



LENTEN

Devotions

Foreword

You hold in your hands a labor of love, I simply want to talk about God and all His Beauty. As you read you will find that I try to approach God's word in a unique way. My thought process is quite different than most. As you read these devotions you will learn about church traditions. But learning facts is not my intention. By sharing these bits of information, I hope to deepen your understanding of Biblical knowledge. As I close each devotion, I hope to challenge you to answer the question that the facts demand. There may be a time or two, or three when you do not completely agree with my observations. Please do not let that get in the way. The important thing is that you let the wondrous events of this season wash over you and cause you to reflect what it means in your life. May these devotions lead you to a deeper and more profound and infinite relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Dedication

This is dedicated to our God and Father who blesses us daily when we spend a portion of each day in quiet devotion. This is also dedicated to all those who will take time to read each devotion daily, to all those who have nurtured me in my growth and a fellow believer in Christ Jesus.

Thank You

I want to thank Larry and Lynette and their spouses for the patients while their mates edited this work. I also want to thank Blair and Sassenach for their editing work.

Acknowledgements/Sources

I cannot begin to acknowledge all the authors I have read over the forty plus years I have walked among the giants of the faith. Their names may not be written in history books, but they are written in the Lambs Book of Life. To only name some would do a disservice to the ones I fail to mention.

Then there is the internet and the countless website I have visited and read.

Lastly, and most important I want to acknowledge that my main source was and always will be our Father who guides my thought. Thank you

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**And I,
if I am lifted up
from the earth,
will draw all
peoples to Myself.**

(John 12:32)

An Introduction to Lent 2022

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry.
(Matthew 4:1-2)*

Just as we set aside time to spiritually prepare for Christmas Day, it makes sense to set aside time to prepare for the two most important days of the Christian year. Lent is a time that offers us an opportunity to come to terms with the human condition we may spend the rest of the year running from, and it brings our need for a Savior to the forefront. Like Advent, Lent is a time to open the doors of our hearts a little wider and understand our Lord a little deeper, so that when Good Friday and eventually Easter come, it is not just another day at church, but an opportunity to receive the overflowing of grace God has to offer.

According to 40acts.org, "While Advent is a celebration and a time of great anticipation, Lent is more frequently seen as a time of solemn observance and preparation for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. From its start on Ash Wednesday until its conclusion on Easter Sunday, Lent has been a traditional time for fasting or giving something up or abstinence. Just as we carefully prepare for events in our personal lives, as a wedding, birthday, or a commencement; Lent invites us to make our minds and hearts ready for remembering Jesus' life, death, and bodily resurrection."

But unlike the childlike joy associated with the season of Advent, with its eager anticipation of the precious baby Jesus, Lent is an intensely penitential time as we examine our sinful natures and return to the God we have, through our own rebelliousness, hurt time and again. Lent is also an opportunity to contemplate what our Lord really did for us on the Cross - and it wasn't pretty. But ultimately, the purpose of Lent does not stop at sadness and despair - it points us to the hope of the Resurrection and the day when every tear will be dried.

Although the nature of suffering is not one that offers itself to easy explanations or pat answers, the answers we seek seem to make the most sense in light of the Cross. There is nothing in the world - no religion, philosophy, or material comfort - that offers such a powerful answer to life's toughest questions as the two slabs of wood on which our Savior died. Although I was drawn to Christianity in search of joy, it's the Cross that keeps me coming back day after day, year after year. It is in this time of year that I am reminded of what Jesus did for me.

When I look into the eyes of our suffering God, I'm in awe - suddenly the complexity of our Lord, the love of our Lord, the humanity of our Lord shows through. I realize God is not just some nebulous energy source or a grandfather sitting in the clouds - He is so much more. The Cross is where our faith stands when all other faiths fail. Christ's sacrifice and his subsequent resurrection are the true "cruxes" of the Christian faith. Without one, there would be no salvation, without the other, no hope. This is why Good Friday and the following Easter Sunday are the most important dates on the Christian calendar - even more so than Christmas.

So where does Lent come from, and how do we "do" Lent? The Lenten season developed as part of the historical Christian calendar and is typically celebrated by Catholics and some mainline Protestant churches that follow a liturgical calendar. Although its format has varied throughout the centuries and throughout different cultures, the basic concept remains the same: to open our hearts to God's refining grace through prayer, confession, fasting, and almsgiving as we anticipate Holy Week. Lent traditionally lasts forty days, modeled after Christ's forty-day fast in the desert, and ends on Good Friday. In the Western Church, Lent officially begins with a reminder of our mortality on Ash Wednesday.

Almighty and Ever-living God

you invite us deeper into your world, your people, your Lent.

May this time be one of outward focus;

seeking you in those we often ignore.

Help us live a Lent focused on freedom, generosity, and encounter.

Give us hearts hungry to serve you

and those who need what we have to give.

- Author Unknown

Wednesday March 2nd: Is He Worthy?

Do you feel the world is broken? (We do)
Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do)
But do you know that all the dark won't
Stop the light from getting through? (We do)
Do you wish that you could see it all made new? (We do)

Is all creation groaning? (It is)
Is a new creation coming? (It is)
Is the glory of the Lord to be the light within our midst? (It is)
Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? (It is)

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave
He was David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honor and glory
Is He worthy of this? (He is)

Does the Father truly love us? (He does)
Does the Spirit move among us? (He does)
And does Jesus, our Messiah hold forever those He loves? (He does)
Does our God intend to dwell again with us? (He does)

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave
From every people and tribe
Every nation and tongue
He has made us a kingdom and priests to God
To reign with the Son

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honor and glory
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Is He worthy of this?

He is!
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
He is!
He is!

Songwriter: Andrew Peterson & Andres Shive

The centurion answered, "Lord, I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. (Matthew 8:8)

In the secular world, bunnies, lambs and eggs are associated with the Easter season, because most baby *animals* are born in the spring around Easter. Eggs sometimes are used at pagan festivals to represent the springing up of new life. Christians may include eggs as part of their celebration; however, it is not the egg, but the Lamb of God that is the most powerful symbol of Easter for believers.

The concept of a sacrificial lamb began in the Old Testament. Lambs were sacrificed regularly in the Jewish religious system. Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple in Jerusalem for the sins of the people (Exodus 29:38-42), because blood was the requirement to atone for sin (Leviticus 17:11).

Lambs were sacrificed during the Jewish Passover. At the first Passover, Jewish believers selected and sacrificed a year-old male lamb, without defect, also called the Paschal Lamb, and then painted their dwelling doorpost with the blood of the lamb so that the God's, Angel of Death, would "pass over" their homes while carrying out God's judgement on Egypt.

The Messiah came as a humble and meek lamb, prepared to fulfill "the Law of the Prophets, Moses and the Psalms" and be the ultimate sin offering. We as Christians believe that there is a correlation between the Paschal Lamb and the perfect Passover Lamb.

At the beginning of the Savior's ministry, John the Baptist declared Him "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," and Jesus was crucified during the Jews' Passover observance. Sadly, the Jews did not recognize the prophesied two advents of their Messiah when He came, and they are somewhat blinded or hardened to the Gospel of Christ for a predicted time.

In Revelation, John saw a powerful image: a lamb, "looking as if it had been slain" The blood of God's chosen Lamb, the Messiah, was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Revelation 5 is one of the most awe-inspiring, majestic passages in the New Testament. In Revelation 5:1-2, the One sitting on the throne holds a scroll with seven seals. A mighty angel asked those gathered around the throne, "*Who is worthy* to break the seals and open the scroll?" In the vision, John, the writer of Revelation, wept profusely, because "no one," John said, "was found worthy to open the scroll." But then, the triumphant "Lion of the tribe of Judah" stepped forward. Only the lamb, now described as a reigning "lion," was found worthy.

Heaven rejoiced! When Jesus stepped forward to take the scroll, a "new song" broke out and a myriad of angels worshipped Jesus around the throne of God. "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain," they said, "to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" The citizens of heaven held nothing back! In churches today, this is a powerful anthem: "Thou art worthy, Thou art worthy, Thou art worthy, O Lord, Thou art worthy." The Lamb of God is still worthy to be praised, and He will be praised and honored forever. Remember, if we do not cry out and give Him praise for His worthiness, then all of nature will. I would love to hear that concert, and I will when I live with Him in heaven. As for now I will shout with all my inward being, "HE IS WORTHY."

Thursday, March 3rd: Behold the Lamb: Part 1

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away
Slain for us and we remember
The promise made that all who come in faith
Find forgiveness at the cross

So we share in this bread of life
And we drink of his sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of peace
Around the table of the King

The body of our Savior Jesus Christ, torn for you
Eat and remember
The wounds that healed the death that brings us life
Paid the price to make us one

So we share in this bread of life
And we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of love
Around the table of the King

The blood that cleanses every stain of sin, shed for you
Drink and remember
He drained death's cup that all may enter in
To receive the life of God

So we share in this bread of life
And we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of grace
Around the table of the King
And so with thankfulness and faith we rise
To respond and to remember
Our call to follow in the steps of Christ
As His body He loves us

And we share in his suffering
We proclaim Christ will come again
And with joy in the feast of Heaven
Around the table of the King
Around the table of the King

Songwriter: Keith Getty

everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (Isiah 55:1)

Whenever I hear this song, I cannot help but think of King Arthur and the Kingdom of Camelot. Arthurian legend, the body of stories and medieval romances, known as the matter of Britain, center on the legendary King Arthur. Medieval writers, especially the French, variously treated stories of Arthur's birth, the adventures of his knights, and the adulterous love between his knight Sir Lancelot and his queen, Guinevere. This last situation and the quest for the Holy Grail (the vessel used by Christ at the Last Supper and given to Joseph of Arimathea) brought about the dissolution of the knightly fellowship, the death of Arthur, and the destruction of his kingdom. Not really a true love story.

I also think of the song, "Are You Sitting Comfortably," by The Moody Blues. It is also a story about Camelot, Merlin, Guinevere and sailing along the sands of time and the crystal sea. However, I suspect that the song has other meanings.

What makes me think of these things is the last line of the song which goes "around the table of the king." That, in turn, makes me think of the round table in King Arthur's court and the Knights of the Roundtable. I know that may sound like a leap, but then my mind makes many such leaps.

Now, if you think that I'm thinking that God's table is round, you would be wrong. You see I must admit that I do not know what shape God's dinner table is. To me, here on earth, God's table is the altar where the bread and the wine are consecrated. I have never seen a round altar. They are always rectangular. Some are wood and some are stone, and some are made of a composite material. Some are solid and some are open. Some are draped in linen, and some are not. But here again, I do not think the altar is what is meant by around the table of the King. But just maybe it could be.

When you look at the painting of the Last Supper by Leonard de Vinci you see Christ in the center with His arms spread out. In other paintings you see Christ holding the Host (the wafer which represents the bread and the body of Christ). When I saw that, it hit me that that may be the table of the King. When Christ holds the host, He is performing the duty of the priest during the Eucharist, and if you remember, Jesus is our High Priest. So, the Table of the King maybe just be ordinary table like the one in the di Vinci painting.

Then I had another thought. I have served congregations where communion lasted at least thirty to forty minutes. That is how long it took to serve the congregation. There were two lines where people came and knelt at the altar and two lines where they received the host and wine standing and returning to their seats. There was always music, which was sung by the choir and congregation, and when the meal was over, a spirited praise song followed. I have also served a congregation where we sat around tables and served each other.

I must say that I do not have a clue as to how communion will be served in Heaven, only that it will take several years to complete. I look forward to that day when the King Himself will send me an invitation to join Him at His table in the most festive meal ever served. Hope to see you as we all sit comfortably around "the Table of the King."

Friday, March 4th: Behold the Lamb: Part 2

See Him there, the great I Am
A crown of thorns upon His head
The Father's heart displayed for us Oh God,
we thank You for the cross

Lifted up on Calvary's hill We cursed Your name,
and even still You bore our shame, and paid the cost Oh God,
we thank You for the cross

Behold the Lamb The story of redemption written on His hands
Jesus, You will reign forevermore The victory is Yours We sing Your praise
Endless hallelujah to Your holy name Jesus, You will reign forevermore
The victory is Yours

All for us, this sacrifice For every sin our Savior died
The Lord of Life can't be contained Our God has risen from the grave
Oh, our God has risen from the grave

Behold the Lamb The story of redemption written on His hands
Jesus, You will reign forevermore The victory is Yours
We sing Your praise Endless hallelujah to Your holy name
Jesus, You will reign forevermore The victory is Yours

When the age of death is done We'll see Your face,
bright as the sun We'll bow before the King of kings
Oh God, forever we will sing

Behold the Lamb The story of redemption written on His hands
Jesus, You will reign forevermore The victory is Yours
Behold the Lamb

The story of redemption written on His hands
Jesus, You will reign forevermore The victory is Yours
We sing Your praise Endless hallelujah to Your holy name
Jesus, You will reign forevermore
The victory is Yours
You reign forevermore
The victory is Yours
King Jesus reigns forevermore
The victory is Yours

Songwriters: Melodie Malone / Philip David Wickham / Kristian Paul Stanfill

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. (1 John 1:1)

If you have ever seen the movie The Ten Commandments you may recall when Pharaoh was talking to Moses, he would end his sentence by saying, "So it is said, so let it be written" and the scribes would hurry to write it down so it would be preserved for perpetuity. In one of Tom Clancy's books, Jack's wife Cathy makes the statement, "if it is not written down, then it never happened." Here are two diametrically opposing thoughts. One writes things down so that they can be remembered, and the other states unless things are in writing, one will never know what exactly happened.

We know from the four gospels, that Jesus was crucified and was raised from the dead. We have written accounts. Whether or not you believe them is another story altogether. However, I believe they are true. Now we do not know if the stories about the crucifixion and resurrection were told to another, and a scribe wrote them down, or if they were penned by the person for whom the books are named. Either way, we have them as evidence that they took place. Just let me say, that to me personally, I believe the Bible to be the inspired word of our Father, and how it came into print is a moot point.

According to the song, the story is not written on paper so all can have a copy and read it any time they so desire. The story of redemption is written on the hands of our Savior and Lord, Jesus the Christ. I must admit that I had never thought of it that way. But how true it is. When Jesus held out His hand to Thomas and asked him to place his finger into His hand, He was in essence telling Thomas and the other disciples the old old story of His love for humanity.

When I worked for the American Anglican Council, a well-to-do donor gave us a piece of art. In reality, it was a wall hanging of Jesus on the cross. The left hand was still nailed to the cross, while the right reached down to the world to lift it up. As I walked by that piece twice each day, I came to a better understanding of the cross and what it actually means in my life. What I came to understand was that the cross could not hold Him there. With His hand extended down, Jesus had actually pulled the nail through His hand. And yes, the hole in His hand was still bleeding. I could literally hear Him say, "This is my body broken for you and this is my blood shed for you for the remission of your sins."

It is kind of eerie when a piece of art reaches out and speaks to you. But you know, God moves in mysterious ways. Or maybe it is not so mysterious. Maybe we need to take the time to stop and look at the world around us, and let God speak to us through nature. Maybe it is time to stop and smell the roses. Maybe it is time to just stop and take a deep breath and inhale the goodness of God. Just maybe ... and I will let you fill in the blank.

When was the last time you held the story of redemption in your hand? Was it the paper version or was it the real redemption story written in the blood of the Lamb? Just remember the words of Isaiah, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." The hand of redemption.

Saturday, March 5th: Above All

Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man
You were here before the world began

Above all kingdoms, above all thrones
Above all wonders the world has ever known
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth
There's no way to measure what You're worth

Crucified, laid behind a stone
You lived to die, rejected and alone
Like a rose, trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me
Above all

Above all powers, above all kings
Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man
You were here before the world began

Above all kingdoms, above all thrones
Above all wonders the world has ever known
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth
There's no way to measure what You're worth

Crucified, laid behind a stone
You lived to die, rejected and alone
Like a rose, trampled on the ground
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Above all

Like a rose, trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me
Above all

Songwriters: Leonard J Le Blanc / Paul Joseph Baloche

*I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds.
For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. (Ps 50:9-11)*

There were times in my life when I was going to college and seminary that things got so financially bad that I did not know where my next meal, or for that matter, where the rent money was going to come from. I would pray that God would sell a couple of His prize cattle and send me the proceeds. He never did. But He provided in other ways. In addition, I can remember Him telling me that He never said it would be easy, but He said it would be worth it. And yes, the hard times taught me so many good lessons. I would not exchange them for anything.

The first lesson I learned was this, in His own way and time God will provide the bread necessary to sustain life. One Sunday night, I was in church sitting next to an elderly woman whom I did not know. My stomach started to growl and continue to do so the entire service. After the service, she took me by the arm and asked me when was the last time I had anything to eat. Since I had never seen her in church before, I thought she was just a visitor and was curious. She explained that she was a visitor and was just passing through the city. She then stated that she had this premonition that she was to come here and give someone twenty dollars. She handed me the twenty and went on her way. Yes, God does work in mysterious ways.

The God I serve today is above all. He is above all understanding but a little confusing at times. Just when I think I have God figured out, here comes a curve from left center field. The song states that the wisdom of God is beyond the ways and understanding of man. Paul writes in First Corinthians that the wisdom of man is the foolishness of God. Isaiah also states that according to God, "His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, for as far as the heavens are removed from the earth, are His thoughts from our thoughts." How true.

We as human beings also talk about the seven wonders of this world. Psalm eight tells us to look up into the night sky and see the first great wonder of the universe. The psalmist then asked the question, "who is man that you are mindful of him?" I like to put it in the first-person context, "who am I that you are mindful of me?" You who hung the stars and called them all by name, who am I? For me, that puts it all in perspective. He is truly above all nature and all created things.

The song states that there is no way to measure what He is worth. In a way that is correct. But only in earthly terms. He is the pearl of great price, and we who accept him as King of our lives, know what he is worth and the gifts of salvation and forgiveness he offers is priceless. However, they did cost His Son everything.

Sunday, March 6th: Table of Grace

Hear the good news, you've been invited
No matter what others may say,
Your darkest sins will be forgiven
You will always have a place.
At the table of grace the cup's never empty.
The plate's always full and it's never too late.
To come and be filled with love never ending
You're always welcome at the table of grace.

So come weak, and heavy hearted (heavy hearted)
Don't try to hide your earthly scars.
In His eyes, we all are equal (yes, we are)
Don't be afraid, come as you are.
At the table of grace the cup's never empty.
The plate's always full, and it's never too late.
To come and be filled with love never ending
You're always welcome at the table of grace.

So let the first become the last
Let the poor put kings to shame.
Their willing hearts will be their treasure
By the power of Jesus' name!

At the table of grace the cup's never empty
The plate's always full, and it's never too late!
To come and be filled with love never ending
You're always welcome at the table of grace.
At the table of grace the cup's never empty.
The plate's always full, and it's never too late
To come and be filled with love never ending:
You're always welcome at the table.
Everyone's welcome at the table of grace.

Songwriters: Connie Rae Harrington / Anna Hutto

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(Eph 1:2)*

Grace is an essential part of God's character. Grace is closely related to God's benevolence, love, and mercy. Grace can be variously defined as "God's favor toward the unworthy" or "God's benevolence on the undeserving." In His grace, God is willing to forgive us and bless us abundantly, in spite of the fact that we don't deserve to be treated so well or dealt with so generously. The Bible repeatedly calls grace a "gift." This is an important analogy because it teaches us some key things about grace.

First, anyone who has ever received a gift understands that a gift is much different from a loan, which requires repayment or return by the recipient. The fact that grace is a gift means that nothing is owed in return. However, there is a whole lot that is expected. If you do not believe me, read the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew.

Second, there is no cost to the person who receives a gift. A gift is free to the recipient, although it is not free to the giver, who bears the expense. The gift of salvation costs us sinners nothing. But the price of such an extravagant gift came at a great cost for our Lord Jesus, who died in our place, and it cost Him everything.

Third, once a gift has been given, ownership of the gift has transferred, and it is now ours to keep. There is a permanence in a gift that does not exist with loans or advances. When a gift changes hands, the giver permanently relinquishes all rights to renege or take back the gift in the future. God's grace is ours forever and ever.

Fourth, in the giving of a gift, the giver voluntarily forfeits something he owns, willingly losing what belongs to him so that the recipient will profit from it. The giver becomes poorer so the recipient can become richer. This generous and voluntary exchange from the giver to the recipient is visible in: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." And how rich are we? Immeasurable.

Finally, the Bible teaches that grace is completely unmerited. The gift and the act of giving have nothing at all to do with our merit or innate quality. In fact, the Bible says quite clearly that we don't deserve God's salvation. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."

When I think about "The Table of Grace" I associate it with the altar where the bread and wine are consecrated. The original "Table of Grace" was located in such a place and situated between the entrance to the courtyard and the doorway that led into the Holy Place of the sanctuary, no one could come into God's presence without first encountering this sizable altar. Its central location is significant, for it reminded Israelite worshipers that access to God depended on the efficacy of the various kinds of sacrifices presented on it. These sacrifices were vital for ensuring that sinful, defiled people could approach God's holy presence in comfort and safety.

I believe that "The Table of Grace" is where grace and mercy meet. Where the cup is always full, and the plate is never empty. Where we are to come and be filled with the Love of God. Where no one is ever turned away. So come and partake of the Grace of God. Remember, the meal has already been paid for.

Monday, March 7th: Breathe

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your Holy presence living in me

This is my daily bread
This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me

And I, I'm desperate for You
And I, I'm lost without You

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your Holy presence living in me

This is my daily bread
This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me

And I, I'm desperate for You
And I, I'm lost without You
And I, I'm desperate for You
And I, I'm lost without You

I'm lost without You
I'm lost without You
I'm desperate for You
Cry out to Him

I'm desperate for You
Cry out to You
I'm desperate for You
Well I'm lost without You now

I'm desperate for You
I'm desperate for You
I'm lost, I'm lost, I'm lost without You Lord
Yea, I'm lost without You

I'm lost without You
I'm lost without You
I'm desperate for You

Song Writer: Michael W. Smith

*The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the
Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4)*

In the Lord's Prayer we pray to our Father who is in heaven. The literal meaning of the Greek word "ouranos" (heaven) is air or sky and paints a far better picture of where God is to be found. In one simple word, Jesus informs the disciples that God's home knows no boundaries. In essence, Jesus has told his disciples that the one who will hear their request is all around them. They do not have to go to the temple to deliver their appeal. The one who cares for them does not keep office hours but is available whenever they choose to enter into a conversation. What He is telling them is that God is accessible any time and any place.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *ruach* means "wind," "breath," or "spirit." The corresponding Greek word is *pneuma*. Both words are commonly used in passages referring to the Holy Spirit. The word is first use in the Bible appears in the second verse of Genesis: "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." In Genesis 6:17 *ruach* is translated "breath of life." Genesis 8:1 uses *ruach* to describe the "wind" God sent over the earth to recede the flood waters.

Often, when the Old Testament talks about the "Spirit of the Lord" or the "Spirit of God," the word for "Spirit" is again *Ruach*. Use of *ruach* as "spirit" when not linked with God, usually is in reference to the human spirit. This can mean the actual spirit of a human or one's mood, emotional state, or general disposition. *Ruach* as "breath" or "wind" can be a reference to literal breath or wind, or it can take on a figurative meaning such as in the idiom "a mere breath."

God's *Ruach* is the source of life. The *Ruach* of God is the One who gives life to all creation. We could say that God's *Ruach* has created every other (non-divine) *ruach* that exists. All living creatures owe the breath of life to the Creative Spirit of God. Moses states this truth explicitly: "God . . . gives breath [*ruach*] to all living things" Job understood this truth as well: "As long as I have life within me, the breath [*ruach*] of God lives in my nostrils." Later, Elihu tells Job, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life".

To this day, the orthodox Jew still believes that at birth, God still breathes into the nostrils of each child the breath of life. Pascal went a little farther and believed that in that breath, God placed a void that only He could fill. That is why when we are looking to fill the void in our lives, we need to go outside and look at our surroundings and take a breath of fresh air. Not only will we fill our souls with the Spirit of God, but we will also fill the emptiness of our lives.

For some the emptiness is vast and unending, something like space. If you find yourself in this situation, just take several deep breathes, hold and release. Repeat as often as needed. Remember, there is plenty of God's breath to go around.

Tuesday, March 8th: Remembrance

Oh, how could it be
That my god would welcome me
into this mystery?
Say 'eat this bread, take this wine'
Now the simple made divine
for any to receive

See his body, his blood
Know that he has overcome
Every trial we will face
None to lost to be saved
None too broken or ashamed
All are welcome in this place.

By your mercy, we come to your table,
By Your grace you are making us faithful

Lord, we remember You,
And remembrance leads us to worship
And as we worship You,
Our worship leads to communion
We respond to your invitation;
We remember you

Dying you destroyed our death
Rising you restored our life
Lord Jesus come in Glory
Lord Jesus come in glory

Lord, we remember You,
And remembrance leads us to worship
And as we worship You,
Our worship leads to communion
We respond to your invitation;
We remember you

By your mercy, we come to your table,
By Your grace you are making us faithful

Song Writer: Matt Redman

*And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders
and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne
and worshiped God, (Revelations 7:11)*

The apostle Paul described true worship as: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable, or well pleasing and perfect."

There is only one way to renew our minds, and that is by the Word of God. It is the truth, and the knowledge of the Word of God. To know the truth, to believe the truth, to hold convictions about the truth, and to love the truth will naturally result in true spiritual worship. It is conviction followed by affection, affection that is a response to truth, not to any external stimuli, including music. Music as such has nothing to do with worship. Music can't produce worship, although it certainly can produce emotion. Music is not the origin of worship, but can be the expression of it. Do not look to music to induce your worship; look to music as simply an expression of that which is induced by a heart that is rapt by the mercies of God.

True worship is God-centered. People tend to get caught up in where they should worship, what music they should sing in worship, and how their worship looks to other people. Focusing on these things misses the point. Jesus tells us that true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth. This means we worship from the heart and the way God has designed His creation. Worship can include praying, reading God's Word with an open heart, singing, participating in communion, and serving others. It is not limited to one act, but is done properly when the heart and attitude of the person are in the right place.

It's also important to know that worship is reserved only for God. Only He is worthy and not any of His servants. We are not to worship saints, prophets, statues, angels, or any false gods. We also should not be worshiping for the expectation of something in return, such as a miraculous healing. Worship is done for God, because He deserves it, and for His pleasure alone. Worship can be public praise to God in a congregational setting, where we can proclaim through prayer and praise our adoration and thankfulness to Him and what He has done for us. True worship is felt inwardly and then is expressed through our actions. "Worshiping" out of obligation is displeasing to God, and He can see through all the hypocrisy, and He hates it.

True worship is not confined to what we do in church or open praise. True worship is the acknowledgment of God and all His power and glory in everything we do. The highest form of praise and worship is obedience to Him and His Word. To do this, we must know God; we cannot be ignorant of Him. Worship is to glorify and exalt God and to show our loyalty and admiration to our Father.

How does your worship stack up?

Wednesday, March 9th: Communion Song

Let's have a meal Let me reveal who I am I'm your Savior
I will kneel down and wash all the sin from your soul
I'm your servant I am all you need

I'm the lamb that was slain
and my blood washes you clean
I'm the pure sacrifice
Let my life give you life
I'm the lamb

I am the bread
Given for every man
I sustain you
Drink from the cup
It is my blood shed for all
I'm redemption
I am all you need
I am everything

We cry worthy
We cry worthy
We cry worthy
Is the lamb of God

It is my blood shed for all I'm redemption
I am all you need I am everything
We cry worthy We cry worthy
We cry worthy Is the lamb of God

Songwriter: Jonathan Stockstill

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Revelations 5:11-13)

I must start by saying that I am not worthy to receive any gift from God. But then neither are any of you. We were and are made worthy by the actions of our Father and His Son. In every case, what we find is that our worthiness is not our deserving or meriting or earning, but rather our seeing and savoring something of infinite worth. Our worthiness is our preferring that worth above all things. We do not merit or deserve or earn the Lord and his calling and his kingdom. But in our need, God grants us to see them as infinitely precious; infinitely worthy. And we must embrace them with desperate desire. We prefer overall. We treasure. We receive. We trust. That is what it means to be "worthy of the Lord."

We become worthy of grace, when we see our need for grace, and when we embrace the infinite value of the Gracious One brought to earth by His Son, Christ Jesus. In this sense, if we love mother or father, son or daughter, or our own life more than Jesus, we are not worthy of him. Our worthiness is our desperate preference for His gracious worth over all else.

Are we worthy of repentance? Repentance and forgiveness have such worth that the fruit they produce will share in that worth. Fruit worthy of repentance means that there is a suitable correspondence between the beauty of the repentance and the beauty of its fruit. Repentance is the turning to God from all else, and the valuing of God above all things. That is beautiful. That is what humans were made for. That is worthy. Then, this inner treasuring of God above all things bears fruit in deeds. And these deeds reflect the supreme worth of God. And so, they too, in all their imperfection, are worthy. Their worthiness is a reflection of the repentance, which is a reflection of God's infinite worthiness. I know, a lot to digest.

But all we really need to know is that we are made worthy when we place everything at the foot of the cross. We are commanded to place our lives on the altar of God as a living sacrifice, which represents our spiritual worship. However, in so many other ways we are unworthy. When John looked around heaven to see if anyone was worthy to open the scroll, he cried, because no human or angel was worthy. The only one worthy and deserving any praise is the Son of God who is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Why is He the only one who is worthy? Because He is the only one who overcame evil and conquered death. He is the only one that should receive all the blessings and honor and glory and might. He is the only one who has the power to break the seals and open the scroll. Is He worthy, more than we will ever know? That's a good thing.

Thursday, March 10th: Come to the Table

Come all proud, come all greedy
Come all liars, come all shamed
Come all wealthy, come receive it
To the table, come today

Come all broken, come all needy
Come all poor, and come all slaves
Come all rulers, come be seated
Come all sinners, come all saints

Come to the table, from near and far
Come from the shadows, come out of the dark
There's room at the table, we saved you a seat
Come to the banquet, come join in the feast

Every race, every nation
Come all rebels, come all gay
From the fringes, come to Jesus
To a table full of grace
To the table come and stay

Come to the table, come eat and drink
There's no inner circle, come dine with the king
Recline at the table, come let down your guard
You're never a stranger, just come as you are

Come be whole, come be loved
Come accepted, come now come
Come be whole, come be loved
Come accepted, come now come
Come be whole, come be loved
Come accepted, come now come

Prepared is the table, we're ready to feast
The party is waiting, there's more still to feed
The harvest is ready, so go fill every seat
Go live out the mission as a kingdom of priests
Go live out the mission as a kingdom of priests

Come be whole, come be loved
Come accepted, come now come
Come be whole, come be loved
Come accepted, come now come
Come now come, come now come

Songwriters: Mark Alan Schoolmeesters

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31)

When I was in college, I did not have a whole lot of money, but I still liked to date. There were several times when I would ask a woman out on a date, and if she said yes, I would ask, how about a picnic? It seemed safe and no one was on the spot. I would stop by a restaurant and pick up a sandwich called a Marshall Fields, named after the department store in Chicago.

The sandwich was three slices of dark rye bread. It was more like a club sandwich but with thousand island dressing on top, covered by a crumbled-up egg. When I picked up the sandwich, I would always get two extra plates, plastic clutter and a host of napkins. Then I would pick up my date and drive to a designated place, park the car, open the car door for my date, then open the trunk and retrieve a blanket and the food. We would then walk five feet or so to the site where I had chosen to have lunch. No, it was not a romantic spot, it was the grassy area between two of the parked cars. I would spread out the blanket and we would sit down and have lunch.

I received quite a few different reviews about my choice of a spot. Some liked it, others not so much. I choose the spot for two reasons. The first came from a wise woman. She told me that if a female really wanted to date me it would not matter where we went or what we did. The second reason was to prove her correct or incorrect. She was correct one hundred percent of the time. If I asked for a second date and was granted such, I would know she wanted to be with me. If the answer was no, well there is no harm in trying.

The second date was usually a church league slow pitch softball game. Yes, I am mister excitement.

I have always wondered when we come to the Table of Grace how many come because they just want a free meal. Or they come out of habit or custom. Do they come because they are proud, greedy, liars, shamed and wealthy? If so, they come for the right reasons. Do we come because we are broken, needy, poor, slaves, rulers, or do we come because we are all sinners wanting to be saints? Do we come because we want to be whole, we want to be loved, we want to be accepted? We should.

The table is prepared for us to come as we are. It is prepared for every race and creed and for every gender. We come to the Table of Grace to let down our guard, to come and feast with the King, because we are never strangers at His table, and we come to the table because we are family. To laugh and to love. Not just one time or two, but for all eternity. The blanket is spread, what are you waiting for? An invitation? If so, here it is.

Friday, March 11th: Have Thine Own Way

Have Thine own way Lord
Have Thine own way
Thou art the potter I am the clay
Mold me and make me after Thy will
While I am waiting yielded and still

Have Thine own way Lord
Have Thine own way
Search me and try me Master today
Whiter than snow Lord wash me just now
As in Thy presence humbly I bow

Have Thine own way Lord
Have Thine own way
Hold over my being absolute sway
Filled with Thy spirit till all can see
Christ only always living in me

Songwriter: Adelaide Pollard

But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:20-21)

I once read in a book of Christian jokes that a mother has three treasures. They are, but not limited to, a handprint drawn on paper, a sketch, drawing or portrait, and lastly, a lump of clay. Around our house all handprints and drawings are gone from the fridge and replaced by non-important magnets. However, we do still have one very valuable piece of clay. It was designed to be a spoon holder for the stove. Unfortunately, you might never guess what it is. But it is priceless.

Writing in Second Corinthians, Paul reminds us that "we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Of course, the treasure that Paul is writing about is Christ in us. And as the scripture tells us this clay jar that we call a body was formed and shaped by our Father and we have no right to question our maker.

However, there are times when I'm sure we have either asked or wanted to ask the Creator "Are you sure this is the right way?" Which in my opinion, is a result of our wanting control, which is sinful. Let me give you an example. Both my knees have been replaced and one of my shoulders has also been replaced. My question to God would be, "Are you sure that there wasn't a better way to design them?" What about our spine. I have had two back surgeries and am in need of a third. I have been informed that the blood supply to our spinal column stops nourishing that part of our bodies in our early twenties. Could there have been a better design? Maybe so. There is one thing I do look forward to, and that is a body that will not be in need of any more surgeries.

But I am not so sure that the scripture is talking about the design and function of our bodies. I have a feeling that Paul was talking more about the functionality of our lives. According to Martin Luther our function is to "love and serve God," and I am fine with that. What I wonder about is my function in the body of believers. When I first became a believer, I had one prayer and it is found in the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs and reads:

"Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonor the name of my God."

When I received my call to be an ordained servant, I prayed a different prayer. It was, "I do not have to be number one, and I am just as happy being a number two." I wound up being a number one, but only after years of training and seasoning. And now, I am back to being a supporting cast.

I do not know how God has chosen to shape you for His ministry. That is between you and Him. But this I do know. Each one of us has a part to play and each one has been shaped and molded for that specific purpose. If you don't know what you were fashioned to become, and what duties you are to perform, ask. Please do not be like the servant who took the master's talents and buried them. If you do, I can guarantee that you will not hear the words; "Well done my good and faithful servant." And wouldn't you love to hear those words. I know I want to.

Saturday, March 12th: How Great Thou Art

Oh Lord, my God
When I, in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
How great Thou art, how great Thou art

Songwriter: Stuart Hine

what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 1:18-20)

As far back as I can remember, I have always loved nature. I do not know how it started, but there are many times when I remember living in the country in Newfoundland, Canada, at eight years old, going outside and looking up into the night sky. There were no streetlights and nothing to disturb the darkness of the night sky. There were so many stars. I started learning the constellations and still can recall many of their names.

When I lived in Miami, I would sail down to Pumpkin Key and anchor out. When it was dark, I would place a cassette in the stereo and listen to Gregorian Chants for hours. I was amazed at the vastness of space and often asked God how He accomplished such a feat. Of course, He never answered me. But now I look forward to watching the video when I get to heaven.

In 2014 and 2015, Joyce and I volunteered for the National Park Service on Elliott Key, a little dot of land seven- and one-half nautical miles from Homestead and Florida City. The Key is surrounded by water. On one side is Biscayne Bay and on the other is the Atlantic Ocean. We would spend January through May maintaining the trails, picking up trash left by the campers, cleaning the bathrooms, mowing the grass and other duties as needed. The Park Service would bring inner city children out to camp on the key. Most of these children had never been out of the city, much less on a boat or camping out for two nights. The highlight of their trip was to teach them about nature and have them interact with it.

On their final night there, they were given a blindfold and told not to remove it until they were told to. Then they took their right hand and grabbed hold of a piece of rope. This was to be their lifeline as they walked blindfolded through the forest. They were also to remain silent (yah right). When they reached a certain point the children were told to drop the rope and remove their blindfold. They were then instructed to walk quietly the rest of the way out of the forest, one at a time. The whole exercise was for the kids to learn the sounds and smells of the forest and to listen to nature.

How many times do we walk through life blindfolded and never experience the beauty that God has showered on us? How many times do we not stop and smell the roses? How many times do we miss the colors of the setting sun? How many times do we not stop and gaze upon the vastness of space and wonder, how did He do that? How many times do we sing about the beauty of the earth and yet we have never stopped to see just how magnificent it really is? Are our lives really that busy? Maybe it is time to just take a minute and look around and enjoy the beauty God has provided. Remember, all calendars come with empty boxes. What fills up your boxes? Important stuff or really important stuff. Tell me what you think, I'm listening.

Sunday, March 13th: I Can Only Imagine

I can only imagine
What it will be like When I walk by Your side
I can only imagine
What my eyes would see When Your face is before me
I can only imagine

Surrounded by Your glory What will my heart feel?
Will I dance for You Jesus Or in awe of You be still?
Will I stand in Your presence Or to my knees, will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine I can only imagine

I can only imagine
When that day comes And I find myself
Standing in the Son
I can only imagine
When all I will do Is forever, forever worship You
I can only imagine, I can only imagine

Surrounded by Your glory What will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you Jesus Or in awe of You be still?
Will I stand in your presence Or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine I can only imagine

Surrounded by Your glory What will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you Jesus Or in awe of You be still?
Will I stand in your presence Or to my knees, will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all?

I can only imagine, I can only imagine
I can only imagine, I can only imagine
I can only imagine I can only imagine

I can only imagine When all I will do
Is forever, forever worship You
I can only imagine

Songwriters: Bart Millard

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Sometime ago, Joyce and I purchased our first and only boat. We looked for a couple of years, going to boat shows and looking through every boating magazine you can imagine. However, before we purchased, we took lessons from a sailing school. Not for me so much but for Joyce. Our first week in sailing school saw us leave Ft Lauderdale, FL. on a forty-foot Beneteau. We sailed down the intercostal to Key Largo and back. Six of the seven nights we spent on the hook (anchored out for you non-sailors). We learned a very important lesson that trip, which was, Joyce does not like to be aboard a boat that heels on its side. So much for a mono-hull boat.

After that experience, we started looking for a multi-hull boat such as a catamaran. After looking at so many different brands and styles, we decided on an Island Packet. It is an extremely heavy boat and very sturdy in rough seas. We purchased one in Florida and had it trailered to Lake Lanier in Georgia. We also renamed the boat "Imagine." When people asked where we came up with the name, we told them it was taken from Ephesians and quoted the scripture to them.

In fact, Ephesians 3:20-21 are two of our favorite Bible verses. Now stop and think for a second, what can you imagine? The verse tells us that God can do far more than we can think or imagine. Over the years of being a priest, I have had a number of people question me about that statement. They are in fact ridiculous questions, and they know it, but they still like to ask. Like, can God make a rock that is too heavy for Him to lift? There have been several that are more creative but are inappropriate to write here. Hopefully, you can imagine on your own.

But the point of the song is not about what we can imagine God doing for us. It is about the time when we will stand before God and regardless of what some people think, even believers will stand before the judgement seat. What will you do when it is your turn? What do you see yourself doing, just standing there? What will you say? Will you dance out of gladness? Or will you be able to speak at all? Is it OK to just look into His wonderful face and just smile for a few million years? I can only imagine.

When I am surrounded by the glory of the Most High, what will I do? Will I fall on my face or my knees? Will I dance in joyous pleasure? What will my heart feel? Will my heart still be beating at a normal rate, or will it be racing so fast that it feels as if it will pop out of my chest? I can only imagine. Will I sing hallelujah or in awe will I be still? I can only imagine. Will I prostrate myself in worship and beg forgiveness? I can only imagine.

Ever give it any thought, what you will do when you see Him face to face? As I get older, I start to think about it more and more. I do not believe the "devil made me do it will" work. Or for that matter, any other excuse. As of yet, I do not have a written speech that I have prepared. As of this writing, I can only imagine. But I'm thinking about saying, just a plain thank you.

Monday, March 14th: In Remembrance of Me: Part 1

This is my body given for you
This is the cup that holds
The blood of the new covenant
This is forgiveness, simple and true
This is the way
That I have made for you

Before you eat Before you drink
Take a long look inside
And tell me what you see
He said do this in remembrance of Me.
Do this in remembrance of Me

This is the bread of life broken for you
This is the cup that holds
The wine of the new covenant
This is the love of Christ poured out anew
This is the Son of God who died for you

Before you eat Before you drink
Take a long look inside
And tell me what you see
Then do this in remembrance of Me.
Do this in remembrance of Me

I will remember the cross
That You bore for me
I will remember the crown
That You wore for me
I will remember the reason
You suffered and died

This is my body given for You
This is the cup that hold
The blood of a new covenant
This is forgiveness, simple and true
This is the way
That I have made for you
I am the Way
This is the way
That I have made for you

Songwriter: Cheri Keaggy

Therefore, whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (I Corinthians 11:27)

As stated above, we are admonished to examine ourselves before we partake of the bread and wine at the Table of Grace. There are two types of communions. One is closed and the other is open. The crux of the issue of open or closed Communion is whether or not the Lord's Supper should be made available to people outside of the Body of Christ or denomination. The Bible teaches that Communion should only be taken by believers in Jesus Christ, but it stops short of instructing on how this relates to church membership.

Open communion, often called "eucharistic hospitality" is the practice of some Protestant Churches of allowing members and non-members to receive the Eucharist or communion. Many, but not all churches that practice open communion, require that the person receiving communion be a baptized Christian, and other requirements may apply as well. In Methodism, open communion is referred to as the open table. Generally, churches that offer open communion to other Christians do not require an explicit affirmation of Christianity from the communicant before distributing the elements; the act of receiving is an implicit affirmation.

Open communion is generally practiced in churches where the elements are passed through the congregation. However, it is also practiced in some churches that have a communion procession, where the congregation comes forward to receive communion in front of the altar. Those practicing open communion generally believe that the invitation to receive communion is an invitation to Christ's table, and that it is not the province of human beings to interfere between an individual and Christ. Some traditions maintain that there are certain circumstances under which individuals should not present themselves for communion. However, if those individuals were to present themselves for communion, they would not be denied. In other traditions, the concept of being "unfit to receive" is unknown, and the actual refusal to distribute the elements to an individual would be considered scandalous.

The argument for closed communion is based on a desire that only believers should partake in communion. They, as opposed to non-believers, have made a profession of faith. The restriction prevents the unsaved from participating in the ordinance. The Lord's Supper is something that is shared by believers.

Why is communion only for believers? Communion is the remembrance of what Christ has done for us on the cross. Only a believer can examine themselves and find themselves in need of a confession of sin. In addition, communion must be taken in a worthy manner. Communion is to be taken seriously.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper is deeply significant and full of meaning. It was first held when Jesus kept the Passover feast with His disciples on the evening before He was betrayed. The Lord's Supper or Christian Communion looks back to the death of our Lord and ahead to His victory over death at the resurrection, as well as His coming again to earth at the end of the age.

What does coming to the Table of Grace mean to you? Is it just part of the service? No, it is the highpoint of the service. It is the remembrance of the mystery of our faith, that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again. And when He comes, we will be judged. Are you ready? I sure hope so.

Tuesday, March 15th: In Remembrance of Me: Part 2

In remembrance of Me
This is My body
In remembrance of Me
This is My blood
Whoever eats of this bread
And drinks this cup of salvation
Shall not die but shall live Shall live forever

For His flesh is His food
And His blood we'll drink
Those who receive shall never die but shall live forever
Strengthened by Heavenly bread
Strengthened by bread of angels
Your cup of salvation bring Come all and receive

In remembrance of Me
This is My body
In remembrance of Me
This is My blood
Whoever eats of this bread
And drinks this cup of salvation
Shall not die but shall live Shall live forever

Come humbly bow and adore
Before the mystery of mysteries
Under creation's form
Yet the creator of all
Within flesh yet not enclosed
Incarnate and transcendent
Consumed but by all yet not destroyed
Received by all and the Lord

In remembrance of Me
This is My body
In remembrance of Me
This is My blood
Whoever eats of this bread
And drinks this cup of salvation
Shall not die but shall live Shall live forever

In remembrance of Me
This is My body
In remembrance of Me
This is My blood
Whoever eats of this bread
And drinks this cup of salvation
Shall not die but shall live Shall live forever

Shall not die but shall live Shall live forever

Songwriter: John Michael Talbot

*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie,
promised before time began, (Titus 1:2)*

The idea of an afterlife, particularly one that's dictated by how a person's life was lived on earth, is widely disputed among atheists. Many believe there is nothing after death, and that life simply ends when our earthly bodies die. This view is predicated on the idea that human existence takes place on the physical plane only and not on a spiritual one.

Other skeptics take issue with the concepts of Heaven and Hell, or of an afterlife that's dependent upon the actions people take during their lifetime. They argue that living with integrity on Earth shouldn't be a matter of receiving a reward after death, but simply a moral choice.

One of the foundational principles of Christianity is the belief that Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, died and was resurrected into eternal life. The Bible promises that those who believe in God will also experience a life after death. Eternal life is clearly present in the scriptures, though the specifics remain a mystery to those of us still living.

We see this in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, with the declaration that those who die knowing Christ will also be raised with Him after their death. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-55, the Apostle Paul, describes our earthly bodies being shed upon death, and new, immortal and imperishable bodies being given to us. This begs the question of where these new "spiritual" bodies are going for the rest of eternity. That same Paul discusses his desire to live on earth and his simultaneous desire to die, or depart the earth, to "be with Christ." From this, we can glean that life after death means spending eternity with Christ, which is the Biblical concept of Heaven. Scriptures assure Christians over and over that they'll "be with the Lord forever."

In John 14:2-3, Jesus says, "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." In Luke 23:43, as He was hanging on the cross moments before His own death, Jesus turned to one of the thieves being crucified next to Him and said, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

This paradise that we Christians are promised as our souls' eternal resting place is full of mystery. We can't say where it is or in what dimension, what it looks like, who's there, or what we do there once we've arrived. What the Bible tells us is that if we believe in Jesus the Christ as the Son of God, we'll be with Him in Heaven after our life here on earth. For many, this idea brings great solace. We can't be certain of where we go but knowing that we'll be reunited with our Lord and Savior is enough. And what more could we ask for?

Wednesday, March 16th: Just As I Am

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Hath broken every barrier down;
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, of that free love
The breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,
Here for a season, then above,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Songwriter: Charlotte Elliott

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6)

In October of 1967, the rock group "The First Edition" recorded a song entitled "I Just Dropped In," a psychedelic rock song written by Mickey Newbury and said to reflect the LSD experience. The song was intended to be a warning about the dangers of using the drug, and came to be associated with the counterculture of the 1960s. One of the featured lines in the song was, "I just dropped in to see what condition my condition was in." Although associated with the drug culture, it is also a good line for believers to ask themselves.

The song, "Just As I Am" is a pretty good representation of what we need to ask about our condition, or at least what our condition is in now that we came to faith. Consider the first verse. When we were of this world, we did not have a plea. We were lost, hopeless and helpless. We were as scripture states "a far off." However, when God extended His call to the entire world, we were given the opportunity to be "brought near," by His Grace and love.

There were times in my life when I heard the call of Christ and refused to listen. I did not want to change my lifestyle, and like so many others considered myself to be "not that bad." However, living in the pig pen does something to your sense of reason. You start comparing yourself to others, and it is extremely easy to find the faults with others in order to elevate the way you think about yourself, what I now call a false illusion.

Was I poor, wretched, and blind? Well, I had a very good job, and made a lot of money. Was I blind? Well, I wore glasses that corrected my sight to 20/20. And was I a wretch? I think not. But then one day, I realized I was looking at myself through my own eyes. And of course, when I did that, I looked pretty darn good. It wasn't until I saw myself through the eyes of my heavenly Father, that I realized that yes, I was all the above and in need of changing my condition.

One Sunday morning during an altar call, I announced to the congregation that I had made the decision to allow Jesus the Christ to be my Savior. What I really did in retrospect was to challenge Christ to prove to me that He was who He said He was. Was I surprised when He delivered? Not really. And I felt relieved to be pardoned and cleansed of all my spots. Yes. However, having my soul washed in living water and being welcomed home was a feeling beyond belief.

Our Father's love may be unknown to the majority of this world, as it was to me. But now that love, kindness, forgiveness, and pardon has broken down all the barriers and facades I have ever erected. That is why I come to Him with all my worries and woes. As the last verse states, I am only here for a season, and then I will receive my eternal rewards. Because He promised, I believe, and because I believe, I come.

O Lamb of God may the world turn from its ways and come home to the blood that can cleanse even the darkest heart and rejoice in all your promises. Amen.

Thursday, March 17th: Oh, Worship the King

O worship the king all glorious above,
O gratefully sing his power and his love;
Our shield and defender, the ancient of days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.

O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, thy pow'r hath founded of old;
Hath established it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air; it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills; it descends to the plain;
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In thee do we trust, nor find thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!

O measureless might! ineffable love!
While angels delight to hymn thee above,
The humbler creation, though feeble their lays,
With true adoration shall lisp to thy praise.

Song Writer: Robert Grant

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

The idea of worshiping the Lord “in spirit and truth” comes from Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well in John 4:6-30. In the conversation, the woman was discussing places of worship with Jesus, saying that the Jews worshiped at Jerusalem, while the Samaritans worshiped at Mount Gerizim. Jesus had just revealed that He knew about her many husbands, as well as the fact that the current man she lived with was not her husband. This made her uncomfortable, so she attempted to divert His attention from her personal life to matters of religion. Jesus refused to be distracted from His lesson on true worship and got to the heart of the matter: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

The overall lesson about worshiping the Lord in spirit and truth is that worship of God is not to be confined to a single geographical location or necessarily regulated by the temporary provisions of Old Testament law. With the coming of Christ, the separation between Jew and Gentile was no longer relevant, nor was the centrality of the temple in worship. With the coming of Christ, all of God’s children gained equal access to God through Him. Worship became a matter of the heart, not external actions, and directed by truth rather than ceremony.

In Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4, Moses sets down for the Israelites how they are to love their God: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Our worship of God is directed by our love for Him; as we love, so we worship. Because the idea of “might” in Hebrew indicates totality, Jesus expanded this expression to “mind” and “strength.” To worship God in spirit and truth necessarily involves loving Him with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

True worship must be “in spirit,” that is, engaging the whole heart. Unless there’s a real passion for God, there is no worship in spirit. At the same time, worship must be “in truth,” that is, properly informed. Unless we have knowledge of the God we worship, there is no worship in truth. Both are necessary for God-honoring worship. Spirit without truth leads to a shallow, overly emotional experience that could be compared to a high. As soon as the emotion is over, when the fervor cools, the worship ends. Truth without spirit can result in a dry, passionless encounter that can easily lead to a form of joyless legalism. The best combination of both aspects of worship results in a joyous appreciation of God informed by Scripture. The more we know about God, the more we appreciate Him. The more we appreciate, the deeper our worship. The deeper our worship, the more God is glorified.

This melding of spirit and truth in worship is summed up well by Jonathan Edwards, the 18th-century American pastor and theologian. He said, “I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections [emotions] of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth.” Edwards recognized that truth and only truth can properly influence the emotions in a way that brings honor to God. The truth of God, being of infinite value, is worthy of infinite passion. Would you agree? I would.

Friday, March 18th: Onward Christian Soldiers: Part 1

Onward, Christian soldiers! Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus Going on before.
Christ, the royal Master, Leads against the foe
Forward into battle, See his banners go!

Onward, Christian soldiers!
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before.

At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee;
On, then, Christian soldiers, On to victory.
Hell's foundations quiver At the shout of praise;
Brothers, lift your voices, Loud your anthems raise.

Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God;
Brothers, we are treading Where the Saints have trod.
We are not divided; All one body we:
One in hope and doctrine, One in charity.

Onward, then, ye people; Join our happy throng.
Blend with ours your voices In the triumph song:
Glory, laud, and honor Unto Christ, the King.
This through countless ages Men and angels sing.

Text: Sabine Baring-Gould

*Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were,
my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders.
But now my kingdom is from another place." (John: 18:36)*

There have been denominations that have excluded this hymn from their hymnal because it is too warlike. It is my understanding that they believe that Christians are to be passive and not aggressive. I believe in some cases they are correct. Jesus Himself told us to turn and offer the other cheek if we are struck. He also told us that if someone demands our coat, we are to give them our shirt also. Yes, there are times we are to be passive, but not always.

Paul reminds us that in this world we will have to fight. We will have to do battle with evil, and the battle we fight is not with the powers of this world. However, our weapons are stronger than those of the evil one.

Paul reminds Timothy to fight the good fight, and to remain strong in the faith so that he may stand against all evil. Was Timothy a soldier of the cross? I think so.

If I try to fight my adversary in my strength, I will always fail. Let me give you an example. When I was drafted, I was given a helmet. Would it stop a bullet? No, but it would stop rocks from falling on my head, and it was also good for heating up left over WWII rations. I was given a flak jacket. That was supposed to stop flak, but here again it did not always do what it was designed to do. I was given a poncho to keep me dry in the rain. Did it do its intended job? Never. However, I did receive a rifle that did work as long as I kept it clean. That is why Paul encourages us to., "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

It is important to equip ourselves with the full armor. With no belt, there is no place to store the sword. With no sword, you have no offense and no defense. With no shield, you have no protection against evils most potent weapon. With no shoes, you are not ready to go over any terrain. With no breastplate, your torso is completely exposed. But let's not forget the most important weapon of all. Prayer. Our prayer must have three qualities. First, prayer must be constant. Second, prayer must be intense. And third, prayer must be unselfish. We would do well to remember that as Christians, we are soldiers of the cross. Warriors fight both the seen and the unseen, standing fast for the cause of Christ and His glory. Are you ready to join the battle? If so, I'll see you on the front lines.

Saturday, March 19th: Onward Christian Soldiers: Part2

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
Forward into battle see His banners go!

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.*

At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee;
On then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise;
Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.*

Like a mighty army moves the Church of God;
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.
We are not divided, all one body we,
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.*

What the saints established that I hold for true.
What the saints believèd, that I believe too.
Long as earth endureth, men the faith will hold,
Kingdoms, nations, empires, in destruction rolled.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.*

Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus constant will remain.
Gates of hell can never gainst that church prevail;
We have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.*

Onward then, ye people, join our happy throng,
Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song.
Glory, laud and honor unto Christ the King,
This through countless ages men and angels sing.

Text: Sabine Baring-Gould

*"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."
(II Timothy 2:3)*

"Onward, Christian Soldiers" is a 19th-century English hymn. The words were written by Sabine Baring-Gould in 1865, and today's tune was composed by Arthur Sullivan in 1871. Sullivan named the tune "St. Gertrude," after the wife of his friend Ernest Clay Ker Seymer, at whose country home he composed the tune. The Salvation Army adopted the hymn as its favored processional. The hymn's theme is taken from references in the New Testament to the Christian being a soldier for Christ.

The hymn was originally written as a processional hymn for children walking from Horbury Bridge to Horbury Saint Peter's Church in 1865. It was originally entitled, the "Hymn for Procession with Cross and Banners."

When Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt met in August 1941 on the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* to agree to the Atlantic Charter, a church service was held for which Prime Minister Churchill chose the hymns. He chose "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and afterwards made a radio broadcast explaining this choice. "We sang "Onward, Christian Soldiers" indeed, and I felt that this was no vain presumption, but that we had the right to feel that we were serving a cause for the sake of which a trumpet has sounded from on high. When I looked upon that densely packed congregation of fighting men of the same language, of the same faith, of the same fundamental laws, of the same ideals, it swept across me that here was the only hope, but also the sure hope, of saving the world from measureless degradation."

So, are we soldiers for Christ, or are we workers in the fields? Or are we both? Consider the fact the Jesus states His laborers working in the field are few. Although the fields are ripe unto harvest, there are not enough to go out in the heat of the day to collect the harvest. Likewise, consider Gideon who was given the task to raise an army and go fight overwhelming odds. Many came, but few made the final cut. The many were sent packing back home because they would have been a detriment to the main fighting force.

So it is with life, we are all called to be soldiers of the cross. We are instructed to put on the whole armor of God, so that we can withstand the assault that our adversaries will bring against us. We are to be outfitted from head to foot protecting our most vulnerable parts. We are to leave nothing behind. You may ask, what covers our back? The answer is simple, nothing. We are never to retreat and always to stand firm in the Lord. God and His angels always have our back as long as we stay in the fight. The minute we turn and run; we are on our own.

Always remember that we have the most powerful weapon ever created at our disposal, the word of God, which is sharper than any double-edged sword. That is one defense that we are always to have at our side. It is best used when we are trained, having received the proper instructions in how to use this weapon and are fully knowledgeable. Practice does make perfect and not practicing will rear its ugly head when we try to defend your position without the proper training. So, practice and be like the American Express commercial that states; "Do not leave home with it."

Sunday, March 20th: Our Father

Hear our prayer
We are Your children
And we've gathered here today
We've gathered here to pray

Hear our cry
Oh Lord, we need Your mercy
And we need Your grace today
Hear us as we pray

Our Father, who art in Heaven
Hallowed be Thy name
Our Father, hear us from Heaven
Forgive our sins we pray

Hear our song
As it rises to Heaven
May Your glory fill the earth
As the waters cover the seas

See our hearts
And remove anything
That is standing in the way
Of coming to You today

Our Father, who art in Heaven
Hallowed be Thy name
Our Father, hear us from Heaven
Forgive our sins we pray

And though we are few
We're surrounded by many
Who have crossed that river before
And this is the song we'll be singing forever

Holy is the Lord
Holy is the Lord
Holy is the Lord

Songwriter: Don Moen

one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:6)

When I was an active priest, one of the things I always wanted to do was to incorporate this song into a call to worship. To me it has all the elements that are required to meet a call to come and humble ourselves before the God of all creation. The opening verse is like an opening to a letter. It states who we are and why we have come. We have gathered to pray. For me, prayer has two parts. They are talking and listening to God. To me the most important part is listening. As it has been stated, we have two ears and one mouth, and we must learn to use them proportionally. That in simple terms means we need to listen twice as much as we speak.

The second verse starts by asking God to hear our cry. It states what we need most as individuals and as congregations and the church as a whole. What we need according to the song is mercy. To some, mercy is related to forgiveness or withholding punishment. To others, God's mercy is His tenderhearted loving compassion for His people and the needy. According to Vines Expository Dictionary, mercy is an outward manifestation of pity and assumes need on the part of the receiver. It also means that the one providing such has the necessary resources to fulfill all the needs. In addition to mercy, we also are in need of grace. Grace can be understood as a spontaneous gift from God to His people. It takes the form of divine love and favor, clemency, and a place in God's house.

After we have asked for mercy and grace, we then ask God to hear our song. It is a song of praise asking that His glory fill the earth and the waters that cover the seas, completely. It is unfortunate that we have to ask God that His glory cover the earth. This is come naturally. One of the biblical definitions for glory is "to be held in honor" or "of high repute." Does the world hold its creator in high honor or repute? I think not. Fortunately, there will be a day when that whole of humanity will bow the knee and proclaim that "Jesus the Christ is King of Kings, to the glory of God." I cannot wait for that day to come. But I also have pity on those who deny Him now.

Then comes, to my way of thinking, the most important verse. It begins by asking God to see into our heart and evaluate its condition. After He has done that, we now ask Him to remove anything that is standing in our way of coming to Him. What a dangerous request! That means, he may send us to apologize to someone we hold a grudge against. It may mean that we have to turn to our spouse and ask forgiveness for all the unkind words we have spoken about their culinary skills. It may mean we need to confess all the anger we have in our heart because someone said something about us. It may mean..., well I hope you get the message because it is a prerequisite for bringing our gifts to the Father. At least that is what scriptures tell us.

The last verse paints a beautiful picture of what we will be doing all our days in heaven. We will be standing in a very large crowd of those who have crossed that river before us, and we will be singing. Singing what? The way I see it, we will be singing "Holy is the Lord." Not just once and not just twice. But constantly. Why? Because as we are repeatedly informed in scripture that only God is holy. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come." Want to be part of that chorus? I hope so, I know I do.

Monday, March 21st: Praise, My Soul, The King of Heaven

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,
to his feet thy tribute bring;
ransomed healed, restored, forgiven,
who like me his praise should sing?
Alleluia, alleluia,
praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favor
to our fathers in distress;
praise him still the same forever,
slow to chide and swift to bless:
Alleluia, alleluia,
glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us,
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes:
Alleluia, alleluia,
widely as his mercy flows.

Frail as summer's flower we flourish;
blows the wind and it is gone;
but, while mortals rise and perish,
God endures unchanging on:
Alleluia, alleluia,
praise the high eternal One.

Angels, help us to adore him;
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space:
Alleluia, alleluia,
praise with us the God of grace.

Song Writer: Henry Francis Lyte

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)

The word praise is used three hundred and sixty-three times in the Christian instruction manual. In the Book of Psalms, it is used one hundred and eighty-two times alone. So, do you think praising God is important? My answer is "yes." However, the words praise, and worship are commonly used together in church. Praise and worship time may be a time during a church service when everyone stands up and sings songs to glorify God. Do these two words mean the same, or do they have different notions? What is the difference between praise and worship?

According to the dictionary, worship is defined as the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity. Christian worship can then be defined as the feeling of reverence and adoration for God. The Greek word that is most often translated as worship in the New Testament is known as "proskuneo", which means to "fall down before or bow down before" or "to kiss the hand, in token of reverence." It was used as homage, shown to persons of a superior rank. The Hebrew word for worship in the Bible is "Shaha" which means "to bow low or to prostrate oneself."

According to the dictionary, praise is defined as the expression of one's gratitude and respect towards a deity, especially in a song. So, Christian praise can be defined as the expression of gratitude and respect toward God, especially in a song. There are three Hebrew words in the Bible that are translated as praise. One is "yadah", which means "praise or give thanks or confess" by the lifting of hands. Another one is "zamar" which means "sing praise." And the third one is "halal" (which is the root word for hallelujah), which means to praise, honor, or commend.

I want to focus on the word "yadah" and the lifting of hands. When people raise their hands during worship at church, whether they know it or not, they are admitting that they are weak and without any power aside from the power they receive through the Holy Spirit. They're praising God by physically and publicly demonstrating to Him that they need Him. When I think about this, I remember when I was younger, I used to think people raising their hands looked awkward or even kind of weird. But the people worshipping don't care how they looked. They're surrendering to God--and becoming empowered through it.

There is another important implication about "Yadah." That being, when we come before God with empty raised hands, we come showing that we have nothing to offer except our thanks, and our gratitude. We come because He is slow to anger and swift to bless. We come because He has provided a ransom and has provided healing and a home. In addition, we come because He is the only One who can rescue us from all our foes and from ourselves. Lastly, we come to praise the everlasting King. We come because He is where we find the mercy and peace we so desperately need.

Whatever you need in this life He can and will provide. It is our privilege to come with empty and open hands to be filled and made whole. And don't you want to be whole? I know I do.

Tuesday, March 22nd: Amazing Grace

Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone
I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood, His mercy rains
Unending love, Amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

My chains are gone
I've been set free (been set free)
My God, my Savior has ransomed me (ransomed me)
And like a flood (like a flood) His mercy rains (mercy rains)
Unending love, oh, Amazing grace

The Earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, Who called me here below
Will be forever mine

My chains are gone
I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood, His mercy rains
Unending love, Amazing grace (grace)

I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind (was blind), but now (but now) I see

Songwriter: John Newton

For certain men (and women) have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, (and women) who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Jude 1:4)

Whether you are a believer or not, it's pretty much guaranteed you're familiar with the hymn, Amazing Grace written by John Newton and published way back in 1779, and how lyrics written so many years ago are still so powerful today. In 2007 singer/songwriter, Chris Tomlin was asked to add lyrics to the traditional hymn (which he was reluctant to do at first). The project was for the movie Amazing Grace, which chronicled the life of William Wilberforce who led the way to end slavery in Great Britain. The result of the added lyrics is a beautiful song that speaks of freedom in a very profound way. Louie Giglio also helped write some of the additional lyrics.

Personally speaking, I do not believe the current generation understands the cost of freedom. Many think because we have a first amendment it gives us freedom of speech, it allows us to say what we want and whenever we want. If that is the case, we are fraught with trouble, both now and in the future. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution prevents the government from making laws which regulate the establishment of religion, or that would prohibit the free exercise of religion, or abridge the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, or the right to petition the government for redress of grievances. It was adopted on December 15, 1791, as one of the ten amendments that constitute the Bill of Rights.

The First Amendment gives Americans five basic freedoms. While all five are important, perhaps freedom of speech is talked about the most. And, free speech is the cornerstone of our democracy. Although what you say can have consequences, like losing friends or a job, it gives Americans the right to express opinions without government censorship or control. And more importantly, you can't go to jail for expressing your opinion. It not only protects speech that people like, but speech that people don't like. Because when it comes to free speech, either everyone is protected, or no one is.

It allows citizens to support political movements and candidates. It gives people the power to call out government corruption and abuse. And most importantly, it empowers people to give unpopular opinions. The Civil Rights movement is a perfect example of free speech in action. During the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activists—such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—were able to use free speech as a tool to force change within society. By exercising their voice, civil rights activists were able to outlaw racial discrimination that plagued the nation. In today's politically charged climate, some people believe the government should restrict certain speech. But thankfully because of the First Amendment, everything from car commercials to fiery protests are protected.

But do we really have freedom of speech and are we close to losing freedom? Maybe, maybe not. We will always have freedom of speech. The question is, "how will we handle that freedom. Am I mature enough to walk away from any situation and let Christ intervene on my behalf, or will I give voice and offer my opinion? Which is the better part of valor?" I can tell you from experience that the former works much better than the latter in all situations. According to B.F. Skinner, what separates humans from animals is the time in between a stimulus and a response. The more time between the two, the better the response. Just something to think about.

Wednesday, March 23rd: Sweet Hour of Prayer

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
The joys I feel, the bliss I share,
Of those whose anxious spirits burn
With strong desires for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
Where God my Savior shows His face,
And gladly take my station there,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
May I thy consolation share,
Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height,
I view my home and take my flight.
This robe of flesh I'll drop, and rise
To seize the everlasting prize,
And shout, while passing through the air,
"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer"

Songwriter: William W. Walford

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:10-14)

I must admit that I seriously doubt that I have ever spent an hour in prayer. What I mean by that is one consecutive hour in prayer. I have written prayers for worship services that have taken longer than an hour, but that is different. I believe the longest prayer I have ever written was six pages. Members of the congregation took a single page and read them during our congregational prayer time. However, that only lasted for ten minutes. It is really hard to pray for one consecutive hour.

I was on staff at a church that held several special events. The senior pastor liked to hold an over-night prayer vigil before each event. He would put out a signup sheet and asked the congregation members to sign up for one-hour slots. Panic would always set in. The pastor was asking people to do the impossible. Pray for one hour, non-stop. You must be kidding. However, congregants would, out of a sense of duty, fill the slots. Some would show up and some would not, some forgot, and some did not remember. Some would come and fall asleep and be awakened by the next prayer warrior. Something had to change.

At a staff meeting, I suggested that instead of holding an all-night prayer vigil, we hold a one-hour prayer meeting the night before. The pastor thought it was a good idea and turned it over to me to plan. I planned the service as if it were a first or second century gathering of Christians. The agenda went something like this. I would call the gathering to prayer with a scripture reading, then those who could, would kneel, and those who could not remained seated. I would then announce to the congregation for whom or for what we were praying. That took about fifteen seconds. At the fifty second mark, I would gather the prayer by saying, Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Since each prayer was only too last one minute, their prayer only had to last thirty-five seconds. Prayers were short and sweet and to the point.

The first time we met, only a hand full showed up. But it started to catch on. People did not need to come prepared with a list, because I had already made one. Another miraculous event started to happen, people learned of our prayer group and started to come from all over. In addition, people would call in and tell us they heard about our program and ask that their concerns could be placed on our list. Plus, it became so popular in our church, that it became a weekly event. I would like to be able to tell you the program took off like wildfire and is now happening all over the country. But for some reason, it was limited to that church.

I tried to institute the same type of service in other churches, but it never caught on. And for the life of me I can never understand why. I have always heard that prayer is personal, and maybe it is. But the Bible tells us not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together for prayer. We do it on Sunday morning, why not other times? I realize that Sunday is special, but each time we bow our hearts and knees to our Heavenly Father should be special also. Please remember that prayer is not to tune God's heart to my will, but to tune my heart to God's will. His channel frequency is always open. So how often do you tune in? Frequently, I hope.

Thursday, March 24th: The Lord's Prayer

Our Father
Which art in heaven
Hallowed be Thy name

Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On Earth
As it is in heaven

Give us this day
Our daily bread
And forgive us our debts
As we forgive our debtors

And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us
From evil

For Thine is the kingdom
And the power
And the glory
For ever

Amen

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. (Romans 4: 16-17)

When it comes to singing the Lord's Prayer, there are many versions to choose from. There is the traditional, which is sung (I will step out on a limb and say) by most non-liturgical congregations and by a lot of liturgical congregations. Now I am not saying anything bad about the traditional version and how it is sung. What I am saying is that there are many other versions that I like better. Why? They seem to stir my soul more than the traditional version. Just my preference.

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever gone to a church where you knew all the titles of the songs that you were going to sing? And yet, when it came time to sing the words, they were different? Or the tune was not the same. It seems each denomination has its own hymnal, and each has its own tune and words. When that happens, I just sing the words I know and do not mind the funny looks. Oh yes, I do try to follow the tune.

If we went back to the beginning of Christian worship, most of the service would be sung. Can you imagine that in today's world? I can. You see if you went back to the beginning of congregational worship, you would find that the prayers were also sung. Not only that, somehow our prayer and response have been reversed. A cantor would stand in the pulpit and call the congregation to prayer. He would announce to the gathered what the concerns of the day were, and what the people were to pray for, and then congregation would spend time in prayer for the aforementioned requests. When it was time to move to another concern, the cantor would collect the prayers and say, "Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer." Yes, you read it correctly, the early church had an understanding that although there were many prayers being said, they would be heard by God as one. Hence, "hear our prayer."

Dan Piper in his book; Ninety Minutes in Heaven describes his experience with sound. As I recall, he states that his brain could receive and understand multiple inputs at the same time. (My wife wishes that I could do that now.) If that is what heaven is like for a mere mortal, what do you think God's capacity is to understand? As Isaiah writes, God's understanding and thoughts and our power to do the same are as far apart as heaven is from this earth. And that is understandable. We mortals have limitations whereas God does not.

There are times that I get lost in space and time and have trouble concentrating on one train of thought, let alone two or three. It would be like trying to listen and sing a song with twenty or so different individuals singing in their native tongue at the same time. I am extremely happy that God has the ability to blend all the tunes that we sing to the Lord's Prayer together and have it make a sweet sweet sound to His ears. Maybe when we get to heaven, we will have that ability to listen as God listens to us. I hope so. Don't you?

Friday, March 25th: Dancing in the Mine Fields

Well, I was nineteen, you were twenty-one
The year we got engaged
And everyone said we were much too young
But we did it anyway

We got the rings for forty each
From a pawn shop down the road
We said our vows and took the leap
Now fifteen years ago

And we went dancing in the minefields
We went sailing in the storms
And it was harder than we dreamed
But I believe that's what the promise is for

"I do" are the two most famous last words
The beginning of the end
But to lose your life for another, I've heard
Is a good place to begin
'Cause the only way to find your life
Is to lay your own life down
And I believe it's an easy price
For the life that we have found

And we're dancing in the minefields
We're sailing in the storms
This is harder than we dreamed
But I believe that's what the promise is for
That's what the promise is for

So when I loose my way, find me
When I loose love's chains, bind me
At the end of all my faith, till the end of all my days
When I forget my name, remind me

'Cause we bear the light of the Son of Man
So there's nothing left to fear
So I'll walk with you in the shadowlands
Till the shadows disappear
'Cause he promised not to leave us
And his promises are true
So in the face of all this chaos
Baby, I can dance with you

So let's go dancing in the minefields
Let's go sailing in the storms
Oh, let's go dancing in the minefields
And kicking down the doors

Songwriter: Andrew Peterson

It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of the LORD may be on your lips; for with a strong hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. (Exodus: 13:9)

So, what is the message of this song? It's funny, because the song seems self-explanatory, but I get asked all the time what the song means. Say the song title "Dancing In The Minefields" to older couples, and they don't even have to hear the song to know what it means. Marriage is a perilous journey.

If it hasn't been yet, get ready, because it will get hard. It is a crucible, and an important lesson to learn how to lay down our lives for another person. Just because it is hard, doesn't mean it isn't good. Some young people have a tendency to think marriage is a cake walk. They'll say, "Other people fight, we don't fight." You need to know that if you are in an intimate relationship with someone, there will be arguments. There will be tension. Mountains are moving in your soul, and you'll have scars. It may not be part of God's design, but it can make marriage beautiful.

Although the song is about marriage, it is also about relationships, close relationships. It is a song about what can happen in a relationship, both good and not so good. It is a reminder that all relationships not only take a walk through the mine field of life, relationships are also like living in an eggshell factory where we need to watch our steps, lest we break something that is unrepairable. Why must it be like this? Are we so immature that we have not progressed past the two-year-old stage of life where everything is mine, mine, mine?

In military science, minefields are considered a defensive or harassing weapon, used to slow the enemy down, to help deny certain terrain to the enemy, to focus enemy movement into kill zones, or to reduce morale by randomly attacking material and personnel. Another name for a mine is an IAD. An incendiary ammunition device is a type of firearm ammunition containing a compound that burns rapidly and causes fires. It is meant to disable and to kill. The worst place you will ever find these devices is in a church. And unfortunately, all churches have mine fields and require excellent navigation to avoid such. It seems a strange place to find them, but they are there.

In the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John, there is a story of Jesus dancing through a mine field. One day, He was teaching at the temple when a crowd came pushing a woman in front of them. When they arrived, they pushed the woman down at the feet of Jesus and said that the woman had been caught in the very act of adultery. Then they looked at Jesus and asked the question, "what do you say we should do?" Now the law said she should be stoned. So, in essence Jesus is put on the horns of a dilemma. If He says stone her, His adversaries will say, "where is all this forgiveness you are talking about?" If He says, "forgive her." They will say, "what about the law of Moses." A dilemma? Maybe not.

The story tells us that Jesus stooped down and started drawing in the dirt. While He was down, the leader of the adulterous stoning committee started tossing his stone up and down in his hand. Jesus caught the reflection and sprung like a cat, grabbed the stone and placed it under his nose. Jesus then looked him in the eye and asked him if he was without sin. If he was, He would give him the stone back and he was free to inflict injury on the adulterous woman. Of course, he was not, so he hung his head and left the area.

The story reminds us that the only one who had a right to throw the stone chose not to. A lesson for all who will be dancing through life's mine fields.

Saturday, March 26th: The Silence of God

It's enough to drive a man crazy; it'll break a man's faith
It's enough to make him wonder if he's ever been sane
When he's bleating for comfort from Thy staff and Thy rod
And the heaven's only answer is the silence of God

It'll shake a man's timbers when he loses his heart
When he has to remember what broke him apart
This yoke may be easy, but this burden is not
When the crying fields are frozen by the silence of God

Who are reeling in the throes of all the happiness they've got
When they tell you all their troubles have been nailed up to that cross
Then what about the times when even followers get lost?
'Cause we all get lost sometimes...

There's a statue of Jesus on a monastery knoll
In the hills of Kentucky, all quiet and cold
And He's kneeling in the garden, as silent as a Stone
All His friends are sleeping and He's weeping all alone

And the man of all sorrows, he never forgot
What sorrow is carried by the hearts that he bought
So when the questions dissolve into the silence of God
The aching may remain, but the breaking does not
The aching may remain, but the breaking does not
In the holy, lonesome echo of the silence of God

Songwriter: Andrew Peterson

*To you, LORD, I call: you are my Rock,
do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent,
I will be like those who go down to the pit. (Ps 28:1)*

Have you ever listened to a song so many times that you know all the words and have a fairly good understanding of what the words mean? That is what happened to me with this particular song. I like to listen to the song because it reminds me that the opposite is true. Yes, there are times when God is silent when I am looking for inspiration, but that does not mean that He is silent. It just may mean that God wants me to call upon the experiences we have had together, to look deeper into some past- time conversation to understand and give meaning to the present.

While listening to the song this morning, I came to a profound understanding of the song. Could it be that the song was not written about the human struggle with the silence of God, but that it actually refers to the time that Jesus hung on the cross.

I have heard so many times that God cannot look upon sin. So, when Jesus was hanging on the tree and took all the sin of all time upon Himself, God could not look upon Him and (by human definition) had to turn His back on His own Son. As scripture reference, Psalm twenty-two is used to back up their claim. Here Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But did God really forsake His Son and leave Him alone on the cross? I believe not.

I have often asked the question, "If your child was to be executed, where would you be?" Most, if not all, would say with their child. Personally, I think that is where God was, hugging his Son through all the hurts and pain. If God turned His back on anyone, I think it was humanity. That is how I explain the darkness, which was man's darkest hour. If Mel Gibson is correct, the drop of water that fell as Jesus died was a tear from the Father.

According to scripture, on Thursday night, after supper, Jesus and eleven disciples went to the Mount of Olives to pray. Jesus left the eleven and went to be by Himself. He needed time with His Father. We are told that His prayers were so intense that He sweat drops of blood. We are never told that the Father ever answered Him. We are led to believe that there was silence. Three times there was prayer and three times there was no answer. Why? Because there was no alternative answer. The plan had not changed from the beginning of time. There is only one way.

Jesus is known as the man of all sorrows, and that might be true, but only for a while. Although He was despised and rejected, laughed at and mocked, beaten and spat upon, in the end He is the one that was victorious. Sometimes we as believers think we have to go through a lot of ridicule from being in this world, some are beaten and imprisoned for their faith, and even put to death. Do we count it all joy? Do we suffer the pain with dignity? Do we still hold our head high and proclaim the one who has overcome the world? Do we live our lives as victims or as victors? We get to decide. But here is a thought that we all need to live by. No matter what this world can throw at us, no matter if God is silent and we feel we must walk alone, we do not. How do I know? I have read the last chapter and the good guys win. That includes you. You are one of the good guys, aren't you?

Sunday, March 27th: Turn Yours Eyes Upon Jesus

O soul are you weary and troubled
No light in the darkness you see
There's light for a look at the Savior
And life more abundant and free

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace

His word shall not fail you he promised
Believe him and all will be well
Then go to a world that is dying
His perfect salvation to tell

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace

O soul are you weary and troubled
No light in the darkness you see
There's light for a look at the Savior
And life more abundant and free

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace

Songwriter: Helen Lemmel

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; (Matthew 6:22)

As stated before, I enjoy being in and around nature. When we would go sailing, I would ask Joyce to man the helm, and I would go stand on the bow of the boat. I loved to feel the wind blowing in my face. I would spread out my arms and play like I was on the Titanic. However, Joyce never hit an iceberg sailing in Florida waters or any other structure for that matter.

Living on a boat and being on the water for some six months at a time provides plenty of opportunity to view what I call The Greatest Show on Earth. Each evening, we watched the sun drop over the Gulf of Mexico. As the sun approached the water, the clouds displayed the many colors of the light spectrum, from bright golds and yellows to pinks and reds. The most amazing thing about the show is that it is different each and every night. No two shows are ever the same.

It is one thing to see a sunset over land and it is totally different over water. Not that sunsets over the water are any better, they are just different. But let me say this in defense of sunsets over land. In my humble opinion, the best sunsets occur on the Serengeti in Africa. Why do I think so? It may be that there are no industrial complexes for hundreds of miles. That eliminates the pollution factor and in doing so you can see the brightest reds, pinks and yellows. Just my opinion.

Although the Serengeti may have the best, there is one extraordinary event you will never see in a sunset over land. It only occurs when the sun sets over water. As the sun sets, it shines its light through the upper colors of the spectrum. The upper colors are red, orange and yellow. The middle color is green. When the angle of the earth is in the right relation to the sun, and just before the sun dips below the horizon, you may, if you are lucky, see the color green. It will last only for a nano second which makes them extremely rare and very hard to see. I have watched hundreds, maybe thousands of sunsets and have only seen two. My wife has never seen one.

In addition to The Greatest Show on Earth, there are many others. Have you been to the Arches National Park, and seen the many specular sights? Have you ever driven the Redwood Highway in northern California, and walked between thousand-year-old trees? Have you ever stood on the north shore of Hawaii in winter, or in northern Portugal and looked at fifty-to-sixty-foot waves? Have you ever driven highway fifteen out of San Diego to Los Vegas and seen the beauty of the rock formations? Or have you ever had a humpback whale breach twenty feet from your boat? Or have a twenty-foot Great White look you in the eye as he takes the fish you have fought for an hour and a half? What have you seen that I have not?

The song tells us that we are to turn our eyes upon Jesus, and if we do the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. I have no reason to doubt the song writer. If she is correct, that face must be the most glorious vision heaven and earth have ever seen. According to Ken Boa of Reflection Ministries, it will be worth waiting a lifetime to stand there and just gaze at His face. Grady Nutt states that he has reserved his first billion years in heaven just to look on the face of Jesus and see His smile. I do not know about you, but it sounds like we might need to get our reservations in early. Call ahead or you might have to wait a long long time. But then we will have eternity.

Monday, March 28th: When You Walk Through the Storm

When you walk through a storm
Hold your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark

At the end of a storm
There's a golden sky
And the sweet silver song of a lark

Walk on through the wind
Walk on through the rain
Though your dreams be tossed and blown

Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone

You'll never walk alone

Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone

You'll never walk alone

Songwriters: Oscar Hammerstein II / Richard Rodgers

Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. ²¹ Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (Isaiah 30:20-21)

In her book "Jesus Calling" Sarah Young writes on December 18th, "When you are plagued by a persistent problem—one that goes on and on—view it as a rich opportunity. An ongoing problem is like a tutor who is always by your side.

The learning possibilities are limited only by your willingness to be teachable. In faith, thank Me for your problem. Ask me to open your eyes and heart to all that I am accomplishing through this difficulty. Once you become grateful for a problem, it loses its power to drag you down. On the contrary, your thankful attitude will lift you up into heavenly places with Me. From this perspective, your difficulty can be seen as a slight, temporary distress that is producing for you a transcendent Glory never to cease!" Oh really?

I just cannot think that she is correct. When I read this, I had just ended a case of the hiccups that lasted for twelve days. I doubt if Sarah ever had the hiccups for twelve days, for if she did, she has lost the memory of how it can beat up your insides, how much sleep you can lose and the rawness it can cause to your throat. Or what about a person who is in the fourth stage of colon cancer? My son-in-law's father did develop colon cancer. He went through therapy and the cancer came to a halt. For the next two years he was able to live a cancer free life. Then one day it came back and came back with a vengeance. From no cancer to stage four overnight.

So, what did he do? Being a devout Catholic, he already went to mass at least three times a week, now he increased to seven. Did he stop living? No. Did he stop playing golf? No. Did he blame God? No. So what did he do? He lived his life as if nothing different had happened. However, he did get his house in order. As for his marriage, it could not have been better. He and his wife went on all the trips they had planned, and a month before he died, they left their home in Kentucky and came to Florida for an extended vacation. To my way of thinking, he was and still is one of the good guys. If I ever get cancer and am faced with the same, I have a role model to go by.

What about the wives of those who have been killed or wounded in combat? What if their bread winner never comes home or arrived home after spending a year or more in the hospital recovering from injuries suffered in battle? The list could go on and on and on because the possibilities are never ending.

How do we as believers handle situations such as a life-ending medical diagnosis? How do we handle it when a spouse says, "I don't love you anymore; I want a divorce?" It is easy to show a false facade on the outside when the pain is unbearable, and you are dying inside. If there was an easy answer, I would write a book, make lots of money and escape my problems by living on a deserted island in the Caribbean. But I don't. But this I do know. We will never walk alone once we accept God's Son as a sin offering for our sins. You see Jesus told His disciples and us that He will be with us, even to the end of the age. I am assured that the pain and sorrow we bear will never match what He suffered for us. What do you think?

Tuesday, March 29th: One Bread One Body

One bread, one body, one Lord of all
One cup of blessing which we bless
And we, though many, throughout the Earth
We are one body in this one Lord

Gentile or Jew
Servant or free
Woman or man
No more

One bread, one body, one Lord of all
One cup of blessing which we bless
And we, though many, throughout the Earth
We are one body in this one Lord

Many the gifts, many the works
One in the Lord
Of all

One bread, one body, one Lord of all
One cup of blessing which we bless
And we, though many, throughout the Earth
We are one body in this one Lord
We are one body in this one Lord

Songwriter: John B Foley

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (Colossians 3:15-16)

In his book One, Richard Bach asks a very important question. He writes, "I gave my life to become the person I am right now. Was it worth it?" Here is another question, what if space shifted and time bent, and we could meet ourselves as we will be twenty years from now? (Or for some of us, five years from now.) What if we could talk face to face with the people we were in the past, with the people we are in a parallel universe, or alternative us? What would we tell them, and what would we ask? How would we change if we knew what awaits beyond space and time?

What if? Have you ever asked that question of yourself? Have you ever wondered what would have happened if you had done something different with your life? Where would I have ended up? Would I be happier than I am today? Would I be as healthy? Given the chance, what would I change, if anything? So many decisions.

According to Andy Andrews we are where we are in this life, because hopefully, we used our best thinking. I remember growing up, my father would always ask me the question, "What were you thinking?" Usually, I did things without thinking, just because I did not know I was supposed to think. Life was care-free, and children assume they have the right to have fun. Right? There will be plenty of time for thinking later on in life. Now that I am older, I do stop and think about what I am doing, and how I should accomplish that task.

In 2015 and 2016, Joyce and I served as keeper of the key on Elliott Key in Biscayne National Park. One of the maintenance crew would always say, "we need a plan." So, before we would start any task, we would map out a plan to accomplish the task. I have a son, who for the better part of his first thirty-five years never sat down and drew a plan for his life. He never thought about how his actions today would impact his later years. I would talk to him, but like so many, he thought he would always have plenty of time. But time has a way of sneaking up on us, and then it is too late. (Maybe.) I am happy to say that he now has a plan. He finally caught up with my sixteen-year-old grandson.

Over the years I have seen many believers think that there will always be enough time to come to be one with their heavenly Father. But time has a way of slipping into the future, and then one day is here, and they realize how much they have missed. Then there are those who thought that being part of a family of faith was something they could put off. They wanted to be wild and free, and found that instead, they were slaves to a way of life that was very detrimental.

If you could meet yourself of years ago, what would you say to that person? Would you tell them about the love of a Father they are missing? Would you tell them that the world has nothing to offer? Would you tell them that now is the time to become one? One with God in baptism, one in spirit, and one in fellowship by partaking of one bread and one cup and being one with their Lord. What would you say?

Wednesday, March 30th: You Say

It's amazing how you can speak right to my heart
Without saying a word, you can light up the dark
Try as I may I can never explain
What I hear when you don't say a thing

The smile on your face lets me know that you need me
There's a truth in your eyes saying you'll never leave me
The touch of your hand says you'll catch me wherever I fall
You say it best, when you say nothing at all

All day long I can hear people talking out loud
But when you hold me near, you drown out the crowd
Try as they may they could never define
What's been said between your heart and mine

The smile on your face lets me know that you need me
There's a truth in your eyes saying you'll never leave me
The touch of your hand says you'll catch me wherever I fall
You say it best when you say nothing at all

The smile on your face lets me know that you need me
There's a truth in your eyes saying you'll never leave me
The touch of your hand says you'll catch me wherever I fall
You say it best, when you say nothing at all

That smile on your face (You say it best)
The truth in your eyes (When you say nothing at all)
The touch of your hand (You say it best)
Lets me know that you need me (When you say nothing at all)

Nothing at all
(You say it best when you say nothing at all) Nothing at all

Songwriters: Don Schlitz / Paul L Overstreet

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15)

It was a Saturday, sometime in the year 1975, Larry and I had finished washing our cars and were in the process of applying a coat of wax, when Larry's father came out of the house, and asked for some peace and quiet. You see, Larry and I had the radios in our cars cranked up to the max. Since Larry still lived at home, we thought it good to turn off the music. At first it was strange not having rock and roll penetrate the air waves, but then the sound of silence became very refreshing. We finished with the cars, and just sat and talked for a while, noting how nice the quietness could be.

We read in First Kings, "The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave."

Jack R. Taylor states in his book After the Spirit Comes that there is a mistranslation in this story. The mistranslation is in the words "gentle whisper." According to Mr. Taylor the proper rendering should be "utter silence." However, the individuals who first translated the scripture could not visualize God as being completely silent. The earthquake, the wind and the fire were as Shakespeare would have put it, just sound and fury signifying nothing. So often Hollywood portrays God with a booming voice, with thunder and lightning in the background for visual effect.

I really do not think God needs visual effects to get His point across. We are told in Matthew that, "whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Does God need to make a big display when He rewards someone? No. Does God need to call attention to Himself to show how great He is? No. So why are we, and how are we, to hear God in quietness and stillness.

The answer is very simple. Remove all the clutter from your life and you will be able to hear distinctly and clearly. If you have trouble hearing there is nothing wrong with your ears, but there is something wrong with your heart. Elijah had the fear of a woman (Queen Jezebel) clouding his mind. He had the fear that his life would soon end. So often we are like Elijah, we look for the amazing, the miraculous, and you can see that in nature, but that is not how God works. I know because He told me to be still and know that He is God.

When and how does God talk to you? In quietness and trust? Or do you hear the best when God doesn't say a word, or when He holds you near? Or maybe, when His heart talks to your heart. Whenever and however God talks to you, I hope you are listening. It would be a shame to miss out on such an important conversation.

Thursday, March 31st: Still

Hide me now
Under Your wings
Cover me
Within Your mighty hand

When the oceans rise and thunders roar
I will soar with You above the storm
Father, You are King over the flood
I will be still, know You are God

Find rest, my soul
In Christ alone
Know His power
In quietness and trust

When the oceans rise and thunders roar
I will soar with You above the storm
Father, You are king over the flood
I will be still, know You are God

Find rest, my soul
In Christ alone, oh yeah
Know His power
In quietness and trust

When the oceans rise and thunders roar
I will soar with You above the storm
Father, You are King over the flood
I will be still and know You are God

Songwriters: Otis / Liggins

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation. (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

There have been many times that I wished I could take the pain and agony of my parishioners and cast it into the depths of the sea. If not the sea, then have a magic wand and just make it disappear, forever. But I cannot. Just about the only thing I can do is to be with them in their time of trouble and sadness. I can sit and hold their hand as a loved one goes through life threatening surgery, quietly saying nothing and praying on the inside. One of the things I have never said and never will to a hurting member of a congregation is "God knows best" and "If it is God's will."

Let me ask you a couple of questions. Is it God's will that an infant should die because of the neglect of a nursing staff? Is it God's will that a husband and his two daughters, who were on their way to church on Sunday morning, be killed by a drunk driver who is speeding away from the police? Is it God's will that anyone of us should suffer because another has disregarded the laws society has placed upon itself for the safety of all? But then again, is it God's will that one parent walks away leaving the other spouse and their children with no means of support? Of course, it is never God's will that any of these things should happen. Yet they still do.

I have found that there are basically two types of problems in this world. Those that are enacted upon us and those that we bring upon ourselves. Let me explain. An individual had too much to drink and decided to drive themselves home. They are arrested, given a DUI and lose their license. An individual is unhappy in their marriage and decides that a one-night stand would not be so bad. The problem here is that the person who they chose to have relations with had AIDS. Now they and their spouse have AIDS. Someone else has money problems and decides to make an illegal withdrawal from their employers checking account. They get caught and are tried and convicted of embezzlement. Now they are spending their free time behind bars. What were they thinking?

The second type are those who fall victim to outside influences. I remember one family who, if not in a crisis, was coming out of a crisis or just about to enter into another crisis. Sound familiar? I remember so well a mother telling me that she thought the family was finally starting to see that light at the end of the tunnel only to have the truck back up to their door and dump another load. She assured me that they would get through it somehow. And they always did.

Whether we bring the storms of life upon ourselves, or they are due to the actions of another, how we handle them is the measure of the depth of our relationship with our Father. Do you let life overwhelm you, or do you dump it at God's feet and say, "I give it all to you, so you handle it?" We can soar above each and every storm by resting our soul in the safety of God's hands. We do this with quietness and trust, that is the only way to know His almighty power. I assume you want to live a worry-free life and know His power. Right?

Friday, April 1st: Oh, The Deep Love of Jesus

O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Vast unmeasured, boundless, free
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me
Underneath me, all around me, is the current
Of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward to
Thy glorious rest above

O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee
O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Spread His praise from shore to shore
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth
Never, nevermore

Songwriters: Audrey Nicole Assad

and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Saint Augustine wrote:

"God be in my head, and in my understanding; God be in my eyes, and in my looking; God be in my mouth, and in my speaking; God be in my heart, and in my thinking; God be at my end, and at my departing."

Love is the deliberate act of valuing others more than we value ourselves. Love is the deliberate act of caring for and listening to others. Love is wanting others to succeed, to be happy and fulfilled.

God made us to have a relationship with Him and to be loved. God loves you and me. Sometimes, we who call ourselves Christians, do not reflect the love of God as we should, but God still loves us.

Read from the last paragraph again, God loves us. Now reread the very first sentence. Love is the deliberate act of valuing someone more than ourselves. God continually and deliberately values us more than Himself. The cross is the ultimate expression of that Love. The Son of God did not count equality with God something to be maintained, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and became obedient unto death on a cross. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, chose to die for each one of us.

Stop for a minute. Let that sink in. Not just the cross; not just the act; think about the reason behind it. God loves me, and God loves you. He did not do this for Christians. There were no Christians yet. He did this for sinners. He did this for the world. God calls us to worship him. What is worship? Is it not the deliberate act of valuing God more than yourself? Worship's synonyms, listed in the Merriam Webster dictionary are: cherish, love, adore. When God calls us to worship him, He is simply calling us to love Him the way he loves us. Ours is a faith built on love. Love is the single most used word in the Bible and the instruction given more than all others.

Maybe the song should read, "Oh the deep, deep love that God has for humanity." His love is vast and unmeasurable, boundless, and cost him everything. It rolls over us as if it were a mighty ocean, filling us with His fullness. His love is underneath us, upholding us and all around us. It is a current that sweeps us away. It leads us onward and homeward to our final and glorious resting place above.

The second verse would read; "His love lifts me to glory and lifts us up to Him. I will spread His praise to the utter most parts of the earth because His love never changes and is forever more."

With that kind of love, what should our response be? I love Him because He first loved me. And in response to the love, I will value others more than I value myself. I will love others as I love myself. I will serve others knowing that while I am serving others, He is serving me. Want to be lifted to glory? Have a deep, deep love for Jesus, just like the love He has for you.

Saturday, April 2nd: Hallelujahs

A purple sky to close the day
I wade the surf where dolphins play
The taste of salt, the dance of waves
And my soul wells up with hallelujahs

A lightning flash, my pounding heart
A breaching whale, a shooting star
Give testimony that You are
And my soul wells up with hallelujahs

Oh praise Him all His mighty works
There is no language where you can't be heard
Your song goes out to all the earth
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

O cratered moon and sparrows wings
O thunder's boom and Saturn's rings
Unveil our Father as you sing
And my soul wells up with hallelujahs

Oh praise Him all His mighty works
There is no language where you can't be heard
Your song goes out to all the earth
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

The pulse of life within my wrist
A fallen snow, a rising mist
There is no higher praise than this
And my soul wells up
O my soul wells up
Yes my soul wells up with hallelujahs

Oh praise Him all His mighty works
There is no language where you can't be heard
Your song goes out to all the earth
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
O hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

Songwriter: Christopher M. Rice

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; (Romans 1:19-20)

I have always loved nature, and the older I get the more I appreciate the beauty and the wonder. How do I think it all came into being? Well for me, the answer is Intelligent Design. I can remember being in eighth grade science class and having the teacher explain that no matter how hard man can try to duplicate the creation process, he will not be able. So that leaves me with God as the Creator. The above scripture tells me that God made the heavens and the earth and any attempt to find a different method is fatal.

I had the pleasure of living for a year in Newfoundland, Canada. During the winter I remember going outside at night and watching the Aurora Borealis. I remember asking my mother what made the different colored lights dance in the sky. She stated that she did not know, but that we could look it up in the encyclopedia. And so we did.

We found that the Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis for those Latin lovers among us -- are caused by high-energy particles from the sun cascading down on Earth. As they near our planet, they interact with Earth's magnetic field, which channels them toward the north and south magnetic poles. There they are accelerated downward, and at altitudes ranging from 90 to 700 km (50 to 450 miles), the particles collide with atoms of our upper atmosphere, a process that results in a glowing field of excited gas. These sheets of lights can take on many beautiful colors, and often persist for hours on end, dancing gracefully in the polar skies. Now you know as much as I do about them.

I also had the opportunity to grow up in San Diego, California. During the summer months, I would wake up early, get dressed, grab a towel and surfboard and head for Pacific Beach. There I would spend the day with other likeminded kids, surfing and having fun. When I was old enough to have my own car, I would, after school let out, and before work, drive to the beach for some wave time. Not that I was any good, I just loved the ocean.

As I got older, I learned to sail upon that ocean and eventually lived on a boat for six months a year. At night I would look at the stars and wonder how God determined the order of His universe. It just reaffirmed my belief in Intelligent Design. How can everything expand and spin at the exact rate in order to maintain its natural order? Only in the mind of God.

I have seen the majestic snowcapped mountains of Europe and the Western United States. I have wandered through many caves and beheld their beauty. I swam with and petted dolphins and swam with whales and even rubbed the whiskers of a giant grouper. Even when I am not traveling, I can step out my front door each evening and see the magnificence of a sunset. Oh, how can I not praise His mighty works? Sometimes when my soul wells up, there is only one word to describe the beauty He has provided. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Sunday, April 3rd: In Christ Alone

In Christ alone, my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live, I live

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Songwriters: Townend Stuart / Christopher Andrew / Getty Julian Keith

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

*I arise today Through the strength of heaven;
Light of the sun, Splendor of fire, Speed of lightning,
Swiftness of the wind, Depth of the sea,
Stability of the earth, Firmness of the rock.*

*I arise today Through God’s strength to pilot me;
God’s might to uphold me, God’s wisdom to guide me,
God’s eye to look before me, God’s ear to hear me,
God’s word to speak for me, God’s hand to guard me,
God’s way to lie before me, God’s shield to protect me,
God’s hosts to save me, Afar and anear,
Alone or in a multitude.*

*Christ shield me today Against wounding
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.*

*I arise today
Through the mighty strength
Of the Lord of creation.*

This prayer is known widely as “Morning Prayer,” “St. Patrick’s Breastplate,” or “The Loric.” It’s not known whether St. Patrick is actually the author or whether someone else wrote it years later, and it was attributed to St. Patrick. But it is widely associated with him and his ministry. Like so many other beautifully written words, we will never know the true author. What is important is that we can and should be in touch with the individual’s heart. And we should want to have the same heart. A heart totally open and devoted to God the Father and to Jesus the Christ His Son and our Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

This is another one of those prayers that should be recited by each of us when we arise each morning. More important, we should always recognize that we rise today through the might from the Lord of Creation. In addition, we also need to say to ourselves the last line in the song. “Here in the power of Christ I stand.” I do not stand in my own power, nor the power of those around me. Unless they also are standing in that unmovable, limitless, and eternal power of Christ. If you have that power, we welcome you to come take up your cross and join us in the fight for this sin sick world. Remember, no power of hell or scheme of man can ever defeat you or remove you from the Master’s hand. We are secure. Are you?

Monday, April 4th: What A Friend We Have In Jesus

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
And what a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer

Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Songwriters: Charles Converse / Joseph Scriven

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:15-17)

In the Greek language there are at least five words that are translated love in English. I have heard that there are seven, but I have yet to find the remaining two. I think having one word to describe five words may be misleading. For instance, we hear people say I love my car, or I love chili cheese dogs. My question is, "what amount of love do you have for your car or for hot dogs. To what extent would you go to protect them from harm?" In some way or another, we have a love affinity with the word love. Or maybe, we just have not come up with a better word.

In the above scripture passage, Jesus is having a conversation with Peter. Most translations have Jesus asking Peter, "do you love me?" And Peter responds in the affirmative, "yes Lord, I do love you." But according to the Greek, that is not how Peter responded. An accurate translation of the text would read, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter answers, "yes Lord, you are my very best friend." Or in today's vernacular, "you are my BFF." Probably not what Jesus wanted to hear.

Jesus looks at Peter a second and third time, but the last time with a deeper penetrating stare than the first two times, and He inquired of Peter, "do you love me?" I think Peter is a little taken back. Jesus, maybe in a sarcastic tone, turns Peter's words back on Him. In some way, Jesus is really asking, "am I nothing more than your BFF?" And the third time is a charm. Peter responds correctly. "You know everything Lord, you know that I really really do love you." Once again, Jesus tells Peter to take care of His sheep. Oh, and by the way, you will meet my fate.

We must note what love brought Peter. It brought him a task, giving life to and shepherding the sheep and lambs of his master. Love is the greatest privilege in this world and brings an even bigger responsibility. For Peter, it eventually brought him to the cross. Love always involves a sacrifice. We do not really love Christ unless we are willing to face our assigned task and take up His cross. Plain and simple. Or, no ifs, ands or buts.

If Jesus were to ask you, "do you love me?" What would you say? Is He your BFF, or are you really in love with Him? If He told you to feed His sheep, would you do so? Oh, by the way, each of us are commanded to feed His sheep, and provide them with clothing and water. How much do you really love the one who died for you? How much do you love the one who left all His riches behind to die and suffer on a cross for you? It is one thing to say that you love Jesus, and it's another to have to prove it. I hope when your time comes, you will be just like Peter and admit that Jesus is your number one love. And please, don't make Him ask you three times. That's embarrassing.

Tuesday, April 5th: Be Thou My Vision

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father, and I thy true son
Thou in me dwelling and I with thee one

Be thou my buckler, my sword for the fight.
Be thou my dignity, thou my delight
Thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tow'r
Raise thou me heavn ward, O pow'r of my pow'r

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and thou only first in my heart
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art

High King of heaven, my victory won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

Songwriter: Eleanor Hull

Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18)

In other translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version, it is translated like this, "Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law." It has been said, "that a lack of planning is a plan to fail." The quote is attributed to Ben Franklin.

Is a vision important? Yes. I believe that vision is something really essential. As a man cannot live without a dream, so also an organization cannot live without its own dream or vision. An individual or organization without thought is just like a ship without a rudder, wandering aimless through life with no direction ahead. The strategy-making efforts of successful individuals and organizations are found to begin with a vision.

Vision is a future-oriented concept. Forming a strategic vision is an exercise in thinking about where the individual or organization needs to head to be successful. A vision is a mental image of a possible and desirable future state. A vision describes aspirations for the future, a destination and direction. We can say that a vision is a dream; a distant, long-term dream. A vision statement, which is often called 'purpose of the organization', is designed to express the fundamental reason for existence.

There are two paths to take in life: wisdom and foolishness. These two paths yield completely different results, as explained through the mouth of Solomon. In the Book of Proverbs, God explains, motivates, and directs us to take the path of wisdom. It is the better path that leads to a healthy and vibrant life. If wisdom is not exercised, then wisdom ceases to be. However, the very nature of wisdom instructs your heart to use your insights, your discernment, your discretion, your vision to fulfill God's will and to demonstrate how to love your neighbor.

Yes, wisdom is a bountiful blessing that is available to all. You have only to go to the Lord God and ask for this wisdom. As Paul prayed that the Colossians be granted wisdom, so I pray for those who read this. Let us always remember that Jesus is the fullness of God's wisdom. To receive the anointing of wisdom, then, is in some way, to know the mind of God and to draw close to the one who is wisdom incarnate, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

A buckler is a kind of shield, or piece of defensive armor, anciently used in war. It was composed of wood, or wickers woven together, covered with skin or leather, fortified with plates of brass or other metal, and worn on the left arm. On the middle was a round protuberance called an umbo, boss, or prominence to protect the warrior's hand and very useful in causing stones and darts to glance off. The buckler often was four feet long and covered the whole body.

There you have it. If we have Jesus as our vision, if He is our wisdom and if He is our defensive armor, then we will have all the necessities of life. We will be secure no matter what happens. As a result, we will not need the riches of this earth, as we have as an inheritance all the bounty of heaven. We will not need the vain empty praises of man, as the only words that will mean anything to us are, "well done thy good and faithful servant."

Like many of you, I have read the last chapter and like the song states, through the High King of Heaven, my victory has been won. So, no matter what will befall me, my heart and soul will always belong to my heavenly Father. I have that blessed assurance, do you?

Wednesday, April 6th: Blessed Assurance

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Savior am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

Songwriter: Fanny Crosby

Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. (Psalm 128:4)

The church sometimes can cause a disconnect with the simple idea of what the word “Blessed” means. The synonymous words “benediction” and “beatitude” are confusing. They sound lofty, like they belong in a glass cabinet, behind a church altar. They sound like we have to somehow measure up to deserve them. In truth, all of these words mean something that can accompany us at every step of our life journey.

So, let’s strip these foreign-sounding words of their extravagance and take a closer look at what a blessing is and what it isn’t. Are we all blessed or is it only for the privileged?

As the rabbi in *Fiddler on the Roof* said, there truly is a blessing for everything. In the Hebraic tradition, it is very common to acknowledge them on a daily basis, and in all circumstances. The Jewish scholar, Dr. Nathan Lopes Cardozo notes, “How wise were the sages of Israel when they instituted the custom of making a blessing on almost anything, whether it is eating, drinking, observing natural phenomena, or smelling extravagant aromas. They depicted all these activities as nothing less than totally miraculous.”

For an idea this common, it’s astounding how the true power of it has been overlooked. Because to bless and be blessed is a fundamental part of our relationship with God, as well as relationships with other people. Blessings, whether given or received, help us recognize God in our lives and draw closer to Him. It is not a recognition of riches, rather a humble confession that we are not self-sufficient. We do not control or dictate the power of blessing – it is all God’s.

Jewish thinkers explain that to bless means to increase in joy and in peacefulness. Often in the Bible and in most Jewish traditions, as mentioned above, prayers begin with blessing God. But how can we do that to the One who lacks nothing? God is all-powerful and perfectly self-sufficient. He didn’t need mankind to begin with. He doesn’t need anything *from us*. But He chose us. He wanted fellowship with individual beings who have free will. In return, His simple presence is a reward that we could never earn or achieve ourselves.

By blessing God, we give Him honor for His grace toward us. Thus, “Blessed are You, Our God” is a declaration of trust, and the greatest hope for Him to reign over our circumstances. He is good, and we are dependent on His goodness. As mentioned above, blessing means an increase. When we bless God, it is His presence that increases in us. When we honor Him, we acknowledge how He is increasing the goodness in our lives and points to the abundance of His goodness. And in order to live fully, we are dependent on His presence.

There is an old saying that goes; God honors those who honor Him. I believe it can also be stated, God blesses those who bless Him. How often do you go around the house or when you are driving that you sing songs of praises to the Father? How often during the day do you just stop and say thank you to the One who provides for all your needs? Want more blessing? Give more and it shall be given to you. Remember the measure that you give will be the measure you receive in return.

Thursday, April 7th: In the Garden

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.

Refrain:

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.

I'd stay in the garden with Him,
Though the night around me be falling,
But He bids me go; through the voice of woe
His voice to me is calling.

Text: Charles Miles

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2:8)

After presenting the Creation narrative, God intriguingly sets the Bible's first scene in an agricultural environment, the Garden of Eden. In that garden, God had placed two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, that represent man's choice of relationship with God and each other. Clearly, Adam and Eve chose the wrong tree, and their progeny has lived with the consequences ever since, frequently replicating this wrong choice in their daily lives.

Throughout the Bible, God scatters numerous positive examples of the lives of God's people in which He emphasizes agricultural settings and symbols. The Bible speaks of the vine, Israel, which God took out of Egypt and replanted in Canaan. In Isaiah, God carefully plants, tends and protects His vineyard, which represents His chosen people. Ezekiel describes the vine as fruitful and plentiful with strong branches.

In modern times within God's church, we also have difficulty maintaining a "fruitful" existence in relation to God and His ways. The garden in which He has planted us; His church, contains many plants that have rooted themselves in various plots of ground. Some have been choked out by the cares of this world, while others have no depth of understanding of the truth and God's will. Too many struggle in differentiating between the tares and the wheat. Others are as forgetful of their promises to God, as were the children of Israel or the apostate New Testament church. We seem to continue to repeat the same mistakes of living unproductive spiritual lives and failing to bear the fruits of godliness.

In contrast, we should see the need to renew the growth that is essential before God harvests us into His Family. Christ knew that the laborers would be few, and this fact makes it even more imperative that we take our responsibilities seriously. We cannot take the attitude that someone else will take care of them. The Parable of the Talents emphasizes each individual's need to increase what God has given. Even though trials and difficulties continually hamper our progress, we must patiently wait on God to help us bear the fruits through our relationship with and understanding of Him.

We have to know our proper place in the entire growth process. We have to realize that God has not promised us a "bed of roses" existence. The Christian life is one of planting, watering, weeding, fertilizing, pruning, and bearing fruit—some of which we do, and some are done to us. It is producing a harvest of righteous character through a personal relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ by prayer, study, meditation and fasting. We must recognize that God is the Master Gardener who knows perfectly how to water, fertilize, and prune us to produce perfect fruit. If we do not allow Him to cultivate us, we will die on the vine.

God provides for us while or until we become mature, and capable of working in His fields. The problem is that some never sink their roots to absorb the nutrients and therefore never grow strong enough to become useful. They take up space and never produce. Not what the Master intended. Yes, we are to bloom where we are planted and then release our seeds so that others may become fertile. This process is to be repeated as often as needed. And believe me, this world is in a lot of need.

Friday, April 8th: Rock of Ages

Rock of ages cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee
Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee

Let the water and the blood
From thy riven side which flowed
Oh, be of sin the double cure
Cleanse me from its guilt and power

Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling
Nothin' in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling

Naked, come to Thee for dress (come to Thee for dress)
Helpless, look to Thee for grace
(Oh, look to Thee for grace)
Vile, I to the fountain fly
Wash me, Savior, or I die

Rock of ages (ooh, rock of ages)
Cleft for me (cleft for me)
Let me hide myself in Thee
Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee (in Thee)

Songwriters: Augustus Toplady

"There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. (1 Samuel 2:2)

"Rock of Ages" is a Christian hymn written by Augustus Toplady. This is a very personal hymn using the pronouns such as I and me rather than we and our and focusing on individual salvation. Legend states that Toplady wrote the hymn during a stormy incident in England. While traveling along a gorge near Burrington Combe, he was caught in a fierce storm and took refuge in a gap in the gorge, where he wrote the original lyrics. Some disagree on whether the event actually took place, nevertheless, the rock is now marked with a plaque that reads, "Rock of Ages."

Experienced builders know that a structure cannot endure unless its foundation is strong. The words "*rock*" and "*stone*," referring to the prime elements in ancient foundations, are used in the scriptures as metaphors signifying strength, steadiness, and durability. The prophets used these metaphors in a variety of ways, conveying an impression of the unwavering character of God, as well as the need for spiritual solidarity in the foundation and structure of our own lives.

By looking at the statements of the prophets, we can see how meaningful these symbols are. Moses spoke of the God of Israel as a Rock, "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect, ... a God of truth and without iniquity." David wrote, "the Lord is my rock, and my fortress, ... my shield, ... my high tower." Paul explained that the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses "drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." The patriarch Jacob spoke of the Lord as "the shepherd, the stone of Israel." Isaiah spoke particularly of the Lord as "a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." And Paul explained that the faithful saints belong to the household of God "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the *chief corner stone*."

The prophets had revealed that Jesus would be rejected by the world, and they declared that even so, he is the only way to salvation. Therefore, it is written that "the stone which the builders refused has become the head stone of the corner." Not only is Jesus a Rock, but his gospel also is likened to a rock, a sure foundation. To Peter, who had obtained a testimony of Jesus by the revelation of the Holy Ghost, Jesus said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The faithful disciple will build his life upon the foundation rock of the gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than upon the shifting sands of man's wisdom. Such a disciple is "like a man which built a house and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat mightily upon that house, and could not shake it, as it was founded upon the rock." Peter wrote to the faithful, "come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." What is your foundation made of, and how deep does it go? Is it deep enough to withstand the trials and tribulations of this world? I sure hope so. If not, you are in T-r-o-u-b-l-e. And we do not want that now, do we?

Saturday, April 9th: The Prodigal Song

Here I am just a poor man
Made poorer still by the knowledge of the riches I have squandered
Oh, I've wandered - I stand convicted
Even knowing that the deepest of my wounds were mostly self-inflicted
Where did my heart go?
Where have I been?
You opened my eyes to the darkness and lies
And I shut them again

And I want to go home to my Father
I want to be part of where my heart says I belong
I want to wash my weary soul in living water
I've been away, way, too long - I want to go home

Out on the bound'ries of my freedom
I was lookin' for fences that would keep me in, and I found there were none
Only your sweet love, Lord And, fool that I've been
You broke the chains of my heartache and pain
And I forged them again

And I want to go home to my Father
I want to be part of where my heart says I belong
I want to wash my weary soul in living water
I've been away, way, too long - I want to go home

Jesus, Lord, please help me, I'm so full of regret

It's so hard to forgive myself, Lord, and it's harder to forget
I need you to hold me and heal me
I need you to mold me and steel me
By the power of your Word to be the son
You've called me to be

And I want to go home to my Father
I want to be part of where my heart says I belong
I want to wash my weary soul in living water
I've been away, way, too long - I want to go home

I've been away, way, too long - I want to go home

Text: Don Francisco

So, he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!' (Luke 15:15-17)

I wrote earlier about Nina Perry and her prayer of praise that God allowed her to wake up in her right mind. Some never do, and some do not want to, which is a shame. Dying of hunger, just might have something to do with the Prodigal son coming to his senses. Maybe, maybe not. But we can be grateful that he did come to see the futility of his situation. He reasoned that even his father's hired hands had enough bread, and they surely would share with him. He swallowed his pride, dusted himself off, hopefully took a bath and walked home from a far country.

The word "prodigal" is mysterious to us. Almost the only time we ever hear it is in the title of this parable. It's basic meaning is "wasteful" particularly with regard to money. It comes from Latin roots that mean "forth" (*pro-*) and "to drive" (*agere*). It indicates the quality of a person who drives forth his money, who wastes it by spending with reckless abandon.

Jesus' parables are based on real-life situations, though they often veer off from the expected course of events in surprising ways. Those surprises teach us lessons. Here, Jesus relates the situation of a father who has two sons, one of whom can't wait for his inheritance. In Jewish society, there were laws regarding how inheritances were typically divided. The oldest brother got a double share while the other brothers got a single share. When there were two brothers (as here), the older brother would get 2/3 of the estate, and the younger brother would get 1/3. That means he is asking for the 1/3 of the father's possessions that he would ordinarily get when the father dies. Think about that. He's asking his father to give him 1/3 of everything that he owns *right now*, before the father is dead, when his father would still have use for these possessions. How many fathers would receive that suggestion well today? How many would comply with it if one of their children asked it? Not many! This is a truly astonishing request, and it would have been even more astonishing in the ancient world.

So, what do we learn from this parable? It teaches us the depths to which our own misuse of freedom will bring us. If we are bent on leaving God, things will go badly for us. We will be humiliated in the uncaring world. The farther we get from the Father's loving care, the worse off we will be, and our best course is to return to God and his forgiveness.

From this parable, we can draw a number of spiritual lessons, they are (1) we can be a genuine son of the Father who is spiritually "alive" and be "lost" through sin. (2) We can turn our backs on our heavenly Father and leave him of our own free will. (3) Mortal sin is a real possibility. Mortal sin inevitably lands us in a far worse state than we were originally. (4) We can, however, return to the Father and be accepted by him with great joy. (5) In fact, he is ready and eager to accept us back and forgive us, no matter what we've done, and lastly, Christians who have never fallen should not resent those who come back. They should share in their Father's joy. Their own place is secure, and their heavenly reward is not threatened. God has enough to go around. God loves us just as much as he loves those who come back through a dramatic conversion. Where do you call home today, the Father's house, or the pig pen?

Sunday, April 10th: The Anchor Holds

I have journeyed Through the long, dark night
Out on the open sea

By faith alone Sight unknown
And yet His eyes were watching me

The anchor holds Though the ship is battered
The anchor holds Though the sails are torn

I have fallen on my knees As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds In spite of the storm

I've had visions I've had dreams
I've even held them in my hand

But I never knew They would slip right through
Like they were only grains of sand

The anchor holds Though the ship is battered
The anchor holds Though the sails are torn

I have fallen on my knees As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds In spite of the storm

I have been young But I am older now
And there has been beauty That these eyes have seen

But it was in the night Through the storms of my life
Oh, that's where God proved His love to me

The anchor holds Though the ship is battered
The anchor holds Though the sails are torn

I have fallen on my knees As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds In spite of the storm

I have fallen on my knees As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds In spite of the storm

Songwriters: Ray Boltz / Lawrence Chewning

Fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. (Acts 27:29)

There is one piece of equipment that every boat needs, an anchor. An anchor is a device, normally made of metal, used to secure a vessel to the bed of a body of water to prevent the craft from drifting due to wind or current. The word derives from Latin *ancora*, which itself comes from the Greek *ankȳra*.

Anchors can either be temporary or permanent. Permanent anchors are used in the creation of a mooring, and are rarely moved. Vessels carry one or more temporary anchors, which may be of different designs and weights.

There are several types of anchors each designed to function in different conditions. Anchors achieve holding power either by "hooking" into the seabed, or mass, or a combination of the two. Permanent moorings use large masses (commonly a block or slab of concrete) resting on the seabed. Semi-permanent mooring anchors and large ship's anchors derive a significant portion of their holding power from their mass. Modern anchors for smaller vessels have metal flukes which hook on to rocks on the bottom or bury themselves in soft seabed.

The vessel is attached to the anchor by the rode (also called a cable or a warp). It can be made of rope, chain or a combination of rope and chain. The ratio of the length of rode to the water depth is known as the scope.

Holding ground is the area of sea floor which holds an anchor. Different types of anchors are designed to hold in different types of holding ground. Some bottom materials hold better than others; for instance, hard sand holds well, shell very poorly. Holding ground may be fouled with obstacles. An anchorage location may be chosen for its holding ground. In poor holding ground, only the weight of an anchor matters; in good holding ground, it is able to dig in, and the holding power can be significantly higher.

This claw-shaped anchor was designed by Peter Bruce from the Isle of Man in the 1970s. The Bruce and its copies, known generically as "claw type anchors," have been adopted on smaller boats (partly because they stow easily on a bow roller), but they are most effective in larger sizes. Claw anchors are quite popular on charter fleets, as their percentage set on the first try in many bottom types is very high. They have the reputation of not breaking out with tide or wind changes, instead slowly turning in the bottom to align with the force.

American Richard Danforth invented the Danforth Anchor in the 1940s for use aboard landing craft. It uses a stock at the crown to which two large flat triangular flukes are attached. The stock is hinged so the flukes can orient toward the bottom. Tripping palms at the crown act to tip the flukes into the seabed. The design is a burying variety, and once well set can develop high resistance. Its lightweight and compact flat design make it easy to retrieve and relatively easy to store. A Danforth will not usually penetrate or hold in gravel or weeds. In boulders and coral, it may hold by acting as a hook.

We as Christians have only one anchor, Jesus the Christ and it holds in all situations as long as we are connected. We are joined to our anchor, not by rope and chains, but prayer and walking with Him each moment of the day. So, if you are floundering, check the link to your anchor. It may not be attached in sand.

Monday, April 11th: Adam, Where are You?

Unashamed and naked in a garden that has never seen the rain,
Rulers of a kingdom, full of joy -- never marred by any pain,
The morning all around them seems to celebrate the life they've just begun;
And in the majesty of innocence the king and queen come walking in the sun

But the master of deception now begins with his dissection of the Word
And with all of his craft and subtly the serpent twists the simple truths they've
heard,
While hanging in the balance is a world that has been placed at their command
And all their unborn children die as both of them bow down to Satan's hand.

And just before the ev'ning in the cool of the day, They hear the voice of God as He
is walking
And they can't abide His presence, so they try to hide away;
But still they hear the sound as He is calling:

"Adam, Adam, where are you?
Adam, Adam, where are you?
Adam, Adam, where are you?"

In the stifling heat of summer now the gard'ner and his wife are in the field
And it seems that thorns and thistles are the only crop his struggles ever yield
He eats his meals in sorrow 'til he sinks in to the dust whence he came
But all down through the ages he can hear his Maker calling out his name.

"Adam, Adam, where are you?
Adam, Adam, where are you?"

And though the curse has long be broken
Adams' sons are still the prisoners of their fears
Rushing helter skelter to destruction with their fingers in their ears
While the Fathers voice is calling with an urgency I've never heard before
"Won't you come in from the darkness now before it's time to finally close the
door!"

"Adam, Adam, where are you?
Adam, Adam, where are you?
Adam, Adam, I love you!"

Text: Don Francisco

*for her way leads down to death, and her paths to the shades;
those who go to her never come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.
Therefore, walk in the way of the good, and keep to the paths of the just.
(Proverbs 2:18-20)*

Imagine if you will, having the ability to walk and talk with God each day in the early evening hours. You say that would be wonderful, to be able to have the Creator of the universe all to yourself each and every day, to be the caretakers of the kingdom of the Father and never knowing sorrow or pain. You are naked because you do not know any different. You live in safety and in innocence. It is the best life you could ever imagine. In Deuteronomy, the writer states that God announced to the nation that He had called, "heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live." Well, we know the old, old story.

The fact of the matter is that like us our ancestors did not choose life. They chose to eat of the tree of Good and Evil; however, they did not become as wise as God, but instead learned there were consequences for their actions. Something we still need to learn today. But I wonder if they knew the outcome of their actions, if they would still have made the same decision? That leads me to the question, if we knew the outcomes of the actions we take today, would we still proceed? I would like to think that I am a lot smarter than I was when I was ordained, but who knows?

There is in my opinion, a very bad habit of, what is known as, kicking the can down the road. An organization has made the conscious decision not to make a decision. However, choosing not to make a decision is a decision and the after-effects may be devastating. Sometimes the conclusions and the judgement we make today will not take effect until somewhere down the road. This applies to a church as well as an individual.

The results of eating of the forbidden fruit was physical death and also physical pain. Instead of just going out and picking the fruit from the tree, they now had to earn their own living by the sweat of their brow. They would plow and work the soil and it would only yield thorns and thistles. Plus, they would have to eat the plants of the field. In addition, they now had requirements placed on them. They were required to bring an offering to God.

Has anything changed since the beginning of man? No! Has it become worse? Yes. Do we make choices thinking that we can escape the after-effects of our actions? Of course. Why? Because most of the time there is no immediate action taken by God. He lets nature run its course. Why is it that we live for the here and now and its immediate gratification? That is explained by saying we cannot see the future. However, I believe in some small way, God has granted us the ability to see into the future. All we have to do is look at the past. Although the past is not a barometer of what will happen in the future, it does tell us what road we are presently on and provides options for change.

The good news is God still talks to us today. But the question is, are we listening? Are we listening to God's voice or to our own desires? God lets us, like Adam and Eve, make our choice based on the voices we are listening to. But then, we too, must ultimately pay the piper. Something to think about.

Tuesday, April 12th: On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand

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

On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand

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

On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand

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

On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand

Let's just revisit and visualize it
Just think about what that is gonna look like
When we hear that trumpet sound

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

On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand

Text: Edward Mote

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings, I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by.
(Psalm 57:1)

As long as I remember, I have wanted to live on a sailboat and sail around the world. The dream remained intact until Joyce and I spent a week aboard a forty foot sail boat, while attending a sailing school. The Beneteau, named Seabona was a standard sloop with a main and jib. She had three staterooms, and salon and galley, everything a sailor could want.

The first day out, all went well. We left Ft. Lauderdale and sailed down to a small, out of the way harbor. We dropped anchor and settled in for the night. In the morning, we weighed anchor and headed south on the inner coastal toward Pumpkin Key, where we would spend another night on the hook. (The boating term for anchoring out.) It was beautiful and quite with a night full of stars. The following morning, we hoisted the anchor and sailed down to Key Largo.

The trip to Key Largo was basically uneventful. The winds were ten to fifteen out of the southeast and the seas were about one. It was a perfect day for sailing. So much so, that when I did not have the helm, I would sit on the rail and let my feet dangle in the water. All was well until we reached the point where we needed to turn into the marina. At that point, our captain, John took the helm and made a ninety degree turn to starboard (a right turn to non-nautical types). When he did that, we immediately found ourselves on what is called a port tack. That means the wind was coming over the left forward quarter part of the boat. With full sail a-flying, we started to heel. "Heeling" is when the sailboat leans over to one side due to wind pressure on the sails. To propel the boat, the boat is angled so the wind crosses over the boat at an angle, hitting the sails and pushing them toward one side of the boat. That is when I lost my chance to sail around the world. You see, as long as the boat is upright and on an even keel, Joyce is fine. Once it starts to heel, forget it.

A year after our sailing school experience, Joyce and I decided to charter an Island Packet 350 on Chesapeake Bay. It was early spring, and the weather was a little unsettled. We arrived in Rock Hall, Maryland on the morning our charter was to begin. The boat was brand new and still needed some finishing touches. When all was ready, we set sail about two to three hours behind schedule. It was our hope to make it down to a town called Easton, but that did not happen.

As we rounded Bloody Point, we met the full force of the nor'easter that had blown in an hour before. Did the boat heel! To the water line! I immediately took the sails in, and started the engine, rounding the bow straight into the wind. With the wind, current and tide working all against us, I made the decision to find a cove that would have some protection from the wind. I found such a place. I put out the main anchor and felt it catch. However, I believed I needed to set a second. With the other anchor securely in place I went below. That was not the only time in our sailing adventures that we have had to set two anchors. Sometimes two are better than one.

The second verse of the song reads, "In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the vail." In this life, as in sailing, storms will come up suddenly. The winds will blow, the rains will come, and unless our anchor is firmly planted in Christ, we may be blown off course and away. Please do not let that happen. Make sure the one who is holding on to you is the one you are holding on to. Otherwise, who knows where you will end up. Maybe in a far country.

Tuesday, April 12th: I Surrender All

All to Jesus I surrender
All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him
In His presence daily live

All to Jesus I surrender
Humbly at His feet I bow
Worldly pleasures all forsaken
Take me, Jesus, take me now

I surrender all
I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed Savior
I surrender all

All to Jesus I surrender
Make me Savior wholly thine
May Thy Holy Spirit fill me
May I know Thy power divine

I surrender all
I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed Savior

I surrender all
I surrender all
I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed Savior

I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed Savior
I surrender all

Songwriters: Judson Van DeVenter

But Jeremiah said, "They shall not deliver *you*. Please, obey the voice of the LORD which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live. (*Jeremiah 38:20*)

Polycarp, an early church bishop, had been a Christian since he was a child, but the Romans didn't get around to killing him until he was in his eighties. Whatever the reason for the delay, it is still the first recorded martyrdom in post-New Testament church history.

He lived during the most formative era of the church, at the end of the age of the original apostles, when the church was making the critical transition to the second generation of believers. Tradition has it that he was personally discipled by the apostle John and that he was appointed as bishop of Smyrna (in modern Izmir in Turkey) by some of the original apostles.

In his later years, he tried to settle disputes about the date to celebrate Easter, and he confronted one of the church's most troublesome heretics, the Gnostic Marcion, calling him "the first born of Satan." His only existing writing, a pastoral letter to the church at Philippi, shows he had little formal education, and was unpretentious, humble, and direct.

Such traits are especially evident in the account of his martyrdom, which was written within a year of his death. It is not clear exactly why he was suddenly, at age 86, subject to arrest, but when he heard Roman officials were intent on arresting him, he decided to wait for them at home. Panic-stricken friends pleaded with him to flee, so to calm them, he finally agreed to withdraw to a small estate outside of town. But while in prayer there, he received some sort of vision. Whatever he saw or heard, we don't know. He simply reported to his friends that he now understood, "I must be burned alive."

Roman soldiers eventually discovered Polycarp's whereabouts and came to his door. He was escorted to the local proconsul, Statius Quadratus, who interrogated him in front of a crowd of curious onlookers. Polycarp seemed unfazed by the interrogation; he carried on a witty dialogue with Quadratus until Quadratus lost his temper and threatened Polycarp: he'd be thrown to wild beasts, he'd be burned at the stake, and so on. Polycarp just told Quadratus that while the proconsul's fire lasts but a little while, the fires of judgment ("reserved for the ungodly," he slyly added) cannot be quenched. Polycarp concluded, "But why do you delay? Come, do what you will."

Soldiers then grabbed him to nail him to a stake, but Polycarp stopped them: "Leave me as I am. For he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved, without the security you desire from nails." He prayed aloud, the fire was lit, and his flesh was consumed. The chronicler of this martyrdom said it was "not as burning flesh but as bread baking or as gold and silver refined in a furnace."

History is filled with the stories of those who surrendered all, not just a little but all. What would your response be if you were called to give your life for the one who gave His life for you? Remember your answer may determine your destiny.

Thursday, April 14th: Take My Life and Let it Be

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing,
Always, only for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
Every pow'r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Songwriter: Frances R. Havergal

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:10)

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879) was an unusually gifted and passionate saint. The daughter of a church rector, she was raised in Worcester, England and attended schools in England and Germany. In her love of learning, she grew to become an able scholar (even becoming proficient in both Hebrew and Greek) and a talented singer and pianist.

The deepest desire of her heart, however, was to personally influence the spiritual growth of others. This led her to value most her ability to write; for that reason, she expended the majority of her life's labors in writing prose and poetry that would be spiritually beneficial to the saints.

Havergal suffered poor health and was taken by the Lord at just 42 years of age. But the Lord prospered her ministry; her writings had a large impact in her own day, and several continue to be read and sung today. The story of "Take My Life" gives a good picture of the kind of passion and joy she had in ministering to others. She once recounted the story behind it:

'Perhaps you will be interested to know the origin of the consecration hymn, 'Take my life.' I went for a little visit of five days. There were ten persons in the house, some unconverted and long prayed for, some converted but not rejoicing Christians. He gave me the prayer, "Lord, give me all in this house!" And He just did! Before I left the house everyone had got a blessing. The last night of my visit I was too happy to sleep, and passed most of the night in praise and renewal of my own consecration, and these little couplets formed themselves and chimed in my heart one after another, till they finished with, "Ever, ONLY, ALL for Thee!"

In her own words, the hymn is a "consecration hymn" in which the singer commits all of her possessions and being to the Lord for his purposes. It expresses what each of us ought to feel and long for, even if at times we see so much disparity between the words and our actual state, that we have to sing most of it in hope and faith.

Have you consecrated your life to the One who gave His life for you, or have you consecrated it for your own good? Does your life flow in endless praise to someone other than yourself? Do your hands and feet move swiftly to bring relief to others who are in need, or are they only used for your benefit? What about your voice, how is that used, to build up the body of Christ, or to bully others to get your own way? And what about your silver and gold, is it made available to those in need, or is it accumulating more for you, so that you may enjoy the good life? Your check book will not lie.

Now comes the two biggies, what about your will, is it one with the Creator or do you try to impose your will and ways on others? Is God sitting on the throne of your heart or are you still there? Come on now, let's be honest. It's hard if not impossible to give up control of your life.

Oh, yah, and this love thing. Who do you love most? Who gets fed first, you or others? Have you given your treasures to the King? Did your hands hand it over joyously, all of it? Remember, where your treasure is so is your heart. Sure, hope it is secure in the heart of all hearts.

Friday, April 15th: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbid it Lord that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my Lord
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood

See from His head His hands His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did ever such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing so divine
Demands my soul my life my all

Songwriters: Isaac Watts

Don't run from tests and hardships, brothers, and sisters. As difficult as they are, you will ultimately find joy in them; if you embrace them, your faith will blossom under pressure and teach you true patience as you endure. And true patience brought on by endurance will equip you to complete the long journey and cross the finish line—mature, complete, and wanting nothing. (James 1:2-3)

In my wildest imagination, I do not believe I could call the cross wonderful. Why? It is an instrument on which the lives of individuals were sacrificed. To me, it is the same as saying how marvelous the gas chambers were that took the lives of millions of our Jewish brothers and sisters during World War Two. Or perhaps, it could be compared in beauty to the gallows where innocent victims have been hanged for centuries. Is there any loveliness in the chopping block where the heads of the guiltless were lost because of power hungry rulers? No matter what form of execution is administered, wondrous and glorious should not be terms associated with them.

In antiquity, crucifixion was considered one of the most brutal and shameful modes of death. Probably originating with the Assyrians and Babylonians, it was used systematically by the Persians in the 6th century BC. Alexander the Great brought it from there to the eastern Mediterranean countries in the 4th century BC. Then the Phoenicians introduced it to Rome in the 3rd century BC. It was virtually never used in pre-Hellenic Greece. The Romans perfected crucifixion for 500 years, until it was abolished by Constantine I in the 4th century AD. Crucifixion in Roman times was applied mostly to slaves, disgraced soldiers, Christians, and foreigners--only very rarely to Roman citizens. Death came usually after from 6 hours to 4 days, was due to multifactorial pathology: after-effects of compulsory scourging and maiming, hemorrhage and dehydration causing hypovolemic shock and pain, but the most important factor was progressive asphyxia caused by impairment of respiratory movement. Resultant anoxemia exaggerated hypovolemic shock. Death was probably precipitated by cardiac arrest, caused by vasovagal reflexes, initiated inter alia by severe anoxemia, severe pain, body blows and breaking of the large bones. The attending Roman guards could only leave the site after the victim had died and were known to precipitate death by means of deliberate fracturing of the tibia and/or fibula, spear stab wounds into the heart, sharp blows to the front of the chest, or a smoking fire built at the foot of the cross to asphyxiate the victim.

It has been said that the nails in His hands and feet did not hold Him there. What held Him there was His love for His Father and for each of us. But why did His death have to be so brutal? The decades after Jesus' resurrection and ascension were brutal for the young church. Christians were stoned, torn apart by lions, and crucified. Legend has it that Peter was crucified upside-down. Every Roman Christian who faced martyrdom would have been able to understand that their Savior also experienced horrible physical pain. Knowing that Jesus willingly faced such anguish would have given them strength to undergo their own.

If there is anything wondrous about the cross, it is that someone was willing to suffer and die for my sins, and the sins of all who have lived and those who will live and die. As the song says, that was love so amazing and divine that it demands and commands my soul and my all. Anything less will be unacceptable. There is no such thing as a part-time Christian, it is either all or nothing. If you do not believe me, ask the one who gave His all for you and receive His forgiveness for your failures.

Saturday, April 16th: Oh, Lamb of God

Your only Son no sin to hide
But You have sent Him from Your side
To walk upon this guilty sod
And to become the Lamb of God

Your gift of love they crucified
They laughed and scorned Him as he died
The humble King they named a fraud
And sacrificed the Lamb of God

Oh Lamb of God, Sweet lamb of God
I love the Holy Lamb of God
Oh wash me in His precious Blood
My Jesus Christ the Lamb of God
I was so lost I should have died

But You have brought me to Your side
To be led by Your staff and rod
And to be called a lamb of God

Oh Lamb of God, Sweet lamb of God
I love the Holy Lamb of God
Oh wash me in His precious Blood
My Jesus Christ the Lamb of God

Oh wash me in His precious Blood
My Jesus Christ the Lamb of God

Songwriter: Paris Twila

The Eternal is my shepherd, He cares for me always. He provides me rest in rich, green fields, beside streams of refreshing water. He soothes my fears. He makes me whole again, steering me off worn, hard paths to roads where truth and righteousness echo His name.

Even in the unending shadows of death's darkness, I am not overcome by fear. Because You are with me in those dark moments, near with Your protection and guidance, I am comforted. You spread out a table before me, provisions in the midst of attack from my enemies.

You care for all my needs, anointing my head with soothing, fragrant oil, filling my cup again and again with Your grace. Certainly, Your faithful protection and loving provision will pursue me where I go, always, everywhere, I will always be with the Eternal, in Your house forever. (Ps. 23 The Voice)

To my way of thinking, when this Psalm was written, David saw the people of God as the lambs of God in need of a shepherd. That shepherd would lead us, as David wrote, beside still waters where we will be unafraid and provided with all the necessities of life. This shepherd will also be our protection in and through this life. And David was right. He is all that.

But that is not the theme of this song. This song talks about a different lamb. Although we are considered lambs under God's protection, we are not The Lamb of God. That title belongs to and is solely to be used for His Son.

The title Lamb of God, for Jesus appears in the Gospel of John, with the initial proclamation: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" and the title is reaffirmed the next day. The second use of the title Lamb of God takes place in the presence of the first two apostles of Jesus, who immediately follow him, address him as Rabbi with respect, and later in the narrative bring others to meet him.

These two proclamations of Jesus as the Lamb of God closely bracket the Baptist's quotes, "I have borne witness that this is the Son of God". From a Christological perspective, these proclamations and the descent of the Holy Spirit reinforce each other to establish the divine element of the Person of Christ. In Johannine Christology the proclamation "who takes away the sin of the world" begins the unfolding of the salvific theme of the redemptive and sacrificial death.

The theme of a sacrificial lamb which rises in victory as the Resurrected Christ was employed in early Christology. For example, in 375 AD, Saint Augustine wrote: "Why a lamb in his passion? Because he underwent death without being guilty of any iniquity. Why a lion in his passion? Because in being slain, he slew death. Why a lamb in his resurrection? Because his innocence is everlasting. Why a lion in his resurrection? Because everlasting also is his might."

The 11th century Christology of Saint Anselm of Canterbury specifically disassociates the Lamb of God from the Old Testament concept of a scapegoat, which is subjected to punishment for the sins of others without knowing it or willing it. Anselm emphasized that as Lamb of God, Jesus chose to suffer on Calvary as a sign of his full obedience to the will of the Father. How does our obedience stack up to that of The Lamb of God? As a lamb in God's fold would you be willing to be sacrificed for others? Many have, would you?

Sunday, April 17th: He Arose

Low in the grave He lay
Jesus my Savior!
Waiting the coming day
Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes
He arose a Victor from the dark domain
And He lives forever with His saints to reign
He arose! (He arose)
He arose! (He arose)
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Vainly they watch His bed
Jesus, my Savior!
Vainly they seal the dead
Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes
He arose a Victor from the dark domain
And He lives forever with His saints to reign
He arose! (He arose)
He arose! (He arose)
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Death cannot keep his prey
Jesus, my Savior!
He tore the bars away
Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes
He arose a Victor from the dark domain
And He lives forever with His saints to reign
He arose! (He arose)
He arose! (He arose)
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes
He arose a Victor from the dark domain
And He lives forever with His saints to reign
He arose! (He arose)
He arose! (He arose)
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Songwriter: Robert Lowery

"And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still in condemnation for your sins. . . . And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world" (I Corinthians 15:17, 19 NLT)

The disruption and decay of this earth and the inevitability of death are a living reality. Pain and loss are felt every minute of every day somewhere in the world. Something inside us says, "This makes no sense," and we hope that life will be better tomorrow. But even if tomorrow is better, it won't mean much eventually, because some day, all that we have and hold will fade from our grasp, and we will die.

But, at one point in history, there was a band of believers who trusted in someone to change all that. A handful of devout Jewish people thought a man named Jesus was the Messiah who would transform their troubled times into a godly kingdom on earth. Yet one day, their Messiah hung on a cross, dying, and their hopes seemed dashed. But far more than the fate of the disciples hung on the cross that day. The fate of the entire human race, their hope of a bright tomorrow, and of life after death hung there with him. The human race seemed doomed to endure pain and anguish in this life and then to die, eternally separated from God.

However, as Son of the sovereign God, Jesus broke the power of death by rising from the grave on the third day and pierced the kingdom of darkness with a penetrating light. Christ's resurrection victory over death and despair not only broke the power of death for all of us who trust in Christ as Savior, but also provided the means for us to receive a whole new perspective on life. Though we may endure pain, grief, and suffering here on earth, because Christ's death was followed by his resurrection, we can know that such things are temporary, and that much greater things await us.

Because of the resurrection, we are destined to live forever in new bodies on a new earth, an existence that will be so enjoyable that anything "we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory [God] will give us later." For we "wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us" (Romans 8:18, 23).

But our destiny can become a reality only if the resurrection of Christ literally took place. Because if Christ did not actually rise from the dead, it would be a strong indication that the sacrifice for sin was unacceptable to God, and that Christ had not broken the power of death. For if Jesus didn't break the power of death over his own body, how could he cancel our death sentence?

"But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead," as Paul said. It is a matter of historical record that Jesus literally died, and that his lifeless body was placed in a tomb, but it is equally true that three days later that lifeless body was transformed into a living spiritual body.

Our bodies now disappoint us, but when they are raised, they will be full of glory. They are weak now, but when they are raised, they will be full of power. They are natural human bodies now, but when they are raised, they will be spiritual bodies, and we will be one with Christ.