

Forget-Me-Not

Daily Devotional

Pam Ford Davis



Introduction

Welcome to a collection of Forget-Me-Not devotionals! These brief reminders of God's love are written to challenge, comfort, and, at times, convict us. We must not forget His love for us, which cost the death of His Son, Jesus, on the cross. Without Him we are nothing. (John 15:5) With Him we can do all things! (Philippians 4:13) Thank you for allowing me to walk daily with you during this year.



With love and appreciation I dedicate this book to all
who have supported me with encouragement and prayers.

Husband: Norm

Daughter: April and Husband Joe

Son: Lee and Wife Vicki

Mother-In-Love: Cora Mae

Grandchildren: Matthew, Justin, Ashley, Alex, Brittany,
Kyle, Justin and Josh

Siblings: Lauree, Gayla, and Gary

Girlfriends: Carol, Pat and Ethel

Church Family: Goodwater Baptist

In Memory of Parents: Frank and Betty Ford

Sister: Donna Davis

Father-In-Love: A.N. Davis

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for proof-reading and edits.

I will Forget-You-Not!

January 1

“Taking Down the Decorations”

As we enter a new year, we often get a case of the blues. All of the excitement and anticipation of Christmas lies behind us. Many put up their trees right after Thanksgiving. As I remember, a family in our neighborhood waited until Christmas Eve. What a beautiful surprise to light up sleepy eyes of their children on Christmas morning. They got their first sight of the family tree and wrapped gifts placed below.

I decided to put up our tree early in November. Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year, and it passes by much too fast. So I begin listening to my large selection of Christmas music on November 1st. I put up our tree and holiday (holy day) decorations soon after. Contemplating the sadness of taking down our decorations, I realized the lights of Christmas never really disappear. God hung them in the sky. There are no lights on earth that compare. We must never forget the heavenly star that guided The Wise Men seeking the King of Kings. (Matthew 2:1-2, 9-10) I wonder.... Our world came into existence through the power of the spoken Word. God set the lights in the sky as a part of His good creation. Did He already have one special star appointed to lead the worshiping travelers? (Genesis 1:16-19)

“Twinkle, twinkle little star...” You decorate the night sky in honor of the One who created you. The decorations never come down; just open your eyes to God’s glory.

January 2

“The Day Planner”

“What’s on your schedule? Are you free for lunch?” These questions are not only voiced to business executives or government leaders but to busy students and homemakers. We all seem to be rushing from one activity to the next, hardly leaving time to catch our breath. Convenient day planners make nice gifts and come in a variety of sizes and styles. I believe we have a market for *hour* planners as well. Maybe then we could squeeze in a fast lunch. Better yet, let’s do brunch, so I can combine two meals.

Do things always go according to schedule? Of course they don’t. Interruptions and cancellations get everything off track; make sure you have an eraser handy. Could we try an experiment and boldly do a few things on the spur of the moment? Maybe we could mark one day of the week on our calendars with a big question mark. God might have some surprises in store. He controls time and will help us to use it wisely. “Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this and that (James 4:13-15 NKJ).” Plan ahead, but leave room for God to pencil in divine appointments.

January 3

“Time Released Grace”

I remember one of the first time-released medications available over the counter. The cold remedy, *Contact*, gave wonderful results. For twelve hours my congestion could be controlled. Normally, I needed to take medicine every four to six hours. People at school or on the job know that is not convenient.

God releases His grace in our lives in our times of greatest need. We have all seen a doctor’s prescription directions on pill containers: *Take as needed*. True, we always need the grace of God, but there are times when we need an extra dose. We are warned to follow medication directions carefully, not to overdose. The grace we receive is always given in the precise amounts needed.

What if we don’t have money to pay for our medicines because or have insufficient funds? That is a common problem today, especially with our senior citizen population on fixed incomes. That is nothing you have to worry about when needing God’s grace. “And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore, I will rather boast about my weakness, that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Corinthians 12:9 NAS).” Our account will never be overdrawn. Trust Him. Our *El Shaddi, the God all sufficient*.

January 4

“The Winner Is...”

We all desire to be winners in life. It starts early with children’s games, develops with athletic competitions, and may lead to facing rivals for student council or other academic leadership. When high school graduation rolls around, girls hope they’ll win the honor of *Homecoming Queen*. Boys may desire votes for *Most Likely To Succeed*.

When adult responsibilities are taken seriously a desire to succeed in the career of choice may become a motivation to work your best. Sadly it often can lead to feelings of failure when others are recognized and you are left standing on the sidelines. A husband dreads to face his wife that evening with the latest turn down for a raise or news of someone else getting that desired promotion.

What about the homemaker? Surely, she avoids those experiences? Many women will admit feelings of failure when a special dinner turned out to be a flop. You believe reaching the standards of your mother-in-law’s cooking is impossible. Maybe a casual reading of *Good Housekeeping* leaves you discouraged.

Feelings of defeat touch those in all ages and in all walks of life. Have you seen a baby trying to learn to walk? I’m sure if one could communicate clearly he or she would say, “*Mommy, I just can’t do this!*” Failure can even be present at the approach of death. A cancer patient in soul searching thinks: *I have fought this disease every way I knew possible, and I have failed.*

Do you *want to be a winner* in things that really matter, not in games, but in your relationship with God? “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5 NAS).” We can be overcomers in victory. When we cross the finish line, cheers of the crowd of God’s family will ring in our ears. *We are winners.*

January 5

“Seek Me”

Ready or not, here I come! To children quietly keeping out of sight and enjoying the game of *Hide and Seek*, those words sound like an alarm. They must remain perfectly still or the person seeking them will discover their hiding place. Do you remember the many times you played this game, the sounds of laughter and your disappointment if you were found? It may be one of my earliest memories.

One of the advantages of the game is it works equally well indoors or out. I chose one of my favorite hiding places in the cabinet below the kitchen sink. I must have been very young because that is a small area. I still recall facing the closed doors in front of me in the dark cramped cabinet. Maybe that is why I am not too thrilled about being in confined spaces today. There I waited under the sink for someone to seek me. What if the one designated as seeker decided not to play and thought seeking took too much time or effort? Well...*Pammy Sue* would either stay alone in the dark or come out and reveal herself.

God is waiting for you to *discover Him*. He is not in hiding; we frequently just do not see Him because our focus is on our circumstances. So He patiently waits because He loves us and believes an intimate relationship is worth the wait. “I love those who love Me; and those who diligently seek Me will find Me (Proverbs 8:17 NAS).” The fun of *Hide and Seek* does not last long. Our joy in *seeking God* brings eternal satisfaction. He is ready...are you?

January 6

“Quick Change”

Have you been intrigued at a play or program by the amazing speed costumes are changed? An entertainer leaves the stage and returns before you can say: *Let's go for popcorn*. Before we could even slip off our shoes, they have slipped out of an entire outfit and completely dressed for the next scene. I wonder if they ever end up with shoes that don't match. I'm not sure how a *quick change* would be an asset in life, but it does get our attention.

Moms, do you wish you had that ability on Sunday mornings when dressing your crew for church? It seems no matter how well organized we are, things come unraveled before heading out the door.

I know one situation where a *quick change* would really come in handy. You are having a medical physical, perching on the edge of an examination table wearing one of those open-back gowns. The faster I can get out of one of those and back into my regular outfit, the better.

Life is not a three-act play, and changes often come slowly. If you have ever made New Year's resolutions and tried to see them fulfilled, you know where I am coming from. It only takes a split second to make them, but making them a reality drags on forever.

Let me share a real *quick-change* experience. “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-53 NAS).” Wow, did you notice in that portion of scripture the amount of time it will take for believers in Christ to receive glorified bodies? Paul said it would take only a moment, barely time to see the twinkling in someone's eye. How fast is that? That is at the speed of light. I want to see the new, improved, top-of-the-line models; the one I occupy now is showing signs of wear and tear.

January 7

“Mr. Chapman”

Is the name *John Chapman* familiar to you? He made the scene from the State of Massachusetts in the year 1774, and died in 1845. During his life, he traveled extensively in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. As a young man, he worked in orchards learning the craft. He took part in military action under *George Washington* in New York City, giving him the distinction of service to our fledgling country.

John could be labeled today a bi-vocational preacher. He planted trees in small fenced nurseries and planted seeds of faith as a preacher in missionary efforts representing the *Church of New Jerusalem*. His frugal lifestyle brings to mind *John the Baptist*, living in a desert, wearing rough clothing and living off the land. *John* slept outside during the winter, in frigid temperatures and dressed in tattered clothing. If he acquired new clothing, he used the articles to barter for other essentials. He even went barefoot. Have I been ringing any bells in your memory yet? Maybe you are more accustomed with *John's* nickname, that 1806 label, *Johnny Appleseed*.

Tales of his planting apple trees intrigued me as a young girl in central New York State. Our house set directly in front of a small orchard of *McIntosh apples*, free for the picking. A snack could be reached by children or mothers gathering apples for pies or cobbler. Yes, *Johnny* is a hero, but I do not recall stories of him sharing the gospel. The missionary heart sowed seeds of God's word while his hands planted apple seeds.

What about us? “Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him (Psalm 126:5-6 NAS).” It is always planting season for a man or woman spreading seeds of faith; start planting.

January 8

“Lessons I’ve Learned from Ma’ and Pa’ Kettle”

Hours of entertainment and humor were provided in a series of movies featuring the characters, *Ma’ and Pa’ Kettle*. I watched their movies on television as a child. Our children saw them on weekend matinees and now on DVD. Our grandsons pull them out each time they visit. Their movies are timeless, providing belly laughs and happy memories.

I believe we can glean valuable lessons from this man and wife. First, we need to avoid living by the clock. *Pa’* did his chores at a slow pace and enjoyed frequent naps. A hammock under a shade tree on a breezy day would do nicely. Work does have its place in life, and *Ma’* made sure all details were followed.

Their life story focused on the large family. Children were a blessing and each received love equally. There would be plenty of time for play, but first the children carried out responsibilities. Animals needed feeding, garden work should be tackled, and dishes and laundry were daily chores. With such a large family, valuable lessons of teamwork were demonstrated. The older children willingly helped in the care of younger sisters and brothers.

Ma’ and Pa’ did not always agree, but their commitment to one another and the children held them firmly together. The *Kettles’* worked out frequent problems, like any average family. Together they faced tomorrow, sharing disappointments cushioned by times of happiness. Love for neighbors kept the welcome mat out. They were part of a close-knit community, and *Ma’* would be among the first to reach out.

1 Corinthians chapter 13 reveals a good description of *Ma’ Kettle*. She displayed enormous patience with her husband, who clearly did not carry his share of the load. Her love looked past his weakness and into his heart, with eyes to see the good in her man. “Love is patient, love is kind (1 Corinthians 13:4a NAS), does not take into account a wrong suffered (1 Corinthians 13:5b NAS), bears all things, believes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7 NAS).” Yes, the Apostle Paul would see genuine love in *Ma’ Kettle*. My son is very rarely seen without a cap on his head. I wonder if *Pa’ Kettle* influenced him more than I realized. He wore his hat to bed.

January 9

“Eviction”

The tragedy of facing foreclosure is experienced daily across our land. The American dream of home ownership dies a slow death after months of missed mortgage payments. There is no single reason for falling behind. Some home owners have lost their jobs or retirement funds. Others face monthly payments beyond their ability to pay. The causes may differ but the finality is realized by all involved with the arrival of an eviction notice. The individuals or families are forced to leave the property, once called home. Now it has a new name, *repossessed*.

Adam and Eve were the first couple who *faced eviction* because they rebelled against God, the owner of their home in paradise. “Therefore the Lord God sent them out from the garden of Eden to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So he drove the man out... (Genesis 3:23-24a NAS).” There has never been a piece of property to compare with *Adam’s home in Eden*.

Nehemiah tells of an eviction in the city of Jerusalem, “And I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that *Eliashib* had done for *Tobiah*, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of *Tobiah’s* household goods out of the room (Nehemiah 13:7-8 NAS).”

Eviction from a home brings change. We need to *evict sin and selfishness* from the throne room in our heart. The true owner, Christ, will not share His dwelling. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength (Mark 12:30 NAS).” Our hopes are that those being *evicted* from their homes will quickly find shelter. *The sin we evict needs to leave no forwarding address*.

January 10

“Duct Tape and Flashlights”

Do you remember when a young child would run to you with a *boo-boo*, wanting a bandage and a kiss to make everything alright? I think they may have something there. Both of the remedies are user friendly and easily applied with a dose of love. There is no need to worry about dispensing too much either.

My father believed most things in life could be held securely in place and seen clearly with two handy items: *duct tape and flashlights*. No problem is too big to handle if you keep plenty on hand. We all found it easy at gift time. *Flashlights* are available in a variety of shapes, sizes and price ranges. He owned a large *floodlight*, perfect for emergencies on the road. Inside the home, *flashlights* were always kept close at hand and batteries were replaced often. Naturally, he also had one that plugged into an electric outlet to recharge. The popular *flashlight-radio* combination would rank high on any collector’s list. *Duct tape* kept everything securely wrapped and re-enforced. Packages sent across the country to children would be a challenge for safecrackers to open. He taped broken car fenders or tail lights, giving him the pride of a job well done. Unwinding rolls of tape gave satisfaction.

Spiritually, we would be wise to follow *Dad’s* example. “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105 NAS).” God’s word *gives light* along life’s pathway and prevents our feet from tripping or wandering outside of God’s will. *John the Baptist* came to prepare the way for *Jesus, the true light*. “There was the true light which coming into the world enlightens every man. He was in the world and the world was made through Him and the world did not know Him (John 1:9-10 NAS).” How tragic. *Jesus enlightens us* as preparation for our assignment to *spread the light*. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14 NAS).” Are you willing; are you prepared to be *Ever-ready* and *shine your light* in the darkness?

The comparison of *spiritual light and flashlights* is pretty simple to grasp, but how do we function as *duct tape*? “And beyond all these things put on love which is the perfect bond of unity (Colossians 3:14 NAS).” Our love becomes a permanent bond, a super glue or *duct tape*, holding believers together in unity. “...being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3 NAS).” I desire my life to *act as duct tape* in relationships, strengthening and protecting peace.

Does God use duct tape? “I led them with cords of a man with bonds of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws, and I bent down and fed them (Hosea 11:4 NAS).” I visualize a man or woman wrapped in cords or *duct tape of love*, totally embraced by the loving Father. I may never appreciate *duct tape or flashlights* as much as my *Dad* did; but I appreciate him and his love and the security of being wrapped in the loving arms of my *heavenly Father*.

January 11

“Accentuate the Positive”

If you are easily depressed, disappointed or discouraged, I have advice for you. It may be wise to avoid radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the Internet for the present time. News is anything but encouraging in our stalled economy.

Maybe this is the time to have gentle reminders of the *positives in life* when bombarded with *negatives*. Make a mental list of your blessings and dwell on the good life we take for granted. In the chorus of an old song: *Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative*, we pull a solution using good mathematics. If hopelessness is pulling at your mind, add *positive* thoughts and subtract the *negatives*.

We cannot always control our circumstances, but we have the choice as to how we will react. If we have a game plan in advance, we are more likely to face adversity with hope.

I am not pushing a *positive mind-over-matter* approach, but our way of thinking does make a difference. “For as he thinks within himself, so he is (Proverbs 23:7a NAS).” The message from Paul brings beauty to the forefront: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8 NAS).” Our homes are often described as dwellings. I want to hang a *Welcome-Home* sign on my doorway to peace.

January 12

“The Quiet Man”

How will you be remembered? It is always enlightening to listen to comments voiced about someone following their death. In the past, the majority of funerals were led by a man of the clergy with few others participating, unless special music was provided. In recent years it seems that more and more funerals are termed *celebrations of life*. People are given opportunities to share their personal memories of the one being honored.

Outside of the funeral service, how will you be remembered and described? I have heard such comments as, “*She never had an unkind word to say about anyone.*” Or, “*The world is better off without him.*” It surprises me what I have often remembered most clearly about my own *Mom and Dad*. I so vividly see their hands, hands that touched my life in so many ways.

This story is in honor of *The Quiet Man*, my *father-in-law*. I believe *John Wayne* starred in the movie titled *The Quiet Man*, yet the phrase better fits *Daddy*. He stood straight and tall as he labored alongside his wife in their family-owned fish bait business. Often people rushing to their favorite fishing hole stop along the way for fresh bait, most unaware of the long hours of hard work required to produce that box of worms or crickets.

Daddy loved to be outside, thrived on the fresh air and honest hard work. He never said a lot, just went about the tasks that needed to be done, working from early sunrise to sunset. (Ecclesiastes 3:22a) He is remembered as a faithful husband and father. He showed a profound concern for his wife following her surgery and took me along to visit her during the hospital recuperation. *Daddy* so tenderly worked to meet all her needs.

One occasion I will always remember is a short personal conversation we once shared. His son, my husband, experienced a love for radio, which began at the young age of nine years old. He held his first DJ job at age fifteen at the hometown radio station. And a radio played in my in-laws’ home. *Daddy* kind of pointed or nodded in the direction of the music. “*Do you like that as much as Norman does?*” Being an outdoor man, I think that interest seemed unusual to him. I answered, “Yes”. I grew up in a house with the sound of music coming from radios and the hi-fi every day. He shared a quiet conversation with the young bride of his only son. In so many ways, actions speak louder than words. Maybe he could be described as *a quiet man*, but his actions were heard for miles around and *still speak* to his family and friends. He left an example to each of us, and I see him now in his son, grandchild, and great-grandchild, all named after him.

January 13

“Wood Still Warm”

Yesterday in church, at the conclusion of the message, we stood for our invitational hymn. As my hands reached to hold the back of the wooden pew ahead of me, I noticed something. The *wood felt warm*, holding the body heat of the person who sat in front of me. I did not realize wood held heat. Does that make any difference? Yes, I think it might be a life-changing piece of information.

Jesus gave these commands: “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whosoever loses his life because of Me will save it. (Luke 9:23-24 Holman Christian Standard).” We are blessed to share *Jesus’* life and His victory over death. We shrink away from sharing in His suffering and death. He says we must take up our cross daily. Only then can we follow Him. Yesterday I thought of *Christ and His wooden cross*, how they removed His body from the cross following His execution. The cross *would feel warm* from the body of our Lord. As we take up our cross, remember His. If we are sensitive *we can feel His warmth*, His love as we press against the *wooden instrument of death*. *We are crucified with Christ* (Galatians 2:20). *Jesus as the Son of Man*, lived, breathed and died as man. He chose to lay down His life for us. I have a new appreciation today for that *Old Rugged Cross*.

January 14

“The Epitaph”

Our family has been very involved in *genealogy* for the last twelve years. Searching old cemeteries and reading the information on grave markers reveals valuable historical facts. The stone and marble carvings from the past are a record of many family memories.

Wills and funeral services can also bring a lot of facts about an individual to the forefront. We all hope to be remembered fondly and with respect. *What will your epitaph be?*

The Old Testament gives us *the good, the bad, and the ugly* in the long lists of kings. I discovered a leader who left his mark on his nation. “...Asa was wholehearted his entire life (2 Chronicles 15:17 HCS).” This man’s faithfulness made a difference. Do you have a heart condition? Maybe it is time for a checkup.

January 15

“Old Mother Hen”

I experienced the advantage of growing up in the country with dairy farms in our neighborhood. I saw plenty of cows, but I do not recall seeing hens. The closest fowls were of the turkey variety, at a turkey farm right up the road. Locals avoided standing downwind of the farm. I have heard stories about the protective nature of hens. While some animals neglect or abandon their young, hens protect their baby chicks.

Many years ago while praying for my younger sister, a portion of scripture came to mind. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you are unwilling (Matthew 23:37 NAS).”

As a mother of four children, my sister often feels concern for her chicks and wants to gather them closely for their safety. We are also in need of shelter. “God, your faithful love is so valuable that people take refuge in the shadow of your wings (Psalm 36:7 HCS).” Quickly, run for cover.

January 16

“Inferiority Complex”

Do you have a great deal of *self-confidence*? Could you qualify as the poster child for the *Dale Carnegie* course? I know there are those that will respond in the affirmative. Others like me may have times of *feeling inferior* to others and inadequate. Confidence is just wishful thinking. Well, if we do *feel inferior* or not qualified for a task, we do not have to give in to it.

“And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who, also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:4-6 NAS).” How about that for boosting your confidence?

God gave me a blessing concerning any *feelings of inferiority*. The *ground is level* at the foot of the cross. We all must come just as we are. None are superior to others; *none are inferior*. We can hold our heads high and face tomorrow.

January 17

“Felt-Board Faith”

Do you remember the popularity of *felt-boards* in the past? Sunday school teachers used them as a very effective teaching tool to visually explain a story. The combination of telling and showing stories entertained while it instructed. Sometimes the old-fashioned methods should be given the credit they deserved.

Are we too old for *felt-board faith*? I don't think so. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a lot of knowledge can be crammed onto a felt board. Visualize a sky-blue background, representing God's creation. In the center a totally black figure is placed, representing man in his sin, separated from God. Directly over the character, place a totally white figure. This is *Christ Jesus* in all of His glory. Do you remember where sinful man is? He represents you and me when outside of a personal relationship with *Christ*. He is hidden in *Christ*. “For you have died (to self) and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3 NAS).” When the Father looks at us, He sees His Son in all His glory. *We need felt-board faith.*

January 18

“Family Reunion”

Are you planning a *family reunion*? Our yearly gathering is held each autumn at Collins, Mississippi. Each year there are usually a few new faces in the crowd. Sadly, there is also one or two empty chairs, and we honor those who died during the year.

What makes a *family reunion* so special? Is it scrumptious food? Could your reason be the program or entertainment? Everyone looks forward to the door prizes. Are these the reasons we mark our calendars to be there? No, a *family reunion* is special because we are among family. Our mobile society scatters most families across the country. A *reunion* gives us the opportunity to see each other, share news, and melt in the hugs of family.

Have you discovered that God instructs us to have *family reunions*? “You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing. But you should meet together and encourage each other. Do this even more as you see the Day coming (The day Christ will come to judge all people and take His people to live with Him) (Hebrews 10:25 NCV).”

How does that tie in to *family reunions*? A church is not the building. A church is the *family of God*. He is our Father. We are His children. The members are brothers and sisters in Christ. He wants us to have *regular family reunions* in the buildings where we gather together to worship Him.

Will the food be good? It will be great, as we feed on the word of God. Will there be music to enjoy? Yes, we are offered many styles of music from soloists, choirs and instrumentalists. Are their door prizes? Everyone is a winner. We are offered the prize of eternal life. *Mark your calendar; you don't want to miss the next family reunion.*

January 19

“Barns of Blessing”

Do you have a fascination with old *barns*? Our home has prints, paintings and what-not barns throughout the house. My husband and I are *drawn to barns* and I wonder why. The rural area of New York where I grew up has many farms. Two dairy farms were located in our small community. The silhouettes of *barns and silos* decorate the landscape on country roads. They are picture perfect, waiting to be captured by photographers and placed on postcards.

It is ironic that many Americans feel the same way. In society, people strive to achieve success and own a mansion on a hilltop. *Barns* are normally not much more than glorified large shacks. They are used for storage for hay, horses, or farm equipment. Many that we pass by are *abandoned and empty*.

How can we have barns of blessing? “Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled and your vats will overflow with new wine (Proverbs 3:9-10 HCS).” The Holy Spirit is described in many ways, including a filling and new wine. *Yes, we can receive barns of blessing.*

January 20

“Oxygen Masks”

Are you a frequent flier? I have flown many cross-country trips to visit my family and traveled by plane twice to England. Safety instructions are shared in three ways: demonstration by trained attendants, leaflets in the pocket of your seat, and video messages on the screens.

I find it very interesting that in case of emergencies, parents or caregivers are directed to *put oxygen masks* on themselves first. Step two is to place a mask on any small children traveling with them. It goes against logic and parental protection instincts to protect ourselves first. However, it is true that we will not be much help to our children if we black out from lack of oxygen.

In *Nehemiah* we read of a similar situation. “Then the priests and Levites purified themselves and purified the people, the gates, and the wall (Nehemiah 12:30 NKJ).” Religious leaders need to search their hearts and seek continuous cleansing before ministering to others.

January 21

“No Fishing”

We are restricted or refused entrance in certain places, discovering they are off limits to us. We read signs commanding us to *Keep off the grass, or Keep Out*. Land owners set property boundaries with *Posted: No Fishing or Hunting*. Authorities and private property owners make the point very clear; we are not welcome there. If you choose to ignore the warnings, the law is on their side; and you might be arrested.

I believe God may have an invisible *No Fishing* sign. His children foolishly decide to disobey His restrictions. Our genuine confession of sins is followed by His generous forgiveness. Our merciful Father removes those sins and the weight of guilt. “Lord, you will have mercy on us again. You will conquer our sins. You will throw away all our sins into the deepest sea (Micah 7:19 NCV).” He keeps the sea well stocked, but deep sea fishing is not allowed. Reeling in past failures is out of boundaries; don’t fall for the lure of Satan’s accusations. You will pull in no fabulous fish from these waters, only sin’s stingrays. God posted the signs: *No Fishing*.

January 22

“Queen for a Day”

Are you a person of royalty; does *blue blood* run through your veins? Many from my husband’s family have been deeply involved in family history research for years. It can become a passion, and our links to the past are worth researching. You may have royal relatives.

Recently I attended a wonderful preschool graduation program. As each four-year-old stood before the microphone, they told their name and what they wanted to be when they grew up. There were the usual occupations, plus several straight from the hearts of tender children. One girl said “*When I grow up I want to be a princess!*” Yes, she dreamed big.

In the struggling years of television, programs lacked the glitz and glamour of today; but it did not take as much to impress us then. I felt enchanted viewing *Queen for a Day*. Producers of current game shows would arrogantly reject such simple entertainment. I do not, as it gave people the opportunity to dream big dreams, reach for a chance to be a *queen for a day*.

People wrote letters explaining why they wanted to be chosen, sharing their personal story or a story of someone they felt deserving. As queen, a prize would also be awarded to fit the specific needs of *the queen*. Home appliances, which we consider necessities, were luxuries then. If a mother of six won and received an automatic washing machine, she would feel like a queen. Receiving her crown and being led to her throne, tears filled her eyes. In our lowly estate, God, though the rightful reigning King, lets us have a small part on the royal throne. “The naïve inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge (Proverbs 14:18 NAS).” *The coronation is about to begin.*

January 23

“Head Up, Shoulders Back!”

We feel pride in standing erect, with good posture. We may remember words from our mothers: “*Stand tall, stand up straight, and don’t slouch! Keep your head up and your shoulders back!*” When we view a military group in formation, it is a sight to behold.

What about pride in that stance? Does it speak of *I’ll bow to no man*? The opposite of being straight and tall is bowed down and laid low. We form a mental picture of a man down in the gutter or a beggar down on his knees. One day all will be *humbled before Christ*. (Philippians 2:8-11) At times people lay prostrate on their faces before God, in worship and prayer. I once heard a true story by a friend who served as part of a *Billy Graham* crusade team. A group gathered for prayer with *Rev. Graham* before the services in the stadium. Heads were bowed and eyes were closed. It seemed like *Billy Graham’s voice* came from very far away. As our friend opened his eyes, he discovered that *Billy Graham* laid flat on his face in urgent prayer.

An amazing illustration is found in 1 Samuel 5:1-5. *The Philistines* captured the Ark of God, a holy place where worshipers experienced God’s presence. They placed the Ark in the pagan temple of their false god, *Dagon*. Idol worshippers found the statue face down. *Even false gods are on their faces before God Almighty*. What a mighty God we serve.

January 24

“Body Parts”

Do you still have all of your body parts? Do you have everything you started with? Most people need many surgeries in their lifetime. I am very grateful that as I approach age sixty, I have no operations to list in my medical history. A few nurses have looked at me in disbelief.

With medical advancements today, patients are often given replacements. That is a pretty good deal. A body part that no longer works properly is removed to make room for a new-and-improved model.

One of the first operations that many people experience is the removal of their tonsils and adenoids. In most cases children have few problems, get a lot of attention, and then return to their playtime or school. My oldest sister and brother both experienced complications caused by hemorrhaging and gave my parents quite a scare.

After the removal of tonsils, throats are sore and sensitive. The patients are treated to as much ice cream and *Jell-O* as they want and a few days of bed rest. The time is not one filled with happy memories, just an ordeal faced and worked through. My *brother Gary* received two gold fish from our parents, as a reward for being so brave. I still remember his clever selection of names for the fish: *Tonsils and Adenoids*. They probably did not live long, but they are fondly remembered by his older sister.

If you are absent a *few body parts*, don't be alarmed. God is in control; He knows what you need. “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Luke 12:7a NAS).” If the Lord counts every hair (and those that fall out), I'm sure He is keeping track of anything taken from your body. Do we even notice when they are missing? Maybe we do... it is said: “*You don't know what you've got until you lose it.*”

January 25

“Wagon Wheels”

Wagon wheels traversed the west carrying settlers to a new frontier. Mile by mile and day by day *wooden wheels* moved in circular rotations making the journey possible. *Wagons* were only as dependable as the wheels that bore the load. Any wagon master knowing his business gave instructions to the excited pioneers before they joined his wagon train. They would be advised to travel light, begin with a dependable horse team, and be sure *all wheels* were secure and functioning properly. The most crucial area *centered in the wheel, as the hub*. It bore the weight and each spoke needed to be firmly *connected to that hub*. Travelers regularly lubricated wheels for security. A man trusted not only his team of horses; *he relied on his wheels*.

Our life is a journey, and to travel we need a foundation beneath us we can trust to carry the load, our burdens (2 Timothy 2:19a NAS). *Our life is the wheel and Jesus must be the hub. If we decide to put our own interests at the center, taking our focus and trust away from Him, the wheel is completely out of balance. We fall apart and fall behind in the wagon train to Glory land. How is the hub lubricated? We keep it well oiled with prayer and praise. Keep those wheels turning.*

January 26

“Dead End”

Do you feel like your life journey has you *traveling down a dead-end street*? Today we frequently hear of people feeling trapped in a *dead-end job*. It is sad to realize there is no room for progress or advancement. Within each of us, there is a desire to feel fulfillment as well as the challenge of advancement.

I wonder what it would be like to live at the *end of a dead-end street*. Sitting on your front porch over the years you would see many confused travelers reaching the end of your street. They did not find a fork in the road; they were at the end of the road. There were no choices available; they simply must turn around and find an alternate route.

We must be on the right path. “And the Lord said to him, Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight (Acts 9:11-12 NAS).” *Ananias* protested because he heard all the reports of *Saul* persecuting the followers of *Christ*. *God* made it clear that *Saul* would now be used to carry the Gospel. *Saul* personally discovered the street called *Straight* as the entrance ramp for the man he would become, the *Apostle Paul*.

January 27

“Adopted and Accepted”

Were you an *adopted child*? If you were, consider yourself privileged; you were chosen. I have heard sad stories of *adoptive parents* hiding the truth of adoption from their children. This is tragic; it is not something to be ashamed of, but to give thanks for.

My mother married twice, and my oldest *sister*, *Donna*, came from her first marriage. When *Mom and Dad* married, *Donna* made the transition at age five. I know it involved many changes as she became a part of an entirely new family. Today many families are termed as *blended*: yours, mine and ours. *Dad* adopted *Donna* after his vows to *Mom*; he chose her to be his first child.

Donna proudly held on to her *German* heritage and visited with her birth father and family frequently. We all called her *Grandma Steinberger*, *Grandma*. Her new family did not mean she experienced rejection from the first, but acceptance from the second.

Often I forget *Dad* is not *Donna's birth father*, and the term *half sister* seems foreign to me. The main time I recall the fact is when doing medical history. Yes, we were *whole sisters*.

Dad and *Donna* shared a very close relationship over the years; each very stubborn, they would hold their ground but still love each other. *Dad* loved visits with *Donna* and her children, and she enjoyed giving him his favorite foods. In the last three years of *Dad's* life, she became one of his faithful caregivers. Though she suffered with very serious health issues, she diligently worked to meet *Dad's* needs when he lived in assisted living or a nursing home close by. She carried a heavy burden as she tried to come to grips with the truth he would not live much longer. At times she seemed to be in denial; she fought the enemy of death as she fought all of her battles, with determination and spunk. She lost that battle, but she knew he now stood in the presence of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)

Donna and I shared the same month for our birthdays, mine seven years after hers, meaning we also shared the birthstone of emerald and flower, lily of the valley. Strangely through life we also continued to share the same last name. Both men we married came from the south; though not related, they did have the same last name. It would confuse people at our churches when I requested special prayers for her. Later I would be questioned: “*Did you mean your sister-in-law?*”

It is nice to realize we have things in common; I am adopted, too. “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all His wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:5-8 NAS) *Donna* lost her own battle with death in 2005, and we will not be sharing birthday memories together. I think her *adoptive fathers* are throwing her a big party; both *Dad* and her *heavenly Father* are hosting the event. *She is adopted and accepted.*

January 28

“All You Can Eat”

Do you enjoy buffet dining? Some of my favorite restaurants offer *all-you-can-eat* buffet meals. We have a desire to get our money’s worth and filling our own plates gives us that control. The ultimate experience includes several areas for selection, including salad bars, soups, breads and rolls, hot-vegetable bars, pasta and tacos, and a large variety of meats. It is topped off with assorted deserts including ice-cream treats. A good waiter or waitress keeps your glass filled with your beverage of choice, making everything complete. The only challenge is not making too many return trips for more.

Why do we settle for only snacks or appetizers from the bounty of God’s word? He offers an *all-you-can-eat* feast. “All the days of the afflicted are bad, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast (Proverbs 15:15 NAS).” Life in Christ leads us to filling and contentment. “Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (Philippians 4:11 NAS)” Join the line at the buffet. “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost (Isaiah 55:1 NAS).” Everything is fat free and the feasting never ends.

January 29

“The Bonding Process”

The bonding process is crucial in the early years of a child’s life. From the first moments following birth and beyond, a child yearns for safety, security, and love. Newborn babies turn their heads toward the sound of the voice they heard in the womb, their mother’s. They quickly recognize the touch of loving parents and prefer being held by them over that of others.

God gave us an excellent bonding agent free of charge. Nursing our children by breast feeding brings a feeling of love, provision, and tenderness that is beyond description. Both the mother and child are together in a very personal relationship. I understand all women are not able to nurse their children or for personal reasons choose to bottle feed. I am not saying that is bad, but nursing is preferable. Most babies are much healthier if formula is avoided or used sparingly. Personally, nursing my children forty years ago still brings back memories I’ll cherish always. “Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me (Psalm 131:2 NAS).” God meets our deepest needs, *bonding us close to His heart*.

January 30

“Breakfast”

Have you ever *fasted* for either physical or spiritual reasons? Most of us have, some more often than others. Physicians often instruct patients to *fast* in preparation for medical tests. Scriptures speak of *fasting* in both the Old and New Testaments. *Fasting*, when done with a humble heart, is done to draw us closer to the Lord in prayer, following *Jesus’* model prayer, the *Lord’s Prayer*. (Matthew 6:9-13) He had much to say about *fasting in* verses 16-18. Notice He said *when you fast, not if you fast*.

Have you ever realized that our morning meal is centered on *fasting, break-fast*? Our nighttime hours were spent in slumber without nourishment. After rising we have our opportunity to *break that fast*, and start our day off right with a nutritional breakfast. I believe a good breakfast is almost cause for a celebration; take it sunny-side up.

Another type of *fasting* we may experience is going through a period of time without the word of God. That is also a *fast* to break during the early morning hours. A morning quiet time in God’s word and prayer is food for our spirit. God’s people, in times of recorded history, experienced famine with severe shortages of God’s word. “Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11 NAS).” We are blessed to have God’s word available for meditation and memorization. *Break the fast*; join the feast.

January 31

“Clap or Cringe”

Do you clap your hands or cringe when offered a senior citizen discount? I believe it is wonderful that we get some breaks from generous merchants. We all pinch our pennies and over an extended period of time, those discounts can really make a difference.

At times we may need to ask before we make a purchase to see if any reduction in price is available. The extra effort is well worth any inconvenience. If planning a trip, some Internet searching for motels and restaurants along the travel route offering discounts could result in extra pocket money for souvenirs.

My husband loves to share a true story. I entered a fast food restaurant alone and ordered a few items and went to my table. I have never been good with math but felt quite sure my purchase total added up to more than charged. I returned to the counter, wanting to do the right thing. I know at the end of a shift the totals are supposed to be correct, or some employers take the difference out of the paycheck of the clerk. After explaining, they rechecked my order and said: “*We gave you the senior citizen discount.*” The problem is I had not crossed that golden threshold yet. At the time, I styled my long hair with a nice perm. I guess the gray must have been more pronounced than I realized.

The Bible very often refers to the golden years, “Even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you (Isaiah 46:4 NAS).” I think I may purchase a big round button to wear saying: *On the decline, discounts delightful!*

February 1

“Don’t Stop”

How long is your attention span? Working with very young children, I learned they average one minute for every year of life. That explains why it is so difficult for them to sit still and quiet in worship service. It’s amazing when we discover a child who breaks the mold. *Thomas*, a boy in my class, could concentrate for long amounts of time, either by himself with an educational toy or listening as I read an *ABC’s* book to him. Yes, *Thomas* demonstrated a fantastic attention span; he puts most adults to shame.

I think with most of us, things which interest us most do hold our attention. Sports fans can spend hours at an event or watching television. They seem to be in a trance; yes, sports hold their attention. Reading, music, and other forms of entertainment are easy to concentrate on. *What about God’s word and prayer?* I wish I could say we score as well there...Our minds wander, and we think of all the other things that need our attention. Very often, we just get sleepy and give up.

We need staying power. Others are depending on us to pray. “They said to Samuel, Don’t stop praying to the Lord our God for us. Ask the Lord to save us from the Philistines. Then Samuel took a baby lamb. He offered the lamb to the Lord as a whole burnt offering. He called to the Lord for Israel’s sake. And the Lord answered him (1 Samuel 7:8-9 NCV).”

Don’t stop now. The cry of victory will ring out soon.

February 2

“Freddy the Freeloader”

Laughter is not only the best medicine; it is also easier to swallow. Humor wraps around an unpleasant issue and opens our eyes and hearts to truth. The insight of *Will Rogers* is recognized decades after his life and death. The unique talents of *Red Skelton* are copied but never duplicated.

Viewing *Red Skelton's* television programs led to roaring laughter, and his many characters showed us the lighter side of life. One of my favorites: *Freddy the Freeloader* depicted the life of a bum. Skits with *Freddy* and special guest stars most often resulted in missed lines on cue cards and belly laughs from the viewing audience. He almost made the life of the homeless look desirable. He encountered a choice of working or loafing and picked number two.

What is a freeloader? I guess it describes a person looking for a *free ride*, living off the benefits of another's hard work. He crashes parties, eats your appetizers, buffet meal and finest desserts. If there is a tab to be paid he is nowhere to be found. It is all comical when portrayed by *Freddy the Freeloader*, but it is no laughing matter in real life. *The Apostle Paul* minced no words. “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order; if anyone will not work, neither let him eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10 NAS).” There are various causes for the homeless or unemployed, and we must not judge others too quickly. Helping hands extend to those who experience genuine need, *but Freddy and his friends need to brush off the seats of their pants and look for work.*

February 3

“God’s Gamblers”

Recently my husband shared a story from his childhood, remembering getting paid for shooting mice. Our friend thought he said *shooting dice*, and we all had a good laugh. I don’t think his parents would pay him for that.

It is foolish to *gamble* with our hard-earned money, but we should be willing to take a certain amount of *risk* in our lives. That is a natural part of our routine; each time we turn the key in the ignition and enter the highway, we are taking a chance. If we make any major credit purchase, we are *risking* future funds. A marriage proposal acceptance comes with no written guarantee; yet in love and commitment, we take that *leap of faith*.

Are you willing to take risks for God’s kingdom? Across our world today some risk their reputations, their safety, and even their lives. They follow in the steps of the faithful. “...men who risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15:26 NAS).” Join the group today; *God’s gamblers never lose*.

February 4

“Gold Rush”

It seems like we are in another *gold rush*. Viewing television or listening to the radio, we are bombarded with commercials by companies wanting to purchase *gold* jewelry to be melted down for resale. I even saw a feature on the evening news; this is big business. People are actually hosting *gold parties*, inviting friends and neighbors to meet with a representative of the company, selling their items on the spot and walking away with a signed check. The host of the party may receive a percentage from the sales. They have a good opportunity in our slow economy; the promise of fast cash is pretty appealing.

Gold has always held value in our world economic system, but even that is temporary. *Solomon* instructs us to put knowledge first. “Take my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold (Proverbs 8:10 NAS).” I doubt we’ll see a *knowledge rush*. The Book of Revelation mentions gold often, and it plays a visible part in the heavenly city. “And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass (Revelation 21:18 NAS).” The description continues. “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:21 NAS).” That is one *gated community* that I aim to see. Try to imagine a clam large enough to hold an enormous pearl, chosen to design one single gate. Today there may be a *gold rush*, but one day all will rush to fall at the feet of *Jesus*. “...behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you (Revelation 3:9b NAS).”

February 5

“Rescues in the Wild”

Are you an avid viewer of *National Geographic* or *Animal Planet*? If you are, I am sure you have viewed many programs and movies about *rescues* of animals in the wild. At times, these creatures need a helping hand from man.

Many problems for the animals are a result of poor weather conditions. If there is a drought covering a wide area, food and water become scarce and animals are moved to a fertile area. If flooding occurs, animals are airlifted to prevent them from being swept away in raging waters. Predators may outnumber a species, and they are *rescued* before they are totally wiped out. For a large number of reasons rescues in the wild are a regular occurrence across the globe.

God is also in the rescue business. We live in a jungle of confusion and darkness and need His rescue. “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14 NAS).” The lion may claim the title of king of the jungle, but I call the kingdom of the Lord my home and refuge.

February 6

“Lost Baggage”

Recently our son-in-law returned home to his family after two months of military training. The excitement and joy of his return became overshadowed by the frustration of the airlines *losing his baggage*. In my many years of flying or traveling by bus, I am grateful I have never experienced that. Fortunately his bags were located and brought directly to their home.

God provides us with all needed baggage, equipping us for service, and it is always handled by Him with care. The equipping gifts are never misplaced or removed, “For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29 NAS).”

When luggage is lost, a person often must replace essentials to use until their personal items contained in *lost baggage* are returned. Not only is that aggravating but it would mean unexpected expenses as well. My mother wisely packed needed items in her carry-on, including toothbrush and toothpaste, extra set of undergarments, etc. Mom always thought of everything.

God knows our every need, “For your Father knows what you need before you ask Him (Matthew 6:8b NAS).” How is that for speedy service? God not only provides our trip itinerary, (Matthew 28:19-20) but He packs our bags with gifts and power. (Acts 1:8) *That baggage cannot be lost*.

February 7

“Tears in a Bottle”

How do they get those miniature ships in a *bottle*? I guess it is like the *elephant jokes*... very carefully. The mysterious notes in *bottles* that drift ashore are nearly as intriguing. It seems that mankind puts a variety of things in *bottles*, both for protection and display. *Bottles* come in various sizes, shapes, and colors. Maybe you collect *bottles*; many people do.

Have you ever seen a bottle of tears? No, it is not a scientific experiment or some warped idea of a joke. Have you ever heard the expression: *I'm not going to waste my tears on him or her? If you're God's child, no tears are wasted.* “Thou hast taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Thy bottle; are they not in Thy book (Psalm 56:8 NAS)?” Every *tear we shed* is of worth to God who created our tear ducts. In Luke we read the beautiful story of a woman washing *Jesus'* feet with her tears. (Luke 7:44). I wonder what the bottle looks like holding those tears. It might sit on a mantle in the house of the Lord.

One day the Lord will wipe away all our tears in Heaven. (Revelation 7:17). For now let them flow, “He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him (Psalm 126:6 NAS).”

February 8

“Muzzle Me”

Do you speak first and think later? The condition is contagious, and I often recognize all the symptoms in others before admitting I am also infected. The competition for speaking the most words must be great. We are always ready to practice.

How often do we correct small children for talking out of turn or being cruel to their little friends? We need to take a little of our own advice. Do you remember the children’s game of silence? An adult usually gives the challenge to two or more children to see who can go the longest without speaking. A few minutes of peace and quiet is appreciated. I think I’m a loser even before I start because I talk to myself. Sometimes God lovingly gives laryngitis to allow our voices to rest. “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3 NAS).” *Master, muzzle me.*

February 9

“Serve Time”

The prison system is *big business* providing good employment and benefits to all on the payroll. The network of prisons keeps expanding because buildings are overcrowded. If you do not live in the vicinity of a state-correction-system facility, you may very soon.

It is interesting to ponder the different names for a prison... *the slammer*, *the big house*, or the more conventional *prison* and *jail*. There is another to focus on, *penitentiary*. It is not used much today; maybe it is not *politically correct*.

I grew up not far from the *Jamesville Penitentiary*, in Central New York State. When *Dad* drove past the prison grounds it always made me scared, but another interesting aspect of the prison is the structure of the building. I have not seen the penitentiary in decades; but in the 1950's and 1960's, I would describe it as almost beautiful, like a large campus in England.

Many years ago, as a Christian, I realized the significance of the term *penitentiary*. Prisoners were not merely to reform using behavioral management skills. Officials hoped offenders would truly feel penitent for their crimes, express sorrow and repent. “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3 NAS).” The time behind bars would be restitution to the victims of their crimes. We all could *serve time* and express sorrow for our sins. Our best reward would be *early release* and freedom for eternity walking with the Lord.

February 10

“Good Ole Days”

How good were the *good ole days*? We often not only look at our surrounding world through rose-colored glasses but also the past as well. Most of us have gotten pretty well accustomed to the benefits of life today, and with close examination, most would decide against a return to the *good ole days*.

Why do we speak so fondly of yesterday? I believe it is because we desire the simpler life; we want to be freed of the stress of the rat race. We forget that those before us also yearned for the good ole days, so it is not really a certain time period, but more of an attitude. Our children in a few years will be referring to our present time as the *good ole days*. Even those in Bible days dealt with this frame of mind, “Do not say, ‘Why is it that the former days were better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this, (Ecclesiastes 7:10 NAS).” We cannot purchase a return-trip ticket. *Soon these will be the good ole days.*

February 11

“Reveille to Taps”

A military base is a good place to keep us grounded in our patriotic roots. If you have an opportunity to visit a base in your area it may bring rich rewards. Our son-in-law is career *Air Force*, and during the last seventeen years, I have been a visitor at several air bases. A first-time guest is surprised to hear patriotic music sounding through the air. It is beautiful.

The sound of *reveille and taps* is also heard. *Reveille* means it is time to *rise and shine*; *Taps* is the call for *lights out*. I think every mother would love this idea for school children. *Reveille and Taps get your attention*. To a family member attending a funeral for a veteran, the playing of Taps brings sadness; but also hearts swell with pride for those who dedicated years of their lives in defense of our country.

The day will come where the *sounding of Taps* will no longer be needed. “And it will come about in that day that there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light (Zechariah 14:6-7 NAS).” *Keep sounding the reveille; it is always time to rise and shine for Jesus*. “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you (Isaiah 60:1 NAS).”

February 12

“Hate Crimes”

Society and the world system coin many phrases of terminology. Soon they slip into casual conversation, as if we always used them. A current example they are imprinting on our brains is *hate crimes*. They usually describe a murder incident, and I am always annoyed. When one person murders another it is usually a form of hate. I realize that many things contribute to that act of violence, the snuffing out of life in one created in God’s image. Even if it is a random act, hate must be present, hatred of others, authority, themselves, or even God Himself. Reporters often try to separate groups of violence in the *hate-crime* category.

Hate crimes are nothing new, only the label is a current trend. “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this in order that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their Law, they hated Me without a cause (John 15:24-25 NAS).” I wonder how court systems would rule on that today. Do not be surprised if you are not welcomed into *the in crowd*. We are in good company. “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you (John 15:18 NAS).”

February 13

“Senior Moments”

Do you have *senior moments*? I confess to not only moments, but decades. At sixty it seems like my memory for people’s names grows dimmer by the day. Memorization of facts and figures never came easy; now it is nearly impossible.

I have been told we have selective memories, remember what we choose and discard the rest. It is not always that easy, but it does explain why *April 15th* often sneaks up on people.

We are in grave danger if we forget God. “Wicked people will go to the grave. So will all those who forget God (Psalm 9:17 NCV).” An *elephant never forgets*; neither should we. As God’s child I have so many of His blessings to remember. “My whole being, praise the Lord. Do not forget all His kindness (Psalm 103:2 NCV).” If you see me with a string tied around my finger, smile and count your blessings.

February 14

“Written on Our Hearts”

February is the month of love and images of red hearts are displayed everywhere. Our love begins, grows, and flows from our hearts to others. It is also where love dies, resulting in *broken hearts*. We speak of an individual's generosity, describing them as being *all heart*. In contrast, someone who is selfish we categorize as being *coldhearted* or *hardhearted*. There are sad times when we are lonely or grieve. Then we suffer with a common illness known as *heartache*. We all rejoice at special celebrations such as wedding engagements, the marriage ceremony, or at the birth of a child. Then our hearts leap for joy, resulting in *happy hearts*.

The Bible speaks in many ways about the heart. One of my favorite scripture passages is found in Proverbs. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJ).” We are also instructed to hide God's word in our hearts so that we will not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11). One of my church pastors, *Dr. Vernon Harkey*, spoke of another example. God places His word upon our hearts. Our pastor explained that God knew if His word is located on our heart, it will fall right in when our heart breaks (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

The realization of God's love for me, wrapped inside His word, slipping in-between the cracks of my broken heart is beautiful. A broken heart involves an opening like a chasm, growing deeper and deeper. God's love, securely in His word plunging to the depths within me, nearly leaves me breathless. We cannot truly know our hearts, but God knowing all searches our hearts (Jeremiah 17: 9-10). This *Valentine's Day* when you see a heart-shaped box of chocolates, remember *God's written word is balanced tenderly upon your heart*.

February 15

“Mail-Order Bride”

Do you know anyone who uses on-line dating services? We prefer to think matches are *made in heaven*, but some in desperation resort to *.com*. Former outlets for finding a mate included *Lonely Hearts Clubs* or newspaper personal columns.

Matchmaking goes back farther than we can prove; Laban, the father of *Leah*, *Jacob’s* first wife, used deception to find her a man. (Genesis 29:16-28). Today she would likely be referred to as *a plain Jane* with slim chances to land a man. The wedding night for *Jacob* and *Leah* goes beyond the worst blind-date surprises. Seeing her in the camouflage of a bridal veil, *Jacob* suffered from *night blindness*; and he had an eye-opener the following morning.

I find the old stories of mail-order brides interesting. People corresponding by mail learned little about their prospective mate, but they took the risk and arranged their marriage. Many things brought them together, including a deep desire for companionship. I’m sure the U.S. postal system offered no guarantees. The mail-order arrangement brought perfect strangers together to form the binding covenant of marriage.

The Bible gives another vivid example of such blind trust. “...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9 NAS).”

February 16

“Scratch Cards”

Have you ever experienced the frustration of waiting in line to pay for your gas, while the person ahead of you is purchasing *lottery scratch cards*? I feel for the clerks who have to deal with that while they are trying to carry on with their other responsibilities.

Man has always searched for the illusive *pot of gold* at the end of the rainbow. Today he hopes to find it buried under his scratch marks. Sadly, those who spend the most on lottery games are those who can afford it the least.

Maybe we should search as diligently for treasure buried within the pages of God’s word. “Thy word have I treasured in my heart (Psalm 119:11a NAS).” Another treasure outshines the rarest jewels, “Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you (2 Timothy 1:14 NAS).” *Forget the lottery; we are already rich in God’s blessings.*

February 17

“Good Riddance”

Good riddance! We are happy to see an enemy flee from sight. On my top ten list of enemies, fear ranks at the top. Most of us have a large range of fear levels, from feelings of mild discomfort and uneasiness to panic and anxiety, with a climax of terror.

I have never done a thorough investigation, but I once heard the words fear or afraid are listed in scripture 365 times, one for every day of the year. I would say fear is a pretty important topic. A certain amount of fear is a healthy thing; it keeps us from dangers such as fire, deep water, or stepping out in front of traffic. Phobias are fear run amuck.

We are to fear the Lord, not meaning to cringe but to reverence Him and His name. (Leviticus 25:17) He is not *the man upstairs*. When we hold Him in honor, we are well on our way to ridding ourselves of senseless fears.

We also experience fear in times of glimpses of God’s glory. Scriptures give many accounts of people encountering angels or seeing dramatic miracles. Most instantly were paralyzed with fear, followed by words of comfort... “Fear not, or be not afraid!” God understands our fears and holds our hand. “But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, O you of little faith, why do you doubt (Matthew 14:30-31 NAS)?” In our weakness we can never fully conquer our fears, but we can put our trust in One who can. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear... (1 John 4:18a NAS). God is love. (1 John 4:16) Let Him slay the giant called fear and banish him from God’s kingdom.

February 18

“Revolving Door”

Do you feel like you are living your life going around and around in a *revolving door*?

We all have days like that when we don't believe we are accomplishing anything and even feel a little lightheaded. We need to be concerned if those days turn into weeks and months. Then we need to purposely step out and free ourselves from the *revolving door*.

Often we realize we are not in the revolving door alone; though separated by barriers, we sense the presence of others. Hopefully, their stay is only temporary, and they will also get free and out in the open air. As we exit a building *through a revolving door* it often takes a few minutes to get our bearings. We need to get our balance and adjust to the surroundings, maybe busy traffic, crowded sidewalks and weather conditions. If the sun is bright we may feel blinded temporarily. If it is extremely hot, cold, or stormy our body will need to adapt to that as well.

If our lifestyle and busy schedule is suddenly stopped by our stepping out of the *revolving door*, we will also need to make changes in order to enjoy our slower-paced life. It will be worth it all. “The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth forever (Psalm 121:8 NAS).” *Jesus is our Door Man*.

February 19

“Morning Meditation”

Do you meet with God regularly for a *quiet time*? I’m not sure who labeled those special times set aside to commune with our Father as *quiet times*; but quiet is a rare commodity today. The frantic call of a stressed-out parent explains it all. “Be quiet; I can’t hear myself think!” Yes, we need to welcome and cherish those times alone in prayer, praise and growth through God’s word.

The monks knew the power of silence and solitude and guarded those times diligently. God is always available with a listening ear, but there is something extra special about *morning meditation*. With no interruptions from the outside world we can draw close to the Lord for daily direction. If we give Him first place in our busy schedules, He will bless our lives with His still, *quiet* voice.

If you are happily married, do you remember the joy of waking up in the morning and delighting in having the love of your life at your side? We can experience that same contentment when we rise to meet with the holy trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “Before the day breaks and the shadows flee turn (to me), my love... (Song of Solomon 2:17a HCS)” He loves us with an everlasting love and desires *quiet* times alone, to reveal that love. “*Shush! I need peace and quiet. I can’t hear the Lord!*”

February 20

“Burning Bush”

The *burning bush* experienced by *Moses* must have captivated him, as he realized it defied all logic. Today scoffers try to explain away all miracles recorded in the Bible, including the *burning bush*. I read that it may have been just a reflection, like an optical illusion. We may not rationally understand why miracles occur. By faith we know we serve a Holy and Powerful God, and nothing is impossible with Him. “Is anything too difficult for the Lord (Genesis 18:14a NAS)?”

The bush burned, but not consumed. Imagine having a log burning in the fireplace and it never stopped burning. It continuously provided warmth during a blizzard, and you were snowbound. You could not explain it, but you experienced it nevertheless.

Our fire, zeal for God, should stay ablaze. When humanly speaking we experience *burn out*, God is able to keep the fires burning. “And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God (2 Timothy 1:6a NAS).” I have the privilege of personally knowing another burning bush. *Rev. Charles Bush* once served as my pastor, in *Devine, TX*. His heart blazed with a burning desire to preach God’s word. “But if I say, I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name, then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in and I cannot endure it (Jeremiah 20:9 NAS).” *Brother Bush* went home to be with the Lord, but his fire burned away underbrush in my heart. God will one day use His refining fires to consume all sin.

February 21

“Other Shore”

People seem drawn to bodies of water; ask any real estate agent. After severe storms hit our nation’s coastline, homes are left damaged or destroyed. Those of us who are land lovers wonder why anyone would build so *close to the shore*, knowing the risks. The truth is most will rebuild and hope for the best. The advantages of the terrific view of the water, the peaceful rhythm of waves washing up on the shore, and sunrise and sunset reflections make it worthwhile.

Another reason people are drawn as a magnet to the water is the fishing opportunities. If a person simply loves the thrill of baiting their line and casting it off in the distance or if it is a commercial fishing business, the coast makes it all possible.

In the New Testament, *Jesus* found faithful followers as *He strolled along the shore*, and the lake and fishing are frequently mentioned. “That same day *Jesus* went out of the house and sat by the lake. Large crowds gathered around Him. So *Jesus* got into a boat and sat, while the people stayed on the shore (Matthew 13:1-2 NCV).” It is easy to visualize *Jesus* peacefully sitting by the lake. Maybe it brought back memories of the creation He shared with *the Father and the Holy Spirit*...As He took deep breaths, the salty air brought refreshment and He held hopes His followers would fulfill their role as *salt of the earth*. The next time you head to your favorite water spot, look far out across the horizon; you can almost touch eternity and the *outstretched hand of Jesus* waiting on the other shore.

February 22

“Great Rewards”

Do you claim *rewards* offered to you? It seems to be an incentive today to draw our business and retain our confidence and loyalty. There are many examples such as frequent flyer rewards, frequent fueling discounts, and motel rewards. It is simple common sense to keep track of those opportunities and *reap your rewards*.

Christians are promised *heavenly rewards* for our faithfulness, but seeing *Jesus* face to face will surpass any rewards He gives. Do we have to wait to claim those benefits? No, many are now accessible; we just need to claim them. Our confidence in *Christ* is priceless.

“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward (Hebrews 10:35 NAS).” A *Psalm of David* expresses his thanksgiving. “The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me (Psalm 18: 20 NAS).” We know through scripture *David’s* guilt described as *blood on his hands*, the results of arranging the murder of *Bathsheba’s* husband. His hands were cleansed by *God* in His mercy to forgive. Another great reward you do not want to miss is found in reading *God’s* word. *Read it and reap your rewards of: love, joy, and peace.*

February 23

“Who”

I wonder *who* came up with the idea that an *old* owl is wise. Does that mean a *young* owl is foolish? I like owls and have a few collectables around the house. My favorite is a painted owl on a gourd done by my daughter, April. I have been attracted to owls partly because of their claimed wisdom. That points me to scripture, especially to Solomon’s writings in the book of Proverbs. The other reason I like owls is because they just seem so restful, not many ruffled feathers on an owl.

An occasional *who* is what we can expect from owls. That is not much of a vocabulary, but maybe the less said the better. *Solomon* sure found plenty to say about that. “Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is counted prudent (Proverbs 17:28 NAS).” I guess this must be something I am encouraged to remember. In elementary school we had basic *French* classes. I recall very little except the *French* phrase for: *Shut your mouth!* “*Who, me?*”

February 24

“Samson”

There are dogs and then there are **dogs**. Each has a personality all of their own. Yes, I agree, some do act and look like their owners, or maybe the owner resembles the dog. Either way they are made for each other. Does your pooch make you laugh? Like children, they do the cutest things. It is said by health experts that owning a pet can lower your blood pressure. If that holds true, the laughter has to contribute to the cure. (Proverbs 17:22a)

Once upon a time there lived a dog named *Samson*... He became the constant companion of my friend, *Pat*. *Samson* would not qualify as a purebred with a blood line certificate. No, he could be described as your average American family dog. His long shimmering hair, clean and always well groomed, gave him a regal appearance. *Samson* made people laugh and our world needs more of that.

What made him so funny? First of all, *Samson* is just not a run-of-the-mill, curl-up-in-the corner, I'll-see-you-at-mealtime dog. Did he pass an IQ test? There were no scientific experiments. It seemed so eerie; looking in his eyes... he could almost read your mind. Like most dogs, *Samson* loved to play. As long as someone would toss him toys or small balls, he would chase and fetch, slipping and sliding across the living room floor. Long ago my husband, *Norm*, and I were visiting *Pat*, and *Samson* provided the free entertainment. *Norm* tossed the ball several times, and *Samson* proudly held everyone's attention. After a while *Norm* slyly just pretended he threw the ball. Now the fun began. This very intelligent dog is put on the spot. *You throw it, I fetch it... Where is it?* His eyes told the story of a frustrated dog, and we were in stitches.

Do you remember the *Beatles* record album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*? *Pat* and I were enjoying the music on her record player. We could hear the sound of a dog barking faintly in the background. Suddenly the popular fox hunt in England made a public appearance in America. *Samson* took on the personality of a hound dog. In desperate pursuit of a fox, or in this case a dog, he became frustrated not seeing one anywhere. *Where did he go?* He barked, he paced; he wanted that dog. Naturally, we kept teasing him. Keep those cameras rolling pet owners; record those silly moments. If you need to cheer up, push the play button.

February 25

“Zombies”

“*Where are the zombies?*” Those words came from the mouth of our grandson when we were in a cemetery doing family history research. At his tender age, he viewed cartoons with *zombies* and expected to see some among the tombstones.

We chuckled and explained the truth to him, before moving on with our search for information. I think the term *zombie* describes the *living dead*. I hate spooky movies, but there is more truth in fiction than we may realize. Before we surrender to *Jesus* as Lord, we are as the *living dead*. We went through all the motions of life, but in reality we merely existed. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-2 NAS).”

Have you ever heard the expression describing an ill person as *looking like death warmed over*? We forget all of us are at death’s door. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23 NAS).” The choice is ours: life or death. It has always been that clear cut. Eternity hangs in the balance. The next time you think sin is only an opinion of the narrow minded, *remember the zombies and choose life in Christ*.

February 26

“Words of Wisdom”

How much influence do you have on the following generations? We know the children and youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. Will they benefit from our encouragement, advice, and example; or are we leading them astray?

We would hope we do make a positive difference in those we touch with our lives. *God* in His grace can remove our blunders. Those of us in the *golden-years* category look back to the influence of role models who spoke to our lives. Their contributions helped to shape us into the people we are today.

The Bible describes *King Solomon* as a man of great wisdom and understanding. He received those spiritual gifts as answers to prayer. (2 Chronicles 1:7-12) *God* blessed him with much more because his request for wisdom showed a loving heart, desiring to lead others fairly. *Solomon* could not boast of his high IQ as his source of discernment; *God* is the giver of all good gifts. (James 1:17)

Solomon did not reign with arrogance or pride; he looked back over his shoulder. “Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old (Proverbs 23:22 NAS).” Yes, *King David* and *Bathsheba* left their loving marks on *Solomon*. “Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her rejoice who gave birth to you (Proverbs 23:25 NAS).” *King Solomon* honored his parents and instructed us to heed his words. He urged us to listen to our fathers. He listened to his father, *King David*. “As for you, my son *Solomon*, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, he will reject you forever (1 Chronicles 28:9 NAS).” I believe those words of wisdom from *David* were imbedded in the mind of his son, *Solomon*. When *God* asked him what He should give, the obvious choice of wisdom outweighed selfish desires. Are we that quick to choose *God’s* best gifts, or do we waste time with penny candy?

February 27

“Ouch!”

Do you ever have difficulty breaking in a new pair of shoes? It can often be a very painful experience. Each time the shoe rubs against your foot, it causes irritation; and very soon a blister is formed; *ouch!* You may wonder if those nice new shoes are worth the pain.

With every step you take, you feel the blister and may even begin to favor that foot, placing more weight on the other. This is not what you bargained for when you selected the shoes. Each time the shoe rubs, you are instantly alerted to the problem. This cannot be ignored.

I believe this focus on a simple blister may give us more understanding about *Paul's* plight. "...there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me--to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Corinthians 12:7b-9 NAS)."

We are not sure what caused *Paul's blister*; many believe his affliction may have been a very serious eye condition. We do know he wanted it removed, and *God* left it there to keep *Paul* from *getting the big head*. He claimed no bragging rights as an apostle. *Paul's* boasting centered in the cross of *Jesus Christ*. "But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:17 NAS)." What is your *blister*? Maybe it is *God's* reminder of His perfect will for us. *If someone rubs you the wrong way, they may be a blister in disguise.*

February 28

“Interpretation Breakdown”

We do not need to speak a foreign language to have a communication breakdown. Often we carry on conversations with those close to us and the message does not hit the target. We know exactly what we mean; they are equally convinced they understand. The lines get crossed, and we have a *communication breakdown*.

It seems that we currently have a *breakdown in interpretation of* issues relevant to all. It is not a new problem, just one we need to be on our guard to avoid. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter (Isaiah 5:20 NAS).” We must be very careful that we are not deceiving ourselves or misleading others. We have heard of tragic cases where someone grabs a wrong container, thinking it may be a medication; they take poison instead.

A small child would easily distinguish bitter for sweet; feed a baby spinach, and they make faces at you. Spoon feed chocolate pudding, and be ready to keep that spoon coming. I want childlike faith that trusts the one feeding me, and I can always be sure the Lord offers me good, not evil.

February 29

“Keep Chewing”

I grew up in the land of dairy farmers, and the view of cattle grazing or following each other in straight lines back to the barn were common sights. The dairy cow is generally pretty mild unless riled, and then they can kick or run at a pretty fast speed.

We can gain knowledge from one of their traits, *chewing their cud*. This is no fast food experience; they *chew, chew and chew* some more. Do you remember your mother’s advice, telling you to slow down while eating? She likely reminded you over and over to *chew your food well* before swallowing. Sometimes I think my husband swallows it whole because he eats so fast.

Our Bible reading may follow the same patterns. That time should not be part of a speed reading event. To get the benefits of each morsel passage, we need to take our time and *chew it up well* for the digestion process. Maybe you did not realize that meditation is that simple. If we get one simple truth or promise and work through it well, we’ll be strengthened and encouraged.

I am not a big meat eater; but I do enjoy a good steak occasionally, medium to well done. *The chewing* may take a while, but the pleasure of the flavor on my taste buds makes that time a pleasurable experience. Set aside some extra time to read Psalm 119, which is filled with the psalmist’s instructions on meditating on *God’s* commands, law, and precepts, all descriptions of *God’s* word.

God spoke to His servant *Joshua* when he took up the role as spiritual leader, following the death of *Moses*. Imagine trying to fill his shoes. “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (Joshua 1:8 NAS).” *Joshua* spent over forty years in the wilderness; he kept his eyes fixed on his final destination of the *Promised Land*. *God* promised he would be successful; he’d see his dreams become reality if he would keep *chewing*.

March 1

“Home Place”

We are part of a very mobile generation; many are frequently moving from city to city, state to state and for varied reasons, some even country to country. Do you believe your *home place* is only by choice or chance? No, *God* has you there to fulfill a divine purpose.

The Lord plants individuals for times of His will, temporary or lifelong. A person may be replanted in different soil, pulled out and firmly rooted again and again. You need not only occupy space. Make yourself useful; pray where you are planted. “And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will have welfare (Jeremiah 29:7 NAS).” If our cities have rising unemployment, staggering crime statistics or rapid loss of population we can make a difference. Pray where you are planted.

March 2

“Avon Calling”

Avon is a well-established company using door-to-door marketing. In my family of four girls, we welcomed our little brother. Adding *Mom* to the female count, *Avon* found five prospects. We did not let them down. The treat of sampling new products led to regular purchases.

In the 1960s, *Avon* ranked as a big television advertiser. The slogan, *Avon Calling!*, became a greeting when visiting your family or friends. Another catchy phrase they used may not be as widely recognized, but it never escaped from my memory: *Whatever you wear, wear fragrance!* That worked as a good approach for marketing. After a person selected current fashions, the outfit would not be complete until they applied cologne.

Avon fragrances have changed over the years, offering new varieties. I miss my early *Avon* favorites, *Unforgettable* and *Rapture*. I wore *Unforgettable* on my first date with my husband, and he commented on it. *Rapture* came in a pretty, purple bottle. Old Testament writers shared information about perfumes. “Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel (Proverbs 27:9 NKJ).” *Avon* made me a satisfied customer. I think I would like to make one small change in their slogan: *Whatever you wear, wear fragrance, and a smile on your face.*

March 3

“I Remember You”

Our memories of earlier times with siblings keep us young. Something creates a flashback and life is played in rewind. Music is one of my main triggers. I remember when a song became popular, where I heard it, and who shared the moment. Today I heard an oldie from the mid 1960s: *I Remember You*, by Frank Ifield, a favorite of one of my sisters. We were living in an apartment over a furniture store, and a clock radio next to our bed woke us to the sounds of music every morning. Hearing the song again created an instant bond with her.

Do you remember God? As we observe the Lord’s Supper, Communion, we *remember Jesus*. “And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me (Luke 22:19 NAS).” Do we remember Jesus? “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love, (Revelation 2:4 NAS).” Do we remember our Rock? “For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge... (Isaiah 17:10 NAS).” *God* is waiting to hear your answers. *Yes, I remember You.*

March 4

“Our Concerns”

America is facing troubling times in a financial crisis beyond our control. Many are jobless or have lost full-time employment and benefits. Institutions, industries, and huge corporations once considered to be solid investments are falling like dominoes. Unless we bury our heads in the sand like the ostrich, we are concerned. The statistics are not just numbers in a ledger or Wall Street stocks. They represent multitudes of people, their families and communities. Yes, *we are rightly concerned* when we are personally affected and when those we love face financial collapse.

Scriptures repeatedly instruct us not to worry or live in fear. Yet, *God* knows we will at times deal with anxiety. The question is will we face our fears. “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You (Psalms 56:3 NKJ).” I firmly believe that anything that concerns us is important to the Lord. Do you remember His loving plans to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage? He heard their desperate cries for help. He hears ours. He hears and He cares. “The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands (Psalms 138:8 NKJ).” Thank You Lord.

March 5

“Things That Go Bump In the Night”

Do you like scary stories, like those children share around a campfire? Not me; I think it is better to sing *Kumbaya* and *Michael Row the Boat Ashore* while toasting marshmallows.

If you do like the tales which send chills up your spine, maybe a time I remember will create at least a few goose bumps. I filled the role of young wife and mother back in the early 1970s. My husband worked the night shift (*graveyard shift* applies here). We lived in a middle-class-neighborhood section in a large city. Our two-story house, complete with a basement, included two bedrooms upstairs and one downstairs used as a guest room. I feel like *Joe Friday: This is the city...*

In the middle of the night I am home alone with our two small children in the room across the hall. Suddenly I hear a loud noise. Nobody likes unexplained noises in the night. I hear several more loud noises coming from downstairs. Is someone trying to break in?

I reach for the phone next to my bed and call my husband, who tells me to call the police. By now I am scared stiff. When I contact the police, they instruct me to let them in when they arrive. So I watch for them from my bedroom window overlooking the street. When I see their car, I rush down the stairs to unlock the front door. Two officers enter with guns drawn; they suspect burglars may be in our basement. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19 NKJ).” I show the officers the way through our living room, dining room and kitchen. They search the basement and find nothing but advise me the windows need to be better secured.

There I stand, a young wife and mother, in the kitchen with two police officers. The mystery is solved; our refrigerator starts making horrible noises. It bit the dust and I felt so embarrassed. The next time you hear *noises that go bump in the night*, grab a flashlight and face your fears.

March 6

“Post Standard”

Do you enjoy exploring old homes, buildings and barns? It is almost as much fun as searching for buried treasure. There is a television program called: *If Walls Could Talk*. It gives stories of people who have purchased very old homes. They find interesting items that owners from the past left behind. Some homes even go back to the Revolutionary-War time period. Many families have called those houses *home*. There is a good bit of mystery and intrigue as the modern day owners try to put pieces of history puzzles in place.

I've made my own discovery. *Syracuse, N. Y.*, is my city of birth; and I lived there until I married in 1967. After my marriage, we moved away and our jobs led us to homes in several different states. We were living in a small town called *Natalia, Texas*, in the early 1980s. Our small rental house out in the country featured a nice yard and an old open barn on the property. One day when in the barn, I noticed a yellowed newspaper. I discovered an old *Syracuse Post Standard*. Apparently another *Yankee* left a paper trail. Maybe my articles will be found by future generations. I hope they are tucked inside a family Bible. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You (Psalm 119:11 NKJ).”

March 7

“Wheels of Government”

From city to national government, progress comes slowly when reform is needed. The red tape stretches so far it could easily replace our interstate coast-to-coast highways. Our founding fathers knew of the dangers of stall tactics. A speedy trial by peers is a joke today.

It seems the wheels of government have always turned slowly. I am no history buff, but the Bible gives us a valuable look at history. “Afterwards, (King) Joash took it to heart to renovate the Lord’s temple. So he gathered the priests and Levites and said, Go out to the cities of Judah and collect money from all Israel to repair the temple of our God as needed year by year, and do it quickly. However, the Levites did not hurry (2 Chronicles 24:5 HCS).” Maybe the *Levites* were the inventors of ‘*round-to-its*’.

March 8

“Calling My Name”

Babies and young children recognize the *sound of their name* spoken by family and caregivers. Not only do they listen because they recognize their name, they also find confidence knowing the voice of the one calling. It is a voice they have learned to trust because they meet their needs.

In my teen years my sister, a friend and I were dropped off at a dance in a fire-department hall by our family. After getting inside, we learned many of our friends were not there but at a private party. We decided to leave the dance and walk to the party, being held close by. After we got there, we called home to explain the change of plans. Well, we were quickly and firmly given instructions to return to the dance.

On the way back to the fire department, a car slowed down alongside of us, and the boy driving offered us a ride. I wanted no part of that and just kept walking. From the back seat, I heard my name: *Pam*, spoken by a boy I liked, *called out* by a voice I recognized. We rode back to where we started that evening; I guess we got our share of exercise on the roads instead of a dance floor.

The illustration points to someone else who spoke a name clearly. The sound of her name rang with music to *Mary's* ears. Following the brutal death and hurried burial of her Lord she became confused at the sight of His empty tomb (John 20:11-13). "...she turned around and beheld Jesus standing there and did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, Rabboni (John 20:14-18 NAS)!" (which means Teacher) She carried the news... "I have seen the Lord (John 20:18a NAS)." Listen, He tenderly *calls you by name*. When He does, you will have a message to share. *I have seen the Lord*.

March 9

“Facing Discouragement”

Do you have trouble understanding disappointments? Is life unfair? As a child of *God*, do you at times feel like He has let you down? Things just are not turning out the way you planned. Your dreams are shattered.

The Bible has many life examples revealing real people, just like you, with hopes, dreams and *discouragement*. I'll share a few examples to get you to check it out yourself. *Abram* received *God's* promise to bless and be blessed with a *son of promise* and a great nation of descendants. (Genesis 12:1-4) *God* took longer than expected to keep His end of the bargain, and *Abram* and his wife *Sarai* decided *God* must need their help. She conceived a plan of using her maid as a way to bear a child, and *Abram* went along with her suggestion. (Genesis 16:2) He fathered a son, *Ishmael*, yet not the son *God* faithfully promised. *God* did not forget the couple or His promise. He gave new names and a new direction to them; *Abraham* and *Sarah* became parents to *Isaac*. At 100 years of age, *Abraham* cradled in his arms the long-awaited son and heir. (Genesis 21:1-7)

Joseph, with his *coat of many colors*, took pride in knowing he would experience a bright future. *God* revealed to him while a young man that he would be a great leader, with even his family in submission to him. His bubble burst when his brothers captured him, threw him in a pit and then sold him as a common slave. Owners led him to Egypt, to be bought and paid for like a piece of property. In the home of his master, he found trust and confidence because of his great character and wisdom. That backfired when he was falsely charged with seducing the master's wife. Earlier family members threw him in a pit; now he is cast into a prison. Do you think he felt *God* treated him fairly? *God's* hand still rested upon him. Freed from prison he became second in authority under the Pharaoh, with leadership to rescue the nation in a time of a great drought and famine. His brothers come seeking food and fall down at his feet, not recognizing their own brother. Later he forgives them and a great restoration in the family occurs. (Genesis 50:18-21)

What about Jesus' disciples? They expected Him to be the conquering Messiah, to free their nation from Roman rule. They were blind to the role of Jesus as the suffering Messiah who would die to free them from bondage to sin. When arrested and crucified, all their hopes and dreams died with Him. They scattered and went to their homes to lick their wounds. Wait; that is not how the story ends; He arose. He triumphed over death. (Matthew 28: 5-6) One day He will return as the conquering Messiah.

Personally *God* gave me a desire to become a writer over thirty years ago. Lacking confidence, I did not pursue it. About ten years ago, I sent a story to a publication which rejected it, a deathblow to my dream. Today a writer's ministry is opening before me. If the dream or vision placed in your heart is from *God*, it will be fulfilled. Trust Him; He may need to prepare you first.

March 10

“Granny Pam”

It is fascinating to hear the names selected by grandparents today. Traditional choices of grandmother, grandfather and grandma and grandpa are still used. From that foundation, our labels go off in all directions. You know who you are; enjoy your new identity. “And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas (which is translated, A Stone) (John 1:42 NKJ).”

Both sets of my grandparents were grandma and grandpa; so we added the last names when referring to them. I never thought much about choosing a classification when I would one day become a grandparent.

When our two children were small, we lived about fourteen miles from my husband’s hometown. His family still lived there, and we got together often. His grandparents were called *Grand Ma’* and *Grand Pa’ Davis* and *Granny* and *Grand Daddy LeMasters*. Well, our children spent quite a bit of time with their *Great Granny* and *Great Grand Daddy*. Though in her 60s, *Granny* played right along with the children. She got down on a quilt pallet and wrestled with them, the preschool version of course. She enjoyed her role. *Granny* became a role model to me for grand parenting. Yes, I would be *Granny Pam* when the time arrived twenty years later. My husband gladly accepted his role as *Grand Daddy*. If the name fits, wear it.

March 11

“Circle Your Wagons”

Wagon Train and *Death Valley Days* were two very popular TV series during my early years. They inspired their viewers with tales of American pioneers pushing westward to a new way of life. These heroes were driven from within to face and overcome obstacles beyond their natural strengths. Time and time again they would show a group of travelers with their covered wagons facing an attack by Indians. The wagon master would shout out the command: “Circle your Wagons!” Quickly they followed the instructions of the leader they trusted. They gathered in a circle knowing they were safer, more powerful, as they grouped close together.

Christians, we are under attack. Just as the pioneers faced savage Indians, we must be on guard against the attacks of Satan and his demons. *Circle your wagons*. I think there are a lot of things that compare: The Indians would catch the pioneers off guard when they felt safe and secure. Suddenly the sounds of the Indians’ war cry would fill the air. The Indians were very vocal. With their chants and cries, they were announcing their attack in a very dramatic way. Satan, the Accuser, can be very loud as well. He shouts his accusations and condemnations in your ears and mind. Does this sound familiar? “You are worthless. You are no good. God could never love YOU. God could never forgive you!” Just as the sounds of The Indians made pioneers fearful, we are often paralyzed by fear at Satan’s shouts. The Indians were known by their vicious attacks, often using flaming arrows; not only were they shot at the westward travelers but at the covered wagons. Today Satan shoots his flaming arrows at us (Ephesians 6:16) and at our covering. We should be covered by prayer. It is our protection on our journey to our Promised Land. How does he attack prayer? He uses any way he can. He tries to keep us from prayer; he distracts us during prayer. He tries to get us to use only general terms; he keeps us too busy and too tired. The pioneers did not surrender. They circled their wagons. They kept their guns loaded. They all joined in, each having their part. Even the children could pass around the ammunition to the adults. Yes, we must circle our wagons. We must work together, young and old, to be over-comers. The TV shows carried the sound of a bugler leading the charge as the Cavalry rode in to rescue the pioneers. The Indians fled as they were pushed back by the Cavalry with swords drawn. Calvary is our victory. Can’t you hear the trumpet sounding? We are rescued, delivered, saved. The Lord Jesus and His Heavenly Host are pushing back Satan and his evil, wicked spirits. We can continue on our journey of faith. *Circle your wagons*.

March 12

“Drowning in Depression”

Anti-depressants are dispensed nearly as frequently as common aspirin. One of the fastest growing age groups being prescribed these medications is preschoolers. Broken homes and overstressed parents pull security out from under their children. Adult usage is a result of stress and anxiety that pushes many past their limits to cope. I am grateful help is available. The Bible speaks honestly about our emotions, both the highs and lows. We often sway between extreme ranges from love to hate, forgiveness to bitterness, fear to trust, and joy to depression.

The Psalmist in Psalm 42 and 43 appears to be drowning in depression. Personally, many times those raging waters have pulled me under. Carefully read those two Psalms and then repeat the reading again. This is self-talk surrounded by an intimate relationship with God. The writer faces his depression and honestly asks God, “Why?” His conclusions are revealed in the last verse of both Psalms. He declares the lifesaver he will reach out to for deliverance. “Why am I so depressed? Why this turmoil within me? Put your hope in God; for I will still praise Him, my Savior and my God (Psalm 42:11/ Psalm 43:5 HCS).” He is our only lasting hope.

March 13

“Foster Care”

The Foster Parent organizations give help and care for countless numbers of children, and their influence cannot be calculated. Today I pondered the role of *Foster Grandparents*.

Many children do not have the close contact and support of grandparents. We are in a mobile society, and many children cannot stop by grandma’s for milk and cookies after school. Little girls cannot help granny cut out Christmas cookies, and boys cannot spend a hot summer afternoon under a shade tree on the bank of a river, fishing with grand daddy.

Even if distance does not separate children from grandparents, divorce may. Sometimes time apart is even created by court restraining orders. How tragic for both the young and old to be cut off from rewarding relationships.

I am not sure if there is an official group designated for foster grandparents, but it would be a worthy service. I do personally know a foster grandmother. *Am* has willingly and happily served in the role to our grandchildren in Florida. They have access to all of their natural grandparents; but from the time they were born, she stepped in to be added to those so blessed. She changed diapers, fed the babies bottles, treated them to bubble baths and summer swimming-pool cool downs. They enjoyed story books, *Ninja Turtles* and *Power Rangers*. Their favorite foods, snacks and beverages were stocked in her cabinets and refrigerator. As they grew a little older, visits were not as frequent because school stepped in to fill many hours. Yet, they always remember *Am* and love chats, now on their own cell phones. *Happy Foster Grandmother’s Day, Am!* If you have no grandchildren of your own, your love and services are greatly needed. Jesus touched the children with kindness; you can too. “And He laid His hands on them and departed from there (Matthew 19:15 NKJ).” Let others know you are available and wait for the phone to ring, “Granny, can I come spend the night with you?”

March 14

“Money in Reserves”

Did your father give you the wise advice to *save money for a rainy day*? Those disciplines are difficult to establish, but they reap large rewards to the faithful.

I remember my very first savings account. My elementary school offered a savings account plan through a local bank to encourage children to develop the good habit of saving. I clearly visualize my small, blue savings-account book where my small deposits were recorded. Coming from a family of five children, I did not make substantial deposits, but even small amounts built up interest over the years.

When I became a teenager, I came to a decision on how I wanted to spend the money my savings account accumulated. Dad drove me to the bank and I withdrew my cash, and then he drove me to the closest A.S.P.C.A. in Syracuse, N.Y. I picked out a small, beautiful Irish terrier; and I named her *Terri*. Our entire family quickly became very attached to her.

Terri, still young and small, surprised us when we discovered puppies were on the way, with our neighbor’s dog, *Charlie*, as the proud father. Both families were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the litter, but our excitement did not last long. *Terri* survived the delivery, but shortly after, she became ill and we lost her. I saved for a rainy day, but they did not bring showers of blessings.

Maybe our investments do not always lead to happy endings, but it is wise to keep money in reserves. Also, remember our heavenly Father can always be approached to provide our rainy-day needs, “For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. (Psalm 50:10 NAS).” He owns it all. My husband’s parents once raised cattle, and when needs arose, a cow would be sold to raise cash. Mother once purchased a beautiful sofa from one of those sales. God always has manifold blessings held in reserves. Make your withdrawal today.

March 15

“Tangles”

“Help, I cannot get this straightened out!” Is that your cry with the problem of untangling a long vacuum-cleaner cord? There have been many times when it got the best of me. I have no idea how they can get in such a mess. Another frustrating example is a tiny, delicate necklace chain; once it gets knotted, it is nearly impossible to correct.

If there is someone close by, passing on the project can be the solution. Maybe a fresh approach is all that is needed. We could just set it aside and come back later when we have more time to concentrate. It can be worked out. Things are more involved when the tangles are in our relationships or our nerves are tied in knots. In those times of stress and feeling overwhelmed, we need to go directly to God. He can make a way, when it seems there is no way. The Apostles Paul and Peter developed conflicts regarding relationships with Gentile believers, (Galatians 2:11-12). Later we see from a writing by Peter he held no hard feelings toward his accuser, “ and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter:3 15-16 NAS).” Let Him untangle and untie; His hands are to be trusted.

March 16

“The Green Door”

What or who is hiding behind the *Green Door*? That song, made popular in 1956 by Jim Lowe, used a catchy tune and interesting lyrics. The listener is left guessing about the mystery door. To this day the song holds a place in my memory. My mother’s only brother, my *Uncle Bob*, sang along with the song on the radio. As a seven-year-old girl, his deep voice and the words to the song scared me. I don’t think he realized how much it frightened me because I can remember his big, beautiful smile.

There is a *door* not thought of much: (John 10:1-9). We remember that Jesus is the Lamb of God and our Great Shepherd, but in this passage we are introduced to Jesus as the *door*. “Jesus therefore said to them again, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who come before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture, (John 10: 7-9 NAS).” I understand that a shepherd often laid down at the front of his sheep at night, becoming a *door*, an entrance to the flock. If anything or anyone tried to harm the sheep, they would need to get over the shepherd first. Jesus is the *door*, protecting us as part of His flock. I’m still not sure what writers imagined behind the *Green Door*. Behind Jesus, the *door*, we can always find security and love. No password is needed.

March 17

“Tolerance”

A politically correct word for our times is *tolerance*: “...to be indulgent and liberal, allowing things to be done without opposition. It recognizes rights of others to their own opinions and customs as in matters of religious worship, when they do not interfere with the rights of others or with decency and order, freedom from bigotry or race prejudice”... (tolerance, tolerant, tolerate, toleration/ *Britannica World Dictionary*) Yes, that is a mouthful. Most of us agree that our nation was founded on man’s rights for *Liberty and justice for all*. As with many privileges, our freedoms can be used for good or evil. The phrase *when they don’t interfere with the rights of others or with decency and order* seems to be frequently ignored today. We want our rights to be protected, but too often it is done at the expense of others.

We have seen what the dictionary revealed about tolerance. Now let’s go to the true standard for our belief, the Bible. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NKJ).”

God’s children must not tolerate sin; like a cancer, it destroys lives. Our Lord showed tender compassion to people from all walks of life, but He showed no tolerance for sin. “When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you? She said No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more (John 8:10-11 NKJ).” Jesus knew she must turn her back on sin and go forward to find freedom. Look to Him as our example and seek His wisdom. He will never lead us to a wrong conclusion.

March 18

“Tinkerbelle Taillights”

Keep watching at twilight; you may catch a glimpse of a *Tinkerbelle taillight*. She has cousins everywhere, and fireflies can bring us needed light and laughter. Maybe we can recapture a bit of the wonder we held as children.

Some areas of America have more fireflies than others. Glowworms fly about very often at eye level, blinking as they go. Many children entertain themselves by catching the fireflies and putting them in a glass jar. It usually does not take very long to gather a good collection. If there is competition, the children work quickly trying to claim victory with the largest number.

It is amazing how much light is seen from a small firefly, but even more, it gives delight.

We are told to be light in our world, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16 NAS).” If we keep blinking His message it will not only bring glory to the Father, but delight as well. He is a proud Father who rejoices to His children shining forth in a world of spiritual darkness. *Tinkerbelle taillights* ignite.

March 19

“Come To Me”

Growing up I lived in a small, country, Central-New-York-State neighborhood. On pretty days, most children would be outside playing. Many families then were larger than now, and it did not take long to get a crowd together for games or exploring. There were five children in our family, six across the street, twelve in the house on the corner, and a number more in our close-knit community.

We did not have the luxury of cell phones, beepers or even walkie-talkies. When we were looking for someone, we just yelled out their name, trying to locate them! A McIntosh apple orchard behind our house gave children fun opportunities to climb trees, pick apples, and explore. I remember our secret call to others, “Kee-aw-kee, come to me!” Friends or siblings would come running when that message filled the air.

A few years ago while watching an old television rerun of a *Lassie* show, I got the surprise of hearing *Timmy* and his neighborhood friend use the same phrase while playing together. I guess that may be where we picked it up. I did some quick Internet searching to see if it is an Indian translation for *come to me*, but I did not locate my answer. I guess it is alright to leave a little mystery with my childhood memories. When the Lord calls us, we don't need a secret message from Him. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me (John 10:27 NAS).” Here I come.

March 20

“Abundant Natural Resources”

I can remember doing Social-Studies school reports on the natural resources of foreign countries as well as our homeland. America is blessed with many natural resources and has shared that bounty around the world.

Did you realize the church is also blessed in the same way? God has gifted and equipped His people in such a way that we can tap into this ready surplus of supplies. (Romans 12:4-9) A few gifts we easily recognize as being used in church ministry are prophecy (proclaiming God’s word) and teaching; but the entire list is used to help build and strengthen the body of Christ, His church. Three words in the last portion of our scripture need to be applied liberally...mercy, cheerfulness, and love (vs8b-9a). Those resources become natural only by God’s grace.

March 21

“Blah”

How do you like your food and beverages...cold, lukewarm, or hot? My husband and I agree on many things, but we sure have strong opinions about this daily meal decision.

I like things hot or cold; lukewarm is *blah*. He does not like foods or beverages too hot. Well, when you cook a meal, it gets hot. So he either tries to cool off his food (after complaining a little) or decides to wait until it cools down. What about me? By the time I get the food on my plate and sit down at the table, it is often too cold. So I have to return to the microwave to heat it back up.

How does God feel about something lukewarm? He makes it very clear, leaving no room for doubt. “And to the angel of the church at Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. (Revelation 3:14-16 NAS).” So the next time you taste something and discover it is lukewarm, just *blah*, remember how God warns us against lives and churches being lukewarm to His taste. Will His final word be *blah* or *ah*?

March 22

“Family Feud”

The game show *Family Feud* has been popular for decades. It’s fun seeing families as they pull together in hopes of winning the prize. In real life far too often family members are in opposition. We just don’t always get along; feelings get hurt and bitterness grows. We pull away from each other either unconsciously or by choice.

Families are often torn apart by deep hurt, bitterness or resentment. The sad truth is family feuds are as old as mankind. It all began in our world’s *first family*. Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve. Cain killed Abel. (Genesis 4:8) A few more *family feuds* found in scriptures...David and his son Absalom, who tried to seize his father’s throne; brothers Jacob and Esau, sons of Isaac, who competed for the father’s blessing and inheritance; Jacob’s sons who had such sibling rivalry for Joseph that they captured him and sold him as a slave. The closing example demonstrated severe conflict and abuse, yet ended with tears and forgiveness. (Genesis 45:1-7, 14-15) Life is too short to waste fussing and feuding. Let’s follow Joseph’s example and turn a feud into a family reunion.

March 23

“Follow That Dream”

Elvis could claim many box-office hits in his movie career. One of his films, titled *Follow That Dream*, did not have a dramatic plot; it just gave fans the chance to see him on the big screen and enjoy his music. We all need a dream, and the challenge to follow that dream is motivating.

We should seek out our goals, those repressed dreams, and line them up against God’s plan for our lives. “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14 NAS).”

In many ways a dream and a vision are similar. Search several Bible translations for wording in Proverbs 29:18. The word *vision* is also shared as a *revelation*. The tragic results of a lack of vision include: perishing, *running wild*, and being unrestrained. It seems that individually families, churches and nations need a dream, a vision, renewed and refreshed in us. I desire that within my mind and spirit.

I do not want my life to be *running wild*. It brings to mind a car on a busy interstate with a loss of control, leading to chain-reaction accidents. Take my challenge. *Follow that dream* of reaching the goal ahead. Jesus is waiting at the finish line.

March 24

“Who Feeds Them?”

We are fascinated with the story of Elijah being fed by ravens. (I Kings 17:4-6) They brought the prophet both bread and meat. Can you imagine how long it would take for birds to gather enough food to satisfy hunger and sustain life? They did it because they were on a mission for God, their Creator.

That is amazing; but who feeds the ravens? “Who prepares for the raven its nourishment, when its young cry to God, and wander about without food (Job 38:41 NAS)?” This question came directly to Job by God Himself. Naturally, the answer is He did. He provided for Elijah, Job, the ravens; and He provides for us. We get our needed nourishment from the One who feeds the smallest of His creatures. He offers His best to be taken from the palm of His loving hand.

March 25

“Standing in the Wings”

Wouldn't it be great to have a back-stage pass to your favorite events? The opportunity to see what happens behind the scenes would be a real treat. Seeing things firsthand might reveal some things we never noticed before. Not only would we see the entertainers close-up on stage, but we would also see who quietly stood in the wings.

A spouse, sweetheart, children, parents, or siblings would receive special privileges and peer behind closed or open curtains to view the one they love. If there is a silent moment, we might hear their buttons as they bust open with pride.

In the drama of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, we know He had support standing in the wings. “Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him (Matthew 4:11 NAS).” Do angels clap? If they do, Jesus received a round of applause from His support team.

March 26

“Our Son”

Do we get too familiar with the story of Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection? Repetition is a great tool for learning, but at times it makes us a little bit lazy about searching for new truths from familiar stories. Riding home from a quick shopping trip, I pondered a new idea from the death of our Savior.

Jesus is totally God in the fullest expression of deity and yet lived here as 100% flesh and blood. I don’t think we can ever really grasp that; we just acknowledge it as fact. We often hear the expression about *apples and oranges*, implying they are very different. Yes, the Son of God and the Son of Man are distinct, but both part of the whole, the great *I Am*.

As Jesus hung on the cross, God and Man bore the weight of all our sin. God the Son was born to die, to fulfill His ultimate goal, His purpose in life. He left heaven’s splendor to die as a substitute for you and I. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). With each dying breath God, the Son of Man, felt the agony of excruciating pain and wanted release from the torment.

Jesus as God... Jesus as man... He also filled the role of *Son*. Two parents were there at Calvary watching their *Son*, their boy, die. Any loving parent seeing a child suffer says, “Lord God, take me instead!” It tears the heart and soul from the tent called our body, to witness our babies in pain. Yes, I said babies; any mother sees a current-age child before her with her tearful eyes; but in her heart, it is the baby she carried in her womb. Mary witnessed the brutal death of her boy and stood helpless to alleviate his grueling crucifixion. She could not bear to look at His bloody body, and yet she dared not turn away for even a moment. She must be there; He should know she stood nearby. He knew; and in His own torment, His bleeding heart went out to her. He wanted to comfort and protect her. “When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, Woman, behold, your son! Then He said to the disciple (John), Behold your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household (John 19:26-27 NAS).” Jesus left no earthly possessions; soldiers even took His cloak. He left His dearest treasure, His mother, to John, for her protection and provision. To John He would be opening his heart to the blessings of Mary’s maternal care and nurturing. The *Son* gave closure to the mother.

What about His Father? Well, the conversation He had with His *Abba* held a question, “...Eloi, Lama Sabachthani? Which is translated, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me (Mark 15:34 NAS)?” Unlike His mother who witnessed every gruesome detail, it seems Jesus did not see His Father there. I’ve always heard it is because Jesus not only bore our sin He became *SIN*. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21 NAS).” I understand our Almighty Holy God cannot look on sin, but I also think His heartbreak made Him turn His eyes away. I remember a time when a dog viciously bit our son, and my husband would not let me look. A mother and a father were both there; God never forsook Him. They both heard His final words. Together they took great pride in a *Son* they both knew, without a shadow of doubt, had not died in vain. He always faithfully carried out His Father’s business (Luke 2:49).

March 27

“M & M Surprise”

Do you remember the childhood game of guessing what lay hiding in someone's hand? It could go on for ages. If your mom or dad moved their hands behind their backs and secretly did the big switch, you were baffled. “I know I saw it in that hand!”

How about the popular candy treat's commercials? “M&M's melt in your mouth, not in your hand!” The hard-candy shell protected the milk-chocolate centers until the candy landed on your tongue. Quickly you bit into the sugar coating and tasted scrumptious chocolate!

Does God hide surprises in His hand for us to discover? Yes, I think He anxiously waits for us to seek those surprises. “Thou dost open Thy hand, and dost satisfy the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16 NAS).” Our parents gave surprises out of their love for us.

Those treats could not compare with gifts from our heavenly Father. He satisfies our hearts' deepest desires with a personal relationship with Himself. He opens His hand to give; will you open your heart to receive?

March 28

“Ransom Note”

Do you like the drama of mysteries involving a kidnapping? The 1932 true-life story of the *Charles Lindbergh* child kidnapping concluded with grief and anger. As readers or viewers, we are personally drawn into the torment of abduction. To have someone you love missing is a nightmare. Learning they were kidnapped is more than a person can bear alone. Fear grips family members by the throat and holds them hostage.

Act One: The family usually receives a ransom note or a phone call with no specific leads to follow, only the terrible news that they are holding captive the one reported missing. The caller says, “Do not notify the police or we will kill_____!” There are sleepless nights and frantic pacing, in the endless hours of waiting for the next note or call.

Act Two: The second message has detailed step-by-step instructions. “Bring the designated amount of cash, usually in small bills, to a secluded area. Come alone!” Family members begin to pull the large sum of money together. At this point, the police and FBI often become involved and give minute-by-minute instructions and encouragement to the family.

Act Three: Hopefully, the police trap the unsuspecting criminals and the kidnapped individual is free. If not... misery never ends for the family.

Do you realize that you were held *captive to sin*, abducted by Satan's lies? Jesus paid the ransom, and you received never-ending freedom. “...just as the Son Of Man (Jesus) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life, a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28 HCS).” We are in debt to Him and it can never be repaid.

March 29

“Bye, Bye Grape”

Oh no, here He comes again! I am so weak and puny; He is strong and powerful! I feel like I may be crushed! This may be the last time I am in one piece! I knew this could happen, but that does not make it any easier to accept!

I do not believe inanimate objects could talk, but if they could, my earlier words were spoken by a grape facing extinction under the heavy foot of the master of the vineyard. Soon he would become pulp and juice. *Bye, bye grape.*

At times, we feel like we are grinded under the heels of humanity, draining us of all signs of life. Guess what? We are just getting ready for a life change. “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; (2 Corinthians 4:8)” Do we want to be one solitary grape or blended with others for the Master’s table?

How are we changed? We are broken and stomped on by circumstances from without and our attitudes within. Those things shape us for service, that our lives would bring refreshment for others. *Bye, bye grape.* Hello, quenched thirst.

March 30

“It’s Your Move”

Do you remember the last time you sat down and played a few games of checkers? Am I bringing back fond memories? I recall some of my own. Hearing the word *checkers* takes me back to quiet times sitting across the checker board from *Grandpa Ford*. Today I regret that I did not do that more often. Checkers is a mathematical game and involves strategy, anticipating your opponents’ future moves. It also requires patience and time; a quick game of checkers happens only when you get skunked.

My husband also has stories about big games he played with his *Grand Daddy LeMasters*. He knew the game and rarely lost, meaning my husband seldom won. Now, he carries on the checkers family tradition by playing with our grandsons every chance he gets. They are now in their teens, but the games started at a very early age. The two oldest boys lived in England for eleven years, and when we visited, they got out the checkers. He experienced an eye opener at how skilled they were. They revealed that they played it on the computer; technology surfaces everywhere. They played several games, each doing quite well.

A couple of years ago we visited them again, taking along another grandson on our trip. They are now stationed at an air base in Vegas. Everyone spent time playing interactive computer games, but a checkerboard soon found a spot on the kitchen table. Can you guess what happened? My husband got skunked. All three boys put him to shame. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18 NKJ).” I guess the torch is now in the hand of the next generation. If you are brave enough, dig out the old checkerboard. Beware; your opponent may be one jump ahead of you.

March 31

“Jam Line”

As teenagers back in the 1960s, my sister and I passed time fulfilling a girl’s special attraction to the telephone. It is a lifeline between them and all of their friends. They can talk for hours about the routine details of their lives. It is even more important when a boy is at the other end of the line. They may have been together thirty minutes earlier, but they want to extend that time over the phone. Party lines were like a nightmare. If adults were on the line, we were forced to wait our turn. If we were on the phone, they would often interrupt our conversations.

A jammed phone line occurred frequently. Different phone lines would cross over, mixing up connections. We could hear voices off in the distance all trying to talk at the same time, often yelling to be heard above the rest. It seems the voices were in competition not only with each other, but also with a busy signal. I guess the *jam line* prepared the way for today’s *chat room*.

My younger sister, Gayla, and I shared an upstairs bedroom and an extension phone. Mom chewed us out for spending too much time talking on the phone. How did we avoid trouble and still use the *jam line*? We hid our heads under the pillows, so we would not be caught. We gave out our phone number to those who sounded interesting, and they would call us back. During our *jam- line* experiences, one boy shared the line, and our attention. His voice and personality drew our interest, and we took turns talking to him. Today youth are warned about giving out personal information or meeting with strangers. Well, we thought we must meet him, this *voice*, who put us in competition with each other. He said he could take the bus out from the city. Boy, were we excited. We agreed to meet him at the bus stop on the corner. The drama began to build, and he stepped down from the bus. Today’s description would be a *nerd*. What could we do? We asked him to come. My sister *exited stage left*, and I filled the hours keeping him company until our Dad got back from work. He took the boy home, and I got off the hook. My sister and I still laugh over our *jam- line* experience.

I have good news; our prayers are not on a *jam line*. We do not have to wonder about the One at the other end of the line. God can hear our faintest whispers, called out in prayer. One day we will meet Him face-to-face and there will be no disappointment. We do need to use caution to avoid *jamming* our prayer lines. Clear communication must be protected. Sin can interfere in our One-to-one conversations with God. Husbands are given a special warning by the Apostle Peter. He urged men to treat their wives tenderly. “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7 NKJ).” That is wise advice we all need to heed, faithfully showing honor to one another. I wonder if there is a cell-phone *jam line*. Can you hear me now?

April 1

“Dandelion Daydreams”

Come with me to dandelion daydreams. Those of you in the north east think of dandelions as a major problem. The more you dig up or poison, the faster they spread. In the Deep South, people battle the kudzu vines in the same way. I’m going to give you my two-cents opinion on the yellow flowers popping up each spring.

To children a dandelion is not a weed or a nuisance. It is a flower. Flowers are to be picked and placed in water. So they pick bouquets and take them to mothers and grandmothers, beaming ear to ear, feeling proud of the surprise they bring. Do you remember making dandelion necklaces? The simple flowers and stems tied together made a treasured, handmade piece of jewelry.

What about dandelion greens? Free food could be found and gathered from our own backyard. I never could understand hearing stories about children being forced to eat their greens. To me they were delicious. I can readily purchase or grow turnips, collards, or mustard greens; but dandelions are not common here. My mouth is watering already.

Another pleasure for a child in a yard of dandelions comes as the bloom dies. Isn’t that wonderful? Praise God, pleasure from death; remember, as believers, death is not an enemy; it is the door to Eternity. “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15: 55-57 NAS).” When the flower dries up and dies, a white ball forms; so fragile a child is able to blow it off into the air. When traveling through space, seeds of life are carried to fertile ground to live once more. If you see a yard or field decorated in bright yellow blooms created by the Master designer, smile and start daydreaming.

April 2

“Easter Egg Happening”

Easter egg decorating is fun for toddlers and a challenge for moms. Easter egg dye can be pretty messy and getting it on the eggs instead of the children is a balancing act. Easter eggs are not only for children. Artists create masterpieces on fragile, empty shells after carefully blowing out the contents of the egg through a pinpoint hole. Beautiful pastel colors and intricate designs are breathtaking. An Easter tree makes a beautiful centerpiece and brings sunshine to a dreary home following a long winter.

Do you want to be a designer Easter egg? You can, you know. Pretend you are an egg, grouped with eleven other eggs in a box, all in neat little rows. The box represents your closest relationships, including both family and friends. Easter time comes, and every egg desires to change from a sunny-side-up breakfast to an Easter egg. You are chosen for boiling by the cook. *Wow, this water will scald me! I don't know how much more I can take!* You are relieved when that is over. *Wait a minute, now I am in cold running water! Talk about extremes, this is ridiculous! What is that terrible smell? Oh, I see; that is the coloring dye I have heard about. I am getting sea sick, twirling around and around in this solution! Stop the world; I want to get off! I wish I could find a mirror; I wonder what I look like...Good, I see my reflection in that toaster on the counter. I am beautiful! I have been transformed!*

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please? If you trust Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, you can be His very special Easter egg every day of the year. The boiling process involves the trials you are faced to endure. They are painful; but they are temporary, resulting in a surface with great strength. Your life even has more weight--God's glory. Why the cold water? Life is filled with extremes; one moment you have mountain-top faith, and the next you are hurled into the valley of despair. Don't try to escape; there are others who need your strength and comfort. God will lift you out soon. “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you (1 Peter 5:10 NAS).”

The dye may be compared to the circumstances we individually go through, each unique and varied to suit us best. These are not crisis times, just daily routines and relationships that at times keep us stressed, feeling tossed around like a ship at sea. They help to shape our lives, giving us the personality we are gifted with. The final result is a transformed life, a beautiful creation made by the Master's hands. He will not use you as a centerpiece; He will put you back in the box, to influence the eggs around you. You can prepare them for the time God will reach in, take them out, and create another very special Easter egg.

April 3

“Toddler in the Pews”

A church sanctuary is a place to worship God, to sing His praises, and where we gather to cry out to Him in prayer. It is, in warmth of Spirit, our place of fellowship. Is the sanctuary the place for squirming toddlers, restless and wanting to get down and play? Yes. Jesus said to let the little children come unto Him. (Matthew 19:14) Many churches provide a nursery during the worship hour. That is a valuable service, but children should always be welcome and accepted in the *Big Church*. Growing up, my family seldom attended church, routinely going for Christmas and Easter to recognize Jesus' birth and resurrection.

As children, we were taken to Sunday school on a few occasions, but never on a regular basis. I have myself been in worship services with my own children when they were small and also with children in my care. I must admit it is not always a very worshipful experience, trying to keep children contented and quiet. Maybe we all just need to loosen up, let a child be a child.

There is one experience I remember about my brother, at the age of two or three years old. I will close with that story and leave you with God's prescription for a merry heart. "A joyful heart makes a cheerful face (Proverbs 15:13NAS)." He attended a church service with our family and would not sit still. He slipped down under the pews to continue his playing. His mind focused on a popular song he heard on the radio back home. Even a toddler remembered the catchy tune and chorus. Suddenly my little brother shouted out the key words from that chorus: "Who wears short shorts?"

April 4

“Easter Bonnet”

Take me back to the days of hats and gloves. Do you have pictures in old photo albums taken during past Easters? Girls wore pretty party dresses, and mothers were arrayed in classy dresses or suits. Young and old were adorned with the current fashion designs in hats. The ensemble included shoes and a matching purse. The gloves selected may have been simple basic white or a variety of long sleek design.

In Your Easter Bonnet you stood tall and caught the attention of onlookers. A hat reveals a lot about the personality of a woman. Is she bold? The color, size and decorations allow her to express her confidence and spontaneity. Does she have a career in the business world? Her basic hat can be suitable for church, a luncheon or a business meeting. Does she hold a place of honor and dignity in her community? If so, her hat, in every detail, reveals her life of integrity and generosity.

What about our little girls? Tiny cap-style bonnets, usually trimmed only with delicate flowers, gave the angelic approach and captured the hearts of her parents and grandparents. Most girls did not desire to wear them for very long, but endured discomfort to please mother. She posed for pictures and thought about Easter dinner and her Easter candy.

Have you ever considered who created bonnets or wore them before that first Easter? “And the soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. And they dressed Him up in purple, and after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, Hail, King of the Jews, (Mark 15:16-18 NAS)!” In solemn remembrance we are humbled by our Lord’s pain and shame on that Good Friday. The creators mockingly wove that bonnet with their bare hands, placed it on Christ’s blessed head, piercing His tender scalp. In sarcasm they announced Him as King of the Jews. They ridiculed Him, but one day their comments will turn to confession. “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11 NAS).” In reverence to Jesus, we all humbly bow.

April 5

“Sopping It Up”

The scene takes place in a hushed room. Approaching death hovered over the Lamb of God. Jesus gave a parting demonstration to His Twelve Disciples, a lesson on service and humility. The Master became their servant, performing the menial task of foot washing. As he finished, He addressed the group commenting, “He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me (John 13:18b NAS).” Again He bluntly stated, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me (John 13:21b NAS).” I believe you could cut the air with a knife. Suspicious eyes searched the room, friend suspecting friend. Now He had their attention. Earlier frictions or irritations with one another were as wounds scabbed over, breaking open and oozing. *Where is the man? Let me have him! I’ll clear this up in no time!* The Disciples’ minds were buzzing with thoughts of arrogance, suspicion and revenge. Moments earlier, they received instructions on humility and service; now they wanted to take aggressive action.

Nerves calmed long enough to arouse simple human curiosity; they asked Jesus to identify the traitor. In reply He delivered the verdict, “Jesus therefore answered ... That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him (John 13:26a NAS).” Customs involved dipping the bread to sop up the food, and then offering it to your guest. God extends grace to us in the same way. Jesus is the Bread of Life, and His sopping wet body dripped with His sacrificial blood. That gift is extended to us. Jesus reclined, elbow to elbow, with the one prepared to betray Him. “So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. And after the morsel, Satan then entered into Him, Jesus therefore said to him, what you do, do quickly (John 13:26b-27 NAS).” He served as the designated treasurer for the group. Holding the purse strings led the others to think Jesus might be sending Judas out on a matter of business. Yes, it would be a business transaction. He would soon betray the Lord for the sum of thirty pieces of silver, paid cash in advance, for his services. Judas, walking in spiritual darkness, slipped out of the room and began a walk into eternal darkness.

Jesus did not experience defeat. His message soon declared His life as glorified. In unity, both the Father and Son shared in the glory (John 13:31-32). God brought triumph from treachery. The next time you notice someone dipping a dinner roll in gravy, remember they are sopping it up. Never forget the price our Lord paid for us. The Bread of Life becomes our banquet of abundant life.

April 6

“Denial”

Have you ever been accused of living in denial? It can happen to anyone; we put up blinders to things that cause pain emotionally. Maybe you refuse to face an addiction or the collapse of a marriage. Surely everything is going to be alright; other people have problems like that, but not me. I have things under control, or do I? Those forced to face reality of a terminal illness, gripping them or a loved one, go through a time of denial.

Jesus in His final days repeatedly shared what lay ahead with His twelve disciples. He lovingly worked to prepare their hearts and minds to cushion the blow. A crisis is never easy, but if we see it coming, it might not knock us off our feet. He told them, but they did not hear His heart. The words went in one ear and out the other, did not register and were disregarded as impossibility. *He is the Messiah! He is going to set up His earthly Kingdom! Soon we will be free from Roman rule! Long live the King!*

Did Jesus use misleading terms or try to sugarcoat the truth of His suffering and death? You decide... “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s, (Mark 8:31-33 NAS).”

In denial, they hoped beyond hope. No, they could not understand. They could not accept the painful death of their Lord. It even blinded them to the promise of His resurrection three days following His death. He would die, must die, for man’s salvation. He would rise again. Hallelujah!

April 7

“Happy as a Lark”

Spring is busting out all over. Tender green leaves adorn the branches of sturdy trees. Colors of bright pink, purple and snow-white catch your eye on trees in bloom. A routine drive becomes a delight. Decorative shrubs brighten front yards and daffodils stand up at attention.

In our area in the Deep South, men and women with gardening plans are breaking ground and making their first trips of the season to the feed and seed stores.

Another sure sign is the sound of birds announcing the arrival of spring to the world. Their notes ring clear with praise and joy to their Maker. Yes, they must be *happy as a lark*. “Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell; they lift up their voices among the branches (Psalm 104:12 NAS).” Listen with your heart. “Where the birds build their nests, and the stork, whose home is the fir trees (Psalm 104:17 NAS).” Are you heading out to play in the dirt? Get your green thumb in gear and whistle while you work. You may hear an echo from the treetops.

April 8

“Blooms or Needles”

Blooms or needles, what will it be? Our frame of mind or outlook on life will determine the answer. Some see cups half full, while others describe it as half empty. A painting is seen through eyes of art lovers. One sees a sunrise, another is sure it must be a sunset.

Now our attention turns to a cactus. Will we focus on the painful sharp needles; or will we turn our eyes to the lovely blooms seen at certain times of the year? I have lived in south Texas where cactus is as plentiful as the lovely blue bonnets. To some, cactus is a nuisance, while others see its hearty characteristics and use it for landscaping.

My birthday falls on or near Mothers Day, and God gave me a special gift each year. The cactus always bloomed just in time for me to celebrate. Unless you have seen the colorful cactus flowers you cannot truly appreciate their rare beauty. They are so delicate in comparison to the plant that grows them, and the colors are vibrant. The bright yellow is especially beautiful. It just seems to shout praise to the Creator.

Our lives are viewed by others on a daily basis. Do they see painful sharp needles causing them fear about getting too close to us? Are they drawn to a colorful life, displaying God’s hand of goodness? A cactus has no choice; it is planted and secure. In the fullness of time, it will bloom.

Bloom where you are, and draw attention to the One who plants, nurtures, and prunes us. “The wilderness and the desert will be glad and the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God (Isaiah 35:1-2 NAS).” Maybe we cannot behold God’s glory in a cactus bloom every day, but we can always see Him in His cherished word.

April 9

“God Vision”

Why do people foolishly worship idols? There is a lack of faith in the unseen, and the visible draws them away. Our spiritual sight is not used enough and as a result we only see shadows of reality. So we let our physical eyes search out a substitute, something tangible and temporary is given eternal dedication.

Can we see God? “But He said, you cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live! Then the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen (Exodus 33:20-23 NAS).” God’s talk with Moses reveals His holiness and glory.

We are warned to not gaze directly into the sun above us. The powerful rays can do eye damage, so we are wise to avert our eyes. I think God blesses us with His sunrise and sunset, so we can enjoy a less powerful glimpse into the glory of His creation. Seeing God’s face and all His glory would lead to death. This gives us a deeper understanding of why angelic visitors were feared. To see just a sample of God’s glory made people terrified.

I think there may be a second reason we cannot look directly at the face of God the Father. If we experienced it for just a moment, we would never want Him out of our sight again. We would selfishly cling to Him. How could we ever return to business as usual after looking directly into the face of God? He understands our yearning to see Him, and as always, God makes a way. Jesus told Philip “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, show us the Father (John 14:9 NAS)?” The truth is clearly seen, “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by His power, (Hebrews 1:3a NAS).” Do you remember my claim we would cling to God if we saw Him? After Jesus’ resurrection Mary encountered Him in His new, glorified body. He lovingly told her to stop clinging to Him. (John 20:16-17)

Our yearnings to see Him are met when we sharpen our spiritual skills of sight by faith. “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, (Hebrews 12:2 NAS).” Today special prescription glasses are available for night vision. Only God can equip us for God vision.

April 10

“Mom’s Molasses Cookies”

Most moms have one special dish, something that becomes a favorite to their children and grandchildren. There is no question my husband delights in being served his mother’s chocolate pie. My sister Donnas’ corn chowder still gets raves. Our grandson in Florida wants Granny’s French toast every time he visits us. A writer created a wonderful book titled: *I Remember Mama*. It later made it to movie theatres and a popular television series. It is still a classic. Treat yourself with a viewing some rainy afternoon. *I remember Mom’s Molasses Cookies*. Her family recipe came from my grandmother and resulted in delicious, fresh-baked snacks. We enjoyed them at home or in bag lunches for school.

Is it possible to build a story around cookies? I honestly believe it could be expanded to a novel. Mom dropped large servings of the batter from a spoon onto the cookie sheet. The aroma of spices filled the house and wet our appetites for the final results. When baked they expanded into a large cookie, most the size of a cup coaster. We rarely waited for the cookies to cool. Each nibble into the soft cookie brought instant pleasure.

Do you have children or grandchildren in school? I firmly believe a long day at school is as taxing to them as the nine-to-five, work-day grind at the office. I know many teachers do not agree with my opinions on homework, but I am against it. Do you like to bring work home with you? I understand needing to prepare for exams, but I am against daily assignments. That is enough of my soapbox. That just spilled out because I remembered the wonderful surprise of Mom’s cookies when I walked in the door after the four-mile ride home on the school bus. Molasses cookies and cold milk is a match made in heaven. “He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks and bakers (1 Samuel 8:13 NKJ).”

Many treats have no nutritional value, but molasses is good for you. I have done Internet searching and discovered the many benefits of this dark, thick, gooey syrup. Regular use even discourages gray hair. I can testify to that because molasses is included in my daily diet. I avoid coffee and tea because of health reasons. (My family knows how much that hurts.) In the place of these beverages, I invented my own concoction; I add a teaspoon of molasses to a cup of boiling water and creamer. This helps to satisfy my cravings for tea. Oh, if only I had one of Mom’s cookies to go along with the drink.

April 11

“Why Women”

The Lord God frequently does what we least expect. If we try to put His activity in a box, He is sure to burst it open. Resurrection morning would not be scripted by any of the disciples. Before complete daylight, a close-knit group of faithful women began a mission of love for their departed Lord and friend. They reverently approached His tomb, laden with spices to anoint His body. They likely discussed the problem of getting in to perform their task following burial. The large stone sealing His tomb created a barrier they needed to overcome.

The sight of His open tomb caught them by surprise. The stone lay off to the side, giving complete access to the burial place given by a wealthy Council member. The kindness of Joseph of Arimathea did not go unnoticed. The women humbly entered the opening and nearly fainted in the discovery that Jesus no longer occupied the grave.

They encountered two men in clothing radiant as a bolt of lightning. Fright gripped the women and they fell to the ground in awe. Maybe this is all a dream. The men then spoke to the women with a penetrating question, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead (Luke 24:5b NAS)?” Before they could react to the question, the message continued, “He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again (Luke 24:6-7 NAS).” It just did not seem possible; they saw Him die. Three days passed by inside a tomb holding His lifeless body. The morning skies now showed the glow of dawn, and their hearts now pulsed with reborn hope and joy.

Next we come face to face with culture, tradition and prejudice prevalent in the days of Jesus. Women lived in the shadows and did not expect many changes in man’s treatment. In spite of the odds, they were given the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection. Matthew said, “And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to his disciples (Matthew 28:8 NAS).”

Do you read between the lines of scripture? If you do, side step briefly and catch sight of these frail women lifting their skirts and breathlessly running to tell the men who were found cowering in fear. Next, they see Jesus face to face. Ladies, it is true, I Am alive! Dropping to the ground, they grasp His ankles with a desire to never be out of His sight again. In tender compassion The Son of Man, born of woman, talked to the select group, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to my brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see me (Matthew 28:10 NAS)” Don’t lose track of the women’s prized privileges. They were the first to see the open tomb; first to hear an announcement of His resurrection; first to behold Jesus alive; and now, first appointed messengers to carry the gospel, the good news of Jesus conquering death.

Did the disciples wrap them in arms of love and share their joy? “And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them (Luke 24: 11 NAS).” The men soon saw Him themselves through eyes of faith and rejoiced.

Jesus’ birth announcement came by a heavenly angelic assembly to simple shepherds, outcasts in society. The Easter story targeted women in their lowly state. Jesus’ return will need no go betweens. Trumpets will sound, and He will appear in the heavens. Every day is Easter! **HE’S ALIVE!**

April 12

“Timex”

Wrist watches are disposable items today. The art of watch repair is quickly vanishing. *Rolex* owners are privileged to have the distinction of using a timepiece touched by the hands of a craftsman. In the 1950 to 1960s, two of the best, well-known brands were *Bullova* and *Timex*, each affordable and dependable.

Timex is still easily accessible in many stores. The television commercials for *Timex* were very effective. The advertising slogan became a trademark. *Timex takes a lickin and keeps on tickin!* The ads were mini cliff hangers, showing abuse to the watches. One commercial showed a *Timex* strapped to a boat motor and placed in a large, clear container of water. The motor started and ran at full speed. The climax of the demonstration: The watch kept ticking. *Timex* could take the beating and won the respect of prospective buyers. The Bible shows us a man, the Apostle Paul, who like *Timex* could *take a lickin and keep on tickin.*” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Paul suffered through beatings, whippings, stoning, and shipwreck. He endured hunger and thirst, severe weather conditions and needed clothing. Did he throw in the towel? No, and we can be encouraged by his example. If he could remain faithful, we can too.

April 13

“Calloused Hands”

Do you enjoy building projects, maybe making extra wall shelves or a bookcase? Are you drawn to the closest *Lowes* or *Home Depot*? The finished products might award you blue ribbons. I once refinished my kitchen cabinets in our used mobile home. I could see potential buried under about 30 years of grime, and decided I could handle the job. It turned out to be a monster of an ordeal. I did not use all the latest home improvement tools. Instead I used elbow grease and enough sandpaper to paper my walls. My hands became blistered and maybe even calloused temporarily. The finished product of bare wood covered with clear varnish made the effort worth the drudgery. The doors featuring new hardware knobs and hinges brightened up the kitchen, and I took pride in my hard work.

The appreciation of wood is in my Ford bloodline. My Dad and Grandfather at times were both employed by the prestigious *Stickleys' Furniture Company* in New York State. My father's duties included furniture sanding, rubbing stains and oil into the quality wooden pieces, and polishing the workmanship. It needed patience and persistence to bring out the highlights within the wood. The sanding process did not destroy a masterpiece; it became part of the creation process.

Have you heard the story of precious pearls? A lady's treasure began inside an oyster in the depths of the water. A small grain of sand is surrounded by a luminous piece of calcium carbonate. That sand's friction is the pressure needed to form a gem, a true work of art. Why do we resist friction in our lives? God uses those times of pressure to create us into His workmanship. “For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10 NAS).” In scripture, oil represents the Holy Spirit and is poured in wounds for healing, (Luke 10: 34) and applied for anointing (Psalm 23:5/ Mark 14:8/ James 5:14). Oil preserves and nourishes wood and God's children can receive benefits as well. Are you a polished product? Do you shine for the Lord? “Let your light shine before men in such a way they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16 NAS).” Dad's hands bore the marks of sanding treasures. I wonder if our heavenly Father has calloused hands.

April 14

“Bubble Baths”

Calgon, take me away! It is so relaxing to soak in a hot tub of water. Bubble bath is a luxury that gives rewards instantly. From the moment you sink into the foamy bubbles, your tension begins to flee. Muscles that moments earlier were tight, now release. Responsibilities lose their urgency. Worries will have to take a number. Taking a break, you sink deeper and deeper into the water.

Will time stand still? No, soon the bubbles lose the fizz and the water begins to turn cold. Carefully you step out of the tub, quickly grab a towel, and without much thought wrap up your private time of pleasure. Maybe it is not over. If you slip into a warm, soft, favorite robe, your peace continues. Can God's children in times with Him have moments of such bubble-bath pleasures? Yes, Jesus pampers His bride, the church. “...just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:25b-26 NAS)”.

April 15

“Cinderella’s Coach”

Do you enjoy fairytales, *Once upon a time, and happily ever after?* At the age of only twelve, I stepped into the door of *Cinderella’s coach*. Listen to my true story...

School started, and I entered the seventh grade in our tall, junior-high-school building. It seems the eighth grade contained a secret admirer. He noticed me when our class visited the school before summer vacation. With creativeness he obtained my phone number from my school teacher, gave me a call, and revealed his interest in me. Stars filled my eyes. I did not even know he existed. He explained he would speak to me in the hallway between classes. Seeing his smiling eyes and hearing his warm hello, my heart began to pound.

A *crush, young love, or puppy love*: each represents the first taste of romance. It held many surprises for me. He may have not been *Prince Charming* in a dazzling uniform with sword at his side; but he came close. He and his brother both attended a military school before we met. My wallet held a picture of him in his dashing uniform. He asked me to my first *boy-girl* party, and I dressed up in a pretty dress for the special occasion. The garage floor became a palace ballroom, and my happiness continued to grow.

His family held membership in a yacht club. The club hosted a dinner dance for the young people at *Syracuse University*. He asked me to be his date! Preparations made me as excited as *Cinderella* and her playful mice. A pretty taffeta, light blue dress became my gown. My mother styled my hair and applied my first touch of makeup, actually a dab of *Vaseline* on my eyelids to add sparkle to my eyes. Light pink, young-girls’ beginner lipstick made a finishing touch.

My date arrived, and he escorted me to our coach, his father’s *Corvette*. I rode in style, sitting on his lap in the two-seat vehicle, trying not to mess up my dress. The room decorated for the dance equaled any fancy club, circular small tables, draped with white clothes and candle light illumination. An orchestra played, and I lived in the make-believe land of a princess. Genesis:17:15 (Living Bible) “ Then God added, Regarding Sarai your wife--her name is no longer ‘Sarai’ but ‘Sarah’ (Princess).” The night ended, and our coach made the return trip to my country home. No, I did not leave a glass slipper behind, and there were no wicked stepsisters, just a memory that lasted nearly fifty years. *The End*

April 16

“U-Turn”

Let's face it, sometimes we just need to make a *U Turn* on a highway. It is frowned upon by law enforcement agencies, but they do it too. When you realize you are going the wrong way, the simple solution is to turn around and head in the opposite direction. Did you realize that is what the word *repent* means? Yes, it is that simple to understand.

In life we make wrong decisions. We sin and turn our backs on God. We are heading into trouble, going in the wrong direction. God's Holy Spirit convicts us, speaks to our heart and conscience, telling us we have sinned against God and others. We acknowledge that is true. The sin must be faced. We make a *U Turn* to repent of our sins, turn around, and run into the loving arms of The Father. Trusting in His Son Jesus our Lord and Savior begins a life-long journey, a one-way trip to Heaven. The Amplified Bible gives a clear explanation. “Now after John was arrested and put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the good news (the Gospel) of the kingdom of God, and saying, The (appointed period of) time is fulfilled (completed), and the kingdom is at hand; repent (have a change of mind which issues in regret for past sins in change of conduct for the better) and believe (trust in, rely on, and adhere to) the good news (the Gospel).” (Mark 1:14-15)

April 17

“Cook-Out Champion”

Summer is coming, and once again, friends and neighbors plan backyard cookouts. Men seem to love their barbecue nearly as much as their remote controls. Will there be simple hot-dog-and-hamburger lunches or the hearty steak-cooked-to-perfection sunset dinners?

A trip to a beach, mountain retreat, nearby lake or campground gives the perfect opportunity to stoke those fires. Cookbooks are full of grilling recipes, including many with mouth-watering fresh vegetables. Recently when doing a yard sale, a customer told us about his grilling specialty. You might want to try it sometime. He cores a head of cabbage, stuffing it with things he likes, including sausage links, onions and green peppers. It sounds good to me.

We find a lake with waves crashing on the shore serene and invigorating, rekindling our spirit. If swimming, fishing, or boating, it doesn't take us long to build up a ravenous appetite. Fresh air feeds our bodies with oxygen and increases the desire to satisfy hunger. A quick sack lunch may fill that empty spot, but it cannot compare with a hot cooked meal.

The disciples were surprised by an appearance of their risen Lord! “Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish which you have just caught (John 21:9-10 NKJ).” None of the disciples wanted to question Him. Jesus called them to a shoreline breakfast. I'm not sure how they were prepared over that open fire, but I know the Master Chef served mouth-watering fish to those He trained to be fishers of men.

April 18

“Blue Angels”

The precision, accuracy and timing for flight demonstrations are no piece of luck. *The U. S. Navy Blue Angels’* pilots experience discipline and grueling practice. If the person at the controls is wrong about distance or off a second on their synchronized timing, it could be fatal. The safety of other pilots and the crowd below are also at stake.

My husband, Norm, held a position as program director at radio station *KONO, San Antonio* in the mid 1980s. *The Blue Angels* were performing, and he accepted the rare opportunity to ride along in one of the jets. The amazing thing is that he is afraid of heights. He feels weak kneed in tall buildings, on bridges, and mountain roads; yet, he is not afraid to fly. Before his ride, the pilot forewarned him that at one point he would lose consciousness. The scare tactic worked. He nervously experienced the blackout, as warned. He placed his safety in the pilot, who made rolls, turns, and dives. He returned to solid ground with a story to tell. Do we have that complete trust and confidence in The Lord? He forewarned us: “I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world (John 16:33 HCS).” Trouble will come. We can have courage and hope. Jesus triumphed over evil.

April 19

“Disaster Relief”

Have you ever been a recipient of disaster relief? Before you answer, consider what a *disaster* is...Natural disasters come in many forms. Nature’s fury is demonstrated through floods and droughts and damaging winds in hurricanes and tornadoes. Lightning is a primary cause of raging wild fires, and hail results in substantial damage. Earthquakes change the landscape and the fabric of lives. Brutal blizzards and ice storms leave many deaths as proof of their power. Avalanches and mudslides destroy homes and at times even villages. Seldom do we deal with volcanic eruption, but it is a disaster to fear. Wherever you live, some dangers are lurking.

Hurricane Katrina revealed that in a disaster we cannot be totally prepared. Residents along the Gulf Coast could not imagine in their worst nightmares what destruction would come. The people of Mississippi and Louisiana now view time elements not according to a calendar but by the descriptive phrase, *before or after Katrina*. My husband is a truck driver, and I traveled with him across country for several years. We were witnesses to *Katrina’s* aftermath. I will not even try to describe it; no adjectives could even come close. Viewing with your own eyes sights similar to atomic-bomb destruction leaves a person numb.

We were allowed into the city of New Orleans with emergency supplies. To see a city brought to its knees brings a fresh reminder that our source of strength is down on our knees in prayer. At a truck stop checking my e-mail in the phone area, I overheard a conversation between a truck driver and his wife. He carried a load of bottled water, one of the most critical needs following any disaster. He shared news with his wife. Outside, the security and protection of an armed policeman guarded his truck. The officials feared robbery and mob rule. The shipment of fresh water held the value of gold bullion carried by an armored truck.

9/11 will leave permanent scars upon the cities of New York and Washington D. C. as well as a rural area in Pennsylvania. We drove through New York City only days after, and smoke still lingered in the air. Those scars may fade with time, but the disaster wounds on our people will remain. We are vulnerable. We could not protect our own. Storms are not the only disasters that reshape our lives. Our economic crisis is a calamity to individuals, families, businesses, ministries, cities, and nations. Personal disasters overwhelm us in the form of lost jobs, broken homes, addictions, a terminal illness, foreclosure of a home, or eviction from a family farm. Disaster includes the loss of loved ones from accidents or death. We cannot cope with a disaster in our own natural strength.

Have you received disaster relief? It is offered to all, but many turn away from the source of all relief. He hopes we will open our hearts’ door and invite Him in. He is offering to us today that critical need following a disaster; He gives the *Living water*. He met a woman with an unquenchable thirst and told her the water she drew could not satisfy. “Jesus answered and said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life (John 4:13-14 NAS).” The Lord sees every misfortune and He understands. He died for man’s worst natural disaster, *sin*.

April 20

“Summer Blonde”

Friends share many things in their relationships...secrets, joys, worries, and even sorrow and grief. I can't speak for men, but the female gender gets a real kick out of sharing personal items such as clothes, books, music and recipes. Good friends think alike in many ways and have much in common. If shopping, they both may pick out the exact same items. They might even show up at work in identical outfits. How many times have you got a phone call from a friend, just as you were planning to call them? True friends can be separated by miles and time but are linked forever in their hearts. "...but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face (3 John 1:14a NKJ)."

In high school, I went out on a double date with a couple I did not know. Both guys are *no longer in the picture*. I made a lifetime friendship with the girl, *Ethel*. We kept in touch after school and marriages for a few years. If you lose contact with a cherished friend there is a vacant spot in your heart. Sadly, we went our separate ways, and I could not locate her. With the advantages of modern technology I excitedly saw her name listed on *Classmates.com*. After 30 years I called her, and we quickly picked up right where we left off decades earlier. Yes, we are alike in many ways, both petite and the same coloring. We each have one son and one daughter. When we met we were both *summer blondes*. That brings to mind scenes of sandy beaches, gentle breezes and the warmth of sunshine lightening your hair. Sorry folks, ours came from bottled *Clairol Summer Blonde*.

April 21

“No Regrets”

“You’ll be sorry!” Those annoying words fall second only to “I told you so!” Our response, even if silent, is something like “Get off my back!” At the age of seventeen, my older sister, Lauree, wore her beautiful brown hair long. If you were a young girl in the mid 1960s you’ll remember the popular *flip* hairstyle. She decided she wanted a change. Personally, in earlier years I changed my hair more than purses. The first time I met my new bother-in-law he commented he could not be sure what I looked like. In family pictures, my hair never looked the same.

Well, my sister shared her plans of a haircut with our older sister, Donna. She tried to make her change her mind and giving up probably remarked, “You’ll be sorry!” Lauree got a new stylish bob and looked perk and happy. Several months later, the drama continued...

Christmas came and we were opening our wrapped packages. Lauree began to open one marked from my oldest sister, nicknamed *Midge*. In those days, Lauree smoked; and tearing off the paper, she could see a carton of cigarettes. At the going price of \$2.98 she appreciated the gift. Our older sister told her to look inside. Remember the phrase “You’ll be sorry?” She thought Lauree would have regrets; so she swept up the hair and gave it to her for Christmas. I’m sure she likely gave her another present, but it could not compare to the laughs we all shared over the treasured locks of hair. Smile, what you give up might come back to you tied up in ribbons. Do you carry the burden of yesterday’s decisions and live in the land of regrets? “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9a NKJ).”

April 22

“Quicksand”

Western movies repeated the same scenarios over and over. Story lines included: cattle rustlers; prospectors; stage-coach companies; cattle drives; drought, anthrax disease; inheritance of a ranch; lynching; and, last but not least, *quicksand*. Even soap operas can't beat that list of calamities. That's why *Calamity Jane* is not on their rolling of credits.

My Dad introduced me to the western sagas. As a little girl, I faithfully watched *Hopalong Cassidy*. I even drank my coffee from a Hoppy mug. I guess that got your attention. Mom filled it with milk and added a few drops of coffee. Little girls are fickle, and later, my favorites were *Roy Rogers* and *My Friend Flicka*. It must have been a solid foundation that certified me to become the wife of a Westerns fanatic. Popcorn loses its appeal without a good western movie.

Earlier in my list of story themes, I mentioned *quicksand*. Just the thought of sinking in the muck and mire makes me want to squirm. That must be among the most terrifying ways to die, so slow and unrelenting. The only hope is that *Trigger* will hear the cries for help. In life we have no silver-screen happy endings. At times we are sinking and can find no means of escape. “I waited patiently for The Lord, and He turned to me and heard my cry for help. He brought me up from a desolate pit, out of the muddy clay (*quicksand*) and set my feet on a rock, making my steps secure (Psalms 40:1-2 HCS).” Together we safely ride off into the sunset...

April 23

“Extra, Extra”

“Extra, Extra... Read all about it!” Surrounded by modern technology, we forget the influence of a street-corner newsboy. With a hot, front-page story fresh off the press, his calls to those passing by were as powerful as sounding an alarm. He rang out, “Extra, Extra... Read all about it,” while waving a neatly folded copy above his head. Curiosity drew people to his side. Each wanted to be the first to know. The boy himself often could not even read the headlines, but if he held a special edition, he understood the urgency of the contents.

John the Baptist heralded the news of the coming Messiah. Boldly his call carried throughout the wilderness. He shouted out the news. God’s people needed to hear all about it. “John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, this was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me (John 1:15 NAS).” He humbly denied his own importance. “He said, I am a voice crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as Isaiah the prophet said (John 1:23 NAS).” What about the street-corner newsboy? The block he worked reached out to a wilderness of lost souls, hungry for good news. Will we take our stand and find a street corner, office on the corner, or even a corner in our house occupied by a loved one? They need the news; *Extra, Extra...Hear all about it!* Jesus saves! “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:11 NAS).”

April 24

“Ball and Jax”

When did electronic toys and games become a billion-dollar industry? Take my hand, and I'll lead you on a stroll down toy-land memory lane... Before *Barbie* and *Cabbage Patch* dolls, little girls cradled *Tiny Tears* or spent hours in the world of make believe with paper dolls. Boys made guns from sticks or wore inexpensive six shooters just like their favorite movie-matinee heroes. School girls laughed with best friends playing cats in the cradle. Outside, the boys were down on their knees playing marbles. We learned eye-to-hand coordination playing games of *ball and jax* or *pick-up sticks*. Jumping rope could be simple exercise or, with practice, amaze onlookers. Hours were passed while playing dominoes, checkers, *Parcheesi* or *Chinese Checkers* with friends, siblings or parents.

I realize board games such as *Monopoly* and *Scrabble* still have their place, but they are not the money makers that electronic gadgets have become. I am not against progress or advancements in education and technology. They bring to society many advantages. Everything seems to be moving ahead at a rapid speed. The Prophet Daniel spoke of these days, “...Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased (Daniel 12:4 KJV).” We can't turn back the clock, but it will not hurt to take a sneak peak back over our shoulder.

April 25

“Filling God In”

“But, Lord, You just don’t understand!” Is that the cry of your heart? He does understand. We are the ones who don’t understand. We view everything through our clouded sight and minimal experience. Our Almighty God sees all, knows all, and understands all. Friends, He is the final authority.

At times my prayer requests may sound more like helpful hints. He does not need my advice. He needs my attention and availability. Remember Peter telling the Lord a thing or two about the need for Him to suffer and die? “And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You (Matthew 16:22 NAS).” His two cents of correction fell flat. “But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s (Matthew 16:23 NAS).” Reading this we are amazed at Peter’s crude approach to our Lord. We may not speak as he did, but we often reject God’s plans. Another faithful follower tried to clue God in on a person’s character and aims. “But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name (Acts 9: 13-14 NAS).” The words he said under his breath may have included, *God, You do not have your facts straight! You do not need Saul; he is trouble with a capitol T! I’m sorry, Lord; but You are wrong this time!*

Did God chew him out; no, He clued him in. “ But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake (Acts 9:15-16 NAS).” Look at the scope of God’s reply. Saul, who would be given a name change by God to Paul, would be a chosen instrument in God’s hands. He would be a messenger on assignment from the ruler of the universe. God chose him to suffer for His name. Suffering for God is not a punishment; it is a reward for obedience. We are honored to share in the suffering of Christ. If God’s beloved Son obediently served the Father through suffering and death, why do we question His will and methods? We can save our breath; God does not need a refresher course. He needs faithful followers (Luke 9:23).

April 26

“Friends and Family”

Do good times with friends require eating at high-priced restaurants, taking in a movie, or athletic events? When getting together in homes, must we provide big meals or barbecues? Do we need a pantry stocked with snacks and beverages? Should it be costly to meet with friends?

Growing up in the 1950s to 1960s, we rarely went to restaurants, movies, bowling or skating. Family outings were generally visits with relatives or friends who also dropped by to see us. There were very little preparations. Our group events for swimming, picnics, birthday parties or holiday meals were the only big projects. Adults and children just simply enjoyed being together. Mom and Dad's best friends lived right across the street. Their six children and the five of us were often playing in our yards till dark. We happily caught fireflies with our hands and collected them in jars.

The parents, *Laura* and *Clint*, were like family. What did the adults do? Mostly, they just talked while enjoying cups of hot coffee or glasses of iced tea. The men sometimes watched *Gillette Boxing* or on warm summer afternoons played a few games of horseshoes. Times were simpler then. Our moms did not work outside of the home. They filled the full-time role of raising their large families. Children were not all wrapped up in after school activities. Take time to enjoy your friends. “A friend loves at all times (Proverbs 17:17a NKJ).” We need each other, not what money can buy while we are together...

April 27

“Know Your Limitations”

Do you know your limitations? Do you stop for directions when you are lost or continue driving in circles? It is hard at times to openly reveal your areas of weakness. I need to give in to a few of mine.

I am absolutely overcome by packaging. If it comes in any type of package or container, it is out to get me. It all looks so harmless, *Open here*; but don't you believe it. If it is a cap to a chlorine-bleach bottle, I may wrench my wrist before getting it open. Do you neatly open the inner packaging for cereal boxes? Many of mine look like the *Incredible Hulk* lost his temper. What about those plastic *Tear here* packaging instructions used for flour tortillas or bagged salad? I usually give up and cut along their dotted line with scissors. Then I stand pulling and straining to get it to pop open. Are you ready for one of my most embarrassing packaging battles? Cassette-tape boxes are on my worst enemy list. They have been around for nearly forty years, and I still battle trying to return one to the case. If my husband is around, I usually just hand it to him. He smiles and slips it in the case.

I am nearly as bad with road directions. Following maps are a real chore, and if someone uses the term “Go to the intersection and head south,” they have lost me. Give me simple instructions; tell me to turn left or right. Another problem that falls in line with directions is distance. It really eased my self-condemnation when I heard it is often *a woman thing*. Men are just better at judging the distance from their front bumper to the car ahead, distance from the curb, or space left on each side of the car driving into a garage. A pastor told a true story of traveling with his wife. She dozed while he did the driving. She awoke, saw a car ahead of them, and grabbed the steering wheel, to avert hitting the vehicle. The pastor regained control, saying they traveled a safe distance from the car ahead. My husband drives a big rig, and for several years, I traveled with him. When we were first getting started, he asked me to get out of the cab to help direct him back into parking places or loading docks. He should have known better. We gave up on that idea in a very short time.

When we cannot handle a task, we need to remember a spiritual truth that far outweighs minor experiences dealing with our inability to get our job done. “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:5 NAS).” Wow, without Him I can do nothing, meaning nothing that really results in eternal value. I guess I am just the poster child for blonde jokes. That's okay; I'll just wait till my husband is handy.

April 28

“Glass Slippers”

Ladies, let's take an inventory; how many pairs of shoes do you own? Do you dare count? Next question, how many pairs does your husband have? Likely, there will be a large gap between the two numbers. My husband usually wears a pair until they wear out, and then he is forced to replace them. Ladies, is the shoe section in a store a magnet pulling you to the shelves as soon as you enter the building? Admit it; it can become an addiction.

Maybe it all began with *Cinderella and her glass slippers*. Ladies, will you wear a pair of shoes that pinch your toes, just because they look great with your outfit? Don't bother; normally your shoes are only noticed by your cat or dog. My fascination with shoes began at *Waldman's Department Store*. My parents bought most of our clothes from *Montgomery Ward*, but we went to *Waldman's* for shoes. Before the start of each school year, we were taken to be fitted for a pair of shoes from a selection of loafers, oxfords or saddle shoes. We also needed gym shoes: white, red or blue sneakers. Before Easter, we purchased shinny patent leather shoes for church.

Did you know God thinks about your shoes? He thinks about everything we need. “But The Lord said to him (Moses) Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground (Acts 7:33 NAS).” Our shoes walk in many areas that are unclean. That is the reason we wipe our feet on a doormat before entering a home. In many cases we remove our shoes just inside the door. Moses stood in God's presence on holy ground. The shoes were unclean and a barrier between him and God. We don't need to remove our shoes each time we pray, but we should remove the sin which separates us by honest confession. (I John 1:9)

April 29

“Joy”

Are you searching for specials in the menu senior-citizen’s section at your favorite restaurants? When shopping and traveling, do you ask for the discounts available to those over fifty-five? We might as well use them. The *golden years* are costing us enough in medical care to tap *Fort Knox*. Sorry, the truth is they are already tapped out.

Government leaders and advertisers are well aware that we represent a large percentage of the population. They are targeting us. Candidates seek our votes and merchants want our cash. We are very important people. Churches offer senior-adult ministries, including a large variety of activities and trips. I have heard some interesting names that these church groups tag seniors with. My favorite is the **JOY** group. Nobody likes to be around grumpy people, old or young. The sound of the word joy makes me feel happy.

Why the name of *Joy*?

J= Just

O= Older

Y=Youth

JUST OLDER YOUTH: That's what I call a positive attitude. The word *Joy* is also a good acrostic for priorities in relationships.

J= Jesus

O= Others

Y= Yourself

“...the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10 NAS).” Being old brings benefits. They will still yield fruit in old age; They shall be full of sap and very green, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him (Psalm 92:14-15 NAS).”

April 30

“Surprise, Surprise”

Surprise, Surprise! The words took on special meaning when coming from the mouth of *Gomer Pyle*. The mythical town of *Mayberry* gave us many characters that pricked our conscience or tickled our funny bone. The old shows are as entertaining as ever and cross several generations. In our hearts, we all call *Mayberry* our *hometown*.

Surprise, Surprise! ... “Ain’t God good?” He loves us and heaps His blessings upon our plate, even when we choose junk food instead. He paints us a breathtaking sunrise; sorry you slept in and missed it. He designed winding trails perfect for leisurely walks and time alone with Him. I understand your decision to head straight home after work. You’ll take a brisk walk on your treadmill while watching the evening news.

Surprise, Surprise! ... Jesus really did reach out to the outcasts; His touch changed their lives. Yes, you gave through your job to worthwhile charities. You can’t give to just anybody. If a person needs a helping hand let them contact a government agency. Isn’t that why we pay taxes?

Surprise, Surprise! ... *Gomer* got it right. He lived every day with the enthusiasm and trust of a child. I believe he lingered over every sunrise or sunset. He wandered country paths and discovered scenic fishing holes or a bird feeding her young in the nest. *Gomer* never got too busy pumping gas to talk with a stranger. He took time to answer the questions of a small boy, the son of the local sheriff. *Surprise, Surprise!* God is awesome! “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him (Psalm 33:8 NAS).” *Shazam*, God loves me, and all my friends in *Mayberry*, too!

May 1

“Froggy”

Are you a collector? It is amazing to learn the many different items that people search out at yard and estate sales, thrift stores and antique malls, not to mention Internet sites. I collect tea pots, oldies music, and church hymnals. Many people in recent years grew a strong attachment to frogs. Strange, isn't it? Something that God once sent as a plague on Egypt now fills our homes. (Exodus 8:1-4)

Frogs are everywhere, on clothes, jewelry, calendars, coffee mugs, greeting cards, knick knacks, and toys. Maybe *Kermit the Frog* started this trend. My older sister, Donna, found much enjoyment in frogs, and our family steadily added to her collection. I remember her excitement and laughter while showing me a musical frog from our younger sister.

In elementary school we enjoyed music class. Some of those early sing-along tunes are still etched in my memory. One favorite selection, *A Froggy Went A Court'n* fits in nicely here. It is a pretty silly song. A few years ago I found an old cassette tape on sale by *Tex Ritter*. To my amazement and glee it included, *A Froggy Went A Court'n*. Yes, it is in my music collection, and *High Noon* is also on the tape. I guess we don't have to be too concerned about collecting frogs, unless we feel tempted to kiss them in hopes of finding our prince!

May 2

“Wizard of Oz”

For generations viewers have followed *the yellow brick road* to the imaginary Land of Oz. As a child viewing the movie *The Wizard of Oz* on our television, I felt myself transported along with *Dorothy* and her little dog *Toto*. The costumes worn by the *good* witch were beautiful, and I felt love and acceptance in her tender smile. The appearance and actions of the *wicked witch of the west* frightened me. Each time I watched the movie I noticed new details. The producers filmed more imagery than a little girl’s mind could grasp in one sitting.

Frank Baum, the writer of this classic, came from Chittenango, N. Y., a village near my home. Today the historical connections with the renowned writer are a drawing card to tourists. Gift shops and restaurants feature *Oz* memorabilia, and each year an *Oz* festival is held. Special guests include people who were in some way a part of the movie production. The *Munchkin* actors and actresses have made regular appearances. Tourists walk into the land of fantasy as each step is taken on a *yellow brick road* sidewalk. I end this salute to *Oz* and Chittenango with a piece of trivia: The author, *Frank Baum* chose the name of *Oz* for this faraway land by a quick glance at his filing cabinet. The alphabetical lettering for the last drawer caught his eye: **O-Z**. He created a city! Our future land of enchantment is being made ready for us by the Creator of all. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last (Revelation 22:13 NKJ).”

May 3

“Gloom and Doom”

Don't you hate gloomy days? Our emotions as well as our stiff joints are easily influenced by weather systems. Dampness causes physical pain, and overcast days leave us feeling downcast. “Why art thou cast down O my soul (Psalm 42:5a KJV)?” Liquid sunshine makes the flowers grow, but it dampens our spirit. Don't you hate a happy face when you feel miserable? Let's be honest; *misery loves company*, and if you are in a lousy mood, a chipper person is not who you seek out for companionship.

Our best defense for gloomy days is offense. Bring out God's arsenal of praise, worship, meditation and faith. He does not want us to hunker down in gloom and doom. In Jeremiah 29:11-14 we are given a pep talk that is worth frequent replay. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end (Verse 11 KJV). Take a look at the *New Century Version*: “I say this because I know what I have planned for you, says the Lord, I have good plans for you. I don't plan to hurt you. I plan to give you hope and a good future.” How can we dwell in the pagan land of gloom and doom? Peace, hope and a bright future beckon to us in the presence of the Lord.

Did you see a focus word in our scripture portion... *plan*? God holds the game plan. If He has it mapped out already, our only responsibility is to *get with the plan*. Let it rain, let it pour. God has the plan and I can't wait to receive more.

May 4

“Rock and Roll Trivia”

Have you ever attended a costume party or a more elegant masquerade ball? People are not quite sure of your identity until you remove your mask. I guess at times that leads to real surprises. My husband and I both worked in radio for many years. He suggested I use my maiden name for the on-air personality jobs. At *KELD* El Dorado, Arkansas, I worked the nine-to-three-pm shift.

Rock & Roll Trivia contest became a regular feature on my program. I asked listeners questions about a popular song or artist. The first caller with the correct answer won a prize. It drew a lot of listeners and boosted our ratings. As a family we found a church home wherever we lived. (Hebrews 10:25) When we first visited our new church and attended a young couple's class we introduced ourselves, where we were from and where we worked. My husband explained I used my maiden name of Ford on the air. A young woman cried out, “Are you *Rock & Roll Trivia*? I guess she removed my mask.

May 5

“Hands of the Potter”

Inspirational messages, songs, stories, and books based on Jeremiah’s *potter and the clay* offer limitless teaching. It extends hope to broken lives. Our loving Father does not throw the pieces away. He reshapes us into vessels of grace. These transformations are His greatest demonstration of power and patience.

My mind easily soaks in the beauty of the master potter’s finished works of art. A church testimonial service gives members the opportunity to hear of God’s power and grace to change our lives. He breaks bondage to addictions; heals marriages; touches broken, diseased bodies and creates love and peace within our hearts. Vessels shaped by the Master are each unique. The creator of snowflakes also delights in variety among His prized collection of pottery, jars of clay.

I noticed on the front of a recent church bulletin a picture of hands working at a potter’s wheel. In a junior high school art class, I gave that art form a try. I am reminded of an aspect of that artwork. The creation of a vessel on the potter’s wheel is very messy business. Water needs to be continually applied to keep the clay pliable for shaping. Do you remember making mud pies? Yes, clay is glorified mud. Our heavenly Father patiently pours living water upon our lives to keep us pliable, teachable, and humble in His hands. He loves us enough to get His hands dirty.

“Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something on the wheel, But the vessel that he was making of clay, was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make (Jeremiah 18:3-4 NAS).”
“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (1 Peter 5:6 NAS).” Mud pie, pliable clay in God’s hands, becomes His temple.
“Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16 NAS)?”

May 6

“Wrong Place at the Wrong Time”

When a person becomes successful, their moment to shine is sometimes described as *being in the right place at the right time*. If that is true, God placed them there. Maybe there is an opposite approach. Can we be *in the wrong place at the wrong time*? Yes, ask a young person that stands before the judge, charged as an accomplice to a crime. Scripture reveals both man’s highest moments of sacrificial service and lowest of selfish gratification. Let’s take a close look at a man *in the wrong place at the wrong time*. It may keep us from making the same mistakes.

“Then it happened in the spring, 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 sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11:1 NAS).” That may not seem like a very important passage, but you will soon see how critical it is... “Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king’s house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance (verse 2 NAS).” Most have heard the love story of David and Bathsheba, but the events leading up to the affair are often overlooked.

David chose to be *in the wrong place at the wrong time*. He stayed behind, leaving his responsibility of leading the army to Joab, who served in a role much like the secretary of defense. David let his troops and nation down, and most important, let his Lord down. David refused to be in the right place, on the front lines of battle. He stayed back home and took an innocent evening stroll on the roof to enjoy the cool breezes. He could not have chosen a worse time. His eyes dwelled on the beauty of another man’s wife. “And David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; (verse 4a NAS).”

The first look led to adultery, murder of her husband and a cover up. David now lived in the land of consequences. David’s relationship with the Lord lost intimacy. He could not hide from God or himself. A prophet named Nathan confronted him with the facts, using four words that are now used as slang, “You are the man (2 Samuel 12:7a)!” David did not play the blame game; he faced himself and his wrong choices when he had been *in the wrong place at the wrong time*. Humbled, he confessed. “Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord, (2 Samuel 12:13a).”

He received mercy but he and Bathsheba lost their son, born from the lust of a king living out of bounds. God called David, “a man after My heart (Acts 13:22b NAS). David sinned but God forgave him. His heart remained tender and he turned from sin. Do you want to see a beautiful conclusion to David’s falling from faithfulness? Take time to read Psalm 51, which reveals a man after God’s heart. If King David could whisper in your ear today he might say, “Don’t be in the wrong place at the wrong time!” He speaks from experience.

May 7

“Wear That Crown”

Do you like your hair color, or do you even know your hair color? With the convenience of easy hair coloring today, many people cover gray or just like a change. My hair color changed drastically when enrolled in the seventh grade. Before then, my light blonde hair made me very happy. My three sisters were brunettes. Only my younger brother and I were blondes.

I colored it for many years, having a couple shades of disaster. One time it turned out orange and once became a gruesome shade of green! Roots are just to keep your hair in and are ignored, unless you color your hair. Then they become a never-ending enemy. Some people look so natural in a new color that the original hair coloring would make you laugh. On the other hand...*Lucille Ball's* stylist went a little bit too far at times.

My mother's beautiful, naturally curly, brown hair started turning gray in her 40s. She colored it herself and did a beautiful job. Unfortunately, her system decided it should fight back and rejected the treatments. She ended up at the doctor's office with a severe allergic reaction. Her physician began to prescribe a medication, and they talked about our family. She explained that all four of her daughters were expecting babies. He told her, "You have earned that gray hair!" I don't think she ever colored it again. "A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness (Proverbs 16:31 NAS)."

May 8

“Voices”

Do you ever hear voices? I guess if you did, it would not be shared. That is not something a person would like spread around. The truth is we all hear voices; maybe not audibly, but they are no less real. We are on the frequent *calling lists* of two rulers.

The Prince of Peace and the prince of the air, of darkness, both have you on their contact list. Networking is not necessary; they know where and how to reach you. There will be no roaming charges; we are always in their calling area.

Do they reach you or just your voice mail? It is wise to screen your calls; talking with the prince of the air may not only interrupt your evening dinner, but also ruin your life. You can say one thing about him; he is persistent. If one marketing tactic does not work, he quickly adapts and tries again. Don't fall for his line; he's nothing but a con man, full of bologna. If you give him a chance, he'll talk your ear off; and there will not be an ounce of truth in what he has to say.

On the other hand, you don't want to miss any opportunity to hear God's word to you. It would be a shame to keep Him on hold, with excuses of your busy schedule. He does not use canned messages; each contact is new and personal, relevant to your day and needs. He does call frequently, but He also loves regular contacts from you. Share all your latest joys as well as the frustrations of the daily grind. He has an open ear and cares about you, “casting all your cares upon Him, because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7 NAS).” Turn a deaf ear to the devil, and turn up the volume for God.

May 9

“Reflection”

Our lives show the reflection of whom, or what, hovers over us. Imagine peering down towards a crystal clear stream and seeing your own reflection. It is a little distorted by the babbling brook, but it is still your face. Suddenly you realize that one you dearly love is approaching; you notice now a second reflection in the water. It towers over yours, but you are not insulted. It is your love.

The world looks at our lives. Is there a reflection seen as one on still waters? “He leads me beside quiet waters (Psalm 23:2b NAS).” Our *Good Shepherd* is aware of the danger of turbulent waters for His sheep. We could be pulled down by undercurrents and swept away to destruction. The quiet waters create a quiet spirit and the opportunity to drink refreshment. Is peace and rest reflected in our lives?

If our lives are in the midst of churning waters, the Lord’s reflection is not visible. He is still hovering above, but the water is moving too fast to record His image. Jesus and His disciples were out on a lake boating. Fierce winds formed rushing waves, sweeping over their boat. Jesus slept while the disciples bailed water and feared for their lives. They woke him, crying out their fear of perishing! (Luke 8:22-24a NAS) “And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm (Luke 24b NAS).” Minutes earlier no reflection of Jesus could be seen in the waters. Now likely His outline shone on the surface of the lake. We want others to see His reflection, and we want Him to calm the raging storms of difficulty we endure. The disciples asked; He acted. Don’t forget the disciples were never alone, in the storm or stillness. Jesus dwelled with them.

May 10

“God’s Little Lamb”

The household pet quickly becomes a central part of the family in many homes, bringing pleasure to young and old. A faithful dog or cat is at your side giving unconditional love. Watching them romp and play brings laughter and joy. Those with a dash of mischief create problems mixed with interest. Our son, Lee, once owned a loyal dog named *Kenwood*. His *Husky* and *German-Shepherd* mix blended the strengths of both breeds. In a couple of occasions living arrangements made it difficult for having pets. So we became guardians of *Kenwood*; but he often roamed, discovering the location of his master. He may not have been a blood hound, but he had the nose of a tracker. *Kenwood* loved yard sales. Well, his version is frequently seen during gardening season. Signs are posted reading, *Pick Yourself*. He went in yards and picked up anything our son might want, dragging home tools of assorted shapes and sizes to surprise his master. Lee shares a story about once hearing a strange sound in the distance. Soon he observed *Kenwood* dragging a shovel on the pavement. I guess he could be described as a *kleptodogiac*! Another characteristic he displayed to Lee revealed his loving heart. If Lee experienced stress, *Kenwood* laid his head across Lee’s legs and showed he cared.

Did you know the lamb sacrificed each year at Passover by the Israelites often lived as the family pet? (Exodus 12:1-6). The busy family saw him grow, standing firmly on once-wobbly legs. They witnessed his growing appetite and stubborn independence. The lamb depended on them for everything; his care and protection rested in their hands. When the *Passover* observance approached, each member of the family eyed the lamb feverishly. They knew he must die; imagine their sorrow.

How could God ask for such a sacrifice? We must remember the reason for the *Passover* feast and worship. When God’s people were slaves in Egypt He said to Pharaoh, “Let My people go!” He refused God’s demands, and plague after plague fell upon the nation in God’s judgment. The final curse came in the form of the death of the first born in every Egyptian family, and even the firstborn animals of the land. The cries of sorrow rang out across the country. God’s people were instructed to kill their lambs, taking blood from the dead carcass and to apply it to the doorframes of their homes, where the roasted lamb sacrifices would be eaten. (Exodus 12:6-9).

Why were they commanded to smear blood on their homes? “And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt, (Exodus 12:13 NAS).” Their sacrificed lambs took the place of their firstborn. God provided a way for their deliverance. He provides for our salvation. He sent His firstborn Son, His only begotten Son, to become the *Lamb of God*. (John 1:36) He laid down His life on the altar of Calvary to become God’s perfect sacrifice, “but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19 NAS).” What does God ask in return? He desires us to live for Him, becoming living sacrifices (Romans 12: 1-2). It is our reasonable response to His sacrificial love.

May 11

“That’s Good”

Do you enjoy a good *corny* joke? I think we all need daily doses of laughter to shake up our weary souls. In the late 1960s the entertainment show *Hee-Haw* became a smashing success, leaving network producers shaking their heads. Their sophisticated tastes overlooked the common people and our need for humor. Reruns keep that dream alive.

God must have a sense of humor. Our escapades would be enough to make a grown man cry. He lovingly smiles and works in and through our foolishness to make us into the image of His Son. (Romans 8:28-29) Jesus often dealt with the questions directed to Him by His enemies by turning the tables on them, with a question as His response. I believe that the Lord likely grinned ear-to-ear as they walked away, caught in their own trap.

Hee-Haw boasted a cast of weekly professionals in their craft. All stops were pulled out to sign country music’s finest treasures straight from the *Grand Ole Opry*. The comedy of *Minnie Pearl* and *Archie Campbell* kept viewers in stitches. *Archie*’s routines normally followed a tested and tried pattern. He worked with one liners and a partner to bounce them off. Stories were told a sentence at a time with follow-up phrases: “That’s good! No, that’s bad. Oh, that’s bad. No, that’s good!” He cleverly twisted each story to keep you guessing. We need more people today like *Archie Campbell* and *Minnie Pearl*.

I have discovered a portion of scripture that *Archie* may have liked in the book of Ezra. The people of Jerusalem celebrated the rebuilding of the temple. (Ezra 3:10-13). Religious leaders sounded their trumpets. Cymbals crashed in worship and praise. God’s people sang in worship and thanksgiving to the Almighty God. Great shouts of joy filled the air because the foundation of God’s house became a reality. *That’s good!*

Seeing the work, the elders remembered the original temple built by King Solomon. They wept loudly in sorrow and regret. *That’s bad!* People in the crowd were left to form their own conclusions. “so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away (Ezra 3: 13 NAS).” Is this temple good or bad?

Confusion is no laughing matter. Do we confuse a lost and dying world by our reaction to life’s trials? Do they see joy and peace? *That’s good!* Do they see misery and no sign of hope? *That’s bad!* The Christian life is good to those who surrender to Jesus as Lord. To those who rebel against Him, it is seen as bad and foolishness. (I Corinthians 1:18)

Our days have trouble, sorrow and uncertainty. Bring out a dose of tonic, humor and laughter. “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones, (Proverbs17:22 NAS).” Leave them laughing and coming back for more.

May 12

“Honey Do”

Do you believe in keeping a *honey-do* list? If you do, is it followed or just held up on the refrigerator with a cute little magnet? Ladies can be very efficient at keeping lists. Maybe I should rephrase that. Ladies are very efficient at writing lists. I’m not always able to find mine after I write them. Nothing is more disgusting than taking the time to carefully walk through your house to make out a shopping list and later discover you left it at home.

Men are probably not too thrilled with our *honey-do* requests, but a list is less painful than nagging. They create new lists of their own, maybe not on paper, but tucked conveniently away in the back of their mind. It is filed under *round-to-it*. Ladies, don’t hold your breath. Will those chores ever get done? “Because of laziness the roof caves in, and because of negligent hands the house leaks (Ecclesiastes 10:18 HCS).” Maybe the best solution is to *let our fingers do the walking* through the yellow pages.

May 13

“Map It Out”

Do you map out your route before a planned vacation? Several travel clubs offer that service. Many frequently use Internet mapping sites found on search engines. For those who travel on the spur of the moment, a *GPS* tracking system takes all guess work out of your travel.

Our grandsons often ask for a map when they travel with us. Our fourth grandson, *Granny's little angel*, Alex gives his undivided attention to the unfolded map he holds and begins his strategy... “Where are we now?” “What highway is this?” Then he searches for our final stop and looks at all the options. It is a feeling of pride, seeing city signs he earlier read as pinpoint names on a map.

It is amazing Alex has the patience to work out the plans. He is our outdoorsman with red hair and a love for hunting, much like a red head in God's word, “When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents (Genesis 25:27 NAS).” Alex is an experienced deer hunter with successful trips to his credit, yet still only preteen age.

God maps out a plan for each of us and waits for us to ask His direction. “Thou wilt make known to me the path of life (Psalm 16:11a NAS).” Follow His clear guidance, “I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths (Proverbs 4:11 NAS).” Your final destination is Heaven; watch for His clearly marked directions, and enjoy your journey.

May 14

“Pack Rat Paradise”

With the excitement of the springtime season, many get an uncontrollable urge to do spring cleaning. I do not fall in that group, but members do have a large roster to unroll. Maybe you are a *VIP* and will make it to top of this year’s list. Spring cleaning in its purest form requires much more than buckets of soapy water, rags and scrub brushes. The biggest demand is not on your energy or time. It takes courage to openly proclaim to the world, “I am a **PACK RAT!**” How could this happen to me?

We hate to admit we have been lured into the addiction of hoarding, but it’s true. The selfish attitudes of our toddler years are still in control. One of the earliest words spoken is *mine!* We cling to things that are of no real importance to us, refusing to open the clenched fist in our hearts and let go.

We wrongly believe that there is fulfillment and security in abundance of things. The only lasting fulfillment and security is in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He gives us not an abundance of things, but the abundant life, “I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly (John 10:10 NAS).”

Shortly after our marriage in 1967, we moved from the northeast to the Deep South. We made that transition with only what could be held in the back seat and trunk of our 1961 Chevrolet Impala. We rented a cozy, two-bedroom, fully furnished house for a mere \$75 a month. As a new bride I tried to learn the disciplines of housekeeping. I discovered some litter in lower kitchen cabinets and cleaned the area well. A day or two later it reappeared. I called the problem to my husband’s attention, and his closer investigation revealed an intruder. He found small shreds of material left behind from a pack rat. He left fabric in exchange for food foraged from my kitchen. We terminated his career and life.

Clean out those closets and your garage, attic, or basement. Have a yard sale or donate items to a ministry-backed thrift store. It will be a liberating experience. We have divine instruction: “A time to keep, and a time to throw away (Ecclesiastes 3:6b NAS).” I can read your mind; you want that loop hole, *a time to keep*. Yes, there are times to keep special items, but usually they are few. Items holding family memories are priceless and should be preserved for future generations. That is not hoarding; it is an heirloom, to treasure. Most of our stash is just occupying space. If you are tempted to horde, check your yellow pages for a *Pack Rat’s Anonymous* nearest you.

May 15

“Repress, Recall, or Reject”

The subject of *repressed* memories is still under investigation. Some things are buried deep within our subconscious and may need to be revealed to bring healing. I believe that repressed memories can at times be a gift of God.

I have a very close friend who for most of her life suffered with a disabling fear of riding in cars. A few years ago doctors diagnosed her with dementia, and family admitted her to a very nice assisted care facility. After changes in medication, almost all dementia symptoms have vanished. I think she now only experiences *senior moments*, common to most of us in the over-fifty-five age bracket. The amazing thing is the dementia totally erased from her mind what caused her fear of traveling by car. If there is a chance to go anywhere, she is out the door!

We should use memories as a tool. We each need to *recall* all blessings, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8 NAS).” Such things will strengthen us and give us thanksgiving and peace.

Our memories also need a *reject* capability. I personally want to reject any lingering feelings of defeat from past failures. I cannot relive my past; I must concentrate on today. “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me (Psalm 51:3 NAS).” He has the power to wipe our slate clean. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me, (Psalm 51:10 NAS).” We are able to reject all knowing accusations of condemnation and regret. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1 NAS).”

The Lord prepares a future with hope and challenge. “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 3:12-14 NAS).” And, all of God’s people said, **AMEN.**

May 16

“Parallel Bars Panic”

Is your life a balancing act? Is it hard to stay focused and avoid falling? Do you have the flexibility, strength and balance needed to live life from atop the parallel bars? Most of us will admit it is hard to keep our priorities straight and to avoid falling flat on our faces.

Physical education, *Gym* class, in our schools used to include a very well balanced program in New York State. With so many cuts in spending it may be curtailed today. I am not athletic, do not have interest in sports, and do not have the coordination needed. I gain great benefits from a regular exercise routine, but that is not athletic competition.

My hours in gym class were pretty grim; climbing the rope extended from the ceiling or doing balancing demonstrations left me frustrated and embarrassed. One day I took it one step further. While on the parallel bars, I sprained my back. It caused a great deal of pain, and the remedy included a few days of bed rest, flat on my back. If that were not bad enough, it happened right before a school break! Ask any teenage girl how that feels. Our busy schedules and large number of responsibilities are more than we can balance upon our shoulders. We crumble under the load. There is an answer. Christ urges us, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33 NAS).” God understands the stress and burdens we carry and offers to be our efficiency expert. Go to Him, and He will help you with your daily planner.

May17

“Textile Turmoil”

Many established companies and areas of industry are vanishing from our horizon. In the area where we live, the textile industry once provided a substantial income and a solid retirement for wage earners. As the sun sets over the horizon, the textile industry is also going down daily. We trust our creator God and know He will bring the sunrise after the long night. As the textile business continues to downsize, we realize it may not return as the rising sun.

Solomon said “There is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9b HCS).” The first weaver was God, creating clothing for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 3:21) Luke tells us the story of *Lydia*, a successful woman in the textile business coming to know the Lord. (Acts 16:14) Another scripture reference sounds much like a newspaper headline in current times. “(Egypt’s) weavers will be dejected; all her wage earners will be demoralized (Isaiah 19:10 HCS).” If mills close doors and silence fills sprawling empty buildings, we can find our source of strength in God who formed us. “For it was You who created my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13 HCS).” **HE NEVER DROPS A STITCH.**

May 18

“Swine in the Spotlight”

The *Swine Flu* is not to be taken lightly. Lives have been lost, and cases are spreading across nation and state borders. Health officials are on high alert and an epidemic is feared. We are to take precautions regarding our own safety, keep informed of recent developments, and watch for common flu symptoms.

In the Bible, we see stories involving swine, usually in very negative terms. They were considered unclean to the Hebrew people, and even coming in contact with them made a person unworthy for worship in the house of the Lord. To be associated with swine in any way would be a black mark on a person’s character and reputation. In the well-known parable of the prodigal son, we see a life lunge into self-destruction, making one wrong decision after another. Let’s stand in the shadows of a young man and see how foolishly he wastes his life. He is ready to live it up, “Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me (Luke 15:12a NAS).” He was not willing to wait till after his father’s death. Our leading character had itchy feet, places to go and things to do.

The gracious father gave the younger son his portion, and *Act Two* begins. The man left as soon as he could get packed and got as far away as possible from father and any restraints. He had no thoughts of tomorrow or of his *money tree* being axed. In a far away land he wasted his resources. A definition of prodigal is wasteful. The father’s hard-earned legacy slipped right between his fingers. To make the situation worse, his environment offered no hope for improvement. The surrounding area experienced a severe famine. He could not expect generous handouts or even loans. He experienced real need, likely for the first time in his life. (Luke 15:13-14) Notice the wording in the opening of *Act Three*. “And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine (Luke 15:15 NAS).” It did not say he was invited, but *attached himself*, like a *leech*. He found a rock and crawled under. In disgust the land owner may have said, “If you stay here you have to work!” Our wanderer now literally faced starvation. He lived with swine and ate with swine. “And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him (Luke 15:16 NAS).”

As the curtain closes on this scene, our leading man faces reality. “But when he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger, (Luke 15:17 NAS).” In the next two verses he picks himself up, dusts himself off and begins his trek back home. Step by step, mile by mile, he begins a prepared speech to address to his father. He would not pussyfoot around the issue. He sinned. He felt unworthy to bear the family name. In our closing scene of *Act Four*, the father sees him off in the distance and runs breathlessly to embrace and kiss his runaway boy. The prepared speech of apology gets cut short by the father’s instructions to a servant. Go gather the best robes and sandals and a ring representing honor and authority. A feast of celebration would be given. In our terms the father implied, “I gave this son up as dead, never expecting to see him again. He lives! He was lost, but found his way back home! What a day!” For our finale we see our young man with memories of swine still embedded in his mind, eating the fatted calf. It is not too late; if you are in that far country living a defeated life, turn around. High tail it back home to our heavenly Father. He is waiting with open arms.

May 19

“Handicap Hurdles”

Do you know your *handicap*? No, I am not speaking of sports; I want you to recognize what holds you back in life. No one is peeking over your shoulder; this is a private self-examination. The word *handicap* is not politically correct today because we like to refer to our abilities, not *disabilities*. That is good because we may let our negatives outweigh positives. Taking a long honest look at our personal *handicaps* can be a positive thing if we follow God’s direction.

Handicaps are not only physical or mental. Even when our *handicaps* begin at birth, many of them can be overcome or removed today. Modern medicines working with up-to-the-minute technology can do wonders, opening the way to full and rewarding lives. *Handicaps* we often ignore or bury are emotional. They not only hold us back, they put a brick wall up in front of us. The types of *handicaps* are varied, some of our own making and others imposed on us by others. I’ll identify mine, while you do some honest self-talk about yours... I live with the *handicap of fear*. I live with it, but I do not give it power to take over the residence. It is not a welcome guest.

I will call it by its ugly name of fear and will not sugarcoat it with a more pleasant description of shyness. Fear has held me back in many ways, but he is not the power force he used to be. I know his source is the father of lies, the devil. I fight the battle and take more and more territory away from him with each conflict. My weapons are mighty and tested by time. (Ephesians 6:10-18) I can have the upper hand. “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5 NAS).” Fears can be reigned in and held captive. The final deliverance will come. “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me (Psalm 56:3-4 NAS)?” Jump the *handicap hurdles* with me; freedom is on the other side.

May 20

“What’s Your Shine?”

Many people when getting acquainted with someone will ask a question. “What’s your *sign*?” They refer to the zodiac, daily horoscope, astrology, which is forbidden by God. “And beware, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the hosts of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven (Deuteronomy 4:19 NAS).”

It is not harmless entertainment. Seeking the counsel of the creation, rather than the creator, is folly and rejection of God. “You are wearied with your many counsels; let now the astrologers, those who prophecy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you (Isaiah 47:13 NAS).” The following two verses explain they are unable to even deliver themselves. Maybe we should answer their question with a question... “What’s your *shine*?” We need the *shine* sent straight from above, even far above the stars others foolishly use to guide their lives. “And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:3 NAS).” When we lead the way to the Lord, we will have the *shine* of our Savior!

May 21

“Pop-Up”

There it is, persistently demanding your attention on the computer screen. It’s a *pop-up* advertisement. A bull drawn to the red cape of a matador could not be more annoyed. Yes, we do have some control over the *pop-up* menace, but it still carries a lot of clout. I saw a real clever one the other day; the corner of my screen revealed a *peel-down-here* tab. It looked pretty inviting as a small area opened before me.

Pop-ups do just as described, when you least expect them, they *pop up*. Here we go again. What is it now? We can ignore them and hope they go away, or we can use a blocker. If not, like a *jack-in-the-box*, they will quickly *pop up* everywhere. I know one *pop-up* we need to block securely. Our peace of mind is at stake. The accusations of Satan *pop up* when you let your guard down. He gets his kicks from dragging up all the muck and mire of our past and then drags us through. Sometimes his stabbing remarks are spoken so quickly we are unaware they *popped up*. On other occasions he pushes the automatic replay button, to *pop up* over and over and over... He earns his title of the accuser. “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night (Revelation 12:10 NAS).” Not only does he accuse us, he tries to convince God the accusations are true. Grab your weapon, the sword of God, His word; and destroy the accuser’s *pop-ups*. We hold the victory! “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1NAS).” Thumbs down to *pop-ups*.

“May 22”

“Here I Come”

If you remember the phrase, “Here I come to save the day,” you must admit you are dating yourself! *Mighty Mouse* made it his cartoon battle cry. I remember a personal connection with the television cartoon character back in the 1960s. In my teens, I visited in the home of my oldest sister and her family. We were in the living room and enjoying some quiet time after she tucked her two toddler-age children in bed. We assumed they were asleep. We were surprised to hear their three-year-old son, *Mark*, loudly calling out: “Here I come to save the day!” It is now a precious memory, but also a reminder that we all need someone to come to our aid and rescue us.

Children’s fairytales featured a prince charming or a brave knight who would charge in riding his white horse. Comic books have super heroes such as *Batman* and *Superman*, characters which are bigger than life. In the real world, we must reach out to our deliverer; He is just a prayer away. He far outranks *Mighty Mouse*; He is the *Mighty God*. He is *mighty* to save! “Who is this who comes from Edom, with garments of glowing colors from Bozrah, this One who is majestic in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength? It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save (Isaiah 63:1 NAS).” We can trust Him for our deliverance from sin and have confidence that He hears our prayers for salvation of others. “Here He comes to save the day!”

May 23

“Midnight Snack”

Do you raid the ice box in the middle of the night? What do you choose for a *midnight snack*? Many of us wake and feel pangs of hunger and make our way to the kitchen. If we know there are leftovers from supper, we go straight to our target, anxious for an extra serving. Stumbling around in the darkness, we try not to wake others. We find our snack and fill that empty spot in our rumbling stomach. Do you choose nutritional foods or a favorite dessert?

A sweet tooth can become an alarm clock, going off just as we settle down for the night. Should we push the snooze button, ignore our cravings, or jump out of bed and satisfy the desire? We may be wise to count sheep, or we'll count extra pounds on the scales. Our wakeup call could be from an inner hunger that only God can fulfill. “At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to Thee because of Thy righteous ordinances (Psalm 119:62 NAS).” Give Him thanks, and enjoy your *midnight snack* of meditation morsels.

May 24

“Sowing Wild Oats”

The older generation frequently remarks that a young person is just *sowing his wild oats*. Smiling, they brush it off, as if to say rebellion and shameful behavior is just a normal part of growing up. How sad, when you realize actions result in consequences; and they will reap what they *sow*. (Galatians 6:7) God does not think it is a laughing matter, no matter how young or old we may be. It is so serious, He sent His Son to die for us, to free us from the penalty of death. (Romans 6:23). A young person does not have to give in to youthful desires. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments. Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee (Psalm 119:9-11 NAS).” The Psalmist spoke wisely and with a burning desire to please God. When we *sow*, let it be God’s word. “And the one on whom seed was sown on good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matthew 13: 23 NAS).” That’s a bumper crop we all want to reap.

May 25

“Glow”

Have you ever seen an expectant woman with a pregnancy *glow*? Joy springs up from her womb and radiates from her face. Light seems to shine from her deepest spirit. As her body form changes, her facial expressions take on new character, showing the honor of bearing a child. Not only women looking forward to their blessed event have such blessings to share. We all may share their rare gift of joy.

“And they shall come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the bounty of the Lord-over the grain, and the new wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; and their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again (Jeremiah 31:12 NAS).” The gifts of God’s abundance are as His gift of the fruit of His Spirit. Filled with His goodness we are radiant, reflecting His glory. No cosmetic product can create such a warm *glow*; open your heart to Christ and you can light up a world of darkness.

May 26

“V. I. P.”

Are you a *V. I. P.*? Sure you are. We all are; we just never realized it before. No, I don't mean a very important person, though you are. I mean there are two types of dominant *personalities: volcanic* and *iceberg*. Either we are on fire for the Lord or our hearts can turn as cold as ice. Do we warmly greet others with the love of Christ, or do we give them the cold shoulder?

If getting close to us gives the warmth of snuggling up to a cozy fire, needy people will be drawn to God's love. We don't want them experiencing frost bite and freezing up, just as they are ready to turn to the source of love and life. They need our best friend, Jesus. We want our lives to touch others in such a profound way that they realize how important they are. Each truly is a *very important person*, so important God sent His Son to die for them. (John 3:16-17) Maybe it is time for each of us to rekindle our flames of love. The more our love grows for Him, the more it will grow for others. We may erupt and spread His love across the path to eternal life.

May 27

“Irreconcilable Differences”

We have all heard the final decision, “irreconcilable differences,” marking the end of a marriage. A judge signs his name to official documents; and two people, once pledged as one, separate. They each try to pick up the broken pieces and say goodbye to a love they once knew. Divorce is a reality; and it leaves its mark on individuals, families and society. There are many contributing factors, but “irreconcilable differences” leads the list.

The word irreconcilable is such a tragic word. It implies any hope of agreement and settling disputes is impossible. If partners truly have tried through counseling to be reconciled, they must feel defeated. Praise God; we are not permanently separated from God by “irreconcilable differences!” Jesus closed the gap; and our great counselor, the Holy Spirit, healed all our wounds! (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) Not only are we reconciled to the heavenly Father, we are given a ministry to reconcile others! Hear the plea, “ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:20-21 NAS).” We can leave our lives of defeat behind and put to death our fears of “irreconcilable differences!”

May 28

“Oops, a Stain”

Don't you hate it when you spill something on that favorite article of clothing? It seems it usually happens on a brand-new outfit. *Heloise* is known for her helpful hints. I'm sure she has a lengthy list of problem stains such as: coffee, tea, spaghetti sauce, Kool-Aid, mustard, and many more. Blood stains are very difficult to remove. Today, with DNA testing often in the news, we have learned that even if we can't see the stain, it is lurking.

Do you want to hear something that totally goes against all logic? Blood is also a stain *remover*. The blood of Jesus *removes* the stains of sin and cleanses our lives. That is awesome. “And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed by blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:2 2 NAS).” Do you need more proof? “And one of the elders answered, saying to me, these who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come? And I said to him, my lord, you know. And he said to me, these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13-14 NAS).” The Lord's stain *remover* will never be replaced by a *new-and-improved* product. Your life does not have to continue to show sins of the past. His supply never runs out. Let Him *whisk* those stains away.

May 29

“Tuning Up”

Have you ever sat in front of a live orchestra or band and listened as they *tuned up* their instruments? It's usually not a very pleasant sound, but in a few minutes, glorious music fills the room. I have never learned to play a musical instrument. In fact, my music teacher at school once told me I could not take lessons to play an instrument. I could not catch on to reading music. I've always wished I could play and confess at times felt a little envious of those who did.

Well, not long ago I heard something that really got my attention. We are urged to avoid using our mouths tearing people down by sharing gossip. (James 3:9-10) The speaker went on to explain our mouths are designed to be *instruments* of praise to our magnificent God. Wow, I can play an instrument, and you can, too. “I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart; I will tell of all Thy wonders. I will be glad and exult in Thee; I will sing praise to Thy name, O Most High (Psalm 9:1-2 NAS).” Let's *tune up* our instruments and learn to praise God in perfect harmony.

May 30

“Inside Out”

How do pieces of tissue end up in our laundry? They seem to hide in the deepest corners of our pockets and jump out during the wash cycle. Didn't we turn the pockets inside out first? The mess before our eyes reveals we must have skipped that important step. Another time pockets are turned inside out is visible proof of no cash at hand. At such times, we do not even have coins to drop on our dresser at the end of the day. Pockets have been used to hold trinkets and even small boys' frogs or garden snakes. Yes, pockets are handy storage areas for many things, from tissues to critters. We prefer to pull out cash on hand.

What happens if you tear a hole in your pocket? You lose the contents, just like carrying a ripped bag. “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes (Haggai 1:6 KJV).” We often say money slips between our fingers; truly, it often vanishes. God drew attention to a problem. His people focused on their homes and neglected His house. Their selfishness resulted in loss of buying power. Maybe it is time to turn all our pockets inside out and take inventory.

May 31

“Mouth Full”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full!” Most of us can remember hearing those words of correction. Children just can’t wait to speak. They talk with a mouth full of food. They forget all about good manners until a parent sets them straight.

There is an exception to the rule. If our mouth is full of God’s word, we have a lot to talk about. It can be chewed, digested and also spoken. Our mouth can never be too full of His sweet truth. *Talk with your mouth full.*

When our mouth is full of praise, we will naturally want to speak to Him and about Him. “Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day (Psalm 71:8 NKJ).” What a delicious recipe. Praise, seasoned with glory, would please the fussiest eaters. When our mouth is filled with that holy blend, words spoken to others would bring grace and healing. *Don’t forget; talk with your mouth full!*

June 1

“Lost and Found”

Lost and Found is a school storage area holding an assortment of sweaters and jackets, lunch boxes, notebooks and backpacks. The child must describe their missing articles and then claim them. To me personally, the words hold a much deeper meaning. One Christmas season, at age four, my mother and sisters, along with an aunt and cousin, went together to a shopping center. We did some shopping and the children excitedly sat on a store *Santa's* lap for picture taking. I'm sure my family shared details, but I vividly recall this experience. My mother got busy looking through clothes hanging on racks, and I played below under the clothes. Then I realized they left me there alone. They were gone.

My mother, aunt and the others did not notice that I did not leave with them. They went on to another store in the shopping center to do more shopping. Trying to rationalize now is easy. Christmas is a very busy, joyful time. They were in the midst of shoppers, likely talking, laughing and window shopping. I felt afraid, alone and *lost*. Nearby I saw a sales counter with an opening underneath, probably for the storage of shopping bags and boxes. I crawled inside and cried. A sales clerk found me and began asking questions. At that time, there were no *AMBER Alerts*, not even *911*. My help came from a very kind clerk who cared. She used old-fashioned common sense and stood me on top of the counter. From there I could be spotted by someone who might be looking for me, and I could also look for my mother in the crowd. I think she asked what color coat my mother wore. My eyes were searching the crowded big room. I caught sight first of my aunt. The clerk asked if she was my mother, and I said yes! At that moment she would do. Her familiar face made me feel safe and rescued. I'm sure the rest of my family gathered there by then, anxiously looking for me. They quickly retraced their steps and found me. *Lost and Found* described me!

For a young girl, the very traumatic experience left some emotional scars. I have always lived with an inner fear of getting *lost*. As a Christian, the words *lost and found* are very literal. I once wandered aimlessly and, like sheep without a shepherd, I needed someone to find me. My Savior, Jesus found me. (Matthew 18:10-12)

June 2

“Rainy Days”

Rainy days get a bad rap. Just the sound of those words often paints a picture of gloom. In days gone by, before clothes dryers, *rainy days* were a source of real frustration. Large families with piles of dirty laundry would have to postpone washday. For children it meant being shut in the house, restless, with their nose pressed up against the window pane. A farmer knows he needs to be out in the field; nervously, he keeps checking the latest forecasts. Yes, I can see why a *rainy day* is not always desirable. Even then, it gives you a good excuse to curl up with a favorite book.

In times of drought, a *rainy day* is a source of jubilation. Rain becomes the motivation for prayers of gratefulness. There will be *rainy days*, just as those with sunshine. We need both. What was that old saying, something about *into every life some rain must fall*? When the rain becomes a storm, having torrential rains and flooding accompanied by damaging winds, we have cause for alarm. Jesus teaches us a valuable lesson about the foundation we choose to build our lives upon. (Matthew 7:24-27) If we construct upon temporary things, we will collapse like the house built on sand. If our decision for the foundation is Rock, the *Rock of Ages*, we will stand firmly in life's storms. One very important fact found in this scripture is a real eye opener. We all go through storms. They are not just a punishment for the wicked, though at times they face God's judgment. We as believers are strengthened through our storms, just as the eagle flies best when fighting the winds. The next time the forecast predicts rain, don't repeat the words of *Karen Carpenter*, “*rainy days and Mondays always get me down.*” Instead borrow the phrase from another old song. “*Let a smile be your umbrella.*”

June 3

“Companion”

We are surrounded by a world of lonely people. Often the most alone are those in the midst of a crowd. It is tragic that they may leave for work each morning by exiting a large apartment building. They can hear the sounds of families rising and getting ready for a busy day. The ride to the job may involve public transportation such as a bus or commuter train. Commuters slide in next to another living, breathing person; and yet each live worlds apart. If our travelers drive personal vehicles, they are still surrounded by hundreds of people who are all so near, and so far away. On the job, most are just a social security number with a face that clocks in and later clocks out. In-between, they faithfully put in their eight hours on the job. At their place of employment, they usually have acquaintances, but may have no true friends. Would anyone even miss them if they were gone? Beneath the mask of contentment lies a lonely person. The work routine is repeated for five or six days. Then comes the weekend, the time they dread the most.

Many may see a few people at the store or running errands but that leaves them to face more lonely hours alone. Surely those others would soon be meeting friends or loved ones? They only know they will return to four walls for forty-eight hours. Those who mingle do not understand the emptiness of those *shut in and shut out* by the world. The lonely feel there is no way out of their emptiness and isolation. Possibly they consider taking the chance of pushing out from their comfort zone to visit a community center or a local church. They would feel so out of place; they do not know anyone there. Some of the most alone are those *shut in* because of illness or a disability. If at home alone or in an assisted-living facility, a nursing home or hospital, they may be starved for companionship. We would never think of letting them starve physically. Why do we ignore their hunger for a person’s touch?

What is a *companion*? It may be a simple word but it covers a large area of meeting needs. It could be as simple as sitting by someone’s side while they share old memories. Maybe you take a short stroll side by side. The *companion* may be as special as a mate for life. You and a *companion* become friends and simply enjoy each other’s company. Together you share only moments or hours. If that *companion* becomes your marriage partner, that closeness lasts a lifetime.

Where do we find such a *companion*? Do we place an ad in a personal column in a newspaper or maybe search an Internet site? Do we pray? Do we pray? There is one who wants to be your *companion*. He wants to console you, to comfort you in your loneliness. The Holy Spirit of God desires to walk alongside of you. Jesus said He would not leave us alone, like lonely orphans. Widows and orphans were helpless. (John 14:16-18, 26/ John 16:7) Do you realize that God shared *companionship* with Adam in the Garden of Eden and with His friends Abraham and Enoch? He and God enjoyed walks together. One day they were walking and God just took him on along home with Him. (Genesis 5:23-24) Jesus chose His twelve disciples as constant *companions*. (Luke 6:13) He also experienced the pleasure of friends from Bethany. (Luke 10:38-42) As God created Adam, He said it is not good for man to remain alone. (Genesis 2:18) He then created Eve to be Adam’s helpmate and *companion*. God in His goodness will provide *companions*. We can do our part by being a *companion* to those in need. Give someone your handshake or hug today.

June 4

“His Eye is on the Sparrow”

Music is nearly as consistent in my life as breathing. *George Beverly Shea* sings the classic *His Eye is on the Sparrow* like no one else. It is a song of faith, encouragement and hope. We cannot survive without all three. Missing out on that strength cripples us and life becomes meaningless. Jesus' teachings through parables are such a blessing. He knows our deepest needs and keenly used the best way to get His points across. Simple stories directed attention of listeners to hidden truths about the kingdom of God. His story about the birds contains pearls of great price, “Look at the birds of the air; that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they (Matthew 6:26 NAS)?” Amen and Amen! It is such a tender illustration of God's provision for His winged creatures and mankind as well. He did not end His work of creation. He now sustains all life. We securely rest in the best of hands.

As a young girl, I often walked up a long dirt-and-gravel road in my small neighborhood. *The Gulf Road* looked dark and mysterious because the trees along the sides kept it well shaded. Curious children took walks, explored, or picked wild leeks to take home to our mothers. My best friend, *Carol*, and I often went there on a special mission. We carefully made a clearing on a side of the roadway hillside, and with small hands, we made a bird's cemetery. Whenever we discovered dead birds, we would bring them to the burial place and give them their funerals. We carefully placed wild flowers upon their graves. I do not know of the scientific classification for those flowers, but to us they were called *Jack-In-The-Pulpit*. Large drooping, white blossoms were appropriate. If you gently lifted the petals to peer inside, you saw a small section erect in the center, like a preacher standing in his pulpit. The flowers made the solemn services complete.

Jesus may have been smiling down on two girlfriends who cared for His lifeless birds. A part of my current morning time prayers includes reading hymns. Several years ago I began gathering a collection of old church hymnals. The oldest classic publishing date is listed as 1896. Beautiful verses of praise set the mood for prayer and worship. I check dates when pieces were published or written, and it amazes me how long these great hymns have been preserved and handed down. Some were written in the 1600s. Their messages are fresh and meaningful in our times. As I read hymns penned by *Martin Luther*, *Fanny Crosby* or *Charles Wesley*, I feel like I am standing on holy ground. That is our benediction.

June 5

“Miracle Grow”

Are you an overachiever, a perfectionist? Do you always push past your limits and stretch your comfort zones? In elementary school, back in the 1960s, our grading system ran as follows:

E= Excellent/ S=Satisfactory/ N= Needs Improvement/ or U=Unsatisfactory.

My grades, as I remember, were mostly *S*. It seems there were notes on my report cards which read: “Pam would do better if she would apply herself.” I learned something interesting about *E for Excellent*. In my way of thinking, *excellent* meant perfect. Dictionary definitions about *excellence* include: *having good qualities, in high degree, superior in worth or value, excels*. Do you *excel* in anything? I don't know if an overachiever is a perfectionist, but I don't think there is much difference. My mind turned to overachievers when I saw something from my living room window. There is shrubbery in our front yard. It is full and green, even in our cold *Alabama* winter months. Something drew my eye to the bush. One branch with leaves stands much taller than all the rest.

The logical thing to do is trimming it back. I almost hate to see that done. It is an overachiever. It set its goals high, and reached them. Yes, it is the center of attraction. Can we grow like that, really stretch ourselves spiritually? I understand *Type A* personalities are always pushing, setting high goals for themselves or their business. A favorite ladies' Sunday school class teacher once shared a special verse with us. It may explain our growth, or lack of it... “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:17-19 NAS).” Yes, that person is rooted and grounded in love. That is the ultimate *Miracle-Grow* product. Be that overachiever.

June 6

“Pity or Praise”

What will your reaction be when trouble comes? It may show up on your doorstep tomorrow or be lurking in the darkness around the next corner. It is packaged in many different circumstances, and you cannot simply mark it *return to sender*. Our true character is tested and revealed on the stage of life. There are no dress rehearsals. I firmly believe the old saying holds true, that trouble and problems *make you or break you*. Do you know we have a choice as to how we will respond? Even if our first impulse is panic, it does not have to be our last.

Confession is good for the soul, and I confess that I am naturally a complainer. That is not a pretty word, and *pity* is its closest friend. We complain because something goes against the grain. We have been *dealt a bad hand*. Life has been unkind, so we drown in *self-pity* and *grumble*. That last word is even harder to swallow than complain. “Do all things without complaining and disputing (Philippians 2:14 NKJ).” Remember that group led by Moses out of the bondage of Egypt. Were they singing his praises? No, they *grumbled*, murmured and wanted to hightail it back to Egypt. (Exodus 17:1-3) Do I want to be remembered that way? No, I choose to keep working on that weakness with God's help.

Have you known people who suffered great loss and repeated tragedy and yet radiate peace? Likely, we can think of one or more. Their choice is to trust God, not to blame Him or others. “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet and He will make me walk on my high hills (Habakkuk 3:18-19 NKJ)!” It is amazing; the writer, like *Old Mother Hubbard*, went to the cupboard and found it bare. The crops were a failure. He found no meat on the table and hope seemed lost. Did he *grumble*? No, *praise* and rejoicing were the fruit of his lips. I want to choose *praise* and walk on those mountain heights. Just imagine the view.

June 7

“Grandpa’s Magnifying Glass”

I never grew out of my childhood name of *Pammy Sue* to *Grandpa Ford*. I remember when very little bouncing on his knee, while he cheerfully sang *Home again, Home again, Jiggidy Jig’!* There were frequent times of playing checker games with all of his grandchildren. Our *Grandpa* used his talents as a craftsman, weaving cane seats in chairs and constructing wood-craft items such as a rooster weather vane. I remember his fondness of honey, fresh from the honeycomb. He lived in devotion to *Grandma*, his bride of sixty-five years at the time of her death. *Grandpa* enjoyed the peaceful times of rocking in a favorite chair on the back porch. A cherished memory I now recall is of *Grandpa* sitting in his favorite living room chair, reading his Bible. He lived to ninety-one years of age. For several years, he could no longer read the small print. So he read the scriptures with a large *magnifying glass*. In my family photos, I have a snapshot of him with Bible and *magnifying glass*. It is also in safe deposit, hidden in my mind with other cherished memories. My desire is to always be as dedicated to Gods' word. Open my eyes, Lord. (Psalms 119:18)

June 8

“Easily Offended”

It is said that some people *wear their heart on their sleeve*, making them extra vulnerable. If our heart is exposed, it becomes an easy target. Attacks will come and sadly often from those who are closest to us. In our homes, we will say things to those we love that cut deep. We would never think of treating outsiders that way. If the *home is our castle*, we may be worthy of banishment to solitary confinement in the dungeon. Man always runs into trouble holding his tongue. We continue to let it out of the cage too often.

As a very young girl, I developed a speech impediment, a very noticeable lisp. Today if I am overtired, it sometimes returns. I routinely pronounced the *s* sounds more like *th*. I took speech classes in elementary school and again briefly in junior high to correct the problem. The speech teacher in my very early years said to think of my tongue as a *snake* behind my teeth. Then when I hissed, guess what happened? There was the *s* sound I needed. She may have not realized how true it is. The tongue is compared to a *snake* in scriptures. It holds a poison just as deadly as venom. (James 3:7-10) Not only do we need to be more careful about what we say, but also to learn not to be *offended* so easily. Many times things are said in jest, but we take them seriously. As young people say: *Lighten up. Chill out.* An extra place to turn for help when oversensitive is God's word. “Great peace have they who love Your law; nothing shall offend them or make them stumble (Psalms 119:165 AV).” Don't wear your heart on your sleeve. Tuck it safely away. God will guard it.

June 9

“God’s Bouquet”

There is a special feeling of kinship when we discover we have things in common with those we meet. It is like an instant bond. Maybe we share the same birth date, and if it is the same year, that is a bonus. Another piece of information is your birthplace or where you grew up. If someone says they are from *Syracuse, New York*, my ears perk up. We were once members of a church in *central Florida* with a large number of *snowbirds* in the congregation each winter. We would often greet each other warmly and share where we were from. The icebreaker drew us closer together. See how much we have in common?

Adopted children are quick to compare notes. Another thing easily discussed is a person’s occupation. If it filled your days and another worked in the same field, you understand each other. People like to talk about their families. You have children? That is wonderful; me, too. You are a grandparent? Welcome to the club. Those who have served in the military have a relationship with each other that is beyond description. They have so much in common, even if they served in different branches of the armed forces. These are all positive links, and the best thing you can share is a personal relationship with Jesus. You have not just made a friend; you met a sister or brother.

Did you know that you feel an extra closeness to people that share the same bad experiences? It's true; you feel comfortable with people who have gone through the same trials as you. Some examples are sickness, divorce, the loss of a loved one, being fired from your job, financial loss, possibly even destroyed homes by fire or a natural disaster. These people really understand what you have gone through. As military veterans may say, “They have been in the trenches.”

I have something in common with the Lord Jesus. In scriptures, He has many beautiful names that describe His character and His role. We run into the arms of the *Good Shepherd*, find fulfillment as He is the *Bread of Life*; and He quenches our thirst as the *Living Water*. I am so happy to say that Jesus and I are both a part of *God’s Bouquet*. He is beautifully described as the *Rose of Sharon* and the *Lily of the Valley*. (Song of Solomon 2:1). How do I share that description with Jesus? My mother told me at my birth the nurses in the hospital nicknamed me *Rosebud* because of the shape of my lips. My birthday is in the month of May, and the flower of the month is *Lily of the Valley*. God loves flowers. That is plain to see each spring with the colorful display of wild flowers. I must give first place to the state of *Texas*. Consider today what you have in common with others, and even with Jesus. He and you both have the same Father. (Luke 11:2) As believers, we will live in the same city, the New Jerusalem. One day when we meet Him face to face, we will discover more.

June 10

“Clear as the Nose on Your Face”

Don't you feel silly when you are searching desperately for something and it suddenly appears right in front of your eyes? Your eyeglasses were discovered on top of your head! Do you know what is really frustrating? You find a missing item exactly where it needs to be. Admittedly, it is in desperation where we look last. My husband's famous words are repeated often in our home, "You'll find it when you're not looking for it." As *Gary Cooper* would say, "Yep!"

Bookstores and library shelves are filled with books on self-help, psychology and professional advice. For answers to personal problems and broken relationships, people grasp at straws. We need help and seek solutions. Maybe we confidently turn to family or friends. At times, hurting men and women are too ashamed to confide in anyone. So an author who claims to have all the answers tucked away between the front and back covers is a *safe* choice. The obvious can be invisible to us, and we are just clueless to reality. Sometimes we just need someone to lovingly point it out to us.

God asks: "Can you hear me now?" Are we listening? "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely and in truth. He will fulfill the desires of those who reverently and worshipfully fear Him; He also will hear their cry and will save them (Psalm 145:18-19 Amplified Bible)." God asks: "Can you see me now?" I am right here waiting for you to confide in Me. Don't refuse His counsel. He invites you into His private chambers.

June 11

“Adventures in Paradise”

Let’s take a paradise adventure. In the early 1960s, *Adventures in Paradise* became one of my favorite television programs. It focused on a schooner captain’s exciting life, taking viewers along on *Tahiti* sailing adventures. The episodes placed a dream in my mind to one day take a cruise, traveling with sails caught in the prevailing winds.

In that era *Hawaiian* clothing, luau parties, and the limbo rock became the rage. My older sister, *Lauree*, and I, along with my best girlfriend, *Carol*, planned a garage-*luau* teen party. I might recommend that all teenagers be given that opportunity and responsibility. The organization of a party can be pretty difficult. We earned the money for the tropical refreshments by babysitting jobs. We made *Hawaiian leis* for each invited guest, using assorted colorful, fragrant tissues, stringing them like flowers one at a time with needle and thread at our kitchen table. The three of us wore bright print *muumuu* dresses. We proudly created a memorable *paradise adventure*.

My husband and I are now friends of a young married couple at church. They have a *true paradise adventure* to share. They chose a tropical *Hawaiian paradise* location to hold their marriage ceremony. They will cherish the romantic island setting always. As great as any *paradise* party or trip could be, they could never compare to the ultimate *adventure* one man received. He needed to only receive the gift and trust the giver. He felt unworthy for any special treatment, and yet he would soon experience an *adventure* of faith. Jesus said they would be together in *paradise*. (Luke 23:39-43) Do you feel the gentle breezes rustling your hair? Take a deep breath of the salty air. Palm trees are swaying and you are there.

June 12

“Evacuation Route”

Life in the *Sunshine State* is not always a vacation paradise. Even there residents have to face the reality of nature. You take the bad with the good, wherever you live. In this case that means the possibility of hurricanes. In recent years, *Florida* dealt with the fury of many, their power and destruction embedded in memories. In a storm’s path real estate is leveled; communities and their people are scarred. When the hurricane warnings were issued, the call rang out: *Evacuation Mandatory*. The Emergency Management authorities prepare *evacuation routes*, marking streets and highways properly. If residents and tourists would follow the directions of authorities, they could leave the danger and flee to safety.

Problems always develop when *evacuation* is ordered. Many people underestimate the seriousness of the storm’s threat. They decide to stay put, hunker down, and ride out the storm. It can mean the loss of life or serious injuries. Another problem surfaces by those who do *evacuate*, as they face critical decisions of what to take with them and what they must leave behind. We are often unaware of the *tight grip* possessions have on us. At the approach of a hurricane, people are forced to meet this issue head on.

In the spiritual realm, a force more powerful than a hurricane is lurking. Sin, evil, and temptations are growing, building, gaining strength as they approach. Do we have to see the destruction? Do we need to have our lives leveled, bear the scars forever? No! God freely gave us His *evacuation route*. He made a way of escape. (1Corinthians 10:13) The choice is ours, stay where we are or flee to safety. Will we take seriously the seriousness of sin? Can we see it as God sees it, leading to death, an eternal separation from Him for those outside of Christ? To Christians, will we face the reality that sin causes a break in our intimate fellowship with the Lord and a loss of fruit bearing? Or, as those who decide to take their chances and sit out the hurricane, will we choose to *dig in our heels* and remain in the approaching storm of discipline and judgment?

Okay, if we do take the provided way of escape, what about our baggage? We are told to cast away our sin, anything that weighs us down in our race ahead. (Hebrews 12:1) Christ tells us, those who leave all behind will gain eternal life. We are also told not to look back. (Luke 9:62) Our way of escape is always there and is always open. It is never stopped or blocked due to a traffic jam, as *evacuation routes* often are. So do not face the powerful storms of life alone. As hurricanes are named alphabetically, our way of escape is ***J E S U S, Alpha and the Omega, A-Z.***

June 13

“Bad Taste in Your Mouth”

Our taste buds normally work very well. We are quick to recognize a food that is salty, sweet, spicy or sour. Many of us like the sensation of that sweet taste way too often. Sometimes the characteristics are blended like in a sweet-and-sour oriental food or a trail mix that includes salty nuts with sweet chocolate bits. My understanding is that our sense of smell greatly influences the ability to taste. A friend shared that she had lost most of both. Do you like sour foods? My oldest sister, *Donna*, often cut lemons in half, sucking out the juice. It just about makes me pucker thinking about it. Sour foods can be *bitter* and hard to swallow.

I have heard stories about the frequent use of castor oil many years ago. I think people used it as a cure-all treatment, taken for whatever ails you. The *bitter taste* resulted in children avoiding it whenever possible. It leaves a *bad taste* in your mouth. We want to find something fast, anything to get rid of that *bitter taste*. If we try so fast to remove a *bitter taste* from our mouth, why are we so slow to remove *bitterness* from our hearts? Often people hang onto that for dear life. A grudge, withholding forgiveness, leads to *bitterness*. It takes up residence within and settles in for the duration. We must learn to get rid of it the instant it shows up. Quickly find something to replace it, as we usually get rid of a *bitter taste* in our mouth with a sweet and refreshing taste. The best thing to fight off a *bitter taste* in our hearts is the perfect blend of love and forgiveness. “And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him (Luke 17:4 NKJ).” God’s family recipe brings joy.

June 14

“Comin’?”

As we read of Jesus choosing His twelve disciples, the calling began with an open invitation to Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew. (Mark 1:17) Jesus asked them to *come* and follow Him. Later He extended another personal request to *come* together in a quiet place for rest. (Mark 6:31) In an encounter with Jesus, a man seeking answers questioned what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. (Mark 10:17-21) He also heard a personal call from the Lord, to *come* and follow Him.

Follow me now to a place of commitment. I believe this is the line drawn in the sand. Jesus spoke: “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me (Luke 9:23 HCS)” To the thirsty he gave this message: “If anyone is thirsty, he should come to Me and drink (John 7:37-38 HCS).” As we have walked through these words of scripture, God offered each of us His personal invitation to *come*. Will we accept?

At age two, our second grandson, *Matthew, Granny’s Little Man*, always wanted others to stay with him. As his parents would be getting ready to take him somewhere, he had a regular reaction. He would turn towards others with twinkling eyes and excitedly say “Comin’?” That is Jesus’ question, “Comin’?” Let's not disappoint Him.

June 15

“All that Glitters Isn’t Gold”

Do you have the luxury of owning a large collection of *gold* jewelry: dazzling gems and dangling bracelets? Most of us have only a few authentic costly pieces, an engagement-ring-and-wedding-band set and maybe earrings and necklace chains. We settle for costume jewelry that also sparkles in the light, though it does not have the clarity. *Cubic Zirconia* in recent years came to be easily recognized by us after advertising on television shopping networks. The old commercial slogan for ladies hair coloring, *only her hairdresser knows for sure*, remains true. Now we can say of a lady dripping in diamonds and *gold*, *only the shoppers networks know for sure*.

Trained eyes can recognize diamonds from paste jewelry and high-carat *gold* from *gold* plated, which will tarnish. In *gold* rush days, prospectors were easily tricked with fool’s *gold*. Their disappointment must have been overwhelming. They would get new supplies and eagerly head back into the hills to try again. They held high hopes of one day finding the mother lode and striking it rich. *Gold* is mentioned many times in the Bible. You might be surprised to learn where it is first found, the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:11-12). We know it is also at the back of the Good Book where the exciting description of Heaven’s streets of *gold* is found. (Revelation 21:21)

There is a fascinating story recorded in II Chronicles. It is really sad when you read between the lines. Do you remember all of the riches displayed in Solomon's Temple and Palace in Jerusalem? As you read the very detailed descriptions, you learn that *gold* showed up everywhere. It must have been a dazzling site to behold. Scripture passages explain that Israel used very little silver because to the people it appeared as common as stones. The nation rejected God and lived in rebellion. As a consequence, they fell into the hands of their enemies. The treasures of the temple and palace were taken as plunder. (II Chronicles 12:9-11) The king of Egypt took control of the treasures including *gold shields* made by King Solomon. The current reigning king, Rehoboam, replaced them with *bronze shields*. They were brought out for temple worship, temporarily, in God's presence. The shields were then safely placed in the armory of the royal escorts. They were not stored away because they were of great value. Bronze is a poor substitute for the precious *gold*. It could be they were stored out of sight to keep them away from close inspection. These newer shields were not displayed with pride and honor. In contrast, with shame they were used only as inexpensive substitutes.

What about our lives? Where is the radiance upon a face from one who once walked with the Lord? Has it been replaced with artificial light masked on a face of someone just playing church? Our *golden* shields of faith are still available. Let's not keep them in storage like fine china. Raise them high, and the reflection will be seen in believer’s lives. *All that glitters isn’t gold*, but as children of The King, we do not need to settle for junk jewelry or inferior shields of protection.

June 16

“Angel with a Beard”

Two little words are dreaded by all: *car trouble*. Yesterday, outside of the bank, my *Sebring* refused to start. It decided to take a sit-down strike and only made irritating clicking sounds each time I turned the ignition key. Nobody likes to be stranded with a car breakdown. I freely admit to being a member of the weaker sex. I am totally clueless about vehicle maintenance or problems. In desperation, I called my husband on the cell phone. After hearing my description of my ailing car’s symptoms, he said it sounded like it could be a bad battery. He said to check the battery terminal’s connections and call him back. I did not even know where the lever was to pop open the hood. Discovering the latch, I tapped the terminals with my small flashlight and made my next call. I tried to start the car again; it still would not start. We discussed my options: I could call AAA and get towed home or go to an auto parts store located next to the bank and ask them to check my battery. If I bought a battery, the car still might not start because I may need an alternator. Feeling frustrated, I decided to walk to the parts store. Taking the stressful stroll I thought, *alright, Lord, You are giving me a story* and mumbled the words out loud. I felt very thankful that I broke down on a pretty day with a place to seek help so close by.

Inside the parts store, a clerk said they do not usually go to check on vehicles. He would see if anyone could go to my car. An elderly man at the counter heard my problem. He said he owned a set of jumper cables and would try to start my car. His good news provided hope. He met me back at my car, and he tried to jumpstart the vehicle with his emergency jumpstart kit. He discovered that his unit needed to be recharged. It could not charge my battery, which he felt needed to be replaced anyway. He refused my offer of money for his help and said his wife did not even know how to pump her own gas. He showed genuine kindness and generosity to a perfect stranger.

I walked back to the parts store, ready to buy a battery. The helpful stranger already did so much for me, but to my surprise he returned to the store. He went in with me to be sure I got the help I needed. The management decided on a workable plan of action. Someone from the staff would drive to my car and use jumper cables to get my car started. I could then drive to the parking lot of the parts store and have a new battery installed. Mission accomplished! Today I am richer for having met such a kind man. Yes, he could possibly be an angel with a beard.

June 17

“Construction Zones”

As I drive down a busy interstate I often see warning signs ahead: *Construction, Reduce Speed. Merge Into Left Lane. Right Lane Ends In ¼ Mile.* Construction is such an annoying waste of our time. It slows us down and makes our way too narrow. Roadwork is so frustrating. It seems the highways are always under construction. Yes, I know they need repairs, but must it happen when I am on the highway? Why can't little elves mysteriously come and do all the work when nobody sees? Alright, I am being ridiculous, just grip the wheel and slow down...Be patient, follow the vehicle ahead. The construction is not forever. This work area will end a short distance ahead.

I realize that I become just as frustrated and impatient about the *construction zones* in my life. Yes, there is *construction* within, below the surface, in my life and yours. Why is this *construction* happening in me? Well, there are a lot of rough areas that need to be smoothed out. Bitterness has left some deep pot holes. Several storms in life have washed away large areas. It's easy to see that it would not take much to cause me to swerve out of control. I must admit there are also a lot of ruts from doing things the same old way, right or wrong. That's the way those ahead traveled. I just continued in their path. I can see the need for the road to be widened, so more can make their journey.

There is no doubt, my life needs repair work. Do I have a choice? Honestly, I say yes...and no. Yes, I can hand over the keys, say: "Go in, take control; do what *construction* is needed and take your time." Or, I can firmly reply, "No, I'm happy the way things are. I don't like change. It is not convenient. It slows me down." Then *construction* will occur, but at a much slower pace. Work will be done in and around my busy schedule. Changes will be more tedious and more awkward. How do I react to this work? Am I patient? Do I surrender to it? In spite of my hate and fear of change, I am thankful. I know I need change and corrections, and I know I cannot do it myself. No matter how many times I make a resolution or turn over a new leaf, it's useless unless I am changed from within.

Who is in charge of this work? As you drive through *construction* areas on the highway you see signs: *Men At Work.* In *construction zones* within us, all work is done by *God's Holy Spirit.* His *construction* work began during creation of His world. Who better could recreate a life? Men do influence us, but that is always by outward circumstances. Only God *constructs* from within. One more sign usually seen in *construction zones* is a very welcome sight. It reads: ***End of Construction.*** We will not see the end of our personal *construction* until we reach our final destination, our eternal home with The Lord. So the next time you enter a *construction zone*...relax! Let it be a reminder of all the work going on, at that very moment, in your life. Your journey finds you on the highway to heaven, the king's highway, *a Highway of Holiness.* (Isaiah 35:8a)

June 18

“Broken Man”

How often have you heard the expression, *he's a broken man*? It brings to mind someone who through circumstances has lost it all, at times through no fault of their own. Let's take a close look at the words *broken* and *brokenness*. Among other things definitions include: *fractured, crushed and shattered*. (*Britannica World Language Dictionary*) How would you like your life to be described that way? When a person becomes *broken* they often are devastated with a loss of family, home, occupation, self-respect, and even at times loss of health. To be *broken* appears to be only a negative condition. It is a negative which can be turned into a big positive. Individuals, families, churches, communities, and nations benefit from *brokenness*.

Remember the symbol for negative, that flat horizontal line...How does it become a positive? You add a vertical line in the center. What do you see? A *cross* is formed. Disease left *Job broken*. He suffered the loss of his family, financial disaster, and received unfair criticism from family and friends. The most crucial loss came in the sense of losing God's presence. How did he respond? (Job 17:1) Job's life became *broken* by negatives, yet the story continues. (Job 42:1-6, 10) Job received a second chance.

Hannah felt crushed and *broken* because of the loss of a fertile womb. (I Samuel 1:5-18) God transformed this seemingly hopeless situation into praise. (I Samuel 1:26-27) Imagine her joy! Her dramatic answer to her heart's cries filled her heart and mouth with thanksgiving. (I Samuel 2:1-10)

Naomi traced her *brokenness* to the loss of her husband and both of her adult sons. (Ruth 1:20-21) God would display His power over seemingly hopeless circumstances. (Ruth 4:13-16) She once could only see death and grief. Now, life and rejoicing pulsed through her veins.

The sin and guilt of King David's adultery with Bathsheba left him *broken*. He tried to cover up and eventually put plans into action resulting in the murder of Bathsheba's husband in battle. David experienced the deep loss of intimate fellowship with God. (Psalms 38:8/ 51:17) David became contrite, deeply sorry and repented. David's negatives became positives. (Psalms 51:13) He would be used by God to be a channel of blessing.

The Apostle Peter's life lay *broken* following his sin of denying the Lord Jesus. (Luke 22:54-62) Peter thought he could never be trusted by Jesus again; how could he ever face his Lord? His total failure turned into a positive. (John 21: 15-17) His Master, the *Great Shepherd*, gave him a special assignment, *feeding the sheep*.

God does not want us to stay locked into sorrow and *brokenness*. (Psalms 147:3/Ezekiel 34:16) Picture this if you can...Your life may be hard, no longer warmed by Gods' word. Your life may be brittle, like a piece of pottery...needing transformation. Maybe you are living for Him, but He wants to use your life as a demonstration of His power and grace.....Let Him gently *break you*. He will put the pieces back together. Jesus is always our model to follow. (Luke 4:18/ Isaiah 61:1-3) He has set free the downtrodden. He releases the *broken* from sorrow. Jesus offered His body as a sacrifice, becoming *broken* for you and me. Will we share in the power of His suffering and resurrection? (I Peter 4:13)

June 19

“Little Birdie”

Sometimes we hear old timers using phrases they picked up many years ago. A few you should recognize are:

The early bird gets the worm.

A penny saved is a penny earned.

Cleanliness is next to godliness.

God helps those who help themselves. (No, that is not from the Bible.) I think most of these old sayings were quotes from *Benjamin Franklin*. Today, I want to share another...

A little birdie told me so.

I remember as a young girl we would whisper secrets to friends. They usually did not remain a secret for long. Someone would come up to you later with a smirk on their face, sarcastically saying: “I know something you don't know!” They would tell their juicy secret, and you quizzed them for proof. Like a good newspaper reporter, they would not reveal their source. Then in a sound of triumph and mystery, they would say: “*A little birdie told me so!*” I felt surprised the first time I came across the source of the childhood secret messenger. The writer gives us a warning. Even in the secrecy of our private bedrooms, what we say may be coming back to us later. “...for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound, and the winged creature will make the matter known (Ecclesiastes 10:20b NAS).” To close I'll use another catchy phrase:

Well, I'll be doggone!

June 20

“Betrayal”

In a dream I once experienced *betrayal*. The one I loved cheated on me. I felt hurt, unbelief, anger, hatred, and even considered murder. How could this happen to me? I trusted and loved; and what did I receive? ... He *betrayed* that trust and our commitment. Even after waking, hours later, I felt sadness experienced only by those who have taken the risk of loving. Lord, always wrap me in your arms of love. Restore a peace and security, as the trusting of a small child resting in the compassionate arms of their parent.

Oh, precious Savior and friend, You will never leave me or forsake me. (Hebrews 13:5b) You know the hurt of *betrayal* better than anyone. You have tasted its bitterness when Judas *betrayed* You with a kiss, when Your loved disciples fled and Peter denied ever even knowing You... Yet, You never denied him or Your faith in his divine purpose, to feed Your sheep (John 21:15-17). Lord, forgive me for the times *I betray* Your love and confidence. I realize how deeply I grieve You and Your Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). I desire to bring You joy and pleasure with my life. (Luke 15:7, Psalm 149:4)

June 21

“God’s Baby Book”

Most new mothers quickly begin a baby book following the arrival of their child. It is a place to record the milestones of birth date and time, weight and height and description such as color of hair and eyes. Other items may include such listings as the name of the hospital and physician. She will proudly paste in that first picture, which is usually taken while still in the hospital and shared in mailed birth announcements. As time passes there will be a lengthy listing of firsts: babies first smile, first laugh; first time the child rolls over by itself, sits up by itself; the appearance of the first tooth; first time their baby crawls on its knees, is able to pull up and stand; first words; and those proud first steps. The baby frequently accomplishes all of this and more in the first twelve months.

The baby book for our daughter, April, came as a gift from the hospital in Indianola, located in Sunflower County, Mississippi. It left space to record a lifetime of a child. Did you realize that God has a baby book for each of His children? Naturally, I have never actually seen one, but in faith I believe they exist. (Psalms 139:16) “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance: and in Thy book they are written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.” That sure sounds like a baby book to me. Notice God did not wait until after we were born to begin our books, as our mothers did. He wrote the events and details of our lives before they occurred. Wow! Do you wonder what details He penned there? Maybe, in addition to the firsts our moms included, He added: first time we prayed to Him, first time we went to church, our first lie, our first tears, first time we got angry, the tender moment that we first forgave someone, maybe the first time we sang praise to Him. Surely He would record our first realization that we were created by Him, first time we asked Him for forgiveness of sin, and the life-changing instant when we called Him our Savior and Lord. With joy He would smile and jot down the very first time we shared the good news about His Son Jesus with another person...Yes, life is an ongoing list of firsts for us, and God cares enough about each of us to remember each one. I wonder what his entries will be today.

June 22

“Graduation Time”

Graduation time is a time for rejoicing. June is not only the month for June brides, but also a time for school graduations and celebrations. There are no age or gender restrictions. Parents and grandparents proudly attend preschool programs. Kindergarten children wear their graduation cap and gown while posing for snapshots. They are officially ready for big school. Schools offer graduation programs at the end of middle school, and the climax is reached when graduating from high school. College students complete their classes and receive hard-earned degrees. Often senior adults return to school and triumphantly receive their diplomas, along with students the ages of grandchildren.

Along with their diplomas many receive special recognition for academic achievements and are presented with certificates, awards, and scholarships. Such attention can bring big benefits when listed on a resume or discussed in a job interview. Are you teachable, or do you think you already know all there is to learn? We are never too old to put on our thinking caps and enter God’s school of higher learning. “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Thy precepts (Psalm 119: 97-100 NAS).” Students, from ages five through their 100s, can become honor roll graduates as they complete each new life lesson given by the Lord. Congratulations, God is so proud of you.

June 23

“Chicken Backs”

A mother makes many sacrifices for her children; in love no sacrifice is too great. Our children are extensions of our very lives, and we desire the very best for them. Many times we take those sacrifices for granted as we grow up. Some are not only ignored but completely unknown to us. Children from large families realize that many necessities are stretched to the limit to give everyone a fair share. Growing up, Mom halved our chewing gum. That would double the amount in a pack of gum, meaning more for all to enjoy.

I know of two sacrifices that my mom made to stretch what she had for her children. She rarely drank milk; with five children developing growing bones, she let them drink her desired portions. The other sacrifice means a lot to me. She prepared big platters of fried chicken for Sunday dinners, using whole cut-up chickens. Everybody has favorite sections of the bird to eat. Lots of children choose the drumsticks or the wings. Mom desired the breast, but her usual selection would be the chicken backs. I can really appreciate that today looking back to times sitting around our kitchen table. When I see chicken backs, I think of her sacrifice for me...Jesus made a sacrifice that far surpasses chicken. He offers His heart. He emptied Himself of His heavenly glory; and He came to serve, taking the form of man. (Philippians 2:6-7). “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:8 NAS).” He sacrificed His life for me. He viewed the Father’s big family, and He knew no sacrifice would be too great. One day we will all be seated around the table with Him; Thank You, Lord.

June 24

“Don’t Believe It”

How can we be sure if we are in God’s will? Many times we rely on logic, our conscience, or that famous *gut feeling*. In our split-second time frame we expect instant answers and are not willing to wait on the Lord. We leap before we look and often crash, pulling others down with us. Maybe we all need to take a lesson from the turtle and the hare. Time spent in prayer and God’s word gives direction and speaks not through our *gut feeling*, but through the Holy Spirit.

In our efforts to justify sin, we may say, “In my heart I felt like I did the right thing.” Don’t believe it. Our hearts are not a good reference point. “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds (Jeremiah 17:9-10 NAS).” We can’t trust our own hearts. “Beware, lest your hearts be deceived (Deuteronomy 11:16a NAS).” The Psalmist knew the answer. “Thy word have I treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee (Psalm 119:11 NAS).” God’s word in our hearts is our alarm system. Be sure to keep it charged with the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

June 25

“Open-Door Policy”

Three cheers for the open-door policy. The desire to keep communication lines intact between staff and management is wise. A happy employee is a productive employee. If the boss rules with an iron fist, he or she only makes workers resentful clock-watchers.

I remember my husband once telling about the manager’s office where he worked. The desk sat up on a rise, towering over anyone who stood beneath in conversation with the manager. The result would likely be feelings of intimidation for most. I can just see Dagwood approaching Mr. Dithers and requesting a raise.

We need not face God under such restrictions or barriers. Though He is high and lifted up, He also lifts us. Hebrews gives us a clear picture of Jesus, our High Priest. He truly understands our deepest feelings. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16 NAS).” His door is always open to us; enter and bring Him all your concerns. Not only is honesty the best policy, so is the open door.

June 26

“My Turquoise Robe”

Please don't take my turquoise robe away from me. It is threadbare and has served me well, but I do not want to part with it. What is your comfort-clothing article? Most of us have at least one item we wear repeatedly. We have a closet full of clothes, but usually wear favorites over and over.

I have seen television programs with conflict in the home, following the wife tossing out or donating old articles of clothing. The husband sulks like a boy who just lost his puppy. He needs that old flannel shirt. His wife felt embarrassed to see him in such disgusting attire, but he just had it broken in. I bought my old turquoise robe at a thrift store about ten years ago. In winter months, wearing my robe kept me warm and comfy. Ladies, you know the feeling; it's like curling up with a quilt, protected from the chill, enjoying that all-over feeling of...*Ahh!* A friend gave me a beautiful robe a year or two back, and I really like it. It is pleasant to the eye, easy to care for and comfortable. I almost threw out the old robe... I said, almost; I decided to keep it for a comfort emergency. If I get sick, I will put on my robe and feel a warm hug. God understands our emotional needs of comfort and wraps us up in His word. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4 KJV).” *Ahh!*

June 27

“Porch Light”

“We’ll leave the porch light on for you!” Such friendly words make us feel accepted and cared for. A popular motel chain borrowed the concept for their advertising, and it proved to be very effective. On a dark night the light breaks the darkness, illuminates the doorway to comfort and security.

Are there special homes, cities, or churches where you feel a great outpouring of love and acceptance? When we find such tenderness, we are drawn to that porch light like a moth to a flame. We just keep coming back for more. I believe Jesus found that comfort in the city of Bethany. On several occasions, scripture describes his visits in the city with his good friends: Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. We do not know of a last name; in the Bible we know members of God’s family on a first-name basis. Yes, I think they left the porch light on for Jesus and his disciples. He could come at any hour and find refreshment for His body and Spirit.

Will we give the same welcome sign to others, or do they see *No Vacancies*? A very short, simple verse speaks volumes to me. “And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there (Matthew 21:17 NAS).” Following a day of Hosannas, clearing moneychangers from the temple, and dealing with indignant religious leaders, Jesus anticipated the refuge of the city Bethany. Do you think He accepted a standing invitation? Likely He returned at every opportunity. Maybe the popular Welcome Wagon to greet new residents in a community got a start in the hearts of a Bethany family. Coupons and discounts to local business firms is a good introduction, but I still prefer the warm welcome of a porch light.

June 28

“Let It Go”

Is it hard to ignore a wrong done against you? Do you feel you have been treated unfairly? Are you tempted to retaliate? Let it go. We all get our feelings hurt, but harboring that pain only leads to more scars. We cannot undo things done by others, but we can choose to use it to build character and strength within. Yes, it hurts; but let it go.

Do you feel you are about to explode, ready to blow your top? Would that make things better? No, physically; emotionally; and spiritually that would only harm you. Let it go. The book of Proverbs is more beneficial than anger management. If tried and tested, the counsel of Proverbs helps you to overcome frustration and anger. “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression (Proverbs 19:11 NAS).” Let Him take control; reject anger; let it go.

June 29

“Dust Bunnies”

Do dust bunnies multiply under your bed? They are as quiet as mice but are still unwelcome intruders. If you or a family member deals with allergies, you are well aware of public enemy number one, dust.

Our son went through painful allergy testing at age three and broke my heart with his cries for my help. The diagnosis revealed the common allergy triggers of dust, molds, animal hair, etc. We were in a new house with all tile floors so that scored high in our favor. Carpets not only hold dust, but the dyes in the fabric also cause irritation. My job not only included giving him injections but janitorial services as well. I followed the doctor’s instructions. Dust must be eradicated. Do you know that new-car smell we all love? Well, our house carried the recognizable scent of Endust spray!

Just grab a dust mop or vacuum and coax those fragile dust bunnies out from their hiding places. You are bigger than they are, so take the upper hand. You must be vigilant; they keep coming back, welcomed or not. It’s a never-ending battle, and there is no recognition for your hours on duty at the front lines in the dust war zone.

God, who created everything, does not ignore the dust bunnies. “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the heavens by a span, and calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance, and the hills in a pair of scales (Isaiah 40:12 NAS)?” It seems God weighs or measures everything; His calculations in the earth’s rotation around the sun reveal His mathematical genius skills. Are we being weighed or measured? “‘Tekel’ - you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient (Daniel 5: 27 NAS).” This message to Belshazzar should be a warning to us. No false weights will be tolerated, only the weight of God’s glory reflected in our lives. Dust bunnies, your days are numbered!

June 30

“Keep the Flames Burning”

Have you ever attended a marriage retreat or seminar? From what I have learned, they have the potential of refreshing or restoring marriage relationships. Any relationship requires work and commitment to keep it growing and strong. We need to rekindle those flames of love and friendship, bringing back the glow and warmth we once knew.

Even those active in service to the Lord need reminders to keep our relationship fresh and vibrant. “And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1:6 NAS).”

Paul considered Timothy to be his son in the faith, and like any son, he needed encouragement. Maybe Timothy gathered more kindling for the flames by setting aside more time alone with God’s word and prayer. Keep the flames burning.

July 1

“Home or Hospital”

Is hospitality becoming a lost art? It seems that most often when the word is used today, it refers to the businesses of hotels, motels, inns, and bed-and-breakfast homes. According to the *Britannica World Language Dictionary*, hospitality is defined as: “the spirit, practice or act of being hospitable.” Okay, now their definition of hospitable: “disposed to behave in a warm manner or to entertain with generous kindness”...

Our family has lived in many different states across America. We were always in a local church worshipping with our church family. I remember in the late 1960s and into the 1970s people much more often gathered in each other’s homes or arranged meetings at area restaurants following the worship services. It seems that now it happens far less often because we are all so busy. Some of our current church members do meet at a fast-food restaurant after the evening service, and occasionally on a fifth Saturday evening, we pick out a restaurant to fellowship together.

I do not have the sparkle of hospitality. (Romans 12:13) Cooking is a large part of entertaining and hospitality, and I do not like to cook. I often get frustrated like Martha, the sister of Lazarus. I know I should not, and I have positive examples from my younger sister and her daughter. They each excel in hospitality.

As I wrote the word *hospitality*, something caught my eye; within the word we find a shorter word, *hospital*. Hmm...that’s something to think about; back to the dictionary: “an institution for the reception, care, and medical treatment of the sick and wounded.” Our world is full of wounded people. Could our homes be a hospital for them? Wait, there’s more from the dictionary, “an inn or hospice, formerly a place of hospitality for those in need of shelter and maintenance; founding hospital.” Wow, the Lord guides us to allow our homes to be hospitals, places of refuge and healing.

Men, hospitality is not limited to the woman of the house. God can use you, too. “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach... (I Timothy 3:2 NAS).” Men or women; young or old, all can extend hospitality; and, remember, you never know who may show up at your door! “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2 NAS).” If they crash your party, your life may never be the same.

July 2

“Wash-Day Blues”

Do you remember laundry-day Monday? Mounds of dirty clothes were stacked in front of the family’s wringer washer, and mothers tackled the weekly chore. I recall leaning up against the washing machine with my stomach while Mom did the laundry. The vibration felt good; I guess it compared to an amusement ride in my basement.

We can pick up pearls of wisdom from our automatic wash cycles of today. At times we may need a *pre-soak*. The ways of the world leave stains needing attention. Our Bibles hold special care instructions for all spot treatments. Find each stain and rub in the tried-and-true stain lifter. (1 John 1:9) When each stain of sin is confessed, it will vanish.

The cares of the world also build up, and we need a gentle, *light cycle* to remove our feelings of discouragement. We might not even realize those areas of contamination are there. We just know our days are not as bright and cheerful as we once knew. God’s gentle cleansing will make all things new. (Psalm 18:35, 2 Corinthians 5:17)

If we lose control and yield to temptations, a *regular wash cycle* is always as easy as turning the control of washing to God. He does not discard a soiled article; He cleanses it. (Psalm 51:10) His Holy Spirit points to Jesus and the *washing of His* word. (Ephesians 5:26)

Rebellion against God and turning away from His care leaves us wide open for the darkness of evil. A *heavy-wash cycle* is needed to remove every trace of darkness so that we can be clean and white again, pure as the first winter snow. (Isaiah 1:18) He is not shocked seeing dirty laundry, and His laundry room of prayer is always open. Following the wash and rinse cycles, all the dirt and grime is drained away. The final spin twirls us around and around, tenderly landing us in the arms of the waiting Father. Goodbye wash-day blues; hello forgiveness.

July 3

“I Think I Can!”

Do you ever feel like the little train climbing the mountain? *I think I can... I think I can!* I've always experienced a lack of self confidence, and my words have often been *I can't!* Before I married at age eighteen, my future husband pushed me out of my comfort-zone limits by saying: “‘Can't never' could do anything!” The grammar may be lacking, but the message is clear. He led me to a personal relationship with Christ, and one of the first scripture verses I learned is “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Philippians 4:13 KJV).”

I dreamed of becoming a writer for thirty years. Now, as I am pushing my limits again, I feel a lack of confidence and a sense I am inadequate. Yet I believe my dream can come true. Lord, make me adequate. (“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God (2 Corinthians 3:5 NAS).” Yes, *I think I can.... I think I can. I think I can.*

July 4

“Transient”

When we think of a road transient, we commonly get the impression of a person just passing through. They are in a community or city on a temporary basis, with no serious plans of putting down roots. Actually we are all transient, only here on this earth for a brief period of time. “Lord, reveal to me the end of my life and the number of my days. Let me know how transitory I am. You, indeed, have made my days short in length, and my life span as nothing in your sight. Yes, every mortal man is only a vapor (Psalm 39:4-5 HCS).” The next time I hear the friendly phrase: *Take off your hat and stay a while*, I’ll be reminded that I’m just passing through.

July 5

“Hot Pursuit”

Do you like action movies? Do you cheer in the chase scenes, where the good guys are in hot pursuit of the bad guys? The drama builds as it seems the chase may end in failure, but our heroes are determined, and right wins out over wrong in the end. What are you *pursuing* in life? Is it a worthy goal, or are you wasting time and effort? We all reach toward some dream or ambition, and the strain to push ahead is exercising our faith to succeed. “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14 NAS).” Keep your eyes on the goal and inch your way toward the finish line.

Some things are worthy of our attention, and we are wise to pursue them. “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (1Timothy 6:11b).” Are you hot on the trail? “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it (Psalm 34:14 NAS).” Peace may elude us and seem out of reach, but it can be achieved. Set your course and seek in determination. Get ready... Get set... Go! Soon you will be in hot pursuit, and godly character will be your reward.

July 6

“The Shadow of Her Smile”

Recalling special moments and events shared with those who have died is often a source of great strength. Donna, this one's for you... At the 2005 funeral service for my oldest sister, many of us took the opportunity to speak of what she meant to each of us individually. One common theme was her smile, that we would all remember that smile. Years later I have found that so very true. Some people do not know how to smile or laugh. They just take life too seriously, or their hurts have made them forget how to smile. Some have a polite, courteous smile. Others get that special twinkle in the eye, and their whole face lights up. Donna shared that smile, even though she experienced a very hard life, knowing deep hurt and loss. Remember the phrase: *Laugh and the whole world laughs with you?* Donna drew the world closely around her with that smile.

I have a favorite true story she shared with me that will surely add you to her smile group of followers. As a single Mom, it often became a challenge to keep her four young children fed, clothed, and housed. We all know of slackers that could work but prefer the gravy train. For a while, as her children were growing, she did by choice receive assistance because it would provide the medical care she needed. At one time food became scarce. She shared her needs with her Lord, and the results are nothing short of a miracle! They were living in an apartment complex, and a visitor knocked on her door. The man upstairs returned from a day of fishing and didn't want his catch. Would she like them? Yes! She shared with me her belief in God having a sense of humor. Donna asked Him: “Alright, here are the fish; where are the loaves?” Are you ready? Someone brought a supply of day-old bread! You know her smile that day must have lit up the house.

When her children were older, she returned to the work force. She served as an example to all with her years of dedication. Unable to drive she walked back and forth, even during winters of frigid temperatures and snow. She very rarely used a bus or taxi. Her last years were filled with severe pain, which she usually masked with her smile. Sometimes we don't realize the power of a smile. Yet, we know it can melt the coldest heart. “If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face and wear a smile (Job 9:27 NKJ).” Donna left a lasting legacy, a great inheritance. We are heirs to **the shadow of her smile.**

July 7

“Surrender”

Never surrender to the enemy. It is to be avoided at all costs. At times we learn of soldiers actually killing themselves rather than falling into the cruel hands of the enemy. Personal honor and pride in their country is at stake.

Satan brings such memories of conflict to our minds to twist the true blessings found in surrendering to our best friend, Jesus. He knows very well the moment we surrender our wills to the Lord, he will lose his hold on us. The more areas of our lives we submit to the Lordship of Christ, the more freedoms we enjoy. “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7 NAS).” God is not an enemy to fear. We do not need weapons for self-protection; lay down your arms and surrender.

July 8

“No Place to Turn”

Do you feel like the walls are closing in on you and that you have no place to turn? If you do, do not give up. Help is on the way. Things can be worked out, and you can have your hope restored. Problems seem to be beyond solving, pulling you under your circumstances. You become discouraged and begin to give up, feeling defeated and helpless. Dark clouds block the sun in your heart, giving little chance for the ray of hope you so desperately need.

Are you overworked and burdened with stress? Do you skip meals and sleep less than you really need? It is a recipe for discouragement and depression. Take care of yourself, then you can face your problems with the clear mind you need. The first step will be to admit you need some help; seek the One with the answers, and the solution. “Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:22 NAS).” Trusting God with our life and problems lifts the cares of the world off our backs. You do have a place to turn; and Jesus is the way.

July 9

“Patience Please!”

We have all heard the pitiful phrase: *I need patience, and I want it now!* It is not easy to be understanding, kind, and patient with those that annoy us. Where is our patience when we are stuck in slow-moving traffic or at the rear of the line in the bank? We were already running behind and late for an appointment.

Self-control and the character strength of patience are difficult to maintain in our busy lives. If we can be honest with ourselves, we’ll confess patience is not one of our usual inner strengths. “He who is slow to anger (has patience) has great understanding, but he who is quick tempered (is impatient) exalts folly (Proverbs 14:29 NAS).” Patience, please! God is still teaching me lessons on patience, and I must pay attention in class.

July 10

“To Dust You Shall Return”

We joke about someone’s age, remarking they are as old as dirt. Well, I guess that is pretty old. Now that I have hit sixty, I am conscious of my many signs of aging. Car enthusiasts fancy a car that accelerates quickly from zero to 100. My acceleration has greatly decreased. When I get up after sitting, it takes me a few minutes to get moving. I’m glad I am not being timed. My gears need lubrication because I get pretty stiff.

I think... I am as old as dust. We all remember the Genesis account of the sin of Adam and Eve and God’s confronting the couple in the Garden of Eden. Part of His closing remarks include, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:19 NAS).” When I think of dust, it seems dry, as in the depression dust bowl, a time of severe drought. Last night while getting ready for bed, the thought of returning to dust seemed very relevant.

My bedtime routine includes brushing my teeth, taking medications (definite sign of aging...) putting moisturizer on my face, and putting artificial tears in my eyes. When I got to my bed after reading my devotionals, I rubbed cream on my hands and feet. I did all of this mechanically, but then the last step got my attention. I put Chap Stick on and thought, “My whole body is drying out. I am returning to dust!” We know our days are numbered and the clock keeps ticking. I’ll just keep adding moisture wherever I can and keep the dust down.

July 11

“Mom’s Baked Bread”

Is there anything more appetizing than the aroma of homemade bread in the oven? I looked forward to the treat of Mom’s fresh-baked bread. Even the heels of the loaf were delicious. Buttered bread, now frowned upon in many diets, is a real pleasure. I think many times people choose a specific restaurant just because their fresh bread and yeast rolls draw them. Some restaurant chains have even made tossed hot rolls their advertising focus. I guess the rolls that land on the floor will end up as treats for dogs begging at the back door.

In the past people referred to bread as the staff of life. They considered bread to be an essential, not a high-calorie food. In recent times it began to make a comeback. Whole-wheat breads are seen as a very good, high-fiber addition to our diets. Grandpa Ford knew what he needed before it gained nutritional experts’ stamp of approval.

The written word of God uses many different names for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each highlights a part of His character, or His loving action. We often forget that Jesus is *The Living Bread*. He clearly explains His role of sustaining life. “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh (John 6: 47-51 NAS).”

The listeners argued over such a radical claim. Did he expect them to eat His flesh? In a session on foreign missions, our speaker presented the difficulty of Bible translators for a foreign language of cannibal tribes. Those given the challenge realized their need for God’s divine guidance.

What does it mean to you? He is essential. He nourishes. He sustains. He satisfies. There are only benefits when we receive Him as the bread of life. His bread is always fresh and available. We are not asked to settle for day-old bread. He offers Himself; will you receive? The next time you drive through a busy city with a large factory producing bread, notice the aroma drifting through the air; and look above to your true *Bread of Life*.

July 12

“SOS”

Everyone recognizes the three letters of **SOS**, to alert others of an emergency. It signals that problems are out of control and those involved are helpless. Sometimes, as individuals, we are overwhelmed by our circumstances such as: health problems, financial stress, broken relationships and fears of our future. We feel like we are in a sinking ship. We have bailed out the waters of defeat until we are exhausted. We need help; we need to be rescued.

I've often felt helpless and called out to God with desperation: **HELP!** He knows our needs even before we ask. “Your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him (Matthew 6:8b NAS).” He is just waiting, standing by until He receives our signal, **SOS!**

July 13

“The Underdog”

When watching a sports event do you pull for the underdog? That is a common practice of many. We feel empathy with someone with little chance to win. If they beat the odds and come out on top, we applaud their victory.

We receive satisfaction in the realization that if they were expected to lose and surprised their peers, we can be winners too. Nothing is impossible. We may even gain confidence to try something we dared not do before.

There is one underdog we must never be pulling for, the devil. Soon he will not only be the underdog, but also under our feet. “And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you (Romans 16:20 NAS).” All things are under the feet of our Lord. (Ephesians 1:22) Cheer Him on to His rightful victory.

July 14

“Still Going Strong”

Do you have *get up and go* or has it already *got up and gone*? We admire people with drive and ambition and cleverly label them: Type A Personalities. Our efforts are desperately needed by those around us, and we must not become weary in doing well. (Galatians 6:9) It would be so easy to fold our hands in our laps and give up.

Our age might bring challenges, but it need not put us out of the race. The Lord is not judging us by our speed but by our faithfulness. The examples of others motivate and inspire us to serve God by serving others. When worship is important for the elderly, we know where their priorities are. Tucked inside the Nativity story, we find the faithfulness of Anna. (Luke 2:36-38) “...and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Verse 37) She is going strong; and her mind is alert, recognizing promised redemption in the Babe being presented to the heavenly Father. We must allow the Holy Spirit to power us and stay plugged in to His direction.

July 15

“Stop Watch Faith”

Are you a procrastinator? Is tomorrow always the better time? Will that diet be put off one more day? You are not alone. The world is full of round-to-it individuals. We have the best of intentions, and our heart is in the right place; we just need to get in gear. Maybe we all need a dose of tonic to get things done. The achievements of hard workers are proof that they did not wait until a more convenient time. We may be surprised if we learned how many opportunities we allowed to pass by us.

I wonder how things would have changed if Jesus' personal selection of His twelve disciples included one or two procrastinators. He made the right choices. “And he said to them, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him (Matthew 4:20 NAS).” They did not put off their decision and acceptance of His call. The disciples lived with stop-watch faith. The clock is ticking; let's get back in the race.

July 16

“One that Got Away”

The life of a commercial fisherman is demanding and often discouraging as well. My husband’s uncle, A. M., worked many years in the coastal waters of West Palm Beach, Florida. He and his wife, Emma Mae, raised their family with the hard-earned money their efforts provided. We often make jokes about the one that got away, and they both shared those stories and many more.

I have a hunch God must like fishing, and I’ll explain why. First, let’s go back to Jonah and the whale (or great fish). God prepared that whale for that precise moment and pinpoint location. Over the years God may have made many checks on the progress of growth and strength of the specimen. The temperament would need to be just right, too. The big fish must not kill Jonah but only give him a place to do some serious praying. After it spewed Jonah and swam away, God may have provided it with an unexpected free meal for work well done.

Next, we know Jesus chose several fishermen as His disciples and even gave the advice on how to find a good catch. After His resurrection Jesus met them at the seaside and prepared them a fresh fish breakfast. Any die-hard fisherman and camping enthusiast knows the delight of sizzling fish in the skillet.

Last of all, God showed His interest and involvement with an unexpected fish with an unexpected gift. When a tax collector quizzed Peter about Jesus’ tax payments, we get this story...“Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax? He said, yes. And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers? And upon his saying, from strangers, Jesus said to him, consequently the sons are exempt. But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater (or shekel). Take that and give it to them for you and Me (Matthew 17:24b-27 NAS).” Can you imagine the reaction Peter got when he shared that fish story with his friends? Jesus did not even tell him to bait the hook. That fish would be ready and waiting. The next time you are at your favorite fishing spot, smile and remember you never know what could be at the end of your line.

July 17

“Order of Worship”

Each church has a unique style or order of worship. Many are similar but none are exact duplicates. Church bulletins are routinely used by most congregations, displaying announcements; prayer lists or other general information. The listing of selected hymns, times for prayer, offerings, and the sermon are especially helpful to those visiting in the church.

People who regularly attend do not realize how uncomfortable and ill-at-ease visitors may feel. If they can follow along in the sequence of events in the bulletin, they will not feel so out of place. In 1 Chronicles, we see King David carefully planning out times of worship. “Then on that day David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the Lord. Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; speak of all His wonders. (1 Chronicles 16:7-9 NAS).” The music ministry began, and Asaph’s name and selections could be listed on the temple bulletins.

July 18

“Whiskers Against My Cheek”

What memories trigger thoughts of your father? The influence of dads cannot be measured, and it helps us to realize the responsibility and privilege we now hold as parents and grandparents. In ways our dads blessed us, we give our heavenly Father thanksgiving. We release our fathers from their failings and receive peace and healing.

My dad, Franklin F. Ford, touched my life in so many ways. I remember sitting in his lap when a very young girl and feeling his whiskers rub against my cheek. Dad taught me, my siblings, and some grandchildren how to tie our shoes using the two-loops, bunny-ears, method. He taught me how to ride a bike and, along with Mom, tried to teach me to swim. I guess I could swim well enough to stay afloat in an emergency but prefer to be able to touch bottom! He also attempted to teach me to drive a car but that needed the extra patience of my husband several years later.

Dad gave me the example of hard-work rewards. (2 Thessalonians 3:10) He often worked two jobs yet kept up our house repairs, did yard work, plus helped Mom with chores. He gave me great appreciation for wood items because he worked part-time as a craftsman for Stickley Furniture Company.

I often think of my dad when I view rolling hills, trees, streams or animals. Dad thrived when he could be outdoors gardening, cutting grass, taking long walks, or in later years, enjoying his wooden swing. Even in dangerously high temperatures, he would be outside every chance he got.

Dad lived a troubled life, but in his happy moments, the sounds of his laughter filled our house and our memories. He laughed in pure, simple pleasure. I guess Dad’s biggest life lesson I learned is love and concern for family. We never got too old or lived too far away to be on Dad’s mind. He waited for letters and phone calls to learn the latest news about our families and looked forward to visits.

Reading books as he worked long hours as a plant security guard for General Electric now holds special meaning. I can see all those paperback westerns tucked in his lunchbox and know he would be proud of my writing. If Dad still lived, I would be calling soon to share the latest family happenings; instead, I’ll curl up in his lap in my memories and feel his whiskers against my cheek.

July 19

“A Better Idea”

For several years, the *Ford* automotive company used the advertising slogan: *Ford has a better idea!* The phrase, used as a marketing tool, drew potential buyers to dealer's showrooms. Today as our nation's auto dealers have teetered on the brink of economic disaster, they are in desperate need of *a better idea*.

A thought, an idea on this subject brings to mind a frustrated remark used by many. *Do you have any **idea** what I am talking about?* Picture a frantic mother trying to explain the dangers of speeding or reckless driving to a teenage son as he proudly holds his brand-new driver's license in his hands. His blank expression reveals that he is clueless to her warnings. He just wants the keys to the car. He has no idea what she is trying to get across to him.

A picture often carries an unspoken message, and when we see a picture of a light bulb, it represents a brilliant idea. “Now I get it! I have seen the light!” Our only true way to see the light and get the right *idea* is to seek God. “Lord, You are my lamp; the Lord illuminates my darkness (2 Samuel 22:29 HCS).” At the moment you need a fresh insight or idea about your work, ministry, family or relationship problem, He'll provide it. I'm sure that *God has a better idea*.

July 20

“Rocking Chairs”

I began writing this article sitting comfortably in a rocker glider. I have been a rocking-chair fan most of my life. My mom placed one in our living room, and there were rockers on my grandparent’s porches. I believe babies are to be loved, fed, diapered, bathed and **rocked!** I started babysitting at age eleven, and I have happily rocked many babies.

After our first child’s birth we picked up an old wooden rocker. A couple of years later I gave birth to our next child. One Christmas my husband’s parents gave me a beautiful small white rocker with a cushioned back and seat. I could not have been more thrilled. In the past forty years, there have been many rockers, some holding special memories. I enjoy old movies, especially from the 1930-to-1950s era. One of my favorite Christmas classics is *Christmas in Connecticut*, starring Barbara Stanwyk and Dennis Morgan. In one scene he demonstrated different methods and reasons for rocking. It’s a keeper.

The *Britannica World Language Dictionary* explains rocking in ways such as: “moving back and forth, to sway...to soothe, as to put to sleep.” We sing rock-a-bye lullabies. Now I understand the appeal of rockers. It is soothing to rock. The dictionary defines soothe: “to restore to calm, to a quiet or normal state.” Jesus, who calmed the raging sea, (Mark 4:39) is my **Rock**. He soothes me, as He rocks me in His arms.

July 21

“X-Ray Vision”

Superman is one of the world’s best-known super heroes of comics, cartoons, and the big screen. Superman has come with many different faces over the years, and his costumes have been modified. His mission remains the same; he fights for justice.

I am a baby boomer who grew up watching the old black-and-white television *Superman* shows with Steve Reeves, long before Christopher Reeves packed the theatres. One of the things that I find exciting is his x-ray vision; he can see through walls! He could easily see things hidden from our normal vision. As great as that power may be, the Bible has far greater. Moses... “By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. (Hebrews 11:27 NAS).” When Superman viewed Lois Lane and Jimmy Olson gagged and tied deep within an abandoned warehouse, they were hidden; but they were not invisible. By faith we, like Moses, can see the invisible God, who is a Spirit. Open our eyes, Lord.

July 22

“Before and After”

We have a fascination with before-and-after pictures and stories. The majority are either weight loss or fashion-and-style makeovers. Three cheers for all. Musclemen have a different story to share, and their goals were to increase body mass. Magazine advertisements and infomercials make claims of muscle development through their newly revealed secrets. Men are swayed with the philosophy of increased strength equals masculinity.

Bible passages often take us by surprise because we frequently are challenged to come to grips with issues that go against logic. From our earliest years, we were encouraged to be strong. We were told not to cry: *If you're a wimp, people will walk all over you!* Weakness sounds like a disease we must avoid at any cost. The words weakness and failure almost seem to be intertwined; but are they?

“And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NKJ).” So if I feel weak because my immune system is low or if stress leaves me feeling weak and overwhelmed, the end result can be strength. I'm not sure if God has a brag book of before-and-after pictures, but if He did, he would proudly display pictures of *before problems* and *after strength in character*. I'd like to be in that display.

July 23

“Majority Rules”

We live in a society that likes to see things run by the opinion of the majority. That only seems fair; right? It may seem logical to settle questions that way, but it is not a foolproof plan. Most churches vote among the membership about issues that affect their mission. Any pastor or committee chairman is thrilled to get a unanimous vote of approval to their motion. What happens if they get 51% approval and their motion passes? The leadership may decide to drop the suggestion for the current time and seek the Lord for guidance.

At one time King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were forming battle plans against a common enemy. Ahab sought the advice of 400 prophets to determine if they should attack. He received a unanimous decision. “Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the King (1 Kings 22:6b NKJ).” Ahab intentionally left out the opinion of Micaiah, the prophet. He didn’t make it a practice to tell the king what he wanted to hear. He spoke a message of: *Thus saith the Lord!* As the story developed they consulted Micaiah also. After a final word that Israel would be scattered, scripture reveals the bottom line. A lying Spirit used deception to place lies in the mouths of the prophets and entice the king. (1 Kings 22:13-22) The majority is shown to be dead wrong. When we face important decisions we need to trust God, not only the opinion of others. (Proverbs 3:5-6) He will direct our steps.

July 24

“An Epidemic”

There is an epidemic in our midst, spreading like a wildfire. The symptoms include fatigue and discouragement, along with a very negative attitude. I don't know who coined the phrase but it hits the mark; the epidemic is *burnout*. You started a task, job, or project with blazing enthusiasm, confidence, and dedication. Then as the days passed, the fire began to burn out. You thought maybe a few days off and a change of pace would help. Returning to work, you continue to push on...The flames barely flicker, and it seems there is no light at the end of the tunnel. You look forward to a vacation. Gradually you realize your lamp is not low; it has burnt out. Someone else will need to finish what you started.

Isn't it comforting to know that the Lord will never burn out? He is still going strong, giving us His warmth. Sitting in His presence is like being in front of a fireplace or cozy campfire. Yes, but fire can also touch those who are opposed to the mighty God. Then He becomes a raging fire. “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:28-29 NAS).” The next time you experience the symptoms of burnout, take two doses of encouragement and call on the *Great Physician* in the morning.

July 25

“Salt of the Earth”

Jesus calls His followers *salt* in relationships and influence. “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned (Matthew 5:13 NKJ).” Salt has many more functions than just seasoning bland foods. Meats have been preserved by the application of salt across the centuries. Will we be a preservative for godliness in a corrupt society? In a close relationship I discovered a new spiritual advantage of salt. My good friend owned and operated a Christian book store, and the Lord gave her a fresh insight on salt. Salt increases our thirst.

Can you eat popcorn, potato chips, nuts, French fries or pizza without becoming thirsty? The more you eat, the more you need to drink. I have been told that fast-food restaurants intentionally add a lot of salt to their foods in an effort to sell more beverages. When our lives produce salt, we can add flavor to life and zest to conversations.

How can we help the needy and hurting around us? If we are *the salt of the earth* we can make them thirsty for refreshing, satisfying *Living Water, Christ Jesus*. “Jesus answered and said to her, If you knew the gift of God , and who it is who says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water (John 4:10 NKJ).” We have another piece of good news to share with others who are thirsty. They can always go back for unlimited refills.

July 26

“Ballpoint Pen”

Automobiles are complicated pieces of machinery. As we look back to their invention and at the *Ford* construction of a *Model A* or *Model T*, we quickly realize that many changes occurred to bring us today’s transportation marvels. We now have all the comforts of home on wheels to make our ride enjoyable. Cars of yesterday did not have luxuries like heat or air conditioning, featured no power steering, no power brakes, not even inside ignition. They relied on the arm-twisting crank method to begin each ride. Can you imagine traveling without shelter over your head? Rain or shine the first horseless carriages were all like open convertibles.

Like any piece of machinery, problems develop and repairs are needed. We have owned many used cars and have experienced more breakdowns than I wish to remember. My husband learned by trial and error how to replace fuel and water pumps and master the installation of a carburetor. He also did minor brake work. If all else failed we would take the vehicle to a shade-tree mechanic. I love that description. I can just see somebody working on a vehicle in the heat of the day under the shade of a large oak tree. Now with complicated computerized vehicles, almost all maintenance and repairs must be done at a state-of-the-art, modern repair shop.

Our son, Lee, has been working on vehicles since his mid teens. His first hands-on experience began with our 1967 *Plymouth Fury*, purchased in the mid 1980s. We were able to buy it from a very conscientious owner. It truly is one of those little-old-lady-type scenarios. The brake pedal did not even show wear and felt like new. After twenty years of mechanic and body work, Lee has built up a solid reputation of quality work. (1 Chronicles 4:14b) He artistically restored and sold many vehicles.

One true story of his knowledge happened on I-10 in northwest Florida. He drove a used car on his way back home from work. He spotted a dream car broken down and pulled off the road. He stopped to see if he could help the stranger. After checking things out under the hood, he turned to the helpless owner and asked if he had a ballpoint pen. The man found one, thinking that some information needed to be written down. To his surprise, our son unscrewed the pen and removed the small spring inside. He used the spring to make a quick adjustment to the carburetor. He explained it would get him to an auto parts store for needed replacement parts. No, this is not a *MacGyver* episode. This introduces you to a clever young man, and I am his very proud mother.

July 27

“No Loss of Life”

Earlier this year the world cheered following the safe landing of an airliner in the Hudson River. The quick decisions of the pilot and the cooperation of the crew resulted in the happy ending in a crisis situation. No loss of life occurred! In so many ways we each have narrow escapes from death, but rarely do we see such a display of protection.

In the Old Testament Moses led the children of Israel across the perilous Red Sea onto dry land. (Exodus 15: 19-21). The children of Israel recorded no loss of life! Jesus gives us His promise of security, and we can rest in that comfort. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one (John 10:27-30 NKJ).” We can take Jesus at His word; when He offers life, it is eternal. When the *Book of Life* is opened, none of the saved will be listed as missing persons. There will be no loss of life.

July 28

“Look of Love”

We have all heard of the perfect fairy-tale romances. A man finds his dream girl and she discovers her prince charming. In the popular song, “Some Enchanted Evening”, (featured in *South Pacific*), their eyes meet across a crowded room. I like stories with happy endings: boy meets girl; boy likes girl; and, in the end, boy gets girl. I became a part of one of those special young boy-girl attractions when in the seventh grade.

A secret admirer arranged our first meeting. He would speak to me in the hall when we were on our way to classes. Well, the time came, and I saw his beautiful smile. His eyes held the look of love. As in most young romances and cases of puppy love, he lost interest in me as quickly as he found it. His look of love could not compare to one shared in the scriptures. The Apostle Peter, after bragging of his faithfulness to his Lord Jesus, failed miserably. He denied Him, not once, not twice, but three times. (Luke 22:54-60) In a game of baseball the call is: *Three strikes and you’re out!* I’m sure in Peter’s guilt and sorrow he felt he may be cast out of the group of Jesus’ intimate followers. How could he ever be forgiven and regain the trust and confidence of His Lord?

I believe it all started with a look of love. It spoke to the heart and soul of Peter. “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:61-62 NAS).” Peter found forgiveness and demonstrated his loyalty to Jesus over and over, beginning at Pentecost. (Acts 2:14-42) Do you have regrets about letting the Lord down? Do you feel like you are on the outside looking in? Jesus wants you back, close at His side, enjoying a very intimate relationship. Open your heart, and open your eyes. You’ll see the look of love.

July 29

“Follow the Leader”

Children have been playing follow the leader for generations. There are only two essentials to play the game: a leader and followers. Everybody cannot be the leader at the same time. Without followers a leader would have no one to lead. He needs followers and they need a leader.

Ezra gives us a valuable example of people ready and willing to follow. “Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it (Ezra 10:4 NKJ).” The people saw the task as his responsibility. They only needed to follow his lead. Their encouragement sounded like a round of applause, giving him the extra motivation he needed. Ezra likely rolled up his sleeves and led the way.

Is someone in your church needing that encouragement and support? When they turn around and look behind them, do they see you following? If you are a *leader*, don't take your responsibility lightly. Where you lead determines the destination of those who follow. Let's all follow the ultimate leader, Jesus, the head of the church. We are His body and should stay alert to His leading...as the hymn expresses: *Where He leads me, I will follow.*

July 30

“Silence is Golden”

Sometimes quiet can be deafening, especially when there is a long, silent pause in a serious conversation. At other times that silence is just what we desperately need. We have a natural tendency to add our two cents to any topic discussed and try to get in the last word.

Writers included the popular phrase: *Silence is golden* in a song title many years ago. The phrase has a calming effect, bringing a hush to our souls. We are so accustomed to constant noise in our surroundings that we now seem to routinely avoid silence. We begin our days with the blaring sound of alarm clocks. Without even thinking, we turn on music or television. Commuters turn the ignition keys in their vehicles and then crank up music or talk from their sound systems.

Solomon touched on the subject of silence with words of wisdom. “A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7 NKJ)...” Two other phrases pop into my mind: *Hold your tongue! Speak up!* Yes, there are times we need to zip it and times when we need to let our thoughts be known, developing the art of balance in our speech.

On two occasions Jesus demonstrated the wisdom of golden silence. As He stood before Pilate facing crucifixion, He did not speak in His own defense. (John 19:6-11) Hearing Pilate’s questioning: “Jesus gave him no answer (John 19:9b NKJ).” He trusted His Father in matters of life and death. During His ministry a woman desperately approached Him, seeking help for her tormented daughter. (Matthew 15:21-28) With her persistent begging ringing in His ears, scripture records His response. “But He answered her not a word (Verse 23a NKJ).” This behavior confuses us; it is His character to show compassion to the needy.

Possibly He tested her faith, or maybe He wanted His disciples to be confronted with their prejudice against those outside of their Jewish faith as well as against women. I’m unsure, but that silence was golden. She continued to cry out for His help, and her daughter experienced healing because of her great faith. The next time silence is deafening, silently pause and follow God’s advice. “Be still, and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10 NKJ).”

July 31

“Promises Kept”

But you promised! How many times do children direct those three disappointed words to a parent? With the best of intentions a promise is given but not kept. When we give our word to someone we are not able to see into the future. Problems and conflicting schedules develop, and we can no longer deliver what we pledged. If this frequently happens the one waiting for the promises becomes disillusioned, and confidence and trust is lost. Hopes are dashed and a barrier of resentment may rise. We are wise to not promise carelessly. It is much easier to explain a failed *maybe*, than *I promise*.

God’s first promises are recorded in Genesis with the creation story. (Genesis 3:15) Later the promises of a great nation, an heir, and a special blessing were given to Abraham. (Genesis 12:1-3) It is described in Galatians. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:13-14 NKJ).” God fulfilled His promise in His Son Jesus. Promises were made; promises were kept.

August 1

“A Captive Audience”

We appreciate having the undivided attention of others, especially when we have something important to share. To be realistic, that seldom happens. We live in a noisy world. Background sounds of television and music automatically remove our focus from the speaker. A second problem involves other distractions. It could be a coworker coming in or a telephone or doorbell interrupting your conversation. The third reason is not seen or heard by the speaker. It involves the lack of concentration by the listener. Any pastor or public speaker is well aware of that. We all have so much on our minds, and they are usually running at full speed ahead.

The expression *having a captive audience* is a description of having the attention of an individual or a group. At least for a while, they must listen to you. The Bible has a story with the location of a prison. “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25 NKJ).”

Many churches host community sings and hold watch night services. None could compare with this jail scene. Paul and Silas made a choice to sing, praise and worship God instead of moaning and groaning. The complaining would likely have been ignored by the other prisoners. Praying and singing got their attention. If we do the unexpected in times of trouble, we may also discover we have a captive audience.

August 2

“Invisible Ink”

Children of all ages are fascinated with simple magic tricks and slight-of-the-hand mysteries. Hobby shops offer inexpensive magic sets which may contain a magic wand, trick piece of rope, a deck of marked cards, a shell game and a pen using invisible ink. The buyer is confident and excited about the chance to amaze their family and friends with the tools of the trade.

Invisible ink is great for children, giving hours of fun writing secret messages to their friends. Now you see it; now you don't! Did you realize that your heart is used like a delicate piece of fine stationary? God wrote His laws on our hearts. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Hebrews 8:10 NKJ).” Those not of the Jewish faith were grafted into that vine by God's grace and salvation, becoming part of covenant heirs. (Romans 11:16-24) How comforting to know that His word is not only in our minds, our thought process, but also on our heart, the center of life. If you are scheduled for open heart surgery, the surgeon, nurses and technicians will not see God's personal message on your beating heart. Why? God uses invisible ink.

August 3

“Why Must We Be Strong?”

Have you ever heard a stern father tell their child not to cry, that they must be strong? To some individuals that idea is deeply embedded in their memories. Why must we be strong? In reality we are all weak; our only reliable strength is in our trusting our mighty God. He is our Rock. “I will look up my eyes to the mountains; from whence shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1-2 NAS).”

There are times when only those who are strong can cry, can allow themselves to be vulnerable and transparent. One example is seen in times of great loss when we have experienced the death of a loved one. Other situations may be the loss of a job, broken relationships or loss of health.

Honest grief is revealed in 2 Samuel 3:30-39. King David’s military leader, Joab, is held responsible for the death of a man called Abner. David felt that the death could not be justified, and he called for a time of mourning. The people were weeping along with their leader. He refused to eat and fasted in his sorrow. He spoke words of respect and praise to honor the dead man at the funeral. He could even openly confess his trouble accepting his loss. (Verse 39) Many kings or leaders would be afraid of losing their approval rating. How would David be scored? “Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, just as everything the king did pleased all the people (2 Samuel 3:36 NAS).” Remember, he not only pleased the people; he is known as a man after God’s own heart. (1 Samuel 13:14) Jesus also wept when His good friend Lazarus died. (John 11:34-36) Allow yourself to grieve. You will be in good company.

“Bread and Water”

In many countries around the world at this very moment, prisoners are being tortured. A common punishment is a diet of only bread and water. Those of us who are pampered with a variety of foods know the delight of meals that please the palate. Beverages today far surpass the old coffee, tea or milk offerings. One change in recent years is the popularity of bottled water. Modern man has decided that even water can be improved. Bottlers add flavorings and, in some cases, even carbonation.

Diets may even exclude bread from meals because of the extra calories. Our ancestors thrived on freshly baked breads and fresh water from springs. Bread and water are not things to be avoided. Whole-grain breads provide fiber and satisfy your hunger. Not only is water still the very best way to quench your thirst, it reduces your appetite. Vital organs must have ample supplies of water; if not, we become dehydrated and in need of hospitalization.

If all of this is true about the physical benefits of bread and water, you can be sure it also applies spiritually. Jesus invites us to come to Him and receive both nourishment and fulfillment. Satisfaction is found in Jesus, the Bread of Life and the Living Water. (John 6:48, John 4:10) When I have an intimate, growing relationship with Christ, I can enjoy solitary confinement and a daily diet of bread and water.

August 5

“Perfect Fit”

Don't you just love a perfect fit? For most of us that rarely happens. I am an even five feet tall, and for as long as I can remember, most slacks or dresses needed to be hemmed. I clearly remember the extremes of mini dresses to floor-length styles. For many years there has been a good deal of moderation, allowing people to wear whatever lengths are most comfortable to them. I usually prefer dresses right below my knees.

I am a bargain shopper, buying most of my clothes from thrift stores. I have also been blessed with a lot of hand-me-down items, which frequently do not fit quite right. They either feel too tight or too loose. They lack that just-right feeling that Goldilocks found when she found the bed of Baby Bear. There is one guaranteed fit.... “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27 NKJ).” He fits like a glove. Don't settle for less.

August 6

“Money Keeps It Spinning”

Currently there are three things that we hear way too frequently, not only in the news but in personal conversations: downsizing, cutbacks, and economical slowdown. Many feel like the rug is being pulled out from under them. It seems that these forces don't care who they hurt. These painful situations, casting aside differences in education and career levels, reach people of all ages, races and genders.

Love makes the world go around, but money keeps it spinning. Multitudes are losing their jobs or at least the fringe benefits they once took for granted. Face the facts; our security cannot be found in our jobs, the workplace or our employers. In the scriptures, I noticed that even God may choose to downsize when necessary. “In those days the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel... (2 Kings 10:32a HCS).” We know God never personally cuts back from His purpose and plans for our lives. So, let's clock in; we still have plenty of work to do.

August 7

“Antibacterial Campaign”

Because most of us like things to be clean, we become grossed out when we see places that are extremely unclean. In our society *antibacterial* has become a household word. All are urged to wash their hands well and often. Hand sanitizers are available in most job locations and come in convenient pocket or purse-size containers. How did our ancestors survive?

I enjoy the comical advertisement for the cleaner with scrubbing bubbles. They happily do all the work for you, swiftly cleaning all bathroom surfaces. Other commercials dramatize the problems of clogged household drains. *Roto-Rooter* comes to the rescue, quickly cleaning out the clogs until things flow freely again. If only we were as concerned about the bacteria, grime, scum and stoppage in our hearts.... We easily ignore that contamination. David deeply desired that his heart and life would remain clean and pure. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me (Psalm 51:10 NKJ).” Those words may not be as entertaining as commercials, but they can be trusted.... satisfaction guaranteed.

“Who is in Control?”

What happened to childhood? Sadly a child is expected to act like an adult by the time they enter kindergarten. There is a race to push children into the role of high achievers, not only by parents but much of society as a whole. Families, caregivers and educators each assume control and may leave a child feeling confused and discouraged.

As adults we realize keeping our own lives under control is no easy task. To be honest, it is impossible; at times we all need help. Trained professionals advise people who are fighting addictions that the first step to freedom is to admit they need help. We cannot control circumstances.

So what do we do? Where can we go, and who can we turn to? Those of us who are blessed with a supporting family and friends can confide in them. A church home is a lifeline with concerned friends and compassionate staff. Most pastors are trained in counseling or can refer you to others better qualified.

Above all we can and should turn to the Lord. He already knows every problem and heartache, yet patiently waits for us to call out to Him. Peter often lost his temper or spoke out of turn, but he also knew the bottom line. “But Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:68-69 NKJ).” Peter, a fisherman, liked to be in control but knew he could only have fulfillment, peace and joy when he handed over control to his Master, the Messiah. Let’s allow children to enjoy dependence a little while longer and then tenderly guide them into places where they take control of their own actions. Relax; we can also snuggle up in the lap of the Father and give Him control of all of our circumstances.

August 9

“Learning to Lean”

Are you left alone to face the music? Have others deserted you, forcing you to stand on your own? It hurts deeply to feel like you have been abandoned or thoughtlessly cast aside. It cuts deep, possibly leaving lifetime scars. If not dealt with, hurt often turns to bitterness and anger.

Even the apostle Paul dealt with the hardship of desertion. He did not rely on others, their faithfulness or approval. “At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion (2 Timothy 4:16-17 NKJ).” Paul’s security and support came directly from the Lord. Jesus fully understood Paul’s feelings when finding those He trusted turning away when most needed. “Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56b NKJ).” Lean on Jesus. It is a sign of true strength to admit our weakness and lean on the Rock.

August 10

“Anything Goes”

In our anything-goes society, people who are true to their convictions are frequently ridiculed. All of the labels are pasted on them: judgmentalists, holy Joes, to hypocrites. At the center of the opposition is the attitude that there are no moral absolutes. If a person is sincere about their beliefs, all is well.

If you believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, you have no choice but to accept the label of being narrow-minded. “This is the *stone* which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:11-12 NKJ).” The scripture reveals that no other god or way will bring salvation and eternal life. That is a narrow-minded statement, and it leads us to freedom in the arms stretched wide at Calvary.

August 11

“Middleman”

We often try to avoid working through the middleman by going straight to the top with our problems, complaints or questions. We believe the middleman is usually just a stall tactic or maybe a fast way to get us out of the way. When dealing with the middleman, communication can be impaired. By the time our message reaches the top, it has been changed, like in the old game called gossip.

Maybe our frustration with the middleman is at the boiling point today because we have to deal with voice-mail recordings. Please help; I need to speak with a real live person who cares about me and my problems. Just as there are two sides to a coin, there is a flip side in this situation. There is one middleman we desperately need. Jesus has willingly stepped in between us and the Father, asking God to send us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He comes to be our counselor, to abide with us always. He is the Spirit of Truth dwelling within us forever. Jesus could not leave us as orphans. He will return to us. (John 14:16-20) Praise God for our middleman. I want Him front and center.

“Spanking New”

At the sound of a baby’s first cry, the proud parents’ hearts leap for joy. What a sad way to make an entrance into the world, with a firm spank on the bottom. From the baby’s warm, secure place in the mother’s womb, the child is forced out into a world of bright lights and noise. Then, topping it all off, a cold hand meets the bare bottom. The parents and grandparents celebrate, but that new baby may want to purchase a return ticket and go back where it came from.

Is there anything as soft as the skin of a newborn baby? Cosmetologists will never come up with a formula to equal it. As we age, our skin wrinkles and sags. Some fight it with every weapon in their arsenal. They refuse to admit defeat, and plastic surgeons throw a party.

Your skin is just a convenient covering to protect the real you inside. The Bible says, “...*you must be born again.*” (John 3:3-18) When we ask Jesus to live in our hearts, we are instantly born again. We are spanking new, needing the nutritional milk of the Lord’s word. For growth, new Christians also need the comfort and protection of God’s family, His Church. How can we change? The older we get, the more set in our ways we become. We may have the best of intentions, but at times we fail miserably. Don’t surrender to the enemy. “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 NKJ).” The best is yet to come.

August 13

“Broken Cisterns”

Growing up in the countryside of Syracuse, New York, our family used a well and pump for our water source. We also appreciated the benefits of a large cistern in our basement. My parents caught and stored rain water in the cistern for household use. Hard water came from the well, resulting in the need of water softeners. The rainwater from the cistern far surpassed well water for bathing, doing the laundry, and especially, for washing our hair.

Our neighborhood also offered a fresh-water spring. We could always depend on clear, ice-cold water from the spring. Fresh wild spearmint leaves grew along the edge of the spring. We often picked and chewed the leaves then drank the water. The refreshing taste cannot be beat by bottled or tap water.

Jeremiah gives us special teaching about cisterns and how useless they are when broken. The bottom line is they can't hold water. “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13 NAS).” God said His people abandoned Him, their source of fresh living waters, in the foolish exchange for broken cisterns. We do not need to patch up the cracks of old, leaking cisterns to quench our spiritual thirst. Drink from His fountain and find never-ending refreshment.

August 14

“Whistle While You Work”

Think about it; how often do you hear people whistling? My husband did sales work for many years, and I would hear him whistle as he was coming and going, making his contact visits. I honestly believe whistling may be disappearing, not at the speed of light, but at the speed of puckered lips. Whistling used to be a beautiful part of many popular songs, with crisp, clear notes. Some of the silver-screen singing cowboys both whistled and yodeled in their tunes.

Our daughter discovered how to whistle accidentally. As a toddler she blew her soup and out came a little whistle. I think maybe a whistle is a smile that is set to music. A grumpy, cranky grouch does not whistle. Can you whistle while you work? If you are in a high-stress job or deep in a rut, whistling will not be easy; but it is possible. “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 (1 Corinthians 15:58).” Don’t be a sourpuss; pucker your lips and whistle while you work.

“Fly Fishing”

Poolsbrook Creek ran through our property in Mycenae, New York. Though my dad did not enjoy the sport of fishing, my sisters, brother and I made poles from tree limbs a few times to go fishing in the crick. The Fish and Wildlife Department stocked the creek with fresh trout each year. The clear waters were a favorite spot for many loyal fishermen. My younger brother at times made friends with them and ended up bringing home their catch. Mom would pan fry the mouth-watering treat. One neighbor, Dale, especially liked to fish in the rain. I remember seeing him dressed in all his rubber rain gear and casting his fishing line, in hopes of landing a big one. Naturally, he would cast the line out as far as he could.

We can learn a valuable lesson from my neighbor. God tells us to humble ourselves and He will lift us above our cares. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care on Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7 NKJ).” The farther we cast away our cares, the less likely we will be to reel them back in.

“Super Size It”

Human nature always wants just a little bit more than we have. We believe if we could have an increase, we might find satisfaction and fulfillment. Don't we all feel pleased when we are offered a two-for-the-price-of-one purchase? It seems everything is getting bigger today, from king-size candy bars to homes which are sometimes larger than hotels. We now have the fast-growing mega churches that appear more like college campuses than a house of prayer.

Fast food restaurants have us brainwashed into super sizing our meals and beverages. Moving from small to medium, large and super size adds calories, fat, sugar and sodium. We ignore the statistics and go for the most available. Our scales and rise in obesity are proof of our unchecked appetites.

Items that moved in the other direction include automobiles and trucks. People appreciate the luxury and comfort of the super-sized SUV, but the cost for fuel often outweighs the pleasures. The Bible gives examples where Jesus super sized meals. My favorite involved a small boy with a big heart who shared his small lunch with a big crowd. (John 6:1-13) Don't miss the contrast here. We super size things much too frequently to feed our own bellies or our own ego. Jesus super sized to share with the multitudes. That's super-sized love.

August 17

“Avoiding the Fall”

We have conflicting attitudes about pride. From early childhood we were taught to take pride in our work, family, school, community, home state and our nation. Each deserves our respect and commitment. The pride we need to avoid is arrogance, an opinion that in some way we are superior to others and self-sufficient. There is really no such person as a self-made man.

First, we must acknowledge that all life is a result of God’s creation. Along the way family, friends and circumstances each play a part in what we become. King Uzziah, of Judah, is a prime example. “But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azzariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord-valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the Lord God (2 Chronicles 26:16-18 NKJ).” The king’s prideful heart led to his destruction. Pride trips us up, and we fall down defeated. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18 NKJ).” Will you avoid the fall?

August 18

“Every Job a Ministry”

We look up to those who have answered the call to full-time service in our local churches. They deserve our honor and our respect and, above all, our support and prayers. We may feel we have little to offer the body of Christ or the advancement of His kingdom. Truly God will use as vessels those who are available and willing to be used as He directs. Ask Him where you can best minister to others. Most congregations and the communities in their midst have many needs waiting to be met. Tell your pastor that you want to help in any way you can. Every job done for Jesus is a ministry. “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men (Colossians 3:23 NKJ).”

Many wrongly believe ministry is the role of only the leaders of the flock. The Lord holds opportunities for each of us. We can impact those lives that our pastors could never reach. Some churches regularly search their memberships for gifted individuals in the many areas of teaching, outreach and ministry. Do you enjoy working with children, youth or adults? Teachers and assistants are always in demand. Do you have a flair for decorating or cooking? Hospitality is a valuable ministry, and your gifts can touch many. Do you realize the numerous needs of the elderly, which include household chores and yard work? Simple vehicle maintenance would be a real blessing for certain folks. What about your day job? It becomes a ministry each new day if you do it to please the Lord. Every job can be a ministry when you find your assigned role.

August 19

“The Great Impostor”

The profession of impersonator is a million-dollar business. When we no longer see the original rich and famous, we gladly settle for a look-alike. Clothing, hair, voice and mannerisms are carefully studied and practiced diligently. A professional in their craft can temporarily take on the life of those they copy.

We respect impersonators, but we reject impostors. They don't try to entertain with their acquired skills and resemblance. The goal is to convince people they are the real thing. It is common knowledge that both Hitler and Hussein used doubles. We don't like being conned.

I remember a humorous experience in the late 1990s. My hairstyle and eyeglasses at that time were very similar to those worn by the First Lady, Hillary Clinton. I did not intentionally copy her styles and did not realize how similar they were. My husband and I were in Orlando with friends attending a Christian Coalition meeting. A stranger walked up to me in the large convention room and commented how much I looked like Hillary. I laughed it off as a coincidence. Later, on our way home, we stopped at a fast food restaurant. For the second time that day someone approached me to say how much I looked like Hillary.

Don't be deceived by the great impostors. “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13 NKJ).” Satan is the leader of all counterfeit activities. Test the spirits. (1 John 4:1) Impostors may fool a crowd but inside that convincing exterior, they are as misleading as a Hollywood lot showing fronts of fake buildings. Reject the lies and the great impostor. Choose the Truth, Jesus Christ.

“CPR”

Millions of lives have been saved by the actions of those trained in the first aid use of CPR, cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Free classes are offered in most areas through the Red Cross, hospitals and fire departments. Firm and repeated hand pressure on the chest can cause a person’s heart to beat normally again and restore breathing. The combination of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and the pressing down on the chest increases the chances of a successful recovery.

The hands of trained individuals become instruments of rescue. Can you imagine the feelings of gratitude a person would have, knowing they owe their very life to that set of loving hands? Words could never express their appreciation. But for the tender firm touch of perhaps a complete stranger, another life would have ebbed away, yet now continues. Are you aware that a person who has yet to receive Jesus as personal Lord and Savior is dead? It is true; they are dead spiritually. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:4-5 NKJ).” God’s mercy, love and grace brought us life eternal. The blood of Jesus provided our salvation, restoring a lifeless heart. I can picture God’s loving hands massaging my heart, applying CPR, *Christ’s Powerful Redemption*. I’m alive.

August 21

“What, Me Worry?”

Do you worry? Today that word is not tossed around as much as in the past. The more popular term is now anxiety; to be specific, anxiety disorder might be more proper. Word number three is stress. If this were a trip to the store, I would suggest that you leave worry, anxiety and stress on the shelves. Do not put them in your shopping cart. “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature (Matthew 6:27 NKJ).”.... “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:34 NKJ).”

In the Old Testament we are told of an old woman who held the body of her dead son in her arms. Grief and worry would be normal reactions. Twice she commented: “It is well (2 Kings 4:23b/ 26b NKJ).” Elisha, through the power of God and prayer, restored life to the boy. (Verses: 32-37) The woman’s confidence and faith led to rewards. *What, me worry? Why should I worry?* All is well. Jesus’ words bring the perfect remedy: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33 NKJ).” Just as the town crier proclaimed peace and security to America’s patriots, we can cry out the news: All is well.

August 22

“Audience with the King”

It is a great honor to enter the court of royalty. The privilege is rare and awarded to only a few. To approach a monarch with a personal request would be a humbling experience. Imagine the king and queen of Spain being approached by Christopher Columbus with his plans for a voyage to the New World. Fulfillment of his exploration dreams rested in their hands. Everything he worked for could be lost by the wave of a hand.

As children of the King we are brought directly into God’s presence, to His throne room of grace. Through our prayers of faith, we kneel at His feet. One day we will look upon Him through new vision: that from transformed bodies. It is hard to understand, realizing the vast multitude who will gather at that throne, but I truly believe each one will get God’s undivided attention. None will be sent to the back of the line. “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16 NKJ).” Do you have a need? Help is a prayer away. See Him in His holy splendor. Your Majesty, the King!

“Right on the Tip of My Tongue”

Are you blessed with a good memory? Can you quickly recall the name of someone you met only once? I am terrible with names, very often forgetting names of those I know very well. I just go blank. I very seldom introduce people because of this embarrassing memory loss. I guess names are just filed away somewhere for me to retrieve. They are right on the tip of my tongue.

How often does searching for a name of a person, old movie or book title drive you to distraction? I can have it bugging me for days. I go through the letters of the alphabet in my mind, hoping it will jog my memory. Many times, out of nowhere, it pops in my head, and I am so relieved. We all would love to say the right words at just the right moment. King David went one step further. “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue (2 Samuel 23:2 NKJ).” Just imagine David’s delight. He spoke with authority. God’s word was right on the tip of his tongue.

August 24

“Sticks and Stones”

Children can be very cruel; their mocking and name calling often hurts a great deal. Today there is a national focus on those who bully others. It seems to be a root cause for such extreme violence as school shootings. A new term has surfaced. Cyber bullies are a threat to those who innocently browse the web.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me! Beware of that deception. We all need to be encouraged, praised, loved and accepted. Our words can do a great deal of good or harm; the choice is ours.

Have you ever been around someone whose words seemed to tear another apart? Do you know of a husband and wife who quarrel constantly? They act like savage animals ready to devour each other. “But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another (Galatians 5:15 NAS).”

The Lord urges us to build up each other by our words and actions. Paul’s prayer revealed the source of building and encouraging: God’s grace. (Acts 20:32) The scriptures even give an example of boys who taunted the prophet, Elisha. (2 Kings 2:23-24) Sadly, this story of verbal abuse ended in an act of revenge, revealing even God’s chosen messengers are capable of losing their temper. Let’s gather up those sticks and stones and build an altar. Let our words be the sacrifice of praise.

August 25

“Curtain Call”

Each year most church choirs present two special music programs, often referred to as cantatas. The congregation is eager to hear the Easter and Christmas specials. I have been a member of many church choirs in our moves across America. Some of the groups were very small, just a few faithful members offering up a joyful noise to the Lord. Others were larger and very formal in their worship style. I once needed to audition when joining the choir by singing the scales for the choir director.

In many ways cantatas are gala events following many long hours of practice and a dress rehearsal. Then the opening night arrives, and we almost have a curtain call. I can still remember the times, with special lighting and opportunities; I read narrations in front of a full church. Our choir director looked very dignified in his tuxedo. Music is a very special part of our worship and praise experience. Did you know that King David served as the first choir director? (1 Chronicles 15:16, 19-21) This would not be a spur-of-the-moment simple hymn sing. The next time you get a chance, show your appreciation to your choir director, instrumentalists and the choir. They do more than you may realize.

August 26

“Running on Empty”

Do you remember the old television commercials for *Geritol*? If the viewer no longer felt pep and vigor, the tonic held the cure. During the sixty-second commercial you did a self-diagnosis and decided you suffered from iron-poor blood. At the beginning of the commercial a lady representing an average housewife appeared to have very little energy or strength. She looked like something the cat dragged in. Then she began to take the vitamin supplement; and the results were amazing. By the end of the advertisement she and her husband were twirling around a dance floor, enjoying a night on the town.

At times we all feel like we are running on empty. We are aware we have to feed our bodies nourishing food to fuel us for our busy days. Our emotional and spiritual life also needs to be strengthened. Nehemiah encouraged his people and us as well with his message. “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10b NKJ).” That strength can never be found in any bottle, but it may cause you to dance a little jig.

August 27

“Perfect Plan”

The A-Team aired as a very popular television program in the 1980s. One of the leading characters, Hannibal Smith, used an expression repeatedly: I love it when a plan comes together! Weekly they would be in very difficult situations. For all practical purposes, it seemed there could be no way out. Yet, because in fiction anything can happen, they escaped. Their group would form a plan, and they would succeed.

Real life is not so neat and tidy. Our plans do not always come together. To be honest, they very often fall apart at the seams. Don't throw in the towel yet. There is One who also loves it when a plan comes together. God planned for us to have an intimate relationship with Him, even before creation. The sins of Adam and Eve did not derail God's plan.

Thousands of years passed, but God's plan continued to unfold. At the birth of Jesus, the angels in glory were rejoicing. When man rejected Jesus as the Son of God, they crucified Him, assuming they could kill His plans. God knew His plan did not fail that day; in many ways it only began. At Jesus' resurrection, God could smile at the heavenly host and say: "I love it when a plan comes together!" He has a unique plan for each of us, and day by day it is all coming together. (Jeremiah 29:11)

August 28

“Finders Keepers”

Children frequently stake their claim on something they find. With a sound of triumph, declaring their rights, they sing out: “Finders keepers, losers weepers!” Their thoughts are the real owners lost their chance. As adults we understand that is a very childish and selfish attitude. Yet, I think, deep inside we each want to gain things and to hold on tightly to what we already have. Do you store things away; hoard, just in case of a rainy day? Most Americans have more than we really need.

Raised in the snow belt of central New York State, my mother developed a habit of stocking up on items. When you are aware that you may be snowed in during a blizzard, you want to be prepared, which is a wise path to follow. Years later, my parents relocated to south Texas, away from the snow, and she continued to store things away. Maybe she just shifted gears from blizzards to tornadoes or hurricanes. Her extra bedroom became a supply room of items she just might need. I have an idea that Sam’s Club may have got a start that way.

Jesus gave us a warning about placing our trust and security in possessions. (Luke 12:15-21) In a parable He shared an illustration of a farmer hoarding his crops. He believed he could rest securely in his surplus. God called the farmer a fool, saying he would die that very night. Who would get his crops then? Selfishness and pride were at the bottom of his stockpiles. We can only be truly rich in our relationship with God. Did you pay attention to the ending statement of the simple children’s song? Listen again: Finders keepers, losers weepers. Don’t lose a generous heart.

August 29

“It Takes a Thief”

A recent remake of *The Pink Panther* movie brought back to mind a popular thieves theme. The character is often played by handsome or gorgeous stars, making the role of thief appealing. The temptation of stealing rare jewels or robbing banks lures those with a weak conscience. The truth is crime is anything but beneficial. The thief lives an existence of living on the run, not only from the police but from their own conscience. Some will always be willing to take the risks.

The master thief is the father of lies, Satan. “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy (John 10:10a NKJ).” What does he try to steal from you? Everything he can. He robs us of our peace and influence every chance he gets. He robs individuals of their purity and families of communication and togetherness. If you are a believer, he can never rob you of your eternal life. Jesus promised, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly (John 10:10b NKJ).” It takes a thief to rob us of our joy and peace. Trust the Lord to guard your valuables.

“I’m a Little Teapot”

Teapots are very special to me. The children’s song *I’m a Little Teapot* is a tune I remember clearly from kindergarten. Even the motions involved to act out the song remain in my memories. The lyrics have a profound message within the simple words:

I’m a little teapot, short and stout,
Here is my handle, [place one hand on hip] here is my spout [other arm held out straight].
When I get all steamed up, hear me shout.
Just tip me over and pour me out! [bending over, arm bent, as pouring from spout]

At home my mom often offered a fresh pot of tea on the kitchen table during mealtimes. The pot held no monetary value, being constructed from simple aluminum, but practicality made it appreciated. The teapot brought out special feelings of comfort and relaxation.

As an adult I became a contented tea drinker. When I reached my midlife years I began to collect teapots, starting my collection with a gift from my daughter. She later lived in England with her husband and sons at Lakenheath AFB, near Cambridge. During two visits with her family, I experienced the treat of drinking the most delicious tea I ever tasted.

I am blessed to own a gold-trimmed white porcelain tea set, given as a 50th wedding anniversary gift to Grandma and Grandpa Ford. It is a centerpiece attraction and cherished in my heart.

Now back to our song... As a Christian, I can be a vessel for service, God’s little teapot. I am little; at five feet tall, that is a match. Am I stout? I’m trying to avoid middle-age spread, so I’ll skip that one. I guess the handle would represent my hands to be reaching out, to touch and give to others. What about my spout? That would be an open life and free of sin, allowing God to work through me. The steam is a picture of God’s glory just as smoke filled the temple. What do we hear when the tea begins to boil? A whistle is our signal to remove the pot from the stove. I desire my life to express the melody of joy, praise and music. Those around me may be led to give a little whistle.

Now for the finished product; it is time to pour me out. Our lives should be a living sacrifice. “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1 NAS).” We should be poured out and empty of selfishness, allowing the Holy Spirit to take control, flowing into the lives of others. “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering (2 Timothy 4:6a NAS).” I’m a little teapot, and it is always teatime. Won’t you join me?

August 31

“A Clear Conscience”

We have all made wrong choices; giving in to temptation, we take sin by the hand. Children usually have guilt written all over their faces. An observant parent notices something is wrong and asks the question: “Do you have a guilty conscience?” If the child has a sensitive spirit, they confess their wrong, face the consequences and receive forgiveness.

Unfortunately adults often turn the on-off switch to the off position in their conscience.... Remember, we can push reset at any time.

The Apostle Paul dealt with his sins. “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day (2 Timothy 1:3 NKJ).” Was Paul’s conscience pure, clear because he never sinned? No; remember, before trusting Jesus he persecuted the church. His clear conscience followed confession of his sin. He received cleansing, and he cleared his account.

September 1

“Who Cares?”

How much do we really care about our America the Beautiful? Do we sigh, saying her glory days are behind her? Have we been brainwashed by mediocrity? There are still patriots who have an unending loyalty to the heart of America, the core beliefs and standards. As long as they have breath, they will proudly voice the words of our pledge of allegiance.

We have a tendency to lump all politicians into one group, believing they are driven by their own sense of power and pushing the pork back to their home base. No, there is always a remnant of God’s people. I believe there is a remnant of America’s sons and daughters as well.

Listen to the heart’s cry of a man who carried such a burden for his homeland of Judah. As an exile, he questioned his visiting brother about the city of Jerusalem and the remnant who returned home. He presented a sad report. The people were in trouble and disgrace. The protective city walls were broken down, and their magnificent gates were destroyed by fire. (Nehemiah 1:1-4) The news led him to grieve for his nation and the people in the midst of devastation. Weeping and mourning for several days, Nehemiah took action. He focused his grief in prayer and fasting to the God of heaven. He cared; do we really care?

September 2

“Are You Appreciated?”

At times many of us feel like we are just occupying space. One prescription for that ailment is to go away for a few days. You'll be greatly appreciated when you get back home or return to your job. You may be treated like a celebrity making a personal appearance. A deep thinker penned the old expression: *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*. Maybe he missed his wife's home cooking.

Another factor to take under consideration is that at times we just need some space. Time away from someone allows us to recognize their strengths and how much we really need them. The Apostle Paul and John Mark experienced a heated parting of the ways. I'd guess that, as in most disagreements, both needed to claim their share in the conflict. The split need not be final. “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11 NKJ).” I wonder how much coaxing Timothy needed to do before Mark agreed to leave. I think he may have already packed his bags and just waited for an invitation.

September 3

“Polka Steps to Faith”

Have you ever seen the polka danced by professionals? Maybe you remember the regulars and guests in the audience on the *Lawrence Welk Show* whirling across the floor to a polka featuring the accordion. They were having the time of their lives.

In elementary school, we took part in a brief time of dance classes as part of our physical education (gym class). We were given a crash course in ballroom dancing including the waltz and foxtrot. Square dancing gave enjoyment but could be a bit complicated. The dance steps that stand out most in my mind were used in the polka. The caller directed us to meet our partners face-to-face and back-to-back. It involved the group in fast-paced movements, and the fun made class a real treat.

We need a crash course in polka faith to look in the face of Jesus. “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 (1 Corinthians 13:12 NKJ).” If our position finds us face-to-face with Christ, our backs will be turning away from evil. “Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it (1 Peter 3:11 NKJ).” That’s a step we all need to take.

September 4

“Three Little Words”

Hi, it's Mom. Those three little words at the other end of the telephone receiver brought me close to my mother on Sunday afternoons. We lived several states apart and used Sunday calls to keep us connected. Calls were made on any day, but the Sunday conversations were my favorites.

She knew my regular routine of a quick lunch after the morning worship services, followed by an afternoon nap. Often around three in the afternoon she would call, and we caught up on family news. It has been ten years since Mom died, and I miss our chats. We easily take communication with loved ones for granted. In our busy schedules, we often push off those calls or emails till a more convenient time.

We can continue to honor our mothers and fathers as God commanded. “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12 NKJ).” We best honor their memory by faithfully extending that honor to those still with us... Who do you need to call?

September 5

“Lower Your Buckets”

A thirsty man wandering in the desert may easily be misled and seek refuge in a mirage. His desperate thirst cannot be quenched in an illusion. He will die if he does not find water. God offers each of us refreshing, clear water to quench our deepest thirst. He expects us to then share our find with others trapped in an empty mirage. “Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation (Isaiah 12:3 NKJ).”

What effects will be experienced after drinking from the wells of salvation? “And in that day you will say: Praise the Lord, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted (Isaiah 12:4 NKJ).” He can use you to proclaim His message. Lower your buckets; draw from His wells of salvation.

September 6

“Southern Gentleman”

I am a Yankee with deep family roots in the northeast. One day life suddenly changed when I met a southern gentleman. My future husband moved up to Syracuse, New York, from Louisiana to work at a local radio station. We went on a blind date, and he swept me off my feet with his southern charm. Other boyfriends casually wore shirts and blue jeans for dates. He arrived for our first date in a suit and tie and opened doors for me. The southern gentleman treated me like a lady. His beautiful smile and blue eyes won my heart. During our courtship, he led me to a personal trust in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. We were married seven months after our first date. During our forty-one years of marriage, life has been many things; boring is not one of them. We raised two children while living in several states coast-to-coast. We met wonderful people everywhere we went. Our main occupation has been in broadcasting, but he also worked in many part-time jobs. This recognizes him for his warmth shared with all those he meets. Nobody is a stranger to Norm. He speaks to everyone who crosses his path.

One thing that makes me so proud to be his wife is his kindness to others. He makes everyone feel special. He has rubbed shoulders with political leaders, even interviewed two past Presidents, Bill Clinton and George Bush, Sr., before they held that office. In the position of news director, he interviewed them and also Ross Perot. Many years later while living in Florida, he became very involved in county and state politics. At that time, he met Governor Jeb Bush and Charlie Crist, the current Governor. I share all of that to draw a contrast. He has also held many menial day-labor jobs, from digging ditches to shoveling sand out of condo buildings following Hurricane Opal. He also worked as a maintenance man at fast food restaurants for several years. He has been as friendly to his minimum-wage co-workers as to government leaders. “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).” Who is the man that greets everyone he meets? I am sure you know by now. That man is my wonderful southern gentleman.

September 7

“Weeping Willow”

Trees play a large part in the beauty of America, from large areas of woods to landscaping in our front yards. Their majestic heights and swaying branches grace the sky and shade us from the rays of the sun.

My husband’s favorites are the palm trees. Living in both south California and south Florida, he enjoyed different varieties. Indio, California, is the home of some of the world’s best dates grown on the palms. While living in Miami we viewed coconuts.

My heart is drawn to weeping willow trees. They look so graceful with fragile branches and leaves gently blowing as they reach downward to the land below. The term weeping willow brings feelings of emotion and sadness and causes us to wonder the cause of that drooping. How long will the weeping last? “For His anger is but for a moment, his favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5 NKJ).” When God’s wake-up call comes, there will be no more night in the heavenly city of New Jerusalem. The weeping willow may become the rejoicing willow.

September 8

“Show and Tell”

Do you remember the fascination and excitement of show-and-tell in elementary school? Class members were given the opportunity to show items or tell something special to members of the class. I think the teachers may have enjoyed it as much as we did. You never can guess what children will come up with next. Art Linkletter proved that time after time.

I recall my biggest piece of news shared in show-and-tell. At age seven I stood before the class to announce the birth of my baby brother, Gary. That made headlines in our family; after four daughters, my parents finally got their boy.

Our lives are to be a witness for Christ both by showing and telling. A verbal testimony quickly falls on deaf ears if our life does not ring true. On resurrection morning an angel told the women at the empty tomb they had a story to share. “But go, tell His disciples--and Peter--that He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him, as He said to you (Mark 16:7 NKJ).” Jesus wanted to arrange a meeting with the disciples, and the women were acting as the agents to set it up. Tell the good news; Jesus lives and loves.

September 9

“Autograph Hounds”

Do you collect autographs of the celebrities? I have two autograph hounds in my family. My husband and son-in-law both proudly hold large collections of autographed photos and signed documents. Truly, in many cases such items are pieces of history which you can hold in your very own hands. It must be remembered they are only temporary, no matter how well they are preserved. Autographs are an enjoyable hobby and even a lucrative business for some, but they have no eternal value.

The most valuable autograph is ignored by most collectors. God’s autograph can be discovered on every page of His holy word and is displayed in creation. “For He says to the snow, Fall to the earth, and the torrential rains, His mighty torrential rains, serve as His signature to all mankind, so that all men may know His work (Job 37:6-7 HCS).” A signature is used to show ownership, authenticity and authority. God’s name is never to be questioned, and the value never goes down.

September 10

“The Finish Line”

I oppose gambling in any form. I grew up in central New York State where Vernon Downs is well known. We lived just off Route 5, a main road that connects Syracuse and Utica. Between the two cities Vernon Downs, a popular race track, drew big crowds. We regularly saw long lines of traffic returning to Syracuse after the drivers won or lost their bets on horses.

Syracuse television used to show film of the winning horses just as they crossed the finish line. The announcer excitedly voiced results no matter which horse won. The jockeys in their sulkies gliding along the track were a pretty sight. The movie *April Love*, starring Pat Boone and Shirley Jones, is a great story about the trotters.

Maybe in heaven I can have a heart-to-heart talk with Solomon about horses. “Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 9:25 NKJ).” Imagine the cost of horse feed. We don’t have to gamble to appreciate the beauty and speed of horses. God’s creation is good and pleasing.

September 11

“Squeak”

Many people in years approaching retirement daydream of the time ahead. They anticipate a slower-paced life. Imagination carries them to a rocking chair or recliner, passing on responsibilities to the younger generation. It is a pretty dream and it needs no interpretation.

Retirees who sit in squeaky rockers develop squeaky bones. Our bodies and minds were designed to be exercised. If we lazily rock our days away, our strength and stamina will go away too. We may be aging, but we can stay active in God’s work. Caleb is an example of a man who decided to climb mountains instead of rocking life away in a valley. “And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the Lord spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day (Joshua 14:10-12a NKJ).” What will your choice be, rocking or climbing? It’s up to you.

September 12

“It’s in the Mail”

We have all heard the classic response to a bill collector’s annoying call: *The check is in the mail*. Those playing catch-up hope those seeking payment will give them a couple days of grace and wait for the arrival of the check.

What if we are on the other side in this drama, and someone owes us money? They assure us our needed money is on the way. Do we believe it is as good as in our hands, or do we think: *I’ll believe it when I see it*? God wants us to believe **BEFORE** we see. “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them (Mark 11:24 NKJ).” Is it in the mail? No, answers to our prayers are in heaven, waiting for us to receive them as gifts of a loving Father to His needy children.

September 13

“Ladder to Success”

Are you climbing the ladder to success, hopeful of achieving promotions, status or cash rewards? It is not wrong to set goals, but if it becomes an all-consuming drive, put your brakes on. Keeping up with the Joneses never brings satisfaction. It usually raises your blood pressure and empties your bank account.

Most individuals who are truly successful did not beg for their position or neglect their families to be appointed to a place of influence. More often they were just doing a job to the best of their ability. Someone in a place of authority noticed, and they were moved up to the next rung of the ladder. That clearly describes Joseph in the Old Testament. “The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper (Genesis 39:23 NKJ).” Joseph did not depend on networking or using people as stepping stones to achieve success. He knew who was really in charge, trusted God, and could sleep with a restful mind at night.

September 14

“Authority Figure”

It seems that in our present time many young people no longer respect and honor authority figures. They mouth off at their parents, refuse to obey school rules, and rebel against local and federal law officers. Their behavior will likely become worse as they age, unless they see the error of their ways.

What about you? Do you acknowledge the greatest authority figure? “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18 NKJ).” His word is firm; there are no loopholes, and He can be trusted. All respect and honor goes to Jesus now and forever.

September 15

“Weight Training”

In the past, I believed only body builders or athletes lifted weights, but not anymore. Health experts now encourage senior adults to build muscle by lifting light weights of one to two pounds. Increase in muscle builds strength, flexibility, stamina and balance. Muscle around the bones cushions them in case of falls. Yes, middle-agers, we need to get pumped up.

There is another weight I want in my life. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NKJ).” Have you ever lifted a weight of glory? Remember, the next time you are going through trials and are in trouble up to your neck, your end results will be glory.

September 16

“Mended Relationships”

We live in a throwaway society. Fix-it shops are as outdated as last year’s cell phones. It is more costly to repair most items than to replace them. We once believed that things were built to last if they were cared for. Today we expect most of our purchases to be functional and in good working order for a very limited amount of time.

Sadly, frayed relationships are often not mended but cast aside, no longer usable to us. Judges once diligently tried to get couples filing for divorce to work toward a peaceful reconciliation. Now the divorce court is a revolving-door industry and even considered as television entertainment.

Christ’s redeeming love reconciled us to the Father. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) He even entrusts us with that responsibility. “... and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19b-20 NKJ).” God mends relationships; do you?

September 17

“Crash Diet”

Almost all women can recall going on at least one crash diet. You were at a time in your life when you were overweight, needing to lose several pounds, or maybe just wanted to take off that extra five pounds fast. Either way, you decided to lose weight even if it meant your collapse. It could have done you real harm. Have you ever thought about that description: *crash diet*? If you starve yourself, you will crash.

The saddest part is if you succeed and shed a few pounds with no lasting nutrition and exercise changes, you usually put the weight right back on and more. There is a long list of fad diets: grapefruit, low carbohydrate, low fat, high protein... They have all been tried. I remember an aunt using a soup diet. I like that one because there are so many varieties and you get your meats and vegetables. How about this one? There is a tears diet. What is that? It sounds so depressing. Follow me to Psalms. “You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure (Psalm 80:5 NKJ).” The psalmist, Asaph, declared God restricted His people to a diet of tears. Maybe from time to time we need that to cleanse our spirits, just as fasting cleanses the body. Our salty tears bring healing to the soul.

September 18

“Your Inheritance”

Congratulations, you are an heir to a vast fortune. It’s true; as a member of the family of God, you have an inheritance recorded in the book of life. If contents are unclaimed, you miss a blessing. Sadly many families squabble over what is left behind by loved ones. In some cases, greed leads to costly legal battles.

Our spiritual inheritance will not end in litigation. It is held in the safest place imaginable and sealed by the Holy Spirit. “His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3b-4 NKJ).” You may not hold great wealth in banks around the globe, but you are an heir in heaven.

September 19

“Octopus”

Do you enjoy watching documentaries filmed deep under the sea, giving you a close-up look at divers in search of treasure or just seeking adventure? Cameras capture scenes of another world far beneath the surface of the waters. Sea life in every shape, size, and color entertain, using coral and seaweed as their props.

Dangers are always anticipated. Sharks and stingrays are deadly, and octopus is a must to avoid. If divers get too close to these predators, they are taking their lives into their own hands. The octopus has a great advantage, so many legs to wrap around their victims. If the diver somehow frees himself from the grip of one, another can easily recapture him. Sin is just as deadly. We free ourselves from one stronghold, feel confident and fall into another one of the devil's traps. Don't give up. Use your weapon, God's word, our sword of the Spirit. (Ephesians 6:17) Trained divers are able to kill the octopus in its natural habitat. The sword of the Spirit is our efficient weapon to defeat Satan.

September 20

“Beyond Your Reach”

Do you have a heart for the Lord’s work? Is there a burning desire to touch others with the transforming gospel of Christ? Does it seem to be beyond your reach? Following on the steps of submission are Satan’s verbal attacks of discouragement. Have you recognized his voice, his words of accusation? *You can’t do anything that really matters! Nobody will listen to YOU! Look at all the times you failed God!* He used all his weapons earlier to block your salvation. If that failed and you personally trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior, he now has determination to block your witness for the Lord.

Remember, the devil is the father of lies, but he mixes truth with error. In his temptations to Jesus in the wilderness, he quoted the truth of God’s written word, but he distorted it. So if he says you can’t do the work of the Lord, it is both true and false. In your own strength you can do nothing of eternal value. (John 15:5b) Without Christ, we are nothing. Satan hides or distorts the whole truth. “...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13 NKJ).” His will and work are waiting to be fulfilled. He is waiting until we become available. That is His good pleasure. Is it yours?

September 21

“Sipping From Straws”

Are your children making memories? We are usually unaware of the lasting impact activities and relationships are forming. Do you remember hours of coloring books, tea parties, or ball games? They will too. Those teen years were filled with dances, slumber parties, school ball games and endless telephone conversations. Our children and grandchildren, though of a new generation, are experiencing the same events. They are making memories.

It is often the simple things that we cherish years later, not the roller-coaster rides as much as the summersaults in the backyard. My younger sister, Gayla, and I bonded as teens in front of our 19-inch, black-and-white TV. Each week we watched *The Monkees* side by side, making it special time together. Peter Tork held her undivided attention, and I became a fan of Davy Jones. We eagerly waited for each episode and enjoyed their crazy antics and hit songs. One of my fondest memories of those evenings is eating simple meals on TV trays. In between our ooo's and ahhh's, we ate TV dinners. We drank canned soft drinks, sipping from straws. We were clueless at the time that we were making memories. Guess what? Your children don't realize it yet either. Brothers sharing a day fishing together would one day share personal memories of leaving their nets behind. (Matthew 4:18-20)

September 22

“Unlikely Candidate”

We credit the apostle Paul with much of our foundation of spiritual truth found in the pages of the New Testament. If a pulpit search committee received his resume today, it is likely they would not consider him as a worthy candidate. Previous to his salvation experience, he blasphemed the Lord and persecuted His followers. (1 Timothy 1:13) He openly shared his past but resided there no more. “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry (1 Timothy 1:12 NKJ).” He refused to live looking back over his shoulder and refused to live in the land of *if only...*

How could Paul overcome his past failures? Did he have flashbacks of viciously dragging believers from their homes? Did the memory of Stephen’s stoning stay etched in his mind? Guilt, shame and regret are penetrating weapons of Satan. Even when forgiveness is freely given by the Lord and others, we often continue to condemn ourselves. Paul learned, through God’s grace, the way to banish self-condemnation. “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead (Philippians 3:13 NKJ).” We falsely believe only knights in shining armor are needed in spiritual warfare. Paul put on his daily armor and fought the good fight. (Ephesians 6:10-18) Maybe he would be an unlikely candidate for pastor or missionary by some people’s standards. He ranked high on the Messiah’s list to enlist others.

September 23

“Lay Down Your Arms”

In war, enemies are often face-to-face in a field of battle. One side gets the upper ground, seizes control and takes prisoners. The command is given: *Lay down your arms! Surrender!* That action is very difficult to fulfill. Arms of protection offer feelings of security. To drop them leaves us vulnerable and insecure. To surrender means we admit defeat; we are no longer in control of the situation. On any battlefield, these conditions spell failure. In our relationship with God when we lay down our arms and surrender, we experience the sweet taste of success.

We must stop fighting His authority and control in our lives, lay down our arms, and run into His everlasting arms. Surrendering to His perfect will leads to peace. Submit to Him today. All will one day be in subjection under the feet of Jesus. (Hebrews 2:8) Don't resist the King. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not the enemy. They liberate us from the enemy, sin. "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you (Acts 7:51 NKJ)." Lay down your arms.

September 24

“Mister Donut”

Did you know that Mister Donut could use a stand-in? Every Broadway show cast relies on extras. Leading characters are backed up by stand-in actors, ready to step into the leading roles on a minute’s notice. The star’s illness or accident becomes an open door to stardom for a struggling entertainer. In the crucifixion drama, a passerby temporarily took the role of transporting a cross. (Matthew 27:32)

If there were an actual Mister Donut, Dad could have easily taken over the role. Do you chuckle at jokes about police officers frequenting coffee and donut breaks? My father might have been tailgating close behind and honking his horn to get them out of his way. We lived in the country, away from donut-chain enterprises. Dad purchased boxes of donuts from his older brother’s small neighborhood grocery store. Mom lovingly packed the treats in his lunch box, to be pulled out with his thermos of hot coffee. His second-shift security guard job hours were broken up by munching on plain donuts, which he referred to as fried cakes. Retirement years gave Dad opportunities to visit his adult children and their families. One of my sisters lived near a Mister Donut franchise, and as I recall, he hiked that path many times. Do you have a craving for certain foods? It may be your door to notoriety.... Let’s see, is Baskin-Robbins male or female?

September 25

“Closing Hymn”

At the conclusion of church worship services, most congregations are led in a closing hymn of invitation, dedication, and benediction. Do we really appreciate that message in song, or are we too wrapped up in thoughts of our noon meal? If we listened to the words with our hearts and ears, we might be surprised to learn how powerful and meaningful the selections are. It may be several verses or a brief praise chorus, but it is a hearty *Amen* set to music.

King David knew the significance of music with worship and established our modern-day experience. Our hearts become so full of emotions they pour out of our vocal chords, mouth and lips. David’s songs described varied emotions of pain, fear, anger, sorrow, joy and love. He meditated, with music as his friend and companion. Songs were raised in pastures, hidden caves, his palace, and a private place of prayer in the tabernacle. Jesus and His disciples also sang following the breaking of bread at their Passover meal. “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26 NKJ).” I believe the majestic sounds of worship and praise in God’s heavenly choir will be worth the wait. Jesus is saving you a front-row seat.

September 26

“Ways of Defeat”

Don't buy into the lies. We cannot do a quick makeover of ourselves. The ways of defeat are abundant. If we are not satisfied with the product, some quick changes will not bring lasting results. It frequently starts with a resolution to give up some bad habit. With a fresh commitment we believe we are reformed, a new-and-improved model. In our own strength we are unable to change our hearts. Before long, we fall back into our old ways of defeat that we promised to avoid.

What we truly need is complete transformation, not being reformed but reborn. Jesus explained to a seeker of truth. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:6-8).”

Do you remember ever peering through the glass to a hospital nursery? Inside you emotionally viewed newborn babies, beautiful, pink and helpless. When we are reborn we need to admit to ourselves that we cannot be what we need to be or always do what we should. We need the constant help of our loving heavenly Father to cradle us in His tender arms. The reborn are given a new start as well as a new heart.

September 27

“Reach Out and Touch”

Are you a touchy-feely kind of person who gives generous hugs? There is a need for the ministry of touch today. Many of those we rub elbows with in the walk of life have only fond memories of the warmth of a person’s tender touch.

Do you at times feel that God is out of reach and you fear His rejection? That is one of Satan’s lies trying to keep you from seeking God, knowing that the truth will set you free. “... except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet, I myself have not been called to go to the king these thirty days (Esther 4:11b NKJ).” The story continues. “So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter (Esther 5:2 NKJ).” Yes, she reached out and touched. Our Heavenly Father invites us to His throne room. The scepter is His abundant grace. (Hebrews 4:16) This is your golden moment; reach out and touch.

September 28

“Bread Crusts”

Do you have the pleasure of attending formal luncheons? Often tiny tea sandwiches are served to the guests after being carefully cut in squares, rectangles or triangles. They are appealing to the eye, but how nutritional are they? Maybe it is just a clever start to a more substantial meal.

Most tea sandwiches have the crusts removed before serving. Guess what? Most of the vitamins are found in the crust. The best part is tossed in a garbage disposal, and we consume the rest. Do we discard God’s best plans for us? Are we unaware of the priceless value found in His perfect will? “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 12:2 NKJ).” Maybe even when we grow hard as stale crusts we contain hidden treasure. God’s will is always best.

September 29

“Tree Climbing”

Volunteer firemen have a very dangerous job protecting homes and rushing to give aid at automobile-accident scenes. On the lighter side, we have all heard of the kind-hearted, trained personnel rescuing a little child’s kitten that is stuck up a tree.

Did you ever wonder what caused the animal to climb so far? At times it may have been the curiosity cats are famous for. On many occasions the climb involved a quick escape from the neighbor’s dog. The heights above served as an attempt in desperately needed self-preservation. In a matter-of-life-and-death situation, the tree became a refuge. I know I have climbed a tree called Calvary. I am holding on securely to the high tower and stronghold provided for me there. (Psalm 46:11) I will cling to the *Old Rugged Cross*.

September 30

“Skim It Off”

Chicken broth or meat drippings are nice when hot. Later, after there has been time for cooling, fats rise to the surface. The results are far from appealing. The cook skims it off the top, peeling away a thin layer, revealing what is beneath. Do you remember the days of home milk delivery? Milk arrived at your doorstep in glass bottles. Cream would be at the top. Parents enjoyed it in coffee or tea and used it also for whipping.

Our lives are much the same. Eventually all that is within us will work its way up and out. If it is love, all will be blessed, skimming off what they need to add flavor to their lives. I'm sorry to say often feelings of anger or selfishness also rise to the surface. Hopefully we can skim them off with confession before our sin hurts others. “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man (Matthew 15:18 NKJ).” Skim it off; if it's good, spread it around. If it is bad, dispose of it promptly.

October 1

“Clocking In”

Do you need to clock in and out where you work? I once used a time clock at J.C. Penney. I worked there over forty years ago as a clerk in ready-to-wear. In a large company with numerous employees, the official unit gave proof of exact times when staff arrived or left, leaving no room for guesswork.

As Christians we can also clock in and out. As we begin a new day or bring it to a close, we are reminded to pray: “to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at evening (1 Chronicles 23:30 NKJ).” Imagine that; our official time keepers can be thanksgiving and praise. We have a marvelous way to count our hours.

October 2

“Forget-me-nots”

When you were a child, did you ever try to run away from home? Did you make a mad dash, map out a plan or just threaten in an attempt to get your way? TV sitcoms from the 1950s and 1960s frequently used the runaway theme. The child usually tied a knapsack to a stick, put it over their shoulder and hit the road. I can remember two situations from my early years. The first involved our neighbors across the road. Their family included six children; ours trailed behind at five. On this occasion, shortly before suppertime, Mom got a phone call. Her friend Laura told her the oldest daughter, Cindy, got upset about something and decided she wanted to live with us. Her mother came up with a clever idea, and Mom quickly put it into action. The instructions were to share with Cindy plans for our supper. I think Laura said she did not like spaghetti, and if we were having that, she would return home. She left as fast as she arrived. In this case, *Mother knows best*.

The other time I got mad and told Mom I would run away from home. I picked a small bouquet of forget-me-not flowers for her before leaving. I walked only a little way up the road before turning around and going back home. She obviously did not need the forget-me-nots. I did not give her time to forget me. God is always calling out to us to remember Him. “Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today (Deuteronomy 8:11 NKJ).” Don’t keep running away.

October 3

“Talking To Animals”

Our family still enjoys the re-runs of *Mr. Ed* television programs. The talking horse, Ed, faced life with spunk. I know at times his master, Wilbur, wished he would get an animal attitude adjustment. Donald O’Connor and his faithful mule, Francis, paved the way in a series of movies. Their military base antics provided fun for all.

Even the Bible features a talking donkey. This time no Hollywood tricks were needed. God provided the animal’s miraculous speech. Our Bible story revolves around a prophet named Balaam, who tried to stretch God’s patience to the limit. (Numbers 22:12-22) The angel of the Lord stood in the path traveled by Balaam and his donkey.

The angel of the Lord became visible to the donkey, so he veered off the road and into a field. In anger Balaam hit the donkey and directed him back onto the path. The angel stood in the narrow vineyards pathway. Walls formed barriers on opposite sides of the path. Seeing the angel again, the donkey pushed into the wall, crushing Balaam’s foot. In anger he hit his beast of burden. The angel of the Lord stationed Himself where the donkey felt trapped. He just folded under Balaam, bringing them both down.

The prophet reached his boiling point and struck the animal again. To his amazement, his donkey offered words of wisdom. “So the donkey said to Balaam, Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you... (Numbers 22:30 NKJ)?” Now that would be an eye opener. God opened Balaam’s ears to hear an animal and his eyes to see the angel through the talking donkey.

I wonder what another donkey found in scripture would say to us? This animal gave Jesus a ride into Jerusalem one special day. (Matthew 21:2-5) He played a crucial part of Jesus’ triumphant entry into the city with the shouts of Hosanna ringing in its drooping ears. Could he draw the attention of the crowds gathered in Jerusalem? *I, a simple donkey, carry the Lamb of God!* Mr. Doolittle gave good advice; let’s *talk and listen to the animals.*

October 4

“Sweet Tooth”

Do you crave sweets? Has that craving gotten out of control? Do you find that the more cakes, pies, cookies, donuts or candy you eat, the more you want? If only we could easily pull in the reins and say *whoa*. Just as there are some who enjoy eating sweets, there are others well satisfied with fresh fruits. To those not on diabetic diets, a variety of fresh fruits does not need to be restricted. Those sweets do not offer empty calories; instead they give the benefits of vitamins and antioxidants.

God understands our sweet tooth and offers the best way to find lasting satisfaction. The psalmist felt like a kid in the candy store. “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way (Psalm 119:103-104 NKJ).” The next time you crave too many sweets, open the pages of your Bible. You’ll discover a large selection of sweet promises.

October 5

“Common Ailments”

During visits with general practitioners, elderly patients share their latest ailments. It is hard to accept the rapid decline in health we often see. Physically our *want to* and *can do* seem to be parting company. No doctor has a simple answer or magic pill. Our bodies are only temporary and they wear out.

In Psalms, David painted a vivid picture. “My heart pants, (palpitations and irregular heartbeat) my strength fails me; (I just can’t walk up that flight of stairs like I used to.) As for the light of my eyes, (macular degeneration) it also has gone from me (Psalm 38:10 NKJ).” It’s not so bad:

- 1: Our heart is still beating.
- 2: When we can’t get around like we used to, it gives us more opportunities to be still and experience God’s presence.
- 3: We can see God even with our eyes shut. It truly is the golden age. We can really shine.

October 6

“Ink Spots”

Several months ago while doing our laundry, I accidentally left an ink pen in one of my pockets. When I opened the door on the clothes dryer, I saw bright blue ink spots all over the white laundry. The inside of the dryer looked like a child colored all over the interior. Ink from the brand-new pen went everywhere. Even now I see the results of my simple mistake; ink spots remain on our laundry.

Likely you have heard someone sarcastically say, “What I do is my own business; it’s no concern of yours.” That is not usually true. What we do affects others. If we sin, it touches the lives of those around us, just as the ink from one single pen went on most of the laundry.

In Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, he explained the seriousness of immoral behavior. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13) Within these verses we find this statement. “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (Verse 6 NKJ)?” Just as a little yeast expands, our evil actions quickly spread. Sin may not be as easy to see as blue ink, but it leaves stains that only the blood of Christ can remove. Laundry can always be replaced; the closet of your mind will hold your choices for a lifetime.

October 7

“Freedom in Chains”

Freedom vs. slavery is no contest. We all should cherish our freedom. It can be taken away from us in an instant. The knowledge of other countries being taken over by dictators gives us a good reason to guard our freedoms.

Hearing the word freedom, we might dwell only on political issues. We take other freedoms for granted. Every time you can get up by yourself and go to the bathroom, you have the freedom of movement to get you there. To a person who has lost their mobility, that is only a cherished memory. Maybe this brief reflection on freedom will be a gentle nudge to appreciate our small freedoms as well as the large.

Chains; just the word speaks of restriction and bondage. Being held as a prisoner in forced captivity must be one of the most frightening and helpless feelings man faces. Is it even possible to have freedom in chains? With God, all things are possible. “Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed (Acts 16:24-26 NKJ).” Now that is what I call a *grand opening*.

Paul and Silas experienced freedom in Christ. Chains could only constrain them; chains could not stop them. Jesus’ words gave them lasting assurance. “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32 NKJ).” Hands, wrists, or ankles may be bound with chains. The heart pulses a steady rhythm. *I am free, free, free!*

October 8

“Humble Pie”

It is very difficult to eat our words and slice off another large serving of humble pie. Let's be honest, we quickly recognize other peoples faults. When they mess up we wait for an apology. If they deny their faults, we say: *Why don't you admit it?* When we are the guilty party, we play the blame game or excuse ourselves with the old faithful standby: *I'm only human.*

Humble pie is really not bad once you begin eating. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5: 5b-7 NKJ).” Think it through; our part is to accept the humble pie from the hand of our Master. He even tops it off with the whipped cream of grace.

October 9

“Hovering Above”

The peaceful sight of birds hovering above is a dramatic demonstration of serenity. They hover with no flight pattern, ETA requirements to restrict them. If migrating or in search of food, they take time to hover, glide with the winds; resting on undercurrents provided by the Creator. They appear to be drifting in space, much the same as when I float on my back in a pool, lake, or the gulf.

Scriptures give us a beautiful example of hovering. “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2 NKJ).” I believe He hovered in expectancy, hardly able to wait to see the completion of His world, including His masterpiece of mankind. If we listen closely, we may hear Him hovering above, waiting for us to be perfected in Christ.

October 10

“Brag Book”

The role of grand parenting is wonderful. The first time you hold the babies in your arms, you are wrapped right around their little fingers. Time raising our children passes much too quickly and fills our minds with *if only* regrets... The rewards of grandchildren include bragging rights, and often brag books of the latest snapshots are shared.

Bumper stickers catch our attention with the phrase: *Ask me about my grandchildren.* To be honest, most of us do not wait to be asked. Our pride spills out at the most unexpected times. Like fishermen, we are eager to share all of our latest stories. Do we take the same kind of pride in our loving Lord? “I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High (Psalm 9:1-2 NKJ).” Maybe we can’t pull out a photo brag book, but we can show the Book of Books, His holy word.

October 11

“Wind Your Clock”

It is difficult for children of our generation to understand the concept of winding a clock or wristwatch. Nearly all are operated by batteries today. In days gone by, forgetting to wind your clock could lead to big trouble. It might mean the difference between being to work on time and walking in late to face your angry employer.

Our bodies run much like the old-fashioned alarm clocks. If we let down our guard we quickly run down, out of energy, and low on hope. We need to re-wind our clocks. “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 NKJ).” Ask the Lord to keep you wound up and ready to serve. We don’t want to be late for work.

October 12

“Flat on Your Back”

Does a person always need to be flat on their back in the gutter before looking up? Unfortunately some obstinate people will not face the reality of their wasted lives and heed God’s warnings. Until they spiral down and hit rock bottom, they do not look above for needed help. Many are so entangled in webs of rebellion, denial of personal accountability continues even after hitting bottom.

“And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physician (2 Chronicles 16:12 NKJ).” What will it be? Do we humbly fall on our knees in prayer and worship or fall on our backs in misery?

October 13

“Reverse Gear”

Do you ever wonder if you are coming or going? If you are going around in circles, it may be difficult to tell the difference. Our lives might be compared to clunkers with automatic transmissions in need of an overhaul. If the old jalopy only travels in reverse, you are in serious danger.

Life is dished out in three sections: past; present; and future, one slice at a time. If God wanted us to walk back to the past, he would have placed eyes in the back of our heads. Glances over our shoulder are sufficient as long as we are not distracted from the view ahead. Imagine the foolishness of an infantry, hearing the command *Charge*, turning around and attacking behind them. God’s children need reminders of our forward directions to advance His kingdom. “Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward (Jeremiah 7:24 NKJ).” A word of correction may have gone something like this... *Just where do you think you are going?* Stop living in reverse gear; put your life in drive and hit the road to success.

October 14

“The Gourd Lady”

Are you known by your occupation like John, the doctor, or Mary, the teacher? We once owned and operated a low-power television station; my husband quickly became Norm, the TV Man. Today my mother-in-law, which I prefer to think of as my mother-in-love, is our Gourd Lady. She raises gourds for martin birdhouses and crafts. For her it is a labor of love. She also operates a real-estate business, but she is the Gourd Lady.

As I read the scriptures, it is interesting to see how often gourds are found there. Do you remember Jonah and his shade vine? (Jonah 4:6) Gourds were even displayed in the ornate designs in the temple. (I Kings 6:18 HCS) Another place is discovered in (II Kings 4:39-41). Gourds look like squash growing on the vine. Isn't it nice to know that work can be so enjoyable that it is almost like a favorite hobby? The bonus is that you are paid to do it. Whatever we do, we each can do our best. (I Corinthians 10:31) Maybe one day I will be known as the Writer Lady.

October 15

“Spitting Image”

Looking into faces of parents and their children frequently reveals more than a slight resemblance. Children are described as being the spitting image of a mother or father. My brother looks very much like Dad at the same age. One friend of the family commented *Dad spit and Gary sprang up* as the result.

At times characteristics are visible several generations down the line. Our son, in many ways, looks like his great, great-grandfather. While scanning pictures I realized the shape of my legs came from my grandmother. Dig out your old family albums; you may be surprised how much of your children and grandchildren you see in your personal snapshots from days gone by. “Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3 NKJ).” Those who were blessed to behold the face of Jesus viewed a perfect image and reflection of His Father. As His children, we are being shaped into the image of Christ. (Romans 8:29) Don’t be surprised if someone says they see Jesus in you.

October 16

“Head over Heels”

As I recall...the term *head over heels* refers to someone head over heels in love. That is a good position to be in; it sure beats being up to your neck in debt. When that happens, we have fallen in and are sinking fast. When we fall in love we stay afloat because there is a bright future in our plans. When we fall in the bottomless pit of debt, there seems to be no way of escape.

The apostle Paul gave guidelines we are wise to follow... “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law (Romans 13:8 NKJ).” Our desire should be falling head over heels in love with the Savior.

October 17

“The Big Fisherman”

What is a macho man? Rugged men of superior strength do not boast in stamina and abilities. Their actions speak for them, and onlookers are drawn to them as a moth to a flame. The twelve disciples were no wimps, but Peter may have been the most magnetic in the select group. Peter could be described in a variety of ways; boring is not among them.

Do you remember a book turned into a movie titled: *The Big Fisherman*? My older cousin, Don, and his wife, Pat, took me, when a very young girl, to a drive-in movie to see the film. I remember no details of the dramatization of the Apostle Peter’s colorful life. The strange part is I remember it as being very important and special. I hope to have an opportunity to view the movie as an adult and, even more, as a follower of Christ. The macho fisherman left his occupation and nets behind to follow Jesus. In their early relationship, Peter did not understand the deity of Jesus. He simply followed, taking baby steps in a lifelong journey. He made many bloopers and blunders, but one statement is flawless and needs to be expressed by all.

Jesus questioned the disciples about His identity... “Who do men say that I am? So they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elijah, and others one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Peter answered and said to Him, You are the Christ (Mark 8:27b-29 NKJ).” Those four words transformed Peter from a commercial fisherman to The Big Fisherman. He began fishing for lost men.

October 18

“Eternity”

Are you in bondage to time and the restrictions of a day planner? God shows no favoritism in His distribution of time, giving each man, woman and child twenty-four hours daily. They are individually wrapped up in ribbons of the sun, moon and stars. Will you use time wisely, or will it master you? Children are taught at an early age to tell the time with placement of the hour and minute hands on a clock. Only time will tell if we lived life to the fullest.

How long will you live? Our survival instincts place within us a burning desire to live as long as possible. How long could that be? Everlasting, eternal life is offered to each of us as a free gift. “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 3:16 NKJ).” He created us with a spirit designed to live forever. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3 NKJ).” Surgeons peering into open hearts may not see eternity, but it is there. “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:6a NKJ).” The hourglass is measuring moments. God measures eternity.

October 19

“Night and Day”

Opposites are frequently described as being as different as night and day. When we contemplate night we visualize darkness punctuated by a backdrop of stars and a moon hung above us. Daytime is flooded by light and a bright mood filled with hope. Spiritually we know day is the time of alertness, seeing the urgency of following God.

Night represents a time of closure to our day, bringing cessation of our labors. Much of the evil in our world takes place in nighttime hours, as darkness is seen as a cover to sinful activities. God is with us, 24-7, night or day. “In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, and all the night with a light of fire (Psalm 78:14 NKJ).” Both day and night are in the order of God’s creation. Enjoy each detail and diversity and be His light in a world of darkness.

October 20

“Claims or Confidence”

The Lord Jesus reflected holiness and purity with the absence of sin in any form. We humbly confess what purity is found within our lives, He is the source. Scoffers ridicule those who seek to walk a path of holiness, drawing attention to their own waywardness. Do you remember the *Ivory Soap* advertiser’s commercial claims of nearly 100% purity? The public listened and liked what they heard, making the manufacturers of *Ivory* very successful. People were pleased to use a product they had confidence in, and the floating bars of soap were fun for children in the family.

Can we boldly claim purity in lives stained by sin? “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10 NKJ).” Christ cleanses us of all the dirt and grime of sin, making us squeaky clean. We brag on His purity with thankfulness for the privilege to reflect His glory.

October 21

“Where do You Live?”

Do you exchange information when meeting people for the first time? Most casually share names, occupation and place of residence. From that foundation, conversation widens to include topics such as family, hobbies; and in times of opportunity, a personal witness is shared. A relationship begins to build from stranger, to acquaintance, to friendship.

Where do you live? Why are we interested in someone’s home city? It may bring back a personal identification with a specific place, having lived there or visiting during a trip. If it is a place we have always desired to see, we are excited to talk with someone who knows the inside story. We have our own personal tour guide before even stepping into the city.

Do you know where God lives? He does not need a house to dwell in, though we call church the house of God. The trinity is everywhere, and the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of all believers. Almighty God has another place to abide... “But you are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel (Psalm 22:3 NKJ).” His throne is in the walls of praise. What a sight we have waiting for us; one day we will behold Him on a throne built by words of praise.

October 22

“One Size Fits All”

Don't you hate clothing items labeled *one size fits all*? That is misleading advertising and virtually impossible. If it is small enough to properly fit a tiny person, it is far too little to fit a large one. In order to fit a large individual, the smaller people are wearing something as big as a tent. I speak from experience because I have a very small foot. I often wear children's shoes, as they are more affordable and in many instances there is a larger selection. In irritation I have slipped into one-size-fits-all ladies socks, and they were way too big.

There is one article of clothing that honestly meets claims to fit all. “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11 NKJ).” If the armor fit too tightly or hung loosely, slipping off shoulders, we would be distracted by the discomfort. We must firmly stand. “Therefore take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand (Ephesians 6:13 NKJ).” The apostle Paul describes a standing-room-only place of battle. Our armor allotment offers plenty of leg and elbow room, giving us freedom of movement to oppose evil forces. It is always a snug, yet comfortable, fit as molded to each of us individually. God's size fits all.

October 23

“Leaves of Love”

Colorful leaves are a spectacular sight each autumn. Special excursions are offered to tourists for a chance to see a variety of trees in the peak of the season. Many sections of the country are included, but the New England states may hold the most beautiful. As the drama concludes, have you noticed a few straggler leaves clinging to a branch while the majority lies scattered on the ground? These few stubborn leaves appear to be so fragile, and yet they stay connected through winds and rain.

The body of Christ must cling to Him, the vine. It is only when we remain in Him, connected to Him, as our life giving source, that we are able to bear fruit. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me; and I in him bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5 NKJ).” Do you want to be a barren branch? I desire leaves of love to draw others to the Creator.

October 24

“Full of Bologna”

He's full of bologna! The rude description reveals a complete lack of trust in someone's opinions. It is another way of saying: *You can't believe a thing he says.* Those statements cut to the bone, and hopefully they are not true. A reputation takes a great deal of time to build, even if it is a bad one. Being full of bologna implies a long list of whoppers rolled from a slick tongue.

What is the pleasant alternative? Why not be full of grace and truth? It is possible as we draw near to Jesus and His life-changing power. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14 NKJ).” Jesus left no unoccupied space for error to seep in. He was filled to overflowing with perfect grace and truth. The more you are around those you love, the easier it becomes to unconsciously use their mannerisms and characteristics. Reserve more time for quiet time alone with the Lord, and soon you may be known to others as filled with grace and truth.

October 25

“Closer to Family”

Senior citizens sadly leave behind their family home and neighborhood to be closer to children and grandchildren. Why do so many make that difficult decision? Family ties bind them and free them from clinging to security in familiar routines. Failing health may be the biggest factor, but companionship and loneliness also motivate them to move.

Phone conversations, letters and emails will never replace the face-to-face relationships we miss with our immediate family. Affordable travel is a valuable tool used by the elderly, giving opportunities to visit loved ones frequently. Eventually visits lead to sad goodbyes, and thoughts of relocation begin to surface. Advantages and disadvantages are weighed, and plans are carefully developed. Packing begins, and as items are sorted through, memories are safely stored in heavy hearts. Soon seniors can bring them out to rehash with adult children.

God dwelling in heaven moved closer to His family. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14 NKJ).” He bridged the distance between heaven and earth to abide among us. What did He give up as He made the change of address? He left heaven’s glory and presence of the Father. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8 NKJ).” He not only came to live with us but to serve us as He served the Father. Is someone knocking on your door? Open it and help Jesus unpack.

October 26

“Mason Jar”

Do you choose ordinary drinking glasses or priceless crystal? Have you ever considered how many choices we have? Varieties range from paper, plastic, and Styrofoam cups to costly goblets. Our container preference is determined largely by our visual attraction and has very little to do with the taste of liquids.

Have you been refreshed by cold beverages served in Mason jars? My sister, Donna, preferred iced tea from Mason jars. Restaurants trying to appeal to country folks even serve their drinks in the famous canning jars. The size is good, and the heavy glass may be more durable than standard drinking glasses.

I am blessed to have a retired missionary friend named June Mason. Her life is a vessel, a jar of service. As Isaiah, she heard the call of God and answered: *Send me!* She poured her life into people and ministries in Africa and left a legacy of love. “Yes, and I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith. I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me (Philippians 2:17-18 NKJ).” She is one Mason jar that refused to stay on a shelf.

October 27

“Beep, Beep!”

Kids from two through one hundred can all enjoy viewing a *The Road Runner* cartoon. He could be both elusive and very fast. I have, I guess, what could be termed as roadrunner family connections. My mother-in-law likes them and owns a nice collection. We lived in both Texas and California, so we have actually seen many. They can be found in remote desert locations or just strolling across a road.

Once, when living in the California Coachella Valley, near Palm Springs, our daughter April experienced a close encounter with a roadrunner. A large, round lake with a wide dirt road around the shoreline became her stage. Residents enjoyed it for walking, jogging, or biking. While there she saw a roadrunner and decided to try to catch it. They went around and around... Her persistence paid off because the roadrunner ran out of steam. She just picked it up and brought it home to show off. We have it recorded in our old home movies. I guess it could qualify for *Ripley's Believe It Or Not*. Yes, persistence led to victory. The Lord shared a story encouraging us to persevere in prayer. (Luke 18:1-8) Keep on keeping on. Keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. (Luke 11:8-10)

October 28

“Renewal Time”

Have you ever forgotten to renew your driver’s license? It is easy to overlook and is often discovered too late. A police officer makes a routine check, asks to see your license, and you are left to face the music. The renewal date just slipped your mind, and you hope the officer will let you off with a warning.

There is one renewal we must be sure to attend to regularly. It is urgent that we continually renew our minds. “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 12:2 NKJ).” Our transformation process is put on hold if we ignore reminders and neglect to renew our minds. Don’t forget; its renewal time.

October 29

“A Leisurely Walk”

Do you take frequent walks? It is one of the most natural forms of exercise, and the only equipment needed is a pair of comfortable shoes. No costly memberships at an exercise gym are included. You can walk anywhere. Regardless of the weather conditions it can also be done inside. Treadmills are enjoyed by many, but they are not necessary. Walk briskly in place while listening to your favorite music or watching TV. If listening to Christian music or viewing Gospel programming, you will be strengthening your body plus renewing your mind.

My Dad walked faithfully to relieve tension and enjoy God’s creation. The Bible introduces us to another man who really benefited from his strolls. “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him (Genesis 5:24 NKJ).” I love the explanations others share about this occurrence. Enoch and God were together walking one day, and they were closer to God’s home than Enoch’s. God took him on home with Him.

October 30

“Golden Slippers”

My husband I both thoroughly enjoy viewing old classic western movies. If it happens to be a musical western, such as those starring Roy Rogers or Gene Autry, it's a double treat. Golden Slippers is a song heard in many of those westerns. In our vast movie collection, we even have a story of a singer-dancer: *Golden Slippers*.

Do you wear easy-to-slip-on slippers when you are relaxing around the house? I have a few pairs and am always happy to add to my collection. There are different styles, meeting seasonal needs. In the winter months I am usually cold until the spring thaw. So I want a warm slipper that covers my foot, toe to heel. A slip-on scuff will not do then. In warmer months a scuff or thong-type is more comfortable. When gift giving, slippers are a nice choice.

I wonder if one day we will proudly put on *golden* slippers. “And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things (Romans 10:15 NKJ)!” Don't you agree that a beautiful foot deserves a beautiful slipper? We may be wearing golden slippers and walking joyfully on streets of gold.

October 31

“Happy Hagglers”

Do you haggle with sellers at yard sales or with car dealers? You are not alone if you negotiate the sticker price. When we sell an item, we hope to get top dollar; but when we buy, we want rock bottom. My husband almost always makes an effort to talk down the selling price, and I distance myself from the conversation.

Apparently haggling is an age-old dilemma, “It is good for nothing cries the buyer; but when he has gone his way, then he boasts (Proverbs 20:14 NKJ).” The penny pincher confidently walks away. He is proud of himself, believing he closed a big deal. I am not a haggler, but I am a bargain hunter, and thrift stores and yard sales are happy hunting grounds. I may not bag a big one for the wall above the mantle but delight in a bag sale to brighten up my wardrobe.

November 1

“Could not be Stopped”

People make many excuses for not attending church. If employees offered such flimsy excuses for missing work, termination of employment might follow. In many foreign lands freedom to worship is something to only hope for. Faithful believers assemble at every opportunity and often risk their lives for the privilege to study God’s word.

Terrified people in the days of Ezra the prophet could not be stopped from meaningful worship. “Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on the bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening offerings (Ezra 3:3 NKJ).” Worshipers not only overruled opposition forces, they overcame their fears. It is said by many that children appreciate material things a great deal more if they earn money to purchase them. Could it be that attending church has become too easy for us, and we take it for granted? Father, give us a burning desire to gather together to worship You in Spirit and truth.

November 2

“Winged Wages”

Do you ever have the feeling that your money is disappearing right before your eyes? Do you grasp for it and discover it is just out of reach when you need it most? Money seems to power our world and when it is in short supply, the lights begin to flicker.

Money does not meet our needs; only God is sufficient to care for us. (Philippians 4:19) If we foolishly put our confidence in personal, corporate, or national finances, we are in desperate trouble. “Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven (Proverbs 23:4-5 NKJ).” As our money flaps its green wings and soars high out of sight, we can trust our Creator with our future. We are safely secure under the shelter of His wings. (Psalm 91:4)

November 3

“Dressing Room”

The rich and famous are pampered and spoiled in ways the average person could only dream. One example of privilege is a private maid for the ladies and a valet for the wealthy men. Their duties range from taking phone messages to helping with dressing. Clothes are carefully laid out, a hot bath is waiting and the aide is at beckoned call. When finished dressing, clothes are brushed off to remove lint and wrinkles are smoothed out. The smallest details are noticed and problems are addressed immediately.

When we daily put on the armor of God, the Holy Spirit is at our side to personally handle every detail. (Ephesians 6:10-18) It is always a perfect fit and well lubricated with anointing oil. We are blessed to be offered such protection and wise to wear it always. The dressing room is unlocked by the key of grace. Enter and prepare for daily battle.

November 4

“Hope Chest”

What are you setting aside for your future? Is there a nest egg, IRA or pension plan? We can learn life lessons from hopeful young ladies who are diligently storing heirlooms and essentials in a hope chest. They expect to wed one day and so prepare far in advance.

There is something very romantic about a cedar-lined chest tucked away in an attic or closet. Prospective brides play the waiting game with great patience, counting the passing years with frequent openings of the locked receptacle. She is selective as she places items, alongside of her dreams, inside the chest. When Miss becomes Mrs., she will proudly open her hope chest and remove the contents in a new home.

Are you storing away treasures for heaven? (Matthew 6:19-21) “We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel (Colossians 1:3-5 NKJ).” Rejoice; you can send true wealth ahead and a hope chest awaits your scheduled arrival.

November 5

“Teenage Crush”

Most of us can easily recall the excitement and the pain of our first teenage crush. Our tender hearts firmly believed the flames of love would never die. Time recorded the fading love, and we were left with only faded memories. Our personal relationship with the Lord stirred emotions at the point of acceptance. We pledged our undying love and devotion forever and ever. A teenage crush is not acceptable; examine your heart and keep the flames burning. How did love fizzle out in your youth? Did you neglect open communication, or did someone better come along?

True love is tested by time and trials, yet continues to burn brightly. The Father desires loyal love. “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place--unless you repent (Revelation 2:4-5 NKJ).” Put another log on the fire and rekindle your love. He loves you with an everlasting love.

November 6

“Heavy Heart”

Her biscuits are as light as a feather! Compliments go to the cook, and her secret recipe is desired by many. *His biscuits could anchor the ship!* The Navy’s cook is harassed, and tales of his heavy bread are shared throughout the fleet.

Are you light or heavy hearted? We are physically affected by our emotional response to circumstances. Our blood pressures rise or fall, and there may be an increase or decrease in our pulse rates. We intellectually know the weight of our heart does not fluctuate, yet we sense sudden changes.

Happiness gives feelings of floating on air; you feel the carefree light heart of an innocent child. You are in control and see life from the sunny side... You are devastated by bad news or loss; and you have a heavy heart, making it difficult to breathe and carry on your normal routine. Are we at the mercy of circumstances?

The Lord lifts heavy hearts. “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad (Proverbs 12:25 NKJ).” What is the good word? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:1-3 NKJ).” He created our hearts, and His light can cast out the darkness that weighs them down. Reach out for His healing hand and lighten your load.

November 7

“Fertilizer Farming”

My husband gets great satisfaction as he plants, cares for, and harvests his yearly vegetable gardens. Each spring he tries to be one of the very first in the area to get his garden planted. As a result he is also among the earliest to gather vegetables and share with friends. A church member with a green thumb told him the three secrets of successful gardening: fertilize, fertilize, and fertilize. He made a believer of my husband as he compared areas given fertilizer with sections without that head start. Fertilizer left in the bag is worthless. Even inexperienced gardeners realize that it must be spread around.

The good news of the gospel has the power to produce a bumper crop of souls, if we'll only liberally spread it around. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen (Matthew 28:19-20 NKJ).” God’s garden is always in season; keep spreading His word around.

November 8

“Support System”

We hear much today about the importance of a support system, the need by all for love, encouragement, and support. Some people try to make it through life struggles on their own. I sense that deep inside they probably realize how empty their life is without others. In scriptures we clearly see our ultimate support is the unshakable foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only fail-proof support system.

Even the great leader Moses needed to call on the support of others. “But Moses hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun (Exodus 17:12 NKJ).” His hands were the key to victory. See the previous verse... “And it was so, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed (Exodus 17:11).” Maybe it is time we admit our crucial need for the support of others. Hopefully loving individuals are close-by, as Aaron and Hur, who aided Moses in a time of crisis. If not, the ultimate enemy, evil, will prevail.

November 9

“Hand Holding”

Widows and orphans are eternally on the mind of God. Throughout the Bible we see reminders for us to care for them and, when they are oppressed, to come to their defense. The Lord sees their deepest needs and depends on us to partner with Him to touch their lives with compassion.

We assume material needs will be met for widows through life insurance or pension benefits. She is blessed if those funds are readily available, but often women are left to manage financial issues while dealing with sorrow. Housewives outside of the work force for many years may be thrust into stressful job searching. Career women longing to spend time alone with memories are not given that luxury and try to control raw emotions on the job.

What can we do to lighten their load? Our friendship and prayer support means more than we realize. We don't have instant solutions and cannot remove their pain, yet our encouragement and love give strength in times of sadness and despair. Be willing to listen and make yourself available when they feel lonely. Companionship is of a far greater need than conversation; develop the art of attentive listening and hand holding.

Scriptures offer many words of God to encourage a widow in those first days, weeks, month by month, and through empty years. They are not alone. “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth (Isaiah 54:4-5 NKJ).” The Lord waits to tenderly embrace widows and heals broken hearts.

November 10

“Spoolies”

Women are always trying new ways to set or style their hair. How many remember *Spoolies*? If you do, you may hate to admit it. The small flexible pin-curl-type rollers were a brief fad but quite the rage when they hit the market. I remember not only *Spoolies* but also Mom using rags, thin strips of material to curl my hair, along with bobby pins for pin curls.

Hair rollers have come in many different varieties over the years, including electric rollers for fast styling. Those of us who were teenagers in the 1960s, when long, straight hair became extra popular, raided the pantry. Many of us tried rolling our hair on small tomato paste cans. Why do we go to all that fuss? “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering (1 Corinthians 11:14-15 NKJ).” Our glory deserves special attention. Maybe the next hair-styling devices will be marketed as Glorys.

November 11

“Generation Gap”

The simple term *generation gap* is a current description of an age-old problem. Biblical families were involved in squabbles, as friction between older and younger generations frequently surfaced. King David’s son, Absalom, arrogantly seized the power of his father’s throne, temporarily.

The prodigal son parable taught by Jesus is a perfect example of a rebellious child, refusing to honor his father. Yes, in some cases a gap widens to form a canyon. God recognized the problem of a widening gap and formed a plan to bridge it. “So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it but I found no one (Ezekiel 22:30 NKJ).” He still invites men and women to stand in that gap. Each generation is given fresh opportunities to pray for their land and its people. *Gaps* can be filled or minimized; will this generation take the challenge?

November 12

“Creation Eyes”

Do you experience satisfaction in your work and service, or do you go through the motions? Following our heavenly Father’s example, we have expectation of fulfillment and reward in opportunities we encounter. In the Genesis creation story we read God’s personal opinion of His work through creation eyes. It was good. (Genesis 1:4-25) Our creator did not shake His head, fold His arms and voice words of disappointment. The masterpiece He saw before Him gave Him pleasure and delight.

Artists often save the best for last, adding something spectacular as their crowning achievement, step back and take a final look. The work is complete, and they sign their name to be seen by generations to come. God created man and woman to have dominion over His finished work. (Genesis 1:26-31) Did He have second thoughts and consider starting with a new canvas? I don’t think so... “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good (Genesis 1:31a NKJ).” Using the gifts He blesses us with, at the end of our days we can gratefully express it is very good.

November 13

“A Falling Star”

Do you recall the last time you caught the spectacular sight of *a* falling star? They are breathtaking but fall so rapidly you hardly have time to notice. For several years I traveled across country with my truck-driving husband. We were able to see several falling stars on clear nights, and they were awe-inspiring.

Our fascination with stars begins early with childhood songs and stories. Lovers wish on them, and song writers include them in rhymes. One of my all-time favorites is: *Catch a Falling Star* (and put it in your pocket). Perry Como made that one hit material and likely made him a very rich man.

There is one fallen star that we try to push from our memories. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! (Literally Day Star) How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High, yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit (Isaiah 14:12-15 NKJ).” He planned to ascend in pride and authority. God Almighty tossed him across the heavens... *A falling star, that’s what you are!*

November 14

“Up in Smoke”

Are you trying to kick the smoking habit? The addiction is difficult to overcome, but those breaking free share success stories giving motivation and encouragement. The widening number of those who quit is greatly influenced by rising costs of cigarettes and tobacco products. Your bankroll goes up in smoke.

We are forced to cut corners and pinch pennies to deal with our challenging economic times. Individuals consider each transaction, weighing priorities and essentials. Some are forced to forgo taking medications in an effort to save money for groceries. How can we justify handing over cold cash for something going up in smoke? Congratulations if you are considering tossing away that extravagant, harmful pack of cigarettes.

Do our lives have substance, or are we going up in smoke? “Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud and like the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney (Hosea 13:3 NKJ).” Illusionists use smoke to divert our attention. Where there is smoke, there is fire. Let’s stir the fires of love for the Lord into a blaze and get the smoke out of our eyes.

November 15

“God Is not Impressed”

What does a good prayer sound like? Are you awed by eloquent public prayers echoed from sanctuary ceilings? When called upon to pray, do you nervously search for just the right words? We fear failure and public ridicule and place too much weight on proper wording and the length of our communication with the heavenly Father.

Have you taken time to listen to a child’s prayers? With child-like faith they voice simple words of blessing for those they love and share honest desires. They use specific requests and wait to get the answers. They are not ashamed to keep asking; if they want a pony or a new baby brother, they go to God.

The disciples wanted to pray with the passion and power of their Master. He gave a simple prayer as a model, and we still return to that direction as a guide. (Matthew 6:9-13) Peter, who seldom could be found at a loss for words, cried out one of the most powerful prayers I know... “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, Lord, save me (Matthew 14:30 NKJ).” He spoke only three words in his brief prayer. He did not try to bargain or give reasons; he deserved to be rescued. He needed help and he needed it fast. The lost and perishing need to only make that three word request, and they will be saved and welcomed into the family of God. Christians sinking in discouragement and despair can be placed upon the Rock if humbled to say, “Lord, save me!” God is not impressed by lengthy speeches; His ears are open to cries of faith.

November 16

“Smaller Portions”

Have you found the keys to weight management? Every program originator patents their name and uses appealing slogans and spokesmen to draw our attention. Two essentials are at the foundation of long-term success: exercise and wise food choices. We make things complicated with charts and labels, but tools are only beneficial if we diligently use them. We can be trim and slim when we discipline ourselves to eat less and exercise more. The truth is we detest self-discipline, and personal health coaches become millionaires because they play upon that weakness. The Marine’s goal is to mold a recruit into a man and a dieter’s goal is to break their overweight mold.

We are wise to eat smaller portions daily. Dieters can curb their appetites by consistently using restraint. Selfishness begins early when small children tease for more candy or desert and parents give in to keep the peace. More is better, or is it? Do you go back for a second helping? The cook is complimented by a diner’s yearning for more. *Don’t clear the table yet; I’ll be back.*

I grew up in a middle-class family with five children crowded around the kitchen table. Mom sometimes prepared pork chops, one of my favorite foods. I wanted an extra portion. A large family with healthy appetites and cravings quickly cleared the platter. I didn’t always need the additional helpings anyway. I hold the key to life management, choosing a perfect portion. “You are my portion O Lord; I have said that I would keep Your words. I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word (Psalm 119:57-58 NKJ).” We are satisfied if we turn to Jesus for our portion.

November 17

“Dance Partners”

May I have this dance? The request from an admiring gentleman is accepted graciously. He takes his female partner by the hand and to the center of the crowded dance floor. Time stands still as he wraps her in his arms and leads her in a waltz. *One, two, three, four... One, two, three, four...* He leads her in a standard box step, and they glide across the floor to the rhythm of the music. Dance partners repeated this routine, crossing generations and frequent fashion changes. There were variations to the waltz, but one steady rule: He led and his partner followed.

God seeks to lead us. Will we step on His toes and try to take over the lead? He alone knows the perfect steps to take. Wrapped in His everlasting arms we are led in the dance of life. “Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I will wait all the day (Psalms 25:4-5 NKJ).” Ginger knew her proper place and faithfully followed Fred Astaire. I want to follow God’s lead.

November 18

“I Love Lucy”

In the 1950s, Rick Ricardo and America joyously said together, *I Love Lucy*. Today in prayer I heard the still, small voice of God say: *I Love Lucy*. Alabama’s Lucy is battling cancer, and she is not just a number or a disease case to her creator. He loves Lucy. He feels her pain and understands her questions, doubts and fears. God loves Lucy.

I have not met Lucy, but she is on my prayer list, and I lift her name to the Father. Her family brought her to the attention of our church family, and we took her under our prayer wings of faith. She is loved by her concerned immediate family, a caring extended family, and the family of God made up of churches everywhere. Lucy is intimately loved by Jehovah Rapha, The God that heals. (Exodus 15) I do not know what the future holds for Lucy, but hearing of her faith and testimony for Jesus, I am sure her life is witnessed by many in need of her strength. It could be no other way because God loves Lucy.

Epilogue: Lucy went home to be with her loving Father. Her family and friends grieve. Lucy experiences no more pain and suffering. All her questions are answered as she looks into the face of wisdom. Her witness lives on. (Revelation 14:13-14) Lucy loved God.

November 19

“Opposites Game”

Find your box of flash cards. We are going to play the game of opposites. Preschool children love the challenge of remembering words linked as opposites. Are you ready? We will start with a few easy ones: over-under/ inside-outside/ true-false/ slow-fast/ hot-cold/ open and shut. See how easy it is! If we were trying out for the game of Password, we would easily be chosen as contestants.

Now we are ready for two words we know as well as the back of our hand: up and down. Those little words clearly describe your life and mine. Everything seems to be either up or down, and without question, what goes up will come down. Emotionally we grip the bar ahead of us on our roller-coaster ride as we descend after a mountaintop experience. How could we feel so down, when only yesterday everything seemed to be looking up? Financially we are in a downturn, and we daily try to get on top with an upswing in increased income. A friend calls to invite you out for lunch and a movie. You make polite excuses and say: *I just don't feel up to it today.*

Do you enjoy music as much as I do? I cannot express in words what part music plays in my life, but I do keep it playing. Music appreciation class is about to begin... I do not have the ability to read music or play any instruments by ear, but I do realize the tunes are made up of high notes and low notes. As the range moves up and down, something beautiful is created. The up and down movements blend and harmony is the result. Our daily ups and downs can create sweet music deep within, and our hearts become an echo chamber. We learn in the school of hard knocks that God does work His good purposes in all things. (Romans 8:28) Let's end on the upside: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand (Psalms 37:23-24 NKJ).”

November 20

“Old Path”

Human nature is enticed by offers of something better, new, improved or changed. Routines can quickly become ruts as we seek variety. If you have any doubt about the chronic lack of contentment with limited choices, open your eyes to the construction of huge market chain stores.

I remember a conversation with a small grocery store owner, who explained he always tried to offer at least two choices when stocking milk and bread. We want a wide selection. Can we pick and choose foundations of faith? “Thus says the Lord: Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk in it (Jeremiah 6:16 NKJ).” Is it narrow-minded to cry out for a return to that *Old Time Religion*? We cannot improve on God’s simple plan of salvation. He will make it exciting and satisfy thirsting souls, and He does not need to pay for celebrity endorsements.

November 21

“Dead Air”

Radio station owners and management quickly panic when tuning in and finding silence on the dial. Music or talk is broadcast across the airwaves, and quiet is gravely described as *dead air*. Just as a doctor expects to find a pulse, those in radio listen for a message in a wide range of formats. A very brief time of dead air seems like an eternity to those in the radio industry.

God’s powerful message is daily delivered around the globe, reaching nomads to penthouse dwellers. His word is proclaimed on street corners, home churches, and permanent church buildings to congregations of all sizes. Electronic media makes it possible to reach the masses through radio, television, movies and Internet. Magazine and book writers use the printed word, in connection with the Bible, to herald the good news of saving grace.

How would we react if we were confronted with dead air? God’s word is suddenly silenced. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11 NKJ).” Would people even care? God uses many ways to get the attention of a rebellious nation. Ministry airwaves could become silent. The printed word might be removed from stores, churches and homes. *That could never happen today!* Persecuted believers know by experience that it is happening. Thank the Father for His saving message, and beware of those who try to silence His word.

November 22

“AWOL”

The decision is final, and the verdict is read, *Absent Without Leave*. The soldier is found guilty of desertion, AWOL. The label is likely to stick throughout their military career. Will the punishment fit the crime? *Throw him in the brig! He didn't stay with his unit! Separate him for ninety days! He's losing his stripes, his rank, and his freedom!*

Why would a soldier go over the hill? Each has their own story, from flimsy selfish excuses to personal emergencies or cowardice. They were unable to receive permission through proper channels and ran, sneaking off like a school student skipping school.

Where were you when I needed you? A buddy left alone in the trenches feels abandoned and bitter. What would the results be if a whole regiment deserted their commanding officer? “In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:55-56 NKJ).” Did they blow their chance to serve the King? No, following His death and resurrection He met with the group again, and with His authority gave new marching orders. (Matthew 28:16-20) If you are AWOL, fall back in line and loyally serve your Lord.

November 23

“Pride and Joy”

Are you receiving God’s blessings as a parent or grandparent? Children are a gift of the Lord, and they instantly become our pride and joy. We want to hold them, gently rock and smother them with kisses. Each milestone of progress is recorded in baby books, in snapshots and on video. No accomplishment is too small to recognize and remember. They are a part of us and add fulfillment to each passing day.

As heavenly Father, God’s eyes look down on His created world. Can He take pride in each of us, our families, cities and nations? Does He see maturity and steady growth in Christ, or are we still babes? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) He, like any Father, likes to brag on His children. (Job 1:8) Job found favor with God and the devil did not like it one bit.

The Lord holds a special place in His heart for a city on the hill, too. “I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations (Isaiah 60:15b NKJ).” The city of the Lord, Zion, Jerusalem, is His pride and joy. His heart breaks when she refuses His perfect will. When will she accept His unconditional love? “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you are not willing (Matthew 23:37 NKJ)!” A life or a city can become God’s pride and joy. We must not bring Him shame and sorrow.

November 24

“Did I Do That”

Did I do that? Steven Urkel from the sitcom *Family Matters* repeatedly caused problems. When he got caught in the act he played innocent. *Did I do that?* Trouble seemed to follow him wherever he went. If there were jinxed individuals, he would surely be president of Jinxed Anonymous.

We easily become entrapped in unforeseen problems, but often we bring calamities upon ourselves. King David, tenderly described as a man after God’s own heart, (Acts 13:22) made some terrible choices, and God brought them to his attention. He slept with a neighbor’s wife and she conceived a child. Trying to make the woman’s husband appear to be the father, David handled things in a dishonest way. When that scheme fell apart, he laid out plans for the man’s premeditated murder. Instructions were carried out by his military leader, now also an accomplice in crime. Her husband, a faithful member of Israel’s army, died on the front lines, and news made it back to King David. Bathsheba later became his wife and found her new home in the palace. (2 Samuel 11:1-27)

Every false move made by David fell under the searching eyes of his creator and Lord. A time for reckoning would come. The Lord revealed the trail of sins to His prophet and David’s friend, Nathan. He approached David and began to unravel a story of a grave injustice. A successful herdsman needed meat for a visitor, and in selfishness, took a little lamb from a poor man. (2 Samuel 12:1-4) At the conclusion of his dialogue, David became enraged. “So David’s anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die (2 Samuel 12:5 NKJ).” He walked right into his own trap. “Then Nathan said to David, You are the man (2 Samuel 12:7a NKJ)!” Within the heart of a king, his conscience screamed out. *Did I do that?* He confessed his sin and faced the consequences. All are prone to weakness and can find forgiveness, grace, and new beginnings. Read Psalm 51, David’s private journal following this incident. He cried out to God for cleansing and returned joy. He knew the results would be a powerful testimony. “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You (Psalm 51:13 NKJ).” When we yield to temptation and commit sin, we should not be surprised. *Yes, I did that.*

November 25

“Unlimited Thanksgiving”

We open wide thankful hearts when we receive the Lord’s undeserved blessings. In those exciting times, we find it easy to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. Do we selfishly limit our boundaries? Maybe we need to develop a constant thanksgiving plan in all circumstances.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (I Thessalonians 5:16-18 NKJ).” Unlimited thanksgiving will stretch us and also offers the potential of a greatly expanded witness. To be thankful in everything is certainly not a normal response. The key is to remember we are not instructed to thank God for everything, but in everything. Evil and hardship we face are not the source of thankfulness; we face them with inner turmoil. In everything we can give thanks for God’s faithfulness and love. Maybe we can positively influence others to see God’s tender hand in everything. The sky is the limit.

November 26

“Let It Rain”

Let it rain, let it pour. Man, in his listing of many accomplishments, is still unable to control the weather. Changes might be made to influence weather conditions, but controlling the weather is in the hands of the Almighty. Farmers pray for rains on growing crops, and plants flourish following God’s released rains.

Is a onetime rain sufficient? How long will the moisture last? God, in His wisdom and grace, gives early and late rains. “Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you- the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month (Joel 2:23 NKJ).” Are we growing in Christ, or are our souls parched? Look above; rain clouds are forming.

November 27

“Unexpected Company”

How well do you handle unexpected company? Do you panic? Is the welcome mat always out? Some people have the warmth and hospitality needed to easily make visitors feel welcome. They put on a fresh pot of coffee or pour a glass of freshly brewed ice tea.

Have you ever attended a private event and been surprised by the arrival of unexpected guests? In election years, candidates often show up where least expected. No politician, entertainment or sports celebrity could match the excitement caused by Old Testament heroes. (Mark 9:2-8) The disciples Peter, James, and John experienced an encounter of the miraculous kind. They personally viewed Jesus transfigured, glimpsing His glory. Unexpected company popped in from heaven. Moses and Elijah were on a special mission; they came to talk with Jesus.

Peter decided he needed to take control and make preparations for the heavenly visitors. “Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah- because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid (Mark 9:5-6 NKJ).” His heart and hands were ready to work together. Our unexpected guests are giving us opportunities for fellowship and ministry.

November 28

“Big Mama”

Do you have a nickname? It would be interesting to do a survey and discover the starting point of unique handles. Did your high school yearbook feature familiar faces with silly signatures? Let me share just a few classmates: Pineapple, Cherokee, The Kid, and Archie. Our son answered to Bondo because he did paint and body work. These labels do not usually last forever; it would not be very dignified to be introduced as Pineapple in a formal gathering.

I hope I am able to honor a very special lady, many remember as Big Mama. Her family often spoke of her affectionately with the nickname, and she never outgrew it. I don't know how she acquired the handle, but it fit in many ways. I believe many outside of the family circle thought of her as their own mama. Her tight-knit family appreciated her as mother and grandmother. Big Mama happily hosted Thanksgiving dinner for her descendants, and they found comfort in the yearly tradition.

Big Mama reached her 80s before we met while doing family history research. At first she seemed a little cautious sharing personal stories. Soon she opened her memory treasure chest and gave us the key. Her valuable information is written down for future generations, and we are the richer for knowing her. Big Mama widened her heart and invited us inside as one of the family. Her gentle spirit lives on, though she is no longer with us.

I rejoice in knowing we have a Big Father. God is big enough to handle any of our problems and big enough to provide all of our needs. He is big enough to hold the universe in place and big enough to number the stars. Can we ever fully know how big His love is? “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:17-19 NKJ).” Our Big Father wants us to be filled and overflowing with His fullness. That is a big promise.

November 29

“Sore Feet”

Do your feet hurt? When our feet hurt, we hurt all over and seek relief. There are many reasons we experience achy feet, and podiatrists earn their living diagnosing those causes. Sufferers are willing to try most anything to find comfort. They would gladly purchase any shoes if they made walking less painful.

Recently I commented to a friend that in the past I would wear almost any shoes, as long as they looked nice. Later, if they were not comfortable, I would not wear them unless for a very short time. I don't want anything pinching my toes and have stopped wearing high heels totally. I guess I'm the type person that keeps slipper manufacturers in business. Find a recliner or stool and put your feet up. You deserve a break, and short resting periods might really help. We get the weight off our feet and the rest of our body gets pampered, too. Even God puts His feet up. “Thus says the Lord; Heaven is My throne, and earth is my footstool (Isaiah 66:1 NKJ).” He made His stool; we'll have to settle for manmade.

November 30

“Mycenae Mud”

That’s a fine mess you have gotten yourself into! If we are entangled in a problem, a reprimand is not usually enlightening. We know we are in a mess; we want someone to pull us out. The deeper we sink, the harder it becomes to free ourselves.

I grew up in Mycenae, dairy farm country, and pastures were frequent play areas. To farmers they were spacious areas to graze cows, but to children they held wide-open adventure. Cows found green grass and fresh water from the meandering crick. We happily discovered large rocks to climb on and fallen trees forming natural bridges across the water. Moving from one side to the other, we needed the agility of a tightrope walker or a lumberjack.

Rain or melting snow completely changed the landscape in a pasture. I learned the hard way to watch where you step. The ground beneath my feet kept moving, and my feet could not keep up with the action. Dirt became menacing mud and took on all the characteristics of cement. “I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing (Psalm 69:2a NKJ).” I got stuck and I could not get my shoes loose. “Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink (Psalm 69:14a NKJ).” I tried as hard as I could, but it made no difference. In defeat I left my shoes behind and walked back home. I freed myself of one problem but walked right into the wrath of another. My father’s anger focused on the absence of costly shoes. Memory does not reward me with the end of this story; likely it is something I did not want to remember. I think I led him right back to where I left the shoes, and he forcefully lifted them out. If you see someone sinking in troubles, give them a helping hand. You might be the rescue they have been praying for. When you are the one stuck, don’t depend on luck; call out to the Lord; watch Him free you with His mighty arm.

December 1

“Think Mink”

Do you have a favorite Christmas shopping memory? Were you alone or with family or friends? What made that day special? Did you find the perfect gift? One of my fondest Christmas shopping memories goes back over forty-five years. I went shopping in the city with my older sister, Lauree, and best girlfriend, Carol. We went by bus, and it seemed like a big adventure for girls in their early teens.

We were not big spenders and used no charge cards. My wallet held only babysitting money or extra cash from chores. It is the thought that counts when we purchase gifts, and I'm sure a lot of thought and love went behind any selections. I do not remember what we bought for others that day. My mind holds the sounds of *Jingle Bell Rock* on loudspeakers. Music, decorations and lights put us in the Christmas spirit. I recall enjoying a meal of fish sandwiches, fries and Coke in a cozy booth. Another pleasure included the inviting smell and taste of hot, salty cashews.

The day brought the surprise of mink. Three young girls from middle-class families discovered a sale item in a department store. Mink cuff links were within our budget, and we could not resist. We boarded the bus feeling like wealthy models. The small circular mink cuff links helped make a Christmas memory. As you shop this year, take time to enjoy the sights, sounds, and scents of Christmas. Include those you love in simple holiday pleasures. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34 NKJ).” Relationships are the best gifts we receive. We will never stand in line to exchange them.

December 2

“Wish List”

Have you made out your Christmas wish list? Do you remember your excitement as a child when you peered through store windows or flipped the pages of mail-order catalogs? Each year I could hardly wait for the Montgomery Ward Christmas catalog. Colorful pictures of toys were very tempting. I believed my favorite toys might show up under our Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. I found a pencil and paper and listed all I wanted. I never got everything I wished for, but it did not stop me. I knew anything could happen at Christmas. I usually received one or two of the toys I wanted most. Children start working on a wish list early, and they dream big.

I want the childlike faith, hopes and dreams of a child when I write my prayer list. I desire anticipation of blessings and limitless trust in the giver of all good gifts. (James 1:17) He is a generous Father who loves to lavish gifts upon His family. He gift wraps them personally and seals the packages with bows of grace. He examines each list, and between the lines He reads our deepest desires. Do we believe He will answer our requests? “And whatever you ask for in prayer, having faith and [really] believing, you will receive (Matthew 21:22 Amplified Bible).” We don’t have to wait until Christmas to open His gifts. Miracles are sent daily, by special delivery to all who believe.

December 3

“Busy Elves”

Children believe Santa’s workshop is happily run by elves. They can easily understand why help would be needed. Making toys for children all over the world would be a big project. Even young children learn about cooperation. They are taught to put away their toys to help mommy. If they have younger sisters and brothers, they can be a big help to their parents. They can entertain the baby while meals are being prepared and bring mother diapers when needed. If their parents need assistance, Santa would need elves.

The Lord Jesus needs us in His workshop of ministry. When we show kindness to others, He takes it personally. “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me’ (John 25:40 NKJ).”

I’m sure elves would consider their efforts nothing in comparison to Santa’s special delivery service. We also might think we are not capable of anything significant. Jesus said we can do great things. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:12-13 NKJ).” How is it possible for us to do greater works than the miracle worker? Jesus served in a very limited area. He knew His followers would carry His message of eternal life to all nations. We have no special personal power. It is only when we allow the Holy Spirit to touch lives through ours that great things happen. We can be busy elves making a difference.

December 4

“Trinity Christmas”

Christmas is a holy family gathering. As we honor the birth of Jesus, we are reminded that He shared that special day with the Father and Holy Spirit. They were active in His conception and sent out a heavenly chorus birth announcement at His arrival. (Luke 2:8-14) The preparation of that promised event spanned across centuries. The fulfillment brought joy to God the Father and Holy Spirit. Remember, Jesus left heaven’s throne room to be born in a lowly stable. He knew God’s plan of restoration required Him to take the form of a simple helpless baby. He alone could free us from the grips of sin.

There are signs of the holy Trinity in our simplest holiday surroundings. Keep your eyes open, and you may discover them in places you least expect.

First: Snowmen are usually formed in three sections. A large, snow-packed base firmly holds two smaller, round sections.

Second: Our Christmas trees are shaped much like a triangle, with the center top holding a star or angel. The three sides are daily reminders in our homes of the Trinity. We can offer our praise with all we are: body, mind, and spirit. Our three-sided existence mirrors the Trinity. Worship the Father, His only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit of truth.

December 5

“Come and Adore Him”

Come. The invitation is given. *Come and adore Him. O come, all ye faithful.* Will we accept the invitation this Christmas? The days are quickly slipping away. Busy schedules and filled calendars crowd out the Christ child. Will we turn our minds and hearts toward Bethlehem? Can God, our Host, count on us to heed His personal invitation?

The faith of those answering His call is rewarded. *O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant.* True abiding faith in Jesus results in joy and a triumphant life. We are often down, but we are not defeated. “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed- (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NKJ)” We know Jesus brings victory, and we come in humble worship and adoration. “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place (2 Corinthians 2:14 NKJ).”

December 6

“Response to the Perfect Gift”

You have thoughtfully selected the perfect gift for your loved one. It is gift wrapped in gold-foiled paper and decorated with matching ribbons and bows. It is placed beneath the tree in a noticeable place, and you can hardly wait for it to be opened.

Christmas arrives and gifts are exchanged. Your heart leaps in anticipation. What will the response be to that perfect gift? You watch as package after package is opened and the presents are examined. Will yours be opened next? The delay only builds the suspense; maybe the best is being saved for last.

To your surprise the gift remains unopened under the tree. It is easily seen. It is just not opened or received. We would be confused, disappointed and hurt. Empathy is the ability to experience the raw emotions of another, having the ability to feel their pain. This Christmas we might be given the sense of a loving Father’s heart. “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 3:16 NKJ).” His Son Jesus is His gift. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13 NKJ).” We must not leave His gift unopened; He wants each of us to receive His Son and the everlasting life He brings. It is the gift of love, hope, peace and joy.

December 7

“Exchanging Gifts”

Gift giving and receiving brings joy to our Christmas celebration. We find sincere pleasure in giving presents as tokens of our affection. The cost of the gift does not determine its value. Often trinkets from children are cherished for years to come. If the exchange involves love, the greatest gift of all is shared.

We think much about what we will give others and have our own wishes for Christmas. What will we give Jesus? He is easy to please. He wants no gift-wrapped surprise packages. He simply knocks on your heart’s door and waits for you to invite Him in. He wonders if you are thankful for His parting gift to you. “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid (John 14:27 NKJ).” He left the gift of peace. He knew it would be a gift we needed most of all. When we have peace with God, with others, and peace of mind, we reflect the image of the Father. Peace on earth starts in one heart at a time.

December 8

“I’ll Be Back”

Frosty the Snowman left with these parting words: *I’ll be back again someday!* Children know that a snowman is hidden in every fresh-snow accumulation. Their part is imagination and lots of hard work. A hand-size snowball has the potential of becoming a six-foot snowman. The more you roll a snowball, the bigger it becomes; soon a snowman begins to take shape. Final touches for eyes, nose, and mouth give him personality. Create a real attention piece with favorite articles of clothing. Stand at his side, and say *cheese* for photo-album memories.

Small children are brokenhearted when the warmth of the sun melts their winter friend. Parents give words of comfort from the song. *He’ll be back again someday.* We have great joy as we remember the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. During His ministry He gave promises of His return. “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me: Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you (John 14:18-20 NKJ).” He does not want us to weep as abandoned orphans. We are family and He will come back to us. Believe.

December 9

“Candlelight Service”

The presence of God is felt in a candlelight service. A hush often falls over the Christmas-Eve worship hour. The gentle flicker of lights across a crowded sanctuary gives illumination within hearts in need. Darkness can be felt and sends a chill up your spine. Light penetrates darkness, casting it aside as the defeated enemy.

Candlelight service often is part of the observance of the Lord’s Supper, Communion. As we remember the breaking of Jesus’ body and shed blood, soul searching leads to confession and thankful hearts. He loved me enough to die in my place. The darkness of death and the grave gave way to the light of Easter morning. Sunrise service is possible every day that we walk in His light.

The drama of a candlelight service builds one by one. Worshipers each take a turn to light their candles. Often one lit candle is passed down the church pews, to pass along a needed flame. Soon the only source of light is dancing flames held in trembling hands. The glow seen on faces warms hearts, which were earlier cold and indifferent. It started with a light over a stable. (Matthew 2:9-11) Jesus is the Light of the world and is honored when we keep the lights burning.

December 10

“Shop ‘Till You Drop”

Shop ‘till you drop. Is that your motto? Did you get up before daylight the day after Thanksgiving and wait in line for store doors to open? Do you have special gifts on your mind and will not give up the search until they are staked out and claimed? Will you delay preparation of your family dinner because you refuse to leave the mall? *Shop ‘till you drop* might be your reality.

Whoa. You are missing the serenity of the season. We celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. The push and shove of shopping leaves no room to experience peace in His presence. Take a deep breath and receive the Holy Spirit’s calming touch. “Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold (Psalms 46:10-11 NAS).” Be still. Immanuel... God is with us. (Matthew 1:23) He’ll be there to catch you if you drop from exhaustion.

December 11

“Government Concerns”

Do the problems in our country seem to be overwhelming? Will our leaders ever be able to solve problems in our economy? Will we find real answers in the health-care dilemma? Can lasting peace come in war zones? It is easy to become discouraged when we hear the daily news or chat with friends over a cup of coffee. Governments seem to be out of control, and the light is often dim at the end of the tunnel.

We can have hope. We should live expectantly. Everything is in the best of hands. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6-7 NKJ).” God has everything under control; the government rests upon the shoulders of His Son. Will we trust Him?

December 12

“Kissing Under the Mistletoe”

Will you avoid mistletoe, or do you carry it with you? The tradition of kissing under the mistletoe gives some people the opportunity they have been waiting for all year. They might not have been brave enough to share their true feelings about a coworker. The company Christmas party is the perfect place to break the ice. A simple kiss to celebrate the holiday might not be denied.

Do we need mistletoe to demonstrate our affection? As Christians we celebrate our relationship to Christ as Savior all year long. When we were adopted into God’s family, we became His children and brothers and sisters in Christ. We are one big family and need to show our love for one another. Firm handshakes and warm hugs are encouraged. Kissing is also acceptable in close relationships. “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you (Romans 16:16 NKJ).” Turn the other cheek; you might get two. We do not need to stand under mistletoe; we gather at the site of a manger.

December 13

“Receiving Blanket”

Newborn babies are adorable and bring out all my maternal instincts. Did it all begin with baby dolls under the Christmas tree? I remember they were soft and smooth, and the new-doll smell drifted up to my face. I quickly named and loved each doll. I played mommy, feeding, dressing and rocking the baby in my care. My nursery came with child-care essentials each year. Dolls came in baby strollers, baby cribs or high chairs. They were not gift wrapped to delay my excitement. They were displayed under drooping branches, and Christmas-tree lights reflected in their tender eyes.

I began to care for real newborns at age eleven and quickly bonded with bundles of joy. They were so dependent and appreciated all of my attention. Their smiles made the hours of clock watching worthwhile. The contentment of a baby held in your arms brings joy and satisfaction beyond measure.

Expectant mothers gather many articles in preparation of the blessed event. No collection is complete without a large number of receiving blankets. The tiny baby is snugly wrapped inside, keeping arms and legs warm and secure. Have you received the babe who became the sacrificial Lamb? Baby Jesus grew to be the Son of Man and willingly gave His life that we might have everlasting life (John 10:15-18). Christmas led to Calvary and Jesus' crucifixion. We open packages in celebration because worshipers found an open tomb. They carried a story of victory. Jesus lives! We are invited to receive Him in every area of our lives. He waits to wrap us in His unconditional blanket of grace.

December 14

“Holy Jolly Christmas”

Have a **Holy** Jolly Christmas! When we remember to keep the day **holy** and worship the newborn King, we will be filled with joy. When Christ is left out of Christmas all that remains is mass confusion. Fall before the feet of Holy God in the flesh. God will reveal His glory and fill our hearts with contentment.

Wipe that look of gloom off your face. Jesus came to give us full and meaningful life and wants us to experience His gift of joy. “I have told you these things so that you can have the same joy I have. I want your joy to be the fullest joy (John 15:11 NCV).” We can experience joy unspeakable because we have hope. “He is our great hope, and he will come with glory (Titus 2:13b NCV).” If Santa of *The Night Before Christmas* is jolly and laughs coming down from a chimney, we can be jolly looking up to our Redeemer and King.

December 15

“Ornaments”

How much are you willing to pay for a Christmas-tree ornament? There are ornaments which children are able to afford and very special selections at Hallmark stores. I have never stepped inside Tiffany’s, but I’m quite sure they feature exquisite holiday ornaments. When money flows freely, the star for the top of the tree might be 24-carat gold.

Often the favorite ornaments have more sentimental value than monetary worth. They represent milestones such as a couple’s first year together or baby’s first Christmas. Some are passed down from generation to generation and are priceless. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we must never forget his wooden manger began a life journey to a wooden cross. His mother, Mary, securely tucked His little hands and arms in swaddling clothes. (Luke 2:7) As death approached, nails held those healing hands and arms to the cross. (John 20:25) My tree ornaments include a **nail** tied to a branch with a piece of red yarn, representing His sacrificial blood to cleanse us of our sins. He paid a price I can never repay.

December 16

“Light the Way”

Where can we expect to find Rudolph, the red nosed reindeer? Will he be sulking at the North Pole or lagging behind a sleigh in flight? Is he really needed by the team? Can one solitary deer make a difference? In the children’s Christmas story, Santa Claus gives the outcast Rudolph the place of honor. He would lead the sleigh on Christmas Eve through clouded skies. His nose, which brought him shame and embarrassment, could help others. Santa needed him, and the team needed him. Children expecting a visit from Santa would not be disappointed. Rudolph’s nose would light the way.

The world once waited for a deliverer, the Messiah. They prayed with expectation. God selected a special man to light the way. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:5-9 NKJ).” John’s bold preaching dimly lit the path to the Light of God.

December 17

“Manger Bed”

Parents desire the very best for their newborn child, desiring to make them feel comfortable and secure. Babies are so small; they can sleep almost anywhere when they are newborns. A standard crib is nice, but not a necessity. Often they sleep in a cradle, bassinet or portable crib next to the parent’s bed. The baby gets the attention it needs for frequent feeding and diaper changes, and it is convenient for mom and dad.

Mary and Joseph wanted the best for Jesus, but circumstances prevented that from happening. If he arrived in their hometown, Joseph could have constructed a beautiful cradle in his carpenter’s shop. Mary and her Mother might weave beautiful, delicate coverings for a padded foundation. Such luxuries were not to be.

Mary gave birth in a stable, and necessity led them to choose a manger for Jesus’ baby bed. A manger is a feeding trough for horses or cattle. It is not a piece of fine furniture, but it is probably constructed to last. I’m not sure if Mary found time to clean it out well and place clean hay inside, or if Joseph tenderly handled the preparation. She would have brought some essential clothing articles and coverings. The needs of the Son of God were met. He who feeds the souls of hungry worshipers lay securely in the place animals found nourishment. A manger held a King.

December 18

“GPS”

Do you trust your instincts or the GPS on your dashboard? Technology continues to make our lives easier. The latest gadgets give you step-by-step directions to your destination. They are not foolproof. I recently heard of a man stuck on a deserted back road walking for miles to find help and having his vehicle freed by a tow truck. It seems the GPS files showed the road as a shortcut. In reality, it added hours of frustration. Technology offers us tools, but they do not replace common sense or personal experience.

Long before inventors perfected the Global-Positioning-System devices, God led wise men with a Global Positioning Star. They patiently followed the star across country borders seeking the King of the Jews. Herod directed them to Bethlehem. “When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy (Matthew 2:9-10 NKJ).” Their GPS could not be purchased in any electronics outlet. God gave the gift, and His heavenly star gave guidance. When it came to a stop over a simple stable, the travelers rejoiced. When we are unsure of how to find God, help is available. His Holy Spirit will never lead us down the wrong path.

December 19

“Wonderland”

Do you see a winter wonderland or wasteland? It all depends on your point of view. It is barely daylight, and there is a fresh blanket of snow. Children tune in the news hoping school will be canceled. Mom feels a bad headache coming on. Dad dresses in layer upon layer of clothing before beginning the dreaded shoveling out of his driveway. Like the postal service, his employers expect him to be on the job, rain or shine.

I married forty-two years ago this month in 32-below-zero temperatures, amid mountains of snow. A few weeks later my groom moved me south, where he proudly claimed it hardly ever snows. I'm glad he didn't promise to eat his hat. We woke one morning to a winter wonderland in the Mississippi Delta. Six inches fell from southern skies, and this Yankee felt right at home. It did not last long; the warmth of the sun quickly melted all signs of a winter storm.

Are you getting excited about our heavenly wonderland? It will be a sight to behold, and weather forecasters will be shaking their heads in disbelief. They could not predict the size or intensity of this experience. “But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9 NKJ).” We will be speechless, as we behold God's magnificent city. The wonder of it all is God loves me.

December 20

“Dressed for a King”

How would you dress if you were given the opportunity to meet a king? You would likely go shopping and purchase an exquisite outfit with matching accessories. One night, long ago, shepherds tending their flocks received news of a newborn king in their vicinity. God holds a special place in His heart for shepherds. He chose a small shepherd boy, David, to be king of Israel. He now sent angels on a mission to meet other shepherds.

Angels announced the birth, and trembling shepherds quickly sprung into action. They were not concerned about their attire or written invitations. They must see this Child. “So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds (Luke 2:15-18 NKJ).” No newspaper, radio, or television reporters announced the biggest story in history. The Savior, Christ the Lord, is born! Shepherds quickly shared the news. They wore no expensive, purple clothing of royalty or press passes. They wore the peace of God.

December 21

“Home for Christmas”

Each time I hear the popular *I'll Be Home for Christmas*, I feel the twinge of memories. My thoughts carry me back to the living room decorated for Christmas in the house where I grew up. It has not been home for any of my family for nearly forty years, but it is still the first place that comes to my mind. I relive all the Christmas sights and sounds, along with the scents of evergreen branches and fresh-baked Christmas cookies. I feel the warmth of a cozy, dimly lit room, appreciated because frigid temperatures surround the sturdy house. Distance and time cannot keep us away. We can all be home for Christmas.

Heavy hearts surface as families face their first Christmas following the loss of a member of the family or close friend. Holidays are times of celebration and just seem incomplete when loved ones are absent. Christians are given great encouragement; we are not without hope. Those who know the Lord personally and pass over Jordan's river to eternal rest are home for Christmas. “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8 NKJ).” We miss those so dear to us, but we can find comfort knowing they are home for Christmas.

December 22

“Goodwill in Goodwater”

Is goodwill only an angelic suggestion? Will goodwill come to Goodwater? That’s my city, but the question applies to any place where people gather. Listen with your heart to the message from angels, God’s created messengers. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men (Luke 2:13-14 NKJ).”

Do we find kindness, goodwill in the streets of our cities? Is there a desire for doing good to those around us? Do we pick and choose who receives goodwill? The angels spoke of goodwill toward men. We know that is the desire of the Lord for every man, woman and child. It will only become a reality when we make God’s glory our first priority. Until He is number one, we live selfishly with little regard for others.

The shepherds heard the heavenly message and went in search of the Prince of Peace. His heart held the power to bring peace and goodwill to all men. When He returns to earth as the conquering Messiah, He will bring lasting peace. We can experience goodwill in Goodwater.

December 23

“String of Lights”

What happens when one Christmas-tree light stops working? All lights on the string of lights may also go dark. I can speak from experience; that is very annoying. Our tree has the lights permanently on the tree in three separate sections. At the end of last year’s holiday season, the bottom-section lighting quit. I ignored the outage, deciding I could wait to correct the problem. I quickly got a wake-up call when I set up the tree this year. It is easy to pass on problems, so I asked my husband to look for the solution. He said it would be easiest to just buy new lights because they are not expensive. Why is it that those jobs that we believe will be no problem turn into major hassles? We bought a new set of lights, and he dropped them on the floor and shorted them out. He made another trip to the store, bought set two of lights and began to wind them around the already trimmed tree. He is a patient man, and I applaud the final results. The tree never looked prettier.

Each light is important. They brighten their branch and join the others to illuminate the tree and our home. Jesus left us with specific instructions, and He watches us daily. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16 NKJ).” The body of Christ, His church, is much like a Christmas tree. When we each let our light shine, we form a line of lights to illuminate a darkened world. The glory of the Father is on display.

December 24

“The Christmas Song”

Music captures the joy of the Christmas season and magnifies the name of the anointed King. Listen with your heart and be changed inside out. The writers of traditional Christmas carols left us with the gospel message set to music. We can also find encouragement, peace, and joy in the words of many contemporary Christmas selections. I have so many favorites, but one that stands out is *The Christmas Song*. Like Bing Crosby's *White Christmas*, it is a standard which is recorded over and over by various artists. Each gifted singer seems to add their own personality to create a new appreciation of *The Christmas Song*.

The original Christmas song reached God's throne. “And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His seed forever (Luke 1:46-56 NKJ).” Mary's song endures through the generations. The Christmas song of praise rose to the Father above and fills hungry hearts below.

December 25

“Call His Name Jesus”

In Bible times names held significant meaning and often carried prophetic weight. Examples from New King James Version include:

Samuel: Heard by God (1 Samuel 1:20) /Jabez: He will cause pain because of difficult childbirth (1 Chronicles 4:9-10) /Benjamin: Son of my sorrow, as mother died following delivery (Genesis 35:18), and Simon Peter: Cephas, A Stone (John 1:42).

Why were Mary and Joseph directed to name the Christ child Jesus? His name means salvation. “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21 NKJ).” To know Jesus is to experience salvation. When we accept the gift of salvation, we personally know Jesus. They cannot be separated.

At the time of Jesus’ birth a godly man looked expectantly for the coming Messiah. The Holy Spirit impressed on him a message of hope; he would see that fulfilled before he died. (Luke 2:25-26) He stood close by as Joseph and Mary brought Jesus into the Temple. He rejoiced and gave great praise. God allowed him to see salvation and even hold salvation. “he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel (Luke 2:28-32 NKJ).” Jesus saves lost, weary souls.

December 26

“Stop-Look-Listen”

Did your school have crossing guards for children going to and from school? There are various kinds of guards. Some use volunteers, local police or paid staff. Our elementary school called upon children from higher grades. It offered responsibility, and guards gained respect.

I remember once, when in the sixth grade in severe winter conditions, I served as a guard. I have a small frame and always found myself among the smallest in my classes. It seemed strange leading groups of much younger little kids. I directed them to waiting buses and then enjoyed a reward for my efforts. I went back inside the warm building for a cup of hot cocoa. It may have been the best I ever sipped.

Children are instructed to stop, look, and listen when crossing roads. We should remember to do the same. God does. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12 NKJ).” He looks out for us and our safety. He listens to our humble prayers and puts a stop to evil. We must look to Him. Our ears need to be ready to listen to His instructions and we need to hold up the stop sign to sin. We might even be rewarded with chocolate.

December 27

“Clean Behind Your Ears”

Adults need to accept a challenge to clean behind their ears. Yes, I realize you are old enough to handle routine bathing. This takes us one step further. Parents and grandparents often need to remind children to wash well. Most children think of bathing as fun time in the tub. They do very little scrubbing. Health officials suggest frequent washing of hands with soap and hot water to fight infections or use hand sanitizers when soap and hot water is not available. We wisely heed those warnings. What else can we do? Let's focus on the ears, inside and behind, where dirt may be hiding. What kind of dirt? The dirt of gossip and slander loves to hide. Gossip cleverly evades our sight and hopes to stay for a long time.

Gossip and slander is big business with tabloids, television programs, magazines and newspapers raking in billions of dollars. We are led astray to believe it is just a form of entertainment and a downside of notoriety. Some go to the extremes of desiring gossip to keep their name and face before the public.

Gossip can be very destructive, murdering a person's character and their reputation. Once it is tarnished, it is very difficult to restore. Do you laugh it off, saying gossip, slander, and little white lies are nearly harmless? The Bible calls gossip and slander sin. Searching scripture, we find 2 Timothy 3:1-5 lists it among a group of sins of the last days. In another grouping we read of the twin sins of the lips: “They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, disputes, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters, proud boastful inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving and unmerciful! Although they know full well God's just sentence- that those who practice such things deserve to die-they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them (Romans 1:29-32 Holman Christian Standard).” Yes, I think we allow a great deal of dirt in and around our ears. The good news is, it is easily removed by asking God to forgive and receiving forgiveness, leaving the ear area clean. I want to pass inspection when He looks behind my ears.

December 28

“Blowing In the Wind”

Are you securely resting in gentle breezes or hunkering down in fear of damaging winds coming in your direction? Allergy sufferers avoid winds, much aware of pollens, dust and molds being carried aloft.

Job, under God’s permissive hand, endured great suffering; and winds played a big part. Powerful winds destroyed the house occupied by his children. Job suffered from a broken heart but stood firm on his faith in God. We read of a portion of Job’s personal conversation with the heavenly Father in Job 40. Each presented their case, and the scripture reveals intimacy and honesty in the heart of Job. God spoke to His tormented friend... “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me (Job 40:6-7 NKJ).” Listen for God’s voice in gentle breezes and whirlwinds; He has a message for all of us. God will never leave us as a passing wind. Don’t be blown away by doubts and fears.

December 29

“Hollyhocks”

Do children still appreciate the simple things, or do they demand the toys of their electronic fantasies? Are little boys and girls gleefully picking up colored pebbles on the beach, or do they only stub their toes on the way in to wade?

My mother taught me and my sisters, when we were little, how to create delicate dolls from hollyhock flowers growing in our front yard. These dolls only needed a little imagination and a toothpick. I looked forward to pretty summer days and our colorful little dolls. Could anything be more beautiful? “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these (Matthew 6:28-29 NKJ).” Yes, God is a fashion designer for hollyhock dolls.

December 30

“Deeply Moved”

Our times of deep sorrow are understood and shared by our Lord. We must allow ourselves to grieve when we experience loss. Many times we show great compassion for others when they are hurting, yet we believe we must be strong when we suffer.

Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, were not afraid to be honest about their deep pain and confusion following his death. They went to Jesus seeking answers. (John 11:20-32). Both sisters used the phrase “*if you had been here*”... (Verses 21, 32) Jesus did not rebuke them for their cutting accusations. Following their conversations, scripture records His reaction. “He groaned in the spirit and was troubled (John 11:33b NKJ).” He shares your trouble; share His comfort.

December 31

“The Party’s Over”

How sharp is your memory? Most of us can more easily recall days long ago than our lunch yesterday. Do you remember your first junior-high dances? Were you shy and a wallflower...or the life of the party? I’ve been told that girls mature earlier than boys, and I tend to believe that general rule. Preteen girls begin to be interested in the opposite sex and share details of their latest crush. She makes eyes at her dreamboat, and he thinks she has cooties. He goes to planned dances or parties only when coaxed by his mother and spends the evening with the rest of the boys by the refreshment table. Like the War-Between-the-States, there are lines drawn. Boys crowd together in one side of the room, and the girls are left alone in misery on the opposite side.

The Bible shares the details of another crowd going separate ways. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me’ (Matthew 25:31-36 NKJ).” Jesus explained that any kindness shown to others is also personal care for Him.

The goats were cast into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Failing to show expressions of love resulted in eternal punishment. They would be separated from God and from those who faithfully served the Lord by showing compassion to those in need. When the party is over, what group will we be in?