so 'cool' that he had 'tricked me!' I did have to admit that he was rather 'creative' in his design of a sandwich to 'fool' (trick) me!

On another occasion, his creativity in designing an instrument of trickery was manifest, when I entered my dorm room, rather late on a week-end night (probably Friday night). During my sophomore year at college (which was Art's first year), I was spending more and more time with a young lady - a young lady that eventually 'won my heart' altogether (the lady who eventually became my wife). I did not 'date' heavily, but occasionally I enjoyed spending time with Venita.

I will admit that the contraption (mechanism) that Art constructed (as a prank) was amazing! To this very day (after more than 50 years), I don't yet know the dynamics of this contraption (unique device). The device was attached to the top of the door (not visible, of course, from the side of the door that I would see when I approached my room). Attached to the top of the inside of the door, there was an upright can, full of water. This can of water then flipped over to release all the water on the head of the person who entered the room! When I opened the door, the can automatically flipped over, and I got an unwanted shower of cold water! A surprise of surprises when I opened my door, late that Friday night!

Can you imagine the 'hilarious laughter' that erupted from the mouth and lips of Art Humphreys, when I was drenched with water, as soon as I entered my room! Art had waited for some time, in our dorm room, just to see the surprised expression on my face, when I (rather listless) opened the dorm room door!

I remembered this 'prank', after more than 50 years sensed it happened during my sophomore year of college! How long do you suppose Art remembered this prank? (It is too long of a story to recount in this book, but, sadly, Art was not able to remember that 'prank' as long as I, good-heartedly, remembered it, for Art died from cancer when he was probably in his 40's).

Who were the 'culprits', I never knew, but there are a couple other 'incidences' that brought me the opposite responses - both distress and laughter.

Unlike my dear mother who definitely was a 'perfectionist' in her over-all lifestyle, but, particularly, in her homemaking habits, I tend to be, not unclean, but, nevertheless, rather 'random' in my lifestyle. When I say that I am 'not unclean', that statement is not totally accurate. As a student - intent on getting 'good grades' - I sometimes did not concentrate on washing my clothes as often as I should have! There was a special (odd) feature in the old-fashioned dorm room where I lived for several months.

The closets in these rooms were rather unique. The closets were both wide and very deep (probably 6 feet deep). Like a 'large hole' (a large rectangle, maybe 3 feet by 6 feet in dimension), with no door to confine the closet. Of course, it was like an ideal (large) 'store room' where I could deposit all my 'dirty clothes'!

This storage area had a large capacity, so I could deposit lots of 'dirty clothes' in that convenient space. Admittedly (and I have no excuse), I piled my 'dirty clothes' into that large area, and many

days (weeks?) passed by before I bundled up the 'dirty clothes' to take them some place to get them washed.

One day I began to admit to myself that I was 'overdue' in giving adequate attention to my 'dirty clothes'. I admitted that I had become too preoccupied with other (important) matters, and that it was definitely time for me to pull out the dirty clothes, and to do what any responsible student does - wash his clothes!

With a certain degree of shame, to myself, I admitted that my 'dirty clothes' were getting so 'smelly' that the smell was actually permeating my entire dorm room! My irresponsible negligence was becoming very inexcusable! What would my mother think - a mother that was particular in everything she did, and who was committed to utmost cleanliness? I would not want her, presently, to scrutinize my dorm room! She would (kindly) suggest that I regularly 'wash my clothes'!

The time had finally arrived for me to pull out all those 'dirty clothes' (not a 'pleasant task'), and get those 'stinky clothes' washed! Why have I waited so long to do this 'basic task', and why did I have to endure the increasingly 'foul smell' that had been permeating my room for several weeks?

I delighted myself that I finally was doing a 'task' that I hated - pulling out my many clothes that I had 'stuffed' into this 'hole' (called my closet)!

I came to the end of the 'hole', and I had removed all my 'stinky clothes', and, to my great surprise, I discovered at the very end of my 'hole' (closet) a 'plastic container' - a container with a lid that sealed the plastic container! I thought to myself, "What in the world is this plastic container? It does not belong to me?"

I was baffled by this container! I knew that the container contained something! But what?

As any other person would do, I did! I took off the lid to the container. But what a mistake I made, when I removed the lid to the container! Inside the container was 'rotten fish'! As soon as I removed the lid of the container, the foul smell of the rotten fish, permeated the surrounding atmosphere! The odor of the rotten fish was the very odor that I had been smelling for quite some time, and, all along, I had imagined that the foul smell in my room was the foul smell of my dirty clothes!

With considerable shock, I took the container (that was the source of the 'sickening odor'), and I dashed down the steps, from the third floor to the first floor, and I exited the old dorm building, and I quickly found a 'dumping place' where I ridded myself of the 'rotten fish'!

One 'small problem', however. While I was dashing down the steps of the three-story dormitory, I was leaving behind the permeating odor of the 'rotten fish'. My gift of a new fragrance to all my fellow students in my dormitory!

A 'prank in the same category' happened to me, at a different time. Again, I noticed a strange 'odor' in my dorm room. Again, I thought that the 'washing of my clothes' was overdue. I would be ashamed if anyone came into my room, and would be nearly overpowered by the 'terrible odor' in my

room.

I was raised by a mother who was committed to utmost cleanliness, so why am I, her son, so sloppy when it comes to keeping a 'clean room'? I knew that uncleanness is inexcusable! I need to be more 'conscientious' regarding my 'home keeping' responsibilities!

I knew that the 'atmosphere' of my dorm room needed a 'transformation' (a change), and I knew that my clothes needed to be washed 'on a regular schedule'. Oh, to be more disciplined!

One day, while I stretched out on my simple bed (to relax and to rest), I happened to be staring at the ceiling of my room. I noticed a rather strange shadow made by some object - an object that was lying in the light shades, at the center position of the ceiling! What a strange shadow in the shade, caused by some object that was lying in the shade! Of course, I removed the shade to discover the identity of the strange object!

I could hardly 'believe what I was seeing'. There were two eggs lying inside the shade! On more careful observation, I realized that they were not fresh eggs. The two eggs were 'rotten eggs!'

Eggs, when they were placed there - by some prankster - were, of course, fresh eggs. How long had these eggs been in that ceiling shade, undetected? I had not detected them! Of course, the pranksters intended for the two eggs to go undetected for a long time - at least undetected long enough to allow the unrefrigerated eggs to become 'rotten'!

As in the 'case' of the 'rotten fish', I disposed of the 'rotten eggs' as quickly as I could!

As 'lazy' as I sometimes can be, I could have excused myself from washing my clothes, since I could have reasoned that it was the 'rotten fish' or the 'rotten eggs' that were to 'blame' for the 'stinky odors' in my room. My mother, of course, would not have 'bought that excuse', and I know (in my more reasonable moments), that I could not blame the 'rotten fish' and the 'rotten eggs' for my stale atmosphere!

As the third floor dorm assistant, I early learned (when I was 17-18 years old) that I dare not take myself too 'seriously'. I learned that, even though I was the 'brunt of a joke' (recipient of an innocent 'prank'), I must allow others to 'laugh' because of their prank that they 'pulled on me', and that I must allow myself to 'laugh along with the prankster'!

Even though I was the 'object' of the prank, why not have some 'fun' along with those who were 'using' me to produce laughter within themselves! As long as the laughter is not at the expense of hurting another person (a mean joke), then laughter is 'beneficial and life-giving'!

There are likely a few persons in our world who laugh 'too much', but most of the other persons in our world (perhaps you and me) who don't laugh enough!

When I was a student at Central College (as a dorm assistant), I learned as a teenager not to be overly-sensitive to the responses of fellow students who liked to play pranks on me. Previously (as a teenager

who grew up in a rather 'serious environment'), I probably would have been upset (mad?) if any fellow teen would have played pranks on me (to my face or in secret).

I learned, when I was surrounded by teens on a dorm floor, that it was good to laugh at their pranks, it was good to 'go with the flow', it was good to humble myself and to be a part of a teen crowd who wanted to 'have fun' through pranks!

Even though I was 'assigned to be a type of watchdog' on the third floor of the college dorm, at times I needed to 'let my hair down' and to relax, and to laugh at a few pranks! Take God very seriously, but don't take yourself so 'seriously'! Laugh at yourself, and allow others to laugh when they 'pull off' a good prank (at your expense). Be a part of the fun and laughter that God intended you to enjoy!

Laughter is spontaneous for some (few) people, but most of us have to learn to be 'light-hearted' and 'good-natured' when we are the 'brunt of a joke or of a prank'! I had to learn to 'loosen up', to be willing to let others laugh when I fall into their (innocent) 'traps' (their 'contraptions').

Don't be self-conscious! Don't be defensive! Don't be overly-sensitive! Don't be angry when others target you with their (innocent) pranks! God is a 'laughing God', so God wants you to be a 'laughing servant'! God has 'designed' you to laugh (unlike the beasts of the field)- so be glad to laugh and laugh! Laughing will do 'wonders for you'!

Life is too short for you to be so serious-minded! If you are not a prankster, allow the prankster to laugh at you when they 'catch you in their pranks'. Don't be offended by their pranks! Frankly, God was teaching me a lot about laughter (about the value of pranks) when I was quite young (at Central College). I was a very serious-minded (and sometimes emotionally disturbed) teenager before I left my home to attend college, at age 17.

Because of the several 'pranks' that I experienced (when I was the 'watchdog' on the third floor of the old dormitory at Central College), I learned how to 'loosen up', to laugh at myself, and to laugh with fellow students who got their 'kicks' out of engineering 'pranks' for me! I found that life goes much smoother when I can open my mouth wide, hold my head back, and release some hearty and hilarious laughter from my God-created lips!

A little laughter can be compared to a little salt on food. Without salt, the food is not flavored tastefully. Without a little laughter, life can become too serious, life can become dull and tasteless. Too much salt, or too much laughter also does not produce the proper 'flavor', either in food or in general life. There must be 'balance' at all times. The book of Ecclesiastes notes that there is a time to laugh and a time not to laugh. The wise person (the God-directed person) knows the difference!

### "I MUST IMPRESS MY FUTURE FATHER-IN-LAW!"

One summer, probably a year before I was to be married to my wife, I visited my future father-in-law's ranch (the place where my future wife grew up). Of course, I did not know this rancher well, but I did know that he spent his entire life involved in all the tasks of ranching - raising cattle, putting up

hay, and the other daily tasks of ranching. He was not a wealthy rancher, but, nevertheless, through careful budgeting and skillful management, this 'rugged man' had become successful in many ways in his 'profession'.

More than his success in ranching, was his success in becoming a great man, in terms of the development of his godly character. He had a reputation, far and wide, in that part of ranch country, for his outstanding integrity and his trustworthiness. He was a 'man of his word'. He treated his fellow ranchers with respect and with kindness.

He had an unusual love for his Lord! One of the greatest 'loves' of his life, was his love of his little Free Methodist Church, located a half mile from his home, located at the end of the tree-shadowed lane that connected his house to his church.

He seldom missed a church service, although in all honesty I must declare that, because of the weariness from his work, sometimes he found himself sleeping while a good sermon was being preached. This future father-in-law was kind and he was very generous (in his giving to his church and to needy persons).

He was unusually 'extroverted' in his personality. He never met a stranger. He loved to talk to anyone who would give him 'the time of day'! He was very engaging and interesting and informative, when he visited with his fellow ranchers (at his home, or at his church, or at the small town coffee shop).

He had his own strong opinions about certain matters, but, on the other hand, he avoided arguments and debates with persons whom he cherished. He was always 'conciliatory' in his responses to people, not 'adversarial'! He was practically-minded and quite pragmatic in his approach to life and to life's problems. He was man of the Word (of God), and he daily practiced prayer. He was always kind to his livestock!

There was no man that I esteemed and admired, as much as I did this unusual man. He was not interested in high-sounding theories, but he was committed to 'workable solutions' (especially when he was contemplating 'ranch issues'). He was very supportive, in many ways, of the various pastors who came to fill the pulpit of his little church- the little church which was filled to overflowing for his funeral service (which happened many years after I became a 'member of the family').

Some of the 'facts' and 'insights' (shared above) I became aware of, after I became married to his daughter and after I spent quality time with my father-in-law (and with my choice mother-in-law who was a very godly and wise and intelligent woman). I was the son-in-law of these choice persons, for more than 30 years, before they respectively passed away.

I must return to the time when I was yet unmarried - a few months before I was married. I had full intention to marry the daughter of this rancher. I was aware that my future father-in-law knew that I was not raised on a ranch, that, indeed, I had no experience in the 'ways of ranching'. But, nevertheless, on one occasion, when I was visiting on his ranch, I wanted him to know that I was interested in (though not knowledgeable of) the 'lifestyle of the rancher'!

One particular morning (during my short vacation on the ranch), I decided that I wanted to ride along with my future father-in-law, in his pickup truck, to 'check on the cattle'. He was a kind and companionable and conversational man, and he never tried to 'put me on the spot' regarding my lack of 'ranch knowledge'. He knew that I was a 'small town boy', and he tried to engage me in conversation that would be edifying to both of us.

As he drove over the rough pasture land, we conversed some together. There were in the pastures, what were called 'blow outs' -large holes that had been formed as a result of the strong winds that blew away a lot of sand, scattered randomly in the pasture. Much of the pasture land was rough, and the pickup had to maneuver this rough pasture land. Obviously, the pickup steered clear of the few blow outs in the pasture.

My future father-in-law was not a large land owner, but, through careful management and budgeting, during his lifetime, he gradually purchased more and more acreage. I think, at this time, that he own about 2,000 acres. This land was divided into several smaller portions of land, to be used for specific purposes. Obviously, the smaller, divided portions of land was fenced off, with each smaller pasture having 'access' by way of a gate that, of course, could be opened and closed.

The morning that I rode with my future father-in-law, I saw the pickup approaching a closed gate - a gate that needed, of course, to be opened, so that we could proceed into the next pasture. There were cattle that needed to be check on, in the pasture, in the next pasture, on the other side of the upcoming gate.

I thought to myself that I wanted to make myself 'useful'- 'useful' to my future father-in-law. I will, therefore, offer to get out of the pick-up, and I will open the gate to allow the pickup to proceed into the next pasture. And, of course, my future father-in-law can relax a few minutes, while I do the work of opening and closing the gate.

I was young (verily 20 years old at the time), so I jumped out of the pickup, and I hurriedly jogged towards the closed gate. I did not know what I was getting myself into! It was a wire gate (certainly not a modem-type gate), and the strange mechanism that was used to squeeze the post to release the circular wire around the pole- the ancient mechanism was most difficult to handle! I finally, with the exercise of all the strength I could muster, released the strong circular wire that held the gate to the supporting pole.

My future father-in-law (much older than I, and much stronger in his arms than I was)- he watched me (probably with more sympathy than with criticism), as I struggled to release the wire gate from the supporting pole. I wondered how ranchers daily accomplished the task that I verily accomplished just now (that is, opening gates to go from one pasture to another pasture)!

After I finally (with great effort) accomplished my task of opening the gate, I knew that my volunteer job was only half done. After the pickup proceeded through the now-open gate, I would have to close (shut) the gate. I knew that it would be just as hard (maybe harder) to close (shut) the gate than it was to open the gate! I knew that it would require the exertion of all the 'arm and shoulder muscle' that I had!

One thing this 'humiliating experience' taught me was that I was marrying into a rancher family- a ranger family whose 'head' of the family was a man who (after having spent many decades with cattle on pasture lands) was 'very strong and rugged'!

I was young, a competitive runner, but this rancher (who probably never ran a race) was much stronger than I was (and he had lived much longer). Opening and shutting gates that separated smaller pastures - this was a simple and a routine task to him. Why did this task require all the strength that I could possibly muster?

After the pick-up was driven through the now-open gate, I knew that I had the second-half of my task immediately ahead of me. I knew I had to give my 'soul and body and mind' to the difficult task of stretching that circular wire over the supporting post- with the use (aid) of the squeezing mechanism. It was so difficult for me to bring the end of the wire fence close enough to the supporting post, so that I could slid the circular wire over the top of the supporting post.

I was proud and I was satisfied with myself when, through my straining and grunting, I finally got the gate closed! I was excited that I could do something (as a future son-in-law) for my future father-in-law.

After I finished my sweat-producing task (opening and shutting the wire gate that divides the pastures from each other), I inwardly congratulated myself on a 'job well done!' I was glad that I had demonstrated to my future father-in-law that I will be an involved and interested and companionable son-in-law! Even though I know very little about the 'lifestyle of ranching', I nevertheless, will be a son-in-law that will be available (when I visit the ranch) to 'carry on practical tasks' for him!

One of life's abiding lessons: "Good intentions do not always produce good results!"

When I finished by grueling task of finally getting the wire gate closed (shut), I looked up, and I planned, of course, to take a few steps away from the closed gate, to get back inside of the pick-up (where my father-in-law was waiting for me).

I accomplished my task alright - I got the gate closed. But I ended up on the WRONG SIDE OF THE FENCE! Talk about embarrassment! With the great exertion of muscles, I finally got the gate closed, but, in my preoccupation with my formidable task, I was not aware that I was shutting the gate in a way that would leave me on the original side of the fence. I was still on the side of the original pasture, instead of being on the side of the pasture where we were 'headed' to feed some cattle! Of course, to get back to the pick-up, I had to climb over that rather high fence!

My father-in-law (to-be) did not humiliate me. He made no 'ado' regarding this incident. He loved to 'have a little fun', but he 'played down my stupid mistake'! Of course, if he ever doubted that I might someday be a good 'ranch hand', I think 'all doubts' were (that morning) removed! Ha!

During the many years that I enjoyed being his son-in-law, I loved and I admired him and his dear wife (whom I highly admired as a wise and godly woman). It is hard for me to believe, but there was a time when he had me do some haying for him. How he could place so much confidence in me, I will

never know!

There was at least one time he had me drive his large tractor, and this tractor pulled two large mowers. I know that when I turned the comers in the hay field (with a double blade attached to the mower, I left quite a lot of uncut hay on the comers. My dear father-in-law (the kind man that he was) saved my 'dignity', and he never criticized me for my 'far-from-perfect' job of mowing in his beautiful hay fields.

He knew that I was not a 'country boy', he knew that I had no experience of working on the 'ranch' (in Nebraska). He was a good-humored man, and (as a dedicated Christian) he knew how to 'take things in stride' (to see the 'funny side' of life). He never once made fun of me because of my lack of knowledge or of my lack of experience on the ranch.

He was most respectful of my 'call' to the ministry, and he supported me (and Venita) totally and enthusiastically regarding the 'call'! In fact, if it had not been for the generous financial gifts that he (and his wife) gave to us, we would have had a hard time 'making it financially in the pastoral work.

He and his wife regularly gave us financial gifts (usually at the end of the year), and even though Venita and I visited the ranch twice a year, we went back to our home with a box full of meat (choice cuts of beef)!

Once during our trip to the ranch, Venita's dad took us to the largest (nearby) city, and (surprise of surprises) Venita's dad presented to us a brand new car! Venita's dad believed that we needed a better (more reliable and more presentable) car. I think this was the only new car that we ever owned! Of course, we drove that car for many years!

Venita's folks (though they were ranchers) were definitely not wealthy, but they were generous to Venita and to me. They knew that, materially-speaking, we were living on a meager pastor's salary, and, therefore, we needed a regular supplement to our salary!

Venita (with the example of frugality from her beloved parents) knew how to 'stretch the dollars' in or home and marriage! Part of Venita's act of frugality was demonstrated by her canning of vegetables and through her freezing of fruit and meats. I think that in one year alone Venita put up about 400 quarts of garden stuff!

It takes a lot of skill to manipulate (drive) a large tractor, in a hay field. Venita's dad used to 'brag' on her, because she (an experienced ranch girl) could be so 'neat' in the way she mowed the hay fields. She virtually left no hay on the comers! Venita's dad was always respectful of me, but (rightly so) I never once heard my father-in-law tell me what a 'great job' I did while I was mowing the hay in his hay fields! Ha!

In spite of my humiliating experience (the 'gate fiasco'), at a time before I became a part of a rancher's family, the man who was my beloved father-in-law for several decades, never belittled me, never focused on my faults, never rejected me. In fact, he and his wife (and Venita's siblings) could not have been kinder to me and more thoughtful to me.

Of course, there were times (in Venita's family) when laughter resounded- wholesome and life-giving laughter! Laughter sometimes regarding innocent mistakes that were made, during the work-a-day life on the ranch!

I must admit that I never became adept (skilled) at opening and on shutting wire gates on the Glenn White Ranch, near Amelia, Nebraska! I will let my strong-armed father-in-law attend to that important job! I don't need to embarrass myself again, with my futile attempts to 'impress my father-in-law!

### THE WEDDING DAY WITH MANY CACKLING CHICKENS!

It was on one of those hot summers afternoons - a scorching summer afternoon. It was a very sparsely attended wedding, held in the small sanctuary where I had preached every Sunday for several years. I hardly knew the couple who were scheduled on this day to exchange their wedding vows. It was a couple, probably in their early 20's. It might have been through mutual friends that I was contacted to conduct the simple ceremony.

The day of the wedding had finally arrived. As brides usually are, this young bride was very beautiful, with her traditional long gown highlighting the afternoon wedding. Only a handful of friends were in attendance, to be witnesses to this important, life-changing event. Hopefully, it would be a once-only event. After the wedding, unfortunately, I never had further contact with this couple.

As I stood before this young couple, ready to give my blessing to them (through the repetition of a few familiar historic words and a few quotations from the Scriptures), I personally noticed that the atmosphere of the sanctuary seemed rather 'stuffy' and rather 'hot'! I soon learned that I was not the only one who sensed that the scorching heat from the out-of-doors was, apparently, making its way into the atmosphere of the church room where the ceremony was being conducted.

When I was fervently conducting the ceremony - carefully and thoughtfully reading the beautiful words regarding the sanctity of marriage - I glanced at the couple who were standing before me in such a dignified manner. The next thing I saw was most disturbing! The bride began to slightly move her body from one side to the other side - back and forth!

It was not her father, but it was the man (like a father to this bride)- the man who 'gave her away' earlier in the ceremony- who was keenly aware of the 'critical situation'! He rushed from the second pew to the front of the sanctuary where the bride was tottering, and he caught her just before her head hit the hard church floor. He rescued her from a serious injury, just in time!

During the few previous minutes, when the bride was becoming so weak that she finally fainted, the groom did not realize what was transpiring. As he was carefully listening to the words of the ceremony, he was oblivious to the condition of his bride.

When the bride fell backwards in a 'dead faint', and when the man (who gave her away) caught her, this startled and stunned groom finally 'gathered his senses' to the point of going to his bride (as she lay on the floor, in the center isle of the sanctuary)! He frantically carried her to the front pew of the

church, and he laid her out on the pew. (I was trying to keep my composure, in my established position, and I said a few words, salting those words with a little humor).

After he (and a few others) stretched the bride out on the front pew, the groom frantically dashed down the center isle of the church, and he quickly found some paper towels which he soaked with water, and then he dashed back to where his bride was beginning to 'come to'. He applied the wet towels to her beautiful face.

This entire fiasco took place within only a few minutes (maybe 5 minutes), and, fortunately, the bride again took her place beside her groom. In spite of this happening (her fainting), the bride looked as beautiful now as before the 'crisis'!

The wedding reception was held in a semi-country setting, located in the out-of-doors. Informality would be the word to describe both the wedding ceremony and the wedding reception. As I mentioned earlier, there were only a few friends and relatives in attendance at both the wedding and the reception.

The location for the reception was very close to a large shed- a shed that 'housed' hundreds and hundreds of chickens! Possibly the man who acted as the 'giving father' at the wedding, owned this huge 'chicken farm'.

On my way to the reception (which was, as I noted, close in location to where the reception was held, in the out-of-doors), I say, on my way to the reception area, I was given an enthusiastic invitation to view (that is, to walk through) the large building that 'housed' the myriad of chickens! I had never walked through such a building, so I graciously consented to have a 'tour' through this amazing place!

Dressed in my best suit (for the wedding ceremony), I sensed a strange contrast (a dissonance) between the neatness and the dignity of my wedding attire, and the wildness and dirtiness of hundreds of chickens chirping and cackling loudly, as I passed hundreds of towering racks- racks from which they were making their needed 'deposits' (good fertilizer!).

To the guide, I expressed my 'awe and wonderment' that there could be such a amazing place- a remarkable business! I told the guide (who was a part of the wedding company) that he was gracious to take his time to show me this unique place! (I was secretly hoping that my beautiful wedding suit would not be the recipient of some 'deposits'!).

After what seemed like a rather long tour through the chicken 'house' (even though, in reality, it did not consume that much time), I proceeded (like a gentleman) to the lawn area where the reception was already in progress.

Even though I noticed that it was a rather 'strange' thing- that is, that there were two lines that led to two different punch bowls, I got into one of the short lines, to take my turn to get a 'drink' of punch. After I drank a cup of punch, I decided that I would like to have another drink of that particular (delicious) punch. I still could not figure out why there were two lines and two bowl of punch.

At that point (as I had made a decision to get some more punch from the same bowl from which I had just had a drink), some one came quickly to me (the minister), and this person suggested that I was drinking from the wrong punch bowl. This person urged me to take punch from the other punch bowl. I responded that I really liked the taste of punch from the bowl from which I had just been served, and that I would like another drink of that 'delicious punch'!

I sometimes, admittedly, am a 'little slow in comprehension and in communication'! It finally 'dawned on me' why this person was urging me to go to the other bowl, why she told me that I did not want the punch from that particular bowl from which I had just been served. That punch, from that particular bowl, was spiked with alcohol!

Can you imagine how I felt- the minister who had just performed a wedding ceremony, a minister who had never tasted alcohol, a minister who had taught the young persons never to indulge in alcohol - I say, can you imagine a minister (namely, me) being very pleased with the taste of a spiked punch, and that he wanted another drink of that particular 'punch'!

Considering all the wedding ceremonies and all the receptions that I have been a part of, this simple and unpredictable wedding ceremony, followed by a reception that had the marks of 'uniqueness' -a tour through a huge chicken shed, followed by the surprise that the minister was partaking of 'exciting' spiked punch- I say, considering all my previous experiences, it is easy to classify this over-all wedding 'event' as very 'odd', even every 'laughable'!

One of the most unusual episodes in the 'life of the pastorate'! I can't help but 'laugh' when I think back of all the 'twists and turns', of all the unanticipated 'happenings' of that particular hot summer day!

Thank God, the bride was not hurt, and no one else was hurt during those strange afternoon happenings, so I believe I have the liberty to have a 'good laugh'- a 'good laugh' when I allow my mind to take me on a little trip back to a happy (but odd) event, all dramatized on one hot summer afternoon.

I can't get into the 'small heads of chickens', but I am going to think that the loud noises of the myriads of cackling chickens were the loud noises of chickens that were celebrating the happiness of that wedding day! I know that is a 'crazy' idea, but why not be 'crazy' sometimes? Hal There surely must be some reason why God placed that chicken shed so close to the wedding reception!

Why would I, who believe in total abstinence (abstinence from all alcoholic beverages) be so 'satisfied' with spiked punch- and like that spiked punch so much that I wanted a second glass? How odd! How very odd! How could I not even discern the taste of alcohol? What was wrong with my taste buds on that day? How could I be so naive? Was I still upset that the bride fainted, and nearly hit her head against the hard floor?

Was I continuing to think of those hundreds of chickens which I just viewed? Was the cackling sound from those hundreds of chickens still resounding (echoing) in my head? Was I still stunned with the series of 'odd' experiences of this day? Was I still contemplating what the injuries would have been if

that man had not seen the fainting bride, and if she would have hit her head on that hard church floor?

How could I, a minister of the Gospel, who have always been repulsed by the very smell of alcohol, be so attracted (on that summer afternoon) to the taste of 'spiked punch'? I, who think that some persons around me are 'odd', have to admit, in my honest thoughts, that I too sometimes think I am 'odd'! I, too, am also (at times) a rather 'strange' human being, definitely 'unique' and 'one of a kind' person! Are you, too?

### ALL THIS 'TROUBLE' JUST TO LOCATE SOME MOUSETRAPS!

There are some 'basic correlations' that we humans take 'for granted'. If there is a 'head', then there (logically) is a 'hat'. If there are hands, then there are 'gloves'. If there is a 'plate', then there is food. If there is a 'running uniform', then there is a track running trail. If there is a 'violin', then there must be a violinist. If there is a Toyota car, then there must be a driver.

These most basic correlations are obvious to any thinking person! Many objects or persons are involved in the dynamics of 'correlations'. One 'thing' calls for the involvement of another thing, and the two things together are in a complimentary relationship.

What is the basic complement to a 'pesky scampering mouse'? Of course, a mouse trap! In our house (a few years ago), we had one side of the equation - we had the presence of 'pesky mice' - but we did not have the presence of the other side of the equation. We did not have, on hand, any mouse traps!

One night, with the recognition that we did not have one side of the equation (namely, mouse traps), my dear wife sent me on a 'mission'. I was to go to some store to find and to purchase some mouse traps! An important mission, for, you see, my (courageous) wife is 'deathly afraid' of those elusive mice. Years before this time (when she and I were quite young), my wife and a lady friend of hers, were terrified with the presence of a little mouse which was running around in our kitchen.

My wife called a neighbor man, and he and his wife came to our house to do 'battle with the little mouse'! My wife and the wife of this neighbor man (a long-time friend)- these women were 'frightened in an unexplainably manner' (beyond reason)- and the wife of the neighbor ended up on top of my dining room table! The neighbor man chased the mouse with a broom, and the human finally 'conquered' God's miniature creature!

What is there about mice that sends panic to the heart of so many people? To look at the motions of fear, you would think that these panic-stricken persons were being attacked by angry lions, rather than by harmless mice!

There is a hardware store, located about one mile from my home - a good place to fulfill my 'personal and important mission'- to purchase some mouse traps!

It was about 7:00p.m., later than a store would normally be open, but I noticed that there were some bright lights, emitting a warm glow within this inviting store. I was rather delighted that the store was

still open. Surely, it would be an easy task for me to quickly purchase a few 'mouse killers' (mouse traps).

I would go into the store - a store that I enjoyed often to go into - and I would quickly exit, and I would be on my way home to present these 'mouse contraptions' to my wife! I could hear my wife say to me, as I entered the 'front door' of my house, that she was so grateful to me for going out into the night air, to show my concern for her (to save her from those pesky little creatures)!

As I opened the front door of this familiar hardware store, I was glad that it had not yet closed, that business hours were later than I realized! I was not aware of the opening and the closing time for this fine store, but, since I entered the front door of the hardware store at about 7 p.m., I assumed that the store closing time must be later in the evening, maybe 8 p.m. or even 9 p.m.!

When I entered the front door, and I walked over to the front counter (close to the front door), something struck me as rather 'odd' (even strange). Some of the bright lights in the store were turned on, but other lights in the store were not turned on. The front lights (where I was standing) were turned on. But, strangely, the entire center of the store was dark (with no lights turned on). Then, I noticed that the lights in the back of the store (far from where I was standing) were turned on. In other words, the front and the back of the store was brightly lit, but the entire center of the store was very dark, with no lights shining!

I thought to myself, since there was no one to wait on me at the 'check out counter, in the front of the store, that possibly there were one or two store employees working in the back of the store. I thought it was strange that no one (from the back of the store) would come to the front of the store to 'wait on me', to help me find some mouse traps!

These 'various perplexing questions' (conjectures of my mind) lasted for only a few seconds (maybe one minute). Then 'shock of all shocks', an 'emotional-shattering', 'ear-ringing' alarm sounded off in the store! I immediately realized that I was alone in this store! This store was closed for business! I had no employees in the store to 'wait on me'. I was all by my lonesome in this mainly darkened store. The shrill sound of the alarm, combined with the eerie feelings that crept over me, at that time, made me feel that I was in the middle of an 'angry nightmare'!

The sound of the alarm made me feel like I was a robber, a thief who needed to run and to hide- but where could I run to, and how could I hide? I couldn't get out of the store! I was, indeed, trapped in a store! Would the police consider me to be an abandoned robber? And all of this hair-raising event because I was trying to be 'good' to my wife, simply trying to find her some mouse traps!

How did I ever get myself into such a predicament? I went time after time to the front door (the door I entered), and the door would not swing outward to release me from my panic and my 'bondage'! I felt so lonely, so defenseless, so detected, so guilty, so confused, so exposed! I was 'at the mercy' of the police! Would they accept my alibi?

I thought that I probably was pinpointed for an arrest! Surely the police would understand that I found the front door of the hardware store open, and that I assumed that the store was open for business!

After all, some of the lights (particularly the front end store lights) were shining brightly, and those lights naturally 'invited' me into the store.

After I got into the store, I was 'trapped', for the door through which I entered the store, swings in only one direction. **It** is an entrance door, but not an exit door! I thought that if they arrested me for being in this privately-owned store, I would present to them these logical arguments! Surely, with these facts in mind, any fair-minded police officer would 'buy my story'!

**It** was a frightening thought to me to quickly conclude that I came into this store, thinking that the store was open for business!

As just noted, during my moments in which I felt considerable 'panic', I repeatedly went to the same door through which I had entered a few minutes before this time. When I pushed on the door, hoping to quickly exit the store, I found that the door did not permit me to exit. **It** was a door to be used for entrance into the store - entrance only!

I was trapped inside this store! The shrill-sounding alarm continued to sound off! That shrill sound, blasting my ear drums, sent 'chills down my spine'. I tried to use that same door again and again, but to no avail! Yes, there was no way for me to exit this hardware store - the very store to which I had often given my business!

Because the store was located, amidst several other stores, in a small 'shopping center', I now hoped that I could 'get the attention' of some persons who were outside of store, just walking by. I waved my hands, hoping that at least one of the few walking persons would notice my desperate situation. But, to my dismay and to my frustration, not a single soul noticed my waving hands!

Different thoughts were racing through my mind, but I knew that I was penned (trapped) in this hardware store! I knew that I needed to get word to my wife, but how could that be done? Then, I happened to look at the 'check out' counter, and (fortunately/providentially) I noticed the presence of a telephone.

I wondered if I could get through to my wife, to let her know about this strange set of circumstances. No, I couldn't tell her that my mission (to find mouse traps) was accomplished, but I could ask her to fulfill another mission- the mission of helping me to get me out of my present terrible 'mess'!

I called her, and she, of course, could hardly believe my 'story'. No, it is not a 'prank' - this is the 'real thing'! Venita quickly phoned the 'police department', and she told them about the details of my 'predicament'. The policeman who talked to Venita was understanding and he was glad that she quickly called the police department. At that very time (as Venita was talking to the police officer), there were several police officers who were 'on their way' to the store!

If Venita would have waited much longer to call, there would have been a small group of police officers who would have shown up at the store- to talk to me! Venita 'saved the day' (night), and she also saved me from further 'challenges'! I was nervous enough! Can you imagine how fast my heart would have 'beat', if a group of police officers would have surrounded me - in the premises of that

store!

Would they have believed me if I would have told them that I (innocently) had been on a 'mission' to purchase mouse traps? I only wanted to be a 'good husband' and to fulfill my assignment (mission)- to find some armament to battle a 'pesky creature' that brought 'fright' to my lovely wife, every time she saw one of those creatures run across her kitchen floor!

I did not know about the oncoming 'small force' of police officers who were 'on their way' to evaluate the situation at the hardware store. I don't know, of course, but I suppose that my arrest could have been one of the options, when the police arrived at the store!

It was not too long until one police officer kindly came to the front door of the hardware store. He quickly opened the door to release me! How grateful I was to see him. He brought words of comfort and encouragement and understanding to me. A very kind man, as well as a responsible police officer. I was grateful for his 'human touch' and his kind words!

It was sweeter than my words can describe to be released from my 'temporary prison'! It seemed like a long time, but, in reality, it might have been only a half hour that I was in the hardware store. Time, in those circumstances goes so slowly! After I left the confines of that store, to breathe the 'fresh night air' was 'heavenly'! I resumed my 'mission', I forthrightly went to another store in the area (a store that stays open all night), and I purchased those coveted 'mouse traps'!

My wife's sister (who was her companion for the entire evening), was determined, as soon as I made the phone call to my wife in the middle of the crisis, to go to the store, and to attempt to give me some 'comfort' while she stood outside of the store window (where she could view my inside predicament). It was while she was in the process of showing actions of compassion towards me, that Venita had made the call to the police department.

By the time that my sister-in-law got to the hardware store, I had already been 'released' by the police officer. The police office was still at the front door of the store (probably to block any other person from entering the store), when my sister-in-law arrived at the store. My sister-in-law could not find me (for I had gone to another store to fulfill my 'important mission')! The police officer quickly assured my kind sister-in-law that I had been successfully rescued!

I returned to my home (with a sack full of mouse traps), and my sister-in-law came back to our home. Of course, my wife (who was attending to some elderly persons) never left our home. (As usual, however, my wife- a great problem-solver- helped solve the problem of that night, by calling the police department)! The three of us (adults) recounted the episode (inch by inch), and we had lots of laughs that night. We greatly enjoyed drinking hot chocolate together!

We have occasionally laughed since that historic night! When I often enter the front door to enjoy that hardware store, I chuckle inside myself. Was I the only naive soul that night who thought the store was open?

I never 'dreamed' that carrying out the mission of purchasing some mouse traps could involve so

many complications (i.e. so many 'twists' and turns') in one night- a night that was supposed to be uneventful!

In the 'battle with the mice', the mice almost got the 'upper hand!' Do you suppose those 'pesky miniature, elusive, beasts' are gathered together in their dark corner, and do you think that they are making music with their special 'squeals'- glad that some human 'had fits' trying to find those 'mouse killers'? The battle between humans and the mice is a perpetual and a continuous battle!

How 'nerve-wracking' it was to fulfill that important 'mission' -to find some 'mouse killers'!

Have you ever wondered why God - the Creator God - decided to make these little 'pesky' creatures? Well, I will never know, but I also know that God makes no mistakes. There is a 'reason' for all things, in God's own 'season'! Maybe these little creatures teach a panic-stricken woman (who wants to climb on top of a dining room table when she sees a mouse heading for her) - I say, maybe these mice teach a woman who is panic-stricken, to 'calm down and to trust the Creator'! After all, maybe there are some persons who want to laugh while they watch the 'little creatures' running and scampering- to and fro- in their garage! "Everyone to his own taste!" Ecclesiastes (Bible): "There is a time and a place for everything!"

Is there a 'time' and a 'place' for God's little furry creatures (mice)? Probably so, but it seems, however, for most of us (sensible) human beings, there is no place for mice, either in our garage, or in our kitchen, or in our living room, or in our bathroom, or in our office, or in our attic, or in our basement, or on our table, or underneath our couch!

I am willing for the little fuzzy, elusive creatures to live - but I think that they should live where I think God intended for them to live- in the fields of the countryside! Not in our houses!

If there were no little, quick-moving creatures that we call mice, I would never have to go on a mission to purchase 'mouse traps'- and I would never mistakenly go into a hardware store, when it is closed! I would never have to have a near 'nervous breakdown' when a shrilling alarm blasts my ear drums inside a store that I have no 'business' being in! O, the trials of life - all for the purpose of ridding my home of those furry little, fast running creatures!