

I WAS JUST
THINKING

About Life & God



MUSINGS AND PITHY THOUGHTS IN HIS EIGHTIES
BY

George Herbert Cummings

I WAS JUST THINKING: ABOUT LIFE AND GOD
Musings and Pithy Thoughts in his Eighties
© 2004, 2011 by George Herbert Cummings

Published electronically by Cladach Publishing
PO Box 336144 Greeley, CO 80633
970.371.9530 www.cladach.com



CLADACH
Publishing

Table of Contents

ABOUT LIVING . . .	6
Retirement . . .	6
“Old age” . . .	7
Time . . .	7
Progress . . .	8
Serving . . .	9
Choices . . .	9
Mistakes . . .	9
Failure . . .	10
Ordinariness . . .	10
Humility . . .	11
Attitude . . .	12
Roots . . .	13
Anxiety . . .	14
Singing . . .	14
Aloneness . . .	15
Loneliness . . .	15
Bridges . . .	16
Evil . . .	17
Giving . . .	17
ABOUT UNBELIEVERS . . .	19
“Staked out” . . .	19
Osama . . .	19
“Free” offers . . .	20
Chickens . . .	21
Creation . . .	21
Church . . .	22
Salvation . . .	22
Celebrations . . .	23
Reality . . .	23
Light . . .	24
News . . .	25
ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL WALK . . .	26
Fogginess . . .	26

Worry . . .	26
Bill . . .	26
Miracles . . .	27
Faith . . .	27
Joyful Journey . . .	28
Spiritual Blackmail . . .	29
Depression . . .	29
Today . . .	31
Focus . . .	32
Nature . . .	33
The Truth . . .	33
Our Witness . . .	34
Pastors . . .	35
Hymns . . .	35
Coming Home . . .	36

ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE . . . 37

Feeling Needed . . .	37
Connections . . .	37
Feeling Loved . . .	37
Sexual Feelings . . .	38
Marriage & Family . . .	38
Learning to Love . . .	39
Tough Times . . .	39
Exercising Love . . .	39
Expectations . . .	39
Negotiating . . .	41
Adjustments . . .	42
Love Cycles . . .	42
Balance . . .	42
True Love . . .	43

ABOUT THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD . . . 44

Change . . .	44
Stock Quotes . . .	44
Waiting . . .	45
Compassion . . .	45
God's Gift . . .	45

I WAS JUST THINKING...



G. H. Cummings



After living eighty plus years, I have a lot to think about. Raised on a farm in western Kansas, the memories from those days burn and bless. Service in Uncle Sam's army, years in school, marriage and raising a family, pastoring some wonderful people for many years, going back to seminary after my first wife died, earning degrees in Christian counseling, meeting and wedding my present wife. All the rich and wonderful experiences God has given me over the years: what a rich source of thought-provoking experiences! Here are some of the thoughts that have impressed themselves upon me.

... ABOUT LIVING

Retirement ☞

That's what I call myself: "Retired"! What a term. It means going to bed. Sleep. Inactivity.

What else does retirement mean?

I still work, very hard in fact, in my large yard with many shade trees, vegetable garden, flower gardens and orchard. Yes, I work, and never get it all done!

I'm just about as busy as I have ever been in my whole life! No, I'm not making as much money. But money is not everything. Keeping things up while my wife still goes to work seems to be worth a lot.

“Old age” ☞

Some probably think I’m old now. I am creeping past eighty! But I do not and will not say I’m old. Older, yes—but not old. Never! I just read a poem (the author’s name was not given) that says it well.

*I shall not mind
The whiteness of my hair
Or that my slow steps falter
On the stair
Or that young friends hurry
As they pass
Or what strange image
Greets me in the glass
If I can feel
As roots feel in the sod,
That I am growing old to bloom
Before the face of God!*

Time ☞

Though everyone has the same number of hours in the day, people hurry as fast as they can go and never think they have enough time to get everything done. Other people take life easy, relaxed and casual, and they seem to have all the time they need and even more than they need.

Time is a gift to us. We don’t have to pay for it or work for it. A reasonable amount is available for our use each morning. We can use it well, accomplish some tasks and reach out to others, visit a bit, and still have enough left over to get a decent night’s rest.

On other days, time seems to stand still. When waiting for the traffic light to turn, or the microwave to finish

heating, or that important phone call to come, time can really drag its feet.

And then there are those times when things move too fast. You're on vacation and it's over before you know it. You're having a wonderful time and the time flies.

When you think about it, there is plenty of time for everything, at least everything that is important. It's when we don't use it carefully and responsibly that it seems to slip away and leave us confused and defeated.

Use time well and you will have plenty for all the great and good things of life. Commit your time to your Maker, who is your guide and leader, and you will arrive someday at the point in which time shall be no more. Your journey through time will end in God's eternity.

Progress

To do anything worthwhile in life you need a starting point. You have to begin. Many worthwhile accomplishments have died in the birthing. Someone had a good idea, but never got started with it, never completely gave birth to it.

We need to get going by accepting where we are and where we need to go. Come to terms with our possibilities, limitations and tendencies. We must deal in naked truth and stark reality. No amount of positive or wishful thinking can change reality.

Don't attempt to manipulate those around you into getting your job done. Forget magical solutions. Accept the challenge of hard work. Be willing to change your behavior and attitude. Don't ever stop until you are done.

Just a little measurable progress can be most encouraging. What a reward it is to look back down the road and see how far you've come. Taking the long mountain grade in one giant leap would rob us of the joy of daily progress.

There are things we can stop for along the climb: repairs, reading the road maps, rest, relaxation, refueling. But stopping—period—will destroy us. Our integrity, self regard, peace of mind, and zest for life depend on our continuing upward and onward.

Serving ☞

Life seems simpler to me if I think of it as a list of assignments. When I accept an assigned task, I'm bowing to my Lord and Master. When I carry out that project and complete it, I'm obeying my Master. Joy is mine in the very thought of following God's plan for my life. Meaning and purpose is ever present to energize me.

It may be a humble task—planting flowers, feeding wild birds, shopping for groceries or giving encouragement to a trembling soul. In the doing of His will there are personal rewards. The sun shines brighter, the snow glistens with more sparkle, the breezes blow more softly while I carry out the garbage or cut the firewood, *if* I am doing it all from a heart of love.

I enjoy the reward of a love relationship with the Master. And my loved ones are blessed by my actions. They enjoy the birds and the flowers in the backyard. They get to eat potatoes, brussels sprouts, and peaches from the garden.

And then in a wider field of service there are those I have the deep privilege of encouraging. It may simply be the harried checkout person at the supermarket; it may be the brother walking out after the Sunday service; or it may be the one who has called for a counseling appointment. The flow of God's love goes ever outward.

Choices ☞

The choices we make can have a powerful and lasting effect upon our lives. They may be born out of weakness. When truly desperate and totally helpless, a man may make a powerful decision that will start him on the road to recovery and lead to amazing results.

How many times does a child, out of a feeling of total powerlessness, make negative choices that set the course of his life?

Some have gone the wrong direction most of their lives and yet have turned their stubborn wills around and begun to exercise their "won't power" toward evil and their will power toward good.

Mistakes ☞

If you made a bad mistake today, it doesn't prove that *you*

are somehow bad. If you made a whole bunch of mistakes today, it still doesn't prove you are not a good person. Mistakes do not make anyone bad. But remember this, it can sure be rough if you *think* you are bad even when you are not! Thinking you are bad is in some ways just as bad as being bad and has many of the same results.

Failure

It happens to all of us mortals. It bothers us, perplexes us, saddens us, and even at times depresses us. Failure! We all fail; we all fall short. We exaggerate the truth. We lose our tempers. We are judgmental. We are selfish.

What do we do about failure? Ignore it, deny it, repress it? Maybe we say, "I'm no worse than the next guy"? Or do we chalk it up to being human?

We need to be open and honest about our failures. Going into denial will just prepare the way for more of the same. How much better it is to deal effectively with our failures.

We pray the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts (or trespasses) as we forgive others." We need to pray that, not just in formality, but in reality. We need to deal with our failures in a way that will bring about growth and change within us. The changes we make must help us not to fail the same way in the future.

Failure, if dealt with properly, can be a stepping stone to freedom and successful living. Each failure can be a lesson in how to succeed.

Ordinariness

We must diligently avoid the temptation to portray ourselves as hero or heroine for having suffered some terrible loss or endured some terrible affliction.

Three army officers came into the restaurant today where my wife and I were eating. It was a very warm day. Two officers shed their jackets, looking comfortable. The third did not. The whole upper left front side of his jacket was covered with ribbons. Perhaps he could not be comfortable without wearing them.

Can you face the world as an ordinary human being and not as a special case?

Humility

“Don’t you know, I have my pride,” someone says. Pride can be powerful, but it is a negative power. Whatever good may come from pridefulness is very short-lived and very superficial.

Pride does not make a good long-term companion. You can lose about everything in life because of pride. Pride may be all you have left after it robs you of all good relationships. But it won’t do much for you in your lonely hour.

There’s not much comfort in pride. Pride doesn’t help your self-esteem. Ultimately it may mock you and say, “Oh, what a fool you’ve been to hang onto me and let everything worthwhile in your life go!”

Pride won’t pay the bills, feed you, love you, be a friend to you. It won’t take the pain of disappointment away. It can’t assuage guilt and grief. It doesn’t bring joy or help you have fun and relax. It never reaches out and touches you in the cold dark night. There’s no warmth, no encouragement, no sympathy, and no love in pride.

Pride is cold, hard, arrogant, unsympathetic, unfeeling, unloving. It’s contentious; it never really listens or faces the truth. It’s deceiving, conniving, and in the end totally destructive of everything that makes life worthwhile.

And yet we humans hang on to our pride. We lose jobs, friends, marriages, our kids, and even our souls over pride positions that we will not give up. Pride becomes our god.

Consider humility. The opposite of pride, humility opens up to us all the right and beautiful possibilities of life on earth and in the hereafter.

With humility we can deal in truth and reality without fear. We won’t be offended by the truth. Though people heap abuse on us we will not lash back.

With humility we can see ourselves as we are. We are not afraid of what we may see. We know that pride cannot keep us from drowning in the floods of discouragement. But humility can!

With humility we can relate well with others. Knowing our own limitations and being true to ourselves gives us a proper basis upon which to work and play with others.

With humility we can achieve our life's work. While unconcerned with the opinions of others, we are able to work steadily and depend on our own resources as well as the help of God. The approval or disapproval of the crowd doesn't figure in.

With humility we can find intimacy and love. Recognizing our own strengths and limitations is absolutely essential for relating well with others. The closer the relationship, the more necessary to see ourselves as we are.

With humility we can have a fine relationship with our God. The humble heart will naturally feel its need of grace. Its pride positions swept away, no longer striving to prove itself, the soul can accept the call of a gracious God to live a life of sanctity and service.

With humility we can always be a vital part of things. People around us will accept us graciously and make us a part of the good happenings about us.

Humility! What a good friend to have. It will draw all that is good to us, and draw us close to God.

My personal experience: at the point of complete dependence upon God and total surrender to Him came the satisfying, joyful, and reassuring sense of humility, and the overwhelming sense of the Wonder and Glory of God.

Attitude

Some people pursue an exciting career. Some devote themselves to developing a fine physique. Some serve and volunteer with exceptional energy and effectiveness. But not many people grow into their full potential as spiritual beings. Personal development is often sadly neglected while we pursue other, less worthy goals. We may accomplish fame, a big bank account, and fine honors, but yet be bankrupt in spirit.

The *HAVE* attitude says that possessions make the man. The more a man possesses the happier he is. Amassing wealth becomes the magnificent obsession.

The *DO* attitude says that a man's life consists of action. The more he accomplishes the better life is. Doing great things gives him self-worth, happiness, and a sense of well-being.

The *BE* attitude is different. It places the emphasis upon the person, rather than what he has or what he does. He is a happy man if he gains within his own person certain qualities of soul and spirit. He develops pure motives; is peaceful, humble, and compassionate; knows well his own limitations and longs for personal righteousness; and has mercy on those less righteous or less fortunate than he.

Even though this attitude conflicts with that of society around him . . . even though he is misunderstood and mocked . . . even though he may be abused and ridiculed . . . this man rejoices, not in his material possessions or his many great works, but in what he is in God's sight.

His attitude places him in a special class. He is a child of God. He has found a relationship with God. He is aware of his humanness and his Father's deity. He is aware of God's grace and power in his life. This is true *blessedness*.

Roots

We talk about roots, generations of our family history. But what about the roots we have right now? When you look at a man you may not be able to figure out the roots of his family history. You may not discern the roots of his character, either. You see a tree; the trunk is visible, the branches, the leaves, fruit. But not the roots.

How many of us are concerned about our roots? We may be fussy about our looks. We may want to appear intellectual. We will want people to like us, though they may never know anything about our root system.

But through our roots we draw strength, durability, beauty, and fruitfulness.

“Just like a tree that's planted by the waters, I shall not be moved.”

I see someone walking down the street. I cannot see his roots, but I can see the results of his roots — or lack thereof. These become evident as I get to know him.

Let your roots reach deep into the rich soil of God's love. Through the Scriptures, prayer and worship, feed on that love.

That which is unseen in us may be the most important dimension of all.

Anxiety ☞

Anxiety, and the sense of aloneness that comes with it, is not easy to deal with. You feel that there is too much distance between you and others, even those closest to you, which hinders you from reaching out for reassurance and comfort. You try to find answers inside yourself, but you are too distraught to figure out your situation logically and conclusively.

To overcome anxiety attacks you must give up your right to anger. You must reconcile yourself to the fact that there will always be unfairness in our world. Anger will solve nothing, just keep you in the air, unable to find your footing and get on with your life. Your anger may be directed at yourself or others. It may vacillate between a focus on your own faults and failings, and those of others.

Don't give in to your feelings of unworthiness or vengeance; don't fantasize about acting out your frustration. Your worth as an individual is not derived from what happens to you. It comes from what happens within you, what you are becoming in the eyes of your Creator.

After all, your Creator is the one who cares about you continually and consistently. In your fear and loneliness you may shut yourself away from everyone. But you cannot shut yourself off from Him. He is there—ready to help, and ready to give hope.

Place yourself under His protection and His vindication of your life. Fill your life with praise. Reach out to others who hurt. You will soon be on track again.

Singing ☞

Walking in the park one day, my wife and I heard the sweetest song. The tinkling notes came from a bush nearby. Standing on a small branch was a shocking sight. The little bird singing the beautiful song had only one leg. His tail was cropped off short. He looked frazzled. But my, how he sang! His little throat thrust out full and he warbled a lovely melody.

I wandered: if I were as bad off as he, would I still sing?

Aloneness

It's the pain of grief after the death of a child or spouse. It's the agony of failure in divorce and the isolation of separation. It's the anguish following the breakup of a teen romance. It's the torment of the child on the playground with whom no one wants to play. It's emotional distress wherever it is found and felt.

What is "it?" You don't want to know unless it becomes for you absolutely necessary. How it tears at your soul and twists your emotions. How it makes you wonder if you will ever feel good again. You wonder if maybe everybody you pass sees it in you. You feel marked, branded.

You feel sick—sick at heart. Nothing's the same as it used to be. Eating, sleeping, being alone, being with people—nothing seems right anymore. You try to pray, but have difficulty keeping your focus on God. You're forever coming back to your misery.

It's loneliness, aloneness. In the vast universe you stand out alone—different, odd, strange, abnormal. At times panic grips you. At times you fear for your sanity. At times you think you'll never be normal or feel normal again.

At these times you must struggle to get close to people again!

Loneliness

(I came across this poem I wrote a few months after my first wife passed away.)

The edge of loneliness

Wears at me,

Tears at me,

Wearies me.

Memories of shared moments

Leave me with emptiness.

Laughter of the past

Echoes in the empty rooms of my empty heart.

Fires kindle momentarily

With love's memory

Then subside

Like burned out coals upon the cold hearth.

*A chill creeps over me
 As winter winds blow gusty
 Against my quavering soul.
 Brown fallen leaves
 Careen with death rattle along the street,
 And my spirit dries and
 Blows with them into the gutter.
 I feel passed up, unwanted,
 Unremembered, unloved.*

About the same time I wrote this, I found a piece of driftwood on the beach. It was shaped like a whale, with even an eye on one side. I wrote on a scrap of paper: “The fury of storm and tide has made me what I am.” And, “I am what I have had the good fortune of becoming.”

I did not understand it right then, but the grief process was remaking me. The psalmist said, “Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee.” When Jonah came out of the whale’s belly, he became one of the most successful preachers of all time. As a result of his ministry, a whole city repented and turned to God.

Someone said, “When bad things happen to good people, they become better people.” Of many an older saint it could be said, “Once young and carefree, now buffeted into a work of art.”

So what is your ocean, and what are you becoming? “Sculptured by time and the elements, a thing of beauty?” Then someday you can say, “The fury of storm and tide has made me what I am.”

Bridges

We bought our granddaughter a little case, with the picture of a bridge on one side and lovely houses and flowers on the other side. She and her husband had just moved to a different state, and she had a new job and a new house, new surroundings all in short order. So I wrote about bridges:

We need them.
 They get us from one place to another.
 They are a challenge, sometimes scary.

But on the other side always something beautiful.
 A move, a new house, a new job. A new adventure.
 Trust God's bridges.
 Trust God.

Evil ☞

We are shocked at times with the pungency of evil in the world. So difficult it is to understand the whys of the 9/11 disaster and such. The only explanation is the existence of evil, pure unadulterated evil. Too many seem willing to give themselves over to evil to do unconscionable deeds against innocent people.

Why? Is it hatred of the good or the prosperous? Is it envy of those who have more and/or do better? Is it a deep, inherited religious belief that drives them? How strange that religion and evil can become mixed.

True goodness comes directly from God. Whence comes pure evil? Call it Satan if you will. Is there such a thing as a false prophet in the world today? Talk about sinister!

Religion and evil combined!? What can be worse?—millions of people deceived; the whole world caught in vicious struggle between peoples and nations; total lack of empathy and certainly no sympathy on the part of many.

When will it ever stop? Only when the people of Earth recognize and honor Jesus and His teachings. The Prince of Peace can and will stop terror, but only when the nations confess Him as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. He is the only one who can blast Satan's delusions with the power of his eternal *truth*.

Giving ☞

The precious self that God created is yours to do with as you will. You can give yourself to pursuits and causes.

Some give themselves over to pleasure. Pleasure is fine. It feels good. But it does not truly, lastingly enrich us, strengthen us, make us better people.

Similarly, wealth is a lesser goal. Even with abundant gold and possessions a man may be in utter spiritual poverty. The pursuit of

affluence does not advance the soul, does not give us more worth as persons.

For some people, fame is the name of their game. They may be featured on the Today Show, with their picture on the front of a popular magazine. But does that give them a sure ticket to personal satisfaction? Probably not.

Others simply give themselves away to whatever or whoever comes along. It may be an addictive substance; it may be high-stakes gambling; it may be sexual conquest.

What about the man who offers himself to God? The apostle Paul said, “Give your bodies to God as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). And Jesus said, “Give and it shall be given unto you.”

God has given back to me so much more than I have given Him. Without giving Him my all, I don’t amount to a hill of beans! And when I give Him my all, how much He gives back: so many friends, so many memories, so much joy and spiritual pleasure; riches untold. And I’m known by hundreds and hundreds of people.

What does pleasure give back? — guilt, emptiness, and loneliness.

What does wealth give back? — more emptiness and poverty of spirit.

What does fame give back? — It takes all and gives nothing.

What do people often give back? — shallow thanks, empty promises, and backs turned when you need them most.

I’d rather seek God.

... ABOUT UNBELIEVERS

“Staked Out” ☞

I once heard of staking a cow out in the grass. The cow would eat everything within reach and then starve because he couldn't reach the green grass just inches away.

People are starving spiritually because they are “staked out.”

Some are staked out around their prophet. They actually believe that he supersedes Jesus. That makes his message later and better. So they miss out on the bread of life. They miss out on redemption.

Some people are staked out around monotheism. They cannot accept the possibility of the second person of the trinity, or the third person, the Holy Spirit. So all through the centuries they have missed out. They are separate and antagonistic and prejudiced.

Some Christians have their stakes: perhaps their denomination or organization. They are the ones with the truth. They are blind to all else. They cannot let the full light of God shine into the dark cellars of their doctrines, institutions, and practices.

Many evolutionists have their “scientific” stake that totally prejudices them against believing in a God who is creator, a personal God who cares about His creation.

Each of these positions involves crippling prejudice and ignorant bias. Jesus said that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We need to take off the blinders of our preconceived ideas and behold the full light of revealed truth. We need to see the truth and accept the Truth that makes us free.

There's plenty of good green grass out there if we will break away from our stakes.

Osama ☞

The Bible says to pray for those who spitefully use you. After September 11, 2001, I found myself praying for Osama bin Laden. I prayed that he would return to his mother's teaching and influence. I believe that God wants to redeem Osama.

He needs a Savior. Not more religion—he has that!

He needs Jesus. Not religious organization—he has that!

He needs the Lord. Not theological knowledge—he has that!

And he is not so different in that sense from any of us. We may have religion, in fact be very religious. We may belong to a strong religious organization and be very responsive to its demands. We may have our heads stuffed with knowledge about God as we understand Him. But all of this will not save us.

Two religious young men came to our door the other day. I opened the door and took the initiative. I said something like, “Now that you’re here I’d like to ask you something.” They were very alert. “Could you tell me how a person comes to that moment when he passes from death unto life, when he becomes a child of God, receiving the promise of heaven?”

Isn’t that what it’s all about? I don’t care what kind of group they represent. Just one thing is important. Do they know Jesus?

It really doesn’t matter what else we believe as long as it doesn’t get in the way of saving faith. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. May our theology, organization, or religion *never get in the way* of our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord.

Free Offers ☞

It’s not uncommon for us to get three or four “offers” in the mail every day. They are valid incentives for us to have extra privileges. Some have to do with travel bargains; discounts on car rentals and hotel rooms; insurance plans promising to provide for you in your old age; new credit cards, usually with several blank checks so that you can bring your other balances onto the new card.

If you look closely at any of them, you will find that they will cost you. No company is going to offer you something for nothing. They go to a lot of trouble and expense to send these bulk mailings out. You may feel you are a selected target. And you can be sure that you are one among many.

There is a standing offer God makes to humankind. He is not selective. It is offered freely to all. There are no hidden costs. The benefits last uninterrupted for eternity. Why don’t more people accept His offer? No cost to us; but it did cost God a lot!

Chickens

We have two Rhode Island Red hens running around in our fenced backyard. I love to watch them run after insects, scratch for bugs, and sit quietly on their nests. I was thinking one day that they are probably the only red hens I will ever have! You see, there is no rooster.

When chickens came into being, they were truly amazing, as they are today. Eating bugs and earthworms, and scratching the earth, they lay the most marvelous things called eggs. The egg is dropped from them perfectly formed, a hard shell on the outside, and an impervious inner lining. Inside is the white, which contains the protein out of which the baby chick is formed. Inside the white is found the yolk which provides nourishment for the chick.

Now, even though the chicken has been eating all that unsanitary food, her egg is perfectly sanitary. Sometimes there are germs on the outside, but never inside the egg. Everything has worked together to produce a perfect egg. The food goes into the craw, then is chewed in the gizzard. The ovaries are very productive; usually, an egg a day is the result.

It stands to reason that the first chickens had to be perfectly formed, or they would have been the only generation of chickens on earth. Everything had to work just right. Then also, there had to be roosters! So the first chickens had to be male and female. It awes me to think of the beginnings. Nothing was left to chance.

How could anyone think for a moment that all this wonderment could have just happened through accidents of chance and natural selection, without a Thinking Mind behind it all.

Creation

What we see in our world and universe, we call *creation*. It stands to reason that nothing can be a creation without being created. We all seem to agree that something colossal happened to bring all this about. But what?

Someone likened this to a man taking all the parts of a watch, placing them in a wash tub, and shaking them until they came together perfectly and became a reliable timepiece. But the analogy

breaks down: *Who made the watch parts in the first place?* Would it not make more sense to say the man took raw metal ores and shook a watch into being?

How much shaking would it take to bring life of any kind into being? How much shaking would it take to form living cells, DNA, hormones, sex drive? Designs presuppose a Designer. Forms are made by those who shape. The existence of intelligence can only indicate it was preceded by greater intelligence.

The garden is a great place to observe the wonders of creation. One day I picked luscious ears of sweet corn for dinner. As I shucked the long ears, I was amazed to observe that each kernel of corn had a silken thread running up the ear and out the top. Why? I thought. O yes, so that each tiny silk can trap a bit of pollen falling from the tassel, and that bit of pollen can travel all the way down the silk and fertilize that kernel of corn! I wonder how many millions of years it would take for corn to figure out how to do that?

Church ☞

When I invited him to church he said, “I need to clean up my act, get myself straightened out before I can go to any church.”

I wish I had said, “Give God a chance to get on your case. He’s the only one who *can* clean up your act. He *can* straighten you out. The church fellowship is there to encourage you, pray for you and help you grow in the Lord.”

Too often we humans want to get better before we do the only thing in the world that can make us better.

Salvation ☞

What have you got to stand on when you come before God? You say, “I’ve been a good person, an upright Christian, a faithful church member, a regular giver.” Or, “I’ve had experiences with the Lord, had answers to prayer and enjoyed His gifts.” That’s very good and commendable.

There are some who feel they don’t have a leg to stand on. Their lives are filled with sins and failures. Sinking into despair, they might not ever feel that they can come before the Lord.

If you feel you belong to either of these classes, you really should join another crowd—those who stand on the promises. How much better to claim John 3:16, than to hope for eternal life on the basis of your own record!

How much safer and better to claim the promises of God, than to sink into a lost despair over your sins and mistakes.

Faith brings salvation. You don't have to remain lost, and you don't need to take a chance on your good record.

Whether you have done wonderfully in life or have failed miserably, or are somewhere in between, there is really only one way into God's presence. What a great shock is waiting for those who fail to come home by way of the cross and the promises of God.

Celebrations

There are those who will celebrate Christmas with frivolity, drunkenness, and excesses; who do not accept Jesus as God's son; who do not believe in His deity; who have no desire for His salvation; who have no fear of His coming again.

These are they who enjoy the by-products of progress and enlightenment which have followed the preaching of the gospel. While they ignore God, they drink to the full the material blessings of a strong and prosperous land with ungrateful hearts.

But like a spoiled child who has gotten sick with too many lollipops, our generation may have the candy snatched from them and the bitter medicine of purging judgment poured down their throats. America will someday have to face up to rejected Truth and answer to neglected deity.

But there are many who will truly celebrate Christmas by loving acts of kindness and true worship. They will rejoice in the birth of Christ, give in His name, and attend the services of their church with others who believe in Him.

These people truly have something to celebrate!

Reality

There is a reality we cannot fully know in this life. But we can comprehend it more and more. We pay a price for it and give up many things of lesser value to know it better. The joy of discovery

leads us further on our journey.

Words cannot begin to describe reality. They can only point in the general direction. We cannot find it in books or lectures. We can only find it in ourselves. It is not at the end of the rainbow. It is at the end of our vaunted efforts, our struggle for self sufficiency, at the end of our pride.

This is an exciting search. We mustn't give up because it's difficult. After all, what better thing have we to do with our time on earth? Let our lives be lived in pursuit of Truth. May each step we take lead us closer to it.

What is Reality? It begins in the mystery of God, is manifested in creation, is written in the hearts of humble, believing men and women who are willing to give up all the vain things of earth to find it.

In the end, it is so vast, so deep we cannot know it fully until we know God fully.

Light

In the absence of light, there can be no life. God's command, "Let there be light" prepared the way for the creation of life forms upon the earth. Without Jesus, the Light of the World, there is no spiritual life. His light reaches every man on earth. How a man responds to that light determines his spiritual destiny.

Light not only enables us to see, it can also blind us. Coming out of deep darkness into strong light, it will take a while to adjust our eyes. God's light can blind us. "Give me light, Lord, but not too much!" To see too much of our own sinfulness at once can be devastating. To behold God's glorious holiness all at once can be overwhelming. Saul was blinded on the road to Damascus when he saw the light.

But no matter how much light there is about us, we cannot be blinded by it if we are already blind. Bartimaeus could not see. But somehow he became aware of his blindness. He made a decision about the darkness he was in. He made his choice to remain no longer in the dark about life, himself and eternity. "I will to see," was the cry that brought the Master's touch. The Light of the World shone that day upon his blinded eyes and his darkened soul.

Light dawned upon him. His world was suddenly bright and

visible. His mind and spirit was flooded with light. He not only saw his world, but he saw God. And now he could also see himself. He saw himself no longer as a blind cave-dwelling beggar; he now began to see himself as one of the children of light. He could now begin to walk in the light, begin his journey home, and be confident that the light would lead him all the way to the land that is fairer than day. What a thrill for a man who had lived for so long in such darkness to set his gaze toward the city where there is no night.

A man born in darkest Africa has the same light that we have in our halls of theological training. We may know more, or think we do, but is that to our advantage?

Just for a moment imagine you are standing before a group of those people in Africa. You describe the Light. You talk of the sun by day, the moon and stars by night. What the sun does for us. What the moon and stars mean to us. Tell them how the created lights illustrate to us the Light of the World.

Then you ask, “Have you ever been aware of the Light?” And ask, “Have you ever responded to that Light? What has it done for you? Would you like to make a complete response to that Light, letting it lead you through this life to your eternal home? Would you like to know His name? His name is Jesus. He is the Light of the World. He wants to be your friend, your Savior and your Lord.”

And you: have you personally responded to that Light? If you have, are you walking in the Light? Is the Light leading you daily on your journey home? Are you willing to open yourself totally to the Light? Are you willing to let the Light shine into the deepest parts of your being?

News

I get tired of hearing the same news over and over. The commentators conjecture, guess, state possibilities and probabilities. Turn the channel—same thing there.

But there is some news I never get tired of hearing—the good news that God cares about us, has sent His own beloved Son to give us life through the cross. The good news is: I am now a child of God.

... ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL WALK

Fogginess ☞

It was so foggy this morning that, as I drove along a busy boulevard, I could not see another car. I couldn't see the lines on the road. Buildings and trees were ghostly and unrecognizable. I felt alone and very much "on alert."

Did you ever feel alone on the journey of life? No one else in sight. Can't see sign posts or landmarks. The sun is blurred by clouds. Where is God?

Many times we cannot see where we are going in life. But we must journey on. Then I walk by faith not by sight. I trust that He is in the shadows, He knows the way, He has His hand on me. "Lead me gently home, Father."

"He leadeth me, O blessed thought."

Worry ☞

Is worry a sin? Whether or not, it seems to be impossible to exercise faith when your mind is full of worry. And it also seems impossible to worry when your heart is full of faith.

Bill ☞

He is a young man going through a separation and possible divorce. Two dearly-loved children are involved. There is only one way he will make it. He must learn to trust in God, and let God into his life. Communion and worship together with some of God's flock will inspire him, uplift him, strengthen his resolve. But no one can do it for him. Only he and God working together can get through the confusion, pressures, depression, and temptations of the moment.

You need the church. Let it church help you. But don't blame the church if you don't get your act together.

You don't have to go through certain rituals, join a certain church, or have a man-made organization to guide you. All you need to do is follow the light your God gives you. This is a personal matter. Get started and keep on keeping on.

Miracles

We desire God to do something for us. We tell Him what we want. But are we willing to let Him do what He wants, what His Son died to do for us? Are we willing to say yes to His miracle for us?

We want Him to work within our plans, our systems, our organizations. But are we willing to throw up our hands and give up on our feeble efforts, surrender our struggles to be better, and say yes to His miracle for us?

The miracle He wants to give us will sometimes be to change us, not our circumstances. The miracle may not make life easier; in fact life may hold considerably more challenges than before. But it will always lead to praise and purity and eternal life.

Would you like a miracle? The Creator of the universe stands ready to give you your own personal miracle! But you will have to let Him do it His way.

Faith

Faith may not be essential to our existence, but it is necessary to our survival. If the area of our lives in which we live by faith is diminished, we suffer. If faith's light goes out, we sink into the dark fog of despair. Helplessness and hopelessness take over our minds. Then faith seems out of the question, and life becomes unbearable. Sinister suggestions begin to look logical. The impulse to act out our despair may take over our will and marshal our emotions in directions that lead to eternal consequences of wrong and unredeemable loss.

We tend to regard our lives as a perpetual card game. If we persist long enough, we will finally get that good hand and win! Faith says there is good in every day. Be thankful for it! There is bad in every day also. Avoid it, overcome it! Faith will enable you to be a winner every day under any conditions.

When weakness comes, and it comes to all, do not give in to it. If you do, your weakness will gain strength of its own. Your faith must be stronger than your weakness.

Isn't faith a connection to God? You could say that God has a

worldwide web. Anyone anywhere can get in, and *stay in*. There is help when we need it. There is a message of hope, a word of encouragement. There is a steady flow not only of information, but constant inspiration as well. Truth, light and love flow through that connection.

Faith and worry cannot live together long. One will become so strong the other will be driven out. The answer to corroding worry is the confident prayer of faith. God is the answer to worry. Let Him fill your thoughts and you will have no room for worry.

Faith has a rather strange relationship with good works. When there are no good works at all accompanying it, faith quickly expires. Conversely, when works become a person's total focus, then faith tends to die. Perhaps if we are only interested in putting forth the greatest possible effort, there is no place for faith; this is salvation through our efforts. Better to have a balance. It's far more enjoyable, too. You have a lot of hope and love to go along with your faith! There's not much hope or love in works alone.

Faith is the same wherever it is found. It is a gift of God without which we cannot live. To some degree everyone has faith. We would not get up in the morning if we did not believe there would be some good in the day. We would not lie down to sleep in the night if we did not trust in the miracle of sleep.

Faith is something we all have in common, no matter our backgrounds. It is the simple acceptance that there is good in the universe, there is purpose in all things, and life can have meaning. It is the assurance that if we do good, good will come of it. Faith brings all of life together in a unity we can begin to understand. Faith keeps us going through wilderness miles because we know there is something better farther along.

Joyful Journey

For some, the faith journey needs to begin. They may have intended to begin, they may have tried a few times. But they are still at the starting line, or lost somewhere back in the woods or the shadows. If you are there, take courage, step up and begin. If you mislaid your cross, ask God to guide you, find it, and take it up again. Begin again to serve your God and humanity.

Some have already journeyed a long way and are weary. They need renewed courage. Rest a while; there's nothing wrong with that. Sometimes we need to come apart lest we do indeed come apart. As we wait on the Lord He will renew our strength.

For some, the journey is almost over. Just let the Master take your hand and lead you to the Promised Land. It's too late to get discouraged—tempted and tried at times, but never discouraged. It may help you to read Bible passages about heaven and sing songs about heaven.

No matter where you are on your journey, a total response to God and to life is the way of joy. And the joy of the Lord will be your strength.

Spiritual Blackmail ☞

Sensitive souls often suffer severely from spiritual blackmail. They have made a few mistakes, or perhaps many. We are human, and Satan has his spies everywhere. So he picks up on our mistakes and keeps a record of them. Then in our vulnerable moments, he throws them up to us. His blackmail robs us of our spiritual riches, impoverishes our spirits, and if not for the mercy of God, could even destroy us. In my experience and struggles, I can vouch for this.

But there is a way to get him to stop his blackmail. Place your case in the hands of the merciful Judge of the Universe. He will remember your sins no more. Then you are faced with the privilege and absolute necessity of leaving them there, and not remembering them against yourself, ever again.

Many of God's children suffer needlessly over their sins and mistakes of the past. I say needlessly because there is a way of escape.

Depression ☞

“If you are truly spiritual, you won't ever be depressed!”

Is this the message you've heard in Christian circles? Is it really true? Is it possible for you to be in a right relationship to God and depressed at the same time? Some think it isn't, some think it is!

We get weary, tired, worn out, frazzled, and exhausted. A

national depression comes when our economy has over-extended itself. Why wouldn't it be logical also when you have overdone it, that you would have a depression? This is a simple consequential condition. You are forced to stop your feverish activity long enough to recharge your batteries.

You're involved in an activity you enjoy. You may want to extend the period of activity beyond what is reasonable. You may eat less, sleep less, keep going on nervous energy, postponing the dip as long as possible. It makes sense though, that you will have a lower low if you extend your highs.

Who likes the low energy times?

If you feel unhappy with yourself for being tired and not being able to carry on the high level of activity, you are setting yourself up for a deeper depression.

At this point, your depression is not just physical weariness; it becomes psychological. You are now turning on yourself, you are in conflict. Instead of merely accepting the fact that you have limitations, you are now saying to yourself, "I should do better. I should not get tired, I should be able to keep going as long as there is more to do!"

Now you are in deeper than you would have been if you had simply lain on the couch and taken a good nap! That's not to say that a nap will always bring you out of a low. It may take a lot of naps, some trips to the mountains or the beach, or some other change of scenery.

But just remember, it is only natural to feel that grey, cold, damp weariness creeping over you like a fog at times in your life, especially after periods of intense activity.

Don't turn on yourself at those times. Just rest and wait for the tide to turn. Your spirits will lift again, your energy will return, your enthusiasm will be revived!

When life is a continuous uninterrupted flow of happy events your deeper problems will likely not surface. But when times turn sour your inner conflicts will be stirred into action. You will not only have to deal with the challenges presented to you by the adverse events taking place in your life. You will also have the added and often very serious stress of dealing with the threatening forces within.

Unresolved conflicts, low self-esteem, self-doubt, lack of trust in others, deep traumas of the past, losses that have not been grieved over, memories of past hurts, and abuse issues. All of these or any of these may well cause you to go into deep depression during a crisis in your life.

In these cases, you must find someone to talk to. You can cry out to the Lord, let the feelings out, own the reality of your past hurts, mistakes, and sins. It will help greatly to find a solid person of deep spiritual integrity to listen and reflect.

Take your time, don't panic. Remember, you are in this wonderful process of grace. There will be times of conflict, weariness to the point of exhaustion, misunderstandings, times when it seems there is no progress; but the process goes on. If we stay with it, we will get where we are going.

Today ☞

Our instructions for life tell us, "Don't worry," "Fret not," Let God "keep your mind in perfect peace," and "Fear not, for I am with you." Remember that life goes on. He's with us today; the consistency of His presence will be with us all the way through, all the way home!

Amidst all the bad things that are happening in our world His Word says, "Be not dismayed for I am your God."

"You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You."

Do we let all the terrible things out there get inside our minds? Are they like weeds choking out happy, thankful thoughts, keeping us in constant turmoil and discouragement?

Let me share this with you (there was no author or copyright given):

One Day at a Time

There are two days in every week about which we should not worry; two days which need to be kept free from fear and apprehension.

One of these days is Yesterday, with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders, its aches and pains. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All

the money in the world cannot bring yesterday back. We cannot undo a single act we performed; we cannot erase a single word. . . . Yesterday is gone!

The other day we need not worry about is Tomorrow, with its possible burdens, its large promise and poor performance. Tomorrow is also beyond our immediate control. Tomorrow's sun will rise, either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds. . . . But it will rise. And until it does, we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is yet unborn.

This leaves only one day. . . . Today! Any man can fight the battle of just one day. It is only when you and I have the burdens of those two awful eternities—Yesterday and Tomorrow—that we break down.

It is not the experience of Today that drives men mad. . . . It is the remorse for something which happened yesterday and the dread of what tomorrow may bring. Let us, therefore, live but one day at a time.

Focus

We must go back to our center daily. If we do not, we will lose our way. Too many distractions in the world around us will lead us astray. The guiding Presence will never fail us as we focus on the Way. We will avoid many really sad and painful failures by carefully following Him.

There in the Presence we can learn to know ourselves. We can be reminded of our weaknesses and our strengths. We can redefine again and again our purpose and aim in life. We can get our bearings and make any needed adjustments daily. We can review our relationship to God and others and renew our commitment to those relationships.

We must have a healthy center to go to at least once a day. If it is not healthy, we will not get healthy messages. And we will not be healthy. Our Center or heart will remain healthy only as we commune in a vital way with God daily.

Each person's core is like gold in its natural state. The intrinsic value is there, but with impurities. Our gold needs to be refined.

This process will take place as a result of our encounters with God. The more we live in God, the healthier our core. Our wisdom will grow with our spirituality. This process will spread a healthy influence throughout our whole being.

Nature

I love to view the natural world, the seas, the sky, the mountains, even the deserts. The sky at night with the moon and stars speaks to me of God and His creation. Permit me to quote from a letter written in 1996 from my daughter:

“On our walk last night, we had a great view of the lunar eclipse. It rose over the hills at full eclipse and lifted surprisingly lightly for a body so darkly shadowed. Edged in an eerie red glow, the moon enticed many families out of their houses, who we greeted along our walk. In our backyard later, we watched the shadow slide off the moon’s surface, the redness gone, the white and black distinctly outlined. Whiteness and light won out. Like the moon, we are created to reflect the light and glory of the “Son.” At times, circumstances conspire to eclipse His radiance. Earth gets in the way. The hard sphere of our worldly existence casts a darkening shadow upon us. Light and warmth are cut off. But like that red halo, the blood of Jesus—more powerful than any dark, cold shadow—surrounds us. At the ordained time the shadow retreats, overruled and reminding us whence our true light comes. Like the free, full moon, we bask anew in the full glow of His face shining upon us. In the dark of night, we can reflect His glory.”

The beauty and wonder of nature constantly teach us, inspire us, encourage us to trust in God. How could anything so wonderful come from anyone less Wonderful?

The Truth

Life has many complications. Things can get very fuzzy at

times. At the center of all things is *truth*. The devil's arsenal is loaded with lies. He has his Big Lies that he uses incessantly to trip us up and keep us from the knowledge of the *truth*. Jesus embodies the truth and frees us through the truth to follow Him. His truth frees us from error, disillusionment, discouragement and despair, all the things that keep us from following Him. The truth can free us to be all He made us to be.

One of Satan's biggest lies concerns love. He does everything possible to impress upon our minds a false view of love. He tries to get us to believe that important people in our lives do not love us. If they did love us, they would do differently, they would treat us better, they would be more thoughtful. Not feeling loved, we come under Satan's power to tempt us to give in to anger and resentment. In other words, believing his lie leads us into bondage. Any lie of Satan we buy into will take away our freedom to live fully, joyfully and usefully.

With God at the center, we will always have the *truth*. By going into the center daily, we can refresh our minds in the truth, regain our freedom in the Lord. Getting a fresh hold on truth will always give us a renewed sense of freedom.

This release and freedom may come at a great price. It is painful to accept the truth about our dependencies. How often we depend on everything but God! True freedom comes when we free ourselves, and let God free us, to follow Him. Daily at the altar of our hearts we can meet with the eternal God and things will again be right with our inner world, and much better in the world out there.

Our Witness

Why do we often think of witnessing as standing on a street corner, stopping passers-by, and talking to them about the Lord? Or going door to door inviting folk to Sunday school? Or giving someone the Four Spiritual Laws? All these actions may indeed be witnessing; that's true.

But are we missing something? How about the witness of loving your neighbor? How about the witness of forgiving the person who despitely uses you? How about the witness of a

peaceful spirit under pressure? How about the witness of treating others as you would have them treat you?

Have people been turned off to anything about God and the church because some professing Christian has shown bitterness, anger, and a rotten attitude? O that they might see the glow of those who have been with Jesus, and feel the warmth of those who are filled with His Spirit. And talk about gifts—how about the gift of a humble heart?

Pastors

I was at a meeting recently in which a number of different pastors stood up before the congregation and gave a report of their labors. Some tall, some short; some athletic, some sedentary; some with hair, some without (much); some were very funny, while some were very serious.

Out of all these, what kind of a pastor would I want? When thinking about it I decided I would want one with an excellent spirit. Those other qualities might not matter much. What would give him a good spirit? The indwelling of God's Spirit; allowing that Spirit to hallow him, humble him, keep pride away, keep him encouraged, full of faith, and full of perfect love.

Hey, that's the kind of pastor I want!

Hymns

I love the great old hymns of the church. I'm sure that love was fostered in me while growing up in Western Kansas. I sat by a man named Jesse Roberts in worship services at the Methodist Episcopal Church. His son Paul was a best friend of mine. Jesse would often share a little bag of peppermints with me. And he loved to sing! He sang in a strong, rich bass, on key, in melodious harmony, with all his heart. I don't remember much of what the pastor said in his sermons. But I did enjoy a growing consciousness of the reality of God from the hymns we sang: His mercies, faithfulness, love and trustworthiness. This awareness has stayed with me all my life.

When I studied theology in preparation for the pastoral ministry, I already knew that God was omnipotent. I knew that He

was omniscient, that He was omnipresent. I just didn't know the terms for these attributes, nor even the word attribute. But the hymns of the faith had already taught me these things about Him! I knew about Him, and it was only natural to come to know Him personally.

The hymns still stir my heart. I soar in spirit (as I now also sing bass) to the words and music of *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, *Love Divine, O God Our Help in Ages Past*, and *How Firm a Foundation*. I respond to the lyrics of the new music, though not so much to the music itself. I like the choruses such as *Only Believe, all Things are Possible, only Believe*.

Coming Home ☞

On a recent trip I got to thinking about what coming home means. What is that strange pull, that longing, that drawing, that tugging on the heart strings? It seems to be universal.

Home means goodness, fellowship, companionship, someone nearby who cares, who accepts you, who loves you.

Home means rest, renewal, good food, a retreat from the stresses of life, a place to get your head on straight again.

Home is security, safety, four walls around you, a world all your own, where you can be yourself; be tired, be vulnerable, be weak, be relaxed.

Home is a place of peace. How fortunate are those who keep it peaceful, restful, encouraging, and safe.

As perfect and wonderful as it is, this is not the ultimate "HOME" Jesus said He was going to prepare for us. He said He would prepare a place for us, and that in His Father's house are many mansions.

Do you ever feel the longing for your eternal home?

. . . ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE

Feeling Needed ☞

It's such a good feeling to be needed. Everyone needs to feel that someone somewhere needs him. Feeling needed puts meaning and purpose into life. It gives you something to live for. It makes you feel that you have worth. You have value to another individual.

Connections ☞

It is well known that business men and politicians do better with good connections. But in reality, everyone does better with connections. We need others.

I was trying to saw wood the other day. I couldn't get the saw to work. Then I found that the cord had come loose. No power. Funny thing; I don't have the power I need without a connection. I've got to be plugged in to a Higher Power before I can accomplish much in this life.

We usually call these connections relationships. Healthy relationships mean a healthy person. Bad relationships are bad for the person's mental and spiritual health. You are going to hook up with someone. Just be sure you hook up with somebody who can help you along in life, be an "upper" to you, inspire you, encourage you. And be sure to hook onto God.

Feeling Loved ☞

The feeling we have when someone loves us is so delicious. That builds us up for whatever the day may hold for us. It takes us through the discouraging times and makes the good times richer. Feeling loved is a lot better than a large bank account or a sumptuous meal. It's all the good things of life rolled into one.

Countless lives have been changed by the realization that God loves us for what we are, not for what we do. Like a good parent, He loves His children in spite of their flubs, forgetfulness, and slip-ups. His love is constant, uplifting, and redemptive.

Do we love others for what they are, or for what they can do for us? Loving them for what they are is like the love of God. Loving them for what they can do for us is out of character with God's love.

His love also indicates what we can become. If you accept the fact that you are His child, realize you have a relationship with Him, and begin to grow in that grace experienced in Him, you will move toward your true destiny. You will begin to become what He meant for you to be in the beginning.

Sexual Feelings ☞

It's not wrong to have sexual feelings. It's not wrong to have sexual desire. This is very natural and normal to all human beings. What is wrong is the habit of aiming those feelings and desires at someone or something out of the realm of God's providence.

We can celebrate the beauty and wonder of the creator's gift. There is much joy in sex in its pure state. If it is defiled, the joy is gone and lust comes in its place. Then there will be that unpleasant sense of guilt.

Every young person should know that sex is the creator's gift. It is given for the dual purpose of bonding the married couple and bringing children into the family. It will help cement the family together; it will keep on renewing the energy of the union.

Marriage & Family ☞

One of the special things about getting married is that it begins a family. God made families for a reason—to give man a safe place to be himself and raise children to become themselves. The family must be a place of protection, a fun place, a nurturing place—literally a place where everyone in the family can feel at home.

I'm sure that the families you grew up in had many wonderful qualities. There might be some things you wish had been different.

If you are newly wed, do this: Visualize the family and home you want for yourself, for your loved one, for any children that may come along. Then when you have a chance, compare your visions of the family. You may need to adjust to each other. But I would be very surprised if they are very different.

Learning to Love ☞

I seem to have discovered the truth that love doesn't just happen. It does not come accidentally or automatically. I must learn to love. I must come under discipline in order for love to be fully expressed through me.

Love originates with God. His love flows to us through Calvary. His love becomes the food for our love. Learning to love as He loves holds the promise of meaning, fulfillment and joy. This is a great challenge. I can probably always do a little better; in other words, there's always room for improvement in loving. And so it gets better and better.

Tough Times ☞

So often we think of love blossoming when a couple goes out to a fine restaurant and has a great evening together. But what about the times when we are tired out, the kids are fussy, the sink is full, and the house is cluttered? When the bills are coming due and there's not enough money to go out to dinner? When the car needs repairs and the kids need new shoes?

Now wouldn't you say that's the time when love needs to blossom? That's when the miracle of love needs to happen. That's when we need to dig down in our hearts and find some of the love God put there and share it with our troubled spouse!

Exercising Love ☞

A husband confessed that his love for his wife was not very strong. He thought maybe he shouldn't have married her. He was plagued by doubts and temptations of the flesh. With a weak love like that, perhaps all he needed to do was exercise what little love remained on a regular basis. He could be as loving as possible, considerate of his wife, and continually express what love he had. Would it not grow and become stronger and stronger? Could a growing love drive out the doubts and make the temptations manageable? What is the alternative?

Expectations ☞

A huge but often ignored cause of family conflict is

expectations. You have a picture in your head of what you think family life should be. Your picture and that of your spouse do not necessarily match. The differences in your pictures can be a source of recurring conflict. Out of these differences grow all kinds of misunderstandings, frustrations, resentments and even hopelessness. You began developing your pictures while you were growing up at home. You constantly observed your parents moving about, doing their daily routines, relating to each other. Out of those observations you put your picture together.

You may have said to yourself, “When I grow up, I want to be just like my mom/dad.”

Or you may have said, “I hate the way my mom (or dad) acts. I sure don’t want to act like that.”

But whether your reaction to your family was positive or negative or mixed, you were forming your expectations. You were developing the picture of what you thought your family would be like someday.

Much of this was going on unconsciously. But when you came into your marriage, you carried your picture next to your heart.

So did the person you married!

Only, the pictures were distinctly different!

Have you ever talked about or compared your pictures? It may truly amaze you to find out how different they are.

Those differences are the booby traps that will cause endless grief in ways and at times you least expect it.

You can resolve those conflicting expectations. It’s really very simple. You must own them, talk them over with your spouse, negotiate your differences, allow for change, and form a new picture *with* your spouse. Your *together* picture can take the best elements from both originals and discard the details that were not essential, or that were downright hurtful.

You can get your pictures out and show them to each other. Do not assume that your spouse has the same picture of home and family life you have. The pictures in our heads are as diverse as snowflakes. No two are exactly alike.

Talk about your childhood. Share your memories of the events of your life growing up, both good and bad. This is a beautiful way to get closer. It’s an excellent way to begin the task of negotiation.

Get the family together, pray about it, discuss matters of disagreement, identify areas of conflict, and decide the best way to bring peace and harmony.

Negotiating

Is your picture of dinner time a table nicely set, the family all gathered around having a lovely meal together? Or is it a picture of each one looking out for himself? Getting something out of the fridge or freezer, microwaving it, and plopping down in front of the TV to eat is many people's idea of dinner time.

I was just thinking about a couple I knew. The woman had been a single mother with a good job, a small house, a daughter, and a car. At times she would dream that a man would come into her life. She would catch herself at church glancing around to see if there might be a good prospect in service that day!

She actually got along quite well without a man. But she occasionally thought how good it would be to have a shoulder to cry on, someone to do the fix-it chores, another paycheck to help with the budget, and someone to be there when she felt lovable.

The man she finally married was unassuming. He had never been married, but grew up in a home where the mother served her husband and two boys, waiting on them hand and foot. He dreamed of a loving, affectionate woman, always there for him, comforting, encouraging, preparing plenty of good food, and giving daily doses of love.

Not long after the marriage it dawned on him that his wife was not going to wait on him hand and foot! It seemed to him that she had an entirely different agenda. In her way of thinking, he was there to do things for her. The day it dawned on him that all she wanted was an accessory, he kicked the garbage can across the yard. His actions scared her into getting a restraining order and checking him into a nearby mental hospital!

There's got to be a better way to deal with our differences. There is a higher Wisdom that comes from the One who made us. Some of the greatest joys of family life come from working things through, compromising, finding out each other's needs, and working together to get those needs met.

Adjustments

Everything at times needs adjusting: the TV, the car engine, the lawn mower. It's pretty common, everyday stuff. But why is it so hard to remember that we also need to adjust ourselves?

If I'm willing to adjust to my wife, will not my marriage run a lot better? If I refuse to adjust, I may become miserable in my rigid box. And she may not be all that happy either.

Love Cycles

Human love is very much like the ocean tide. It comes and goes. Sometimes it flows in like it will never go away again. Sometimes it flows out and we think it will never come back.

A twenty-four-year-old married woman told me her love feelings were gone. She liked her husband, respected him, but did not have that marvelous feeling of love she had at first. Perhaps she did not realize she could not maintain those intense early feelings.

She did not realize that there are times when we go ahead and act out our love even though we do not feel it. We then give it a chance to return. The other alternative is to leave her honest, hard-working husband and seek out someone else who can turn her on, and get the intensity back! Then what does she do when the new love begins to lose its intensity?

If we let the wisdom of love tell us what to do in the difficult situations, we can keep a healthy balance between what we want and what we want to be; and the emotions of love will have a chance to return.

Balance

Love needs to find a balance between you and me; between your needs and my needs; between your expectations and mine. When one of us does all or most of the giving, it's not right. That's not the way our Maker designed us to be in relationship.

Love has a dawning. Love between two people must begin sometime. But it must dawn in both, or it won't work. To seek the balance in the beginning is most essential.

Love has its process. Horses work better when they pull together as a team. There must be a balance in the effort and

development of love styles and activities.

Love has its fulfillment. This comes along from time to time as we do the right thing and maintain the right attitude.

There is much joy in love. I would go so far as to say that you cannot love God or another person without experiencing joy.

You need a real me to love you, I need a real you to love me. God can make us whole and real for loving. He's good at that.

True Love

True love never loses its value; it never dies. When two people have true love, they always have it. It's a quality of life that can never be taken away. If one dies, they both carry that love in their hearts. It lives on in their memories.

So much of the love we hear about is based on physical attraction, mutual ambitions, similar likes and dislikes. Sexual desire becomes paramount. The desire for pleasure, things, and adventure takes center stage. This kind of love passes away. There is nothing eternal or spiritual or Godlike about it.

True love is unselfish, does not seek its own selfish ends, is not self-centered, does not exist to please the self. It lives between two caring people who really want the very best for each other.

Young men and women develop hormones. These mysterious substances drive a person to do strange things. They result in sexual desire, passion, the instinct for breeding, the drive to propagate the race.

Those desires can fuel the person either to create or destroy. Out of those physical passions can come the ability to love on a mutually fulfilling level. That ability to love can motivate a couple to build a stable life, a loving home, a healthy spiritual environment and immortality.

Those desires can also fuel the person to lust, to mayhem, even to violence. Those physical passions left on the level of selfishness can drive their victim to self destruction, disease, and immorality.

The need is huge to accept the truth about ourselves and those we love. As we give up our illusions and our pretenses, we are liberated to love with our whole selves, with our true selves.

... ABOUT THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Change ☞

Attending a service where the pastor was giving his farewell message, I got to thinking. While the change of pastors will be difficult and unpleasant, it is good to know that some things never change.

“Thou changest not; Thy compassions they fail not.” The things that never change can be our place of refuge, give us our sense of security. The laws of nature never change, neither do right and wrong, love and hate, qualities of the soul.

The problem is we tend to find our security in things that change. That’s where we get in trouble. Our emotions and mental processes can fail us while we cling desperately to a changing world.

Thank God there are some things that never change. We can hold on to them. We can find a way through the storm. “Change and decay in all around I see, O Thou who changest not abide with me.”

Stock Quotes ☞

When I go online I usually check the stock market. Not because I have a large investment! But just because I’m curious. The funny thing about the stock market is, it changes by the minute. You can look it up at nine in the morning and it will be way up, and by noon it may be way down. But by closing time it may be higher yet.

The state of the world around us is in constant turmoil. The wind changes direction and speed. Politics change. People change. The economy changes. “Change and decay in all around I see.” But God never changes. I like to check into His Word daily. When I look up His mercies, they are just the same. When I look up His love, it hasn’t changed an iota. Through all the ages He has not changed. “O Thou who changest not, abide with me.” Nothing on this earth can be trusted to remain totally reliable and steady. Except His presence, His promises; these you can count on.

Waiting ☞

It seems I'm always having to wait. The clerk, the teller, the service manager is busy with someone who got there ahead of me. As I waited this morning, it dawned on me that God is never too occupied. There is never a long line waiting to speak to Him. You don't have to take a number and wait your turn!

He's always ready to hear your prayer, listen to your complaint, or accept your appreciation and praise for the wonderful things He's done for you. In our hurry-scurry world it is so great to know that He is always there for you and me. His is a personal touch, a deeply loving, caring concern for His children. He is never too busy to just be friends.

Compassion ☞

Why do we tend to think that our God will not listen to the prayer of someone we don't think is living rightly? Do we believe that the God of love snubs people of inferior morals? Does He want nothing to do with homosexuals, or those who drink, smoke and carouse? Is He not concerned with their deep longings, the spiritual thirst of their souls? Would He not have compassion on their hurts, loneliness, and weariness? I think He does. His compassion fails not.

God is not like us. I'm thankful for that!

People have to earn our compassion and love. If one of those sinners came to us, repented of his sins, joined the church, paid his tithe, and did all the things the church asks of him, then we might have compassion. We might put him on probation for a couple of years. Of course when he managed to become an exemplary Christian, he would no longer need any compassion! So we would not ever have to give much compassion! Perhaps that's the way we like it.

God's Gift ☞

Holiness is a gift of God to us. It is not something we attain or earn or merit. It is always there for us. We can enjoy it, relish it, live in it, bask in it.

We are so human. Holiness is so divine. We cannot separate holiness from God. We cannot take the gift of holiness and go off

on our own, doing our own thing, building our own kingdom.

Holiness is from and of the Holy Spirit. God's presence in our hearts and lives brings us this gift. It is a deep and wonderful abiding reality of the divine in our otherwise barren selves. His gift brings us to life, and brings love, joy and peace in abundance to us.

