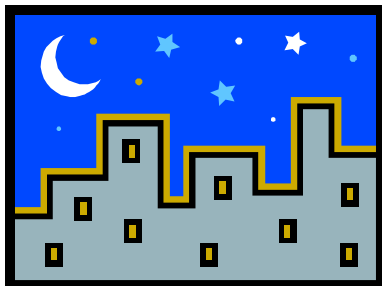


Making It Through The Night

A Collection of Devotionals to help you Make It Through The Night



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Devotionals To Help You Make It Through The Night

Making It Through The Night

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. - Psalm 63:5-7.

My stay in the hospital has severely disrupted the sleep process in my life. I found myself while in the hospital dreading the ending of the day. I dreaded several things about that including the lack of interaction with others. Many fewer people came into my room at night and when they did they stayed for a briefer period of time. The noise from the IV machine seemed louder and the automatic blood pressure every hour seemed more intrusive. During the night hours sometimes bad things would happen and when they did it was magnified by the quietness of everything else. It seemed that it was always at night that they came to draw blood for the continual tests that were necessary. My wife was asleep beside my bed and so it would have been somewhat rude to watch TV while she was trying to sleep. Although for the first days I had no interest in watching television or reading - those things do seem to pass the time away when you are well enough to tolerate them.

Strangely I found it hard to pray while I was hospitalized. I did run some Bible verses through my mind but found that difficult as well possibly because of some of the medications. When the chaplain came Sunday we prayed for God's presence because that was very precious to me. The entire time I was hospitalized I was aware of God's presence. He was not speaking to me most of the time although He did about two days before my release. Maybe I was like Jonah and He had to get me to a point where I could hear Him. He has been speaking and giving me all kinds of ideas since I have left the hospital. I pray every day for inspiration, for ideas for sermons and devotionals and there are at least ten ideas for devotionals and sermons which have flowed out of my hospital stay. One thing I do know about all of this is that out of the bad always comes good if we love the Lord and are the called according to His purposes as His Word promises in Romans 8:28.

As with the Psalmist what got me through the night was meditating on the presence of the Lord there with me in my room. Even though the praise was not coming through my lips I was praising Him with my heart the entire time - night and day.

Are you in the midst of your own night that seems to never end and go on and on and on? The Lord is the One who can sustain you through the night. You have to arrive at a point where you realize there is nothing you can do and place it all into the arms of the Lord. There was absolutely nothing for me to do while I was laying on my bed with wires and tubes coming out everywhere. But I could

be aware of His presence and His concern. I praised Him with my heart during those long nights and that is what you must do as well. Remember the times of His help and comfort through your life.

Remember and rejoice that He loves you so much that His One and only Son died for you. Remember that He has not forgotten about you and that you are still in the shadow of His wings.

All Tied Down

**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil;
my cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. - The 23rd Psalm.**

While hospitalized I found myself facing a new situation. The last time I had been in the hospital it had been 43 years ago when I was ten years old and had my appendix taken out. It was a different world then with sheets between the beds and one bathroom at the end of this large ward of beds. I do remember though that I enjoyed the food with fruit juices and my uncle brought me a comic book. They now have these six sticky things they stick on your chest and hookup wires to them like having a continual EKG. Those wires all flowed off to the right, as did the tubes for the blood pressure cuff and the oxygen level placed on my right finger or taped on as it sometimes was done. On my left side was a portal where IV fluids were dripped into my blood. There was about three feet of leeway for me to stand and move on my left side, which was enough to make it to a potty chair (When I was able to do that). My options for movement were more limited then they had ever been in my life.

The words of the 23rd Psalm flow with words of comfort and peace which we will never outgrow the need of hearing. I have always loved verse two, **“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.”** **“He makes me lie down....”** The shepherd would bring his sheep into a place of good pasture and would make them stay in that good place. The making of the sheep to stay where there was good food to eat and still waters to drink was for their benefit. However, as I have been told many times, sheep are not very intelligent. If the shepherd did not make them stay in the place where they had protection, food, and water the sheep would have wandered off. It was for their benefit. Most likely it was hard for the sheep to understand.

It was hard for me to comprehend the inability to move but it was for my benefit. It benefited me in that life-giving medicines flowed into my body and that the condition of my body could be constantly monitored. If it had been up to me, I would have just unplugged everything and walked out but I was too weak and I knew it would only delay my healing. Like the sheep, I was made to lie down in a place of **“green pasture”** and **“still waters.”** Like the shepherd of sheep, the Great Shepherd was constantly watching and present the entire time.

I think I had been sick for more than a year and had not realized it. It was slowly growing worse until I had an acute attack. It could have been much worse. I am thankful for a time of **“green pastures”** and **“still waters”** that have helped to bring healing and renewed life to my body.

Are you all tied down? You may not be tied down physically with wires and tubes as I was - it may be something else. I will leave that to you to consider in your own life but if you are tied down, it may be for your benefit. The Great Shepherd may have reached down and given you “**green pastures**” and “**still waters**” even though you did not want them. But it is for your benefit. It is because He loves you and is caring for you. There may come a time when He leads you on to new pastures and new waters - until then remember you do have a Shepherd and He loves you.

Pulling It All Out

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king. - 1 Samuel 15:23.

As I described previously I was all tied down with wires and tubes. A surgeon had come and installed an IV portal in my chest and all seemed to be going well until about 11:00 P.M. when I woke up or semi woke up needing to go to the bathroom. Thinking I was at home, I got out of bed (With my wife telling me not to.) and headed for where I thought the bathroom was located. I never made it because of all the wires and tubes and pulled out my portal. As a result, it took another couple of hours to get everything cleaned up and I no longer had a portal. So, they brought in some people from the lab to try to find a vein but seemed to have great problems finding one. It was probably 3:00 A.M. before things calmed down. Dr. Zuerker said the next day that I had made an “F” in Portal Management. My wife thought that it was the sleep medication along with the pain medication that brought it all about. Maybe it was just that I was in a strange place and very sick.

The next day about noon, the surgeon came back and reinstalled the portal on the opposite side of my chest. This time she put in some extra stitches and went deeper. I paid for that when they took the stitches and the portal out on the last day of my hospitalization. Because of my “F” in Portal Management, it was over 12 hours before they could resume the IVs at the same level as previous. It most likely caused an additional 12 hours of hospitalization and as I already mentioned more pain.

That is exactly what happens to us when we rebel against our God. Our rebellion causes us pain and causes a delay in God’s blessings and in God’s will being brought about in our lives. It has been said that, “*sin will keep you longer than you want to stay, sin, will take farther than you want to go and it will cost you more than you want to pay.*”

King Saul was disobedient in doing what God wanted him to do. He was to wait for the prophet Samuel to come and make an offering before taking on the enemy. But Saul got tired of waiting and made the offering himself. It was a very costly mistake, which resulted in the kingdom, being wrenched away from Saul and given to David. This rebellious act caused much pain to Saul, his family, and those loyal to him. It also caused a delay in the kingdom being brought about in its ultimate manifestation.

We have choices and have been given a free will. We can choose as Adam and Eve and King Saul chose to do in doing what we know God does not want us to do. We have that choice. We can pull it all out. But it will cost us. If we rebel against God by doing what we want to do instead of what God wants us to do it will increase the misery quotient of our lives. Our rebellion will make the night longer. Our rebellion will hurt other people besides ourselves usually those we love the most.

Before you pull it all out in rebellion against God, it might be a good idea to count the cost.

Mediflight

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us--see that you abound in this grace also. - 2 Corinthians 8:1-7.

While we were at the hospital in Oklahoma City, we had a great view of the helicopter landing pad, watching as several helicopters brought in those ill, and injured. One of the options we had in going from Elk City to Oklahoma City was a mediflight or helicopter ambulance service. However, the doctor decided I was not in that bad of shape. By ground ambulance, it took a couple of hours, which seem like forever for us to arrive at the hospital in Oklahoma City. Jeanie said later that they were driving 80 mph or more and leaving her behind in a heavy rain. Inside the ambulance, it seemed their biggest concern was finding a radio station and about what time the OU football game came on. By the time, I had arrived at the hospital I was wishing I had been sent in a helicopter. I was in a hurry to get to a place where I could get better. I was in a hurry to get to a place where I knew there was a doctor that had hopefully seen some cases like mine. I was in a hurry to get well.

Not only should we be in a hurry to get well and stay well but also we should be in a hurry to do God's will. To be obedient to Him. You see this happening with the Christians in Macedonia. Those people were poverty stricken but they were in a hurry to give to help other Christians as Paul puts it, **"imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift...."** As soon as they heard of the need, of other Christians suffering they wanted to help.

We should follow the example of the Macedonians and always be in a hurry to be obedient to our Lord whether it is about giving or any other area of life. We should be in a hurry to obey our Lord even when we do not fully understand. We should be in a hurry to obey our Lord even when the consequences seem unpleasant. We should be in a hurry to obey our Lord even when we may not appear in the best light as a result. We should be in a hurry to obey our Lord even when everyone else does not agree.

Think about Joshua and Caleb bringing the minority report after the spies had gone into the Promised Land. Of the 12 spies only Joshua and Caleb believed God that the giants of the land could be conquered (**Numbers 13**). Think about Nehemiah, cupbearer to the king in Babylon. To give up even temporarily his position meant a loss in prestige, power, and comfort. He would also face an arduous journey along with difficult living conditions once arriving in Jerusalem and many potential dangers. However, once Nehemiah understood God's call he was ready to go (**Nehemiah 1 & 2**).

Have you heard God speak to your heart? Do you know God wants you to do something? Do it now! Hurry to be obedient because it is the very best thing for you.

The Marvelous Human Body

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. - 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. - 1 Corinthians 6:13.

And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. - 1 Corinthians 6:14-20.

We have a recliner that is 28 years old and it has received a lot of wear and tear. The chair has seen two boys grow up playing on it and it has been through the family moving nine times. There has been many a nap taken in that chair by a lot of people. However, the chair is beginning to look its age with the fabric being worn especially on the arms. The chair leans slightly to the right and the footrest leans substantially to the right. It has been a good chair but without massive reconstruction, it will soon be in a trash pit. How different is the human body than a material object such as a chair? Our bodies were wondrously designed and constructed. Just considering the movement of the thumb has led some to come to understand that there must be a Master Designer, i.e., God. The cells of our bodies are constantly reconstructing and renewing. Yes, over a lifetime we may begin to lean to the right as well but we will have gone through multiplied times of wear and tear as compared with a chair.

Our bodies were designed not just for us but also for the Lord. Our bodies were designed as a dwelling place on earth for the Holy Spirit - a Temple of God. You have been given the custodial possession of this Temple but make no mistake it still belongs to God. You were **"bought at a price"**, the very high price of the crucifixion of Christ. God expects you to take care of His Temple. This includes the physical upkeep and the avoiding of abuse through extremely dangerous activities, foods, and drinks which will damage the operation of the body. It primarily includes the avoidance of what will defile the body spiritually. Sexual immorality appears to be at the top of the list but any sin committed with the body or to the body is a defilement. Remember you were not made primarily for the enjoyment of food or other earthly pleasures but **"for the Lord."**

The Psalmist says, **"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well (Psalm 139:14)."** Before we defile the dwelling

place and Temple of our Lord let us consider again how, “**fearfully and wonderfully made**” that we are. There is a God and if we know Jesus as our Savior He does not live far away in another galaxy. No, He lives right there inside of you and He knows more about what you do and say and think and are than even you know. Are you making the Lord rejoice with the way you are living or are you making Him cry?

Love and Cherish

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
- 1 Corinthians 13.

One wedding ceremony that I use often has the vow, “*You must promise to love, to honor and cherish....*” After the vows I state, “*Then, you are each given to the other. In times of happiness and in times of sorrow; in times of plenty and in times of poverty; in times of sickness and in times of well being; to love and enjoy till death shall separate you.*” Some couples say those vows and listen to the words with great reverence. Others you can tell they only seem to be words to them. When I said my wedding vows, I meant them and Jeanie meant them. The preacher who married us later said that he had two sets of vows and had us say them both because we looked so young (We were both 19 years old.). I think he was right we needed both sets of vows. While I was in the hospital, I was blessed to see my wife live out those vows. Certainly, she demonstrated many times over that she loved and cherished me even in a time of sickness. I marveled at whom this woman was that was always there no matter what day after day and night after night. Since we have been home we have found out that she has Graves Disease which is an over active thyroid. It causes many different problems including fatigue. Even though she was not feeling well herself she was there with me day and night. I now have a much better understanding of loving and cherishing.

Love. Christian, agape love, was a concept not often practiced in the world of the early church especially outside of the Christian community. Paul gives us the definition of Christian love in **1 Corinthians 13**. This kind of love is not just an emotional or physical love it soars far beyond that. To love someone with Christian love is a love the world finds hard to understand. When this kind of love is practiced, it points those who see it to Christ. Why? Because it is only through the power of God that we can love in that way. I always include in the marriage ceremony the importance of keeping Christ in the center of their lives because then they will have more love for each other. It is a

concept that is true whether in a marriage, in the church, or in the community. If we have Christ in the center of our lives, directing, controlling, and empowering it will be so much easier to love, as Christ would have us to love.

Is there someone close to you that is hard to love? You just need more Jesus in the middle of your life. They just need more Jesus in the middle of their life and if you demonstrate Christian love by the way you live it may be that they will see Jesus is what they need.

Husbands love your wives and cherish them. Wives love your husbands and cherish them. The more you keep Christ in the center of your lives the more love you will have for each other.

Time Passes

But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. - 2 Peter 3:7-9.

(I wrote this devotional on the 18th day that I had been home from the hospital.) Today is the 18th day that I have been home from the hospital. I have treasured each one of the days I have been blessed to be at home. In the sense of the passing of time in my mind just one day in the hospital was longer than all my 18 days at home. Have you noticed how when unpleasant things are happening in our lives that time begins to slow down to a crawl? Instead of thinking about what will happen next week, next month or next year we begin to think about the next few minutes or possibly the next day. When you are not having fun, time seems to crawl by. When you are not having fun but just enduring another minute, another hour, another day it is a painful way to live your life. It is hard to wait out those times of pain. It is hard to have patience that someday there will be a change.

Wait or waiting is a popular word in the Bible with 147 occurrences. Here are some encouraging verses with waiting as their theme:

Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD! - Psalm 27:14.

I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. - Psalm 40:1.

Perhaps the most encouraging verse about waiting in the Bible is Isaiah 40:31: "But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

How can we have the patience to wait? Only through the power of God. Patience (or longsuffering) is in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5**. Therefore, supernatural patience to wait comes by the power of God. I've always hesitated to pray for patience because of fear of the learning process. However, when we are in the waiting mode and the minutes have become days, and the hours weeks it most likely is a good time to pray for God to give you this fruit of the Spirit called **"patience."** If we wait, God will **"renew"** our **"strength."**

God's time is usually not the same as our time. Our days are micro microseconds to the eternal God. We pray for God to move, to do something to make this waiting come to an end. God knows where we are. He knows what we are going through. But His timing is the best. If we will wait for Him then not only will the crawling of time come to an end but we will find our strength renewed and **“mount up with wings like eagles.”** We **“shall run and not be weary.”** We **“shall walk and not faint.”**

Whatever the situation let us remember with the Psalmist, **“This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).”**

How To Have Life

Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. - Genesis 13:12.

...delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds). - 2 Peter 2:7-8.

“Escape for your life! Do Not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed (The angels said to Lot - Ed.)” Then Lot said to them, **“Please, no my lords! Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.” - Genesis 19:17b-20.**

I grew up on a farm about five miles south of a little town of 500 people but only 12 miles away was Elk City. Elk City was much larger with a population of about 8,000 people at that time. When I was older, I spent most of my free time in Elk City and most of my friends lived there. My goal in life was to someday live in Elk City. A friend of mine and I had a shocking conversation one day - at least it was for me. She shared with me that all she wanted to do was to leave Elk City and go far away to another place. She had her dreams and I had mine. Talking with her dad while he was in the hospital it seems she has seen her dreams come true. According to her dad, she is living in California on top of a hill overlooking a beautiful valley in a huge house with five bedrooms and five baths. I also achieved my dream of living in Elk City where we stayed for 16 years (With one interruption of a year in a place called Enid.). I sometimes wonder if my friend has found out as I did that there is more to life than where you live or the kind of dwelling you live in?

Lot was the nephew of Abraham and they at one time lived close to each other herding their flocks. However, their herdsmen could not get along and Lot moved further away and eventually was living in Sodom. Sodom was an evil place filled with people doing evil things. It appears that only Lot and his family were not participating in the evil. The Bible tells us that Lot **“tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds.”** In fact, God promised Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom if there were even ten righteous people who lived there. However, we know that it was destroyed.

After Lot had been delivered from the destruction of Sodom the angels told him to **“escape to the mountains”** but Lot pleaded with them to let him live in one of the little cities. Even though Lot

ended up in the mountains living in a cave because of his fear - he had still wanted to live in a city. I wonder if Lot ever found out that there was more to life than where you live and what you live in?

It may be that God will call you to a certain place as He has me. However, I have found since I received Christ as my Savior that I have life wherever I am at because the Lord is with me. Jesus is my life. Jesus says, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die...."**

What is your life? Is your life a place, or a house, or land, or money, or family, or a job - what is your life? The only way to have real life wherever you are is to have Jesus because Jesus is life.

Leaving It All Behind

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. - Luke 9:23-26.

My recent hospitalization began suddenly as the onset of my illness was unexpected. Arriving at the emergency room, we were unprepared for a long stay but that was the least of our concerns. When I was transported to a larger hospital in Oklahoma City, my wife hurriedly packed a few things to take with us. During my stay in the hospital, I came to appreciate some of the things I had left behind. When I was finally able to brush my teeth, I did so with a toothbrush the hospital furnished and it was very flimsy and I was always thinking that it was going to break. The first day I was allowed to take a shower there was no shampoo but the shower was still wonderful. Of course, there were so many things that were suddenly left behind. Things like the concerns of the pastorate, Internet ministry, so many friends, and unfinished projects. When I arrived finally back home and was able to walk through the house without all the wires and tubes it was a special joy.

In order for us to be a true disciple of Jesus, it is necessary for us to leave some things behind. We must deny ourselves our previous sinful way of life. This may include friends who would drag us down into sin again. It may include places that we know would bring temptation into our lives that would be hard to resist. It may include access to the Internet if we are unable to resist the temptations that are available online. It will include those things that enabled us to sin in the past like drugs, alcohol, memberships, telephone numbers, and a multitude of other things. It is important to leave behind those things that would lead to future sinful behavior (**Romans 13:14**). Deny yourself and leave them behind.

In order to deny ourselves we must take up our cross. The cross is an instrument of execution and we must put our selfish, sinful desires to death. When we have died to self, we will be able to deny ourselves and follow our Lord. To do this we must lose our lives and take on the life of Christ.

Someday we will all face death. Death may come suddenly for some and slowly for others but it will come at some point. It is important for us to face the reality of this fact. By doing so we can be prepared and our loved ones can be prepared. Someday we will have to leave behind every material

thing that we have accumulated over a lifetime. We will also have to leave behind our family and friends at least temporarily. There will be no returning to the physical life we know now at that point.

When we contemplate the leaving of everything here on earth behind for eternity, the words of Jesus have much greater meaning. Jesus says, **“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?”** Yes, we may gain great wealth and material possessions but of what value are such things when we depart from this life to the next leaving everything behind?

Doctors And Nurses

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. - Romans 12:1-2.

We are fortunate in the USA to have so many dedicated self-sacrificing health professionals. Whenever I am around them, I marvel at their dedication and the number of hours that they work each week. Every day while I was hospitalized the doctor made it back by to see how his patient was doing even on the weekend and even on a holiday. Most days his nurse practitioner would be by as well to keep up with my progress. One evening we had waited until 10pm and the doctor had not yet come by. My wife decided she would go to the waiting room down the hall and find something to eat. Dr. Zuerker saw her leaving and joked, *“You gave up on me didn’t you?”*

We talked with two older nurses that shared they had been working as nurses for forty years. After having experienced their care and level of expertise, I could only be amazed that they were still working and not talking of retirement. A much younger nurse said at the mention of the older nurses having forty years of service, *“forty years?” “Forty years?” “I can’t do this for forty years, it’s too hard.”* I know I couldn’t do it for forty years either because it seemed to be an extremely difficult way to make a living.

What made the difference between the older nurses and the younger nurses? They did not say but reading between the lines it appears to be a sense of calling along with a desire to serve - a sense of self-sacrifice. The two older nurses had an understanding of sacrifice because to still be working in such a difficult profession they would have needed to make many sacrifices.

This sacrifice of our lives is what the apostle Paul was speaking of in **Romans 12:1**. Of course, we will face periods of discouragement even when we love our career or profession. Paul was using it in terms of living our lives as children of God. I like that the apostle uses the term **“reasonable.”** It is only reasonable that we experience some sacrifices in living the Christian life because - we have the example of our Lord giving the greatest sacrifice of all.

Whenever we feel discouraged in our careers or professions I believe it would help us to remember that our entire lives should be lived out in sacrifice to our Lord. Our lives should be **“living,” “holy,”** and **“acceptable”** - uncomformed (**Romans 12:2a**) to this world. Our lives should be a living sacrifice to the extent that it causes others looking at our lives to pause and marvel at our level of dedication and service. In the marveling there should be something that will indicate that we belong

to God and this is the reason for our sacrifice bringing glory to Him (**Matthew 5:16**).

I do not know whether the two older nurses were Christians but I pray that they are - they appeared to be Christians in the way they were living their lives. If they had mentioned their faith in Christ, I would have readily understood their sacrifice. Let us always be willing not only to live our faith out through our sacrifices but also through our verbal testimony whenever and wherever we may have the opportunity (I am preaching to myself again!). The apostle also wrote in the book of Romans, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).”**

The Fool's Way

For he sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. - Psalm 49:10-11.

On September 1st in Denver, a man told friends that he had been planning to jump from a moving car. He was not planning to commit suicide but wanted to feel some pain so that he would have the courage to have a tattoo. The 20-year-old during rush hour jumped from a car moving at about 40 mph and he was killed as a result. Another foolish and dangerous stunt was done by a teenage boy in Missouri. For some reason he felt like he needed to demonstrate his pain tolerance and he did this by hitting himself in the head with a skateboard. He then invited a friend to hit him in the head too, which resulted in his being knocked out with one blow, and sadly, he died just a few days later.

What is it that makes a person a fool? Is it the doing of what every sane person knows a person should not do? Is it the saying or writing of words every sane person knows a person should not say or write? Why do they do such things? For young people it is easy to say that they feel invulnerable and that they have a sense because of their youth that they will live forever. For those older as the Psalmist indicates some even in the face of much evidence to the contrary believe they will never face death. Ultimately, whether young or old it is the belief that they will never have to face any consequences for their actions. This belief comes from a lack of a fear of God.

The Book of Proverbs, which contains so much wisdom in the first chapter, says, **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).”** The lack of knowledge and wisdom, which results in foolish actions come from a person's contempt for wisdom and instruction and ultimately contempt for the Lord.

How do you avoid being and acting like a fool? The Bible is very clear about this in many passages of Scripture. In **Proverbs 9:10** for example we are told, **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”** To be wise and act with wisdom it is necessary to have a respect and reverence for God. King Solomon indicates that this is the beginning of all wisdom.

Are you a fool? Most of us have been fools at one time or another to some extent. We can avoid foolishness by having true respect and reverence for God and in doing so we will begin walking on the path of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

Changing Course

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." - Acts 9:1-5.

A thief in the Vancouver area received a little surprise while trying to make off with a roll of copper wire. The wire was connected to a generator that was running and when the thief tried to disconnect the wire, his shoes were blown off and he was burned. He received a 27,000-volt electrical shock. He was found wandering in a nearby railroad yard without shoes and with second-degree burns. The 41-year-old man is recovering from his injuries but will face criminal charges. According to police the man is "well known" to them.

You have to wonder if an unexpected 27,000-volt jolt that blows your shoes off is enough to make a career criminal change his vocation? Certainly, it should give him something to think about. Saul prior to his conversion had an experience that was just as shocking. Saul was on his way to persecute some more Christians in Damascus believing that he was serving God in doing so. However, God intervened in his life. The Bible says, "...**suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.**" That is an understatement since the light, which Saul encountered, was so bright in blinded him.

Saul was headed in one direction and when he encountered the resurrected Christ, the direction of his life was completely changed. The shock of this encounter with Christ was so great that Saul eventually became the apostle Paul and a part of the group that he had been persecuting. Paul was not the first and not the last to have the direction of their lives radically changed by a shocking encounter with Christ. Those who came after Paul most likely did not see a blinding light but their encounter with the Lord was no less shocking or life changing. Paul's life was changed when he came to understand that he had been wrong in persecuting Christians and in his heart committed himself to follow Christ.

For some people it might take more than a 27,000-volt jolt to change the course of their lives. What they really need is an encounter with the living Lord Jesus. What about you? What would it take to change the course of your life?

Slow Down

A wild donkey used to the wilderness, that sniffs at the wind in her desire; in her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they will find her. Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, "There is no hope. No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go." As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets.... - Jeremiah 2:24-26.

Occasionally while I was growing up my Dad would give me some words of wisdom. Once while we were passing a turn off where a car had overturned taking the turn too quickly my Dad gave me

some advice. He said, "Always slow down before making a turn. Hit the brakes before you start your turn." The point being that if I didn't slow down before turning I would have an accident too. It was some well-timed words, which made an impact on me and I have always remembered them and tried to practice what he told me.

I like the way the Message translates Jeremiah 2:24-26, "...tracks of a wild donkey in rut, sniffing the wind for the slightest scent of sex. Who could possibly corral her! On the hunt for sex, sex, and more sex--insatiable, indiscriminate, promiscuous. "SLOW DOWN. Take a deep breath. What's the hurry? Why wear yourself out? Just what are you after anyway? But you say, "I can't help it. I'm addicted to alien gods. I can't quit.' "Just as a thief is chagrined, but only when caught, so the people of Israel are chagrined, caught along with their kings and princes, their priests and prophets...."

The Message makes this passage very obvious in application to the world today. The world is obsessed with sex and more sex. Of course, it is appealing to many and there is a constant bombardment and saturation of this sex appeal. Once in its grips we become like an animal, like a wild donkey, losing our humanity in effect in the way we run after this evil. It becomes an addiction, which will destroy everything that is good, decent, and godly about you. It is an evil, which eats away at every area of your life, and then like the Israelites, you are ashamed/chagrined but its evil has done its work.

Before you take that turn off into the world of extramarital sex - SLOW DOWN!! SLOW DOWN and consider the consequences of taking that turn. SLOW DOWN and ask someone for help. SLOW DOWN and pray. SLOW DOWN and read your Bible. SLOW DOWN and go to church. SLOW DOWN before you have a wreck that will ruin your life. SLOW DOWN!!

Tired Of Being Tired

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. - Isaiah 40:28-29.

In Miami, Florida, Daniel Gallagher was arrested for armed robbery of two banks within 20 minutes and for threatening to discharge an explosive device. Gallagher told bank tellers that he had a bomb in the bag he was carrying and he then demanded that he be given one hundred dollars, which the teller quickly gave to him. Actually, his bag contained only a can of beer. Gallagher, who is 46 years old, grew tired after his second robbery and so he took a break to rest his tired feet. The police caught up with him while he was still resting. According to police, Gallagher has an extensive arrest record.

Have you ever noticed that sin is a tiring business? It doesn't matter whether sin is an armed robbery or a little white lie it drains the energy and life out of you. Sin robs you of sleep and what sleep you are able to have is not restful. Sin robs you of peace of mind and instead gives you anxiety, worry, and depression. Sin may very well give you fear as you fear the consequences of discovery of your actions or the result of your actions. Sin creates friction in your relationships and that friction adds to your tiredness.

How can you have strength when you are weak and your energy for living has been drained? Only by recognizing the ultimate source of strength and energy. That ultimate source is God. When we are involved willfully in sin, we are disconnected from the source of strength, peace, and life. To plug into that ultimate source we must turn from our sin agreeing with what God says about our sin, which is that it is wrong. **1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins...."** Confession involves agreeing with how God sees our sin. Basically that means that we agree we were wrong and that God is right. It is repentance turning from what we want to what God wants with our lives.

If we want peace, life, energy, and strength it boils down to which we love the most - God or our sin. We cannot have both. We must make a choice and for most people it will be a daily choice whether to live for God or to live for sin.

So, how tired are you of being tired? Tired enough to ask God for help? Jesus says, **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30)."**

Boring

It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. - 2 Samuel 11:1-4.

A 25-year-old woman in Germany became a little upset over the Saturday night television viewing options. She was angered because of the slate of boring programs and even more boring reruns. Her solution? Probably what we all ought to do - she threw the television out of her fifth floor apartment window. Veronika K. told newspaper reporters, *"There was nothing decent on so I just threw the thing out the window."* Thankfully, no one was injured as a result of the falling television set and Veronika later calmed down and watched another television with her family.

Veronika's real problem is not with boring television programs and reruns. Her real problem is that she is so bored she relies on what the entertainment industry happens to provide to give her enjoyment in life. Boredom is a dangerous condition as King David found out. David's boredom was a result of his shirking his responsibilities. How did he shirk his responsibilities? His army along with his mighty men were out fighting battles during **"the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle...."** It was during this time that David grew bored and found some adulterous entertainment with Bathsheba. David was in the wrong place at the wrong time and apparently so was Bathsheba. Maybe they were both bored. Bathsheba may have been bored because her husband was out fighting battles and was exactly where he was supposed to be.

It has been said that *"idle hands are the devil's tools"* and there is much truth in the saying. Allowing

yourself to become accustomed to the boring and non-productive activities of the world is just asking for trouble. The world sees nothing wrong with laying around all day every day and doing nothing. Unless you miss work or cause someone else some inconvenience and then the world does care.

How can we avoid the trap of boredom and unproductiveness? The Bible says, **“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).”** How do we **“walk in the Spirit?”** In **Romans 6** we are told, **“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God (Romans 6:12-13).”** The key thought for avoidance of boredom and for walking in the Spirit is presenting yourself or submitting yourself to God. Instead of allowing sin to reign in your life give yourself to God - walk in the Spirit. If we have given control of our lives to God and are walking in the Spirit we will not be bored.

There are always choices in life and we can choose to be bogged down in the worldly choices for entertainment or we can step outside of the world's boring box. We can willfully submit ourselves to the will of God and in doing so we will find that we have been given the cure for boredom. We will have life!

Deception

As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death. Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the LORD, but the blameless in their ways are His delight. Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished; but the posterity of the righteous will be delivered. - Proverbs 11:19-21.

It is customary in our part of the country for churches to take care of the moving when they call a new pastor. Usually several people from the church arrive with a rented truck or they may bring their own trailers and pickups. In one of our moves to a new church, they arrived with a flatbed trailer and a large deluxe horse trailer. The horse trailer was very nice and held almost as much as a large truck. We met the owner of the trailer and told him how much we appreciated the use of the trailer and he seemed like a very nice and kind person. A couple of months later we were shocked to hear that the owner of the horse trailer was not really the owner and that he had been arrested for knowingly concealing stolen property (i.e. the horse trailer). It was only then that we realized that we had been moved with a stolen trailer!

We can learn several things from this story in relation to God's Word. First, even though Tom (not his real name) was using the trailer in a commendable way it did not make up for his illegal actions. If you steal a million dollars and give 99.9% of it to the poor or even to a church it does not and can never erase the sin of stealing. Doing something good does not erase something bad. Only Jesus can do that. **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).”**

Second, we cannot deceive God. Tom did a good job of deceiving the church and us but he could not pull the wool over God's eyes. God was not deceived. The Bible says in **Galatians 6:7-8a**, **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption....”** God was not fooled by Tom's good

works and Tom eventually was found out and arrested. The whole church eventually came to know about Tom's illegal activities.

Third, sin results in death (**Romans 6:23a**). Nothing good can ever come from sin. Evil results in the multiplication of more evil coming about in a person's life. One evil act results in additional acts which results in more and more. This is in contrast to the person who abstains from evil and acts in a righteous manner as **Proverbs 11** says, "**righteousness leads to life**" and "**he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death.**"

Have you been trying to deceive God? It will never work! Have you been trying to make up for the bad things you have done with good things? It will never happen! Have you been pursuing evil? Stop now before it is too late!

Grasping

Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. - Luke 17:32-33.

Remember what happened to Lot's wife! If you grasp and cling to life on your terms, you'll lose it, but if you let that life go, you'll get life on God's terms. - Luke 17:32-33 (The Message).

No one is exactly sure what happened except Edwin Galler and he's not talking about it. It happened in the Bronx on a Metro-North train. Joe Veniscofski, a train foreman said, "*I have never, in my 16 years on the railroad, seen anything like this. This is the first.*" It happened during rush hour with a train filled with commuters, shut the train down for two hours and cost thousands of dollars. It also must have been at least a little embarrassing for Galler. The train foreman, Veniscofski, describes the scene, "*He had to stick his hand inside of that loose splash guard, into the holding basin. And that's when it got caught.*" Apparently, Galler dropped his cell phone into a toilet while he was in the train's restroom and then tried to grab hold of it but got his hand stuck. The toilet was stainless steel and had to be cut apart to free Galler's hand. Albert Cecere, facilities director said, "*We did not recover the phone. I don't know if he did or not.*"

When Lot and his family were fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah they were warned not to look back as God rained fire and brimstone on those evil cities. Lot and his family had lived in that place for many years even though Lot "**vexed**" his righteous soul by doing so. Apparently Lot and his wife enjoyed living there so much so that Lot's wife looked back with longing toward their home and turned into a "**pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).**" Lot longed for his home in the city just as much as his wife (**Genesis 19:17-20**) but he did not look back and was able to survive. Lot's wife sought to save her worldly life at the expense of what was spiritually best for herself and her family. As a result, she lost her physical life and risked spiritual destruction.

What is it that you are grasping for in this life? What is it that you are risking? Are you just risking some embarrassment or are you risking more - physical and emotional pain for yourself and others? Perhaps you are risking something even greater such as spiritual destruction?

I am sure if Edwin Galler had it to do over again he would have just let his cell phone go down the

drain. It would have been a little thing compared to all the trouble that resulted from his trying to keep his grasp on the phone. If he had just let go.... Maybe you just need to let go....

I, Me, and Myself

But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." - Mark 10:42-45.

Larry Scherwitz, a psychologist, conducted a study on the relationship between heart disease and self-centeredness. He studied 150 patients hospitalized either for suspected heart disease or after a heart attack. He kept track of how often they used the pronouns "*I, me, my, mine, or myself.*" He found that patients with more severe disease made far more references to themselves. Also, the findings remained significant even when patients were matched for age, blood pressure, cholesterol, and Type A behavior. Scherwitz in his study found that people who are what he calls "*self-involved*" have more severe coronary artery disease than those who are more focused toward others.

It appears that there is scientific evidence that serving others and being concerned about others is a very healthy activity and attitude. On the other hand being concerned only with yourself, your interests, your activities, your plans ("*I, me, my, mine, or myself.*") is a prescription for physical and spiritual disaster. If you want to do something really good for yourself - stop thinking about yourself all the time. Put the spotlight on the needs of other people and think about how you can be a part of meeting those needs.

If you really want to follow Christ, if you really want to be like Christ then you will serve others and not just yourself and your interests. Jesus gave us the ultimate example of being concerned about the needs of others. Jesus did not just talk about meeting the needs of others. No, He demonstrated how to meet the needs of others continually as He went about doing good being a servant to all He met. Jesus did not come to be served but to give His own life in sacrificial service. Jesus, the Lord of lords, and the King of kings had a right to be served but instead came to serve us.

It has been said by many a doctor that the very best thing that you can do for your physical health is to stop smoking. It may be that they will want to add that ending our self-involvement could be just as important to our physical health. Why not begin today to lift up your eyes from your own life to the lives of those around you as you look for opportunities to serve in obedience to your Lord.

Over Reacting

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. - Galatians 5:19-21.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. - Ephesians 4:30-32.

Devikia Garnett may have over reacted after she received a speeding ticket. Officer Chip Raines gave her a ticket for going 51 mph in a 35 mph zone and after Devikia was stopped, she did accept and then signed the ticket. Officer Raines got back into his vehicle and continued his shift. He had gone only a short distance when he noticed Garnett's Mazda rapidly approaching from the rear and before he could react, she rammed into the police cruiser. Garnett then rear-ended the cruiser three more times but she wasn't through. She tried to ram Raines again but she missed after he pulled to the side. She then turned around and attempted to ram the cruiser head on but Raines was able to hit her vehicle from the side pinning it to the curb.

Police spokesman Jimmie Wideman said that Raines, "...*should be commended on his restraint, because it could have come out a very different way.*" In reference to Garnett, Wideman said, "*She turned a traffic summons into a felony charge.*" Garnett's car was impounded and she is being held in a Hampton, Virginia jail without bond for felonious assault of a police officer. There was no indication of any drug or alcohol use by Garnett.

It appears that Devikia Garnett over reacted to her traffic ticket - and that is an understatement. In Galatians, the apostle Paul warns against "**outbursts of wrath.**" Devikia definitely had an outburst of wrath and the result was the ruination of her life. She most likely will be convicted of a felony charge along with having to pay substantial court costs and fines. She damaged her car and will be unable to work while she is incarcerated. Of course, it may be very difficult for her to find employment after her release. Who would want to risk hiring someone who is prone to "**outbursts of wrath?**"

I'm sure Devikia did not start her day thinking that she was going to try to kill a police officer by repeatedly ramming her car into his. What led up to this horrible over reaction by Devikia? What made her cross over the line from sane responsible citizen to maniac? We will probably never know and Devikia is probably not sure about the answer to those questions herself.

If we allow the works of the flesh to direct our lives, we run the risk that at some point we will lose control and our lives will be destroyed. Devikia is an example of this very thing. If we allow our flesh to express itself through rage - time after time we will find that at some point we will cross the line into craziness just as Devikia did.

Put the works of the flesh away from you and instead have kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness toward others. Ask God to take away the works of the flesh and replace them with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). Then, you will not have to worry about over reacting and see your life destroyed as a result.

When All Is Gone

I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. - Genesis 15:1c.

The Lord is my Shepherd...Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. - Psalm 23:1a; 4a.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. - John 6:68.

Job who lived in the land of Uz was a man who had it made in worldly terms. He had a large family and was blessed with an abundance of worldly goods. However, in a very short period of time it was all tragically taken away from him. The bad news came and then more bad news came and more and more it must have seemed like it would never end. The Sabeans raided killing servants and taking away his oxen and donkeys. Then another messenger came to report that the fire of God had fell from heaven burning up his sheep and servants. Then the Chaldeans came killing more servants and taking Job's camels. Finally, it was reported to Job that his sons and daughters had been killed when a great wind hit their home. On top of all of this bad news, Job became horribly, terribly ill with sores over his entire body and was in much pain.

All had been taken away from Job except for a few miserable friends and his wife who urged him to just curse God and die. Job was about as low as you can go and still be breathing. On top of it all his friends accused him of being a sinner and urged him to confess his sins. They believed all the bad things had happened because Job had committed some terrible sin. However, Job was innocent so there was not anything to confess.

In the United States we have a great tradition of pausing once a year to give thanks to God for His blessings during the past year. The tradition of thanksgiving was begun over three hundred years ago. We are thankful for all the things and worldly blessings that we have been allowed to have and to enjoy. We should express our thanks to God not just on Thanksgiving but every day for all He has blessed us.

Job and David as well point us to a deeper level of Thanksgiving. When all has been taken away. When all our worldly goods and even our families are gone. When our health has broken and we are in pain what can we be thankful for then? David expresses it in this way, **"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death."** When we have reached the lowest of low, even in the **"valley of the shadow of death"** then there is only the most important of all left for which to be thankful. What is that? God. Underlying everything, every blessing, every day we should be thankful for God. As God told Abraham, **"I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."** As Peter said to Jesus when asked if he too was going to leave, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."**

When all is gone, when we are walking in the valley of the shadow of death we still have the most important, wonderful One of all to be thankful for - God! He is our **"exceedingly great reward."**

Hold Fast

Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. - 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22.

You most likely know what a game of tug-of-war is but for those who don't here is my own definition, *"the game of two teams on opposite sides of a line pulling on the same rope until one team pulls the other across the line."* Did you know that tug-of-war is an international sport? There is an International Tug-of-War Federation with rules for the sport and many member organizations. Everything is defined and detailed from footwear, to gloves, to size and type of rope. Until this morning when I played tug-of-war with the children in church, it had been years since I had even

thought of the game - sorry! Sport. But it did remind me that you have to get a good grip, dig in with your feet and give it all that you've got or an equally matched team will pull you across the line.

The apostle Paul tells us to **“hold fast what is good.”** **“Hold fast”** basically means what the team members playing tug-of-war do. To **“hold fast”** spiritually is to grab hold, dig in, and give it all you've got to hang on to what is good.

So, what is it that we are to **“hold fast”** to? Obviously, **“what is good.”** Some things immediately come to mind like, God's Word, Church, Prayer, and Fellowship with Spirit filled believers. But are there other things that are good that we are allowed to **“hold fast”** too? Yes! And Paul give us a list in **Philippians 4:8**, **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.”**

Okay, each one of the things in Paul's list is subject to interpretation. At the very top of the list are those in my family, my wife, my children, daughter-in-law, and my grandchildren. Some other things come to mind like taking a walk outside and admiring the beautiful world that God has created. Picking up a Christian book and being inspired to go beyond where I have been before with my Lord.

Are you holding fast to the good and beautiful or to what you know is evil? Whose team in this spiritual tug of war are you on? Isn't it time to decide once and for all?

Running Away

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" - 1 Kings 19:1-4.

There is a book called, *“It's Not too Late to Run Away and Join the Circus.”* When circuses were more numerous and other forms of entertainment and options were fewer - many people fantasized about escaping their problems by disappearing with a traveling circus. I am not sure what the modern alternative would be? Maybe moving to some isolated South Sea island or disappearing into the mass of population in a large metropolitan area would be another alternative?

Elijah had just won through the power of God the great contest on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal. Fire from Heaven fell and devoured the offering, which Elijah made even though it was soaked with water. As a result the people realized that the God of Elijah was for real and the god of the false prophets was powerless and therefore a false god. Hundreds of the false prophets of Baal were executed.

Queen Jezebel whom the false prophets served was more than a little upset that her prophets had been killed. So, the queen vowed to kill Elijah. It seems strange that after being at such spiritual

heights in the contest at Mount Carmel that Elijah would react the way he did. It appears that at this point, the contest had drained him spiritually and he could not face another confrontation. He knew how evil Jezebel was and no doubt understood that his death would not come easy if he were captured. So, Elijah just wanted to run away from this newest problem and that is what he tried to do. He ran away and told God that he wanted to die.

One important point from this story for all of us would be circus performers is that even after Elijah ran away God knew exactly to where he had fled. God not only knew where Elijah was at - He was present and at work to intervene in Elijah's life to bring about renewal and restoration. We may be able to temporarily remove ourselves from having to face some problems but we will never be able to run away from God. Most likely if we are running away from problems we will discover that we have a new set of problems when we finally stop running that are just as bad if not worse.

The Bible has some great advice for us when we are facing difficulties. In **Ephesians 6:10-14a** we are told, "**Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore....**" In **1 Corinthians 15:58** we are told, "**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**"

If Elijah had simply stood his ground, the outcome in a contest with Queen Jezebel would have been the same as it were for her false prophets. Instead of running away from our problems, let us be steadfast and make a stand trusting that God has the power to take us through whatever may come against us. We may end up in the fiery furnace like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (**Daniel 3**) but if we are faithful, we will find as they did that the Lord Jesus is there in the midst of the fire with us and He will sustain us.

A Fresh Start

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. - John 3:1-3; 16.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. - 2 Corinthians 5:17.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9.

I have a friend who will soon be released from prison and he recently told me that he is looking forward to starting over. While he has been in prison, he has lost all the property that he owned and it appears he has lost his wife and family. A fresh start is being forced upon my friend because there is no other option. However, for most of us, we do have options and once we have begun traveling

in a certain direction with our lives, it is rare that we ever change directions. To change directions, to begin again when it is not absolutely necessary does take courage and strength of character.

God offers to every person a most amazing thing! He offers a fresh start. We can spiritually be **"born again!"** To be **"born again"** indicates that it will be a most radical change. If you erase a hard drive on a computer by reinstalling everything, it is a radical change. When a baby is born, it is born with only the input it received while in the womb. Almost everything is new to a newborn baby because it has never been experienced before. That is what the apostle Paul is talking about in **2 Corinthians 5:17**. Because of being, **"born again"** of being **"in Christ"** everything is new. Being a **"new creation"**, we see and experience everything in a different way than before. Once we have been **"born again"** the Word of God is alive in a way it never was before. When we hear the Word of God preached it touches our hearts in a much deeper way. Our relationships with people take on a new depth, as the Holy Spirit will speak to us when we are unkind or hateful toward others. When we pray we enter through the Name of Jesus the very throne room of Father God. It is a new world indeed that a person enters by being **"born again."** It is a fresh start!

If you have never been **"born again"** you can have the freshest start of all by turning from your sins and turning to God by inviting Jesus Christ into your life to be your Savior and Lord. If you have failed to live in a way pleasing to God you too can have a fresh start and be forgiven of your sins and be cleansed from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**).

Is it time for a fresh start in your life?

Pitch In?

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." - Matthew 22:34-40.

During the summer of 2003 a huge electrical blackout occurred in the northeastern United States and parts of Canada. This was the largest power outage in history in terms of area and people affected. Huge numbers of people were left to their own devices to somehow find a way home without subways and other forms of transportation immediately available. People simply began walking home or catching rides as that was possible. It was of course feared that there would be lawlessness with looting and vandalism. In New York City 250 police cadets were put into action directing traffic and given other duties as needed. In New Jersey 350 state troopers were placed into action along with a mobilization of 700 National Guard troops just in case they were needed.

Governor James McGreevey reported that in New Jersey alone there were one million utility customers without power. By this morning that was down to 15,000. The Governor commented on the good spirit that the people had. He said that people pitched in giving people rides and sometimes driving from county to county late into the night to get people to their homes. There were many acts of kindnesses in the midst of this disruption of their lives. It was wonderful that no one

panicked and there was a spirit of calmness.

Isn't it wonderful to hear of people getting along with each other and helping each other? So often, it is only the hurting, the death and the destruction that we hear on the news. It has been refreshing to see such neighborliness, friendliness and sense of community. It is wonderful to hear of people helping each other instead of hurting each other. It is great to see everyone pitch in and do their part in bringing about the safe conclusion of the power outage with very few injuries if any as a result.

Wouldn't it be great if people could live at peace with each other all the time? Wouldn't it be great if we would all pitch in to do our part in making this world a better and safer place? If each of us pitch in to help maybe someone will see our example and pitch in themselves, maybe someone will see them and pitch in, and someone will see them and pitch in....

How would God have you to pitch in and live out the second greatest commandment of God today: **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself?"**

Call For Help!

There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me. My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off. Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, and plan deception all the day long. - Psalm 38:3-12.

A family's vacation was suddenly interrupted as they were sailing off the east coast of Australia. A 30-foot 10-ton humpback whale jumped into their boat and along the way pulled the mast and rigging down as it crashed into the boat. Trevor Johnson who was on the boat with his wife, two sons and a son's girlfriend said, *"I was below deck when there was a hell of a crash from port as it leapt out of nowhere. It is amazing that no one was hurt or killed, but it was a terrifying experience."* The small ship was ten miles away from the coast and their radio equipment had also been knocked out. But they were eventually able to call for help using a cell phone and were towed to safety.

King David knew what it was like to have a terrible burden crashing down on his head. In David's situation, it was his iniquities and he confessed they were so bad because of his foolishness. David listed the symptoms of the great weight upon him. He was bowed down, mourning, ill, brokenhearted, and his strength was failing him. David was much like the people in the ship with a whale crashing down upon it. David was in many ways just like them - helpless. There was nothing David could do of himself to solve his problem. David was sinking and going down for the third time.

Maybe you have been there or you are there now. Your sin or sins have pushed you down and pushed you down and your destruction is at hand? Or, it may not be quite that bad but the handwriting is on the wall and you can feel the pressure that continues to mount? What do you do? The people in the sailboat called for help. David called for help and in both situations; they called for help from the right people because help arrived.

David called out to God because he knew God was the only One who could possibly help him to have relief from the terrible situation he was in. Here is what David cried out to God, **“For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God. For I said, ‘Hear me, lest they rejoice over me, lest, when my foot slips, they exalt themselves against me.’ For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin. But my enemies are vigorous, and they are strong; and those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied. Those also who render evil for good, They are my adversaries, because I follow what is good. Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation (Psalm 38:15-22)!**

If the weight of your sin of your iniquities are sinking your ship, don't wait any longer. Call out to the Lord your God in the Name of Jesus and ask Him to help you. Now's the time ask for help from the One who can help you.

Power Failure

Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." - Mark 9:17-19.

In our world of modern conveniences from cell phones to cars to washing machines, a power failure like the one we had last week can be catastrophic. We are so used to picking up our cell phone, which we carry with us all the time and simply calling for help if we need help. But millions of people did exactly that last week and nothing happened. Some people were in areas where they could get into their cars and drive but when they were low on gas they found that the gas pumps also powered by electricity would not work. Many used to obtaining money through ATMs found that they were without access to their money, which they needed to buy food or pay for transportation if any was available. For these people catastrophic was an understatement! However, after a truly catastrophic event which happened on 9/11 most understood and appeared to see it all in the proper perspective.

The disciples of Jesus experienced a catastrophic power failure as well. They were unable to cast out a demon that had been inhabiting the body of a boy for some time. Actually, the disciples were powerful individuals and God's instruments but they were underpowered to face the spiritual being they came against. After Jesus had cast out the demon the disciples asked him privately why they had been unable to do so. Here is what Jesus said, **"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29)."**

The disciples were used to being able to see people healed and demons dispatched by simply speaking the word in the Name of Jesus. However, it did not happen this time because of the power of the one they had encountered. What was needed was more power and that additional power would only come through additional prayer and by fasting.

Have you had a catastrophic spiritual power failure? You pray, you read your Bible, you go to church, you fellowship with other believers, you serve God; you seek His leadership and guidance - so why will the spiritual mountain you have encountered not move? As Jesus says to the father of the demon possessed child, **"If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes**

(Mark 9:23)." There are two possibilities. One is that it is not God's will. The second is that you have had a power failure or that you are underpowered spiritually for the task at hand.

Let us consider the possibility of the lack of power. If this is the situation Jesus has given direction. You will have to spend a substantial amount of time in prayer and you will need to fast. It may also be necessary to gather a group of prayer warriors that will also give themselves to prayer and fasting for a period of time so that this spiritual mountain you are facing may be overcome.

Do you want the power? It is available but there is the cost of prayer and fasting that is attached. It seems there are few willing to pay the price. But if you are and it is God's will - that mountain you are facing will move.

Inadequacy

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling (Another translation indicates that Paul felt inadequate and was scared to death at what he was facing.). And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. - 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

The feeling of inadequacy affects every person to some degree at some times. Being inadequate for a task or tasks is a common human trait. It is also a common human trait to bluff, fake, and appear that we are not inadequate for whatever task or event is facing us. How many of you have started a new job and acted as though you knew much more than you really did? Or, have you been in an advanced class, which was beyond your abilities and tried to appear to be at the same level as everyone else? Have you ever had to give a speech or present a program before a group of people and been uncomfortable at the thought of having to do such a thing? Have you had to learn something new like operating a computer or even learning to drive a car and felt inadequate and even fearful that you might not be able to learn what you needed to learn successfully? If you are or were in any of the above groups - you fit in well with nearly everyone else of the human race including the apostle Paul.

Even though inadequacy is a common condition of mankind it is however the causal factor for countless negative effects upon our lives. Inadequacy can lead to our trying to compensate by lying, deceiving, developing addictions, overworking, and materialism (I am sure there are many others.). Inadequacy also leads to psychological problems and can aggravate existing problems. In its worst manifestations, psychologically there is the fear of public speaking or even being around people much less trying to talk to anyone. Many have become so fearful that they are even afraid to leave their homes. Inadequacy can be and is for many people a devastating condition.

The apostle Paul in facing his own fear and his own human inadequacy gives us an example of how to overcome this problem. Paul did not come to the Corinthians depending upon his own human wisdom and excellency of speech even though he was an extremely well educated person. No, Paul came to them and faced his inadequacy by trusting in not his power but in the power of God. He did not try to impress them with his great learning and skills of oratory but instead he laid his fears (**1 Peter 5:7**) upon Jesus and through the power of God communicated the Gospel with great effectiveness.

How many times have I thought moments before standing to speak that I am inadequate for what needs to be said? How many times have I felt so physically ill just before I must stand to speak that I thought I should simply dismiss the service or ask someone else to speak? How many times have I felt fearful of sharing my testimony with someone or visiting someone or talking with someone who I know can be very difficult? Too many times for me to possibly remember and I have yet come to a point that I do not continually feel inadequate for what I need to do and be as a Christian, as a father, as a husband, grandparent and especially as a pastor and in the fulfillment of God's call upon my life.

How can we face and overcome our inadequacies? Only as Paul did. Only through the power of God standing on the power of our Lord (**Philippians 4:13**). That is how we will make it through another hour, another day, another week, another year. That is how we will be steadfast (**1 Corinthians 15:58**) and know that our labor no matter how inadequate we may believe it is will never be in vain and will through the power of God accomplish its eternal purposes.

How To Be Happy

You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. - Psalm 16:11.

Richard Easterlin who is an economist at the University of California is promoting a new approach to finding happiness. This approach combines two theories in psychology and economics. The economist correctly argues that more money does not necessarily result in greater or lasting happiness. Easterlin sums up his views by saying, "*Hence, a reallocation of time in favor of family life and health would, on average, increase individual happiness.*"

It has been said that when the scientists and researchers finally arrive at the summit of the mountain where they find meaning of life and the source of life that they will find that the theologians have already been there for many centuries. The theologians are already there because God has already given us this great wisdom and it is all written down in black and white. Most of us know this wisdom is contained in a book called the Bible.

Our scientists and researchers could certainly increase the speed of their research and save great sum of money by taking a little time to read, study, and listen to God speak to them through the written wisdom of the Bible. Since most of us are not scientists and researchers, we do not have to waste years of time discovering whether "*a reallocation of time in favor of family life and health would, on average, increase individual happiness.*" Why? Because we have already read the Book (as in the Bible) and know this to be true.

Happiness will never be found solely in the pursuit of money, material possessions, and fleshly pleasures. Research does not have to be done to do this although King Solomon did in fact do the experiential research and arrived at those same conclusions (Read **Ecclesiastes** for the findings of King Solomon).

Where will we find joy, happiness, joy, and the ultimate in satisfaction with life? "**In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**" Allow God to show you the path of true life.

Code Blue

What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? - Psalm 89:48.

Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. - John 11:32-35.

CODE BLUE ROOM ### CODE BLUE ROOM ### CODE BLUE ROOM ### CODE BLUE ROOM ###

It happened the last night of my stay in the hospital about 1:00 am. *CODE BLUE ROOM ###* The person in the room across the hall was dead. They tried to revive him but it was too late and death had come. Jeanie had spoken with the family a few times and enjoyed visiting with them. I had never met them because I was all tied down in my bed and unable to even make it to the doorway without help. But I had heard the family visiting across the hall. I had heard them laughing and enjoying each other's company. They sounded much like my own family when we all are able to get together. Now the laughter was replaced by tears, sobs. Those sobs seemed to go on forever. I wanted to get up and extend some comfort. I wondered where the chaplain was. All I could do was pray - and so I prayed, and prayed, and prayed until finally about 3:30am the sobbing finally stopped. My nurse shared with me a few minutes later that the chaplain was delayed by more bad news somewhere else before arriving at our hospital. After arriving home, I read of another person who had also died that same day in that same hospital. Most likely, there were others who died as well.

Do you remember the death and resurrection of Lazarus? Lazarus too came from a good family. It was a family that enjoyed getting together with some friends and having a good time laughing and talking with each other. But in spite of the goodness of the family - death had still visited them.

As the Psalmist asks, **"What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?"** The fact is that unless the Lord comes in the clouds soon we will all see death. Is there any person, in all the world that can deliver themselves from death, from the power of the grave?

I searched to find how old the oldest person was when they died but could not find the record for sure. I did see several people lived into their 120s. We know people are living longer these days and I've personally known of some people who lived beyond 100 years of age. In fact there is apparently a couple that was actually married 100 years before the husband died. I've never heard of anyone living into their 140s in modern times. We do know that life can to some extent be extended by good diets, and miraculous medicines. We also know that in the Bible in the book of Genesis there were several people who lived long lives. Methuselah was the longest lived person of all. The Bible says, **"So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died."** What happened to all these long-lived people? They died.

We need to remember that we need a Savior. We cannot save ourselves. We need to remember that unless the rapture occurs we shall all die. But the Good News is that we have a Savior who is supernaturally able to give us eternal life. As Jesus said to Martha, **"I am the resurrection and the**

life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (John 11:25-26).” Jesus then asks Martha the key question for her and for you, **“Do you believe this?”** I’ll ask you, *“Do you believe this?”*

The apostle Paul writes of the mechanics of salvation in **Romans 10** where he says beginning in verse nine, **“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (verses 9-10). For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (verse 13).”**

Friends, none of us will make it out of this world without our physical bodies dying. How long before our family hears something similar to what I heard just a few short days ago? **CODE BLUE ROOM ### CODE BLUE ROOM ###** Isn’t it time to call on the name of the Lord?

HOW YOU CAN BE SAVED

To receive Christ as your Savior for all eternity and be saved pray the prayer below which is based on God’s Word (**Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Romans 5:8; Romans 10:9-10, 13; John 1:12; Revelation 3:20; 1 John 1:9; Ephesians 2:8-10**).

“Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose again on the third day. Please forgive me for the sins, the bad things I have done, I want to change and be like You. Please help me to change, be my Lord and my Master and my Savior. In your name Lord Jesus I ask You to come into my heart and save me. Amen.”

Please remember that words alone will not save you. Only if you truly mean it in your heart will you be saved. If you do pray the prayer above and mean it in your heart please send me an email at wrather@dobsonteleco.com or edwrather@theburningbush.org and I will send you additional helpful information (Or, write to me at P. O. Box 210, Sweetwater, OK 73666).

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