

In a

WORD

Letters from a Father to his Children

By

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2004 - 2007

Table of Contents

About the Project,	3
An Apology,	4
Being a Parent and a Step-Parent,	5
Fatherhood,	6
“Call Me Daddy”,	7
“Children & Parents, Lost & Found”,	8
Letters to my Children from...	
My Ages to their Names,	9 -18
Absolutes to Asses,	19 - 26
Baby Bottles to Bridges,	27 - 36
Care to Crisis,	37 - 65
Death to Duty,	66 – 79
Effervescence to Exercise,	80 – 89
Failure to Friend,	90 – 112
Galaxy to Guilt,	113 – 127
Haircuts to Hope,	128 – 139
Ice-Skating to Investment,	140 – 146
Jets to Justice,	147 – 148
Kindness to Kiddy-Hawk,	149 – 152
Landfall to Love,	153 – 168
Mail to Music,	169 – 194
Napping to Nuance,	195 – 203
Obedience to Overcoming,	204 – 210
Pacific to Purpose,	211 – 235
Questions to Questions,	236 – 236
Rage to Running,	237 – 262
Sarcasm to Surviving,	263 – 295
Teams to Two-faced,	296 – 316
Unlimited to Unworthy,	317 – 319
Valor to Voting,	320 – 327
Wagons to Worry,	328 – 347
Yoo-hoo to Zorro,	348 – 352
Final Comments	353...

About this Project

This project began in late 2003 at the suggestion of family, and has been accomplished letter-by-letter.

The mission was to present the intimacy that the Lord offers in our relationship with him; and that should be present by all means in our relationship with our children and children in our charge.

The scope or content is a collection of one-page letters, each with a single-word topic with references to my experiences as a child, and my experiences as a parent and step-parent, and the understood or anticipated interest of the children.

The pictures are a selection of images and photos obtained through software resources and Web sites. Selection of pictures was largely based on my interest in black-and-white photography, the relevance of the picture to the topic, and the clarity of the image translated to the end-document.

The letters have enabled me to reach out to my children in a personal, transparent, and enduring way. Furthermore, the letters have encouraged me to document my own beliefs as a Christian and, although through written word only, to convey these beliefs to my children, to family, and other readers.

My hope and prayer is that In a Word will be a source of encouragement, entertainment and instruction to children, parents, or grand-parents in their role within a family, step-family, church family, or other social setting.

An Apology

December 16, 2003

To my Children – Matthew, Abby, Ben and Brian

Today, I begin these letters at the urging of your grandfather - who suggested that it would be helpful to you as you read it for the first time and possibly for years to come.

As of today, it has been about two years since we have been together. I last saw you in December, 2001 and have had only limited contact through my letters and an occasional telephone call by you. It is this separation and the uncertainty of its length that serves as the basis for the letters.

From the recent trial in Jacksonville, my concerns include the possibility that you have not received my letters and gifts; still, this possibility does not deter me from preparing the letters as a continuation and expression of my thoughts concerning all matters and events pertaining to our separation. Most important is that you hear, accept, and understand the following:

First, I am deeply sorry for the failure of my marriage to your mother and, in spiritual terms, the breaking of a covenant or promise in marriage before the church and God.

Second, I am deeply sorry for separation between us and the pain it has caused each of you; again, in spiritual terms, the breaking of a covenant or promise in each of your dedications before the church and God.

Third, I love you very much and am blessed by God to have you as my children.

As I close this letter, the most prevalent thought at this moment is that one day we will see each other again and that beyond that moment, we will be rejoined as father to children and children to father. It is my hope that this day will come tomorrow such that I and your grandparents may celebrate this much awaited moment.

Until that day, I will not forget you or stop loving you; indeed, I think of you every day. My trust is completely in the Lord that, no matter the length of separation, that he will keep you under his care and protection; and that you have or will find a relationship with him and know that he knew you even before you were born, and has a plan and purpose for your life.

Always your father, Kirk

Being a Parent and a Step-Parent

Being a parent has had many rewards and with few if any actual regrets. I remain convinced that children are a gift and that, as parents are guardians, we are obligated and should be committed to the instruction, care, and love of our children within the framework of friendship.

This commitment was not easy in the moment; particularly when the children were babies and could not respond or communicate. But as they matured, and as I adjusted to the role and requirements of a parent, the commitment spawned and flourished without reservations or regrets. Yes, mistakes occurred and, as the children became of age, were sometimes admitted for the purpose of seeking forgiveness, showing fairness, and allowing for reconciliation. Becoming a parent was gratifying and fulfilling – it gave me a sense of purpose that is unique and beautiful.

Becoming a step-parent has been very different in the sense that I was not present at the children's births, did not participate in some of their childhood, share parenting responsibilities with their natural father and step-mother, and cannot relate physical characteristics between us. The fact of being a step-parent allows for certain fears to creep into the role-relationship such as: the fear of rejection; the fear of failure; and the fear of lost relationships, yet again. Needless to say, step-parenting requires time, effort, and patience – for all of us!

In spite of these differences, step-parenting is a wonderful and challenging role. In the process, I have grown to appreciate the accomplishments of other step-parents, foster parents, and otherwise guardians with no natural connection. I am thankful and blessed with the gift of children, step-children, and children in general.

Fatherhood

In addressing the role of the father, or fatherhood, my words must be carefully chosen as my heart has been changed through a litany of court-related events and conditions. Through the course of this legal process, the possibility to become disgusted and even bitter has been a recurring threat – which could be cause for either assuming a victim status or establishing a permanent and monumental chip on my shoulder. But with some reserve, let me continue with my comments on the important and irreplaceable role of a father or father-figure in the lives of children.

Fatherhood is a much-needed resource in the family with the capacity to make radical change in the lives of children through direct and indirect influence. Without going into the history of this key role, or the plight of diminished influence from the media and other sources, fatherhood should stand the test of time and social changes that threaten the value of the father and the structure and importance of the family in general.

I have never questioned my desire, ability and even general record in this role; but, admittedly, some reactions and decisions have not been accomplished in prayer and with the children's overall interest in mind and heart. Perhaps, most fathers and parents share this same view point with the realization of their vulnerability to criticism and to the passing down of generational, but questionable practices. Even with this realization and the negative influences that abound, fatherhood remains a primary call for men to influence the young people about them in a positive, affirmative way. To those who carry on this practice, often as a chief ambition, much gratitude and appreciation will be forthcoming if not already evident. Although not necessarily expressed, the children in your circle of influence have taken mental notes of the sacrifices and commitments necessary for fatherhood and will surely remember them in their lifetime for their children.

“Call Me Daddy”

Call me daddy some distant time
When word first formed from child to Dad
And set the making of daddy proud
To be daddy to the child

Call me daddy some needed time
When word is heard from child to Dad
And quick response from daddy near
To rescue child from moment fear

Call me daddy some recent time
Said from another child to another Dad
And brings to mind the longing word
That once meant me instead

Call me daddy some longing time
When the word no longer from child to Dad
That distance and isolation have caused
The child to lose all sense of word

How my heart aches for this word
But that child is forever certain
That daddy remains a word
No matter how long deferred

Daddy, daddy, a thousand times daddy
A sweet sound to my ears
A celebration for my heart
A heavenly image to my mind

Call me daddy another time
When time and place will allow
The freedom to use this word
Without restraint, but full assured

Call me daddy forever time
That long deferred will still remind
That I am daddy and you are child
What God ordained will never end

A promise is only made
But a covenant, it will stay
The course that has fallen us
Until that day, you call me daddy, again

“Children & Parents - Lost & Found”

To count my blessings does take time
For God has shed his grace on me
Still help the Children Lost for now
Soon find them in the best of state

Father that I use to be
When by decision placed in role
Of parent to the Children Found
From places dark my Father knows

But on the way, the role was held
In strong contempt to gain the edge
By parent to the Children Best
To change the truth to something less

And should reaction be in kind
To fight with might to pass the edge
By parent to the Children Least
And risk the chance of further harm

The effort made to be content
Is eased by other little ones
Of children to the Parent Most
A source of love transcends my hope

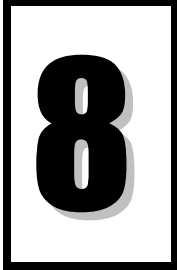
That brings forth beauty refined through time
By her devotion and heart to bear
Of Children to the Parent Lost
With wisdom wrought in younger years
Help us all in the hearts that hurt

To overcome from blessings flow
Of Parent to the Children Lost
Of Children to the Parent Lost
From Father high to Father low

That when the moment finally comes
Let sweetness take the bitterness
Of Children Lost to Children Found
Of Parent Lost to Parent Found
Of Father High to resound,

That Love conquers all...

8 (Eight)



At 8 years old, I was somewhat like you – living in Jacksonville Florida. My house was very similar to the one you presently live in – cinder blocks with a low-pitched roof, terrazzo floor, and similar layout. My house was located on the Westside of Jacksonville just off of 103rd Street on Georgewood Lane.

My dog's name was "Sarge" – he was half-Beagle very similar in appearance to Molly; my favorite candy bar was probably a Three Musketeers; my favorite toys were army men; my bicycle was painted a yellow-orange like a school bus; my parent's only car was a Nova station wagon; and my favorite club was the Cub Scouts.

The summer of that year probably included a trip to see our extended family in Gadsden, Alabama – not far from where I presently live in, if you can believe it, "Jacksonville", Alabama! Our weeks in Alabama included trips to Weiss Lake - which meant lots of swimming, fishing, cookouts, and fun with our cousins and other family and friends.

I was much like you in the sense that I was a "happy-go-lucky" fellow who soaked-up every ounce of fun out of every event - even if it upset my brother or sister. After all, I was just trying to have fun even if it meant destroying one of my brother's models or sneaking into my sister's room to listen to her music.

Most important, I felt love and security from those around me, my parents, my family, my friends my neighbors. I hope that you are much like that too and that you continue to be that one who soaks-up all the fun possible; but without upsetting your brothers and sister.

10 (Ten)

When I was 10, we had just moved from Jacksonville, Florida to Beaufort, South Carolina. I attended the elementary school in Laurel Bay – which was the housing community for the local Marine Corps Air Station. My teacher’s name was Ms. Pressley.

10

The fourth grade was an exciting time as baseball and eventually football would take up some of my time; while the balance was pre-occupied with fishing, playing in the local woods, and riding my bicycle. My brother and sister were both teenagers by now – which seemed to capture a lot of my attention and envy at times.

Beaufort, like much of the South and perhaps America, was struggling with racial integration of the public schools. The local schools suffered through frequent fights, riots and other conflict. It was a time of great tension, not only in the schools, but also over the Vietnam War. Some protested the war, most suffered through it, many died from it, while others lauded our government’s decision(s). Some resisted racial integration, most suffered through it, some died over it, and still others recognized it as an eventual, step-forward for society and the common good.

Suffering may seem like a terrible condition when considered alone; but, the Bible tells us that suffering creates perseverance; that perseverance creates character; and that character creates hope. Suffering is a refining process through which many blessings, that otherwise are taken for granted, can be realized and cherished at the highest possible degree. Perseverance is the strength or ability to overcome or endure hardship. Character includes the qualities or unique features of a person. Hope is an assurance of something good to come.

12

12 At age 12, I was living in Beaufort, South Carolina and attending the 7th grade at Beaufort Junior High School. Several years prior to this age, I had played organized baseball and football; but during that year, I received a back injury {a pinch nerve} that kept me from playing both sports altogether. Still, I was able to ride my 10-speed, to fish, and to hang-out with some of my friends like Mike Bell and Jeff Brown. It was not a good year because of the injury and the transition from a good elementary school to a not-so-good junior high school; still, I tried to develop other interests such as playing the drums and rock-in-roll, and going to youth activities at the local Baptist church.

This time period represented some real changes in my life. First, the school was very different and also included riding a bus instead of my bicycle. Second, my true-love at the time, Lori, had “broken-up’ with me; never to show any interest again. Third, the sports injury was very painful and made even walking painful for awhile. This time period or age does not “bring back fond memories”; as it presented circumstances and changes that I did not prefer or welcome.

The word “cool”, to mean popular or well-accepted, was widely used in 1973 – when I was 12. During elementary school, I was most-likely a “cool” kid who fished, played sports, went to dance hops, peddled around on my bicycle, went to the movies, and basically had fun. But at 12, the “coolness” began to wear-off and this once-outgoing kid was now becoming a quiet, insecure pre-teen. But even being cool, or thinking of yourself as cool, is over-rated...don’t you think?

Being cool requires a lot of effort and, at times, compromise of your values or what you think is “the right thing to do”. When the popular choice conflicts with our personal values, a choice must be made...and the consequences must be accepted as well. The wrong choice may lead to trouble that far outweighs the acceptance that we all desire from time to time. Sometimes we can be cool and be “real” at the same time...but not always.

Jesus was cool because he helped the poor, fed the hungry, healed the sick, and saved the lost. But he also ministered to all people as the acclaimed savior of the world – which for some people was very un-cool and downright unacceptable. Although he came to save all mankind from the peril of sin, the response was anything but acceptance; indeed, all mankind condemned him to death without the realization that his death was ordained that mankind might be restored unto God, our maker. In faith, we believe that he rose from death and, by his resurrection; we too can overcome death – the punishment for our sins. Jesus is still real and, as far as cool, well that is between you and Him.

14

14

Fourteen was an age of big changes for me. I moved from Beaufort, South Carolina to Anniston, Alabama. That same year, 1975, my sister was married and my brother went off to college – I went from being the youngest of three children to an only child in the course of a month. Secondly, I moved to a new city and state while my father remained in Beaufort for another two to three years.

This age was also an age of bodily changes called puberty. Wow, the physical changes that take place during this time are complex and seem to take years of reflection to even begin to understand or accept. You are no longer a boy but you are not altogether a man.

This is a time when you need your parents and others' reassurance and attention; but may not be comfortable at discussing these changes. You may even be ashamed or embarrassed about thoughts and feelings that are consuming much of your time. I will tell you from my own experience that this time of change can be difficult and can lead to insecurities about appearance, acceptance, attraction, and a whole host of issues in and about relationships. I think that a young man at this age period needs counsel and guidance from a father or much older mentor. Unfortunately, I cannot offer that as much as I long too and need too.

As you are experiencing the major transition from boyhood, bear in mind that everyone who is older has been through the same experience(s); thus, you should take solace in knowing that your thoughts and feelings are not peculiar or weird. But, in the limits of this letter, let me offer some advice that may help albeit adolescence is tough!

First, the Lord knows your every thought, your every desire, your every intention and effectively everything about you both now and in the future. In a word, He is omniscient. Furthermore, he loves you like no other or more than all others; therefore, he wants the best for you and is present to help and guide you. In a word, he is omnipresent. Finally, he is the ultimate authority and wants to be master or lord of your life. In a word, he is omnipotent. With some sense of his knowledge, his presence, and his authority, he is very merciful and forgiving – he loves you unconditionally and will be the best friend you will ever know.

Matthew, remember that fourteen and being a teenager is only a season in life – enjoy this time and embrace it as part of God's plan for creation, for you. Remember, the ways of your youth as an opportunity to grow physically, mentally, and spiritually; hand-in-hand with your best friend.

ABIGAIL



“Abigail” was first documented in the Old Testament in the book of Genesis. She was the wife of an ungrateful husband named Nabal; and was very instrumental as a counselor in both this marriage and her eventual marriage to King David.

Her purpose included a gift to “see the big picture” in matters of critical importance; but she possessed many other skills and gifts as David found very attractive. These included:

- Sensible and capable
- Persuasive – but able to see beyond herself
- Strengthened in tough circumstances
- Seemingly unknown, yet used by God
- Homemaker

These gifts allowed Abigail to play such an important part in David’s life and he praised the Lord: “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you {Abigail} to me today! Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murdering the man {Nabal} and carrying out vengeance with my own hands”.

The name also applies to my only daughter, Abigail Rainer; who is the most precious young lady I have ever known and whom has brought me much joy in her early years. From her birth, touting a head full of black hair, to her horsemanship, she has given me much to be thankful for in my days as her father. How I wonder how you, “Abby”, are doing at age 12; and how I hope and pray to still be a father that I always wanted to be from your birth.

Be of courage, as David’s Abigail was in her time, and possess all the gifts and purpose that the Lord has planned for you. Hope, as I do, that we can have a relationship that sets in place some semblance of what your husband may one day be – one who values your gifts and holds you in high esteem through affirmation.

And now, as I have prayed before and as I will continue to pray, watch over this young precious girl and provide for her needs, her protection and her care. Please bring healing to her heart and fill her with joy that she may know she is loved by you, by her father, and by her family. Let her be encouraged and strengthened, even as David’s Abigail was in her time, that her purpose in God may realized in due time and celebrated all the days of her life and beyond.

Amen

BEN

B Ben or Benjamin is also from the Bible; he was the youngest son of Jacob and the second son by Rachel. From Genesis 42, Jacob was very fond of Benjamin because he was Joseph's only full brother. **B** Little is known or provided about Ben beyond that summarized above; but, the name has been used over and over again in the naming of boys.

From memory, the name applied to one of my college friends, Ben Craig. My brother also had a college friend by the name of Ben Darby. From recollection, both were very intelligent and performed well in difficult programs. In the fictional series, "Star Wars", the master Jetti warrior's named was abbreviated as Ben. Some years ago, the prime minister of Israel was named Benjamin; and, of course, the great statesman and inventor was Benjamin Franklin. "Ben" is quite a name!

Benjamin, from the Bible, also came to be the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. At the time of the revolt from King Rehoboam, the tribes of Benjamin and Judah remained loyal to David's line and formed the Kingdom of Judah {2 Chronicles 10}.

Well, Benjamin seems to have some real qualities worth noting in order:

- Intelligent
- Loyal
- Admired or held in high esteem
- Reliable
- Leadership

I'm sure that many more qualities could be derived if I only knew more Benjamin's. But what is most important is that I know Benjamin Rainer who is my second oldest son and third oldest child. It is this particular Ben that struggled through multiple eye surgeries as an infant, a multitude of formulas, and an endless case of ear infections. Yet, somehow, by God's power he made it! – thank God for miracles and the compassion and skill of doctors and surgeons.

How I miss those brown eyes and your somewhat pensive expression; the way you kick a ball; or react to defend yourself against greater threats; the way you stacked your toy soldiers with such care and precision; that sometimes gravely voice; and stubborn manner; and simply the way you brought joy to my life. Ben is a name and a person I will never forget; and have always remembered with great admiration, affection, and devotion. Amen

BRIAN "WESLEY"

B

"Brian" is a name that, closest to your family, is the name of your uncle, Brian Keith Rainer. Aside from this fellow, Brian is not too common; but neither is your middle name, "Wesley". Still, I think both names fit you well and provide both a connection to this side of your family, and to a great theologian, John Wesley.

When the name is mentioned, I sometimes think of a famous football player for the Chicago Bears, Brian Piccolo, whose career and life were cut short by cancer. Brian and Gayle Sayers, another running



back, were room mates at the Bear's training camp. One being white and the other black, these living arrangements were very controversial during the 1960's; consequently, their close friendship became an issue for the media. This reaction did not stop them from continuing their friendship and mutual respect. You may sometime hear a song, a tribute to

Brian Piccolo, entitled "Brian's Song"...it is beautiful! What about your other name, "Wesley"?

John "Wesley" was born in the 1800's in England and became a theologian {or minister}. Simply, he tried to make Christianity available to all people regardless of their wealth or their race; like Jesus, he presented the gospel to the people who were *poor in spirit* and of less account by worldly standards.



Two great men from which you derive your name "Brian Wesley"; and who went against the popular or accepted views of society or the church and extended themselves without prejudice but with conviction and purpose. Go forward and do the same Brian with the understanding that you are loved forever. Amen

GARRETT



“Garrett” is a very distinguished name; a name that is English according to sources. But the Garrett that I have come to know is a bright and very social boy.

Encarta provides a number of famous people; most of whom have the last name Garrett rather than the first. The exception is Garrett Morgan, who was an inventor that lived in the late 1800’s. Among his inventions was the gas mask used by American soldiers during World War I, and the 3-way traffic light that is still used today by everyone who drives or walks across a cross-walk.

Another famous person, Almeida Garrett, was a Portuguese poet, dramatist, statesman, and the founder of the Romantic Movement in Portuguese literature. I only bring up this name as a possibility that Garrett may have some Latin origin – which would explain why our Garrett is both a charming yet temperamental personality.

Garrett is very bright having learned and refined his speech very early. This development enables him to conduct in-depth conversation with older children and adults; but it also enables him to practice the art of articulation when it comes to instruction and discipline. Consequently, Garrett has the dual ability to talk his way into trouble but also talk his way out of trouble on occasion.

In addition to his speech, Garrett has developed some physical skills in the way of kicking and throwing a ball; a development that has his mother predicting a positive future for sports of some kind. I agree that he has the basic skills and, along with his talents in talking, could very well play or talk himself to victory against most competition his age.

His future looks very bright as long as he limits annoying his older brother. The two can be the best of chums some moments but at one another throats the next – but I guess that’s true in most families. Amen

KEEGAN

“Keegan” is a name with origins to Ireland; that first name coupled with your Irish-based last name is a choice tribute to the “old country”. I have never met another person by that name; hence, it is very unique and distinguish – perhaps, it is a legendary name that deserves some research.

K

From the Internet, I could not find any personalities with the first name “Keegan” although there are numerous last names. For example, the picture to the right is one of many art pieces by Charles Keegan. I thought you might like to see this example since his art delves into gothic and medieval style images and settings. Secondly, that painting has some history in your family with your grandfather being a career artist.



One of the more interesting characters bearing that last

February 23rd, 1847

During the afternoon it grew cold with a strong wind from the north-east, accompanied by driving showers. Towards sunset the sea was a lather of foam, and the wind had increased to a gale. When the waves began to flood the deck, the order was given to put the hatches on. God help the poor souls shut in beneath my feet!

name was Gerald Keegan. During his crossing the Atlantic from Ireland to Canada in 1847, he kept a diary of the events such as a storm that occurred in late February. His diary was eventually published under the title, Summer of Sorrow. Like you, Gerald was Irish.

Gerald may have had trouble looking beyond the storm to envision his future in North America; as some passengers and crew were lost at sea during the gale. Your mother and I are here to help you and encourage through the storms for which you face, and to help you envision the future and the promises that await you; and to understand and follow God’s purpose and plan for you.

In the meantime, have fun and enjoy learning and growing. As they say in the navy, keep a tight sail mate! Oh, and keep the room looking ship-shape!

Amen

MATTHEW

M

“Matthew” is a name that I have always liked because it reminds me of a character in the Public television series, “Ann of Green Gables”. The character, or brother of the family who becomes a foster parent to Ann, is very kind, patient, and loving in his modest and rather unassuming way.

Matthew is probably most associated with the first of the four gospels and the writer and apostle, Matthew the Jewish tax collector. In the world of movie-making, Matthew Broderick is well known for movies like *Inspector Gadget* and *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*. Through history, several noted theologians, writers, and similar types bore names such as Matthew Jones, Flinders, and Henson just to name a few.

Matthew was the first of four gospels and the first book in the New Testament. Being a first in both categories, Matthew is the bridge or link between the two testaments as well as the first account of Jesus from his lineage to his death and resurrection. You are the first of four children – each child being a human account or testimony of a plan ordained by God. Please do not forget that your birth and life are ordained by God; consequently, that there is plan for your life, intended to glorify God.

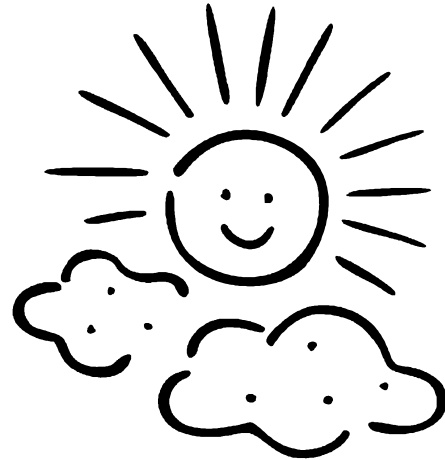
Second, Matthew contains references to prophesy of the Old Testament; again a link between the two testaments separated by at least one generation. You represent a new generation of both Vicki’s family and my own – it is our hope and prayer that you and the others will be wise in your decisions and make choices that are based on a relationship with Christ. Ideally, that your wisdom comes from the perfect source and is not diluted or altogether overruled by the so-called wisdom of the world that is simply self-centered and single-minded. From the reading of the letter and from this day forward, know that your life is priceless and that your purpose has already been planned – even before you were born.

The apostle Matthew and his fellow apostles lived the post-resurrection and ascension with the presence of the Holy Spirit. As you may know, the Spirit enables us to be more like Jesus; to pray from the depth of our hearts; and to experience joy in the midst of suffering and trials. The Holy Spirit is simply our helper made available to all believers through a relationship with Jesus. I pray that you may experience the presence of the Spirit just as Matthew and other believers did in the early church; and through his indwelling, will experience joy and fulfillment through certain suffering and trials that you have and do incur. How I long to see you, to hold you, and to re-affirm our relationship. Amen

ABSOLUTES

What are “absolutes”? Absolutes are things that are unquestionable or free from restraint. For example, an absolute truth would be one that cannot be denied or questioned in any way; simply, it is understood to be proven and true. If you were to say, “the Sun will rise and set tomorrow”, than you would be voicing an absolute truth or an absolute; after all, the Sun always rises and sets within the course of a day...or does it?

In the book of Joshua, God stops both the Sun and the Moon for an estimated day to enable Israel to complete a battle. This event was described as the only one of its kind in the history of the world. Since God has stopped the Sun, or rotation of the Earth, the movement of the Sun is not an absolute. Still, the natural event is something understood to be an absolute based on the almost 100 percent chance of occurrence – it is practically certain!



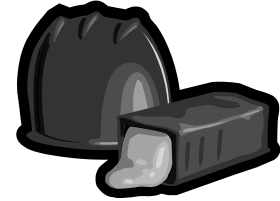
Other natural events could be taken through the same rationale, but what about supernatural events or events that do not follow the laws of nature? For example, ghosts would be considered as supernatural and have been presented with some degree of proof or evidence. A survey or poll might show a mixed response to this issue: some being absolutely certain, some being dubious, and others denying the very existence and even finding the issue to be ridiculous. The existence of ghosts is not absolute.

What about other supernatural events or conditions such as the existence of God, the certainty of the Bible (as God’s truth) and of Jesus Christ being the messiah (as God’s son)? The Bible is replete with supernatural events that are sometimes difficult to accept as absolute based on what we know, understand, or have observed in the natural world (call it, our framework). The Sun halting, the water parting, the sky raining food (manna), the presence of angels, healings, and many other miracles cannot be rationalized by our knowledge or senses. Sometime these events, the Bible, and the position of God and Jesus must be accepted in faith as absolute truth. Like gravity, oxygen, magnetic forces and other invisible elements of nature, the truths of God must be accepted as absolute based on substantial but not fully understood evidence.

ADDICTIONS

What is the difference between an addiction and a need? Usually we think of a need as something we must have to sustain life like water, food, shelter, etc. Addictions are usually associated with drugs and, in particular, illegal drugs. Addictions can also be associated with vices or something we don't need to sustain life but probably rate very high on the scale of "wants" versus "needs".

You may have heard or seen the slogan: "I'm addicted to chocolate" or some similar reference to chocolate. This slogan is, of course, an exaggeration...unless you are a chocolate fanatic. But chocolate does delight the palate with a variable degree of satisfaction.



All the sweet stuff aside, addictions can create a host of problems for the addicted as well as family, friends, or other associations. Addictions are responsible for numerous health problems and medical treatment, for lost work and ineffective use of time, for dysfunctional families, and even premature death among many illnesses.

History will bear out that some drugs intended as a pain killer, such as Heroin, could become very addictive leading to extensive and long-term illness. Similarly, pain and other prescribed medication, if improperly used (or abused), become addictive and leads to adverse, sometimes irreversible health and social problems. In short, drugs have provided some benefits to be sure; but have the potential to cause adverse side effects if abused in some way or obtained as an illegal drug.

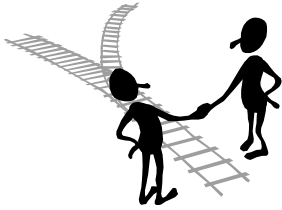
I am certain that you have been exposed to some advertising and education on drug addiction, but some additional advice and encouragement from those who love you and care about you can make a difference in your decisions on this matter. Realize that you have been given a healthy, functioning body and mind. Please don't destroy this precious gift by the momentary pleasures or acceptance gained from drug abuse.



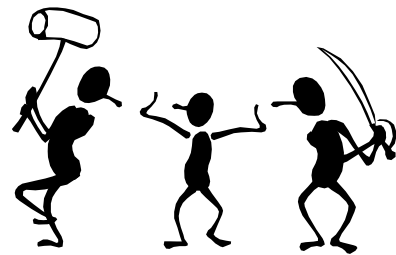
Wanting things is not bad at all; but when your desire and chief objective becomes the fulfillment of your "wants", you may be addicted to self-indulgence. Self-indulgence causes neglect of those things and people who are important and potentially depending on you in some way. Self-indulgence runs counter to the Christian view; that is, to love one another, and to honor one another above yourself. Help us Lord; free us from self-indulgence and give us a heart like Christ.

AGREEMENT

An agreement is the understanding and mutual acceptance regarding a matter between two or more people. For example, two people may agree on certain terms of a contract or arrangement; thus, they expect one another to execute or fulfill the contract. If one fails to execute the contract per the terms, the other party may have grounds for suspending or terminating the contract. Other agreements may not be formal or legal; rather, an understanding is built on friendship or informal assumptions and conditions. Whether formal or not, agreements are necessary in our every day life as well as in major decisions, business affairs, etc.



You may hear on the news about two or more countries striking an agreement such a peace accord following a period of discord, turmoil, or even war. A peace accord is an agreement to effectuate peace by certain conduct and conditions. Content of the accord may include a fair division of adjacent land, a willingness to respect each nation's religious or other cultural differences, and a variety of other measures aimed at peace. These agreements may not be shared by some individual citizens or pockets of the population; but, as a nation, the general consensus is to comply with the measures in the best interest of the whole.



Agreement seems much easier and less costly than war and conflict. The costs of war and conflict can be enormous in the form of property and people. Long-term social, economic and even developmental problems are often the results (of disagreement, discord, division, derision, etc.)

The adage, "Why can't we just get along" has been popularized (possibly by Rodney King during the Los Angeles riots). The possible reasons for not getting along or agreeing may be too numerous and complex. A fact is that we are naturally selfish, greedy, and even cruel at times; left to this nature, agreement may be a goal or idea, but never a realization. This *plight of life* extends to great geo-political regions, to economic and business sectors, to differing cultures, to cities and neighborhoods, and even to families. Our hope for agreement and peace should come from our God (his love through us), and our faith that he can change our selfish nature and cast out all fear that drives us apart, one away from the other.

AMISH

You may be familiar with the Amish – a group of people or society that maintains standards of living that may seem rather backward to most of us. These standards often include the use of a horse and wagon over the convenience of modern day transportation such as cars and planes. Although common to Pennsylvania and the Midwest, these societies can be found in the Southeast to include Tennessee and, yes, even Florida.



Amish may easily stand out in a crowd where the men and women dress in black and simple, hand-made clothing. I would imagine most of the men have facial beards while the woman may cover at least a portion of their simple hair style. Still, I'm not that familiar with the ways of these societies although admiring and respecting some of the noted lifestyle(s) and beliefs.

Their lifestyle and beliefs, a form of Christianity, include a non-aggressive or passive approach toward dealing and resolving problems. In times of war, the Amish may have been "conscientious objectors" or citizens that do not believe in killing other people or *taking someone's life*. I really struggle with this area in that Christ instructed us to *turn the other cheek* and to *pray and forgive those who hurt us*. I'm not sure on whether this instruction applies to the protection and defense of a family, village or nation - what do you think?

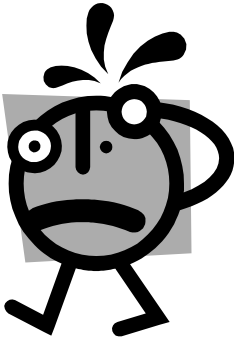
Their interests and devotion extends to fellow brethren – they are the best of good neighbors. You may recall in the movie *Witness*, the entire community joined in a barn-raising. Hard work and discipline are essential to this good-neighbor practice as well as maintaining their own farms and homes.

These people begin the day very early and, avoiding many of the conveniences of this time; and spend additional effort on preparing meals and maintaining their land and buildings. Rather backward, but a lifestyle steeped in the early work ethic of our history, instrumental to our growth and survival as a nation.



I think they are a neat people from which I can learn much about living, loving, and commitment to family and community.

ANXIETY



Anxiety is defined as an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear. The symptoms can include sweating, tension, increased heart rate, self-doubt, or stomach ache.

An example of a condition that might cause tension is an upcoming test in school. Another example is possibly when we feel threatened by a person or event that seems beyond our control to change or alter to our comfort; for example, when someone has threatened to hurt you in some way or continually teases or harasses you.

When I was about your age, the circumstance of being threatened by someone at school occurred more than once; and anxiety or fear would develop as a consequence. Much later, in college, I often dealt with anxiety of my courses, tests, and the new-found level of responsibility and challenges of college life. A fear of failure can also produce anxiety.

The Bible provides great instruction and direction on anxiety. *Do not be anxious about anything but with prayer and thanksgiving present your requests to God...than the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* We are also instructed to *cast all our anxiety upon God because he cares for you.*

God knows that we can experience fear and that anxiety is a part of this condition; hence, he has enabled us to be set free from the fear that can be so devastating to us - and to those who care for us and depend on us. To be gripped by fear is to be immobilized or disabled from action and to essentially doubt if not disbelieve in God's promises and his provision for us. Yes, we naturally succumb to fear at times; yet, as believers, we are given the provision of God whose power is not understood or comprehended by man. We are given the means to be set free from fear and to be more than conquerors through God who loves us so.

APATHY



Apathy is another word for unconcern or indifference. Apathy is more than having a disinterest in something because it does not excite you; it is a developing unconcern brought on by disappointment in previous outcomes. Again, an example will help in your understanding.

Suppose you have the responsibility of keeping your room clean such as making your bed, putting your clean clothes away; and keeping other things put-up when you are not using them. As you carry out the responsibility, one of your brothers comes along and messes everything up - effectively limiting if not eliminating all progress in your effort. This problem occurs frequently whereby you are responsible, but someone else interferes in your duty and accomplishments.

If the matter is not resolved, or your brother is not corrected, your attitude is affected in the worst way. Frustration and your fruitless attempts at cleaning lead to apathy or a sense of unconcern. Apathy may ask the basic questions, "Why does it matter?", or "What is the point?", or "Who cares?"

Generally, apathy is not looking for promise or hope, but has already established that the matter does not warrant concern or investment. Apathy is withdrawing from the fight without conceding the match – which is perhaps more harmful than giving the appearance of interest and team play.

Applied to voting, apathy would forfeit the right and responsibility (to vote) on the basis that a single vote *does not matter*. If many citizens had apathy or were apathetic, a lot of votes *would not matter*, and eventually voting may only be an idea or a cause for action, and not a right, liberty and responsibility.

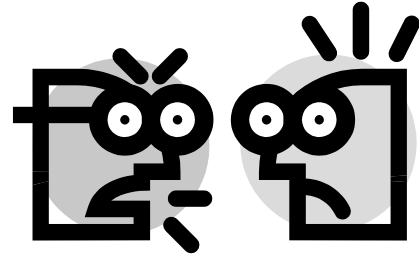
ARGUMENT

Well, I am sure each of you have had an argument; most likely, a spat with a brother or sister, or with a friend. I hope you accomplish little if anything such that you learn that an argument is rarely an effective way to resolve a problem.

Sometimes an argument starts with a difference of opinion, and escalates to yelling and unleashed emotions. If left uncontrolled, an argument can even lead to a physical confrontation or a fight.

On the other hand, an argument can be a point of debate or a court activity. An argument is necessary at times but should be controlled such that each

may speak, be heard, and respond likewise. Never should an argument lead to a fight unless you are defending yourself or someone whom should protect – even in this circumstance, the results can be costly.



My confession to you pertains to the senseless and unnecessary arguments that took place between your mother and I. How this conflict must have hurt and upset you is not yet fully understood or measured; but I know that you have been hurt and that we were very wrong. Please forgive me for the arguments and for not practicing the very advice that I am giving you now. I am sorry.

Arguments can be an art form. Consider politicians or debate teams, who go head-to-head on points and counterpoints of an issue or belief. Even as a Christian, the art can be honed by studying the Bible, praying, and *always being prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you*. This form of defending your beliefs or confronting doubts is known as apologetics. No, the word does not mean to be sorry but rather to share your faith by addressing contemporary issues in the context of Biblical truth, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, and under the power and protection of your Lord.

ASSES

No, this probably wasn't what you thought from the title; but instead, the beast-of-burden by the same name. Yes, that somewhat horse but unusually smaller, stern, and stubborn beast. Remember that a donkey carried Mary to Bethlehem and carried Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem - this beast turns-out to be quite a noble creature!



Near my house is a small farm, and in the pasture are numerous mules. In passing, these mules come in a variety of colors but all seem to be about the same size. Sometime, I am going to find out more but, for the moment, my description and understanding are limited to a drive by viewing.

A donkey or mule can be a real asset to the farmer with its physical stamina and low torque, high-output organic engine. In my recollection of these animals, the one word that comes to mind is determination – but not necessarily to work or pull something but rather to do what it sets-it-mind to do. If it wants to sit still, it honkers down and does so; if it wants to move a plow or wagon, well it does it with Olympic fashion. All in all, a mule or donkey must be worth its price else they simply wouldn't be around except for pony rides.

From your visits to the fair or a petting zoo, you most assuredly remember the donkey or mule. I know Abby would never forget such an event just because of her inherent attraction to these four-legged creatures. Anyway, the donkey makes the sound described as “hee-haw” {a screeching, raspy sound that is unique to the animal}. Like its cousin the horse, the donkey or mule is probably prone to kicking and bucking in a moment of fury.

For years, a one hour variety show aired on television by the same name, *Hee Haw*. It featured a combination of regular cast and visiting musicians and other talents from country music, bluegrass, and southern gospel. Some of the regular staff included Grandpa Jones and Buck Owens among others who performed a blend of corny comedy, music, and the like. It must have been popular considering that it lasted for so many seasons.

To further ennoble the donkey or mule, consider the wild horses North of Jacksonville on Cumberland Island. These horses are shorter, smaller variations with longer hair – like a Shetland or something. Is it possible that the donkey is more similar to the early horses like those found today on Cumberland? Consider that the first arrival of the donkey to America was on-board Christopher Columbus' ship; also, donkeys were used extensively by the minors during the California gold rush. Now, with the bit of information, let's give praise to the much worthy donkey with a bring shout of “Hew Haw”!

BABYBOTTLES



Ok, why on Earth am I writing about baby bottles? Well, on first site of this picture, a bottle reminds me of a baby and a baby reminds me of when you were babies.

Baby bottles were a very important item in the arsenal of baby care. Of course, milk could be provided by the mother; but sometimes you babies didn't take to the natural nibble and a supplement or substitute was this artificial one.

Baby-bottle preparation or formula was also a tricky matter in terms of capability or tolerance with your digestion.

Benjamin seemed to have issues with just about every product on the market; finally, we were able to find some relief with the most basic and least expensive of them all, Carnation.

When each of you was a baby, those bottles were "made-up" in mass production style; often, as many as ten bottles would be mixed and refrigerated at one time. I remember with the "bag-type" bottles, that pushing out the air was a last step to minimize gas passed on to you during consumption. The process became rout and often, with your sleeping habits, could be accomplished with the least amount of concentration or consciousness.

Anyway, hurrah for the modern day when babies' milk is formulated and bottles can be conveniently warmed in the microwave – which was far from the case for generations past. History would bear-out that the plastic bottle and all its conveniences are a modern invention; as is the variety of formulas suited for every kind of digestive system.

The one disadvantage of the bottle is that it places the father in equal capability of feeding child as mother – which is not quite right in my book! Volunteerism was never with greater sacrifice than that two hour, multi-day task. When you "took your bottle", it meant that sleepy time was just around the corner; but when you declined, a short cat-nap may be all that one could expect – it makes me yawn just to think about it.

The sight of bottle reminds me that for a period in my life, I was responsible for preparing meals and serving the meals to four babies. Though having reached the ages present, you were once bottle-feeders and I was once a bottle preparer and server. And now I raise a bottle to this most memorable and auspicious occasion - drink-up young bottle-feeders!

BASKETBALL



Basketball has always been a lot of fun to play and often exciting to watch. You may remember when we use to play at the half court in our home in Lawrenceville. Much to his dismay, Matthew was the likely victim of my amateur training regiment. The basic intention was to encourage you all to exercise and teach you some ball handling and game skills at the same time.

It is March and that is the time for the NCAA tournament. In this week, both Alabama and Alabama-Birmingham posted upsets by beating Stanford and Kentucky. Kentucky was rated as the best team in the nation. "Upsets", or unlikely outcomes, continue to make the game exciting by adding the unknown element of victory – the will.

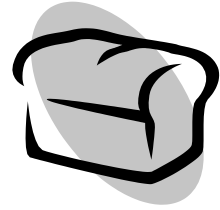
With little experience actually playing the game, here are some general rules and guidelines.

1. Each team plays five people at a time with the usual positions being two guards, two forwards, and a center
2. The defense can play a zone where each position is responsible for an area or man-to-man where each covers a single player
3. The offense generally runs plays but can adjust as needed with some creativity of individual talent and team familiarity
4. A foul is committed when one player interferes with another by grabbing him, blocking him {with contact} or reaching-in with a similar outcome
5. A free-through is a shot taken from the foul line and is usually the result of a foul, penalty, or something similar
6. Other shots include a lay-up, jump shot, set shot, fad-away, hook, dunk and granny
7. The game has four periods and, if a tie occurs, goes into overtime
8. Other penalties include double-dribble, traveling, palming, goal-tending, lane violation, etc.
9. Speed, height, accuracy, and court and team smarts are common requirements for good play

Learn the game, play the game, enjoy the game and remember: if you want to score, you must shoot; if you want to shoot, you must get set; to get set, you must get position; to get position, you must be quick. The same conditions prevail even if you miss the first shot as the rebound is equally important. If you lack one or some of these conditions, a foul can work but only up to five times per game – after that, you foul out and can no longer play. Now, crash those boards and give me a bucket!

BLESSINGS

What is meant by a “blessing”? The word blessing means a *divine or heavenly reward*; but it also means the opposite of a curse.



When we “say the blessing”, we are giving thanks for the food before us; as with food, all good things are from the Lord, and provide nourishment to sustain us. When someone describes themselves as blessed, it means that they have received good fortune or divine favor from the Lord.

A blessing does not always appear as a blessing; but, only later, may be realized as a blessing. In the Bible, Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and spent many years living in Egypt separated from his family. But what may have seemed like a curse, God planned and managed as a blessing; as Joseph eventually became very powerful leader in Egypt and was able to provide for his family when a famine struck their homeland. During the separation, he must have experienced some sorrow, pain, and even anger; yet, he remained faithful, trusting in his Lord in all matters.

God’s plan prevailed amid the mistakes and misfortunes of Joseph and his family. God is the *master planner* that knows even the number of hairs on our head. The Proverbs tell us that: even though we have our plans, God’s plan will prevail; even though we not always accept or acknowledge a blessing as a blessing, the revelation of the blessing will come to those who wait, watch, and obey.

Each of you is a blessing to me, your mother, and our families; but only God knows your *innermost being* and the blessings planned, stored, and given to you. Our response to God determines whether we are a blessing to others; this response comes with the simple truth that we deserve nothing. In his mercy and love, God has endowed eternal life to all those who acknowledge and receive him as Lord – this is the greatest blessing of all.

BODY

The word, “body” may suggest many images but, for this writing, is intended to mean your physical body including every function and purpose.

From conception, your body began forming in your mother; though your soul has been known by our Lord even prior to this first physical sign of your existence. The human was designed and manufactured as God’s greatest creation; altogether conceived in his image, the body is the temple of God made to please and glorify him. The body, as with all machines, needs attention to operate efficiently. Our human body is a magnificent example of engineering that, above all others, has the mental capacity to reason, think, and be creative above measure.



Taking care of your body is very important. I know you’ve heard about the usual hygienic practices from bathing to hair care, but understand the importance of this need early on; else, the later years may some how remind you in ways that are far more painful than healthy diets and exercise. You don’t have to make this practice a religion of sort, but you should not discount the value and importance.

Neglecting your body comes in several forms. First, you can deny your body’s needs by ignoring possible signs or symptoms of poor health. Second, you can purposely abuse your body by engaging in a lifestyle that damages and even destroys mental and physical functions. Drug abuse and eating disorders, such as anorexia, are examples of this lifestyle.

How are we to use our bodies to glorify God? First, there is the physical use of bodies to work, play, and otherwise carry us from one space to another. Second, there is the mind that must be nurtured to think and be creative. Consider that the mind and other body functions work together in an intricate way with the body acting on the operation of the mind and nervous system. What we “feed” the mind is so very important to the spiritual part of body.

If we feed the mind garbage, we get garbage – *garbage in, garbage out*. But if we feed the mind healthy stuff, it grows and produces meaningful thoughts that, in turn, influence our words and actions. Take good care of your mind and your body that you may serve the Lord well – a temple healthy in all ways.

BONDAGE



Bondage is another name for slavery or to be enslaved to something or someone. Bondage means that your freedom or liberties have been taken away without just cause or reason. For example, the Hebrew people were forced into slavery by the Egyptians in the Book of Genesis; and Africans were forced into slavery during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade of the 1700 and 1800's. My understanding is that human slavery is more prevalent in the world today than at any time in history.

Bondage is a lifestyle for which my understanding is only by reading books and articles, or by watching TV or a video. One of my favorite videos on the subject, *Amistad*, is based on an actual event that occurred in the United States in 1837. Directed by Steven Spielberg, this film is a great story of the struggle for human freedom and justice upheld against great obstacles and other interests. The realistic portrayal of the slave trade and unbearable conditions make for real education on the subject - I highly recommend it for older ones.

Before leaving this story, let me add some additional comments on one particular character. One of the tribal leaders is handed a Bible by the Puritans in the town; he takes the Bible and interprets the illustrations to determine that Jesus must be a great king who can set them free. By the illustrations and his intrigue with the cross, this leader admits his own trust in Jesus for his delivery from the trial and whatever punishment he may be facing.

Bondage comes in other forms; that is, slavery in the literal sense is not the only form of bondage. Enslavement can include anything which is master or lord over our life. In Romans, Paul instructs us that, *just as you were once slaves to impurity and wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.* Our Lord is a fair, just and loving master; let us offer our bodies, our minds, and our hearts for his service – *let us be free.*

BONES

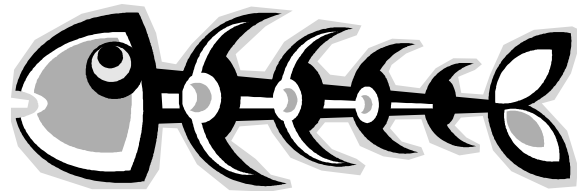
Well, since I brought-up the “body” why not bring-up bones; after all, what is a body without bones?... a jellyfish maybe?

We have many bones in our body from our skull to the integral bones in our feet. In between, we have bones in our legs such as the femur or thigh bone, in our arms such as the humerus or funny bone; and wherever there is flesh and muscle. But, since you will have to learn all the bones in school, the rest of the names will simply await your interest or education.

Old bones are often a cause for excitement. Of course, dinosaur bones bring much interest to paleontologist or other similar scientist who spend many intricate hours excavating and analyzing the “find” for age, classification, etc. But certainly human bones are of interest for identifying and studying historical civilizations and cultures.

I remember seeing a documentary on the city of Pompeii, Italy: an ancient city destroyed from a volcanic eruption. If you have seen or studied this story, the volcanic ash acted as a preservative for the bones and other artifacts. Pompeii was particularly interesting because the bones (or once-citizens of the city) were found in body positions that suggested preparation for *the end*.

Bones are fascinating from several aspects: the size and shape relative to the surrounding tissue and body form; the integral function of attaching bones, muscles, tendons, etc. Often we go about the day without even thinking about or considering the bones in our body - much less the bones in some ancient city. My biggest concern over bones has probably been at a fish fry where fine, sharp bones can easily get hung in your throat. That’s why a fillet is a better approach.



I have been fortunate to this point to have never had a broken bone; but probably would have given much more concern over the injury than all such worry over fish bones. Breaking a bone has got to be very painful.

Well, in the closing of this letter, the old classic song comes to mind: the head bone connected to neck bone, the neck bone connected to the shoulder bone, thewell, I’ll let you sing the rest.



BOOKS



To my left appear to be some old books of who knows what. Books have been around a long, long time and continue to serve as a standard medium for information from the paperback at the news stand to the most eloquent bound volumes of classic literature or other prized text. Books are a gateway to adventure by providing access to distant places and times, to newfound characters and events, and to a new understanding of a subject.

Books may be received as gifts or purchased as necessary for classes. Books may be highly valued and traded accordingly; or books may be considered threatening and burned or destroyed in mass. Sitting on a shelf, a book is worthless; in the hands of the reader, a book may be priceless. Books are a common and reliable means for learning, entertaining, and stimulating for mind, heart and soul. Why books can even affect the body if the content pertains to exercise and nutrition.

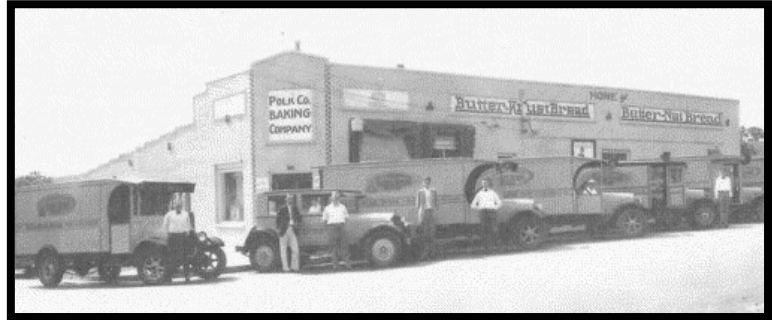
More than paper and texts, a book is a combination of words formed by the writer and bound by the publisher. Available for all ages, books can captivate the mind by invoking and exercising the imagination. Television and videos are only passive forms of entertainment when it comes to the imagination.

What are your favorite books? One of my favorite is *The Count of Monty Cristo*: a great adventure of courage, the will to survive the pursuit of revenge; and ultimately, the discovery that losses incurred by the acts of jealousy cannot be recovered or replaced by justice.

Today, someone referred me to a book they recently read entitled, *The Book of Ruth*, by Jane Hamilton. From the person's description and a book review on the Internet, the story involves a girl who is able to cope with a difficult home life by, you guessed it, reading books.

BREAD

Bread making has been around for the ages. Bakeries, like the one shown in the picture are capable of producing mass quantities and varieties of bread for distribution to super markets, convenience stores and other retail outlets.



I prefer to go to a bakery rather than buy bread from a store; as the smell of baking bread is a favorite of mine, along with brewing coffee and frying bacon.

I have never baked bread although I am told that it is easy. Flour, water, yeast, oil, and flavoring are described as the basic ingredients; mixed together and properly kneaded; the dough should be ready for the oven.

There are many varieties or flavors of bread as you may have noticed at the grocery store. Sandwich bread comes in a several flavors but also consider the other loaves of uncut bread as well as sweet bread. But of all the varieties, three basic types include yeast bread, quick bread and flat bread. A common example of yeast bread is pizza. Quick bread does not use yeast to rise but rather uses baking powder; an example is good old corn bread. Finally, flat bread does not contain yeast either, but remains flat. In the Bible, flat bread is called unleavened bread and remains a common staple for the Middle East today.

You may recall from the Old Testament, the Hebrews celebrated their exodus from Egypt with a Feast of Unleavened Bread; this celebration begins on Passover and continues for seven days. The feast continued in the New Testament as Paul urged Christians to replace the “old leaven” of malice and wickedness with the “new leaven” of sincerity and truth. From this passage in 1 Corinthians, leavened bread represented wrong motives (malice) and sin (wickedness) that is characteristic of man; unleavened bread represented a heart filled with sincere motives like that of Jesus Christ.

For the believer, this feast is the celebration of our release from the bondage of sin - just as the Hebrews celebrated their release from the bondage in Egypt. Our Lord is *the bread of life* that gave his life for all mankind’s redemption. Let us celebrate or Lord – a bread of unending aroma.

BRICKS



In the picture to the left, bricks have been laid in a cross-section pattern of some kind. I have no other information about the bricks, but suspect they are not old bricks such as used in the coastal forts we used to visit.

A building is being renovated near my workplace and includes some major brickwork. Watching the bricklayers at work, the task seems easy as the mortar is transferred from trowel to wall and so on. But bricklaying is far more involved than the passing, untrained can realize.

Recently, I learned about a local mill built in the mid 1800's. This mill was used to grind corn (I believe) but history has it that the mill was constructed by a roving brick mason. By roving, the mason may have actually built a kiln to produce the brick.

You may remember that much of the brick used to construct the coastal forts in the early 1800's was actually produced in distant, northern locations and shipped to the area. Apparently, the local area lacked one or more the resources need to produce the brick; thus, the brick had to be shipped by barge or other modes of transportation. The logistics must have been no easy task; but, as time would change the benefits, local brick production became more and more feasible with increasing demand and resources.

Brick has been used for construction for a long, long time. Recall, that the Egyptians enslaved the Hebrews to produce brick and carry-out other tasks in accomplishing the pharaohs' master plan. By all accounts, this brick was made from clay and straw: clay was the primary ingredient and straw the binder or the substance that kept the brick from crumbling. At one point, the Hebrews were not allowed to use straw in the production – a form of punishment that resulted in high defect rates for the brick and, in turn, longer hours or production to replace the broken, defective brick.

A skilled mason is able to lay brick in all types of patterns in forming walls, window frames, and door openings among other features. One building at the local college uses two shades of brick to produce a very attractive façade and overall building frontage. Brick continues to be a very common building material from residential to commercial and industrial applications. Brick is strong and durable against the weather but was shown to be ineffective against the cannon of the Civil War; hence, brick-type fortresses were rendered obsolete after the war. Brick remains a fortress for many to take shelter and refuge.

BRIDGES

You should be somewhat familiar with bridges – since there are at least five bridges that span the St. Johns River in Jacksonville.



The adjacent picture shows the construction of the historic Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. Designed and erected in the 1880's, this structure was the longest suspended bridge at the time and ushered-in a century of similar designs to include the famous Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

In 1989, the Dames-Point Bridge was completed in Jacksonville providing access from northern Duval County with the Arlington and Beaches area; at that time, it was America's longest cable-stayed bridge at two miles in length and 471 feet above the waterline. A similar bridge spans the Savannah River in Georgia.

The common saying, “bridges to cross”, applies to phases or steps in your growth or maturity. For example, passing from elementary to middle school may be considered as one such bridge in the advancement of your education. In the Boy Scouts, a Webelo crosses a makeshift bridge to symbolize the promotion from cub scouting to boy scouting.

You have crossed some bridges already in your life whether you now realize it. Ideally, children have parental and other mentor support to guide them through development and life's transitions. You may not have such opportunity and, on this point, my heart and prayers go out to you about everyday. I have grieved over this matter but remain encouraged by the power of prayer and hope that others will be there in my stead to help you and lead to and over the bridges you must cross.

THE BRIDGE BUILDER

An old man going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
The old man crossed at the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim near,
"You are wasting your strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You will never again pass this way;
You've crossed the chasm deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at evening tide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head;
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followed after me today,
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
The chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!"

CARE

When you think of the word “care” what comes to mind? I think of an act of kindness to include medical assistance like that shown in the picture. Care is an expression of love in a sense, and usually includes tending to one’s needs and comfort as well as being conscience and sensitive.



What do you care about? A common expression of disinterest or unconcern is simply: “I don’t care”. For example, brushing your teeth is very important, right? But if you will not care about getting cavities, than you probably will not brush your teeth. This entire conversation or subject may seem boring or pointless but be patient and read on – that is, if you care.

To care about people and things is very important and necessary. Sometimes young children go to daycare while parents are working. In this arrangement, the parents have entrusted the daycare with the care of their children. Certainly, if parents care about their children, they want the best possible care for them when away at work or doing other things. Parents generally care the most for their children and make sacrifices to ensure the best possible care for their children. Care of such depth is undoubtedly an act of love.

If a child sees an animal in distress, they may rush to the animal to try to help; particularly, if the animal is a pet. This type of care may be an act of compassion because the child does not like to see some animals suffer. Most drivers will make great attempts to dodge a dog, cat, even opossum to avert an accident. This type of care may also be compassion but is more likely concern over damage to the car and endangerment to themselves.

Care abounds by many expressions. If we celebrate after a team or athlete wins, we care about the player, the program, or the sport in general. If we get excited when someone notices or recognizes us for our qualities, we care about how this someone or others think about us. If we cry or get upset when Old Yeller dies or Sea Biscuit breaks a leg, we care about these characters of the movie or story.

To care is to commit yourself to something or someone and to be willing to make sacrifices or give-up some of your own desires for the good or interest of the other – even when such acts go unnoticed or unappreciated by them. Care may be an early sign of love, but it is a sure sign of commitment, maturity and responsibility.

CARPET



What if you actually owned a magic carpet. How convenient to simply hop on and take-off. But I've always wondered how flying carpets could be steered and controlled – seeing that a steering wheel is not included or for that matter any instruments. Anyway, it would be cool!

In the real world, we all benefit from carpet. Bringing comfort to the feet and legs, carpet is available in many forms and in many places such as car, home, and office.

When I was a kid in the 1970's, shag carpet was popular. While it was thick, with yarn an inch long or longer, the stuff matted or wore easily, and was probably a beast to keep clean. One of my cousins had shag carpet in her room – it was solid white and looked wild under a black light. Anyway, shag style's came and eventually went away along with a heap of dust, small toys, and other particles embedded deep within the yarn. I like Berber carpet; it is durable, low-ply, and showed little wear from family traffic.

While living in Atlanta, I would travel up to Dalton on business or weekend trips. Dalton is the acclaimed *carpet capital of the world* and acquired it's name by the invention of automatic tufting and production of large volumes of bedspreads and such. Carpet manufacturers, such as Shaw and Mohawk, established offices and plants in the area. Even AstroTurf, who manufactures artificial turf for ball stadiums, has a plant there; so if your in the market for turf, carpet, or other flooring, look to Dalton.

Many years ago, in a small town in the mountains of North Georgia, a cottage industry began. Local people began to hand tuft cotton chenille spreads. What started as a hobby, and caught on as a way for a poverty-stricken people to feed and clothe their families, continued to become an industry of worldwide importance: the tufted-textile industry. The small town of Dalton, Georgia, has grown to be a small city.

Recently, I purchased some Berber carpet very similar to that in our home in Atlanta; again, I could not be more pleased except if you were here to really test the durability. So bring your shoes, bring your legs, bring all your moves and tumbles to my place – my carpet needs you.

Much can be said about carpet from colors to types and so on. But, my favorite carpet is Berber because it reminds me of my children. It reminds of our last home; it reminds me that what matters is not what is under the shoes but who is in them; it reminds me not of the importance of floor covering, but the feet that tread on it.

CARS



For many decades, the “horseless carriage” has been a primary source of transportation - and this is no more the case, than in the United States. Can you imagine life without cars?

In the early days of car development, Henry Ford was responsible for designing and manufacturing cars at costs affordable to the “common” man. His objective was to make the car inexpensive enough for all his employees to own. Thus he made economic vehicles using very efficient production lines, with colors limited to black. The car and our interstate system have brought the

once exotic vehicle into a common, almost-entitled accessory for anyone old enough to legally drive...or young enough to take the chance!

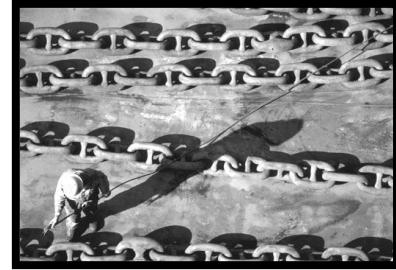
My first recollection of the car was my families' Ford Falcon station wagon. I remember cracking one of the windows with a misguided rock. This vehicle was followed by a white, Nova station wagon for which a wreck occurred while at least once of us was eating a milkshake. The Nova was much-less damaged than the Cadillac that hit us; but the milkshake was history. Our first import was a Datsun 1200; it was a real gas miser and only cost about \$2,000 brand new!

At age 19, my first car was a Ford Mustang; again, underpowered with a 4-cylinder engine but certainly a real eye catcher with its sporty look. Mustangs have a history of providing a sport car look and sometime-performance at a practical price. For some reason, I have remembered that it cost \$5,384.26.

My next car was also a manual transmission but, though still a 4-cylinder, offered more pep with a German-built Volkswagen engine. The Jetta, as it was called, did not move at supersonic speeds but still delivered a lot of acceleration with only 90 horsepower. By the way, the Jetta was the car I had when Matthew was born. As Abby and Ben came along, my mode of transportation shifted to a series of mini-vans and practical vehicles such as a Ford station wagon... without a broken window. Let's go cruising...maybe to the beach or on some other excursion such as the mountains – I am always ready and the motor is running.

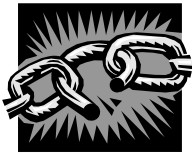
CHAINS

To the right are some mighty-big chains with the links possibly weighing more than hundred pounds! What would a chain of such size hold?



Sometimes the word “chain” is used to denote a continuous line or a series of similar units. For example, a “daisy chain” is a flower chain consisting of a string of daisies linked by their stems; but also describes devices on a part of a chip or circuit board in a computer. In transportation and commerce, the word “supply-chain” represents the combination of suppliers, manufacturers, and distributors integrated or linked to the delivery of a product and service.

Chains of all sizes, from bicycle chains to the ones pictured above, share the common features of interlinked units that form a continuous, interacting line. These similar units are independent in a material sense in that adjoining units are not forged from the same steel; but are mechanically enjoined and interdependent. Obviously, if a single unit fails or breaks, the whole line does as well; this would be a continuous line or “system” having a single-point of failure.



Families might be considered as a chain in that they ideally function as interlinked or dependent units; they are not completely alike but still have a lot of similarities and shared interests that bound them together. Unlike the chain with a single-point of failure, the family may have multiple-points of weakness that allow for the possibility of fatigue, breakdown and failure at several points.

What is the substance that keeps the family together and strong? The substance is love - which *covers a multitude of sins* and makes *all things possible through Christ Jesus*. God designed the family by establishing marriage on the foundation of Christ’s love for the church, his bride. He has provided the model by which we are to live, to love, and to prosper in his glory.

CHARMING



Being charming is a real virtue. Often, children can be very charming for parents, grandparents, and other adults. Being charming should be natural, but seems to be difficult for many adults who find that such a disposition does not suit them or is just plain difficult. Like the illustration to the left, music or some other stimuli may sooth the serpent or curtail the venomous behavior in some of us;

yet, there are those who have resolved to leave such charming ways to others.

One such title of this uncharmiing kind is a curmudgeon or a crusty, ill-tempered fellow. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, presented Ebenezer Scrooge as a curmudgeon-type; recall, the Scrooge was an intolerable, greedy, and bitter old man who forfeited his charming ways for selfish gain and worldly wealth. He treated everyone with contempt and would only exercise some counterfeit charm when the encounter involved the potential for more wealth for his insatiable appetite. He seemed incurable or without any hope of resuming his long ago charming and sincere manner.



Scrooge did regain his charming, sincere manner; but only after he realized what was really important and what value gained in giving rather than taking. Threatened to near death by the last of three ghosts, Scrooge had a wake-up-call that his past, selfish and bitter spirit had lead him to a lonely place with an even more terrible place in store. Scrooge came to the harsh realty that his pursuit of wealth was futile or worthless; but at the same time, became attune to the real needs that he had overlooked and the value of caring, giving, and being charming to his fellow man and to their children.

CHERRIES



Erma Bombeck, a humorist and writer, wrote a book entitled: *If Life Is a Bowl of Cherries What Am I Doing in the Pits?* (In case you don't know, cherries have pits much like an apple). But to begin to appreciate the title and general tone of the book, read some of her famous lines below about families and life in general.

On children and their antics, she writes: "Every day of his or her life a child is plotting an event that will age you 20 years in 20 seconds." On the brain, she writes: "I have a theory about the human mind. A brain is a lot like a computer. It will only take so many facts, and then it will go into overload and blow up."

As far as her own children, she writes: "Most children's first words are 'Mama' or 'Daddy.' My kid's first words were, 'Do I have to use my own money?'"

But Erma's words are not only funny, but offer some very good advice - apparently from wisdom gained through her years. Among her quotes from IF I HAD TO LIVE LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN, she writes:

- I would have talked less and listened more.
- I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth.
- I would have cried and laughed less while watching television - and more while watching life.
- I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show soil, or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.
- There would have been more "I love you"...more "I'm sorry"... but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute...look at it and really see it... Live it... and never give it back.

Hope these quotes are meaningful - Thanks Erma!

CHILDREN

Of all the letters that I have or will write to you, “Children” is one of the most pertinent to this collection of letters. I find that in all my experience and association, children are a gift from God and evidently represent what God had in mind for the character of man. *I tell you the truth, unless you receive Christ as a little child, you will never enter the kingdom of God.*



The playful spirit of children, with some measure of competitiveness, is one my favorite attributes to watch and enjoy; oh, how children will give some games or sports a wide-open approach while painfully caring out the less-challenging chores around the house.

They can begrudge taking a bath or shower one minute and bask in the pleasure and entertainment the next. They can explore the great regions of the world aside a globe and use their unlimited imagination to travel great distances without a single step.



Children are needy at times and may even be very frequent to ask for help, to reach out and to take a hand. They appreciate and value help, often expressing their appreciation with words but through the understanding that they are vulnerable and, therefore, require protection and support even when they may not be aware or conscious of such needs.



The can be destructive and constructive at the same time and, if entertained or satisfied, can repeat this combination many times in the same hour without any sense of failure, frustration or regret in the course. Small and incidental changes can set them off into a emotional melt-down reversed by only the distraction of their imagination or the comfort of a parent, family member, friend, family pet, teddy bear, blanket or anything else within each. Even with all these security options, the effectiveness of one or more working at anytime has no applicable rule or scheme – it is merely a God-sent.

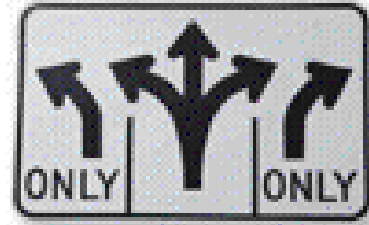
Children can be mischievous and even cruel; but the instance is rarely preconceived or calculated with the intention of hurting; rather, the behavior is more along lines of experimental and adventurous.



Much more could be said about children, but consider Jesus’ words: *Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for I tell you, the kingdom of heaven belong to such as these.*

CHOICES

Our lives involve many choices from the most trivial and mundane to the important and exciting. From our childhood, choices occur in learning from conscience and casual observation, listening, and inputs from our other senses. The basis for choices may range from little or no experience and understanding, to much understanding and experience from learning, training, and education.



A child chooses to touch a bowl of soup and learns that some objects may be hot and painful to touch. A teenager chooses drives his car at high speed, and is been reminded that *life in the fast lane* may be exciting but very costly. A young adult chooses his career goals, applies to a college offering the related program, and embarks on her profession or vocation. Choices are made every day, of every week, of every year, and for a lifetime.

The adage, “Hindsight is 20/20” sometimes arises in the aftermath of a bad choice. “If only I had known about _____, my choice would have been different”, is sometimes the expression of regret or dismay over a particular choice. Choices are often linked or related in someway. Choices are made on a basis of rules or guidelines along with a variety of emotions. The child is cautious about touching objects having experienced the pain of touching something hot. The teenager is cautious about driving too fast after paying the high cost of previous occurrences. The young adult is satisfied about her choice of programs and, with confidence, anticipates future opportunities.

Don't fret about bad choices – it's part of learning; but do practice and develop the right basis for your choices. The rules and guidelines are very important; likewise, the frame-of-mind or emotions are also very important. Sometimes, a good rule to follow in the more serious choices uses the acronym “HALT” which stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired. Never make a serious choice when one or more of these conditions exist. Secondly, pray about your choices; preferably, before hand rather than afterward. Above all, remember the Proverb:

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails; though a righteous man stumbles, he will not fall for the Lord upholds him with His mighty hand.

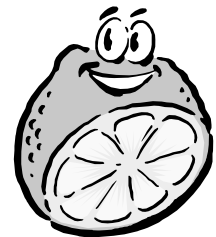
Thanks to the Lord who prepares our way, who guides us in choices, who listens and helps us as we call upon him, and forgives us when we make choices without Him. I urge and pray that your choices will begin and continue with Him as Lord of your life. Well done good and faithful servant!

CIRCUMSTANCE

What is a “circumstance”? Webster defines it as a condition, fact, or event that accompanies or determines another. The definition uses an example of the weather being a circumstance that determines plans for an outdoor event. You may have recently had an outdoor event cancelled because of a storm. The bad weather is an unavoidable or uncontrolled condition, or circumstance.

Circumstances affect every facet of our lives. Circumstances from our birth, growth and development are very significant. Circumstances can create bad or good conditions. Sometimes bad circumstances or conditions are associated to a lemon. You may have heard the encouraging expression: “If life gives you lemons, than make lemonade” – which is an encouragement to take a bad condition or circumstance and use it for good.

Of course, lemons are sour and can be very distasteful if eaten alone {although I’ve known some who actually eat them like oranges}; but combined with tea, sugar, and water, the lemon becomes a very nice complement to the whole. What may seem bad or distasteful is turned into something good and appetizing.



Some circumstances, as bad conditions or outcomes can be avoided by obeying the rules and practicing common sense. A simple example is wearing your seatbelt to maximize your safety in the car. But other circumstances are unavoidable such as the car accident where the other driver is at-fault.

How do we accept bad circumstances and use them for good? Sometimes, it is very difficult, if not impossible; especially when we are upset, hurt, confused, or emotional. Often we may ask the questions: “Why did this have to happen to me?” or “What have I done to deserve this?”

It is during these times that we must turn our hearts to the Lord and ask for help, for strength, for healing, for endurance, for understanding, and for contentment in the circumstances we face. As Bible characters such as David cried out to the Lord during bad circumstances, so too must we express our feelings as well – he knows your feelings to your very soul and longs for your prayers and trust in Him. Entrusting these circumstances to God is the needed recipe for turning lemons to lemonade; for taking something distasteful and making it sweet; for taking bad conditions and using them for good. Squeeze that sour juice into something refreshing and good.



CLIMBING

You may remember the classic movie {and play}, “Sound of Music”. In the story, the leading nun at the Abby (or church) sings a song, “Climb Every Mountain”.

The word’s and melody of this song are an inspiration as the strong voice of the nun seems to guide the Van Braun family from the pursuing Nazi’s to freedom beyond the heights of the Austrian mountain range. As you may also remember, the family appears to escape through the assistance and prayers of the nuns. It is a great story!

Recently I was at the Space Museum in Huntsville, Alabama. Even with all the space stuff to see and touch, rock climbing and repelling was available. While watching the kids test their speed and balance, I was reminded of a similar scene at Stone Mountain when Matthew did the same.

Even to the observer, mountain climbing is dangerous and sometimes unforgiving. From observation only, the sport must require extreme mental preparation and control not to mention physical strength and capacity. To watch televised images of climbers carefully choose each move and location does not fully describe and define the experience where wind, fatigue, and limited view are some of many factors in the effort. Recently, I watched a climber who does not use safety equipment, and climbs up as well as down the chosen cliff – the exhilaration apparently exceeds his fear of falling...of dying.

What is your mountain - or what is so important to you that it warrants your love, your life, and your all? For Maria Rainer (the character name of Maria played by Julie Andrews), the mountain may have been finding a place where she was needed, desired, and fulfilled. Though the children were not accepting at first, Maria maintained her determination and with persistence and patience, soon won the love and acceptance of the children. Now, go and climb your mountain.

Climb ev'ry mountain
Search high and low
Follow every byway
Every path you know.

Climb ev'ry mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream.

A dream that will need
All the love you can give
Every day of your life
For as long as you live.

Climb ev'ry mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream



CLOUDS

Clouds come in all shapes, sizes, and quantities. Sometimes the sky will not have a single cloud visible; while other times, the entire skyline is covered by clouds that are ever changing in form and location. One of the neatest views of clouds is from an aircraft. When looking down {rather than up}, the clouds can appear as large drifts of snow or balls of cotton; as though, you could step out of the aircraft and walk upon them.



One of the most vivid memories of clouds occurred during a tornado. While attending a family reunion in December, a tornado was sighted in the general area. Disrupting the gathering, much of the family filed outside to watch the natural development and to possibly dart for cover if necessary. Fortunately, the storm passed us by, but continued north; but the combination of clouds, wind, rain, and drop in temperature were astonishing!

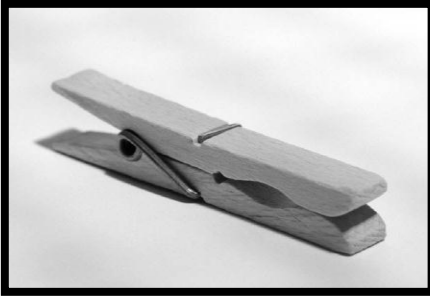
Not altogether abandoning the opportunity for a lesson, what caused that violent storm, that tornado? Given limited personal knowledge of meteorology, the simple answer is that two weather fronts, one hot and one cold come into contact.

The strongest thunderstorms normally form in warm, humid air {east or south of advancing cold air}. A "low level jet" of warm, humid air blowing from the south only 3,000 to 5,000 feet above the ground helps feed the violent thunderstorms that can form tornadoes. Dry wind from the southwest, around 10,000 feet from the ground, adds energy to thunderstorms.

The dangerous kinds of thunderstorms known as Supercells are likely under the area where jet stream winds are speeding up. Even though the jet stream is 25,000 feet or higher above the ground, it helps pull air upward, increasing the thunderstorm's violence. Tornadoes form in the air rising into a thunderstorm or in the updraft. The strongest tornadoes are often near the edge of the updraft, not far from where air is descending from the thunderstorms. Falling rain or hail pulls down air to form such "downdrafts." This is why a burst of heavy rain or hail often hits right before a tornado. Since the tornado is in rising air, wind is flowing in from air around into the tornado. This means that damaging winds can hit hundreds of yards from the actual tornado vortex.

Well, it may seem boring reading about it, but actually seeing a tornado and experiencing one nearby has got to be a real jolt. I really don't think Dorothy was every the same after the tornado swept her and Toto from Kansas into the Land of Oz; and I know the witch from the east took it hard.

CLOTHESPINS



To my left is an age-old device called a clothespin; used primarily to hang clothes out to dry on a clothesline – when people hung out their clothes.

I'm not trying to be sarcastic but to accept the possibility that you only know this device for other purposes such as crafts.

At one time, my favorite use for clothespins was to secure a towel to my back and pretend that I was an action superhero like Batman or Superman. It may seem like a ridiculous idea but, with the help of a makeshift costume, many marvels are possible. Yes, with that towel or cap on my back, I could jump higher, run faster, and fly if only for a moment.

Clothespin reminded me of an alligator. I guess it was the similarity of the two sections to the muzzle or snout of a gator; but when pressed open with the lever like action, my imagination went to work. Oh, and it could also resemble some birds - but birds aren't as thrilling as a gator.

I am not ashamed to say that I have hung some clothes in my lifetime. But, such daily activity seems rather rare in the modern age; and it's quite possible that many subdivisions or housing communities forbid such equipment. Before dryers, however, hanging clothes was the only means of getting the job done. During foul weather, the clothes could be hung near the fireplace. In cities, the clothesline was operated with a pulley wheel where someone could operate the line from a single point like a porch or upper deck.

Hanging-out clothes was far less expensive than the dryer; particularly if you have a lot of children...and a lot of clothes. In addition to the upfront cost of the appliance, dryers require a lot of electrical power or Watts. But drying all those clothes is not so bad; especially if you pin a towel to your neck and imagine that you are a superhero.

{Batman} "Robin, before you start the next load, could you grab the bat phone?" {Robin} "Holy power-outage, we may have to use the clothes line!"



COFFEE

I love the smell and taste of coffee. Coffee is one of those items that has grown on me through the years and will probably continue for some time...it's a simple pleasure!



Coffee shops have continued to rise in popularity ranging from the bookstore shops to the stand-alones such as Starbucks. To give some measure of this growth, the trade of coffee is second only to petroleum in terms of dollars traded worldwide. It's time for a history lesson.

Coffee was first discovered in Eastern Africa in an area we know today as Ethiopia. In the 1700's, coffee found its way to the Americas by means of a French infantry captain who nurtured one small plant on its long journey across the Atlantic. Coffee was declared the national drink of the then colonized United States by the Continental Congress- this was in protest of the excessive tax on tea levied by the British crown.

While living in Savannah Georgia in the late 1980's, I became familiar with the coffee derivative, Espresso. Italians at my work place preferred this high-powered coffee in small cups - it's a good thing, since the stuff really packs a punch. The Italians perfected this wonderful machine and were the first to manufacture it. Espresso has become such an integral part of Italian life and culture with over 200,000 espresso bars in Italy.

Coffee comes in a host of flavors and types but, for most, coffee is purchased as beans or grounds, and brewed in an automatic-drip coffee maker. Making coffee has become easy since the days of my childhood when coffee was brewed in a percolator. Still, the old way of brewing coffee did not slow down my dad {your grandfather} – he would drink the stuff by the gallons!

Much, if not all, of our coffee is grown in Central and South America - where, the coffee plant/bean requires the type of climate. Beans are dried and roasted before being shipped to plants such as Maxwell House in Jacksonville; "Ah", that processing plant issues a pleasant fragrance unlike other industry such as paper processing.

Aroma, acidity, body and flavor measure the quality of coffee; but I am not that particular about these qualities but simply, a cup or two in the morning to start the day. Matter-of-fact, I am enjoying a cup this morning as I write this letter.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior. Communication can also apply the hardware to include telephone, computer, radio, television, or other hardware.



Communication is the key to any relationship whether in family, in a business or company, or other setting where relationships and information is necessary.

The efficiency at which information is communicated depends on both the transmitter and the receiver; of course, the parties involved in communication generally exchange the role of transmitter and receiver but sometimes the roles are not clear. For example, one person may want to speak or transmit some words to another person; while the other person may want to transmit at the same time. This lack of coordination and agreement between the two creates a lot of noise or confusion – their communication is not very effective.

When communication “breaks-down” so do all other aspects of the relationship; subsequently, plans and orders become unclear and may be disregarded, overlooked or ignored. Think about a ball team or other organization; when the members do not communicate the play or action, the team loses its effectiveness and cohesiveness. Whether the coach is signaling the play via hand-movements or verbalizing the play on the sideline, the team must listen, understand, and follow directions – this is part of executing the play.

Communication is very important. Learn how to express yourself. Be clear, concise, and effective in your communication whether by word, speech, or other forms. Be sensitive to the receiver or listener and practice being a good listener. Be patient with others to ensure that that exchange of information is clear and effective. Proverbs 1:5 tells us to *let the wise listen and add to their learning*.

COMMUNION

Communion (also called the Lord's Supper or the Holy Eucharist) is a celebration of the Jesus sacrifice, his body and his blood. Captured on canvass by Leonardo da-Vinci, this masterpiece of the event portrays Jesus and his twelve disciples sitting at a long table.



The information below, from an Internet source, describes this sacrament or Christian practice; essentially, the Holy Eucharist is not a rite of mourning or sadness but of celebration.

The Holy Eucharist is the oldest experience of Christian Worship as well as the most distinctive. Eucharist comes from the Greek word which means thanksgiving. In a particular sense, the word describes the most important form of the Church's attitude toward all of life. The origin of the Eucharist is traced to the Last Supper at which Christ instructed His disciples to offer bread and wine in His memory. The Eucharist is the most distinctive event of Orthodox worship because in it the Church gathers to remember and celebrate the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ and, thereby, to participate in the mystery of Salvation.

The scriptures describe the wine (or grape juice) as representing Jesus' blood – which was sacrificed so that all mankind would have the opportunity for the forgiveness of their sins; and the bread (or cracker) representing Jesus' body – which was sacrificed so that all mankind would have the opportunity for salvation or a relationship with God. Jesus was ordained to give-up his life so that all mankind could have an opportunity for eternal life with God.

Communion is a very special practice or rite. The scriptures tells us that *each should examine his heart before taking the sacrament* – which means that we should know Jesus as Lord, meditate on the God's gift of salvation and forgiveness, confess our sins, and partake with thanksgiving and heart of worship and reverence. Never take this opportunity lightly but with an understanding, mindset, and heart on Jesus and the priceless gift of salvation.

COMPASSION

Compassion is another name for love – it is having mercy toward someone because you feel compelled to help them. You may have reason not to love them or to help them, but you choose to love them because you realize that they truly need help. To have compassion is to embrace and practice what God taught us through the giving of his son; what Jesus taught by the giving of life; and by what others teach us by the giving of resources to help others.

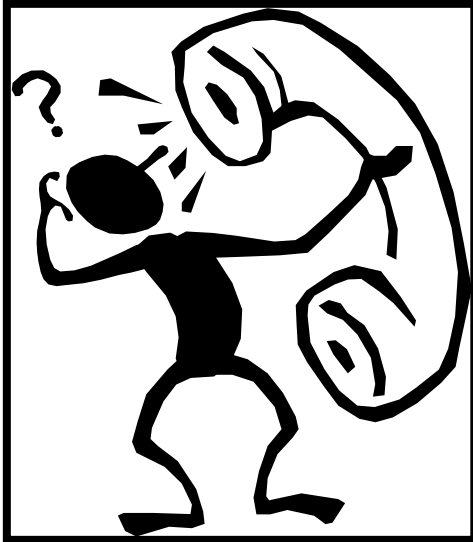


Having compassion is a condition of the heart. The book of Psalm tells us that *as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear them.* A father, parents, and adults should have compassion on children with the understanding that children need a protector, a caretaker, and a nurturer. With the same understanding of man's frailty or condition of need, God has compassion on man. Far more than man, the compassion of God extends beyond human understanding or capability. To have compassion is not being weak but, on the contrary, is being strong in the Lord's provision and free from our selfish nature.

The Good Samaritan is an excellent example of compassion. Crossing ethnic and social barriers, the parable personifies compassion as a vivid portrayal of love for your fellow man.. The Good Samaritan was not only responsible for the rescue of the wounded man, but ensured his full recovery by leaving a deposit for his care. He was truly genuine in his care and oversight in this man's recovery without any knowledge of the circumstances or outcome.

If only such compassion were extended to such degree in our lives – what a testimony and example for our world? Can we begin with our own family and continue the act to friends, acquaintances, and mere strangers – what a wonderful idea!

COMPLAINT



Is a complaint necessary? Yes, sometimes a complaint is justified and necessary. By justified, I mean that a complaint may have good reason or need. For example, when someone mistreats you or attempts to hurt you in some way, should you complain? Yes, because you have the right and need to protect yourself or, if possible, to have others in authority protect you and hear your cause. But, other less serious matters may also warrant a complaint too.

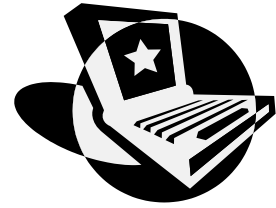
But when does a complaint become unwarranted or unnecessary? Maybe when the complaint is “petty” or does not have a good reason or need. For example, you complain that you have to wake-up early to go to school or church – now that is not a reason for a complaint because this task should be your obligation or commitment. If you are tired in the early morning then, at your age, you could have gone to bed earlier? Sometimes you do not have the right and need to voice (or show) a complaint about an obligation, commitment, or duty; furthermore, your complaint may aggravate the situation further and cause others to get frustrated with you. Scriptures from Philippians instructs us on this subject of a complaint:

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God... in which you will be like shining stars in the universe...

Therefore, become shining stars by conducting yourself without complaints, except where warranted, and by remaining blameless and pure.

COMPUTERS

I remember the first time I saw a personal computer – at least one with a screen.



In 1980, while at college, a friend of mine offered to help me with a computer program. Instead of taking my effort to the computer center, to use the mainframe, he worked the problem from the convenience of his dorm room. There, on his desk, was a TRS-80 – one of the first personal computers that I remember.

By today's standards, this machine would be worthless – and many generations of computers have passed since that time. Yet the *age of information*, where the Internet makes information and communication so convenient and efficient, has forever changed our lives.

Computers have similarities to any other machines or appliances in that, not working or performing as intended, can be a real frustration. Sometimes the problems are *operator error*, although, if the operator is like me, they may have difficulty accepting the cause. Other times the problems are software-related, and may require a utility program or involve compatibility issues between hardware and software. Still other problems may be hardware where the hard drive fails or a circuit board has a component failure. In all cases, the operator may have a component failure of his own – which is generally fixed over time and through an extended and consistent level of performance on the part of the computer.



In 1996, I bought our first family computer; a Compaq direct from the Houston-based headquarters. After several months of satisfaction, my experience *turned south* when the mother-board burned-up. This failure rendered the computer inoperable and, based on the cost of the board, the justification for repair in question.

While still a young man, my father's job at Ford Motor Company involved *data processing* with mainframe computers and IBM cards. Information or data was stored and maintained for managing operations to include: manufacturing of cars; control of inventory to include finished cars, cars in assembly, and raw materials; accounts payable and receiving, and other business functions. As one may come to realize, the costs of computing capacity at that time was far greater than comparable capacity today. Study your history!

CONDEMN



To condemn means to be sentenced for a crime; the sentence or punishment is understood to be death.

I chose the illustration of the crucifixion because Jesus was condemned to death by hanging on the cross. As a contemporary song well describes, Jesus' committed himself to God's plan and was condemned so that we might be set free from death, the penalty of our sins.

To be condemned is sometimes not the result of a crime; and for Jesus who committed no sin, the reason was the atonement or sacrifice for our sins, all mankind. To condemn seems to connote the end of life; yet, for this ultimate sacrifice, it meant the beginning of life for many past, present and to come. In Jesus' victory over death, Satan was condemned; though he remains at-large, the final chapter will bring Satan to his certain end, the "lake-of-fire".

Perhaps a study or knowledge of history would find some who were condemned to death for unjustified or uncertain reasons. The will of government, a village, or a person can exact such a misfortune to others undeserving of such punishment. A moral code-of-ethics or natural, human conscience could raise doubt and question to this ill-will if not oppose the act(s) of judgment altogether.

When Christianity spread geographically following Christ's ascension, so too did persecution and martyrdom. When the Colonist in America revolted against England regarding *taxation without representation*, many aspiring citizens and patriots lost their property, their families, and their lives. In both periods and causes, we might agree that the cause was right and good; and, we might ardently oppose the actions of those who condemned the cause and it's followers.

Being condemned - even to death - is not necessarily an indication of the accused wrongdoing. In such cases, being condemned may be the raw circumstance of dominance and control likely perpetrated out of fear and anger. The English feared the loss of the colonies, thus they engaged in war on the basis of treason. The non-believers feared the rapidly-growing and self-governing Christian church as both a heresy to God and to political leadership in the regions. To quell these uprisings, dominance and control were exercised to the worst possible degree. From those condemned, freedom has come to believers and citizens alike.

CONVICTION



Within this word conviction is the work convict – which has several pronunciations, functions, and applications. A convict (noun) is someone serving a sentence for a crime; to convict (verb) is to convince of wrongdoing or a crime; and convict (adjective) applies similarly to one who has been convicted. Let's talk about the verb form.

To be convicted of a wrongdoing does not mean that jail or prison is forthcoming; but it does mean that a wrongdoing has been acknowledged and that some form of penance is the expected, desired, or certain response from the offender. Someone under conviction may not be ready to “serve penance” or to even acknowledge they have done something wrong; but at least they are beginning to realize that something is not right and perhaps further reflection and introspection is needed to *get to the root of problem*.

Being convicted or *falling under conviction* continues beyond reflection to a conclusion and contrition. Thoughts or words describing the process might go something like this: *I have come realize, after much thought, that my words (or actions) were offensive to you and, consequently, that you were hurt. I am sorry that I offended you and hope that it does damage our relationship.*



If the offender does not come to a conclusion or contrition, than a sincere apology will not occur; still, the offender may remain under conviction or *a sense of guilt* for some time. If conviction is not occurring, the offender may simply be desensitized to the matter and may even be reveling in the offense as a measure of revenge or intended hurt. But I'm not sure that the short-lived satisfaction or relishing in the offense can offset the long-term effect of conviction.

Being desensitized or relishing in the offense can become systemic or common to the point of being a character trait. Individuals that personify such behavior probably have a very dim view of other people (even de-humanizing) while having a grandeur view of self. If his objective is entirely self-serving or rationalized as self-preserving or protecting, *this end (of hurting another) will justify the means* (or the behavior of being desensitized or relishing...).

If you have offended or do offend others, conviction can bring you to reflection, conclusion, and contrition. If you have been offended, without sincere apology, forgiveness can and should occur by you. Both responses are processes that lead to possible closure, eventual healing, potential reconciliation, and certain freedom. The power of love and condition of the heart enables forgiveness.

CONTEMPT

Contempt has several meanings:

1. To despise someone or to hold them in a lowly or worthless position
2. To dishonor or show disrespect toward a court or judge



Not only is contempt punishable, but it has lasting with adverse effects for the one *held in contempt*. These effects can come in the form of some kind of judgment or ruling that ultimately renders you powerless and without excuse or reason. In other words, your behavior is inexcusable and will receive due penalty.

One of several uses of “contempt” in the Bible occurs in Romans and pertains to our reaction to God’s judgment. In Romans 2, a hypocrite is described as one who cast judgment on another, but does the same things (that he is judging) himself. If you have contempt for someone because they are a liar but are not convicted by your own habit of lying, you are a hypocrite.

In this same text, some who have been described as hypocrites have *shown contempt* for God’s judgment; that is, they have dishonored God because they do not approve of his *kindness, tolerance, and patience* regarding his method for judgment. God’s method allows sinners to repent. God is merciful or shows clemency to those who *have a heart of repentance* and desire to be forgiven and healed from their sins.

Why would hypocrites show contempt toward God for his mercy and his justice? It is because they have not come to terms with their own sin, or the need for repentance, or the beauty of God’s method for forgiveness and reconciliation. Without recognition of their own condition, they have effectively placed themselves on the throne (of God) to the point of judging God himself.

The scripture that follows is one of my favorite.

God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger

COOKING

Cooking is not something that I do very well; I can really appreciate anyone skilled in the culinary arts, and especially if I can partake of their handiworks!

I don't think I'm very selective in my choice of foods simply because I usually tolerate my own cooking. This predicament is probably one reason I can really appreciate the skill and art; and a second, of course, is the delight of my taste buds and the fulfillment of my appetite.



As a young person, your opportunity to cook is very limited; but in time, the opportunity will enable you to hone your skills and talent. In this age, cooking can be limited to heating a frozen or freeze-dried item in a conventional or microwave oven. The painstaking procedure of preparation has become far removed from the daily duties of many households. Yet, some aspects of that once, daily duty still occur around holidays and family events such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

In detail, gourmet cooking is a laboratory experiment where a combination of standard and special ingredients are combined, mixed and processed using a variety of equipment. A televised cooking show is, by its name, a real stage of entertainment as the chef blends both their character and the dish of day into an interesting experiment. Whether cooking certain cuisine such as Cajun, or cooking from a grill outside, the chef must be able to sell his recipes, equipment and other wares in a one hour segment – while maintaining a prevailing level of joy and interest in his art!

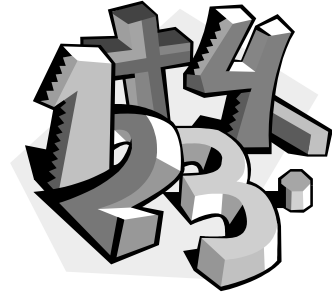
Cooking is as much a part of history as anything else; and most nobly received its debut with the advent of fire and realization that heat did more than simply warm us. Remnants of the earliest cooking are seen in our outdoor barbecues, open pit grills, and old brick ovens in a bakery. Armies, towns, and populations of all kinds survived on their resourcefulness at finding, roasting, processing, and maintaining food stocks to include prepared items such as salted pork, canned goods, and other items to last through the winter and lean periods. The French seem to be among the top cultures in fine cuisine yet we benefit and enjoy dishes from many cultures. For example, peanuts came from Africa even though the state of Georgia may lay claim. I must now stop...I'm hungry and must go forging in the kitchen or...



COUNTING

The word, “counting”, can imply several meanings: to count such as numbers such; and to suggest or request a level of trust such as “I am ‘counting’ on you to help me with my work”.

The first meaning may not bring a warm-and-fuzzy feeling if math is not your favorite past-time but may bring great satisfaction if you happen to be counting your money or some quantity of a personal collection (such a horse figurines; army men; or the age-old favorite, money).



The second meaning is a whole different matter: for the requester, it means trust; and for the deliverer, it means responsibility and commitment to a purpose. When someone is counting on you, they believe you are accountable, reliable and trustworthy in some respect.

One of my life’s ambitions and chief purpose is that you can count on me; even when you may not need or want to do so. As your father, I want to have a relationship and disposition as much like our Lord as possible: He is present, ready, willing, and responsive to my requests but, in addition, He is present even when I am not praying, thinking or seemingly needing him. In truth, I always need Him...and He is always there.

Realize that counting on someone should not include abusing the relationship. Abusing the relationship occurs when one or both do not respect and appreciate each other. Abusing a relationship may appear as healthy (to involve love, respect, commitment or similar attributes) but is actually self-seeking and gratifying; thereby lacking earnest attention to the needs of the others. Though far from versed in this area, I offer some basic advice on symptoms and conditions of developing abuse - hopefully, usable and understood advice!

A relationship requires commitment in terms of time, energy, and self-sacrifice. Even in a friendship or marriage, the depth of love will not sustain any long-term relationship unless it is under girded by commitment. This commitment must be mutual; if one or more in the relationship is no longer committed, the relationship is unhealthy (abusive) at the least and terminally ill at worst. Time and time again, “real” relationships that weather the storms of life are due to commitment and not love or other conditions exclusively. Jesus committed himself to the will of God; that is, to death on the cross, that we might have eternal life. Through time, there has been no greater commitment; no greater example for us to understand, to follow, and to worship. You can count on him!

COURAGE

In the well known story, “The Wizard of Oz”, the character Lion has the ironic circumstance of lacking courage. He as well as his three companions call upon the “wizard” to grant them a gift or need; in the case of the Lion, it is courage that he needs over his present, cowardly disposition.

Another illustration of courage comes in the well-known book-made movie, “The Red Badge of Courage” by Stephen Crane. In the story, a young man develops courage through the experience of battle. Placed in the Civil War, the story paints vivid images of each scene as the reader places himself in the very soul of this developing soldier. The soldier has a very idealistic view of battle at the beginning of the story; and confronted by the realities of battle and deaths, cowards to the onslaught of the enemy. In a transforming moment, in which he is wounded, the fear that so griped him gives way to courage. Even so, the soldier must contend with guilt over the tragedy and losses of battle.

In 1933, our president-elect, Franklin D. Roosevelt, made an appeal for Americans. In his speech, he comments that *the only thing we have to fear is fear itself*; in other words, Americans must stop thinking in the past and dwelling on hard times (The Great Depression) and look to a future with promise. To understand the challenge of his appeal would require some understanding of the economy in the 1930’s; but in short, it was time of staggering unemployment, loss, and hardship. The charge of the President was resolute: fear must first be overcome; in turn, the great odds before the country would be overcome.



As believers, we are empowered to be fearless; in fact, the command, “fear not” is used more often in the Bible than any other introduction. Among the many versus, be encouraged by the one below.

**Wait patiently for the Lord. Be Brave and Courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.**

COWS

Cows are among the friendliest of farm creatures. Notwithstanding the “bull” variety, the cow seems to be rather skittish of people and content at grazing. But my actual contact with these beefy, four-legged creatures has been on small scale with casual observation and a margin of distance as a safety precaution.



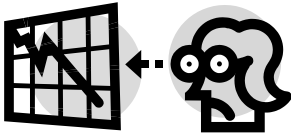
Speaking of cows, remember when we visited the local dairy, Wrights Dairy. Abby seemed especially attracted to the calves; but all of you found some interest in the place and the products to include milk, ice-cream, cheese, chocolate, and more. Even now, I occasionally visit the dairy and think of all of you each time.

As laid-back and carefree as a dairy farm may seem, the “operations” is by every measure a science. From a previous article in the local paper, this particular dairy has a regimented feed schedule and specific feed (or type of grass). As you probably know, the cows are milked using automated equipment and. In short, the whole process is calculated and far different from first impressions for the visitor or the farmer want-to-be. Even owning one milking cow is a lot of responsibility, as the utter must be squeezed each and every day – that’s a fact!

Recently, some cows were grazing around the old blue pond – the spring-fed pond by the ball field. We tried to approach the cows but were unsuccessfully; every time we got close, they would “moooo-ve”.

Again, I know very little about cows, but let me offer some additional advice to “steer” you down the right path. After all, each of us must take the opportunity to toot our own “long”-horn”, right? I know, at this point, you’re probably asking: “please don’t “utter” another word or comment about cows.” But, I don’t care; it’s not as though my reputation as a cow lover is at “steak”.

CULTURE



The attention to culture is not to really discuss the different cultures of the world but, instead, one defining measure of the culture – the marriage and the family. Changing attitudes, values, beliefs, and lifestyles have ushered in changes to the American family. The

illustration above, showing a shocked appearance to a declining graph, is to set-the-stage for the tone of my discussion: our culture, or more specifically the condition or state of the family, is in serious decline and may very well be approaching the endangered level.

The news of the day generally includes the topic of same-sex marriage. Depending on the news source, the reporting may include the latest legislative or state law initiatives, but invariably invokes a level of concern that marriage and the understanding of family has and continues to be redefined by the dynamics of our culture.

Until recently, divorce was on a continual rise in our country with an estimated 50% of all first-time marriages and 60% of second marriages ending in divorce. The recent idleness of this trend may be occurring because of the decline in marriage per capita, but I'm not sure. Still, the often used but neglected vow, *'till death do us part*, should probably be replaced by a more appropriate or applicable phrase. In my mind and from reading, the bonds or commitment of marriage as a covenant (promise before God) has given way to a marriage of convenience. This possible change seems to contradict to the idea of marriage and raise the question of who really loves whom.

The trend in divorce has created an increased level of single-parent homes where the parent, most often the mother, is the predominate parent-figure in the children's lives. The absence of both parents in the family has produced a host of social problems and elevated risks for the children: lower performance in school and higher drop-out rates; out-of-wedlock pregnancy; and increased drug and other criminal activity. From a read last year, a multi-decade study of several children of divorce showed alarming emotional and social problems for young and middle-aged adults – problems that did not manifest until after their adolescence.

My intention of this letter is not to condemn but rather to educate and prepare you for risks that you have and may incur. Yes, such risks would apply to all young people but you are not all young people – you are my people! Please understand that you that these words are not meant to hurt or hinder, but to help you remain firm and steadfast in a changing culture.

CREATION

Have you ever created anything? If you have, than you are both a creation and a creator; that is, you were created by God and are using your gifts and talents to create things.

I know that you realize that you were created by God but have you ever really thought deeply about this relationship? Have you ever realized that God knows everything about you including past, present, and future? And, of course, with all that knowledge, He has a purpose and plan especially for you.

The Psalmist looked to heavens with wonder and awe. *The Moon and the stars which you (God) have set in place; what is man that you are mindful of him...* In his observation and amazement of God's creation, the Psalmist was questioning how God could think of man (or himself) who seems so minuscule relative the creation around him.



Yet God does think of us and indeed *created us in his own image*. Of all his creation; we were extraordinary and unique. Even more profound, he loves us and delights in our loving and serving him. Finally, he is merciful to us through the giving of Jesus to restore us unto him; the Holy Spirit as our helper; and the Bible as the truth and means for further development of our relationship and faith.

Young people can be more attentive and amazed by God's creation. The heavens, the earth, and the endless species of animals and plants behold a God of unfathomably imagination, power, and brilliance. As we get older, however, such natural wonders often give way to the challenges and trappings of adulthood. Still, we must continual be reminded of God's gift of life and many blessings. Secondly, we must place our faith in the creator and not the created (or other people). Through such reminders, discipline, prayer and study, the created will bring delight to the creator and rise to the intended place in all creation.

CREED

A creed is a statement or belief, usually of a religious nature. The Nicene Creed, still used today in many churches, resulted from the adoption of Christianity as the chief religion in the Roman Empire.

Constantine the Great, the first emperor to be converted to Christianity, was instrumental in the formation of the council and the resulting creed. Much more could be said about Constantine, his conversion, and his accomplishments – but back to creeds.

The Apostles Creed is another of the creeds used by Christians; again, from Encarta, the following brief.

Held in 325, this first ecumenical council was convened by Constantine the Great, emperor of Rome, to settle the Arian dispute concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. Of the 1800 bishops in the Roman Empire, 318 attended the council. The Nicene Creed, which defined the Son as consubstantial with the Father, was adopted as the official position of the church regarding the divinity of Christ.

The Apostles' Creed continues to be used as the baptismal profession of faith in most Western churches; Orthodox churches prefer to use the later Nicene Creed. In Roman Catholic practice, the Apostles' Creed is also recited in the daily office, before the first and after the last service each day. In most Protestant churches, it is used periodically at Sunday worship. Anglicans and Lutherans use it regularly in morning and evening prayer

The Olympic Creed is interesting because it emphasizes courage and endurance over victory.

Ask not for yourself victory, but for courage, for if you endure, you bring honor to yourself; and even more, you bring honor to us all. – Olympic Creed

As a U.S. citizen, your creed might include *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness* or other similar content that transcends your past experience or culture – particularly if you're a first-time citizen or immigrant. Some credit is given to the *American Creed* as a greater influence in a citizen's choices than is their culture. Some believe that the creed {where we are going} is more influential in shaping society than our culture {where we come from}.

The Apostles Creed addresses God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit – it begins each paragraph with "I believe in..." and describes the trinity or relationship between the three persons of God. To believe is to accept something as real, as true, as authentic - not just to accept as plausible, but to embrace as proven and understood. Unlike a culture, which describes where we have come from or have lived, a creed possibly describes who we want to be or where we want to go.

What is your creed; what do you believe in, and how will aspire in that belief?

CRISIS

How would you define a crisis: Is it just a problem that is easily resolved; or is it a collection of problems that seem to have an undesired outcome; or is it a crucial point of certain and radical change?

The definition and qualification of a crisis can be relative to experience, age, and perspective.



A crisis may surround a severe weather pattern such as a category-4 hurricane – the potential outcome being a catastrophe involving major destruction and displacement. A crisis may occur in the economy such as the stock market crash of The Great Depression; it may occur in national or international security such as the Cuban Missile Crisis; or it may occur in an individual's life on news of unemployment, failing health, or the loss of a loved one.

In the media and politics, the qualification of a crisis has some latitude; a designation or classification, whether appropriate or not, can naturally grab the attention of the viewers or general public. Reaction to an announced crisis can vary from one of pandemonium to patience, of pessimism to optimism, detriment to opportunity, and apathy to outrage.

There are those who maintain a personal crisis out of a sense of being needed or justifying their actions. In this environment, a crisis can be an excellent way of diverting attention away from a more-serious or actual problem. While such a disposition may work for a season, this behavior may eventually lead to the “Cry-Wolf” reaction or basically the understanding that the crisis is not really a crisis...but only a tactic, habit, or abnormality.

A crisis is not to be taken lightly, but with every degree of understanding, should be qualified and communicated as necessary; reaction should not be taken lightly either, but with every degree of understanding, should adhere to proven procedure and practice if possible. Always be prepared!

DEATH

Death is a subject that is sometimes difficult to discuss; after all, death possibly means the end of natural life whether the life pertains to a flower or to a human life. Generally, death is followed by grief - the process of accepting the loss.



On a lighter note, Charlie Brown may have coined the phrase, “Good Grief” which playfully meant that he or his friends were bemoaning a circumstance. But can grief be really good; or can acceptance of death or another unfortunate circumstance be good?

This is a tough subject – even for adults – but, perhaps this letter will have some benefit to you in the years to come when grief will most certainly find you as it does all people. Please be patient as I tread through this delicate subject but, above all, understand that grief is a good thing and enables us to cope, indeed succeed, through a bad circumstance.

When our beagle “Billy” ran-away, Matthew grieved over the matter; he was upset, then sad, then winsome, and finally accepting. Matthew went through a grieving process because the dog he cared about was gone. The positive outcome of this experience is that Matthew was able to care for something or someone and was willing to show his feelings or affection for the pet.

In some cultures today, and in American history, grief is a welcomed and public condition of post-death or loss. In times past, woman would dress in black for long periods of time signifying their grief; men would wear armbands, also black, for the same reason. Actually, dressing in black was to honor the dead or lost by making the matter visible and to invoke the sympathy of the public as well.

Whether planned, expected or actually caused by one’s lifestyle, the loss of life can cause bitterness and other unresolved conditions. Grieving enables one to achieve closure and to move forward, renewed in their faith and strengthened by the experience. Grieving allows healing through a set of steps or conditions to possibly include: denial - about the seriousness of the loss; anger about the loss; guilt about the loss or things you think you could have done to prevent it; depression or a frequent sense of sadness; loneliness or fear of isolation from others; acceptance; and finally, hope.

Grieving can be a healthy way of dealing with death or other major losses in your life. Again, this process enables you to *work-through* the loss and find hope waiting to usher you back to a place of appreciation for the time, experiences, opportunities, and blessing that we receive as gifts.

DEED

A Cub Scout is tasked with doing a good deed; which mean he/she must perform some act that results in goodness. Doing a good deed benefits both the receiver and the giver; the giver benefits with a sense of good doing while the receiver accepts the kindness and generosity.



Deeds can be both good and wicked; in other words, the outcome can be intended to help someone or to hurt them. Don't confuse a wicked deed as one that results in hurt – it is the intention of the giver that differentiates the two types of deeds. If the intention was not to hurt but to help, the deed is still good. In the ordeals of the day, we may hurt someone else having never intended to do so; but sensitivity to such ordeals may enable us to apologize if not altogether limit the possibility. Our words, or *the tongue* to use the Biblical term, can be a real source of evil deeds in the form of gossip, lies, and other character-damaging conversation.

Having been hurt by someone is reason enough to be conscious of our own words, actions, and interaction with others. When others hurt us, an apology may not be enough to heal the hurt – we may still have to deal with the reason or intention. For example, someone may say something hurtful because they expressly do not like you. Though they may later apologize, the basis for their cutting remarks remains; hence you must deal with the basis or reason for their dislike of you even if the basis is jealousy, vindictiveness, or downright hatred.

Why should we desire to do good deeds? Not because we expect others to respond in kind, but because we are called to be agents of goodness in Jesus. The scriptures in 1 Peter tell us to *Live such goods lives that others may see you good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* As so, from Matthew, *Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and praise your father in heaven.*

DEER

Deer are another of our animals that travel in herds...or at least in numbers. But unlike the cow discussed earlier, the deer is a game animal.

Around here, the deer is a favorite subject for conversation; particularly, during the season that seems to extend over several months during late fall and winter. As you may also know, the chosen season is necessary to ensure that the meat is healthy both during the field dressing and for consumption in general.



Where I am presently living, the backyard eases up to a wooded ridgeline. On one particular night, we heard the local dogs barking and shined a light in the backyard just for the fun of it. To our surprise, several whitetails were walking along the ridgeline; their eyes emerald green in the shine of the light. In roughly the same area, we found an antler – evidently a recent loss of some buck during its annual replacement of his “rack”.

Much could be said about the deer if I were a hunter, but here’s a little knowledge picked-up along the way. Hunters set-out salt blocks to attract and lure the salt-craving deer. Typically, but not always, deer hunters will build and maintain tree-stands or platforms above the ground. Such a position probably allows a certain vantage point or visibility not possible at ground level. During the general season of hunting, some period may be for bow hunting, some for rifle, and some for black-powder {or musket-type}. Some hunters will hunt with all three which means that the sport can get very expensive. The more experienced and gung-ho hunters may travel great distances to hunt cousins to the white-tail such as the mule deer or elk.

My beagle and I use to walk at a closed-down military fort nearby. On several occasions, that beagle would take-off tracking these animals and, on occasion, even come upon them. On one particular event, she actually ran them across a golf course. You should have seen the golfers as the deer, the beagle, and I ran across the fairway in succession. It was a real hoot and probably a rare sight for all of us.

Deer meat, or venison, is very good and, at the chance, I will take some in a heartbeat. Whether in stew, plain, sausage, or the like, it is a favorite around the table of most around here. Why it even gives me some sense of yesteryears when deer meat was a staple for the pioneers, settlers, and back-woodsmen.

DELIGHTED

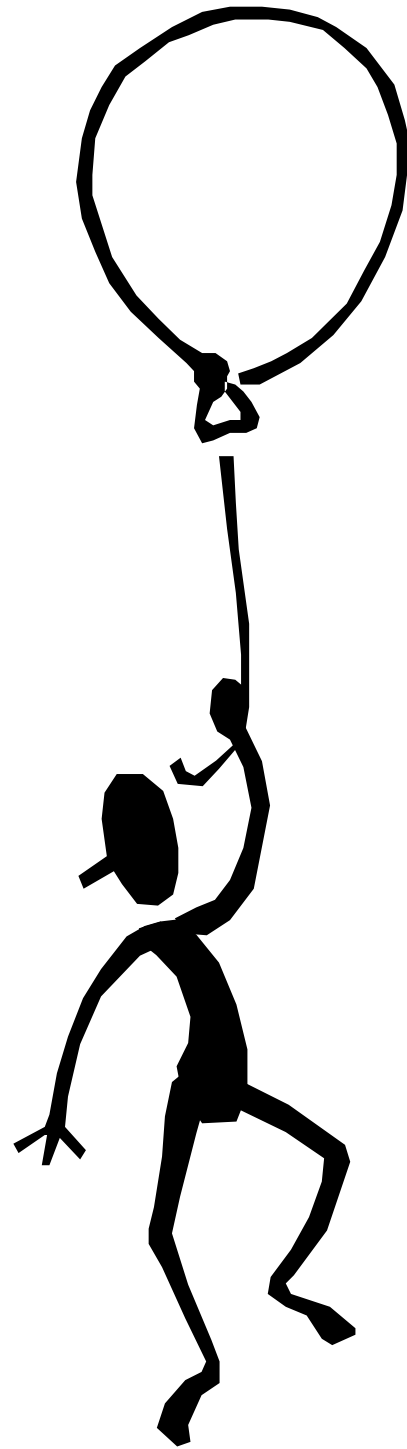
“I am delighted to meet you.” This is an old saying that, translated to the modern vernacular, could be said as, “Nice to me you” or “It’s a pleasure meeting you”. So the word “delighted” means to take pleasure or to rejoice.

There is a Bible scripture that tells us to *delight ourselves in the Lord and he will give us the desire of your heart*. Delighting ourselves in Christ means that we take pleasure in the life of Christ and his Lordship in our lives. This delight is not a momentary feeling or reaction that is whimsical; rather, it is a condition or disposition of our lives that should grow over time and be strengthened through the phases of our relationship with him.

As difficult as this may seem at your ages, delight can be more than the pleasure of an ice-cream cone on a hot, summer day or the warmth of a fire on a cold day; perhaps, this delight is more like a classic movie, music collection or band, or something of the variety that grow more valuable and cherished with time and age. This form of delight is like a balloon to a child except that it never loses its air, deflates, or bursts; but it remains constant and reliable thus bringing an increasing level of trust, pleasure, and admiration from the child.

Delight does not have to be solely directed at the Lord; certainly, there are momentary pleasures and even life long interests. But *in the big scheme of things*, the promise of the scripture is to simply delight in our Lord (all the days of lives) that our needs and even other desires (that please him) will be given to us (who is his pleasing child).

Balloons, toys, clothes, food, and other things of this world will all pass away and are perishable; but the things of the Lord are eternal. On the certainty that spiritual things are eternal, find your delight in the Lord – and never let go!



DENTISTS

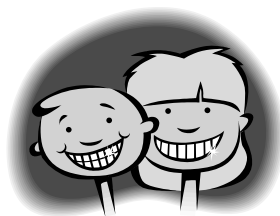


Recently, I had a dental check-up and cleaning; the dentist found a cavity on a wisdom tooth and will either fill the cavity or pull the tooth. But, I don't have to tell you about dentists since two of you have had braces. Please, *cut me some plaque*, while I drill-down to the root of this subject.

Going to the dentist is not a favorite experience for most of us. As the dentist told me this week, anyone who tells him that they like shots is a prime candidate for the psychiatric ward at the hospital. Anyway, even a cleaning can be a less than pleasant experience with all the probing, scraping and painful reminders of poor dental hygiene (that you always forget from the last appointment). Most of all, I wonder what the hygienist or doctor is thinking as they face yet another open cavern of saliva, bad breath, and remnants of recent meals – it's a nasty business you know!

Being a dentist has some similarity to being a sculptor, brick mason, or some other type of similar occupation or artisan. From the annals of poor or damaged oral conditions, these masters create healthy bites, pretty smiles, and some measure of confidence. These maestros of the mouth, crafters of the cavity, technicians of the tooth, and colonels of counter-gingivitis are to be exalted to their rightful place.

The whole experience of a cleaning reminds me that, in order to repair and restore, some immediate discomfort and even memorable pain, may be necessary. Before the cleaning begins, the patient may be mildly aware of calculus, tartar, and the like that has built up over the teeth and gums since the last visit. Once engaged however, the realization is acute to the point of white knuckles, body tension, and even the need to yell if only one could.



Days following a cleaning, the sensitive areas of the mouth have recovered and the patient is back to business with a much improved, healthier kisser. Having volunteered himself, whether because of oral pain or just plain consciousness, the patient is much relieved that the procedure or process is over. Yes, it may have been avoided had he been more disciplined in his

hygiene, but thank God that the damage was correctable and that pain, as it were, could be relieved by the skill of one so caring, so qualified, and so prepared as this great oral physician.

DISABILITIES

Disabilities are usually thought of as physical or mental impairments that affect the ability to progress or function in a normal way. Of course, the question immediately arises, “what is a normal way?”

One of your cousins is disabled. She has physical and mental disabilities that have and will continue to limit her progress to function in a normal way. I have also had some contact with children at church with disabilities ranging from autism to cerebral palsy – which cause behavior, learning, and physical problems.

Your cousin, Kathryn, is loved by your uncle and aunt (her dad and mom) and their other children in a special, very-caring way. I do not have an understanding or comprehension of the depth of this love that is manifested in increased effort for the daily as well as long-term care of your cousin. But I have a great deal of respect and admiration for the families’ response and ongoing effort in this matter – as many such family situations can cause division and destruction in the family rather than unity and growth.

As apparent as disabilities are at times, the degree of a disability may be somewhat unclear. We may sometimes create or protract a situation or circumstance to make it a disability. For example, you may compare yourself with a friend or student who makes a better grade; and in turn, you may feel disabled (or inadequate) on learning or in the particular subject. The trouble that I find with this perspective is that it does not help us in using what we have (or can develop); but instead, it limits our potential and promotes a pattern of compromise, apathy, and failure.

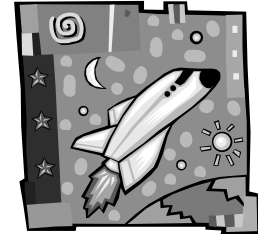
For the believer, this pattern can be very destructive as it may be directed at God as anger (in that we are something less than his creation and his child). Satan wants us to believe that we have no value and are basically losers without potential, promise, and purpose. What a lie! By such deception are we torn from God and reduced to nothing. Remember the many promises God has given us: *In Him, all things are possible; By Him and through Him, all things were made; and I can do all things through God who gives me the strength.* Make claim to this promises and do not be deceived into destructive thoughts.



DISCOVERY

Discovery involves making gains by exploration or adventure. Gains can include new land or other wealth, or new information and understanding.

The illustration to the right is to remind you that one of the space shuttles was named Discovery and, along with the remaining spacecraft, symbolize the essence of adventure and exploration as well as increased communications through the transport of satellites.



The word “Discovery” may conjure images from the earliest explorers to the latest developments in science and other areas. Most certainly, this word invokes an immediate level of excitement simply because it implies something new and mysterious.

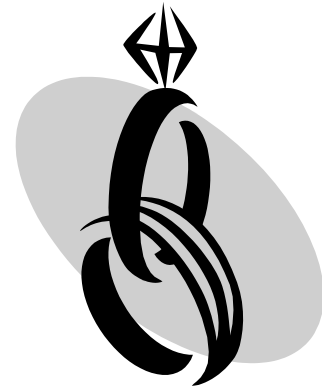
Discovery involves risks, and risks entail potential costs of failure. On the chance that a discovery may fail to complete the intended or desired mission, much planning and preparation may go into reducing risks. Consider the shuttle, or any other aircraft that involve significant risks such as: the potential to delay the take-off, abort the flight, or lose the craft and crew at worst.

Even in everyday life, we try to reduce our risks of a serious bicycle accident by wearing helmets, seatbelts in cars, and so on. Insurance companies, manufacturers, hospitals, and literally all of industry places some attention and action on reducing risk and cost for product failure and customer liability.

I recently learned that Lewis and Clark spent many months of planning and preparation for the northwest-passage expedition. Lewis prepared by learning medicine, Indian languages, navigation, and other skills necessary for the multi-year trip; all of which was considered essential to a successful mission. The lesson is clearly to plan and prepare if you want to achieve the highest potential for success.

DIVORCE

This is yet another of several hard-hitting subjects that I am forwarding to you; but the hope and intention is that you understand that divorce is an imperfect outcome to a perfect beginning; that is, that marriage is a covenant or promise before God and divorce is a creation and convenience of fallen man.



Divorce is a terrible experience, circumstance, and condition of a once enjoined couple; and is a travesty for the children who, in all cases, are the least considered but greatest effected in the ordeal. Long-term studies have shown that children of divorce are at higher risk of social, academic and developmental problems compared with children of married parents – but symptoms or evidence may not fully surface until adulthood.

Traditionally, marriage vows in our country have included some phrase as *what God has joined, let no man tear asunder*, but these vows have been greatly diluted (as has marriage in general). The industry of divorce is a scourge on our society and has propagated immeasurable costs to the once honored and protected sanctity of marriage.

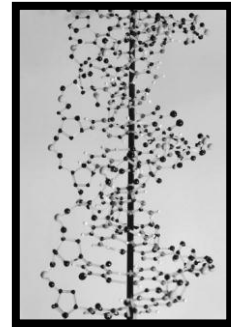
Please understand that my words are not aimed at condemning or criticizing those who have suffered from divorce or bad marriages for that matter. My criticism and concern is with the laws and conditions that enable divorce to be transacted with such simplicity and volume; and, in turn, have enabled couples to conveniently terminate the marriage rather than try further or try at all. A *chicken-and-egg* proposition might be that such laws and conditions have changed our society and not visa versa. Perhaps marriage and the traditional family should be placed on the endangered species list.

My views or opinions are not based on my perfection in relationships, marriage, and family; on the contrary, I too have been divorced after 13 years of marriage. But my personal experience and my limited reading on the subject are the basis for my strong words. God hates divorce because it is counter to his model of marriage; but God loves his creation and is able to forgive as forgiveness is sincerely sought. Marriage can be a wonderful experience if each is mutually committed to the relationship over an above their individual wants and even needs at times. Divorce is the worst of possible outcomes to the children, to the couple, and to marriage as it was designed to be. Love will always prevail if pursued to the end.

DNA

There is much conversation about DNA in this day and time – but what is this organic code all about? Here is a little information that I've collected on the subject.

DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid, and is the molecule that carries genetic information. Near the end of the American Civil War, genes were first studied as the link between physical similarities of parents and offspring. The work or studies of Gregor Mendel enabled improved breeding of livestock. He developed several laws structured on the discovery and purpose of genes transferred from parent to offspring.



DNA can be obtained from the organism's remaining tissue. On this premise, such ideas as collecting, developing, and actually growing once-extinct animals have been entertained in the movie industry {for example, Jurassic Park}. Still, DNA can serve many other purposes in criminal investigations whereby hair samples, blood, and other organic material can be used to link the crime to the suspect. A second application has involved genetic engineering to include the improved development and growth of plants or breeding of animals.

Each of you has a DNA code that shares both the code of your mother and I. Certainly, the most apparent evidence of that combination is in your physical features such as your hair color and texture, eye color, face, and body dimensions. Matthew, you and Brian probably have your curly or wavy hair from me; whereas, Abby and Ben have your straight hair from your mother. Similarly, the two of you have blue eyes like me and, again Ben and Abby have the brown eyes. Other less-apparent features result from a combination of the two gene pools. Your features can be matched to your DNA code.



Though you share our genes, each of you is unique as God formed you. Each of you have a unique finger print that no other person shares. What is amazing beyond this limited description of genes and DNA is the understanding that each of us was known by God before we were born. Psalm 139 discusses that fact that God *created my inmost being and knit me together in my mother's womb.*

How wonderful to see the similarity of each of you to me; yet, how much more exciting to know that God knew you before I did and has planned all the days of your life. Thanks to our Lord for each of you...and for your unique DNA.

DOGS

A dog may be man's best friend, but may also be his worst enemy depending on which side of the fence he belongs.



In my childhood, some dogs were friendly while others were very protective and even down-right fierce. I remember a German Shepard that all the kids feared; even behind a fence, the Shepard was most lethal in its size, bark, and growl.

But on a positive side, several dogs bring good memories. For many years, my family had one or more Shetland Sheepdogs (or miniature collies). The first, "Lady Sunshine", was a good dog altogether; and her offspring such as "Piper" was good as well. Smart and playful, these animals were bred as sheep-herding dogs; hence, they might instinctively try to corral another dog or some other animal.

We (you and I) certainly have had our share of beagles - but why, I am not altogether certain except for having some strange bend toward this breed. Beagles are not necessarily a good family pet in that they are driven entirely by their noses. In the woods, however, the beagle is a site to behold with his tireless chase of rabbits, or in the case of our untrained pets, anything on four legs.

What is your favorite breed of dogs? – Or maybe you're more inclined to cats, horses, or hamsters.

DOMINANCE



Dominance means to be superior or to have power over others. A ball team may dominate its league with a history of consistent wins. A country may dominate other countries by oppression and even conquest. People dominate other people by physical, mental, or other means. The desire for dominance may be the natural desire for power and control.

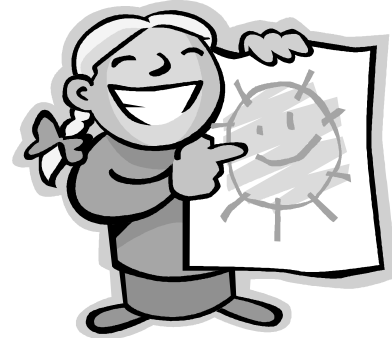
In 1 Samuel, the highly-feared Goliath dominated by physical size and strength; on record, none of the Hebrew army would accept his challenge. By any human standard, Goliath would seem unconquerable, indomitable, or otherwise unmatched by any and everyone. Present on the field of battle, King Saul was the closest in height to Goliath but, as you probably know, did not offer himself to the verbal challenge. Sent to the front to deliver food to his brothers, young David becomes the most unexpected victor in the challenge of Goliath. Faith in God won out over physical dominance.

I will always love this story as it contains the intrigue of victory or success against great odds. Most of us like and can appreciate the profile “underdog”, but this story is an epic of God’s power to use the apparent weak to do his work and change lives in the process. To all who have been in David’s shoes (or sandals), the story offers encouragement and direction that God’s power is supreme, his plan is perfect, and his purpose is certain. Through his faith and desire to please God, David dominated the day, sent the Philistines in retreat, and gave God the glory for it all.

Having weaknesses enables us to grow in our faith; perhaps, David’s position in his family and physical size contributed to his faith. Paul tells us that *in his weakness, God is made strong*. What we may lack in apparent ability is supplied by God as needed to perform his purpose for us – now that is dominance!

DRAW

When I was your age and well into my teen years, drawing was a favorite pastime. I would draw cars, aircraft, and even sketches of people. From recollection, you like to draw things as well. I remember horses, soldiers, space warriors, stick men, self portraits, family members, and who knows what else.



Drawing is a reflection of who we are and what we are thinking about at the particular time. When we are happy, we may draw the Sun, and when we are sad we may draw rain or dark clouds. When we are adventurous, super heroes may be the subject; and when we are at peace, a forest or plants may be the center of our artwork. I think that those who draw as children and continue to draw as young adults are very special because they have not abandoned the means of communicating and admitting their thoughts, ideas, and imagination.



Many adults draw in their profession; these include engineers, scientist, graphic artists, industrial designers, architects, fashion designers, interior decorators, animators, cartoonists, marketers, and developing artists of several kinds. Why, they may very well have taken the childhood art and aspirations through adolescence and well into their adulthood – so the early years of all that paper, pencil, crayon, and water colors was not in vein. Let this be a lesson to all children: that drawing in your childhood may lead to a respectable, satisfying career of the multitude of skills necessary for such professions.

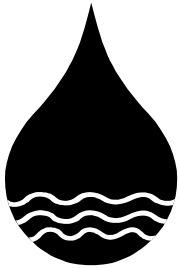
Whether a 5-minute sketch or 50-day portrait, keep on drawing to produce in tangible form what lies within you and your imagination. The world is waiting for your next creation.

DROPS

Drops of water on a branch collect from the day's rain or from the early morning dew. The drops are not pure but still bring refreshment to the surrounding plant life and the passing animal life.

Each drop held in suspense by water's surface viscosity acting against the gravity bearing down on its weight. From each drop comes a ray of light that, like an eye, can cast a distorted, mirror image of our self however small and discrete.

The drops are each unique in terms of their position but all bearing similar characteristics of the dynamic of the drop from collection to elongation to eventual fall to another place.



By its name, “drops” seems so insignificant, immeasurable and countless; yet, the word may represent much more beyond each actual volume or appearance. A drop of blood can serve as a sample for the testing and observation of our health; a drop of medication can sooth a hurt or cleanse a wound; a drop of acid can etch a surface; and a drop of rain can bring immediate concern to an outside event.

Raindrops can also bring relief to a dry, parched, and withered land; can be hope to a distressed farm; and bring a blessing to a large, battling fire. Raindrops are the beginning of a stream and the end of an ocean. Drops are rarely alone and often are in such number as to irrigate the earth, flood a waterway, upend a deep-rooted tree, and drive a hydro-electric power plant. A harbinger of changing weather, raindrops may begin a gradual fall or come in a ‘gully-washer” on the edge of a storm, tornado or hurricane.



Listen to the rhythm of the falling rain...

DUTY

To do one's "duty" is to do what is expected of them. To your right, the soldier has been tasked with cleaning a tank. Imagine trying to clean a tank after it has been *out-in-the-field* and is caked with mud. It may take more than a bucket, brush, and hose; why, it may take a power-washer and several days!



No matter how difficult the task may be, we should still use all our resources to accomplish it. As an employee, a young person or soldier, duty is foremost in order that others may be able trust and rely on us.

If we fail to do our duty because of negligence (because of a bad attitude), we have failed ourselves and others as well; but if we try and still do not succeed by some measure, we do not fail ourselves although some improvement may be important if not necessary – which we call learning.



Both learning and succeeding in our duties begins with a good attitude: a willingness to try our best, to accept any set-backs or shortcomings, and to remain vigilant in our effort and objectives at hand. With a good attitude, the steps that follow become easier with time while enabling us to take on more duties, responsibility, and leadership.

I think our duty to God is best summed-up in Ecclesiastes:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

EFFERVESCENCE



Effervescence means to be bubbly; like the spray of a waterfall or the personality of someone who seems to be brimming over with joy.

If you have ever been next to a fountain or waterfall, the over-spray can be so refreshing on a hot day. At the great Niagara Falls, visitors are able to take a boat at or near the base and catch the over-spray and witness the sheer power of the water's volume and flow.

But effervescence can also be felt from the person described earlier; their blissful look on living is often a welcomed and refreshing presence for many who know them or catch the spray of their warmth and joy. I believe that many children fall into this category; that is, they seem to be oblivious to the bleakness and other ill-conditions that sometimes befall and even plague young and old adults alike. I believe that old people who have maintained effervescence are cool because they must overcome the aging effects of their bodies, the disappointments and regrets of a long life, and other such conditions that can easily limit if not dry up effervescence.

Over the last several months, I have visited a natural spring and a water fall. The spring emits gurgling water that feeds a stream; the falls produce the over-spray from the volumes that reflect off of the basin below. Each type of effervescence helps sustain life by moistening the surrounding area and providing beauty and sanctuary to those who visit. You may remember these places or you may have similar places of your own.

One account of effervescence occurred when Jesus met a woman at a well. Several circumstances surrounded this meeting but, in short, Jesus took an opportunity to minister to the woman. He associated the well with the *living water* or eternal life that he could provide for the asking; he also acknowledged that he was the Messiah that she had momentarily described as Christ, the one who is coming. Jesus tells her, *but whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never thirst but will become a well springing up to eternal life.* Jesus' effervescence never ends, never dries up; but is the *life, the light in man.*

Effervescence is life-sustaining and refreshing to the soul. A Psalm describes the blessed *as like a tree, planted by streams of living water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither, but whatever he (the blessed) does prospers.* Therefore, accept and embrace his effervescence that you may please him and pass it on to others that they may please him as well.

EIGHT-BALL {8-BALL}

The game of Pool can be a lot of fun – even when you may not know the difference each end of the cue or stick.



When I was a kid, I got a miniature pool table for Christmas one year. I cannot remember the reason for wanting this toy, but the thrill (and the table) lasted just a few weeks or months. To this day, my knowledge of the game is reduced to the simple goal of hitting the solid-white ball (cue ball or “rock”) with the stick and, with some luck, hitting a solid or striped-ball into a hole following contact.

Some people (mostly guys) will spend countless hours playing the game at some club, bowling alley, or pool hall. In my small town, a particular locally-owned restaurant serves the need and is called by the name “Cue Time”. I’ve never played pool at the place, but they have pretty-good food and are convenient to my workplace.

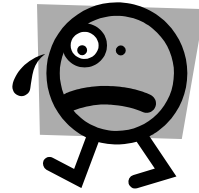
I discovered the Web site “easypooltutor.com”. Looks very comprehensive and includes a chat room, a lessons book in Acrobat format, and several other features. Still, there is no substitute for actual practice with some heated competition.

My favorite moment in pool is the opening break; when I seem to have the greatest chance of victory and randomly sinking a ball. Beyond that moment, my shots are usually very unidirectional or direct shots rather than angled, banked, or arched at some lethal trajectory. There is probably certain spin that can be applied to the cue-ball for effect but such advantages are better left to pure chance and uncertainty rather than actual intention and result.

Pool is one of those games, like chess, where every move or shot must be carefully calculated relative to the current state as well as subsequent options and conditions. If I do this, than the other player can do that...but maybe if I do this, the other player will not be able to do that... In the end, the player who is able to respond best to this *cause and effect* captures the king or clears the table. Rack-‘em-up!

EMOTIONS

Emotions or feelings are such a big part of our everyday. A good grade on a test can bring much satisfaction and celebration {or relief}. To be recognized for good work by your employer or associates can bring similar feelings. A much desired and anticipated call can spark a surge of adrenaline at the sound of the phone. Of course, there are other emotions by a host of names to include: rage or anger; depression or melancholy; loneliness or isolation; elation or exuberance; happiness or bliss; and so on.



Emotions occur when we care deeply about something or have a great deal of interest; or when we incur a heightened event such as a scare of some kind. Let your favorite ball team lose (if you even like sports) and you may be upset for the rest of the day or longer. Driving along calmly in the car, an oncoming car veers into you lane and fear sends a shockwave through your body. In both cases, your emotions are ignited because of your interest in your team or the shear terror of a possible wreck.

Emotions can be both an aid and an enemy of our objectives, our will, and our relationship to God and others. A general sense of happiness about school or learning contributes to better performance; but periodic sadness or even contempt for learning makes success more difficult if not impossible. Of course, the social and other aspects of school and learning must be considered as part of the overall experience; but the primary purpose of school is learning, developing, and applying knowledge. To carry the point a step further, the social aspect may be in high gear but your learning in much disarray. Your emotions and attitude are very important in school and other endeavors.

Emotions can mislead us or, if uncontrolled, can impede our judgment and decision-making. You may not feel like going to church or cleaning up your room – not because you are sick but because you would rather do something else. Sometimes these tasks must be carried-out with a sense of respect, duty and even love. Be careful about feelings; if left uncontrolled, feelings can cause all kinds of problems by confusing, misleading and deceiving you and others as well.

Emotions enable us to communicate. Conviction, compassion, and other examples of sentiment should be admired and appreciated if the cause is worthy and right; but if the cause is questionable or wrong such sentiment can be devastating for participants, followers, citizens, or loved ones. Emotions should not be used to manipulate or deceive others; and other's emotions should not be exploited or "played-on" to manipulate or control others.

EMPATHY

Here is another of those words that has something to do with love. From the book, Bold Love, empathy is described as a connection to the heart of another and a respect for their personal boundaries.

Empathy is similar to “sympathy” in both sound and definition; but sympathy may focus on the hurting person whereas empathy may focus on the basis behind the hurt or deep-felt condition.

From a helpful Web site entitled “Empathy and Listening Skills and Psychological Hugs”, the following story may further bring light to the slight difference.

A man is talking about **his father's death**, which had occurred a week earlier. As he talks about missing his father and his powerful love for him, the man's voice gradually becomes filled with anguish and then he bursts into tears in front of a friend who is listening to him.

If the friend uses **sympathy**, she might think, for example: *He is remembering his father with pain*. If the friend decides to verbalize her thoughts, she might say to the grieving man words such as: "I feel your pain."

If the friend uses **empathy**, she might think, for example: *He is remembering his father with pain and also the pleasure of his love for him*. If the friend decides to verbalize her thoughts, she might say to the grieving man words such as: "I feel your pain and also your great love for your father."

This **sharing of the painful feelings** of another person is characteristic of both sympathy and empathy. However, the person using sympathy would pay more attention to the pain than to the love for the father whereas the person using empathy would pay equal attention to the pain and love.

An empathetic response must go further than the outcome and delve into the past and the conditions and circumstances that lead to the outcome. By exploring and perhaps understanding the past, an empathetic response could offer hope and encouragement to a bleak and dismal disposition.

Empathy is probably easier when the one offering this encouragement has experienced similar problems or crisis in their own lives. How could someone fully understand the loss of a father if they have not lost a parent or close-relative? Even life's suffering enables us to help others by truly being empathetic toward them. Empathy is exemplified by the simple statement:

“I have been there {in the crisis} and know, from experience, what you are going through – I know that it is difficult but there is hope and promise beyond”.

ENDURANCE



When I was in high school and for some time period after college, I ran long-distance. In high school, my events were the mile, two mile, and sometimes the mile relay. During high school and after college, I ran the 10K and similar road-races. Running long-distance takes endurance; and endurance requires training and preparation to run and finish the race. Whether a road race or any of life's other challenges, a common basis for preparation is the mindset or will to endure to the end where the prize awaits the victor.

From Ralph Waldo Emerson, American writer and poet in the 1800's, a quote applied to endurance simply identifies that our attention or, what matters, is *what lies within us*.

What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

As believers, what matters is *who lies within us*. In the book of Hebrews, Paul writes: *let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and developer of our faith...*

It is Jesus who is our goal, our prize, the very essence of our desired character and being. Whether in an actual race or continuing in life's journeys, endurance is usually associated with suffering, patience, fortitude and resignation.

As a previous long distance runner, suffering would occur in the form of shin splints (sharp continuing pain extending along the lower legs), frequent muscle aches, and muscle cramps to include the arms, ribs, and legs. The suffering did not end over time but became an accepted "cost" of participation in the race. For believers, there have been countless examples of suffering that include loss from property to person. Suffering is described as producing perseverance.

Patience is necessary on several fronts. First, the runner has to progress through increasing conditioning and exercise. Second, they must be prepared for setbacks that occur in development such as the suffering described in the previous paragraph. Believers are instructed *to be patient in all things and with prayer and petition, present requests to God*.

Fortitude is initiative or drive. In the book of Philippians, Paul tells us: *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*. Paul had forgotten the past and was looking to God's calling. In the same vein, resignation is dedication and commitment – necessary qualities for living a Christ-centered life. I pray that you will run the race with purpose, with passion, and with a plan of God who loves you.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement means to provide moral support or to give someone “courage” to face a problem or challenge.



Encouragement is one of those gifts for both the receiving and the giving person: the receiver obviously gets a boost or is *lifted-up*; the giver is gratified with a sense of *being needed* and attentive to others' needs and circumstances. One fascinating outcome of this arrangement is that, even when we are down, encouraging others may actually encourage us. Our effort at helping others genuinely helps us.

The book of Romans tells us that *everything written in the past* (from the scriptures) *was written to teach so that, through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.* The same chapter closes with the encouraging words, *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Many other scriptures provide encouraging verses as well as stories of those who gave and received encouragement. In Paul's letters to Titus, the men of the church are *encouraged to be temperate or self-controlled.* In the teaching, the men should *show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.*

Recently, I received a phone call from a friend of mine. For many months, he (and his family) has been enduring several major problems; on this particular day, he and his wife had been rear-ended in their van but were not seriously hurt. He called to provide a word and a prayer of encouragement – this while he endures these problems and the jolt of the accident earlier that day. His call and his encouragement are that much more valuable because of the example he has set: laying aside personal problems, he cares enough to reach out and to share with those who are need.

ENIGMA

An enigma is something or someone who is difficult to read or understand; who or what is mysterious and obscure. A secret code would be an example of an enigma.

From the Web, the information to the left pertains to the historic “Enigma” developed by Germany in 1918. Below is a picture of the “rotating” rotors – a unique feature of the machine.

In the last several years, a movie was made about the Enigma; a second movie, about the capture of a German U-boat, also included the Enigma as the object of the mission. The suspense and thrill of each story was built around the major breakthrough for the Allied forces.

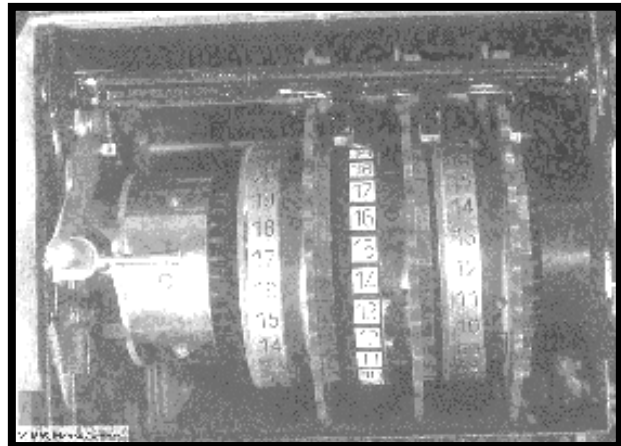
Once the code (or machine creating the code in this case) is discovered, radio and other communications transmissions and messages are no longer secure; hence, the military loses its effectiveness in developing and executing tactics.

Even in business and industry such circumstances occur in the form of reverse engineering (taking something apart to determine how it was designed and built). Patents and other aspects of law may prohibit or punish such infringements; but the practice still continues as competitors play catch-up and potentially by-pass much of the money needed for research, etc.

You may have used a secret code to communicate with family or friends – it can be a lot of fun anticipating the message while deciphering the code. Sign language, words, pictures can all serve as the basis for a code.

About 1918, Albert Scherbius took his idea of the "rotating rotors" in a cipher machine to the German military. The first Enigma machine was produced in the early 1920's. It was an electrical enciphering machine which provided "better" encryptions of messages than other machines at the time because of the rotating rotors.

The Germans placed a lot of confidence in the security of the Enigma machine because they thought that the probability of breaking a message would be too great for their enemies. Contrary to the beliefs of the Germans, the Enigma machine was not secure. In 1928, the Poles acquired the knowledge about the German military Enigma by intercepting one, in customs, being sent to the German Embassy in Warsaw and....



ESTEEM

Esteem is the measure of one's value or worth; self-esteem is how you feel about yourself, or what you think of yourself as a person.



Figuratively, self-esteem can be associated with looking at yourself in a mirror, or seeing your reflection. If you like what you see, you are satisfied with your appearance and basically feel good about it; if you don't like what you see, you may feel bad about yourself. Of course, your appearance is only the surface and does not really identify all of you, your worth and value.

“Character counts” is often a phrase used in the public forum. This phrase means that an individual should be valued on their attributes and qualities – as opposed to appearance only. Not everyone is considered physically attractive by public standards and, if they were, the public would simply change the standard anyway. But character is something that is developed over time, not passed-on through our lineage. Character can be formed and fashioned such that the result far outshines physical beauty.

“Beauty is only skin deep” is a phrase that means that our physical appearance is a very diluted or shallow form of measuring a person's value. The mouse may be very delighted by his reflection but if he doesn't treat other mice well, if he doesn't take care of his family, or if he steals cheese from the others, he has bad character – and his appearance simply does not matter.

Self-esteem is very important because the way that we feel about ourselves has a great deal of influence or weight on how we develop and mature. If someone is insecure or has low self-esteem, they may never achieve to their capability or potential. It is one thing to recognize our weaknesses or areas where improvement is possible; but my concern is that low self-esteem may lead to pervasive or general failure and a skewed impression of one's own abilities and value. A healthy self-esteem does not affirm that you are perfect or flawless but it does affirm that, because God created you, you have value and purpose; it is not an unrealistic sense of grandeur but rather an honest assessment of your character.

For children and adults alike, esteem is nurtured by those who are closest to us. For children, nurturing most likely will come from the parents; but can also come from extended family and other adults in your life. When children are loved, and they sense that love, the product is healthy self-esteem; but without real love, the children may very slide into a period or a lifetime of low self-esteem. Please know that you are loved dearly and that we (all us Rainer's) esteem or value you.

ESTHER

The inspiration for this letter is from a recent radio program in which I learned about a Christian ministry, writer, and several books pertaining to the development and nurturing of young women or teenagers. In particular, the writer and founder of this ministry referred to these young women as the “E” generation or those who model their lives after the virtues of Esther.

E-Generation

The basis for the ministry and the foundational books was a heart for the adverse effects of the changing culture in America; in particular, the adverse effect shaping the development of young women at a much earlier age than in times past. Today, the influences of popular culture are attracting the pre-teens in a much more significant way; consequently, the girl’s values and lifestyle are being formed much earlier leading to further problems in the teen’s years and beyond.

As I write this letter, addressed specifically to my daughter, my heart is extended to those parents and young people experiencing these conditions and struggling through the process of leading their children {and daughters} toward *the way they should go*. My hope for my own daughter, and for other children, rests in the power of prayer and God’s provision in my absence during this critical time.

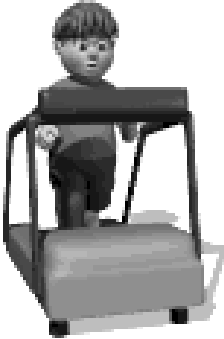
From the Book of Esther, the story occurs in the Persian Empire during the reign of King Xerxes. Esther, the adopted daughter of Mordecai, is living in the citadel of Susa; the residence of the throne of King Xerxes and his present queen, Vashti. Due to circumstances that I will purposely not describe, the queen loses her favor with the king and is deposed from her royal position. To replace Vashti, the king issues a decree or, in the modern description, a directive or classified, for applicants or prospects to become the new queen.

Esther is not a likely candidate simply because she was not a natural born citizen or native; rather, she is born of Israel and Jewish birth. Not revealing her nationality, she and other prospects are ushered to the citadel to audition for the leading role of queen. Esther is described as a woman *lovely in form and feature* – which apparently was noticed by the King who was *attracted to Esther more than any other woman*.

Esther was placed in this powerful role by providence; she was serving God by ensuring that *her people* (the Jewish captives) were not destroyed by evil leaders among the King’s court. The King listened to Queen Esther’s appeal to *spare her self and her people from death*; indeed, he listened and granted her appeal.

If being beautiful includes the soul, Esther was the epitome of beauty in that she made great sacrifices to save her people, to obey God.

EXERCISE



Exercise is something that is generally on my mind but does not consistently reach my body – but at least I’m thinking about it!

Much opportunity and benefit occurs with exercise:

- ☑ It is healthy and conditions us for the rigors of our activity as kids and adults
- ☑ It is a form of discipline and balance to the demands of our time
- ☑ It is good for the heart and for your esteem

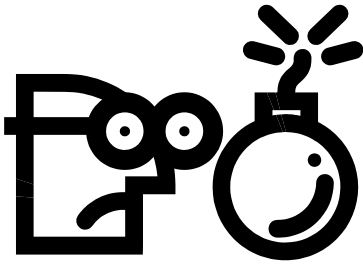
Other benefits abound but, in general, exercise should be a regular part of our routine.

When I was in high school, my favorite exercise was long distance running and a balance of simple exercises to include push-ups, set-ups, leg-lifts, pull-ups and some stretches for the legs, torso, etc. Preparing for running included the stretches while the other exercises were just a basic regiment of muscle building and conditioning. Exercise was never easy or painless but enabled other demands and tasks to be more obtainable - again, because of the discipline and regiment.

Sometimes, we are expected and even required to do things which are not easy and even involve a lot of sacrifice and pain. Why should we be compelled to do these things when the immediate and sometimes long-term results are less than desirable? Possibly because we are told, it is expected, and it does not violate our beliefs, morals, and other legitimate reasons. A more important reason is that we must always try to do our best, to strive for the goal, and to press on with conviction and objective.

Make exercise a standard part of your routine and as an investment in the health and physical abilities you have been given – the rewards are many.

FAILURE



I have heard that as long as you never give-up, you are not failing; in other words, failure is giving-up or considering your effort as pointless.

Still, there are setbacks in life and times when momentary failures may be exaggerated to our general performance. The art is learning from the moment and refusing to make this moment, or the periodic moments, a cause for purposeful failing in life. To accept failure at its best (for learning and growing), understand that incurring failure is an indication that you are being challenged - if you do not incur failure, you are not facing challenges in life.

If you can't accept failure or if you are afraid of it, simply withdraw from any challenges in life and relegate yourself to something far less than you are potentially capable of achieving. If you can *stomach* some failure than *roll-up-your-sleeves, grab a tool, and dig-in* for the onslaught of an exciting, rewarding, and beneficial life. Franklin Roosevelt, a man that faced many challenges beyond his Presidency, describes this *hands-on* approach to life.

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again because there is no effort without error and shortcomings, who knows the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the high achievement of triumph and who at worst, if he fails while daring greatly, knows his place shall never be with those timid and cold souls who knows neither victory or defeat."

-- Theodore Roosevelt, 26th U.S. President

In my years of track and field, failure was far more frequent than success; that is, if I measured each by losing or winning. But the losing opportunities provided experience and motivation to improve. With each race, my gains far outweighed my set-backs and my performance leading to eventual ribbons and wins.

In college, my grades varied considerably but, on some occasions, the much dreaded "F" *reared its ugly head*. Yes, I was temporarily floored by the results but after some hours to fume over the matter, the will and determination resurfaced to lead me on to more struggles and challenges. Don't you love it?

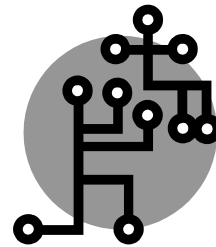
FAITH

The Bible tells us that *faith is being sure of what is hoped for, and certain of what we do not see*. From this same source, many examples and other descriptions of faith are seen in the lives of the righteous; for righteousness comes through our faith in believing, trusting, and accepting Jesus as our savior.



To have faith is to believe without tangible or concrete evidence. Tangible evidence is not necessarily physical evidence but rather evidence *beyond reasonable doubt*. Therefore faith must be established on more than evidence but must include a measure of acceptance, belief, and trust that our hope is indeed the truth.

When you were younger, I would throw you up and catch you; sometimes you would tighten and be afraid while other times you would be exuberant embracing the excitement of going airborne. Your exuberance, or lack of fear, was predicated on faith that I would catch you. At first, you might be afraid and even cry; but after several throws, fear had given way to faith. I would stop at nothing to ensure your safe landing.



Being a believer requires faith – again, by faith the believer is made righteous. Though faith will be tested and may even wane at times, the believer should continue to grow in faith having experienced the riches of God's faith through time and events. As the child's faith becomes increasingly stronger with continuing reassurance (that he will not be dropped), so too should the believer's faith continue to grow as he witnesses the outcome.

The scripture tells us that *faith comes through hearing, and hearing from the word of God*. To grow is to be a student in the Bible and in Bible-based education. By a solid diet of Bible study and application, the believer becomes free from doubt and the *distractions that can so easily entangle and distract*. By diet, I mean that the believer must not be only *a reader of the Bible but a doer as well* – this made possible through the Holy Spirit who enables the believer to *understand the things of the Spirit of God*.

For the believer, what should be certain is that God remains faithful: though we may at times lapse in faith or falter, God remains steadfast and faithful. In a world where there are no absolute certainties, to include the understanding of truth, faith is necessary to ensure that what cannot be achieved or claimed in this world is certain in the world to come. Be good, be faithful.

FALLS



When I think of falls, the immediate impulse is to crawl beneath them and let the cool water cascade over me to the point of total immersion. Falls, and turbulent rivers, invoke a sense of refreshment and vibrancy: the sound, the power, and the surging water provide an ironic sense of solitude, peace, and promise.

The sound can be relatively mild or so overwhelming that it is deafening. Whatever the audible

range, falls gives evidence that the area is alive, nourished, and fertile. The power can be equally varying in range but represents energy able to move and wear rock, unearth plants, and shake the ground around it. The surging water is bound only by the shoals and banks - that shake in its wake while enduring the constant pounding and taking of the swell.

There are several falls in our area. Last year, while in Fort Payne, I enjoyed one set of such falls on Little River Canyon. The picture above was taken from the Internet along with the brief description below.

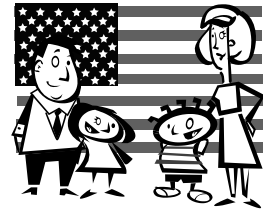
Some day you and I are going to visit these falls and *take them in*; you will know, not just have read about, the falls that are such a beautiful monument to God's creation and such a profound example of water at work. Why, we may just have to take a dip and let some of the overspray pour over us to immersion. We may just have to swim, to play, to experience the sensation of the chilling water followed by the heat of a big rock.

This 14,000-acre preserve protects the nation's longest mountaintop river, which flows for almost its entire length down the middle of Lookout Mountain in northeast Alabama. Over eons of geologic time, Little River has carved out one of the Southeast's deepest canyons as it winds its way from headwaters in Georgia before exiting the mountain and emptying into Weiss Lake near Leesburg, Alabama.

Maybe afterward, we'll have a cook-out and spend the evening roasting marshmallows and telling stories and catching-up on each other. I look forward to such a time, a place, and your presence; I look forward to the falls, the sound, the power, and the surging waters; I look forward to solitude, peace, and promise.

FAMILY

In the same vein as an earlier letter, entitled “Culture”, the traditional family is fast approaching the endangered species.



Many citizens would agree that the family is a vital component or building-block of our society. By some measure, the health of the family may well be an indicator of the health of the community, state and nation. If many families are unhealthy or divided, so too is the large populous for which the families comprise.

Families, whether organized by natural relations or not, provide a sense of foundation, belonging, and bonding or kinship. Ideally, the family should be a support group for each member through love, nurturing, and training; but I realize that such benefits or opportunities may be limited or non-existent in unhealthy or divided families. As much as the family can be a pillar of support, an unhealthy family relationship can be a ruthless source of problems. But I do not believe that divorce is the failsafe solution for the unhealthy family.

Regarding marriage and the traditional family, William Bennett, former Secretary of Education, has argued

...a married couple living with their children is vital to the success of civilization and that today's trends towards people living together in unprecedented numbers and having a record number of children out of wedlock is dangerous. Children suffer without the benefit of two committed parents, and society itself is threatened by turning its back on what he believes is a precious and hard-won historical achievement that safeguards the interests of men, women and children better than any other yet devised.

Social influences of our culture are pressing for a redefinition or broadening of the definition of the family through the mainstream media, television and movie productions, and political forums. A concern could be that as the acceptance and recognition of the family continues to expand or broaden, the influence and role of the family will continue to recede.

A final comment is directed at the television and movie-making industry in particular. Considering the influence of these media on the young populous, due to their maturity and viewing hours, children or young people have little opportunity to examine a healthy family in realistic circumstances. I am not suggesting that children must be educated through entertainment but, in fact, they are being influenced to the degree of emulating what they see.

FARMS

As with falls, active and once-active farms dot the countryside in my area. As I drive along Highway 204, the fields are planted with cotton, soybean, corn and a mix of vegetables or orchards. My experience with farms is limited to little more than a drive-by viewing; therefore, I will have to limit my comments.



My fascination comes with the wonder of dilapidated buildings; also of interest, is the history and what occurred leading to the fallen state of the farm. These farms may include an old farm house, one or more barns, and several other outbuildings – all once providing the livelihood of a family, community, etc. I prefer to see the farms as portrayed in the picture: freshly painted in the classic barnyard red; full of livestock, equipment, feed, and other stuff typical of a farm found in an operating farm. Yes, a farm that is flourishing, alive, productive, and full of promise would be a better sight; but instead, the farms are usually overrun by weeds and the buildings lie in ruin and decay.

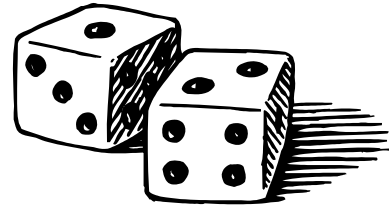
Last night, I attended a musical at a local church called “Hallelujah Heart “: Placed on a farm, the musical involves a pleasant family that includes a grand pappy, ma and pa, and a heap of children. Their guest is a *city slicker* who, as you might expect, does not understand the country life and in particular, the families’ happiness centered on Jesus. Through interaction, music and words, and some resourcefulness on his part, the young *city boy* discovers and embraces their Jesus.

Much can be learned from being on a farm {rather than simply driving by it}. The farm operates to the season and nature. I admire the farmer who has survived an ever dwindling profession and continues the age-old profession. With every food item that finds its way to our stomach, with every cotton article we wear, and every picturesque farm we see along our way, the farmer is due some credit, consideration, and appreciation.



FATE

Fate is described as an inevitable and often adverse outcome, condition, or end. By inevitable, the outcome is unavoidable or is very likely to occur; by adverse, the outcome is bad or a certain death without hope of life here after.



The dice to your right are to represent *the chance nature* of fate; or the idea that outcomes or events do not necessarily follow providence {or God's purpose}, but rather occur without rules are cannot be determined by human control or be predicted with certainty. When you role the set of dice, a total of (36) possible combination can occur as possible outcomes:

- 1 & 1 which can occur (1) time
- 1 & 2 , which can occur (2) times
- and so on a so forth

With each role of the dice, the combination cannot be predicted or the outcome foreknown; that is, with fair dice.

I can think of several board games that use dice: "Monopoly", "Trouble", "Clue" just to name a few. While some skill and knowledge is useful, winning also depends on the role of dice; therefore, the games involve an element of chance, as described previously, coupled with an element of skill. When the role of the dice seems to be in the roller favor, it might be described as being lucky or being *on a role*. When an experienced player (of any game) is winning, it might be described as *beginner's luck*.

Fate and destiny can be used interchangeable (synonyms). Consider the book of Job where both words are used:

- Job 12:5 – Men at ease have contempt for misfortune as the fate of those whose feet are slipping
- Job 8:13 – Such is the destiny of all who forget God...

To summarize, fate or destiny is not completely unpredictable; indeed, probability and statistics can be applied to some dice to obtain some indication of a *likely* outcome(s). The verses from Job indicate that destiny or fate is to some degree fashioned by choices and decisions. Your fate or destiny may be impossible for you to predict but has long been planned and is being realized by your maker. Your creation and existence is not by chance or through some unpredictable chain of events, but has been established before you were born and fashioned by the decisions you and those responsible for you have made, are making, and will make. Fate or destiny; no, I think the accurate word is providence.

FATHER

Twinkle, Twinkle little star
How I wonder who you are
Father, Daddy, Papa, Man
Show me, teach me that I can
Live my life that I may see
The child in you is the child in me



Twinkle, Twinkle little star
It seems that you are very far
And distant from my childhood play
“Goodnight, sleep well” you use to say
So long the time when held me close
And showed me that your love was most

Twinkle, Twinkle little star
Do the stars see him as I see them?
Does he think of me and remember when?
He was with me and was my friend
I pray just now that these stars will be
An Image of him, a reflection on me

Twinkle, Twinkle little star
I think I hear him on the phone
But can I say beyond the tears
Of memories of yesteryears
Where have you gone, why did you leave?
My need to hold, my want to cleave

Twinkle, Twinkle little star
They are confused and well deceived
But someday I hope for unity
To overrule by immunity
From the hold on our need to cleave
The children of which I too conceived

FATIGUE

Fatigue is being tired due to work, exercise, or some other type of strenuous or stressful activity. The activity does not necessarily have to be physical; mental fatigue can result from studying a lot or reading a lot of detailed information.

In the background picture, fatigue is resulting from the girl {maybe a sister} beating up the boy (maybe a brother). She seems to enjoy it while he is obviously enduring it – both are probably experiencing some level of fatigue although he is probably feeling the effects more than her.

Fatigue does not always *send up a red flag*, but may creep every so slowly and eventually make itself known to the brain. For example, a busy day at school keeps you hopping between classes while you prepare for not one but two tests on the same day! By the end of day, you may be *wiped out*, although fatigue has been developing for some time and you burn physical and mental energy.

Physical fatigue can sometimes cause your muscles to cramp; ouch does that hurt with sometimes lasting pain. When I ran track in school, cramps were a typical event for the day; sometimes requiring some assistance to alleviate the knots of bound-up muscle. Stretching and some warm-up exercise is always a good idea to reduce this problem, but I think that cramps are sometimes unavoidable. Even a simple stretch in the morning can send your toes contorting in all kinds of directions.

Well, to bring the letter to a close and allow my typing fingers to rest awhile, let me offer some simple advice regarding fatigue:

1. Fatigue can be limited by eating healthy, staying hydrated, and getting adequate rest or sleep
2. Regular exercise is also helpful and it builds your muscle tone and increase your endurance
3. Regular mental exercise is important, such as casual reading that keeps your mind active, improves your vocabulary, and enhances your imagination.

FEAR

When I was about 10 year old, I saw the movie, “Jaws”. At some point during the movie, one of the characters is diving around a sunken fishing boat to determine if the boat sank on account of the great white shark. Expecting the



shark to show-up, the moment is very tense; but instead of the shark, the head of one the crew float by a hole in the hull of boat. I still remember nearly leaping into the seats behind me. No, I didn't see the shark but was still afraid. The shark had evidently caused the boat to sink and was expected to still be lurking around.

Among the many realty programs currently on TV, “Fear Factor” attempts to shock or scare the viewing audience by having the cast members perform incredible and sometime gross acts. The visual and graphic images, and not the unknown, largely activate fear or disgust.

Fear has arisen in a variety of circumstances, whether in an instant or as a prevailing condition. Fear can limit our abilities by rendering us unable to function or efficiently react to conditions. The fear of failure, such as in a course or in a job, can bring anxiety, dread, and anger. A symptom of the fear of failure is perfectionism - a condition that places more emphasis on the things we do wrong rather than the things we do right. Perfectionism is more than “doing your best” but is based on the falsehood that we can be perfect.

Of all introductions in the Bible, the most common is “fear not”; more often than any other instruction, we are told not to fear. Psalm 27:1-3 tell us

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom will I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life; whom will I dread?...
My heart will not fear...I remain confident

Instead, we are to place all confidence in our Lord – that he will free us of fear that may have *imprisoned* us, and deliver us from those things that have invoked this fear. To remain confident requires patience. In the closing words of this chapter, David says, *Wait patiently for the Lord, Be brave and courageous, Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.* Consider that young David was afraid at times; he cried out to the Lord who enabled fear to turn to praise.

FEED

When a farmer thinks of the word “feed”, he is probably thinking about food for his livestock. When a growing boy or girl thinks about the word “feed”, they are probably either thinking about or actually eating food at that moment; when a parent or adult thinks about “feed” they are probably wondering where all the food goes, and how they can afford to feed the bottomless stomachs of their children.

But when other countries, riddled by famine and other crisis, think about “feed”, they may be concerned with the health and the sustenance of their populous or citizens. It is on this perspective that I continue this letter.

Throughout our world, many people do not eat or have access to food as many of us do in the United States. From television and other media, we learn of the masses that suffer and die of starvation, disease, and deprivation. We may even see pictures that vividly illustrate the condition of villages and the plight of its villagers. In some countries, rebel armies and rouge governments force the weaker and unprotected into exile, prisons or even execution. Many live their lives as refugees, roam the country side forging for food and shelter amid a war torn landscape and continuing danger from the military activity.

Such conditions, as even imagined by our viewing, are impossible for most of us to fully comprehend considering our lifestyle, background, etc. Still, there are some who have survived such conditions and know firsthand the suffering and anguish incurred in these circumstances.

The word “feed” has several meanings but could not represent a more important issue and condition than that described above. At the least, knowing or hearing of such places and people, should raise our attention to the blessings and benefits that we enjoy. For some, the attention has been transferred to action through giving of themselves and the resources – I really admire such people!

FIGHT



When I was a kid in school, fights were not that uncommon. Fights at middle school were the center of conversation for weeks to come. One of my friends was by any definition a fighter, and paid the price with several 3-day periods on suspension. On one of those occasions, he actually left the principals office following a fight, to resume a fight with the same guy – Tony did not back down to anyone!

Fighting should be the least desirable and avoided form of settling an argument or dispute; although it is the easiest form of engagement since it typically involves raw power, fury, and some determination and skill. At the same time, fighting is costly to at least one of the two or more participants. Depending on the type of fight, from an altercation to a full scale war, fighting is costly to everyone and the innocent or noncombatants suffer with the rest.

On leaving (or exiting) Egypt, the Hebrew people were told by Moses that they need not be afraid of the pursuing armies: *The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.* Joshua reminds the people of God's promise: *The Lord has driven out among you great and powerful nations; to this day, no one has been able to withstand you.* He continues: *So be careful to love the Lord your God.*

In the New Testament, Paul urges Timothy to follow the prophecies made about him so that he may *fight the good fight, hold on to the faith and a good conscience.* In the same book, Paul charges Timothy to remain faithful and not be diverted by myths (as others have) but to *endure hardship and to evangelize.* In the next verse, Paul describes himself as having *fought the good fight and finished the race.* Paul was preparing Timothy to continue the ministry while he was nearing the end of his days. If the Lord is with you, than who can be against you.

FISH'EN

When I was young, somewhere between eight and twelve, fishing was one of my favorite pastimes. Much of my fishing took place on the Broad River, a brackish river located in and around Beaufort, South Carolina. On that river, I would catch a variety of fish and would, on occasion, shrimp and crab as well. It was usually a lot of fun.



One of my step-children, Keegan, is a profile fisherman in that he has the one primary attribute - determination. It's not uncommon for him to fish all day and well into the evening; why, he would probably keep going for days if hunger and sleep did not pay a call. He likes salt-water fisherman at his nana's house in Sarasota, Florida; on the pier, he has caught Snook and several other species and critters.

Fishing can be an expensive hobby. Much backwater in this region provides an abundance of fish such as Bass, Brim, and Crappy. For the serious fisherman, or anglers, a large variety of tackle and a fast boat are not uncommon. Last year, at a Cub Scout event, one such professional provided a primer on Bass fishing – it was like watching one of those televised programs on Saturday morning.

I suppose that fishing has been around since the beginning of time. As you may know, several disciples of Jesus were professional fisherman – which was the setting for his first *fishers of men*. Peter, Andrew, James and John gave up their fish nets and joined Jesus' fishing club. Another fishing story of sort, Jonah was swallowed by a large fish or whale; being bait rather hooking the bait is not exactly fishing but you have to admire the size of his catch.



I enjoy fishing on occasion as it reminds me of my youth and the adventures of growing up on a river. Let's go wet-a-line.

FLOWERS

When I was a boy, my mom grew sunflowers in her garden – the type that seemed to grow 4 feet high or more, and yield a very large flower. Getting into mischief, I would hit the flowers and knock off the petals or even down the flower altogether.

Needless to say, flowers meant no more to me than as punching bags. But as time went on, flowers began to be valued as a symbol of caring and affection. While it seems odd to some of us, flowers bring much happiness through the fragrance as well as the appearance.

There are many types of flowers although I probably know only a few by name. Roses come in a variety of colors and are often sent to love ones as a symbol of love and beauty. Other flowers that are found in a bouquet often include daisies, lilies, or carnations. I personally like a mixed set of spring flowers to really bring a room to full color; but roses are usually the favorite of girls and women.



As a flower-beating boy, one of my favorite songs from the hymnal was “The Lilly of the Valley”. I liked that song for the words, the melody, and the opportunity to yell “hallelujah” during the chorus. It was a powerful song that deserved to be sung with boldness and a “cut-loose” attitude. I can still remember: “He’s the Lilly of the valley, the bright and morning star; he’s the fairest of ten thousand to my soul”. The song goes on: “in sorrow He’s might comfort, in trouble He’s my friend...”

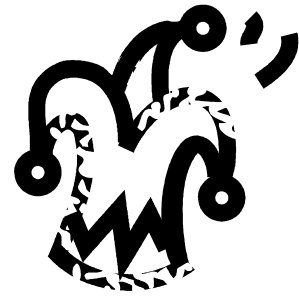
Living on the coast, I have had the pleasure of enjoying the Azaleas during the spring season. Like roses, these flowers bloom in a variety of color making them absolutely beautiful in a cluster. While living in Mobile, Alabama and Savannah, Georgia, I came to appreciate these flowers in particular. As I recall, Mobile has some festival that features these flowers.

Flowers are a beautiful reminder of God’s creation. The elegance and uniqueness of flowers give us a moment if not a lifetime to realize God’s artistic ability and ingenuity. Perhaps flowers are more appreciated and adored by women; and for this reason alone, men should also appreciate them and make flowers a regular part of gift giving for the girlfriend, wife, and mother. Roses, carnations, daises, and other garnishments are the perfect touch to the heart and affection of our ladies – they need flowers if just remind them that they are special and are appreciated by us all. Oh, and do include a sincere card.

FOOL

A fool can be described in several ways:

1. One who is silly or meddlesome
2. One who dislikes wisdom and understanding, but instead chases after folly
3. One who spreads lies or slander and who is deceptive



For the first time in modern history, the English government has advertised and indeed will employ a fool or gesture for their palace or royal court. You may remember, the gesture was a comedian, dancer and otherwise source of entertainment and relief from the drudgery and protocol of medieval life. Garbed in a colorful outfit and hat somewhat like the one above, the court clown was responsible for bringing humor to the palace, castle or countryside.

Referring again to one my recent reads, *Bold Love*, by Dr. Dan Allender:

A fool sees God as an interloper who meddles in the rightful business of life. Consequently, the fool either ignores God or compartmentalizes God and then sanitizes Him to be as he desires. Dealing with God in this way leaves an untouched emptiness in the fool's heart that can never be filled as long as he lives in rebellion. The fool will always be insatiable, always looking for more to fill the emptiness, and even more, to numb the awareness of his hatred of God.

Why does the fool hate God? Could his hatred stem from a tragedy or misfortune in his life that, even if due to his decisions, has been blamed on God? Perhaps, but the fool has spurned God and everything that is Holy for the self-seeking, self-indulgent trappings of the world. Unable to recognize his own inability to control the events of his life, the fool may continue to chase folly until he is brought painfully to the point of honesty and humility – which enables the need for God. To continue ,

A possible reason for the fool's hatred of knowledge (or of God) is an unwillingness to experience fear. Wisdom is gained primarily through personal disruption and pain that urges one to seek understanding of life, and ultimately of God...The fool must bend his knees and extend his hands to ask for mercy, knowing he deserves nothing but condemnation. The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge.

As I close this letter, much more could be included in the description and the characteristics of the fool. In retrospect, I have been such a fool at least once in my life having attempted to forego the pain and suffering of a personal loss with the immediate comfort of the world's enticements; yet, God in his patience and mercy, has allowed me to once again worship and serve him – I am fortunate!

FOOTBALL

It is the fall and, once again, time for the pigskin, the gridiron, and all other descriptions of American football.

I'm thinking that football began in the early 1900's: at first, it was a running sport somewhat like Rugby but continued to broaden in dimension with the pass and other methods of scoring. The oblong ball is a deviation from the Rugby ball but obviously better designed to throw - preferably as a spiral.

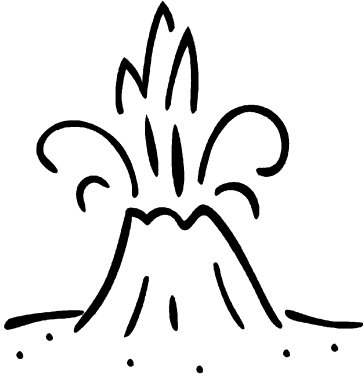


As part of the sport's progress, the players have become bigger and faster through increased conditioning and diet. The combination of speed and weight makes for greater performance but risks of injury. Equipment improvements have countered the risks to a degree; yet, football is a risky sport where a knee or back injury can instantly end a player's season if not career.

From children's leagues to professional, football is perhaps the most popular and watched sport in our culture, drawing large crowds to the stadiums and television screen each weekend. Through its history, the sport has created many heroes or icons for the patrons of the sport. For many who follow the sport with great attention and detail, football remains an annual ritual of entertainment.

Like all sports, and many games, football should produce some level of enjoyment and entertainment whether from participation on the field as a player or staff, or cheering from the sideline or living room as a spectator. Football and other sports have come far from the days when playing was a game; it has emerged as a very lucrative business depending on the interest and investment of much of the general public. The objective to win, the glory of victory, and the agony of defeat is the experience of the player and staff, who do all the work, or the patron who simply watches from the sidelines or television and makes all the right decisions...someone like me.

FORCE



A force can be defined by many examples. A volcano spewing lava is an example of a force – the combination of pressure and heat that defies gravity and the weight of the earth above it. To push a lawnmower or other yard tool, a force is applied through a distance and it is called “work”.

When we walk, forces are being exerted on our body that slows us down: gravity exerts a downward force; friction exerts a horizontal opposing force between your shoes and ground – even air can

create friction! Each of these forces act to both help and to hinder our walk: gravity keeps us firmly grounded (as opposed to floating away) but also opposes our forward motion; friction keeps our feet from slipping but also opposes our forward motion – especially if we are walking in mud or snow. Isn't it odd how can these forces help and hinder us?



In the movie-series “Star Wars”, a spiritual *force* is known by some to exist in the universe. The *force* provides power to “Jedi-knights” or other students of faith; yet, it is seemingly used for both good and evil (or has been abused by Darth Vader and bad company). To stretch this theme, the Bible tells us that *there are spiritual forces in the heavenly realms*. These forces or force may very well represent the Holy Spirit whom God left as our helper during Jesus’ ascension; but also represent forces of evil that are waging war on the good or upright forces.

As believers, we face these forces at times. We may call these forces temptation, evil spirits, the Devil or Satan. In Ephesians, Paul provides instructions to *put on the full armor of God that you may be able to withstand such forces*. Each piece of a knight’s armor is associated with a spiritual weapon: the belt of truth; the shield of faith; the breastplate of righteousness; the helmet of salvation; the sword of the Spirit. Each and all of these weapons are provided by God, through his Spirit, and are outfitted to the praying believer. By being equipped with such weapons, we are able to withstand and even stand victoriously through the temptations certain to come our way.

FORGIVENESS

Several years ago, I unduly punished one of my children. Without describing the circumstances, the act was completely unjustified and my behavior completely out-of-line. Realizing the wrongdoing, I confessed it as a sin, received forgiveness from the Lord, and began a series of requirements aimed at reconciliation. Though the outcome of the requirements was very positive, the intended purpose of reconciliation seemed to fall short from the view point of others.

I have accepted God's forgiveness freely or with the understanding that nothing I have done and can do is sufficient; rather that his forgiveness is a gift made possible through the shed blood of Jesus. In the book of Romans, this gift had the effect of bringing righteousness to all mankind. A creation previously condemned to death by first sin of Adam, were offered forgiveness. In chapter 5, forgiveness has overcome death.

For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this other man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's bountiful gift.

Forgiveness means to pardon for a wrongdoing. Though not necessarily warranted or earned, the wrongdoing is pardoned to allow for

- Repentance – or admitting or confessing to wrongdoing
- Reconciliation – the wanting or process of restoration in the relationship
- Redemption – the wanting or desire that the one who has done the wrong will be restored to God.

Repentance may not occur prior to forgiveness; that is, someone can be forgiven even though they have not yet repented or admitted to wrongdoing. For reconciliation to begin however, repentance must occur as a desired outcome over judgment and condemnation.

Reconciliation allows healing or restoration in the relationship in a form of an invitation to the offender. This step bares cost for both {the offended and the offender} in that one grants mercy while the other must repent. Understand that reconciliation is not the one-sided effort of peace at any cost; rather, it is mutual effort with the central aim of restoration and fulfillment of much desired redemption.

Redemption is necessary for true forgiveness to occur. Redemption represents the desire that the offender be restored to God or the beauty made possible through God's indwelling in their lives becomes visible and real. Just as God redeemed us through Christ, so too can God redeem the offender.

FORSAKEN

Forsaken means to be left behind or abandoned – typically relating to a person or people and not to places or things. A momentary search on the Internet for topics by the name does not result in anything of real interest or knowledge – it seems that the immediate sites are about a contemporary band and a video game, both of which seem to center on doom and survival.

Turning to a second resource, Encarta, a search renders many topics from which I have chosen Abraham's Lincoln's first inaugural address in 1861.

If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet **forsaken** this favored land are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty.

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

In the passage from his address, the President reminds the *fellow-countrymen* of God's continued blessing upon the land ("who has never forsaken this land...") that can sustain the country intake through the issue of slavery and impending war ("all or present difficulty"). Lincoln makes clear that the *dissatisfied* hold a responsibility to the outbreak of war and, if the *aggressor* of such actions, will surely be opposed in the effort to "*preserve, protect, and defend it.*" Lincoln is appealing to the best nature of the citizens – that will not tear asunder was God has *favored*.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, "Why have you (God) forsaken me?" In the Old Testament, while he pursued by King Saul, David made a similar plea to God. In both circumstances, each sensed that God was not with them. In Revelation, the Church of Ephesus is chided for having forsaken their first love, Jesus. The church is urged to take account of *the height from which they have fallen*, and to repent and be healed of their sins.

In both Jesus' and David's circumstances, God was there. The patience and mercy of God to remain faithful, even when his creation is faithless, continues to be the most profound indication of the depth of God's love.

FORTITUDE

Determination is to have a firm intention or purpose. When someone attempts to accomplish something with great energy and determination, they have fortitude and may very well be *unstoppable*. Once again, Encarta is the convenient source for application of this word: St. Augustine uses “fortitude” in his famous work, “The City of God”, as described below.

It is He, then, who has given to the human soul a mind, in which reason and understanding lie as it were asleep during infancy, and as if they were not, destined, however, to be awakened and exercised as years increase, so as to become capable of knowledge and of receiving instruction, fit to understand what is true and to love what is good. It is by this capacity the soul drinks in wisdom, and becomes endowed with those virtues by which, in prudence, **fortitude**, temperance, and righteousness, it makes war upon error and the other inborn vices, and conquers them by fixing its desires upon no other object than the supreme and unchangeable Good.

As I read this passage several times over, the message seems to be that fortitude is one of several enablers to confront and conquer the sinful nature in our natural man; thereby, living a life of goodness over a life of evil. Examples of fortitude, in the application described above, might include Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, John Wesley, William Booth and many more who have dedicated their lives for goodness with fortitude to the point of tireless and never-ending effort. Along the historical timeline, many other followers of Christ have even given their own lives to participate in this *supreme and unchangeable good*.

Outside of the context of Christianity, but remaining focused on this measure of the will, fortitude was well defined in the World War II siege of Leningrad. Well portrayed in the movie *Enemy at the Gate*, the siege and victory over Leningrad was Hitler’s personal objective. Though the Nazi army could have continued around this city toward the much needed oil reserves, the orders were to take the city and thereby demoralize the Russian resistance.

The population of about 3 million was callously left either to starve or freeze to death. By late 1941 the daily bread ration had been cut to 110 g (4 oz) per person, and before long isolated incidents of cannibalism were reported. To make matters worse, that winter was extremely harsh. Nevertheless, the population showed astonishing courage and **fortitude** in the face of such adversity.

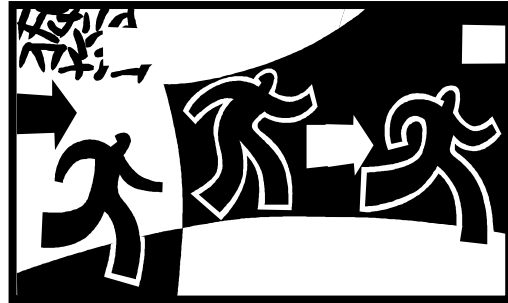
As the movie well illustrates, the impossible odds of survival and victory were accomplished through a will to survive – even to the last person or last meter of land.

Fortitude is generally a quality in that marks unsurpassed and even unbelievable accomplishments; it serves as a lesson and a source of hope to us all.

FORWARD

“Forward” generally defines a direction of advancement: to move forward is to take one step ahead; to not move forward is to do nothing; and to move backward is to fall-back, back-down or back-off.

When Russia was the USSR, the Communist government’s common slogan or mantra was “two steps forward and one step backward” – which meant that the growth of Communism would occur on the basis of two advancements followed by one retraction for overall growth.



Forward is an ideal direction or objective as long as the cause or end is just and right; but sometimes the justification for the cause/end can be questioned, diluted, or refuted based on opinion or interpretation of the means or method. An end or cause for the American Civil War was to preserve/restore the Union; as opposed to the southern states for which the cause was state’s rights (for slavery). The means became war that, as history describes in detail, resulted in unprecedented destruction of our countries’ population and property.

War, or similar destruction by any other name, is difficult to justify by all and generally creates disagreement and division among a free society. As I write this letter, the Presidential race has been the forum for issues surrounding our continued involvement in Iraq. At the center of the argument is the question: How much should we spend (in financial and personnel costs) to democratize Iraq; is such political change and the dissolution of the related sources of terrorism even possible?

These and other questions cannot be completely answered – since the outcome of the effort is not yet realized and the risks or uncertainty remains. The end seems to be a noble one from the perspective of the United States and some other nations; although, an entirely different perspective occurs from other nations and in particular those with Muslim populations. Should the United States continue this effort or has the effort thus far been in vain?

I do not believe the effort has been in vain because of the lives lost and suffered prior to and during the war. I believe that if the effort has limited suffering of the Iraq peoples and is further limiting the re-occurrence of terrorism as that on 9/11 or similar, it is necessary. I do not know whether the effort should continue or for how long or by what conditions. I hurt for the Americans lost before and during the war and for the families who must go on without them. The rest I must think about more.

FOUNDERS

If you added “L” after the “F”, and drop the “S” on the end, you would spell “FLOUNDER” – which is a fish generally dark on side, white on the other, with both eyes on one of those two sides. But the word above is “FOUNDERS” – which pertains to a special day and person of whom I am about to tell you.

Founders’ Day is a celebration that began with a great human being by the name of William Booth. Below is a brief biography thanks to the Web site by the same name.

During his teenage years he became a Christian and spent much of his spare time trying to persuade other people to become Christians too... In 1855 he spent several years as a Methodist minister, traveling all around the country, preaching and sharing God's word to all who would listen... One day in 1865 he found himself in the East End of London, preaching to crowds of people in the streets... The idea of an Army fighting sin caught the imagination of the people and the Army began to grow rapidly. Booth's fiery sermons and sharp imagery drove the message home and more and more people found themselves willing to leave their past behind and start a new life as a soldier in...



...The Salvation Army. Yes, William Booth founded the Salvation Army and the ministry which began in the streets with a tent and emerged as an international organization of humanitarian relief and mission outreach.

William and Catherine Booth were truly dedicated to a great and much needed cause of evangelism to include the physical needs as well as spiritual needs of people. They took to task and a life's work that

- I was hungry, you gave me something to eat
- I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink
- I was a stranger, you invited me in
- I needed clothes, and you clothed me
- I was sick and in prison, and you came to see me.

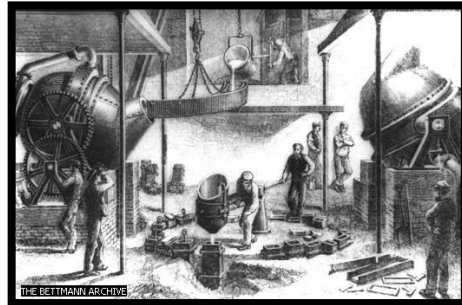


FOUNDING

At first glance, you might wonder about this word, “Founding” - so did I. This word has to do with a once-prevalent metal industry in this area. According to Encarta, Founding is the process of producing metal objects called castings. A description to the right and illustration below should be enough information to *test your metal*.

Founding, process of producing metal objects, called castings, by pouring molten metal into a hollow mold, usually made of sand. The founding process itself is sometimes called casting. It is an ancient art that is still used extensively, although it has been supplanted to some extent by other methods, such as die-casting, forging, extrusion, machining, and rolling.

More generally, Iron and steel manufacturing was at one time a mainstay of Alabama industry; Birmingham was referred to as *the Pittsburg of the South*. As with Founding, Iron and steel manufacturing or processing involved the transfer of solid ore into molten liquid metal and the forming of the metal as it changes back into a solid. Iron, an element in the Periodic Table, is a component of steel along with other ingredients. Iron, steel, and other metals can be formed and shaped into finished products or into structural stock materials for construction of buildings, bridges, ships and similar.



A large employer in my dad’s hometown was Republic Steel; both my grand-dad and my dad worked at Republic for a brief period. The work was, and may still be very strenuous and dangerous. In the movie, *The Quiet Man*, the main character (played by John Wayne) describes his experience in the steel industry as “so hot that you forget the fear of Hell.” I think both my grand-dad and dad would agree with the statement – hard work in a hot, blazing place.

You may recall watching an iron smith heat metal and than forming the metal using his mallet and anvil. Of course, the bright red iron is very soft or *malleable* – which means that the metal is readily formable. Another property of metal, *ductility* pertains to the ease at which the metal can be deformed without damage or destruction.

To associate metal to our development, are you malleable and ductile, or are you brittle and unworkable?

FRIEND

When my youngest child was 3 or 4, he would tell us, “If you do _____, than I will be your friend”. As the background image portrays, a friend can occur among the most unlikely pair and involve the most warming acts. A friend is someone who gives and receives; ideally, a friend is someone who you can count-on or *who will be their through the thick and thin of it.*

If the relationship is strong, the friend is someone whom you trust; otherwise, the relationship may be weak, shallow, and subject to the whims or conditions of the moment. In a popular song by Michael W. Smith, “a friend is a friend forever if the Lord is the Lord of them” describes the Lord’s presence in the relationship can yield unconditional love – the essence of friendship.

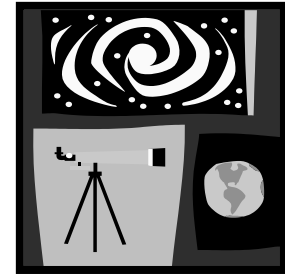
In the movie, *Grumpy Old Men*, the life long relationship between two men is tested by both their conflicting interest in the same lady, and by the a health-related crisis of one of the two men. The mutual affection for the lady and competition for her affection, creates division in the friendship; however, the true essence of the relationship is later realized when the one has a heart attack. As the other man waits anxiously to hear of his friend’s medical condition, the nurse ask the waiting man if he is a family member (for verification and visitation); the answer is simply “no, friend!”.

A life long friend is a wonderful gift. Ideally, this type of relationship is most often between a husband and wife but can certainly, and often does extend to other people. Sometimes friends can go for long periods without having much social interaction, but if the relationship is built on a *strong foundation* or basis, the relationship will last. This foundation is tested by a crisis (or imminent period of need) as the one described from the movie.

Jesus said in John, *You are my friends if you do what I command* – which indicates the relationship desired by Jesus is to be your friend, bound in the greater love where one would *lay down his life for the other.* Do you have at least one good friend?

GALAXY

In your studies, you have probably been exposed to space, the planets, the stars, and the galaxy. You may be familiar with the names, position, and characteristics of many of the celestial bodies that appear on a clear night or through the aid of a telescope or photograph. Space and the cosmos often arise as subject of debate in terms of content, size, properties and other such matter of interests to scientists and those interested in astronomy.



In the small town where I live, the stars can still be seen on a clear night. I have never been that interested in studying the stars and therefore have little detail to contribute to the subject of the galaxy, the stars, and other space matter. Still, I can appreciate those who find the celestial bodies interesting and contribute some time to such studies. I include in this population those who once, and may still, navigate ships through the dark frontage of an ocean voyage to the intended and sometimes uncertain destination.

Most of us are familiar with the *star shining in the east* – the star that led the three wise men to Jesus, the child. I have probably also described in a previous letter, the Psalmist who may be pondering the mystery of the heavens when he *considers the heavens, the moon and stars which you (God) have set in place; what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him...*

Recently, I listened to the book-on-tape, “Apollo 13”. In this account of the troubled, second mission to the Moon, one of the astronauts describes the technical and emotional details of the experience: though they were positioned to land on the moon and to carry out the mission, technical problems and an explosion aboard the ship resulted in a certain aborted and near-perilous mission. A deep sense of loss and sorrow came over the crew with the realization that they would never touch down on the moon; but this sorrow soon gave way to the determination and ingenuity to navigate the module back to earth.

Each of us have our own galaxy which may be ever expanding and filled with wonder, excitement, and a variety of recognized and mysterious matter; like the crew of the Apollo 13, we may not always reach our objectives but the intention and desire must be there. Pray above all, that we return safely from the mission having given our best and having left the rest to the Creator of ourselves, our galaxy, and all that we do not yet see and understand.

GARDENS

I'm not sure if this letter is more about gardens or about love; but gardens and love are sometimes intertwined - which will be the subject and point of this letter.

I can think of several movies that present a garden as a sort of refuge for love and romance – a tranquil reserve for which the two can be enjoined in a relationship without the distractions, obstructions or otherwise interference to such opportunity. The garden is like an oasis in a desert with rich, fertile and living things that naturally voice a word or sing a note that allures the weary and the wanting to a place in which rest, romance and bliss may occur.

In a favorite musical, *The Sound of Music*, young romance flourishes in the garden or atrium as starry-eyed young people sing of promise and commitment for each other amid the divided interest on the impending war and related political changes of the country. The garden is the sanctuary for which such differences may be overcome if just for the period.



Gardens play a similar role in the Bible:

- 🌻 The Garden of Eden - located between two rivers is the designed home for man having all that is needed for a perfect place
- 🌻 Gethsemane - a garden and olive grove where Jesus sought refuge and comfort in prayer to God the Father before his crucifixion
- 🌻 Gardener – God is described as the “gardener” and Jesus as the “vine” to figuratively illustrate that *every branch* {or believer} that does not *bear fruit* {does not grow in their relationship with God} will be *cut off* {will lose their relationship or fellowship with God}

Thinking about a garden, let me clarify that my image is probably more of an atrium (rather than a vegetable garden or orchard). In my imaginary garden, the plant life encircles a fountain or clear, cold creek. The cold water, whether trickling down a brook or bubbling from a fountain has a cooling effect on the surrounding air. The vegetation provides both ground covering and a shroud over this sacred place. The center contains a preferred, bench swing – which provides both comfort and a lulling, soothing effect. The garden is quiet, mystical, and serene.

GAUGES

The topic “gauges” is not exactly an exciting or potentially intriguing topic; but is still important considering we must be able to read such indicators to control the temperature in the room, to *tell time*, to measure the speed of our cars and such, and to understand and regulate a host of other equipment and devices. Gauges are a regular part of our life.



In my work place, gauges are used to:

- ⊗ Regulate air pressure used to power equipment
- ⊗ Measure steam used to heat the facility
- ⊗ Calibrate and measure dimensions of material used to build and to assemble aircraft
- ⊗ Test and qualify other materials and substances for use – to ensure the items are *in-tolerance*

In my home, gauges are used to:

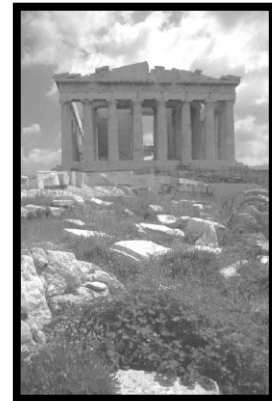
- ⊗ Control or regulate the temperature
- ⊗ Turn-on and control appliances such as the washer and oven
- ⊗ Check the water pressure at the pump
- ⊗ Weigh myself on a scale

The gauge in the picture to your top-right is to measure blood pressure - you may have had your pressure checked during a doctor’s visit.

In this modern age, the dial-type gauges have been augmented with digital LED’s and LCD’s that simply display a number of text instead of using a needle and dial. For some applications, the digital read-outs are OK; but for some others, there is not substitute for the classic analog or dial type read-out. For instance, the car speedometer is a gauge that seems to be holding on to the classic read-out; although a few attempts and applications have occurred with digital read-outs. Looking at my analog watch, the times is 6:00 in the morning – which means I must be *hitting-the-road* but with much attention to the dial on my speedometer.

GREEKS

Greece, the original location of the “Games”, was once again the host city of the Summer Olympics this last year. Perhaps scenes on international television, such as the one to the right, reminded many viewers of the ancient architecture reminiscent of the influence and position of this society before Christ.



At this stage of your educational experience, you may know much more than I can recall about Greece and its history and influence. Instead of attempting a broad discussion of these matters, some small but significant points will follow. The point of this letter is to remind me and you that much can be learned from history and applied to our seemingly-modern age.

Linking Greek history and the an Olympic event, the marathon (approximately 26 miles of long-distance foot racing) was first established in commeration of the Battle of Marathon: a battle and great victory of the Athenians over the much superior Persion Empire; during the battle, a dispatcher ran a long distance to Athens to announce the news of victory and to set in place the event known today by the same name.

According to similar sources, Greek literature reached its height with such works as Homer’s *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These works of literature may have been presented in your studies but, in short, represent a period during or shortly after the Trojan War. One of my favorite movies, *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou*, is based on the second of these works, *Odyssey*. Other recent movies pertaining to this time period and Greek liturature include *Troy* which protrays the wrath of the Greek hero Achilles.

Today, examples of Greek inflence can be seen in abundance: Greek food is common in some circles (much like Italian); Greek fraternities prevail on college campuses; and the Greek language is a common reference point for understanding our own language and content in literature such as the Bible. Other aspects and references of Greecian life can be seen with the discerning eye. Greek architecture is found in the style called *Greek Revival*. So much more could be included but a single-page letter is only the beginning. I encourage to take the journey and discover the Greeks and other old-world civilizations and cultures.

The importance of Greek art and architecture for the history of Western civilization can hardly be overstated, for the Greeks established many of the most enduring themes, attitudes, and forms of Western culture. – Encarta

GIVING

I have often read and heard “It is better to give than to receive”; but is this always true or is it even sometimes true; does it depend on the age of the giver; does it depend on how the giving is received (by the recipient)? Well, I believe the answer to each of these questions is, “sometimes”.



By the name, “giving”, the concept is that a sacrifice of some kind is made for the intended benefit of another, without any expectation or condition placed on the act; in other words, the giver is acting out of love (kindness, generosity, etc.) without any expectation on the receiver.

Children can go both ways on the matter of giving: at times, they may not want to share anything, much less give it away; while at other times, they can be extraordinarily giving - and practically offer anything or everything they believe is theirs to give. In their youth, young people may struggle in both cases being simply oblivious to the gift or to giving...but maybe not in your case. As adults, we still like to receive gifts, but also enjoy giving to those whom we care and love. This same desire of giving may extend to some we do not know personally, but know of their needs.

In the book of 2 Corinthians, we are told to *excel in the grace of giving*. One meaning of grace is an underserved or unearned blessing; another meaning is to have poise or beauty in movement. Drawing from both meanings of grace, “giving” could be thought of as an art form that requires both the desire to offer to others what they do not deserve and to do it without reservation or regret. Giving is a good thing!

But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in love for us – see that you excel in the grace of giving

GLASSES

Eye glasses have been in existence for a long time; and still today are helpful, even essential, for some of us to function. Since I was in the 5th grade, or about age 11, I have worn glasses or contact lens – which is both good and bad.



It is good that I wear glasses because it helps *put things in focus*. My vision is very bad, a combination of myopia and astigmatism, and steadily worsened during my teen years and into young adulthood. Whereas glasses may have been optional when I first started wearing them; corrected vision became a must in my early teens. Being able to have corrected vision has been a real blessing and benefit of living in *the modern world*.

It may be difficult (to wear glasses) because it means that I must depend on some equipment or apparatus to function. When I was younger, glasses meant extra caution when playing basketball or contact sports; it meant some vision impairment in the peripheral vision. In my teens, this limitation was greatly overcome through contact lens; but, the contacts could pop-out at the worst possible time or be knocked ajar at the least. On the one hand, corrected vision was a hassle; but on the other hand, the ability to see was a significant blessing even it meant seeing through an apparatus of some kind.

In the modern world, such apparatus or even surgery can restore or correct vision, but such means for perception are not yet as perfected or prescribed; no, perception can be very abstract or broad in its form and description. Whereas our vision can be diagnosed through medicine and perhaps our own awareness of changes in sight, perception is much more challenging and difficult to examine and to classify. Perception is not precise or scaled by some chart on the wall, but is varied and broad in its potential and range. One may believe that there are God is God because they perceive the scriptures (Bible) to be true in its content; while the other may not believe the same or may believe that any supernatural being exist.

How than can our perception be tested (as in some way or vision) so that our senses are not easily fooled or taken-in by wrong or incorrect information or other potential influences? Again, the Bible is our text and the Spirit is our tutor. If we believe that Jesus is truth, than he will lead us to truth in every matter and areas of our lives – this is 20/20 perception!

GLOBES

When I see a globe, my immediate thought is control – I suppose that having a globe within reach gives me a sense of power as though I were Atlas and could view and manipulate the world at the ease of a handgrip. I also associate the globe with knowledge {from a classroom or library}...but I'll stick to the "control" thing for this letter.



We are told, and have come to accept, that we live in a global society - thanks in part to the expanding economy and by increased and unprecedented communications. Daily reminders of this society include: the many products that we use from international sources such as China and the Pacific Rim; advertising that is written or presented in several languages; and the Internet that enables commercial, casual, and other forms of communication. Your educational resources are probably *well on the road* to instruction on this development; with classes giving much attention to other countries, cultures, religions, and similar. As I remember from a TV ad several years ago, "It's a whole new world order" - whatever that means.

Well, I'm not necessarily ready for a *whole new world order*, but the developments leading to further understanding, appreciation and cooperation with the international community seem both exciting and promising. Our ability to acquire information and to learn through Web resources is a relatively recent development (in my life time) and one that still leaves me awestruck in moments. Satellite communications enables: increased television viewing (now I can watch the same movie in several languages...that is, if I can figure-out how to operate the remote); global positions systems (to help me figure out where I am); and other such benefits.



While I relate a globe with control or power in my imagination, I relate accessibility to global communications and information with control or power in a more-realistic sense – since *information is power*. Still, I cannot embrace the sense of power or control derived from these information sources as being too serious in that a power outage or failure with the associated hardware/software will often render the source ineffective.

Yes, when such aggravation or interruption occurs, my immediate thought is that control and power is, at the most, short-lived and fleeting. As ridiculous as I might think that world-control can be exercised with a globe grasped in hand, control of and power over people cannot be sustained by even the most ardent and determined resolution – eventually the wall will fall, the pressure will blow, and the rocks will cry out.

GLORY

You probably remember that we use to occasionally watch “Glory” - a movie about the first black Union regiment in the Civil War. Although having some graphic scenes and language, the movie was highly recommended as a resource to teaching children about honor and integrity among other character qualities. It is the personal stories of the main characters that I found so intriguing; their quest for “glory” travel different paths but ultimately end up on the same battle field.



One pivotal moment in the movie occurs when the recently promoted Sergeant Major Rollins disciplines the “hate-filled” private, Trip. In the conflict of that moment, Trip takes account of why he is fighting and whom he is fighting. Though admitting that he want “carry the flag” into battle (as an accommodation for his bravery), the private becomes increasingly aware that fighting (and dying) remains a necessary course for freedom. On this understanding, he commits himself in to battle on Fort Wagner and indeed bears the colors to his death along side Colonel Shaw.

Glory is fame or honor; but can also be an expression to give praise or recognition to the Lord. For example, Colonel Shaw uses the expression “Glory, Alleluia” on finding the entire regiment in formation following the Confederacy’s announced policy on punishment of captured, black soldiers.

Believers seek to obey the Lord and, by that, to give glory to the Lord. History bears-out that much personal suffering has occurred because obedience to the Lord contradicts human nature – the way of the world. Though certain to encounter suffering and possible death, a believer is supernaturally empowered to serve the Lord having been set free from the bondage of sin through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Inspiring scriptures include Joshua’s, *but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*; and Paul’s, *to live is Christ, to die is gain*.

In the gospel of Luke, the angels’ announcement of Christ’s birth occurred in the presence of God’s glory. This glory, that brought fear to the shepherds, may have been in the form of a bright light or energy of some kind; but introduced the announcement long waited by the Hebrews – the Savior has come. In the moment of fear, God’s glory brought the good news of freedom for Jew and Gentile alike...for all man.

To draw a parallel to the believer, perhaps Trip (and the entire regiment) had decided that personal freedom, as it were, was not enough; but their purpose was to fight that all may be free, that all may one day meet in Glory.

GOLDEN

One of my favorite movies has to be *Paint Your Wagon*. In this hilarious story about the California Gold Rush, several miners find themselves together in a makeshift town that they name, “No Name City”. The possibility of their village being an actual township is of little interest relative to the prospect of finding the *mother-load* vein of gold.



A musical-comedy, *Paint Your Wagon* is replete with the theme that gold and fortune are all that matters – everything else is of little consequence.

This theme is well described in words from the chorus of the main song, “Where are yaw going I don’t know, when we’ll yaw get there I don’t know, all that I know is I am on my way...” This carefree, nomadic-type lifestyle does have its drawbacks however, as some of these fellows find themselves in the midst of civilization (rather than on the edge of it as they prefer); still, they are able to put their creative, subterranean minds together to concoct a method for collecting gold dust from below the saloons and gambling joints.

Gold and things that are golden are appealing (why even Golden Grahams is likely a favorite cereal). Gold and the use of golden color have many applications:

- ☀ Dental work and electronics use gold because of its physical and chemical properties
- ☀ Even though the insignias on automobiles are not actually gold, the higher-end or luxury vehicles will often have gold insignias just because something golden implies wealth
- ☀ Jewelry is head-and-shoulders the most widely viewed application of gold – adding some to your wardrobe helps accent your, well, head-and-shoulders
- ☀ Gold is the international standard for wealth and value
- ☀ When employees are gracefully forced to retire, they are said to have a *golden parachute*
- ☀ “Silence is Golden” – especially to someone subject to a lot of noise
- ☀ The highest award of the Olympics is a gold medal



So, if yaw think ye’ might-a hit pay dirt or there’s gold-in-them-there-hills – do your old partner a favor and let him know about it – I’d be obliged!

GOLF



I know so little about the sport of Golf but let me see if I can just play-it-through. First, Golf has two types of clubs:

- Clubs that go in your Golf bag and are used to swing at the ball, plow up the grass {that would be a divot}, or to hurl on the occasionally “bad day” – clubs come in a variety of sizes and types to include the driver, the wedge, the putter.

- Clubs that the golfer belongs to and are social to include a clubhouse at times

Other necessary or optional equipment includes:

- Golf balls – which come in several brands, types and colors
- Tees – which essentially elevate the ball for the initial swing called the drive
- Shoes – which have metal spikes in the bottom for good traction and foot-hold during the swing
- Clothing – no real standard or uniform although the more expensive courses may require certain attire
- Hat – any type will do although a cowboy hat would probably get in the way and lead to using the club as a cattle prod
- Patience and Endurance – Golf is a slow but a methodical sport that generally takes several hours to play 18 holes
- Towel – not for showering after the game but for wiping off the clubs during the game
- Caddy – this too is optional although a caddy and a cart can reserve energy for the game
- Cart – fun to drive around the course even if you don’t play
- Gators – if you live in Florida, a gator is a must to make the game more exciting and provide additional challenges over the occasional pond, sand trap, or bunker



GRACE

Often the word “grace” is associated with prayer at the meal, someone’s name, or controlled or flawless movement such as a swan on lake; but the word also pertains to the love and favor of God toward men. It is the last description of this word that is the subject of this letter and, I should add, is central to Christianity.

You may know the scripture, *for by grace you have been saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it is a gift from God.* Being a gift, grace is neither earned nor deserved; instead, it is simply a gift - but a gift above all other gifts. In the Bible, grace is offered to wicked people – even though they continue to do wicked things. In the Gospel of John, Jesus was *sent from the Father, full of grace*; in turn, *from the fullness of Jesus’ grace, we have all received one blessing after another.* Many other accounts of grace given to man are described beginning in the book Acts and continuing through the book of Revelation – but why are we given grace?

Simply, because God loves us and has endowed grace to us without conditions or prejudice; he has enabled us to receive his mercy and his blessings in order that we might be reconciled unto him and to live with him forever. Without grace, we would have no chance of reconciliation, no chance of salvation, no chance of redemption, no chance at all!

As hard as this circumstance may seem, the advent of grace should be a relief of unparalleled proportion; it is an enabler for any meaningful friendship, for marriage, and for our relationship with Jesus as described above and in many places of the Bible. Our salvation rests on Grace!

As a final “Point of Grace”, Jeff Bridges (a Christian writer, Navigators) clarifies that injustice cannot be overlooked on the basis of grace. Grace enables our salvation and relationship with God; yet it not a substitute or replacement for our humble commitment to him and love for him. Though we may receive grace in that it is a gift of God, we must accept this gift with the gratitude, thanksgiving, and appreciation that lead to love, honor, and respect.

A gift is not to taken for granted or taken lightly - but comes with a cost bore by the gift giver. In the case of grace, the cost was beyond measure and understanding...but the benefits, dividends, and rewards are as well.

God, however, cannot exercise mercy at the expense of His justice. He cannot choose simply to overlook sin because He feels sorry for us. God's justice must be satisfied. Yet many people seem to have that concept of grace. They think of God as loving and kind, as one who will pardon our sins without regard to justice. But if God pardoned our sins in that manner, that would not be grace. That would be a miscarriage of justice.

GRANDPARENTS

Grandparents are important in the lives of their grandchildren; often, these most-wise members of the family have the luxury of time and of *limited liability* giving them great opportunity to spoil the children of their children. Grandparents take a range of roles in this opportunity:

- Some are retired from all such opportunity
- Some get involved as they are able due to health, distance or other constraints
- Others are reliving their parent role as custodians of their grandchildren

But in all three circumstances, and everything in between, grandparents have great opportunity in the eyes and view of that child, their parents, and the community.

My parents' decision to move back (or near) to their hometown during my teen years gave opportunity for me to spend some time with my grandfather. He was retired from Goodyear after many years of service and spent his days reading, working crossword puzzles, driving my grandmother here and there, and watching college football during the season. Every once-in-a-while, he would take his gun and go shooting or wet-a-line just to enjoy the outdoors. He loved the outdoors having spent much of his youth on the Warrior River. Anyway, he was still very much a kid in some respect, and enjoyed kidding around, telling jokes, and teasing and tricking the grand kids to the point of tears, if possible.



As most of us had learned from experience, walking behind our grandpa in the woods could be dangerous: he would invariably pull-back a branch and *let it go* just at the right moment to whack one of us across the face; again, one of his teasers or tricks. But, while crossing a creek on this venture, he slipped off a log and fell in – I mean he was fully immersed – receiving a much needed baptism for the sins committed against his poor, innocent grand kids. After a moment of hilarious, but internal laughter, I reached down and helped him out. The expression on his face and his soggy appearance remains a Kodak moment.

I could spend hours describing the great cooking, the warm pallets during a sleep over, the games of Rook and board games, the trips to the lake and to the woods, and much more. In short, my grandparents will never be forgotten for who and what they meant to me. Their willingness, ability, and accessibility during those years meant so much to us all.

GRAVE



In my *neck-of-the-woods*, a cemetery is still a common sight of the property surrounding an church. Just down the street is one of these churches by the name of “White Gap Baptist Church”.

It seems unusual that a cemetery would be located next to a church. Based on casual observation of old churches, dating back to as far as the 1600’s, the adjacency of the two were common if not the rule. It seems only right that the physically living and dead could coincide on the same property. The living could give reverence and honor to those *who have gone on, passed, have gone to be with the Lord*, or similar description.

The sight of a cemetery can invoke several reactions depending on your age and other circumstance:

- it can give us a sense of our mortality
- it can give us a chill in that the cemetery is so often associated with ghosts
- it can be somewhat beautiful with the uniform monuments dotting the landscape, or fascinating and interesting with the varied designs and times of the monuments
- it can be memorable of a previous burial or the love one’s that passed by-and-by

Among the most awesome, the military cemeteries invoke a thought of the many that have made *the greatest sacrifice* for peace and freedom. As you already know, Memorial Day is a national time set aside for this very purpose of honoring the fallen of all wars and military actions.

In my fair city, Memorial weekend is marked by families and friends gathering at these churches and cemeteries to continue the tradition of remembering those who gave themselves to a cause – for which we have cause to honor, to decorate, remember, and to never forget.

Celebrated in most states on the last Monday in May, Memorial Day is a time to remember the U.S. men and woman who lost their lives serving their country. Originally known as Decoration Day, it was established in 1868 to commemorate the dead from the Civil War. Over the years it came to serve as a day to remember all U.S. men and women killed or missing in action in all wars.

GUIDANCE

Aircraft, missiles, and other such equipment and vehicles have guidance systems that, as the name implies, guide the vehicle from point A to B. Even the most skilled of vehicle operators rely on guidance systems to ensure that the vehicle remains on track or on course toward its destination.



Guidance can be come in many forms. For some ground equipment, guidance can be mechanical such as a train operating on tracks and switches or electrical using wired or wireless communications. At this point of the conversation, the details become cloudy as to conversion of signals into data, and data into mechanical movements. Whatever the means or mode, the guidance of vehicles and other systems is essential to performance and safety.

One image that immediately comes to mind is a ship and a lighthouse. You may remember from *Pete's Dragon*, that the lighthouse was necessary for Pete's father to navigate his ship into the harbor. A heavy storm caused the ocean tide to surge and kept snuffing out the lamp in the lighthouse. The dragon, considered to be threat up to that point, became the hero by using his fire breath to ignite the lamp. Pete benefited from both his father's safe passage and the dragon's safekeeping.



When I see a lighthouse, an image comes to mind of a ship navigating rough waters while using the land based beacon of light as its reference point. Another guidance system, tugboats also guide ships into ports – but this image does create the same effect.

Jesus said, *I am the light of the world.* The book of Psalm relates the Word the light - *Your word is a lamp into my feet and a light into my path.* God is our guiding light and, through his Word and his Holy Spirit, guides us. Again, Psalm described this relationship as

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye

Whether floundering in the depths or pressed by the crashing tide, we must fix our sight on the Lord and stay the course through these troubled waters.

GUILT

Guilt sometimes suggests the breaking of the law, but it can also be a sense of having committed an offense. If you take something that belongs to someone else, you may have a sense of wrongdoing – this is guilt. When you are accused and convicted of theft – this is being guilty. When you have a prevailing sense of guilt or wrongdoing from the past, you have remorse. Another word similar in nature, shame is a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt. The definition and distinction of these words gets very confusing; but, the words are very important in the context of the primary word, guilt. The information below comes largely from L.A. Rounds via the Web site: www.soaringhigher.org.

Guilt can be:

- Real - having been accused and indeed having committed an offense
- Implied - having been accused with allegations – that are not true or proven
- Imagined – having thought you committed an offense – but not certain

Guilt is described as an *outward* condition or circumstance that can be forgiven through the desire/action on the part of the offender or accused, and/or on the part of the offended by like desire/action. For example, I said something that really hurt someone's feelings. Having realized the consequences of my action, I ask for forgiveness or I apologize. They (the offended) could also describe their hurt to me and ask for an apology from me. Ideally, forgiveness is sought by the offender, and accepted and granted by the offended – this leads to reconciliation.

Shame is a sense that you are deficient, inadequate or *can never measure up*, defective, worthless or otherwise deceived of your value and worth. Sometimes *shame-based* discipline or control is exercised by those closest to us, and can occur as verbal abuse and a general attitude that *you will never measure-up* to their standards; consequently, you may develop a poor or low self-esteem. With low self-esteem, you are more prone to seek acceptance from anyone and everyone, more prone to poor decisions and choices, and more prone to mistakes and failures.

Hope, healing, and freedom from shame can only occur through a relationship with God. Remember that God accepts us, loves us, and has a purpose for us – each and every one! The unconditional love and acceptance offered through God alone is the remedy for the tired, deprived and abused shame-based individual. No longer bound by the conditions that created the shame in the first place, you are released or set free. Yes, mistakes and wrongdoing do occur; but God has put in place a process for forgiveness and reconciliation – all the long, still loving us more than we can every comprehend.

HAIRCUTS

A haircut has generally been a welcomed event about once-a-month or so. My preference is to establish a reliable, trustworthy barber and dedicate my curly hair to their steady hand and cuttery skills. My favorite shops are the older, classic, 50's style; with the swirling sign in the front and heavy, chromed chairs.

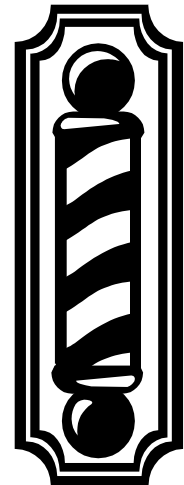


When I think of a barbershop and haircut, my preferences can be summed up in just one word, "simple." The store front should be modest with a picture window to see the activity inside. The chairs and other appointments should be equally as modest with a combination of sports, outdoorsmans, auto and other themes hung on the wall and stacked on the magazine rack. The conversation should be light to moderate although I tend to listen to the barber more. He usually has some sound judgement and valuable substance probably gained through years of practiced conversation.



Pricing or rates are important too. I don't think of myself as cheap but I don't like to pay too much either...my hair style is simply not worth the added expense. A tip is always important; thus, I usually pay \$2 but could pay more depending on the rate, my momentary whim, and the atmosphere and conversation.

One of favorite add-on's to the trim is shaving the back of my neck – the sensation is great, the neck is clean, and the smell and soothing of the Talc powder is very refreshing. The barber shop is a great place to relax, sit back in a comfortable chair, and worry little about time. The barber shop should be a place of refuge from the busy world less appreciative of rhetoric, dialogue, and banter that makes it special.



HAMMER

There are several types of hammers from the small, docile carpenter's hammer to the sledge-hammer and mauler. A hammer is probably the most rudimentary tool for fixing things. The term, "if it don't work, get a bigger hammer", suggests that if you can't fix it, you can beat the heck out of it in frustration. Using a hammer and being frustrated is probably not a good combination – your fingers deserve to be protected.



Using a hammer, or hammering, can be very satisfying. On the surface, hammering seems like an easy task composed of a lift, a stroke, a blow, and a return; but half of hour of effort on the part of a novice can quickly change the mind of even the most determined hammerer-want-a-be. With practice and concentration, some progress can be made to improve but not guarantee that the hammer and intended surface meet with ideal contact, impact, and result.

A hammer is considered to be harder than most materials. The handle of a hammer use to made of oak or other hardwood; but today, the handles are sometimes made of hard plastic or similar substance that is more resilient and forgiving than the wood of before. Of course, the hammer head continues to be made of steel whether cold-rolled steel (which is subject to rust) or stainless steel (which does not corrode easily). If a hammer happens to break, my recollection tells me that it would more likely be the handle and not the head.

Every household needs a hammer if just to hang pictures for decorating. Make sure that the hammer is kept away from young children that are very willing to explore its use on just about anything or anyone. Also, as a matter of safety, make sure that you wear safety glasses while using the hammer. Finally, try to have a tool belt to place the hammer when not use – it looks real cool.

HANGAR

This letter is not about coat hangars, but is about aircraft hangars like one sketched to your right. The inside of a probable World War II wing-skin shop, this sketching is actually a rendering from the Naval Air Station, Jacksonville. Unable to locate the artist, my only reference is that the photograph came from a Naval Air Depot and is apparently one of many of his works having a similar theme.



I will try to credit or reference the artist at a later date, but could not pass-up the use of this fine image of aircraft mechanics repairing and reconditioning aircraft wings, flight controls, etc. Whereas aircraft skins, or surfaces, of military aircraft are fabricated from aluminum and composite materials in the modern age, the aircraft in the sketch had fabric or silk-type skins.

Hangars can be large with enough space and height to accommodate multiple aircraft. The hangar complex of my employer is over 1.5 million square feet; that is about (26) football fields! The complex includes (10) bays or hangar sections; each bay can hold (5) large aircraft; the complex can conceivably accommodate (50) large aircraft. Inside the hangar bays, the space is generally very open – this order to move the aircraft from one position to another with relative ease and efficiency. The aircraft usually follow a assembly line with inductions or entry at one end of the bay and close-out or exists at the other end – a flow through shop!

Some hangar space is dedicated to shops that process and provide small parts; other space is dedicated to storage for these parts and for purchased material; still other space is for painting and line-side support of the aircraft assembly flow. Intermixed and integral to these areas are many employees that work directly on the aircraft and parts or support those who do the direct work – I am one of those who support those who do the direct work.

Hangars offer an interesting value proposition: the value of the hangars is dependent on the number of aircraft currently on-site and under work. If the hangar is completely empty {without aircraft}, it is worthless; but if filled with lots of aircraft and a beehive of activity, the hangar is priceless!
Got-to-go now – I must help fill this hangar up.

HAPPINESS



Happiness is said to be a state of mind. When I was a boy, in the 1970's, the "happy face" was a popular image on t-shirts, decals, and other items. Variations of this face were also visible, but the happy face was image that brought a moment of gladness if not a smile to all faces present.

How is happiness acquired, or maintained? The great Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle believed that happiness was found "in different ways" – the result of which was "different modes of life and forms of government." He also believed that "happiness depends on ourselves" – not on any other or any thing.

Different men seek after happiness in different ways and by different means, and so make for themselves different modes of life and forms of government.
-- Aristotle



You may know of Anne Frank, famous teen-diarist, who spent two years in seclusion during World War II. Narrowly evading the Gestapo police, she recorded her experiences in what later would be published as "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl." At age 15, she died of a disease in a Nazi concentration camp; but still prevailed in her courage as a victim of the Holocaust.

Anne was clearly in a life and death circumstance, having every reason to lay aside her happiness. In spite of these grave circumstances, she believed *that people are really good at heart*. It seems impossible to understand how she could maintain such an attitude - yet she did!

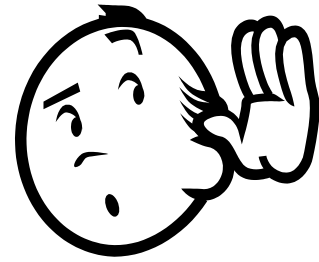
"I keep my ideals, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart."
-- Anne Frank

Of all my mistakes in life, one of the majors was the notion that I could make others happy or, more specifically, that I must make others happy...that this is my responsibility. I struggled for years to fulfill this responsibility but, as certain, failed in the end of a long-term relationship. How much it would have relieved us both if I had simply admitted that I am not responsible and, though my promise is to love, honor and cherish, it cannot render certain happiness.

At the root of happiness is a personal decision that demands our attention to and desire for our source(s) of hope. For believers, the source of this hope is Jesus Christ. The book of Philippians tells us, *Delight yourselves in the Lord, yes, find your joy in him at all times*. I pray that you have found this source of hope, joy, and happiness.

HEARING

It is one thing to hear, but it is another thing to understand. It one thing to see, but it is another thing to perceive. You may hear my words but you may not be listening enough to understand the meaning; you may see my actions, but you may not be watching closely enough to perceive my intentions.



Sometimes, I am so busy trying to prepare to say something or be heard, that I do not listen to the comments of others. Sometimes I am so concerned about how I look or what impression I am making that I do not observe others with sufficient detail. In both circumstances, I am missing-out because I am not using my senses to learn, to understand, and to respond properly. If my emotions are heightened, such opportunity is even less likely. Help me God to be silent and attentive, to listen and to understand, to see and perceive with accuracy and resolve.

What does it mean to perceive? How does the ability to perceive, or perception, occur? It means to use your senses to the maximum. These senses include sight, smell, hearing, touch, and vision; but, also the sense that comes through Jesus Christ – the spiritual sense. It is this last supernatural sense that will be the topic of the remainder of this letter...and maybe more letters.

In the Book of Isaiah, and in several New Testament books, the following scripture is presented: *Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.* The scripture continues by indicating that such a condition occurs when our hearts become calloused; when we lose sensitivity to and love for other people enabled by God through Jesus. Continuing in the scripture, this condition will prevail as long as we remain convinced that we do not need God, that the absolute truth (the Bible) offered by God is not important or desired, and that the blessings of God are of no value and purpose in our destiny. This condition is to reject Christ as Savior and Lord.

To reject our Lord will mean a certain destiny of destruction and death; for without him, we have no hope, no faith, no love...nothing but flesh for this time. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy:

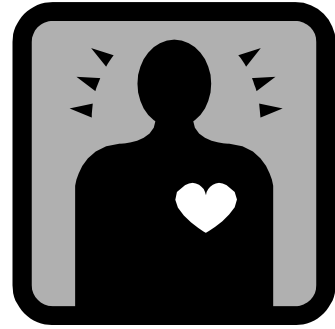
What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in you.

The Holy Spirit, our helper and intercessor, is the “spiritual sense” that allows us to hear, to learn, to embrace, and to be that which God has purposed for our lives. From his presence, we are able to understand and perceive.

HEART

When I think of the word “heart”, several meanings come to mind:

- ♥ The organ than pumps and helps circulate blood
- ♥ A spirit or courage – *Seabiscuit had the heart to win the race*
- ♥ The central or core part – *Here is the heart of the matter, children are a gifted from God*
- ♥ An indication of love or compassion – *She had a heart for old horses left otherwise to the pasture*
- ♥ Center of our emotions, our attributes, our values; from which comes our thoughts, our words, our actions, and all other aspects of our personality, behavior, our will and the way in which we live



The last of these five meanings is the focus of this letter and, let me add, a very important word among all the words contained in these letters.

In Matthew, Jesus tells us: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.* Continuing in this book, Jesus tells us: *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Other scriptures within the same book also indicate that the heart is a processing center: the patterns of our thought-life, the words expressed toward others, and the actions applied in our lives are all indications of the condition of our heart. God is able to understand our heart, to change our heart, and to transform that heart toward purity – from which comes thought patterns, words and actions that are pleasing in his sight.

In some passages of the Bible, the heart is described as being calloused are hardened; a description of one who cannot or will not listen, accept and practice the will and purpose of God. Romans describes the heart as being “darkened”

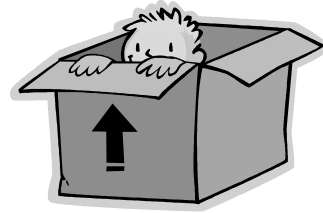
For although they knew God, they neither glorified as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened...

or in state such that the worship of God as God is not possible; instead, that hearts in such a state are foolish and result in foolish thinking.

You may remember the children’s song that included the following words: *In to my heart, in to my heart, come in to my heart Lord Jesus; come in today, come in to stay, come in to my heart Lord Jesus.* Such a request made into song is the essence of the relationship with Jesus: a simple yet certain decision, desire and request to have Jesus come into our hearts and change our hearts to that of his own. By such a transformation can we think, speak, and act in his character and life.

HIDDEN

The game of hide-n-seek is still a favorite of children. What is it about this game that makes it so intriguing and timeless to the children from age 3 to age 13?



The word “hidden” invokes a level of excitement; especially, when it precedes the word “treasure”, “money” or something else of value.

The excitement comes not just in the possibility of finding the hidden wealth but also the adventure and suspense in the process. Maps, clues, legends and other signs make the adventure that much more captivating.

“Treasure Island” is a classic story of hidden treasure buried on a tropic island. The story is told through the experience of a boy who befriends a much sought after pirate by the name, “captain”.

Realizing that the captain’s sea chest contains an equally sought after map of buried treasure, the boy must act quickly to protect the captain and ensure that the map does not get into the wrong hands. I highly suggest you read the book and watch the video; better yet, have Matthew read *it to ye good mate - as ah read the book to him in his younger days when he was just a wee lad.*



This word “hidden” is used on many occasions in the Bible:

I have hidden your word in my heart that I may not sin against you
- Psalms
...and if you look for it {wisdom} as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you
will understand the fear of the Lord
- Proverbs
He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness and light dwells in him
- Proverbs
I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world
- Matthew

HOLY

What does it mean to be holy? When I think of holy things, my immediate thought is the Bible simply because of its full title, “Holy Bible”. The Bible is holy because the message is created by God. Though people wrote the words and though some of the content is about people who made mistakes (or sinned against God), it is holy by virtue of its origin and *divine quality*.



If the Bible is holy for reasons described above, is the church holy for similar reasons or by association to the Bible and God? The church building and property may be consecrated to God or dedicated to the work and glory of God; but, being holy is more applicable to those who make up the church body or congregation. Each of these believers is a *temple of God*; collectively, they compose the church body and are described as the *bride of Christ*.

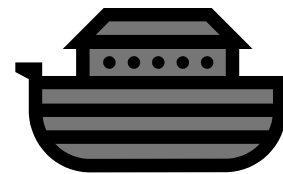


As a believer, we are called to holy or to be set apart Peter, in the books by the same name, urges us to live holy lives:

- *You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming*
- *But you are a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God*
- *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices...*
- *Be Holy, because I am Holy*

Set apart from the world, from this earthly place, and becoming more like Christ who is Holy.

Are all things made or designed by God, Holy? Well, Noah may have been disappointed and discouraged if the hull of the Ark has been “holy” - he may have spent a lot time bailing and may have had to employ the elephant to use its natural pump.



HOME



Home is where the heart is; Home is where you hang your hat – several of many sayings that describe the place described as “home”. For whom ever lives in the house shown to the left, the home is really defined by the family. Of course, with a home comes a hometown, home state or nation for which we associate ourselves as a citizen or resident. Even within a large, extended family, we may be described as the children of our parents, the

brothers or sisters of another sibling, and so on.

But do we really have such a home whether house, family, city, state or other?

In the 1980’s, a contemporary Christian band, “Petra”, produced an album entitled: “Not of this World” (an album is like a CD except larger, black in color, and made out of vinyl). The theme of the album was that Christians are really *not of this world* but are aliens, sojourners, or something other than native. Since we are aliens, the previous association to our home does not really apply...at least not in eternity; therefore, the sense of home is not really where we were born, where we live, or our family; rather, it is place in eternity for which we are waiting to arrive, to rest, to be a peace, forever.

I have trouble conceiving the open-ended span of time called eternity; likewise, I have difficulty understanding what heaven must be like – since I have nothing to draw a comparison. Some days I think little on this matter while there are other days that I think solely about this matter – I shouldn’t have to tell you about which of days are typically bad days when I’m thinking “Stop the world, I want-a get off”. But I don’t think that is what Paul meant when he said: *Do not love the world or anything in the world*. In these moments of mine, relief and perhaps sanctuary are the immediate desire; but longing and anticipating for eternity should be a prevailing desire based on our love for Jesus.

The world (to include our earthly home) has many enticements, comforts and other attractions; why, it is sometimes the only place we have *to land* and, ideally, to find acceptance and love. But aside from how good or bad we consider this earthly home, our desire should remain steadfast for eternity and the *things that are eternal*. Imagine for a moment your greatest desire. With this greatest desire, the outcome could never begin to measure-up with eternity.

HONESTY

Some of the information contained in this letter comes from Erwin Lutzer's: *Why Good People Do Bad Things*. My desire is to be honest in all matters and in relationships but, as Lutzer writes, this desire and practice must begin with God.

Honesty has several meanings to include: trustworthy; frank or open; genuine; or gained by fair means. Consider the following possibilities:

- If I lie or cheat on a test, than I am being dishonest
- If I have committed a crime or offense against someone, but deny it, than I am being dishonest
- If I make an allegation toward someone but know it is not true, than I am not telling the truth and am being dishonest
- If I hurt or am in pain {emotional} about something that happened to me or someone I care about, but do not pray about it or ask for healing {for the other and myself}, than I am living in denial or not being honest with myself and with God – although he knows or hurt and pain
- Finally, If I intentionally lie to others whether once or routinely, I am attempting to deceive and mislead them – which is being dishonest

In the book of Job, friends of Job attempt to encourage and console him during much suffering and pain. Although their intentions are worthy, the friends' express reasons or causes for Job's suffering or pain that are simply not accurate or right. In the final chapters, Job says: *Let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless*. Essentially, Job is refuting or denying the reasons or cause alleged or expressed by his friends. Job did bring about this suffering and pain by his actions or behavior; indeed, he was *blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil*. The friends were not intentionally trying to mislead or misdirect Job; therefore, they were not being dishonest.

In a much earlier story, Satan (as a serpent) deceives Eve by convincing her that eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil will not cause her to die. Contrary to God's command and, with full intention to alienate man from God through disobedience or sin, Satan convinced Eve that God's command was simply not true or authentic. The Father of Lies, Satan conceived and planned this act with the full intention of ending man's relationship with God. For this act on Satan's part, both man and the serpent incurred God's judgment.

Again, the first example is not an example of being dishonest – because the friends' intention was sincere and earnest though yielding the wrong reason or cause; however, the second example is a blatant or obvious form of being dishonest. Help me to be honest in all things, in all ways, and in all relationships by your presence in my life and your truth within me.

HOUSEKEEPING

Housekeeping is simply the practice of cleaning-up after yourself and others. This is an important word and responsibility in a household, office, factory, or other private or public place.



“Why is it so important?” - is a question frequently asks by most young people who have not yet grasp the benefits or value of housekeeping. For this age of wonder, chores are often an inconvenience with few exceptions.

In our vigil to underscore and engrain the importance, we adults are most concerned that you may turn out like us; hence, much painstaking effort is applied under the guise that we were definitely more responsible at same age. Thus our central question: “Why can’t you be more like me {who was responsible at such age}?”

Though I have had limited exposure to the military discipline, my recollection, coupled with a lot of war movies, suggest that the military is perhaps the originator of housekeeping. Whether an encampment or boat, the military seems to make housekeeping *the first line of defense*. Maybe I know the reason.

If the military can train and sustain housekeeping, the soldier can fully apply himself to a real crisis during battle. I am sure there are



military conditions that easily take precedence over housekeeping, but the routine and mundane aspects of detailed cleaning must instill much needed discipline to carry out the duties of the day and in the battle to come. If John Wayne can do it, so can our children.

I believe in housekeeping because it teaches us to respect and manage the things that we have, or use, or enjoy. It also teaches us to respect the things we share with others and to be considerate for their interests and needs.

HOPE

My first viewing of the movie, *Hope Floats* occurred during some post-divorce counseling called Navigating the Family. In this movie, a woman played by Sandra Bullock is going through a difficult period following divorce – she is grieving over the loss of her marriage and of love. During this difficult period, she returns to her hometown to live with her mother. She also has a young daughter that is suffering some separation anxiety from the father and, in reaction, is on less than good terms with the mother, Sandra Bullock.



“Hope floats” because Sandra is able to endure grieving by learning to accept that certain matters are beyond her control and that, no matter how much she thought she tried or indeed did try, the marriage could not be saved by her alone. With time, her healing arises through the stages of grief:

1. Denial - unable to come to terms or to realize the loss
2. Anger – asking the question “why did this happen to me” and finding someone or something to blame
3. Bargaining – wanting for the person, place, or thing to return or come back
4. Depression – sudden extreme feelings of loss, hopelessness, and frustration
5. Acceptance – treasure your memories and am able to move on with your life

On reaching acceptance, Sandra is able to resume her life under the radical changes resulting from separation and divorce. For some people who experience grief over divorce or other loss, the first four steps may perpetuate in a cycle without transition to acceptance, healing, and good health. In this cycle, the individual can retain one or more of the symptoms and remain less than healthy.

How does “hope float” or remain alive in us? How do we manage grief? Well, I know that the stages described above take time, and sometimes a lot of time. Since grief represents pain, the desire is to overcome grief as quickly as possible – but time remains a certain factor that allows us to fully process each stage and emerge, preferably, as a better person. I also know that prayer, both our own and that of others, is important – after all, *faith is being sure of what is hope for and certain of what we do not see*. The Bible contains numerous references to hope but, in general, our faith or belief in God’s promises is the predecessor for hope. When we begin to realize that nothing in this world is certain except God’s promises, then we truly can acknowledge that hope does float.

HUMBLE

To be humble is to lower oneself to a point of limited pride or the sense that you have not earned or deserved the things that belong to you. These things may include the basic physical, mental and emotional functions such as:

1. The ability to walk, talk, and otherwise use your body for its intended purpose and functions
2. The ability to think, learn, and develop your mental capacity
3. The ability to laugh, cry, be happy or sad, and to otherwise develop and somewhat control your emotions

These things, while provided to most of us at birth, follow a general pattern of development that enables us to live a “normal” life; yet, there are some who do not have the normal life because of a given or developmental problem with one or more of these things. Therefore, these things are gifts or attributes provided to us without our earning or deserving them. To acknowledge that even these basic things are gifts is to be humble or to be aware or conscience that they are not available or given to everyone.

Beyond these basic functions of the body, we are given a home, a family, a neighborhood, a church, friends, education, and government. These things, while recognized or identified throughout our lives, will change with time in terms of importance, value and influence; still, such gifts vary from those who have very little to those who have in-excess. Many do not have the same level of each or all of these things. In the United States, the level also varies but not to the extreme of much of the world. Therefore, these things are gifts or attributes provided to us without our earning or deserving them. To acknowledge that these things are gifts is to be humble or to be aware or conscience that they are not available or given to everyone. We have much reason to be humble or to be aware that these seemingly basic and accepted things are really gifts.

As our example, Jesus *humbled himself even to death on the cross*. Though he was all-powerful as the son of God, he humbled himself to the Father’s will and endured a life rejected in his hometown and by his own people; moreover, his very position as messiah was denied by at least one closest to him. Jesus, who was without sin, became sin that you and I might have are sins forgiven – this is the greatest gift of all gifts described previously. Throughout the Bible, being humbly or having humility is characterized as a quality or attribute. Jesus described himself as *gentle and humble in heart*. Writings from Paul instruct us to *be humble* and tells us that *grace is given to the humble*.

I leave you with the simple but essential command of the Lord’s servant: *Be humble under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

ICE-SKATING

Ice-skating is one of those activities that I do on a rare occasion. In high school, I went to Birmingham several times; in college, I went to Lagrange, Georgia. Since that time, my only skating experience has been with Matthew.



I like ice-skating over roller-blade skating. Ice-skating in the south is not as popular (for obvious reasons); thus, the activity is less intimidating or challenging in the sense that most skaters fall once or more. During one such fall, I happen to be wearing a new pair of jeans and ended-up leaving a blue streak on the ice. Do you think it's where the term, "blue-ice" probably got its start?

The national and international pair skating events always intrigue me: the way the two skaters are so synchronized and make the precision seem so effortless; the event holds a certain amount of romanticism as the two join and re-join in a series of requirements that often suggest perfect communication and coordination. Performance is reflected in their faces and in the response of the judges and audience; flowers are sometimes thrown onto the ice following a great performance.

On a different venue, Hockey is one of those sports that I just can't appreciate; but while skating is a primary skill, attention and emphasis seems to be on *checking* the opponent. I will never forget the underdog finish of the U.S. Olympic team in the 1980 events. As you may know, a movie was recently released on the same story.

ILLUSION

According to Encarta, an illusion is a mistake in the perception of a sensory experience. Illusions may occur in any of the human senses, including vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. In general usage, however, the term is most often applied to visual illusions, also called optical illusions.

In the picture to the left, the two women appear to be of radically different height and size; yet, in fact, the two are the same height and general size – read below.



The room itself is constructed in such a way that it provides misleading cues about distance. The left corner of the room is actually farther away from the viewer than the right corner of the room. In addition, the right side of the room is elevated so that the feet of both people appear at roughly the same relative height on the visual field. This contributes to the size illusion, because normally when two people stand at different distances, the feet of the more distant person appear higher in the visual field. This unusual room is called the Ames room after American ophthalmologist Adelbert Ames, who first constructed such a room in the 1940s.

What illusions have you seen before? If you have ever looked in a flawed mirror, your image will appear blurred or distorted to some degree. Years ago, we lived in a condominium that included opposing mirrors in the bathroom: when you looked in one mirror, and endless number of reflections resulted in the full spectrum of your disappearing – you would really need to see it.

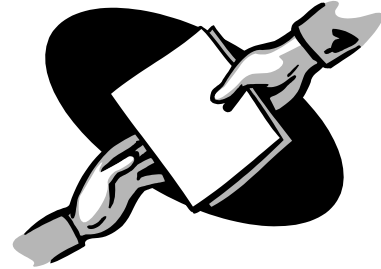
Magicians use illusions to perform acts of disappearance or appearance of something unexpected such as rabbit from a hat. Movie developers use illusions to make small sets of a few building facades to appear as sizable towns. With computer animation and enhancement, several hundred soldiers may appear as an entire legion while scaled models of aircraft may appear as full scale with all the sound and detail to impress the mind.



Camouflage is another example of an illusion whereby the image or object is hidden or appears to be something it is actually not. The military has gone to great length and application to camouflage ships, planes, tanks and personnel using some form of camouflage. In the recent old-navy movie, "Master and Commander", a war ship was made to appear as whaler by hiding the cannons, changing some of the masts, and replacing the crews' uniforms with whaler type clothing. The trick or illusion worked and, in the end, enabled a smaller, inferior ship to capture or down a much bigger foe.

IMPART

Impart means to give or share, to make known or to reveal. An example of something imparted would be advice or instruction that is presumed helpful, encouraging, and valuable.



“Impart” is a root of the word impartial; and impartial means to apply advice, instruction or something helpful without bias or in fairness. Another example could be in the area of discipline: two children of the same family and of similar age commit similar acts of disobedience; yet, one of the two is disciplined while the other is excused. The dissimilar treatment or partiality shown by the parent is wrong for both of the children!

If such partiality continues in the family, the one who is disciplined will begin to resent the one who is not; because the one will consider that the other is more loved or favored by the parent. At the same, the other who is shown partiality will be deceived or misled into believing that the favoritism is an indication of love – when in fact, the favoritism may be more an indication of disregard of instruction and direction.

When an alleged criminal goes to court, his verdict or the decision regarding his innocence is sometimes conducted by a jury or a group of selected citizens. In the selection process, the court attempts to select the members as an impartial jury. An impartial jury is important considering that innocence should be determined on a fair and impartial basis.

Today, I impart to you the desire and ambition to be impartial; to be fair and equitable; and to be without prejudice toward anyone. Jesus was a savior for the sinner, for the Jew and for the Gentile.

INDUSTRY



I thought this picture was cool: a welder performing some task, although her mask or shield is up instead of over her face as it should be.

The word “industry” can invoke several meanings to include different segments of the economy such as automotive, defense, and aerospace among others. These three industries are mentioned because each represents my previous or current employment as an

industrial engineer.

You will at some time choose job or career opportunities taking into account your skills, education, and interests. The benefit of considering and even deciding on a career path cannot be undervalued – the earlier the better! There have and will be events in your life that influence your career or job path.

- Where would you like to live?
- Do you want to marry and have children?
- Do you like to travel?
- Do you enjoy working directly with people or do you prefer to work alone or with limited interaction?

These and many other questions and preferences will help frame the basis for your choices and ultimately the direction of your life. Even at your ages, it is something to consider on occasion.

I did not necessarily choose industrial engineering but was inclined toward a technical field. This direction was somewhat influenced by my brother’s career path and my developing interest. All things considered, my choice may have been graphic design or some field where I could blend technical and drawing skills. Engineering and related fields seemed to offer reasonable career potential and opportunity – which is one of many factors in such decisions. My hope and prayer is that you will choose a field that brings some degree of satisfaction, accomplishment, and reward.

It is not too early for you to consider careers. If I can make a suggestion, give this matter much thought and time – it will pay dividends. As you begin to limit your choices, hook-up with someone who is in the field or area of interest, and find out what they do and how they got there. This effort will provide some much needed practical application to your choices as well as inspirations, models and positive influencers in your decisions and endeavors.

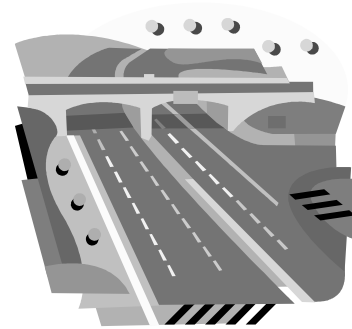
INTEGRITY

During a marriage seminar that I attended several years ago, a question raised to an audience of men was: what is the root word of integrity? After a moment, someone replied “grit” - possibly because having grit, or unyielding courage, has some association to integrity.

To have integrity is to imply honesty or to have a strong allegiance or adherence to moral or ethical standards. Politicians will often claim to espouse such attributes in order to give the impression or perception that they are honest and can be trusted as representatives of the region or citizens. Inanimate things such as metal can be described having integrity relative to the fabrication, content, and overall quality to specification. In both applications, integrity pertains to compliance and adherence to certain expressed or implicit standards and a consequential level of trust.



The root word of integrity is actually integer; which, in math, means a whole number or a complete number. Similarly, integrity means to be complete, whole, or altogether. When something has integrity, the indication is that it is *everything you think or understand that it should be*. If a bridge collapses because a girder fractured, the cause of the failure might be described as a loss of metal integrity. Twice in as many years, Birmingham has had two overpasses or bridges collapse because of an accident leading to fire and heat under the bridge. In both accidents, fire and heat broke-down the integrity of the metal.



Sometime in the early 90's, a great ministry emerged in America called “Promise Keepers”. This ministry became a great opportunity for men and young men of different churches, races, and regions to come together and worship and praise God. In addition, the ministry provided programs, study material, and other resources to encourage *men of integrity* or men who can be trusted by their wives, children, churches, and employers

A most meaningful and memorable opportunity was to participate and worship with these men of integrity; once at the Alltel stadium in Jacksonville and the other in Atlanta. “Stand in the Gap”, “As Iron Sharpens Iron” and other scripture-based slogans set the theme for these national events. I want to be like iron that spans the gap with Integrity though surrounded by heat and fire.

INVESTMENT

The word “investment” generally invokes an association to money or finances; after all, to invest is often in the form of money with the prospect of a return or an increase in the money. Investments come in many forms from Individual Retirement Accounts to a variety of methods for which I am not very familiar. My knowledge of this area is very limited – which may explain why my savings and investment earnings are very limited too.



But there is more to the word than simply money; after all, we can invest our time, our energy, or experience or knowledge into a variety of endeavors without the expectation of monetary return. Volunteers offer their time and energy to political, religious, or other worthy causes - often without any tangible expectation of return, but only the satisfaction or gratification of helping others. Already described in a previous letter, The Salvation Army is an example of such an organization that ministers through attending to the physical and spiritual needs of others less fortunate. In recent days, an international outpouring of compassion and relief has occurred for the victims of the Tsunami.

I believe it is important to be involved in such endeavors where *the Good Samaritan* is practiced and the blessings given to us are passed on to others. These endeavors commonly include a financial contribution but can also include our prayers, actions, and earnest interest and attention to the needs of others. Remember that Jesus applied himself to physical, social (family), and spiritual needs of both the Jews and the Gentiles. *He came to his own...but to as many as receive him, to those who believe in his name; he gives the right to become children of God.*

- ? Where do you invest your time? Do you spend a lot of time plying your energies toward worthy objectives and goals; or do you have objectives for that matter?
- ? Where do you invest your mind? Do you spend a lot of time thinking about good, meaningful and useful things; or do you spend your mental energy worrying or thinking about stuff that is wasteful, hurtful or damaging.
- ? Where do you invest your gifts? Yes, you have gifts that include your intelligence, your personality, your physical strength among others

As a final thought, the Parable of the Talents uses the concept of taking that which God has given and multiplying it for his glory and pleasure. In this parable, the servant that does not use the gifts {or talents} well, referred to as the unprofitable servant, does not please master {or God}. Please read this parable and be conscience and careful in your investments!

JETS

Jets and other aircraft have always been fascinating to me. From my childhood, when my dad's squadron and other units of the command would host an air show, I can remember standing beneath and sitting in aircraft of all types. The picture to the right is a formation of F-16's – perhaps the Thunderbirds or a similar performance team.



Presently I work at an airport and, even to this day, will stand and watch the commercial and private aircraft land and take-off – the whole ideal that something of size and weight can actually fly still amazes me. The speed, the sound, the power, and those maneuvers are more than I can absorb at any moment – which is why I am awestruck during such exhibitions. Besides, being so intrigued allows me to be a child again; and being a child can be a lot of fun if only for a moment.

Jesus loved children; he described them as blessed and as what all believers should emulate or be-like. On one occasion, he insisted that the children in his view be allowed to come to him. He said: *Blessed are the little children and do not hinder (or prevent them) from coming to me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.* He continued: *Unless you (everyone) receives me as a little child, he will not enter the kingdom.* Jesus identified the attributes of a child to that of the believer: sincerity, honesty, forgiving, trusting, teachable, and much more. Though some children have lost some of these character traits because of their environment or conditioning, most retain these in-born traits.

To watch a child in action can be compared to one of those agile, fighter jets: zipping over there; twisting and turning *on a dime*; climbing at rapid speed; and all that action! Although I am not sure about being in formation as most children want to *do their own thing*. In doing their thing, children possess the “freshness” to this world that allows both the pleasure and excitement of discovery and adventure.

My prayers are often if not always for your protection and for other children whom God has laid on my heart. The protection and care of you and those similar to you is vitally important to me. *Sour on wings like eagles, run and not grow weary, walk and not tire*; for you have been known before you were born and have a place in God's plan and purpose.

JUSTICE

Several meanings occur for the word “Justice”, but for this letter the basic definition will be: the quality of being just, impartial, or fair.

Sometimes the understanding or interpretation of justice conflicts with a view point or perspective of a person or group; for example, two drivers in a car accident may dispute over who was at-fault – in both cases, the drivers believe they are right, or that they are telling the truth. In such cases, the police or a traffic court must evaluate the accident and resolve such conflicts. On the court’s decision or the outcome, the driver at-fault may still believe that he was right and may resent the court’s decision; or he accept the outcome gracefully and consider the gains over the losses. Whether right or wrong, the drivers’ gains may be that there were no deaths or fatalities and, possibly, no major injuries.

Justice is not always clear or absolute: one person’s definition of a just or fair outcome may be vastly different than another person; then, there are cases where justice *is not served* for one reason or another, or the facts are not pursued and presented as the truth. Justice is something that all of us claim to desire – as it does not conflict with what we want; when it does (conflict), we generally ignore or may side-step justice or the truth. As Plato describes below, the fight over injustice is largely driven out of fear rather than by honor.

Mankind censure injustice fearing that they may be the victims of it, and not because they shrink from committing it.

- Plato, Greek author & philosopher in Athens (427 BC - 347 BC)

Justice, which is predicated on the truth, has remained a goal rather than an absolute accomplishment; consequently, many forms of injustice continue to occur and often will involve us from time to time. The outcome of injustice can be very devastating or costly – it can be very hurtful for the victims or those dealt the injustice. In such circumstances, the hurt can lead to several responses: restitution, which is being restored; retribution which is being paid-back or compensated, or revenge which is retaliation with the aim of hurting others – presumably those who have apparently caused the hurt. In all possible responses however, the fact remains that justice was not severed because the truth was not found – or even sought!

Recently, while at a Boy Scouting event, I heard a memorable definition for justice: Justice is being fair in all things without prejudice toward others.

KINDNESS

Kindness, or the act of being kind, has many forms:

- Helping someone in school – who needs help with a class or homework
- Being thankful, or expressing thanks for something to someone
- Being nice to someone else – even if they are not nice to you
- Showing compassion for someone {trying to understand their feelings}

These forms, and many more, are not easy to carry out; sometimes, we don't want to show kindness to someone else – especially if they have unkind toward us of someone we care about. But kindness is not practiced on the condition that someone is kind to us; rather, it is practiced because of what God has done for us – he has shown his kindness toward us by giving us the gift of eternal life!

God's places in us the ability to show kindness toward others. Yes, kindness can occur without God in our lives: people give time, money, and other resources for very worthy causes – possibly more than some who know God! But the matter of my belief is not necessarily based on what kindness is actually shown by those who God, say compared with those who do not; rather, the matter is that those who know God have every reason to show kindness or be kind toward others. Kindness is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Whereas we may easily be kind to a neighbor or a friend, being kind to an enemy is entirely different; yet, Jesus told us to pray for our enemies or those who, in some way, persecute us. The idea or concept of praying (or being kind) to someone who does not like us, and may even want to hurt us, seems unthinkable or impossible – though Jesus did that very thing even while hanging on the cross. He said: “Father, forgive them – for they do not know what they do”.

Being kind to others (really a form of love) is not conceivable when it comes to potentially endangering ourselves; that is, our human nature tells us to resist, retaliate, and even seek revenge if someone is threatening or is attempting to hurt us. My reaction would be similar if I knew that one of you was in such a situation – again, it is human nature. The supernatural ability to go beyond this reaction or condition is only possible through the presence of Jesus in our lives; and while it may seem contrary to our best senses to react in such a way, God is far more interested {an aware} of your safety, care and protection than any and everyone else collectively. He knows everything and he knows all about you!

Being kind or showing kindness is not something that comes easy or is natural; but it is a reflection of the wonderful and miraculous power that is in you – the power that transcends human understanding and ability. My hope and prayer is that this kindness is a characteristic in you from your relationship with Jesus.

KINGDOMS

A kingdom is the territory or property of a king. My immediate thought to kings and kingdoms usually pertains to the *days of ole* when kings and lords ruled over vast amounts of land and other holdings.

Serving these wealthy property owners were a collection of military and civilian staff and citizens with the chief purpose of ensuring security and prosperity: the military would protect the land from potential invaders or conquer adjacent lands as directed; and the civilians would serve in various capacities from advisor to peasant.



“Kingdom” is used in the Lord’s Prayer: *your kingdom come, your will be done...* This request or desire is that God’s kingdom or Heaven, be revealed or made accessible to those who believe – who worship and serve God as their king and lord. What do you imagine Heaven is like? We understand that Heaven is a perfect place and that it will last forever; but the very thought of Heaven raises a second question: what is perfect or how long is forever?

Examples of great kingdoms called Empires or Dynasties are found in history. The Assyrian Empire, the Egyptian Empire, the Babylonian Empire are some examples of once-prominent kingdoms that controlled or dominated large regions of land. Each of these three kingdoms, along with the Roman Empire, is included in the Bible – each played an instrumental role in Israel’s history pertaining to conquest, captivity, and enslavement. Yet these empires did not last; but as with kingdoms before and after, have emerged, prospered and fallen. Though I do not know the specific events or conditions that led to the fall, my general understanding is that people are not perfect and the nothing of this material world last forever.

Understanding the concept that Heaven is perfect and eternal is difficult because our experience and understanding is based on this earth and the kingdoms, cultures, and communities in which we are born, live {and die}. To begin to understand and appreciate the concept, our thinking much change; that is, we must commit ourselves to our Lord with *all our hearts, minds, soul, and strength*. On that commitment and the strength supplied by Him, we begin to understand the concept and value of a perfect, eternal place that awaits us; moreover, we begin a transformation that changes our soul – though our bodies and flesh continue certain aging; yet our souls are being renewed into the likeness of Jesus. From this continual change, called sanctification, God’s will is being done and his kingdom is being made known through the individual and collective lives of his children.

KITTYHAWK

“Kittyhawk” is both a place in North Carolina, and the name of the first aircraft recorded “controllable” flight. Not too long ago, you should have received a poster describing the aircraft in detail – a commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the maiden flight. To the right is, of course, the aircraft in action in Kitty Hawk, NC.



In the previous paragraph, the use of “controllable” means that the Wright brothers were able to develop and apply navigational control to the Kittyhawk and other designs – while previous flights may have occurred, their flight is documented as the first whereby the aircraft was in a controlled flight pattern. From a Web-based site, the brief in the box below describes some of the development and accomplishments.

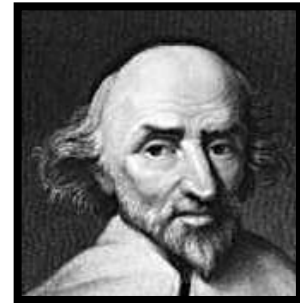
As mentioned in a previous letter, my fascination with aircraft and flight remains somewhat childlike with wonder and awe. To connect the modern aircraft with the Wright brother’s accomplishments is most evident by the similarity of the aircraft airframe: wings, elevators, vertical stabilizer, and other flight controls; the *rib & beam* infrastructure; the contours of the wing surfaces. While the two airframes may actually be very different in detail, the general similarity in appearance gives some added degree of credibility and importance to that flight in 1903 on a craft designed and constructed by two mechanics that had a vision and mission to fly.

The Wright Brothers were noted for placing the emphasis of their aviation research on navigational control rather than simply lift and propulsion which would make sustained flight practical. To that end, they first made gliders (beginning in 1899), using an intricate system called “wing warping.” If one wing bent one way, it would receive more lift, which would make the plane lift. If they could control how the gliders’ wings warped, then it would make flying much easier. To allow warping in the first gliders, they had to keep the front and rear posts that hold up the glider unbraced. The warping was then controlled by wire running through the wings, which led to sticks the flyer held, and he could pull one or the other to make it turn left or right.

In a very indirect way, my own job and experience are due to the accomplishments of these brothers and many other pioneers that followed them in the aviation industry. As well, my dad and brother could pay similar due having been in the aviation industry at one time. A vision can go a long way – to space and beyond I suppose. What is your vision and mission...or do you have one?

KNOX

John Knox was a Protestant Reformer in Scotland in the mid 1500's; his influences included George Wishart, John Calvin, Martin Luther and other reformers of the period. Calvinism (named after John Calvin), was the most influential work in the development of the Protestant churches of the Reformed tradition. Though initially a Roman Catholic Priest, John was called to the Protestant ministry around 1546 – a decision that would lead to his hasty departure from his homeland, Scotland, and his later participation in the Protestant revolt. More information from Encarta is in the text box below.



John Knox introduced the strict codes of Calvinist doctrine to Scotland. In contrast to John Calvin's focus on the bourgeoisie, however, Knox preached the idea of "the Elect" to the peasant masses of 16th-century Scotland. Later called Presbyterianism, this Protestant religion became a symbol of Scottish nationalism in the struggle against Catholic monarchs.

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Much of the conflict that ensued in Scotland during the later years occurred between the Catholic and Protestant religions. Reformers of Christianity, as named previously, had differing interpretations and opinions. Because Scotland was ruled by a Catholic queen at the time, Catholicism was the dominate religion. In exerting their dominance, the Catholic Church prohibited reformers like John from preaching on Sunday; thus, he held

his meetings during the week – the outcome brought many to this new found faith and understanding of Christianity and their relationship with Jesus.

In 1547, John and others were captured during a French Invasion of England; for the next two years, he served aboard a ship as a slave. Yet, even though a slave, he was a far better off than if he had been captured by the Scottish government as a religious fugitive. Returning to England following his liberty, John resumed his preaching with effective results for both the local as well as nearby Scottish citizenry.

From John Schaeffer's, A Christian Manifesto, the following:

Knox is rightly thought of as a radical reformer. There is, however, an important distinction to keep in mind concerning him. Throughout his ministry, Knox appealed for moderation and compromise whenever truly fundamental issues were not at stake... Knox was not against civil government per se. He knew well that civil government is ordained of God. Knox maintained, however, that state officials have the duty of obeying God's Laws...All life and all actions, he reiterated, must have their base in God's Word.

LANDFALL

When I think of “landfall”, my immediate thought is the event of actually reaching land after being at sea for many a weary mile. The much awaited and anticipated day finally arrives and, although limited in duration, the simple experience of walking on solid ground is enough to give thanks and appreciation.



Think about the French Huguenots, Spanish or English that settled along the coastline in your area – what a momentary relief they must have felt to finally land and begin their settlements.



I wonder what type of setting occurred in their landfall – the beach may have looked like the picture above or like the beach along A1A north of Saint Augustine. Dunes, saw-grass and other plant life may have been the first things that these Europeans touched on land; but what else did they see and observe, and how did they develop the land for their temporary and permanent dwellings? Let your mind go to that period and circumstance, blend in some knowledge, and let imagination take away to a landfall of the 1700’s. Now, what do you see?

Many such explorers would make landfall with great expectations, but find themselves and their crew in the worst of circumstances. Deprivation, starvation, and disease often plagued these early settlers – sometimes wiping out entire villages and communities. Other cause for concern included militant settlements: the Spanish in Saint Augustine and the Huguenot’s located in what is today Arlington is one example. Pestilence was yet another concern with Yellow Fever and other insect-borne illnesses. Needless to continue, life for these settlers was not a pristine beach!

Such conditions and risks did not obviously deter these settlers from making landfall; indeed, the mistakes and outcomes of these early settlers probably eased the trip and transition for many who followed behind. English, German, Irish, Chinese, Africans and scores of other nations followed a journey laden with much sacrifice and difficulty. As with all explorers, these individuals experienced the jubilation, trepidation, and even fear of traveling to a foreign place. Some traveled by their own decision and means, while others were forced or pressed by authorities both legal and illegal.

Clearly, the reason or purpose for traveling has much bearing on the attitude or response to landfall; but at the least, there is a certain relief that earth is beneath you, land is before you, the sea is behind you, and the rest awaits you.

LAND HO



“Land Ho” is another one of those Navy terms which means, “I think I see land”. For anyone traveling at sea and anticipating landfall, this word is a God-sent.

In the movie (or book), *Mutiny on the Bounty*, this word “Land Ho” has added meaning. The ship’s captain, “Bligh”, is the ‘worst of his lot; why, he’s down-right cruel and blistering as a high-noon Sun, he is.’ Ok, I’ll dispense with the old-English, but I am merely expressing the sentiment of his crew. Anyway, the captain is a bad dude with extreme and unethical forms of authority – that could be appreciated by seeing the movie

or reading the book. But before two bells, I will try to navigate you through at least some points of the voyage.

Disembarking from England, the small vessel sets-out for Tahiti – a small isle in the South Pacific populated by a unique plant called a bread plant. The mission of the voyage is to collect as many plants as possible, and return to England over what is estimated to be a two year period. Aboard the ship are the Captain of course, several seasoned and junior officers, and a rowdy crew varying from old salts to criminals pressed into service by the Crown.

A senior officer, “Fletcher Christian”, takes issue with the Captain in these matters of cruelty in hope that he can ease the tension among the crew; but frequent confrontations between the two only seem to raise the tension and derision aboard the ship. Sailors are given inadequate supply of water and food, medical problems are overlooked, and punishment is brutal to the point that an insubordinate sailor is whipped beyond death and another drowns from a keel-haul. With the ship’s mission in peril, something must change!

After managing to reach Tahiti, the ship completes the collection of plants and begins the return home; but again, the issues surface: the Captain insisted on as many plants as possible with the knowledge that water supply for the crew would be insufficient; the extreme forms of punishment and discipline continue and so on. Reaching a breaking point, Fletcher takes command along with a divided crew; the staff refusing to mutiny are placed on a dingy while he and the rest of the lot sail back to Tahiti. I charge you mates to learn the rest of it for yourselves.

LANDSLIDE

The words of the song, “Landslide”, are very meaningful to me. If you’re not familiar with this song, the words and music were written by the group, Fleetwood Mac and recently re-recorded by The Dixie Chicks. Some of the words are provided in the box below.

Landslides are, by the name, a natural event whereby land or earth gives-way under pressure. Weeks of heavy rainfall last month resulted in mud slides that killed several people in California last month. In travels to San Francisco, I saw the result of large sections of elevated beach and road that had literally collapsed into the ocean leaving a chasm.

I took my love and I took it down
Climbed a mountain and turned around
And I saw my reflection in the snow-covered hills
'til the landslide brought it down
Oh, mirror in the sky -What is love?
Can the child within my heart rise above?
Can I sail through the changin'...ocean tides
Can I handle the seasons of my life?
I don't know.....I don't know

Well I've been afraid of changin'
because I've built my life around you
But time makes you bolder, even children get older
And I'm getting older too....

In the song “Landslide”, the writer or singer describes a relationship that has ended; whatever the cause, an end to the relationship leaves a degree of fear in regard to the “changin.” Change is described as *seasons of life* and as *sailing through the ocean tides*; and the love that what once experienced is gone leaving the question: *can I handle the seasons of my life? – I don't know.*

I like this song for several reasons: first, the person is being very honest over the pain of a lost relationship; second, the person realizes that time is necessary for healing over the loss and the subsequent doubts about love and life; last, that the person is growing older (or stronger) – just as a child as a child should be growing mentally, emotionally and even spiritually toward adulthood. But learning and growing does not or should not stop beyond childhood; indeed, events and occurrences, to include losses of one sort or another, given cause and reason for continued growth.

We cannot avoid or avert loss – it is simply a part of life. The question is not whether loss will find us; but when it does, from where will we draw the strength and courage to go on. Just because we pray and trust in the Lord does not mean that we do not suffer; on the contrary, suffering is necessary such that we may experience what Christ experienced while on Earth. We do not suffer for the purpose of suffering; we suffer such that Christ will be our only source of hope and assurance in a world where the very earth beneath may be gone in a landslide that, without Christ, would leave only a chasm.

LEAD

What does it mean to lead – to be a leader?

To the right, the woman is pointing forward as though giving directions and instructions to someone; at the same time, she appears to be extending her other hand as though to encourage them on their journey however short or long it may be.



A lot of information, books, and classes are offered on leadership; perhaps, you can think of a few examples of leaders or even programs that provide training and preparation for being a leader of some type. Much has and continues to be written and practiced on this subject; but I believe that preparation to lead begins with the ability to follow – in other words, to be successful as a leader, one must first be successful as a follower. The ability and success to follow is not predicated on a perfect or flawless leader; rather, it is practiced based on commitment to a higher cause or objective. Let's look at a few examples from the Bible.

Moses was not perfect or flawless; yet, he was chosen to lead a nation out of bondage; he realized his weaknesses, and even admitted them to God, but was resolute on following or being led by God. Paul was not perfect; he persecuted and executed Christians on the belief that they were heretics and therefore deserved such punishment; yet, his conversion on the Damascus was God's first sign of Paul's place and position as a leader in the expansion of the Christian church. David, though a lowly Shepard was ushered into leadership through boldness supplied by God – he refused to accept the challenge of Goliath as something greater than God. To be a leader, one must learn the art of following, of being led, of being faithful and committed to a cause.

A favorite quote is provided below; perhaps Thoreau and many others share this belief – *that most lead lives of desperation*. A question in reply to this belief is: do we have to lead lives of desperation or without any sense of hope?

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

- Henry David Thoreau, "Walden", 1854

Each of the great leaders described above, as well as an endless list of others, possibly dealt with moments or instances of uncertainty and confusion. Moses fled from Egypt as a murderer; Paul spent much time imprisoned for his faith; and David expressed moments of despair in the Psalms; yet, they did not remain in despair because they were very good at being followers – followers of their Lord!

LEARNING

Sometimes learning is a lot of work; especially if you're trying to learn something that you don't already know. Like the illustration to the right, learning can seem like a large volume of stuff being funneled into your brain – I guess that where “cramming for an exam” came from. The fact remains that understanding a lot of facts over a short period of time can be challenging and down right fatiguing. While a lot of work, learning can also be very rewarding and beneficial; it may not be compulsory, or seem necessary, but *neither is survival* according to Edward Deming.



Learning is not compulsory... neither is survival.

- W. Edwards Deming
US business advisor & author
(1900 - 1993)

Learning should not only be relegated to school or homework, but should be habit or practice of every day life. As we breathe, eat, sleep, and play; so should we learn as a part of our routine, our daily ritual, and our life long goal.

Doris Lessing describes learning as *understanding something in a different or new way*. If we know today that a ball thrown into the air will surely fall; perhaps we will soon understand the natural force called “gravity” that causes the ball to fall. Many examples of learning upon learning can be recalled even as children. Last week, you may have learned that any number divided by the number one is itself; but this week you may learn that any number divided by itself is one – both similar equations although expressed in a different way.

That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way.

- Doris Lessing

Think of learning upon learning as building a great wall or structure - the strength of the structure is only as good as the foundation of initial structure, and each increment of learning is another brick laid on a firm, solid wall. In the matter of daily learning, you may ask the basic question: “What did I learn today? Kevin Marler said that the answer to this question is a reflection of *who you are*.

Tell me what you learned last and I'll tell you who you are.

- Kevin Marler

When you were younger, and we were together, I use to frequently ask you: “Tell me one thing you learned today at school?” This question was probably not always welcomed, but had the intention of opening conversation to find out who you are...or what you are becoming from

you learning experience. Never stop learning – it will do you well.

LEONARDO

The choice of Leonardo was based simply on the possibility that you may not be familiar with him; but also that he remains such a renowned figure of innovation and diverse talents. Considering that you know of his genius in many fields, the remainder of this letter will concentrate on a few high points.



First, Leonardo) was well educated; he applied many years to training and education – apparently this application, coupled with obvious gifts, spurred him to the top of his class as well as his noted accomplishments in painting, sculpture, science, and engineering. Surprisingly, much of early paintings were never finished according to my sources in Encarta.

Second, he was born during a period in European history called “The Renaissance”. As you may know, this period followed the Middle Ages and was considered a period marked by radical changes in literature, art, politics and the like. Occurring over a period of about centuries, the change included a variety of “Renaissance’ figures to include Leon. The time in which he developed seemed ideal for his accomplishments and innovation – I guess timing is important!

Thirdly, he wrote much if not all of his scientific theories using a mirror script – a practice which enables the letters to be written backwards as a form of encryption; that is, to be written so that no one can understand or read it. This technique may have been applied to protect his work from being stolen or copied; but it may be a customary measure before patent lawyers existed. Oh, a patent or copyright is a legal method for ensuring that inventions, stories, and other works are not stolen.

All kidding aside, the accomplishments of this one person are profound by even today’s standards. His most famous painting is.... – that’s right, “Mona Lisa”. In addition to his art and scientific progress, Leon also served as an engineer for a number of military projects. His experience in the *art of war* may have inspired other paintings that portrayed such events. His genius carried further in the determination and documentation of the human anatomy; the remaining manuscripts of this work clearly illustrate his desire for details and intricacies, not to mention his precision in drawing these remarkable findings.

“The Last Supper” is my favorite of all his creations. Although a faded image painted on a wall, the art remained intact having narrowly escaped complete destruction during World War II. Read and learn – be inspired!

LIFESAVERS

A life vest like the one to the right reminds me of my boyhood days on an occasional ski or finish trip. Wearing a flotation device seemed like such a hassle at the time; but on occasion, the value and purpose would be brought to my attention.



When you were young, water wings was the equipment of choice; supplemented by a float of some kind...usually with a theme or favorite character. Anyway, the wings usually kept you afloat and gave you a sense of security beyond or outstretched arms or careful watch. I remember a few times when Brian scared both himself and us with his “float-free” bouts with the deep. For sometime after that, he was very careful and even somewhat skittish.

By the name “Life-saver”, this equipment can make the difference between drowning and surviving – even when one is weak or near unconsciousness. A light-weight device has the buoyancy or floating ability to keep much human and other physical weight afloat – thanks in part to the fact that being submerged in water makes one appear lighter than our normal weight.

Why does one seem lighter in the water; or for that matter, why can we float when we hold air in our lungs, tread with our hands and feet, and add a flotation device as a helper? Simply because air, composed of oxygen and a few other elements, is lighter than water; therefore, air bubbles and other stuff filled with air, rise in the water. Boats and ships float for the same reason: the gross weight of both the vessel and the contents {including air} is lighter than the water it displaces; but should the vessel and contents become heavier than the water, than *man the lifeboats* and prepare to disembark or evacuate. Nature has rules or principles; the rule described above is called Archimedes Principle – which is named after the historical founder or discoverer of this principle.



A principle or fact helps explain a phenomena or mystery; thereby, setting in place certain or understood cause-and-effect relationships; but a principle can also be defined as a code of conduct or standard for our lifestyle. In both definitions, the word provides an ironic sense of freedom. Yes, Archimedes Principle explains the reason for our sinking in water; but also prepares us for the action and equipment needed to stay afloat. Likewise, a principle for our lifestyle may limit our friends, our forms of entertainment, and other aspects of daily or frequent routine; but such guidelines and even rules may protect us from damaging ourselves and hurting others – both types of principles can be lifesavers!

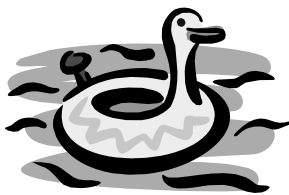
LIGHT

Light is energy. Sunlight is solar energy represented by both the light and heat that the sun generates on Earth and throughout the galaxy. We believe that God created light as recorded in the book of Genesis: And God said, Let there be light...and he separated the light from the darkness.

Light is described in several forms or is created by several different sources as described in the textbox below. A particle or micro-representation of light is called a Photon – which is charged, or has energy visible to the eye. These photons travel in the form of waves much like water in the ocean. When waves of photons make contact with the air or any other substance, heat or energy is absorbed; and the smallest description of the substance, called an atom, becomes excited or energized by the photons. The process is probably a lot more complicated than this brief description – consider a practical example.

Sources of light differ in how they provide energy to the charged particles, such as electrons, whose motion creates the light. If the energy comes from heat, then the source is called incandescent. If the energy comes from another source, such as chemical or electric energy, the source is called luminescent (see © 1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved).

The sun rises in the morning and radiant energy is beamed down to the earth, to your town, and to a float filled with air, next to your pool. As the day progressed, the atmosphere or ambient air became warmer – and so did the air inside the float. As the air becomes warmer or is energized, the atoms in the air become very active and the air begins to expand or take-up more volume; in turn, the float feels tighter or fully inflated because the air is very active or voluminous. As the sun sets and the day light dissipates, the air decreases in temperature or becomes less active.



What happens? Radiant heat, or sunlight, causes objects to expand or increase in volume because the small particles that make-up the objects become excited or energized by the small light particles called photons.

Do you get excited about light? – I certainly do after several dreary days of winter gray skies. Light should be exciting to everyone; after all, how would we see without light? When Jesus told us, *I am the light of the world*, he meant that he was good, true and holy – the use of light symbolizes good while darkness represents evil or that which is false. Those who trust in Jesus as their savior are described as children of light. As the sun emits or discharges light or energy, so does the Son of God emit light to his children – to those who call him Father. *Therefore, let your light shine before others that may see your good works and praise your father in Heaven.*

LIGHTS



Lights come in many types: street lights, search lights, Christmas lights, reading lights, porch lights, car lights, security lights, flash lights, runway lights (at an airport), instrument lights {for car and other equipment}, traffic lights, warning lights, studio and theater lights, and so on.

Whatever type of light or application, lights share the common feature of producing light.

The expression, “shed light on the subject”, is a metaphor – it means to bring understanding of clarity to the subject. In the last letter, the description of light was intended *shed some light* on the subject of light; or to help understand both natural light as well as the supernatural light of Jesus. In each all of these examples or uses of light, the basic underlying meaning is that light {or lights} produces energy that decreases or removes darkness.

As I write this letter beneath the light of my desk lamp, the thought occurs to me that you may be reading or studying under a lamp or light at the moment. As I think about the light or energy, both my lamp and your lamp are virtually identical – they both produce the same type of energy. Given the similarity or coincidence of our lamps, my imagination will hop aboard the waves of energy and take a long trip from my desk to your desk. From my lamp, through the wiring of my home, across the power grids and stations that interconnect our regions, and finally to your home, to your desk, and through your lamp to you; I have traveled a long distance but with the speed of light.



On arriving at your home in a relatively short time period, my immediate response is to come bursting out of your lamp and land right in your eye – right where the light must go to help you see that which you are studying or reading. Moreover, I want to help you see many things through the light which has enabled me to see many things.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus says *that the eye is the lamp of your body* – as the desk lamp illuminates your desk and reading material, so too your eyes indicate the state of condition of your whole body. A lamp or other light fixture may be very ornate and beautiful, but if it does not produce light, the light has no utility value or no practical use.

I pray that light will flow through your eyes from your whole body, just as a fountain flows from the well spring beneath it.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

LINCOLN

President Lincoln is a person whom I greatly admire. Among the attributes of his character, his sheer determination or constitution was profound. Though he served as a two-term President, the period was the most controversial and divisive in our history – a crossroads in the development of the nation that jeopardized the vision and plans of the founding fathers.



In regard to his determination, Lincoln was largely self-



educated; to the left, the illustration shows a possible scene in the Lincoln home as Abe reads by the fire light. Lincoln was a bit of sailor (on a flat river barge), a store clerk, a soldier for a brief period, a business partner, a postmaster, a surveyor, an attorney, a politician, a state representative, and the 16th President of the United States – all this with only one year of formal education and a series of setbacks of a financial, political, and personal nature.

Lincoln's constitution included the personal and political belief that *all men are created equal*; thus, they are afforded all the rights of the democracy as described in the Declaration of Independence. The text box below provides statements from one of the debates in which Lincoln urged the citizenry to *discard* the notion of an inferior race of people and *stand up* and declare that all men are created equal.

Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man—this race and that race and the other race, being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout the land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal.

Lincoln considered that slavery should not be a part of democracy; and that the continued government-support of slavery would inevitably lead to division or *a house divided*. Though the statement and political position was controversial, and therefore divisive as well, such a response was generated from one who had observed the burden placed on this people and the inhumane treatment as property rather than people.

Lincoln faced great obstacles from his humble origin to the death of several of his children and related emotional instability of his wife – Mary also lost four brothers who died for the Confederacy. Though Abe suffered with depression and melancholy, he remained committed and resolute to victory and re-construction for the Union. Books, stories and memories contain valuable lessons of the determination of one man who refused to allow his house to remain divided and separate.

LIVING

“Living” can have several meanings but, for this letter, it will be used in the context of how we should live or the lifestyle that we conduct. French intellectual, Jean-Paul Sartre, was quoted as “how to live” is the only matter that has not been figured-out (by the human race).

"Everything has been figured out, except how to live."

- Jean-Paul Sartre
(1905-1980)

Posed as both a question and issue of theology, Francis Schaeffer wrote a book and published a tape series entitled, *How Shall We Then Live?* He does not answer the question in detail but rather describes the history of religion in relationship to society, law, government and culture dating back to the Greek Empire. He also describes an individual's “presuppositions” as being the basis for their values, decisions, and the underpinning of their life style. A presupposition is similar to an assumption – basically our forethoughts and ideas about a something or someone.

The view of Jean-Paul may be that this fundamental question has not been answered (at least in his lifetime); the view of Francis may be that the answer can be answered through a thoughtful reflection of history and understanding of presuppositions as the basis for values and decisions. My interpretation of either view or both views may be completely wrong; but on that possibility, I encourage you to further investigate each view for yourself.

Much could be said about the idea of living: living is the opposite of dying; living is experiencing freedom from slavery or tyranny; living is prosperity and a future over poverty and despair; living is being able to seek and even accomplish your goals and aspirations; and so on and so forth.

Famous dancer Agnes de Mille described living as *a form of not being sure*. In

life or the forum of living, the *one certainty is that nothing is certain*; yet, the idea is that to live, one must *take leap after leap in the dark* – which may represent the uncertainty or unknown that remains an ever present part of living for each and all of us. While living includes the certainty of uncertainty, it also includes the possibility of the impossibility. For me, the impossibility is that there is a God, who had a son, who left a Spirit; who is the source of all living things and the one in whom the uncertainty may rest while we tarry for what is certain – what is living.

“Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how...We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark.”

- Agnes de Mille, *US choreographer & dancer* (1909 - 1993)

LOADS

In the picture to the right, a container is being loaded (or unloaded) from a tractor. Containers are metal boxes in several lengths that are used to transport ocean-going freight aboard Container Ships, and haul from ports to end destinations. The containers enable increased transportation by maintaining the freight in the same container from origin to destination; with ground transportation (i.e. motor carrier or trucks, rail carriers or trains), surface transportation (i.e. ocean carrier or ships). In Jacksonville, the Port Authority is responsible for much of the activity that includes international and domestic carriers.



“Loads” can define anything that has weight or burden – whether actual weight or a *sense of being heavy*. Let me explain. The expression, *A Load on My Shoulders*, is a metaphor that means: to have a lot of responsibility or a lot of duties; but not to have actual weight. Used in terms of the picture above, “load” would refer to the weight (pounds, kilograms, or tons), or the cubic volume {liters, gallons, cubic feet or meters}, or the linear dimensions (feet, meters). Loads can be in actual weight or dimension or figurative size such as used in the metaphor above.

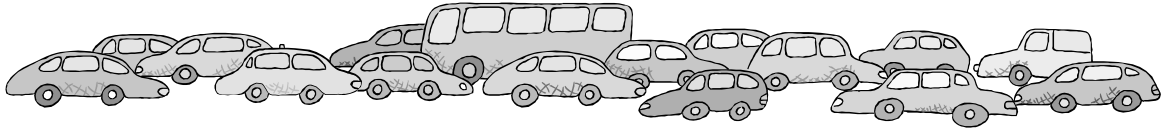
Sometimes college students refer to their current courses as the *load for the term*; a heavy load means that they are taking a lot of credit hours. Than again, the same condition might apply to young people in primary and high school who are really challenged by the courses that they are enrolled in. Student or not, a heavy load can befall many of us when we accept a lot or responsibility that tasks our time, mental and physical energy, and other resources. When the load becomes overwhelming, the condition may be referred to as simply, “spent” – which means exhausted, overwrought, of similar.

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and burden is light

Jesus offers rest and peace for those who have a heavy load or burden. Remember that his services are just a prayer away, and that he is always ready to listen, 24x7.

LOATHE

I'm not sure if this is a letter about the word "loathe" or about something that I loathe, such as traffic. First, the word means to hate, abhor, or detest – it is a deep, internal type of hatred which does not necessarily rise up in moments but rather prevails or languishes.



Years ago, a daily commute would take me from the Southside to the airport – which meant crossing a toll bridge each way. Invariably the afternoon trip home would be delayed considerably by the *lifting of the bridge* – by observation, to allow one sailboat to pass underway. The almost daily occurrence of this phenomena (the passing of one sailboat while hundreds if not thousands of commuters waited impatiently), would cause immediate, though expected frustration. Overtime, such repeated incidence drove me literally to a stop but emotionally toward such fantasies as dropping a concrete block off the rail of bridge as a gift to the good captain of his vessel below.

Aside from the trials of traffic, my point is that life offers something, if just one thing, for which one might apply the word "loathe". To loathe or even hate something is not necessarily a bad thing; especially, when that it pertains to something far more serious than traffic.

Proverbs tells us that there are six things that the Lord's hates, and seven that he detests:

1. Haughty eyes – or a proud heart that hinders man's faith and worship
2. Lying tongue – simply, one who lies repeatedly or habitually
3. Hands that shed innocent blood – one who murders
4. A Heart that devises wicked schemes – from the heart comes corruption, greed, jealousy, and others sins that drive or promote such schemes
5. Feet that are quick to rush into evil – quick tempered or impulsive to cause evil such as murder or other crimes
6. A False witness that pours out lies – more than *lying tongue*, one who gives false testimony or account of a critical matter to a court or resolution of conflict or crime; perhaps, one who would lie under oath
7. A Person who stirs-up dissension among his brothers – perhaps within a church body, one who would cause disagreement or conflict simply to damage and destroy unity, love and all characteristics of this family

God does not hate or loathe the sinner, but he does the sin – so should we!

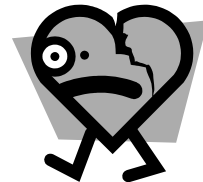
LOCKS

Locks are used to secure things and people; and while such precautions do not guarantee security, both the appearance and actual utility provide added security.

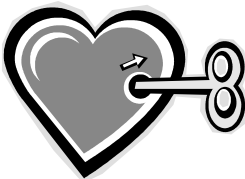
Our homes, cars, outbuildings, offices, warehouses, bicycles, school lockers, and computers have some type of lock or security device to reduce the possibility of theft, damage, or other such outcome or violation of personal and public property.



With this limited information, a lock of another sort will be the remaining topic of this letter. Yes, the lock is not a conventional type like that above; but, instead is the lock that is figurative – A lock that applies to the heart and is a means of preventing further hurt such as emotional damage. Sometimes, the hurt which enters a young, tender, and developing heart can cause seemingly irreparable damage (damage that is difficult to heal or recover from). This condition may be called a *broken heart* or hurt that has cut deep into one's soul with permanent feelings and attitudes. A symptom of such hurt may include frequent crying; but may give way to denial in order to cope with the hurt or to simply *get on with life*. This means of coping is to deny or lay aside our feeling and attitudes – to try to pretend that such hurt never occurred and such brokenness is no more. The more the heart is hurt, the more it is scarred, and the more such coping may occur to prevent yet further damage.



In this condition (that affects us all), the heart may become hardened; like a scar that results from one or more wounds, the heart may become hard or impenetrable – such that we incapable to receive and enjoy the healing that God offers to those who have broken hearts. Just as miracles are recorded in the Bible and continue in this modern age, the supernatural abilities of God enable healing of the heart or unlocking of the heart.



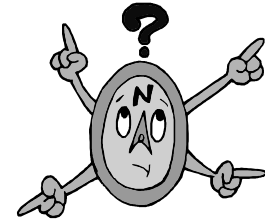
A favorite children's song is my prayer for you and for others with broken hearts: "Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus; come into today, come into to stay, come into my heart Lord Jesus..."

A renewal of the heart is possible with the one who understands and loves you.

LOST

When something is “lost”, it cannot be found...at least for the moment. If never found again, we might say it is *lost for good*. The loss of something is not usually a good thing; particularly, if the something was highly valued and even loved.

Sometimes the something lost is, well, ourselves; for example, we may get lost while visiting a different neighborhood, town, or even country. Though a map is useful, the directions or our location-destination may still be unclear; at the same time, a person familiar with the area could be really useful – but then, you have to ask for information in the first place and, for some, this exercise can be most humbling. Why stop and ask when you still have a half tank of gas?



Whether something or someone is lost, the reaction is usually frustration at the least and sorrow and grief to the extreme. If something or someone is lost, the impulse should be to find it if all possible. A parable in the Bible describes a shepherd that leaves his ninety-nine sheep to search for one lost sheep. It might seem careless to leave the rest (seemingly endanger) but the point is that even one lost sheep is highly valued and important. Once more, the shepherd was responsible for all the sheep and not just the ninety-nine – but that’s another story.

At times, you may feel lost or actually be lost. Being lost is more than uncomfortable or frustrating – it is downright scary! When you are lost, the most important need of security (or a sense of being wanted) is put in jeopardy if just for a short while. During the horrific moments, and overwhelming sense of doom and despair can cloud your thinking to the point of total confusion and disorientation. Once discovered or found again, these emotions immediately give way to relief and celebration.



Being lost or experiencing a loss can be useful in creating an appreciation for being found or for the things that we remain ours. Sometimes, salvation (or knowing Jesus as Lord) is described as being saved – having *once been lost, I now am find*. For those who have been found through salvation, the relief and celebration comes in the promises of God, the blessings of knowing Jesus as Lord, and the fruits (or character changes) of the Holy Spirit.

But for the shepherd, as either God or one of children, the joy comes in knowing that the one who was lost is now found and has returned to the fold.

LOVE

Faith, Hope, and Love – but the greatest of these is love.
- 1 Corinthians 13:13

Among all the letters that have been or will be written, this is one of the most important. Love is the

greatest gift that we receive and that we give. To coin the song by its title, “Love makes the world go round....”

As a gift, love is not earned or rewarded on merit; rather it is given and received with a deep realization and appreciation for God’s mercy to us – who are undeserving of salvation, reconciliation, and redemption in Christ. *For there is non righteous, no not even one...*



In his book, Living the 7 Habits, Stephen Covey comments on the story of the love expressed by a father to his 13 year old son. He describes 5 ways to express love:

- ♥ Simply to understand; particularly feelings and deeper meanings
- ♥ Seek to be understood; also, particularly feelings and deeper meanings
- ♥ Explicitly affirm the worth of another in words – to say what you feel about them, and to affirm their potential, that they can “do it”
- ♥ Pray for and with them; for safety, protection, development, salvation, and guidance, peace, security, etc. on general and specific matters
- ♥ Sacrifice for them, to do something for them that would be outside what they normally think or expect you to do

The power of love, to mean much more than romance, goes far beyond our human nature by enabling us to sincerely extend and receive without conditions or expectations – unconditional love remains a mystery although an unparallel indication of God’s desire and plan for man.

Why is love so important?

A writer by the name of Tom Walker, in commenting on 1 Corinthians 13, writes:

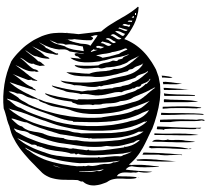
Where one finds love, he finds a breeding ground of hope, and where there is hope one again has faith. Life again is rich and beautiful, not in the material but in the spiritual. So without love there is no hope. Without hope, faith is not worthwhile, and living becomes hell. But love supplies the hope which in turn enables faith. Faith, hope, and love - The greatest of these is love.

LUST

This is one of those words that must be carefully discussed; but at the core, “lust” is simply having such a desire for something that it becomes your god or a form of an idol. Lust can be an impulsive but intense desire that in the moment is all consuming or all powerful; particularly, if the initial thought is entertained (or thought) in our mind. It begins with just a thought but, as the moment leads to several moments, lust takes over our total mind and is elevated to the only thing of concern or interest; in short, you must have it or you will be incomplete.

While love is about giving, lust is about taking – the two are practically opposites! When you truly love someone, you want to serve and to give – your prevailing desire is to please them. When you lust after someone or something, you want it to serve you – your desire is to take, possess, conquer, and even destroy. Love offers eternal satisfaction – as long as you are committed to love and to be loved; but lust is short-lived or temporary. Lust is like a drug that offers only a temporary degree of satisfaction with emptiness and wanting waiting *just around the corner*. Fulfillment of lust leads only to further lust – want, want, want!

When a three year old child spots a candy bar at the checkout of the grocery store, he cries out for it – he knows the candy bar tastes good and is demanding it by every tactic possible. If pointing or moaning doesn’t work, he may try screaming followed by the final act of a temper tantrum. If given the candy bar, he will be momentarily satisfied; but would likely go through the same process minutes later to acquire something similar. While the notion of a child lusting after something is probably farfetched, the scene will at least provide some similarity for which any one of you have witnessed and even conducted at one time in your young life. I use to loathe all those goodies at the checkout.



When Adam and Eve sinned, they were deceived into to believing that by *taking of the apple*, they would not die; paradise was not enough for them to enjoy and to *have dominion over* – they had to have the one thing that God forbid. As another possible example, this story of the first sin is an example of lust: the apple was pleasing to the eye and very desirable for gaining wisdom. Believing a lie, that the apple could bring wisdom and would not result in death as God had pronounced, the two would end their days laboring to survive.

Lust is a desire that is based on a lie; that is, by fulfilling the lust {as though lust could be fulfilled}, the outcome is thought to be some of degree of satisfaction or gratification. At best, such an outcome is only short lived and generally leaves an increased appetite for more. When the child craves the candy on sight, the fact of the previous candy is of no regard – it’s all about *here and now*. Not only does it leave an insatiable appetite {or a hunger that cannot be fully satisfied}, but it makes everything else seem meaningless and void – including yourself.

LUTHER



This past year, a movie was produced about Martin Luther.

Martin Luther was a theologian in Germany around the early 1,500's during the early part of the Reformation. Among his accomplishments was the publication of his Ninety-five Theses – a document that denounced the methods in which believers sought forgiveness and salvation through financial payments (indulgences) rather than by God's grace through Jesus Christ. The document was highly controversial as it opposed the power and theology of

the Roman Catholic Church. Because he would retract his opposition, Martin became a criminal against the church; only by the mercy of a few, was his life spared for future writings to include a translation of the Bible from Latin to German.

Luther maintained that God interacts with human beings in two ways: through the law and through the Gospel. From Encarta, the following elaboration on his view of the law {from the Old Testament}:

The law represents God's demands—as expressed, for example, in the Ten Commandments and the golden rule. All people, regardless of their religious convictions, have some degree of access to the law through their consciences and through the ethical traditions of their culture, although their understanding of it is always distorted by human sin. The law has two functions. It enables human beings to maintain some order in their world, their communities, and their own lives despite the profound alienation from God, the world, their neighbors, and ultimately themselves that is caused by original sin. In addition, the law makes human beings aware of their need for the forgiveness of sins and thus leads them to Christ.

On the matter of the Gospel (or New Testament), the following elaboration from the same source:

God also interacts with human beings through the Gospel, the good news of God's gift of his Son for the salvation of the human race. This proclamation demands nothing but acceptance on the part of the individual. Indeed, Luther argued that theology had gone wrong precisely when it began to confuse law and Gospel (God's demand and God's gift) by claiming that human beings can in some way merit that which can only be the unconditional gift of God's grace.

Martin Luther was a person of strong conviction in regard to the interpretation of the Bible; in particular, the basis for salvation is by grace alone and the source of salvation is Christ alone. His conviction was of such depth as to place himself and other followers in grave danger; yet he remained steadfast in his place.

MAIL

“You’ve got mail!” is the common audible that signals inbound e-mail; but let’s not forget that the first type of mail was hardcopy, delivered by a variety of carriers from the Pony Express to the modern jumbo aircraft, , LLV’s {i.e. USPS local trucks} and other commercial trucks, and personal vehicles of one sort or another.



Receiving mail, whether hardcopy or electronic, can offer a variety of responses:

- ☞ If it’s junk mail, bills, *spam* or contains a virus, the response ranges from annoyance to madness
- ☞ If it’s personal mail, such as a birthday card or something similar, the response is usually gladness and appreciation; unless you forgot to send them something similar on such occasion – then the response might be embarrassment followed by belated wishes, apologizes, or regrets depending on the time and condition, etc.
- ☞ If it’s a package or parcel, the mail can be exciting too; but as with a personal letter, attention to the sender may leave you wondering why you didn’t consider them in kind
- ☞ Finally, if it’s a legal document of some kind, whether from a court or attorney, the response is likely going to be a groan of discomfort followed by a long-term sense of helplessness and despair – but let’s hope that such occurrences, if any, are more favorable for you.

For the last several years, mail has been my single form of communication with you – it has been the only possible way to conduct a one-way conversation with you for whom I deeply care and love. Certainly, I would prefer to see you and talk, as most parents do; but this is not possible for reasons beyond my and your control. Thus, my prayer is that mail will not remain the only means for communication but rather than our relationships will re-develop through reconciliation.

Until that time, you can be assured that I will use the mail quite frequently to communicate with you; the information may not every reach you and, has been the history, you may never be able to respond or reply. Still, I am committed to continue mail such that you may know, and not just think, that effort has and will always be applied toward our communication and eventual relationship. “You’ve got and will always have mail!”

MALICE

“Malice” is a desire to cause injury or distress to another. This form of behavior goes beyond hate or loathing – it is a desire for revenge or something of that kind. Where does such a desire come from?

The Bible tells us that *the heart of man can be deceitful in many ways*. The heart is where such deep feeling begin, from love to hate and everything in between. In the book of Romans, Paul describes the behavior of people who rebelled against God: *although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him*. The free-will of man allows for rebellion against God which includes malice as one of many sorted behaviors. In the book of Corinthians, Paul urges the church to remain free from the *yeast of malice and wickedness* by partaking of the Feast of Unleavened Bread - which is a festival following Passover that symbolizes living the Christian life in holy dedication. Continuing with the Epistles, Paul urges the church to *be kind and compassionate...forgiving each other*, as opposed to *every form of malice*. Finally, Peter urges the church to *crave pure spiritual milk* – which means that they can only grow in their salvation (sanctification) by desiring the word of God with the same hunger that a baby craves milk.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you.
- Ephesians 4: 31-32

When you were babies, and perhaps even now, milk was a mainstay of your diet – it often meant the difference between a happy baby and an upset baby. When you cried, the remedy was most likely a bottle to feed your stomach and to satisfy the oral sensation that is an inherit need. In this same way, spiritual milk should be desired for you to grow an develop in your spiritual health – without such intake, you will likely regress to *bitterness, rage, anger...and every form of malice*.

I urge you to make a choice on the basis of need rather than want: you need God’s word such that you can be free from malice and all the similar forms of Godless behavior. Without his word, you will be left as an unhealthy and unhappy baby – without any hope of ever changing in time.



MARRIAGE

Marriage is a beautiful relationship; it is a relationship designed by God for a man and woman to be joined together as lifelong partners under the lordship of God.

The Bible describes this relationship in Ephesians:

- 🔔 *Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord* – this means the husband is the designated head of his wife, just as Jesus is the head of the church, and should be respected for this assigned position
- 🔔 *Husbands, love your wives as your own bodies* – this means to love them just as Christ loves the church and gave himself for the church (all who are part of the church body)
- 🔔 *Husbands, leave your family and be joined with your wife* – this means that in the sacrament or marriage, a husband and wife are a new family with responsibility to each other, honor for each other, and trust in each other



As important as these instructions are to a healthy marriage, the foundation or ability to carry-out the instructions is a love for God and, in turn, love for your spouse; without love, a sense of responsibility, honor and trust will not be sustainable; in short, love covers a multitude of sins or imperfections.

If God did not love us, He would not have:

- ✝ Given us a way for salvation or reconciliation to Him through his son
- ✝ Given the Holy Spirit as our helper and intercessor
- ✝ Given us the Bible as His word and the truth
- ✝ Been committed to His relationship with man both before and after sin

God loves us as a gift. In a similar way, marriage is based on two people loving each other unconditionally through the understanding and acceptance that each is loved unconditionally by God. If love is based on conditions and expectations, it is not love of God or of another; rather, it is love of self and one's own needs and interests.

Marriages can succeed, overcome, survive, and fail. Even if the marriage remains, the relationship and love itself can be in deterioration. For marriage to succeed or be healthy, both the man and woman must remain humbled by the grace afforded them through God's love; in turn, they are enabled to love their spouse. Aside from God's love, marriage has probably succeeded; still, I see no way possible for man's love alone to sustain this lifelong relationship as God designed marriage to be.

MEASURING

Pictured to my right, a measuring tape is a handy tool to have around the house; it is a must for all kinds of do-it-yourself projects to include:

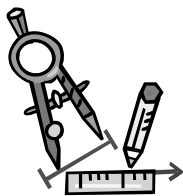
- ✎ Hanging pictures or other items on the wall or ceiling
- ✎ Installing wall molding or other detailed carpentry
- ✎ Hanging wall paper or similar wall decorative
- ✎ Installing flooring such as tile, carpet or wood
- ✎ Installing electrical outlets, phone jacks, and other utility access
- ✎ Determining the height of your growing children and so much more



Measuring involves some types of calibrated devices such as:

- ⊕ A measuring cup – used to measure volume such as ounces, cups, liters, etc.
- ⊕ A thermometer – used to measure temperature in Fahrenheit or Celsius
- ⊕ A ruler – used to measure length in inches, feet, centimeters, etc.
- ⊕ A compass, used to measure direction with the needle always pointing North

Measuring requires that you understand how to use the device – which sometimes takes a few tries to *get the hang of it*. Once mastered however, measuring becomes as simple as 1-2-3; unless of course, the device is not accurately calibrated or basically is not working right. Therefore, an accurate measurement requires both an accurate or calibrated tool and an understanding of the tool's application and use.



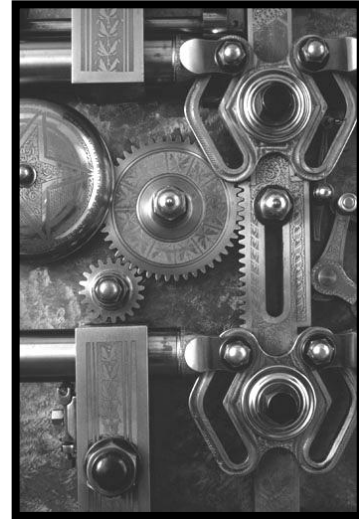
The use of measurement devices is likely a part of your repertoire of math and science related subject matter; thus, the information above will be most likely be received as boring, passé, and well covered at this point. Yet, attention to measuring and the use of said devices are forever and always of keen interest to those whose lives and livelihood depends on accuracy and precision.

Whether for the nurse or doctor that record and analyze test results, or the patient receiving medical attention, such measuring is sometimes of vital importance. For the engineer sampling the results of a test or control, such measuring may determine the difference between product success and failure. For the team constructing a house or other building, such measuring may directly impact the integrity and longevity of the structure and the associated maintenance to repair and maintain the property.

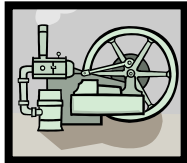
As the carpenter, you should always measure at least twice before cutting or recording your results; *differing weights and differing measures – the Lord detests them both*.

MECHANISMS

Mechanisms are another name for gadgets, machines, or anything else that has mechanical operation or action. To the right, a series of gears, cogs, and other integrated components operate systematically in the function of some machine or device. The components appear to be all mechanical – or without electrical, hydraulic, or pneumatic (air) operations. In old clocks such as the wind-up variety or Grandfather clocks, the mechanism was entirely mechanical with intricate components like that illustrated aside. The word “mechanism” may be a little outdated (with more direct application to the pre-electronic age); but, if only in an antique or novelty shop, mechanisms can be found with the same ability to captivate and fascinate the young minds, and bring awe of those so creative in the design.



On the risk of further dating this word, consider some of the early machines that operated on the basis of mechanisms as described above. Steam engines, typically fueled by coal or wood, relied on mechanisms for the engine as well as the integral equipment such as trains and boats. Watches and other mechanisms existed in the 1800's; and were common enough to be used and owned by much of the population. Even before indoor plumbing and residential electrical service, mechanisms were household equipment such as clothes washers, tractors and other farm equipment, and sewing machines.



Other mechanisms included typewriters, adding machines, and similar office and administrative equipment. You don't know what typing on one of those all-mechanical typewriters is like; trust me, it's not for the weak fingered or for the inaccurate typist. I learned how to type on one of the beasts and, frankly, have no desire to go.



Industry was quite possible the earliest benefactor of mechanisms: craftsman or engineers might have designed the first of mechanisms but in order to meet market demand, mass production would have likely followed in the course. In industry, mechanisms were applied for building more mechanisms and so on and so forth. Mechanisms were both applied and produced in the developing industrial age. What once has been unimaginable had become repetition thanks to the advent and availability of mechanisms in all forms from children's toys to machines of all kinds.

Final Comments

In these final comments, I must consider the many that have prayed over my long term estrangement from my children and, though not fully aware of the circumstances, have no less given their attention and prayerful thoughts. For these people and their genuine interests, I am eternally grateful and appreciative.

Secondly, my family deserves more than I can possibly provide in the way of appreciation and gratitude – they have been present through the darkness and have never left me or my matters alone; rather, they have embraced me both physically and otherwise in both obvious as well as discrete ways. As I side note, I have learned more about my father in the last few years than I learned in all prior years. As for my mother, she has always been there to bid us welcome and to lift us up in prayer – whether we seemed to need it or not.

For my wife and step-children, the blessings continue to pour in as my opportunity to experience intimate family-life has been rekindled. I must say again, that my appreciation and respect for step-parenting has reached a new plateau but, still the lessons and experience may serve me well in the eventual reconciliation with my nature children. As for Jill, my wife, I could not have a more blessed help-mate, friend, and companion.

I close by praising God for those described above as well as my own children and the circumstances that exist – it is only by God's grace that I can give thanks for the circumstances that separate me from my children, but must continue to trust that reconciliation will occur in his time and for his glory...I do not understand but must trust and must learn to trust.

God Bless You.