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Walkin' Stories

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Walkin' Stories are a collection of thoughts, reflections, and observations taken from God's Word and the world of nature around us.

March 27, 2005

It's easy to do. Many people do it. But a few don't. The latter have fewer troubles. .because they don't. The reason? They are ready to receive truth. By being open to truth, they learn to weigh words they hear by checking out the facts. Then, they go the way of that truth. . Regardless who has spoken and what has been said. Not being disrespectful, but wise. Not being contentious, but cautious.

The Bereans were like that. The Apostle Paul was their teacher. He was "a Pharisee of the Pharisees", educated in the law. He had the Spirit of God within him, as well. When he spoke, it was worth hearing. For many listeners, they gladly heard his words. Since he had done all the research and studying, why should they? Therefore, they accepted what he said. .and did what he said.

There was one difference between the Bereans and other listeners. The Bereans took the time to "search the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so (Acts 17:11)." They checked with the Word what they had heard. There is no letter of instruction or of reprimand written to them in the Bible. There are such letters to the Thessalonians. .who had many troubles. We can have problems. .and if they go unsolved, they become troubles.

An interesting thought here: When people hear the teacher. . Respected, admired, appreciated. .they tend to accept what is taught. That is good. However, to stop problems from becoming troubles, they would do better to check with the Word that has been heard. .and do what the Word says (James 1:22). To do what the teacher says and not what the Word says can be subtly dangerous. People tend to follow the disciplines of the teacher (good as they may be). .not God. Because the disciplines eventually become oppressive, they are inwardly resisted. Then, the teacher is resisted. .and bitterness can develop toward the teacher for having "misled" the listeners. Contention and divisiveness can result with all their kin.

However, when the truth is taught and the Word is searched to prove it true. .and. .the truth is then accepted and put into practice, the doer is rooted spiritually in God's Word. .not in the teacher. .and gains more maturity. Problems get solved and troubles diminish.

March 20, 2005

How invigorating to walk along the wooded path on a quiet but cold winter day. Even the water on the Sound looked as placid as a calm lake. The gentle waves seemed to caress the sand in a whisper, barely audible. The sun cast its welcome rays upon the world and stirred new life within every tree and tawny blade of grass. Ducks seemed to float effortlessly on the water's surface while seagulls soared overhead. The blue of the sky painted a beautiful canopy against which tall cedar and fir and alder etched their shades of green. It was tranquil here in this forest edge by the bay.

Yet, there were signs that it was not always peaceful here. Giant trees had been cast from their heights along the path, to lie broken with ragged edges fresh and full of unhealed scars. On the ground were bits and pieces of broken boughs, twigs and cones. The air was pungent with the scent of cedar crushed and flung far by a mighty wind. It was clear that this peaceful, placid scene had been invaded by great storms rolling in from the sea. The signs told the story.

Life can be like that, quiet and peaceable in a spirit of Godliness. It is a great blessing. Not only to those involved, but to an onlooking world who need good examples. All parts of life seem to be working well. Health is good, income is stable and sufficient for every need. Neighbors are kind, friends praise and give honor. A helping hand is given to the needy from time to time and words of wisdom are shared with those who listen. God is loved and honored and taught. Blessings abound.

Yet storms can come to shake the foundations of belief, to crush with sorrow or shame, to test one's character with a vengeance. Losses mount, crises build, honor disappears, cruel words taunt, and blame seems to cast forever its ugly finger toward the fallen. Where is God in a time of storm? He's there! To build again, to heal and refine, to restore peace and good will. . .better than ever.

"A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength (Proverbs 24:5)." He is lifted above the storm. .by His God.

March 13, 2005

There was a winter's chill in the wind and a spring's warmth in the sun. Coming down the hill, the hiker was awestruck with the scene ahead. Midst barren trees, brambles and bushes befitting the wild there stood the most profound cloud of pink fluff which refuted the dark gray clouds above. At closer scrutiny a delicate petal on a fruit tree abloom opened a window of discovery never realized before. This petal of such dainty design was one of five protruding from a center of pink. Its white strand was tipped in pink and little pink dots were exquisitely arranged around the blossom's center. One lone petal looked fragile and useless, regardless of its beauty and place. Held next to the onlooker's hand, how thin and fragile it felt. How could this petal of such dainty design be so important on a spring blossom just one inch around? And how important could such a spring blossom be in relation to its place on a tree?

The onlooker backed up for perspective. A look to the left and a look to the right depicted other trees. They were still caught in winter's bare garb, not yet ready for spring's awakening thrust. What a contrast! That one little petal, so fragile and thin, joined the other four to make a single blossom which joined millions of other blossoms on a tree exploding with beauty and fragrance and life. All together, the petals of white and pink created a brilliant cloud of fluff which graced the horizon and its environs; it was a crown to its Creator, it proclaimed the promise of spring and the fruit of summer. What a privilege to be a little lone petal on a blossom of pink in a cloud of fluff on a tree in spring! Admirable! Useful. Promising.

Like a little lone petal in a blossom of pink, we are a part of God's workmanship with the whole of His Kingdom. Our faithfulness and integrity, our steadfastness and truthfulness are important and beautiful to see. Together, we comprise the beauty of God's character as we cling close to the core of His Spirit and fulfill His perfect will in all the seasons of life.

"And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. . . (Psalm 90:4)."

March 6, 2005

What could they see in that? What tasted so good? Swirls of brown mud, like warm chocolate folds, were left hardened as the sea water had drained back into its main channel. Ducks and grebes looked happy as they padded about, pecked something succulent here and there. A waddle to the water for a paddle or two, then upending to dive further down for the really tasty stuff, up for air, a flutter of feathers and a settling down contentedly upon the water course. .it couldn't get better than this! Life was good!

The sky was clear, the sun was warm, the air was fresh. This was their home on the tide flats by the Bay. Herons and loons and seagulls joined ducks of all kinds to enjoy the good life together. The ducks stayed closer to the water, the seagulls floated high above on air currents unseen. What a sight for the hiker! The two-mile trek around the bay was a delight as February edged closer to its end. The walking dike trail was edged with willows and brambles. .all budding with new life. At one bend large rocks were piled to keep the sea currents from re-claiming their territory. Old pilings projected from the water at intervals and atop the highest one sat a heron, poised for the perfect picture.

Mud flats and little critters, sea channels and tall grasses came together to make a home for all kinds of waterfowl. They looked at it and saw something good. They tasted all kinds of tidbits and went after more.

What do people see in our routine living? What appears to taste so good? Does peace reign within and come out as contentment? Or do we embrace fears and appear fretful and discontent? Do we handle disappointment with grace and reveal strength? Or do we complain and cast blame? Do we stay on course in God's will and spell faithful? Or do we cast off impatiently and show weakness?

Look around at your blessings. There's the Lord our Saviour. There are provisions for our needs and more. He solves our problems or gives adequate grace. .for a higher purpose.

“O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him (Psalm 34:8).”
Indeed, life is good!

February 27, 2005

It had fled so quickly! So welcome, so wonderful. Yet overnight, it had disappeared completely. Or had it?

Over the water of the Bay, dark gray clouds lingered from horizon to horizon. They turned the water dark gray. Tree trunks at the water's edge were colored dark gray. Wild rose bushes and other shrubs, tangled vines and thickets were all dark gray. Even that single eagle looked dark gray in the distance as it soared above the trees.

The quiet was so intense that it seemed it could be heard. The waves gently lapped upon the shore, but with a hushed sigh. The call of the seagull was stilled, the heron retreated to its private domain to search for food another day. The air was soft as a gentle kiss upon the cheek. The onlooker stood mesmerized at the scene. Winter had returned.

Softly fallen snow lay as a blanket upon the trees, the grass, the rocks, the ground. Robins quietly ventured forth to find a morsel of food beneath the snow. Their feathers were ruffled. They looked confused at this springtime storm of snow and cold. Where was spring? The warm sunshine? The balmy breezes? Was spring gone forever? As quietly as it had left, so it would return. It was the way of life. A time to grow and a time to rest. A time to proceed and a time to recede. It is the time and chance of life. .as God wills.

There are times in life when the energy and growth of spring are evident. Work is rewarding, health is good, relationships develop in good taste. God smiles with His favor. How can it all disappear so quickly? And seem to last forever? But spring does return with its renewed strength and promise. It's the time and chance of life.

“ .The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all (Ecclesiastes 9:11).”

February 20, 2005

Wasn't it still winter? Didn't frost cover the ground in the night? Wasn't the wind chill even when the sun kissed the air with its daytime warmth? Indeed! Right in the middle of the season! Yet, there it was before the eyes of the onlooker, beautiful in color, delicate in appearance. However, something else was present here. The more it was considered, the more it became apparent. Strength! That's what was so evident, yet easily overlooked at a casual glance.

The surroundings spoke of winter. Dead leaves were still on the ground from the previous season. Brush and shrubs were still bare, brittle in the wind. The tall alder tree nearby held exposed limbs,

too, still asleep during winter's nap. Its gray splotchy trunk was an excellent background for the small lavender flowers gently moving in the breeze below. This small rhododendron bush was ablaze with glory while its comrades were still waiting for spring's call.

Looking about, the hiker spotted a patch of green grass about the size of a pancake. A northwest winter boasted green in many places due to much rain and fog. So, the little rhody had a friend! Spring was on the move! And they were harbingers of it. Signs of good things to come.

Some people can be like that little rhody bush. It may seem to be winter all around with its cold, unloving atmosphere. Life may seem unproductive, barren, colorless and lonely. But the little "rhody bushes" are alive with colorful blooms. .ready smiles, comforting words, inspiring ways, good deeds done joyfully. How do they keep on "blooming" when it's unseasonal? When life is harsh? When nothing else seems to be in bloom. .to edify, lift up and encourage? What is the key? Their inner strength! A strong spirit develops as one gets into the Word regularly. .and puts it into practice.

“.My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (II Corinthians 12:9).”

How inspiring to be like that little rhody bush! What glory they exhibit! Even in winter.

February 13, 2005

Trees are a great blessing to mankind. Some trees are tall, some short, some are beautiful in color and form, others are plain and all bent over. Each has its purpose designed by the Creator. Certain trees have healing properties, others bear nutritious fruit, some are meant for ornamentation. The great red cedar lives for hundreds of years, while the alder tops out at forty years. Birds like them, squirrels climb them and people enjoy their shade when the sun is warm. A wonderful creation, the tree.

The Psalmist used a tree to describe the blessings of the person who delights in God's law, meditating therein day and night. This tree was planted by rivers of water, signifying the importance of being nourished continuously by unending sources of water. .spiritual nurture for the person who meditates daily in God's Word. This goes beyond intellectual storing of truthful knowledge. A person can memorize vast passages of Scripture. .an admirable ability. .yet fail to stand under temptation's pressure. Pressure is facing demands which are irritating or oppressive. Like meeting early classes when it's hard to get going in the morning, dealing with strict deadlines when interruptions are ongoing, or managing health or financial losses.

The strong tree by the river endured storms, escaped drought, overcame the heat of summer and the cold of winter. The person with a strong spirit learns to stay quiet during satan's stormy accusations, to keep confident in the Lord during spiritual droughts and in frigid climes of ill will.

As the watered tree will be fruitful in its time, keep vibrant leaves, so the strong spirit will bear the good fruit of righteousness in conduct and in character. His spirit will not dim or weaken. .and. .his choices in life will be wisely made. A prosperous tree. A prosperous life (Psalm 1:2-3). Are we like a well watered tree, nourished in the Word? We could be a great blessing.

February 6, 2005

How far had it traveled at the mercy of the waves? It was a cold winter's day. The wind was strong. The bluff was elevated several feet above the shoreline and faced the fury of a storm. .or the gentle kiss of a soft breeze. However, this day knew no gentleness from the sea. The winds sailed in, stirring the waves to froth upon the surface of the deep and breaking apart as the shoreline interrupted their travels.

The onlooker stood atop the bluff, braced against the wind, and gazed out upon the scene with awe and inspiration. Mist still hovered between land and distant island. Sunbeams danced about at the beginning of a new day. Seagulls soared and dived and played in the wind. And atop the restless waves were great logs with pieces of planks, long strands of seaweed, all tossed about mercilessly. Some were flung along in the swift current to disappear in the abyss of oblivion. Others were tossed upon the beach, mangled and mingled with other such kind. So it is with giant trees, felled and flailed to become inert objects, help sway by wind and wave, moving at the will of a foreign force. One in particular became lodged among giant boulders at the water's edge. It still had areas of bark attached here and there. That would soon be gone, thought the onlooker, as intense waves sprayed the huge trunk with salt and sand. Boulders, unmoving edges sharp as a warrior's weapon, gouged and tore with each wave's work. How far had it traveled at the mercy of the waves?

Sometimes spiritual storms can come subtly but gain momentum in waves of turbulence if we are not rooted in the pure Word of God. Cunning minds can talk against the deity of Christ, against our faith. They can promise health and prosperity, endless happiness in the pleasures of the world. .and find lodging in our thoughts if we are not strong.

The Christian can be rooted in the pure Word of God and rise above the waves of doubt and unbelief. We need not be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:14)."

How far should one travel at the mercy of deceivers? "Let no man deceive you with vain words. .Be not ye. . .partakers with them (Eph. 5:6-7)."

January 30, 2005

Knowledge is vital for all ages. As we grow, we should be exposed to more and more knowledge of wholesome subjects. Ever wonder why children are required to go to school daily? Why not just two or three days? Because knowledge is needed and it is gained by routine study. .building upon a foundation. Basic arithmetic needs to be understood before algebra and calculus can be grasped. Those are necessary for some types of employment.

So it is with God's Word. Routine study is important for we need to become familiar with His law and with His ways. By studying His law we learn what is right and what is wrong, how to become wise in making right choices, and how to use His grace, develop faith and joy and be content in life as He leads us.

The key is routine study. Daily input. .reading, meditating, memorizing. .feeds our spirit and stimulates our mind. The next key is to make the time. Satan would steal our time by scattering away our interest. Victorious Christians have developed that habit. They become wiser, more established in the faith, more sensitive to God and holy things, as well as to others. Courage, loyalty, compassion, diligence, dependability and many other virtues are strengthened by this ongoing education of God's Word. They can find direction, comfort, strength and truth. .in the Word.

May we all be refreshed and encouraged to develop and maintain a consistent study of Divine writ. It's our teacher. It's IN THE WORD. Our theme for February.

"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law (Psalm 119:18)." (Insights)

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word (Ps. 119:9)." (Cleansing)

"My soul melted for heaviness: strengthen Thou me according to Thy Word (Ps. 119:28)." (Strength)

"I have chosen the way of truth: Thy judgments have I laid before me (Ps. 119:30)." (Truthfulness)

"Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end (Ps. 119:33)." (Purpose)

It's IN THE WORD. And we have it.

January 23, 2005

They're good!! If you ever ate one, you'd want another! Their flavor can be sweet, their content nutritious. They're great when mixed with other foods or when eaten alone. They always embellish the dinner table or one's own pallet. There'll always be room for one more hickory nut!

There are different kinds of hickory nuts and while most are grown in the south, a few extend over into the southwest. Hickories are kin to the walnut family; they grow slowly and they have a long tap root. These trees can reach up to 80 feet in height and about two feet in diameter. When the nut matures, the husk splits open and the tasty morsels are ensconced in deep veins. The shells are extremely hard and with great skill and patience are the goodies extracted. One taste and all agree, it's worth the work!

In the late autumn many years ago, a family scouted about the wooded countryside near their southwest home to pick up hickory nuts. Into the family car they scrambled for a happy time together. They sang as the miles went past and into the leaves the children ran when their destination was reached. The parents brought baskets and bags to fill and they began searching the ground under the tall trees for the treasured hickory nuts. .and beckoned the children to lend a helping hand. After work and a bit of play, the picnic lunch was delightful, then on to complete their

task. While the sun was high, they hurriedly loaded up the car and headed home, tired but happy. Some good eating was just ahead!

Sometimes it takes work to find rare nuggets of spiritual truth. One is how to tell when a tree is good or bad. That's simple. A good tree brings forth good fruit and a bad tree brings forth bad fruit. When trees look alike, how can we know? By their fruit. False prophets can be dressed in sheep's clothing, but inside they're ravaging wolves. Look at their life, their message and their ways. .and what that produces (Matthew 7:15-20). How we appreciate the godly life! It "adorns the doctrine of God" in all things (Titus 2:10).

Like the hickory nut, rare, tasty and nutritious. They embellish. .adorn. .and please. Worth the work!

January 16, 2005

It was a beautiful day with a chill in the air and a clear picture of God's magnificent handiwork. Coastline fog did not hinder the distant view, nor the drizzle of a northwest winter. Every twig seemed to stand out along the forest path and islands far and near looked vibrant enough to touch. The miles seemed to back away and bless any viewer with details seldom seen on yonder shores. The hiker trekked along, missing nothing of the sights and sounds of God's wilder creation. The clean, fresh air and the seasonal beauty of His wintry canvass were priceless to enjoy.

Topping a hill, ready for a brief rest before venturing further, the hiker stopped mid-stride and stood transfixed at the sight ahead. There atop a lone cedar of many seasons sat two bald eagles, looking down upon the world below as if it were their own domain. Against the deep blue of the sky, their white crowns were majestically outlined and their dark forms were merged with the boughs of the tree as if they were a part. Their powerful hooked bills could be seen with clarity and those long broad wings had folded softly after a strong, soaring flight. What wild beauty! No wonder the eagle was used as an emblem for so many organizations. Even for our own beloved country. They looked so powerful, so confident, so comfortable. Like a ruler of wealth and wisdom. Serene and unafraid. Complete in their world.

Our God is complete. He is over all and sees all. Although He is high, He has respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knoweth afar off (Psalm 138:6). He may be silent in His watch, but His spiritual eyes remove time and hone in on details we may not realize are known. The sins which so easily beset us we need to come repenting and seeking His forgiveness. It is there. To those that keep His covenant and His commandments, "The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all. .Bless the Lord, all His works in all places of His dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul (Ps. 103:18-22)."

Even the regal eagles bring blessing to Him, our Creator and Lord. May we always remember our place in His picture.

January 9, 2005

It had once been a huge, vibrant tree, a home no doubt for singing birds and perching hawks. Eagles had soared high above its crown to settle gracefully upon its highest boughs. It had stood majestic and grand, a specimen of strength and stability. Storms had raged against it, only to strengthen the broad root system. Time had left its mark of maturity in its size and shape. At one time it surely seemed to live forever, to conquer any foe. But something happened.

Violence of some kind had sent it plummeting to the earth, uprooted and forever still. The tides had come and surged it forth into turbulent seas to peel and flail and strip it of its grace. And now it lay upon this beach where a passer-by stood in study and in awe of what once had been. The roots were a mere skeleton of its once heavy mass of tendrils and soil. Bleached by the sun, sand-blasted by ocean waves, these barren bones looked hollow, empty and useless. An end surely comes to all things.

Like a tree, regal and strong, man was created by God to be a blessing upon the earth. But by clever deceit, sin barged in and stole his purity. Jesus Christ then came and bridged that gap by which man can be restored to God through repentance from sins committed and full obedience to God's perfect will.

To maintain strength of spirit, man. .male or female. .must be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. The pure Word of God nourishes man's spirit as waters do the tree roots. He is ever vibrant within, making wise choices and prospering thereby. He does not listen to ungodly counsel nor dabble on the edge of evil. He does not let self righteousness enter to scorn and condemn others.

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. .The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Psalm 1)."

Man can think he will live forever, ruling his own life, but will instead be brought down from his pomp and glory, ending up like a battered dead tree, empty and useless. Perishing eternally.

The wise consider what nourishes their spirit. .and it shows.

January 2, 2005

The leaves were gone, trampled into the dust. Autumn was past and winter's mark was evident on limbs now bare and gray as they swayed in the cold wind. Trees once regal in their plumage of green now stood gaunt and brittle to face the portent of a somber sky. Along with shrubs and thistles, they swayed with a grinding rub as the wind moved hastily past. It was winter. A time to sleep. A time to rejuvenate for the coming spring when energy would once again burst forth and bring to life fresh leaves and flowers and grasses of all kinds.

In all the bleakness of seasonal gray, the hiker caught a glimpse of color which brought him to a dead stop! There among wilted flowers of a summer past swayed a bright, cheery golden aster! It was vibrant, sturdy, ready for spring and a season beyond for growing! It seemed to wave a cheery

greeting to the passer-by as the wind gently caressed its petals. It had been protected from the harsher blows by a cabin on the beach. The near freezing temperatures at night, the pelting rain and strident breezes damaged its less protected peers. They were bent or battered into a quiet demise. Little Miss Aster, however, was ready to live and laugh and love. . .whatever the season.

What a picture of nourishment and care! Even in winter with its storms and severe temperatures, the little lone flower proved healthy and strong. It brought inspiration to all who noticed, hope for a better day.

God's children can be as inspiring even during trying times and stormy blasts of hardship and trial. They don't blame or complain, they don't grudge and get back, they just go ever onward and upward wearing a crown of grace, using Divine strength. They have core connection with God and find joy in doing His will over their own. Whatever the cost. Whatever those around them may choose to do.

"Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord. .shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven (Matthew 7:21)."

Such people add a touch of color to bleak surroundings. Whatever the weather. Remember the cheery golden aster. .in winter.

December 19, 2004

"I remembered how our forefathers won a battle and we did the same here. And won." A young Jewish soldier was interviewed by an American journalist during the 1967 war which restored Jerusalem to the Jewish nation. He had bravely turned a near defeat into victory by implementing wise strategy which he had learned from the Old Testament Scriptures. During crisis, it was brought to his memory and he quickly responded. A valuable key was revealed in this soldier's knowledge of God's Word. Who would have won the battle that day had he not known what to do?

". .The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple (Psalm 19:7)."

What a gift God has given all of us! His holy Word holds secrets of wisdom, which are found in studying God's ways. The way He dealt with Moses and the Hebrew people s He led them out of Egyptian bondage is masterful. Making a great fountain of water burst forth from a high rock in a desert country is quite creative. And why. And when.

How about the way God prepared the world for His Son's entry upon earth? And His actual coming? Very spectacular! What points of wisdom can these ways of God teach us today? By remembering that the testimonies. .His recorded ways of dealing with man. .are sure, and will teach us that they are real rather than being mere theory. And can be a basis for our trust. If God did that for them then. .He can do this for me now. How thankful we are for His holy Word. .which He lets us hold in our hands that we may hide it in our hearts. Not all people are so blessed.

When parents teach their children the ways of God, they are preparing them for wise choices in the future. Why were Mary and Joseph chosen to form the family for His Son while on this earth? It

wasn't Jezebel and Ahab! Children learn from many angles and views which are based in solid doctrine and conviction of lifestyle. Parents teach when they do not realize it. .attitudes, habits, integrity. And young lives are colored thereby. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple (Ps. 19:7)."

December 12, 2004

He was just under three years of age. His bright red knitted cap felt comfortable in the nippy northern air. And like most small boys, he liked to pet dogs. In Nome, Alaska, in the mid-twentieth century, there were many sled dogs in many backyards. The dogs which had good care were friendly and greeted any visitor with a hearty wag of their big furry tail and a moist tongue ready to plant a warm sloppy kiss on any hand which got close enough. .or face, if a visitor was only three. However, several dogs were mistreated. They rarely got enough to eat, their chain was so short they could hardly move about. .and they were cranky. They could easily turn angry and viciously attack any visitor. Powerful dogs they were, with long sharp teeth to sink deeply into the tender arm of a three year old boy.

And along the boardwalk this happy little fellow skipped and walked and ran, a big smile on his face, his eyes bright with excitement. He was free! He could go where he pleased. It was about time that he could show his parents how big he was and how he didn't need their guiding hand all the time.

But his mother was not excited. She had looked away for just a moment and he had darted into a nearby alley. .out of sight. He wandered around looking at all the dogs he could pet. Parents and friends hurried about, calling his name, hoping to see that little red cap bobbing up and down in the distance. The parents prayed. They hoped to reach him before he approached the wrong dog. Finally, there he was, standing at the edge of a yard, looking intently at a grayish black husky dog hooked to a short metal chin. He was straining for release, barking loudly and pawing the air. The three-year old boy hesitated to pet this dog. He didn't seem too friendly. And he wasn't! While the boy hesitated, it gave the parents time to rescue him. .and thank God!!

There are benefits for having loving parents who know God and teach their children about Him. They know how to pray during crises and stand ready to protect and rescue, even when cranky dogs are too close. God bless such parents who make good homes a haven.

December 5, 2004

The moon was not shining. The stars had disappeared. Darkness had descended with the night. .a darkness of great density. Nothing reflected light. The trees were silent sentinels. The undergrowth of the forest lay unmoving, not a leaf rustled in a faint breeze. The passerby had gone beyond night lights and lamp light. The pathway was not distinguishable. Not even a hand placed before the face could be sighted. To turn around revealed no particular direction. Every step, right or left, forward or backward, gave no hint of place or position. No movement of limb or leaf beckoned. Even sound had stilled as had sight in a dark and dense night.

With a fervent prayer, the passerby stealthily pressed on. .sensing, feeling, smelling, listening.

.probing for signs of familiar footing. The path was still present as pressed gravel grated with each step. With eyes groping the darkness, right or left, looking for some faint reflection, the passerby moved on. How interesting that time also seemed to stand still. How many minutes. .or was it hours. .had passed? The darkness was so dense, so compact, so impenetrable.

But wait! Was it a glimmer? Yes! There, peeping through the trees, were faint rays of light. There was a guide! Following that glimmer, the darkness had divided. Like a knife, the light had cut through the blackness and the path opened up. The passerby had found safety in the dark night.

The spiritual darkness of sin is equally dense. It is outer darkness.. away from any reflection of light. .and it is dense, compact, impenetrable. Except for one thing. The light of Jesus Christ, Saviour of all mankind. .and. .His light shining in the lives and works of His followers.

People who are wise and cautious. .prudent. .are a bright light in a dark and foolish world. Those who are firmly fixed in the Lord. .the steadfast. .are great lights for the weak and wayward. People who have deep affection and good will for others. .Divine love. .are lights in a dark world of hate and hurt. Those who believe God's truth and live by it exhibit faith. .and. .make bright rays of light in a sinister world of unbelief and fear.

"Ye are the light of the world. .let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-15)."

LIGHT UP THE DARKNESS!

November 28, 2004

They knew He was merciful. They knew He was just. They knew He was longsuffering. .and. .they knew He was right. They knew of His love, protection and provision. They had experienced it all, these Israelites. They could remember the escape from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. They saw the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night as God protected them on their journey. There was manna from heaven to satisfy their hunger and water out of a rock to quench their thirst.

They had heard God's call to obedience and the blessings it would bring. They would be fruitful in every level of living and "Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store (Deut. 28:5)." Their enemies would be smitten before their face and flee away. They would be a holy people unto the Lord (Deut. 28:1-14).

There were also warnings. .and curses. .if they refused to hearken to their God and refused to do what they knew He required. .for their own good. "Curses shall be thy basket and thy store (Deut. 28:17)." Because of their wickedness, pestilence would cleave unto them until they were consumed from off the land they were to possess. Painful illnesses would pursue them until they perished. Powder and dust would replace rain until they were destroyed. Enemies would attack. .and win. They would be confused and blind in their heart. .and not prosper in their ways. More pain and sufferings were predicted (Deut. 28:15-68).

Of grave consequence in falling downward away from God is the effect upon succeeding generations. "And (the Lord) said, I will hide My face from them. .for they are a very froward generation, CHILDREN IN WHOM IS NO FAITH (Deut. 32:20)."

Generations of wickedness snuff out their faith. .but God's mercy still acts upon the penitent. While God is longsuffering, He, too is just. While spiritual darkness is dense, God's light can cut through it.

We can choose God's way and His great blessings. .AND. . LIGHT UP THE DARKNESS with our faith. .by believing God's truth and living by it. For the obedient, His blessings abound.

November 21, 2004

THANKSGIVING is a wonderful season which turns our attention to God and His blessings and to people who may need our help. We are a nation blessed with God-fearing forbears who honored Him and were unashamed to praise Him in public, to encourage others to remember His goodness and give thanks.

The first Thanksgiving Proclamation was made by our first president. He said, "Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly implore His protection, aid and favors. . .

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these states to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the Beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country, and for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us."

George Washington, 1789

What a privilege and blessing to have in our national heritage such a wise and understanding leader. Others who have followed have kept the course by directing their generations to give thanks to God for His many benefits, to call upon Him during crises and to honor His holy Word. God's laws have been the basis for our own. His Ten Commandments grace the halls of many buildings and public sites. The fabric of our lives are full of the threads of Divine truth. Peace and prosperity have been signal blessings through the years. We've known national struggle for achievement and the freedom to create a better life. .from generation to generation. While evil has always been present, good seemed to conquer and reign.

Would President Washington be pleased with us today? Is our Almighty God as central in national and in private life?

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord..(Ps. 33:12)."

November 14, 2004

In our nation's presidential election year, it is noteworthy to remember the beginning of our republic. Rus Walton said: "Our very political superstructures stand upon the critical bedrock of cherished biblical principles. .in ONE NATION UNDER GOD.

“Each RELIGION has a form of government, and Christianity astonished the world by establishing self-government. .the foundation stone of the United States of America.

“Our founding fathers gave to this government just enough power to serve. Even then, with all the checks and balances and fences of that constitutional document, it was not until the Bill of Rights was tacked on that the states consented to the union and ratified the federation.

“Christ died. .and rose. .to make men free. Through Christ we are freed from the wages and the death of sin. Just as Christ brought us internal freedom so He brought us a new direction for our external freedom (and a new purpose for our civil government). There was the sense of the Constitution of these United States.

“The Constitution was designed to perpetuate a Christian order. Why then is there, in the main, an absence of any reference to Christianity in the Constitution? Because the framers of the Constitution did not believe that this was an area of jurisdiction for the federal government.

“In 1851, when Daniel Webster was reviewing the history of America, he reaffirmed the need and role of God in government. More than one hundred years after Webster, Charles Malik, one-time Ambassador of the United Nations from Lebanon, said: ‘The good in the United States would never come into being without the blessing and the power of Jesus Christ. .the irrefutable truth is that the soul of America is as its best and highest, Christian.’”

—”Rebirth of America” by The Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation

November 7, 2004

There are many evidences that our nation was founded on a commitment to God and the principles of His Word.

In the summer of 1787, representatives met in Philadelphia to write the Constitution of the United States. After they had struggled for several weeks and had made little or no progress, eighty-one-years old Benjamin Franklin rose and addressed the troubled and disagreeing convention that was about to adjourn in confusion.

“In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of superintending Providence in our favor.. Have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance?

“I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. .

"I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning."

The very purpose of the Pilgrims in 1620 was to establish a government based on the Bible. The New England Charter, signed by King James I, confirmed this goal: ".to advance the enlargement of Christian religion, to obey the glory of God Almighty."

—"The Birth of America", by Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation

October 31, 2004

He was an avid reader. He devoured books. .thick books with small print. And he remembered what he read. Isn't that commendable? Reading books keeps the mind active and the imagination alive. In contrast, when people watch hours of TV, it can send the mind into inertia and dull the imagination. Artists, writers, inventors and others have vivid imaginations which breed creativity. That's one reason why timeless paintings grace gallery walls, musical scores are recorded and preserved, books of all kinds keep ideas, facts and adventures stored for future reference and artfully designed furniture is passed to succeeding generations.

This young man with the scholarly mind began reading about lives of famous Communist leaders. He learned how Lenin lived and thought, how his imagination fired his creativity and he built a giant kingdom of oppression which suppressed his subjects for generations. What was the influence of such books upon this young reader? He took on the mind of the one he studied. Where once he was sensitive and caring, he became hardened, merciless and cruel. He gave his parents great sorrow and he would not listen to their warning of dangers ahead. He went on into higher education, continuously building the intellect but starving the spirit. Then he began teaching principles of thought from the Communist doctrine. .and influenced many eager young minds seeking direction in life. However, God was not included.

This illustrates how important it is to check what our minds feed on. It's good to read, but what do we read? Some TV programs can be relaxing, but are they full of unprincipled behavior or do they edify good character qualities? We take on what we feed on.

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed (Prov. 13:20)." Who is walking with you?

The law of the Lord converts the soul; His testimony makes wise the simple; His statutes rejoice the heart; His commandment enlightens the eyes (understanding); they give warnings and keeping them brings great reward (Proverbs 19:7-11).

Our young man took on what he fed on. So do we.

October 24, 2004

There are several special days of the year when we celebrate certain events of the past, remembering well the meaning of each one. However, one day in autumn gets a lot of attention without the general understanding of its real meaning. All Saints Day on November 1 was celebrated to remind people of the saints and all the good they had done for Jesus' sake. The evening before was called holy or hallowed. .to get ready to remember these dedicated people.

During the hallowed evening (Halloween), the poor would go to homes of Christians and ask for food. Special cakes were prepared for giving and a candle in a window was a welcome sign. Children eagerly watched at a window to see who would come. Mothers tried to send the children to bed, but they'd keep sneaking back at every knock at the door.

Some people didn't like those who served the Lord with this practice. So, people began dressing up like witches, devils and ghosts. When the door was opened, they would frighten the children. It was a sorrowful thing to do, especially using something meant for good and turning it into something evil. Isn't that just like the old deceiver!

Several years ago, one young mother was helping her family enjoy Halloween. .like the rest of the world. .without knowing its real meaning, or what it had become. After a happy time at dinner, the children were excused and were off "trick or treating," dressed in silly costumes and going throughout the neighborhood, knocking on doors. Many other innocent children joined them and their laughter resounded from block to block. They were having fun!

The mother sat alone at the dining table, thinking of all the activities leading up to and filling this particular night. She noted the freshly ironed tablecloth with bread crumbs scattered around empty plates, a splotch 'n spill here 'n there from a drippy milk glass or fruit bowl. She smiled, remembering childish excitement, anticipating all the "loot" (candy) they'd collect. Then, there was the centerpiece. .a candle burning skull, now having become even more grotesque as the wax had melted it into deformity.

As the mother studied the situation. .the hideous skull in particular. .she compared this celebration with any the Lord God Almighty would author. Would He build such fear in people? And use such ugly, grotesque things to sow seeds of violence? NO! He brings peace. His creation is one of beauty and balance. She became ashamed for having given evil such an important part of their time and interest. This was a Christian family, but their focus this night was not on God and His goodness, but on the devil and his meanness. They had been tricked!

She prayed for God's forgiveness, took that ugly centerpiece and threw it in the trash, pushing it far down out of sight. Her next thoughts became even more sobering. How could they change the children's fun and excitement from one practice to another? She cried out to God for guidance. The children had to be told the truth..and..a new focus formulated without casting a condemning eye on neighbors who continued as they had done in the past. "Some can, we cannot."

Several ideas could be carried out, but harvest was in autumn and was it not a blessing from God? That was the theme they would try. .and dress it up with special treats. It would be uplifting, a happy time filled with wholesome memories. There is no limit to God's creativity when we ask for His help!

October 17, 2004

They were hurting. Life was hard. However, they expected to be released from this oppressive state some day and then they would enjoy a bountiful life. There would be enough food and enough clothing and enough shelter. Peace would also reign.

The Israelites were living in Egypt, but preparing for Canaan. Egypt represents a land. .or time. .of hardship with fiery trials and testing. Canaan represents a land. .or time. .of plenty with peace and prosperity.

Spiritually speaking, how do we get to "Egypt"? Perhaps the happenings of Joseph can hold a key. Life was good for him. He was favored by his father Jacob (Gen. 37:3), who provided him a coat of many colors. .a badge of favored affections. God also gave His approval. He showed him by dreams that one day he would become a great ruler. .even over his brothers (:5-10). Because of envy. .which holds the seeds of murder. .Joseph's brethren conspired to slay him (:18). Because of Judah's appeal for profit, they sold him for 20 pieces of silver and he was brought into Egypt (:28). Joseph was sold out. .betrayed! Have you ever felt sold out by people you trusted? Living in Egypt.

However, the Lord was with Joseph in Egypt and he was given a bountiful position in Potiphar's house (39:23). Life was good. .but. .again it all ended. An evil woman enticed Joseph, but he fled! She sought revenge and Joseph again was betrayed. He was imprisoned (:20)! But the Lord was with Joseph and gave him favor (:21).

In our times of fiery testing, we can be taken quickly from the good life. We can feel sold out. .betrayed. We can be put under another authority.. financial crisis, health crisis, relationship crisis. We can feel like a slave.. making money to make ends meet. .no luxuries allowed. But God is there! We can feel like a slave to health care. .studying, searching, preparing and spending everything! But God is there! We can feel like a slave to fixing fights. .taking responsibility for petty arguments, for grieving over serious splits. But God is there! Living deep in Egypt. .but preparing for Canaan.

Joseph suffered during those 13 years. .and so may we in our Egypt. God delivered Joseph from prison to be made ruler over all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, who said of Joseph: ". .There is none so discreet and wise. .Thou shalt be over my house. .(41:39-40)." Where did Joseph learn that wisdom? In Egypt!

During hard times, God meets survival needs. He uses those evil times (Egypt) to strengthen us for future responsibilities and blessings (Canaan). We can also expect God to lead us out of Egypt while preparing us for Canaan. We'll need the wisdom we learn there.

October 10, 2004

He was just doing his job. The sheep were placid and the backside of the desert was a welcome sight. The mountain it hugged rose strong and awesome before him. It was called the mountain of God. Horeb. Moses was not eliciting any favor from anyone. He was just doing his job. .caring for the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law (Ex. 3:1). This would be a memorable place for Moses. Here he would meet with God. .and. .his life would drastically change. Instead of shepherding a flock of gentle sheep, his job turned to ministering to a nation of people, oppressed and poor.

We know of the years of suffering the Israelites endured from Egyptian oppression. Impossible demands were made and severe punishment was meted out for not doing their job. Their authority was big and powerful and cruel. None could escape the Egyptian tyranny. We know how God used Moses to lead His people out of Egyptian bondage. .and all the hurtles in between. .as recorded in Exodus.

From this story we can glean a nugget of truth which can open a window of understanding. Many Christians experience oppression during testing. Just like the Israelites, we can be set upon by some authority which is big and powerful and cruel. Like a boss on the job, a family leader, a vindictive enemy. .a war with terrorism. Oppression can be like a prison without a key. However, there is a hidden key which locks us there.

The key is fear. Fear is not always recognized and it cripples faith and other noble virtues. Some fear is good, in that it preserves life. For fear of what traffic can do, we teach children not to play in the street.

Fearing the big, powerful and cruel menace besetting us, we can feel hopeless, helpless and lost. Fear has our focus. .and that brings to pass the very thing we fear: being forever hopeless, helpless and lost.

While we feel the pain of emptiness, the shame of weakness and the confusion of misunderstanding, we can escape our prison. We can call upon God. One man did. "And Jehoahaz besought the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Assyria oppressed them (II Kings 13:9)." Big, powerful, cruel.

We must keep seeking the Lord and consent to His timing and will. Hope emerges, strength returns and clear direction begins. We can go about doing our job. Serving the Lord. .and be blessed.

"In righteousness thou shalt be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt NOT FEAR: and from terror; for it shall not come nigh thee (Is. 54:14)." Think about it. .and. .go about doing your job.

October 3, 2004

He lived many years ago in a land far away. He helped the poor and fatherless and caused the widow's heart to sing. He assisted the blind, the lame, and young and old alike respected him for his wisdom. Job was perfect and upright. He feared God and avoided evil (1:1; 29:12, 15-16, 20-25). He was a man to emulate.

For all Job's goodness, he suffered tremendously. However, there is a key to Job's resilience, even at his lowest ebb. This key sustains every Christian in every kind of fiery trial in every age or era. Without it, the one in testing can fall into sins of the spirit. .pride, bitterness, anger, covetousness, etc.

The key is a clear conscience, a perfect heart. .before God. As had Job. With a clear conscience, Job kept his reasoning sound. "My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live (27:6)." "My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit (:4)."

Others may reproach us because of Godly living. Satan would deceive us to reproach self within. .no worth, false guilt, unsound reasoning. A conscience clear with God and man has no guile, no self reproach. What a way to live!

When one's heart is not perfect before God at onset of fiery trials, stability of spirit can be quickly lost and sins of the spirit can emerge, lustful deeds, iniquitous acts. King Saul had a humble start, but fell into corrupted thinking. .and became a murderer. His heart was humble. .but not perfect. .when he was subtly tested. He did not keep the commandments of the Lord and did foolishly (I Sam. 13:13). He did not obey the voice of the Lord (:19). He became harried and haunted and in the end, fell upon his own sword (31:4). What a way NOT to live!

God says in Matthew 5:48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." We cannot attain this alone. By "walking in the light as He is in the light (I John 1:7)," we allow Him to lead us and we willingly obey His will. We'll get there! We'll find the key. And be blessed.

September 26, 2004

We've all heard about King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. They didn't earn any good behavior medals, did they? However, Ahab used a prominent Scriptural tool. .and profited from it! The fine tool of humility can be used by wicked people as well as the righteous. Let's look at Ahab's character from God's eyes. ". .There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. He did very abominably in following idols. .as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel (I Kings 21:25-26)."

Ahab had a major greed problem. Even though he had great wealth, he coveted Naboth's vineyard, but Naboth didn't want to sell. So, Ahab ". .rent his clothes. .and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly (:27)."

Jezebel wanted her husband to be happy, so she designed a wicked plan to take the vineyard from Naboth. .by his murder. .and then gave it to Ahab. But God sent His prophet Elijah to cast judgment upon Ahab for his evil deed. A curse of lost posterity (I Kings 21).

God knew Ahab and saw his fasting. .and humility. . That's what touched the heart of God. Humility. To fast, one must be humble. .denying self. And God said: “. .Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring this evil in his days: but in his son's days I will bring the evil upon his house (:29).” So it was.

Humility and fasting can be used by wicked people for good. . and. .God will alter their curse, as with Ahab. However, consequences for sin do get paid, even though others must suffer for the sins of the fathers.

How much better for God's people to humble themselves and pray. God will hear and forgive and heal. Very profitable.

“If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (II Chronicles 7:14).”

September 19, 2004

In a desert climate stands a great tree of renown. Some people would think it to be the noble fir, which has silvery needles and cylindrical cones. It also has a dense domelike crown. However, our tree of renown is not the noble fir. The bristlecone fir has reddish-brown bark with a crown like a sharp spire. Pretty, but it's not our special tree. The great Ponderosa pine has a pleasant fragrance and grows to 150-180 feet. It has a broad, open crown and is common throughout the West. There is a special kinship here with our particular tree of renown.

Driving north winds have sculpted this captivating tree. Its roots have often thirsted for water, and soil erosion appears all around. It's not stately and tall, but twisted and low. Most branches veer off to the right and one straggly limb reaches out to the left. A part of its upper trunk is missing, resembling the snag that it is. Some of its roots lie above ground, gnarled and contorted. It is so uncommon that the passerby stopped and gazed long upon its attributes. All the harsh abuse had made it thrive, even though its beauty was not in perfect form. Picture it against the tall, beautiful Ponderosa and there was instant contrast. However, this old windblown Ponderosa kept one's attention and spoke of many admirable virtues. Indeed, a truly great tree of renown.

Sometimes our spiritual climate may seem dry and eroded. Testing seems to keep us low in humility and twisted in our form. The driving north winds get fierce, causing constant losses. Outward beauty can be impressive, but the inner strength portrayed in triumphant presence is captivating, exemplary. .and renowned.

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ. .(II Corinthians 3:14).”
Whatever happens.

September 12, 2004

It was a place far away. Storms came often and held no mercy for the weak. The Behring Sea was shallow. .for seas. .and storms could disturb the calm of air and water with sudden fury. Waves grew higher than a house and lashed the sea wall like an angry giant, bent on coming through. The wind howled and challenged anyone to stand against it.

Upon the graveled beach were thrust huge logs which lay cradled among others. Giant waves diffused their foamy spray and with salt aplenty proceeded to polish these mighty forms like the touch of sandpaper.

The sound was deafening as giant breakers surged and rolled and spent their power upon the sands of earth. A northern storm can obliterate the memory of sunny skies and gentle breezes which once lived here. But they shall return.

Sometimes in life we may be suddenly immersed in a big storm. No good will. Constant lashing of accusations and false reports fill the air. Peace and quiet are invaded and pushed aside. Confusion and darkness reign. However, storms pass. Quiet returns, the sun smiles again and the earth is freshly washed.

The Hebrews found Egypt a stormy place. Bondage destroyed all security, peace and joy. Even though it was painful, a very important benefit was derived. The forced severity of hard work strengthened the people so that they could trek across the desert miles like athletes. At last, God's promise was being fulfilled!

Egypt was so painful an experience that the people eagerly left...never to return. Their emotional tie was broken. It's that tie which holds our emotions and interest. No more for them.

Sometimes, our storms hide treasures, deposited in our lives for needed use ahead. Joseph rose above his prison storm and became a mighty ruler under Pharaoh. Jacob's cheating storm molded his life to be a prince.

What does God have in mind for you? The greater the responsibility, the greater the refining fires of testing. Catch the treasures, break old harmful ties, and walk on with God to higher planes of living.

"For Thou, O God, hast proved us; Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. .we went through the fire and . .water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place (Psalm 66:10, 12)."

September 5, 2004

Dusk was upon the land. Shadows were dense. The sunset's muted colors were diminishing into purples and faint peach. The inlet's waters were calm and the gentle lapping of the waves seemed to caress the pebbled beach. Suddenly, a large, graceful bird with wide wing span glided silently just above the water's edge. His dark form was silhouetted against the pale sky. How majestic and elegant his beauty as he effortlessly settled upon a jutting rock and calmly folded his wings. His statuesque outline held vigil over his new territory. Perhaps a tasty tidbit lay just beneath the water's flow.

It was a blue heron, a bird of beauty, akin to many of the long necked, long legged wading birds, all sporting a long, pointed bill. They like watery places rather than desert regions. They fit in moist environs, rather than on mountain heights. Sandy beaches beckon them rather than the meadows or the mid-west. God made them so in order to fulfill His perfect purpose for the balance and beauty of His creation.

Man is also created to fulfill God's plan and purpose. .which is perfect for both. Why is the missionary happy who lives among headhunters and warring tribes? Why do some people tirelessly teach God's truth while others prefer to go about doing good deeds. .in private? Why are some content to labor long in isolated areas while others prefer the action and attraction of the masses? While the blue heron is distinct, he has family members who differ. But they're all herons.

God wants His people to fit together in His Kingdom work. Some may be more elegant and gracious. .but not superior. Others may feel awkward and ugly. .but are not inferior. We can all be content being what God has designed for us. .and where He has placed us.

Remember, you are you. .not another. Herons are herons, not buffalo. Each of us is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Therein is dignity.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus UNTO GOOD WORKS. . .(Ephesians 2:10)."

August 29, 2004

The key to a good life is often elusive to many people. It is very simple to the Christian. Since all good comes from God, there are two main requirements to receive them. TRUST GOD. .and. .DO GOOD. To trust is to rely upon God. .for direction, for stability, for judgment in life. What path does He want me to take for a vocation? How can I find His favor? How can I be sure that my choices are right? All these will be answered as we go through life and follow these two basic requirements: TRUST GOD. .and. .DO GOOD.

Sometimes circumstances can be painful. People can rise up to question our judgment on the job or hinder us from getting a comfortable position in business or keep us from gaining the promotion we deserve. Instead of trying to flee these painful circumstances we can TRUST GOD. .and. .DO GOOD. After all, He has allowed it. Be kind when others would demand their rights, be true when others would take more than their share. Joseph was a good example of TRUSTING GOD. .and. .DOING GOOD.

Sometimes life can be so comfortable that we can waste our mind in idleness. .becoming slothful in responsibilities. Instead, by TRUSTING GOD for guidance, we can DO GOOD in seeking after WISDOM. Studying the Scriptures, the ways of nature and people.. keeping our mind engaged in Scriptural meditation, good reading, wholesome thinking, principled entertainment. Life is richer for the wise. A by-product. Abraham found it so.

Sometimes life can be so demanding with busy cares that we lose our spiritual alertness to subtle dangers. We're choked with making money, finding pleasures, releasing stresses, building empires.. that we do not see our understanding becoming darkened. The things which were once bad, no longer seem so bad. Convictions wane, love weakens, joy is gone. By getting back to God and doing good, we can REBUILD OUR SPIRIT. We will be established and enjoy life. .Psalm 37:3. God's blessing await.

"Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

August 22, 2004

It looked like a smooth piece of brown paper, all new and wrinkle free. People could walk on it and have solid footing. Birds could swoop down and leave their prints. It is a popular place, the beach. Here a writer can develop thoughts of rarest truth. An architect can construct a great castle with all its steeples and steps. Boys and dogs can run together, frolicking. And this smooth piece of brown paper becomes scarred and scraped. .but it will not matter. The tide will come and smooth it out again.

One particular artist came when everyone had gone and the tide had left its mark. The brown paper was smooth once more and it became a gigantic canvass. With great flourish, lines were put together.

High on a bluff, an onlooker stood, observing this creative scene below. With the artist's skilled maneuvers, it became clear what he was drawing. The map of the United States. Each state was distinctly carved in sand as though a blueprint were at hand. When he stood back to appraise his work, the onlooker could see how beautiful it was. What a shame! It could not last, for the sea would come and wipe it all away. Sin is like the sea. It can wipe away much good.

When Israel was scarred in sin, Jehoida the priest arose to train young King Joash and help him set the nation aright. But Jehoida dies at 130 years. After all the good Jehoida had done, Joash turned from God and served idols. He remembered not the kindness of Jehoida (II Chronicles 24).

SIN WIPES OUT ALL THE GOOD DONE IN THE PAST. .

like the tides of the sea. It takes God's guidance to make one's life smooth again.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Hebrews 3:12)

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. ." II Corinthians 5:10

August 15, 2004

Once it was tall and stately. Prime. Admired by many who passed by. But a storm came along. .not that there had not been other storms. But something happened through the years which made this beautiful tree vulnerable. It was not easily detected. The cedar still appeared tall and stately. In fact, the trunk's perimeter continued to grow. But. .when the fierce winds thrust their fury against the massive trunk, it yielded to the pressure. .and broke asunder. With a giant splintering noise, the stately tree was severed into two irregular pieces. The tree top lay still upon the fern and vines of the forest floor, its boughs broken, many cedar fronds torn and stripped. The trunk stood jagged and torn, about five feet tall. The perimeter showed a sharp slender point on one side, ragged projections coming down into a much lower and rougher edge on the opposite. It looked hurt, wounded.

A glance at the core told the story, as it lay exposed for all the world to see. The hollow, brownish inner heart of the tree had decayed away through the years. Its heart was gone. The inner core. The wood was reddish and fibrous, a beautiful hue of color. However, regardless of beauty, it no longer was stately. Where once it was tall, it would never be again.

Human lives can be like that downed tree. We can stand tall and stately. .prime. .a picture of perfection to all who pass by. But if the heart is not sound, the years will hide inner decay. When that one un-doing storm comes along, its winds will be too fierce. .and eternity will call.

“. .And I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible (Isaiah 13:11).”

“He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour (Proverbs 21:21).”

He stands tall and stately. .in spirit. .prime. So can we all be, by God's grace and guidance.

August 8, 2004

It made them smile. They looked at the fleecy white clouds lazily moving across the miles of blue. Sometimes, the clouds seemed to rest awhile in one place. .like huge fluffy cottonballs. Then, they would mutate and form imaginary castles in the sky or galloping horses hurrying across the heavenly way. Or the clouds would billow out to magnificent heights, brilliant even in the sun's rays. The startling white curves were distinct against the vivid blue as though an artist would highlight the two for an inspiring contrast. People, minute in comparison, looked and marveled. .and smiled. God's handiwork was awesome when given a free hand. No one's artistic prowess could compare. What a Master!

As the light and beauty of God's fleecy clouds evokes a peaceful moment on a troubled earth, so He also authors the dark clouds with their ominous portent of storms to come. Sober faces turned to glimpse the shadow over the sun. .and became tense. What will happen? The heavy air parted as a cool wind picked up and brushed the earth, fresh from the grayish moving mantle above. The tall pine trees swayed as the wind pressed against their top branches. Darkness descended hurriedly as the dense mass of storm clouds moved closer. An onlooker stopped to gaze upon this

angry, moving volume of cloud clusters as they swirled forth across the higher altitudes. Nothing peaceful about them. Threatening and offensive they were. Thunder rolled, loud and low. A large drop of rain spattered the dust and little puffs moved aside for the new invader. Winds charged in gusts, moving against anything in their path. And the rain came, cold and drenching. It gave the earth a good washing.

As storms come to every Christian, so also God comes with His calm. For storms have an end. During storms we find cover and stay quiet. During storms of spiritual warfare, we find protection in God's tower of strength and stay quiet, doing routine responsibilities without projecting oneself. The wise take heed and are safe.

"He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still (Psalm 107:29)." Smiles return. Peace prevails.

August 1, 2004

He lived eons ago, but his life story is indelibly imprinted on the pages of scriptural history. It was said that he was perfect and upright, that he feared God (honored Him with awe) and eschewed evil (stayed away from it). It is also said that he was the greatest of all men of the east. Job instructed many and strengthened weak hands. He encouraged those who were falling and strengthened feeble knees (4:34).

Then, he lost it all. .his family and properties. His response proves his good heart: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly (1:22)." In fact, he even proclaimed: ". .The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord (1:21)."

One weakness Job had. .and which many others have had or do have.. and. .which troubles people to this day: fear. Fear focuses on failure or loss.. which brings it to pass. "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me (3:25)."

Fear has many faces. .not always clearly recognized. However, fear has some traits which are indisputable and by them it can be discerned, then dealt with.

As with Job (a righteous man), one's PEACE is disturbed when safety is questioned. .as when troubles mount with no apparent cause.

One's REST of faith is hindered when agitation continues to grip the soul and try the spirit. .the cause is confusing, unclear. Why is all this happening. .and. .when will it stop?! TROUBLE becomes an unwelcome guest! The car won't start, the baby's sick, the neighbor's angry, the world is ending!!

"I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came (Job 3:26)."

We can conquer fear by changing our focus to what God has said in His Word. .and do what He says. It is important to analyze our situation in order to determine whether we are at fault. If so, thank God for revealing it and fix it. If not, remember that righteous people can be gripped by fear.

.Job was. However, when we see the face of fear, we must not let it stick around, taunting and stealing our faith. Our first response should be to cry out to God: "I am afraid! Deliver me from this fear. .for the glory of God." We may have to repeat this step from time to time until the habit of changing focus from fear to faith becomes settled in our thought process. We're actually changing a habit and creating a better one. In doing so, we may forget. .but. .back up and try again.

"The Lord shall help them and deliver them. .because they trust in Him (Psalm 37:40)." Believe it! Job did.

July 18, 2004

Just like the wagon train a century ago, life can be challenging as mountains loom up in our path today. We may not have a relentless wagon master, but we can have an authority in our lives, or an overwhelming situation, which can seem as insensitive and/or as impossible. A mountain to overcome.

For some who are alert to the stark edges of right and wrong, an authority can seem not to care about the cries of the overworked as he presses on to meet deadlines or company goals. Or a circumstance can be just as difficult. People get weary. To ease up a bit would be the right thing to do. Anger can rise up within and contention can break out, defying authority and making war within the ranks. Peace is beaten down.

How can peace be restored in such a situation? It lies with the workers, not the "wagon master". The wise can see a Higher power to whom they run in times of trouble. The living God! "From the ends of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed. .(Ps. 61:2)." They can ACCEPT what they cannot correctly control..knowing that God has allowed it..and GIVE IT TO GOD for safe keeping. Confident in His care. With prayer and patience and time, God can change things..for His glory. Peace will be returned..with productive work.

For others who see people hurting whom they love because of the leader's callous and mean spirit, anger can emerge and resentment flare. Divisiveness can sever the spirit of good hearts by shunning and spreading harmful gossip against the leader. Disloyalty results. Stubbornness fans the fires of vengeance..and unity is all burned up.

The wise remember to cry out to God when overwhelmed within (Ps. 61:2)..and RELEASE their burden into GOD'S GOOD HANDS. Expecting His help. With prayer and patience and time, God will change things..for His glory. And unity will be restored..with good will.

When some people see a waste of time and energy because of the short sightedness of a "dull leader", they tend to take matters into their own hands. They can lead this "wagon train" back on course, designing ways to trick the leader into displaying to others the fool that he is. Pride and arrogance mingle with rebellion in replacing authority and gaining the affection of the people to follow their new and more worthy leader. A foolish act. Harmony dissipates. People become ruled. Subservient.

The wise remember to CRY UNTO GOD when their heart is overwhelmed (Ps. 61:2)..and IGNORE

what cannot be removed, GIVING IT TO GOD for His higher purpose. Trusting His judgment. With prayer and patience and time God will change the man's position or his heart. Harmony will return..and inspired service. When mountains appear, the wise run to the Lord for help. And the "wagon train" moves right along.

July 11, 2004

Many wagon trains heading West stopped at South Pass, that valley in southwest Wyoming, at the south end of the Wind River Range. This valley was a welcome respite for many weary travelers a century ago.

Last week, a wagon train master in our story was relentless in his pursuit to reach this pass very quickly. He seemed to ignore the complaints of the people for a rest along the way, for it was a strenuous journey. One group of pioneers became angered at the leader's insensitivity to the weaker ones who needed rest. Their peace was disturbed as a contentious spirit emerged to agitate all of them. They were right. He was wrong.

Another group tried to persuade the leader to make a sensible decision and grant the people a rest. It would not hurt anyone to be a few hours late. He refused and a spirit of division resulted, for they were no longer loyal to their leader.

A few chose to remove the wagon master and stop this useless drain of energy and spirit by taking authority into their own hands. The atmosphere was unpleasant and ugly. But they made a foolish choice, not considering the dangers or responsibility involved. Harmony was gone.

How could peace and unity and harmony be restored in such an explosive situation? The KEY is in looking to God for solutions. For those who were concerned about protecting the weaker ones, they could ACCEPT what they could not correctly control and GIVE IT TO GOD for safe keeping. God could apply the right pressure. .and. .their peace would return.

Others who were alarmed that the leader was so insensitive to the needs of others, could RELEASE their burden into God's good hands. .and have good will and unity restored.

Those who would take authority into their own hands could IGNORE what could not be removed, giving it to God for His perfect purpose. .and harmony would return with some inspiration for living. Their goal would be attained. .pleasantly.

June 20, 2004

On a sunny summer day a sightseer followed a winding narrow road toward the top of a particular mountain in eastern California. Some of the curves were very sharp with deep canyons plunging straight down from the paved edge. The breeze grew cooler with each hundred feet of climb. .a welcome relief from the lowland heat! Valleys grew misty with distance as the ascent pointed ever upward. Certainly a wild environment existed in these rugged mountains, home to many creatures. .as the gentle deer or the powerful mountain lion. Suddenly, giant redwoods began to grace the scene. What a spectacular difference they made beside the other forest trees! The mighty sequoias towered above all others. Their blue-green foliage contrasted with their reddish bark. And

there, within a small white fence, stood the grandest of them all. General Sherman! Another spectacle was the sequoia cones lying here and there beneath the tree. Everyone wondered how such a small cone became such a big tree.

Everyone who holds the walnut size cone in his hand, instinctively gazes upon the immense height of General Sherman, the giant Sequoia in the Sequoia National Park in California. It is interesting to note that the General's diameter is over 30 feet, it is nearly 300 feet tall, and has lived for 3,800 years. The redwood family is surprisingly resistant to fire, insects and disease. What a remarkable specimen of God's handiwork!

Is not man a marvelous creation as well? What a tiny beginning in the mother's womb, to become a giant among men in spirit or intellect or physical strength. Given space, how one can soar to fulfill his own potential!

"I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works. . .(Psalm 139:14)."

We stand in awe of God's handiwork. Even at the mirror.

June 13, 2004

Birds sang. Butterflies flitted among the reeds and wild flowers. The summer sun was hot, but here in the quiet shade of forest shadows the air was cooled by calm water flowing gently along. Around the water's edge grew succulent green grasses which looked back at them from a darker image. The air hung heavy with warm, humid odors of damp vegetation mingled with cedar and pine. A silent reverence seemed to embrace the moment and make an indelible imprint upon the soul. It warranted stopping all movement and collecting scents and sights and sounds to hold in memory. A wild terrain it was. .and in a peaceful mode.

Yet, as the eye traveled upward along the steep mountain side, the sandy bank was strewn with dead branches and decaying trees. They lay forsaken and forgotten. Higher still, outlined against the sky, stood a forest of dense evergreens. Their varying heights and sizes made the undergrowth look like a dense carpet. A rugged region, indeed.

And there it was! A narrow path carefully chosen by wildlife, coming down to the water line. The sandy soil was so steep and unstable that at certain points the animals had slidden in order to reach a drink of water. They had to cautiously dodge rotting forest debris lest they stumble and fall and become injured, and then fall prey to enemies. However, they needed water. They had to come this way.

While living for the Lord is very rewarding, its path is not always easy. It is a narrow way, sometimes lonely, sometimes difficult to stand for what is right. There is great peace within, but peace without can be invaded with distress and danger. But it's worth it to gain heaven!

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14)." We must come this way.

June 6, 2004

It was so easy to say it. .but so hard to do it! But there was one man who would. .at great cost. .and never forget it. How much better to have kept God's laws and learn to love Him, to keep Him and to serve Him! How he would have been protected from the deep inner hurt which was to spread throughout his being. .because of his own few words. If he could only reclaim them, to take back the promise he had made. .to God. There was no excuse, no reason sufficient to overlook what he had said. Regardless of the time when great wickedness abounded, a time when darkness was dense. .all around. Mercy was uncommon, compassion forgotten. People rebelled against God, against authorities and against each other. People were volatile, giving vent to their anger without thought of hurting others. They cast fierce judgment upon those who would disagree or who ignored their skills. It was a time when refinements were sorely lacking in men, in manners, in lifestyles. Courtesies lay hidden in dusty corners of the past.

Upon this canvas of history stepped Jephthah. .the man in whom the Spirit of the Lord worked, who led his people to victory over the enemy. But not before he made a promise. .so easy to say. .so hard to keep! He "vowed a vow unto the Lord. .If Thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace. .shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering (Judges 11:30-31)."

Guess who greeted him at his return? His beautiful, happy daughter!! His only child. She asked for two months when she heard the news. Then "did with her according to his vow (:30)."

UNWISE VOWS ARE AS BINDING AS ARE THE WISE. Without weighing the cost, or seeing only the glory of the present, it is so easy to say it. .so hard to keep it. The wise weigh their words and keep their vows. .without regret.

May 30, 2004

It was a new land! Explorers ventured forth to find and fetch the gold, to lay claim upon vast territories. The wild bounty and beauty of the land beckoned. It was ready for the taking.

The early fourteenth century found men of daring ambition trekking through a new land which would later become our home. .America. Some early arrivals suffered sickness and sorrow in order to find their way. Some were misdirected and lost control. Others gave up too soon and never saw their rewards. A few left their mark upon the land, preserved in the annals of history. And the door was opened.

Spiritually, it takes courage and determination to find the good land of righteous living. The way is plain, but many trek through spiritual darkness with entangled worldly cares. Some become misdirected or fall into despair or dismay. .and lose their way.

Once we find the Lord and revel in His blessings, we can fall prey to hidden dangers, which by being wise we can foresee and sidestep. Christians are to be proved, tested by circumstances

allowed by the Lord, which strengthen muscles of faith and patience, peace and endurance. Refining times. The rough edges get trimmed and smoothed for better living. .for better service and better witness.

A key to finding the good life is to TRUST THE LORD. .and do good. .dwell in the land. .be fed (Psalm 37:3, 27). It would be wise to. .NOT flee painful circumstances. .when personal rights promise firmer control or pampering favor or a gain born of greed. TRUST GOD and do good instead.

A key: NOT allow the comforts and conveniences in life to waste the mind in idleness. LEARN WISDOM (Ecclesiastes 10:18)

NOT let a bounty of blessings cause passions to be satiated, which stifle spiritual alertness. EN-DURE HARDNESS (II Timothy 2:3).

NOT choke spiritual senses with busy cares of this world, which darken understanding and lead to eternal death. BUILD THE SPIRIT (Matthew 6:33).

USE the trials. .as an explorer. Store their bounty. .finding gems of wisdom which shall embellish our lives forever. .and be safer, wiser, and richer.

May 23, 2004

It was hard to stand against the gusts. They roared down the gorge with great speed, whipping river waves into frothy white crowns. Tree limbs grew limber, being tossed to and fro in the frenzy. Leaves trembled constantly and some suddenly tore from their moorings and hit the ground with a groan.

In a green corner of the gorge a lovely park had been created. Giant trees of all kinds graced the hills and vales. The locust trees tossed their spring blooms to the ground, permeating the air with their heady fragrance. The big willows left fronds a yard long here and there, a tribute to the force of the unharnessed wind.

Something unfamiliar clung to the crown of one tree. It wasn't leaves, but tiny circles of white ribbons which appeared to float above the limbs and attach to the leaves. A mass of living lace. No matter how hard the wind blew, the "lace" was unmoved.

At first it looked like an adornment, but with closer scrutiny, leaves lay hidden. .smothered. .with the dense volume of "lace". It seemed to thrive with any movement.

The "lace" was in itself very attractive. What could be wrong with it? Why was it dangerous? It wasn't hurting anything. But it could. .eventually. It looked to be a parasite, which grows and feeds on the tree while not contributing anything to the survival of the tree.

The Israelites were told of dangers in the Jericho triumph. The wicked city was accursed to them. They were to "keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed and

make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it (Joshua 7:18).” Guess what Achan did? He took of the accursed thing. .a garment, some gold and silver. They were useful, he could have thought. What was wrong with them? His whole family was destroyed and Israel was troubled. That was what was wrong.

The accursed thing may look attractive and innocent, but if God says not to touch, we would be wise to heed it. Punishing consequences can be like a parasite. Tossed in the wind. .and hanging on. Growing until they smother.

“Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away (Prov. 4:13-15).”

May 9, 2004

Beauty is important. It feeds the spirit and calms the soul. There is beauty everywhere, as in each season of the year, in a happy baby, a pleasant friendship, a comfortable home. Some people are also beautiful, whether within and/or without.

Esther must have been such a woman. She was given a year to be purified. .six months with oil of myrrh, six months with sweet odors and other things (2:12). The upkeep of feminine graces always brings favor. Inner beauty can excel external perfection. Esther was meek and quiet in spirit. . a rare virtue. .sensitive and obedient to authority. Her uncle had become her father and his love for her was evident in her wise and tender heart. “Esther obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her (2:15).” “And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight. .and he made her queen (:17).” Beauty is noticed, appreciated and favored.

However, there are dangers in being beautiful. Consider the city of Tyrus. .at the entry of the sea. .boasting perfect beauty (Ezekiel 27:3-24). Wise ones were their craftsmen and the best of materials were theirs to choose. Their armies were the grandest and their ships traveled far, laden with rich cargo. However, their glory did not last. Why? A basic danger developed which brought down this city of perfect beauty. It afflicts all people everywhere, in every era. That basic flaw is pride.

God said to the prince of Tyrus: “Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God. .Thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures. .thy heart is lifted up because of riches. Therefore thus saith the Lord. .I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations. .they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit. .thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee (Ezekiel 28:2-9).”

Wise is the one who walks humbly with his God, as did Esther, and learns to hold a full cup. .escaping a serious fall. It is also wise to be alert to the danger signs of pride: the heart is lifted up, independent of all authorities and counsel, and trust is transferred from God to riches. What can guard the heart from such defilement? Try humility. And be beautiful. .for God’s glory.

May 2, 2004

How beautiful they stood at the base of a huge evergreen shrub. Their cheery yellow blooms nodded gently as the wind skipped around them and sped onward to greater heights. Fresh young daffodils they were, eager for the spring, bunched together and protected from the harsh winds coming in from the sea. The giant bush rose higher than a man and was wider than the biggest shield. Its foliage was so dense that light could not be seen through its branches as they raced against the fierce wind. How sturdy it stood, unmoved by all the storm around it. Litter lay about upon the ground where cedar and pine springs had been flung mercilessly. But the daffodils were unmoved and seemed to laugh and tell the world that they were here.

They did not seem to consider the storm, although its roar proved its presence to be real. They did not seem to notice the pelting rain, although the puddles grew and broadened all around. They did not seem to see the giant cedars and hemlocks thrashing about at the top of the world as the winds bent them to their will. The daffodils looked content and untouched by it all. They were protected and safe from the storm.

How many people would categorize themselves with daffodils? Yet, God created both of them. We can see and hear and touch and sense and smell and move about from one place to another. Daffodils are stationery and unseeing, unknowing. .but beautiful. Their purpose is to add beauty to their surroundings. .for such a brief time. Our purpose is to be glorious for our Lord. .and our time is equally short midst the eons behind us.

The storms of life can rage all around and we can see the devastated lives and hear the commotion of war. .and be at peace within. Because God protects us. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Ps. 91:1)." How beautiful. How safe. In God's care.

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April 11, 2004

It stood there, a silent witness to the past. Once it was in great demand, a bridge of beauty, sturdy and sound in its structure. Hundreds of feet had carried happy travelers to the far side of the mountain river. The wilderness awaited, wild things to see, old trees of magnificent height, a sunlit path with shadows dense playing upon the vine and shrub, the scent of decaying vegetation. An old cedar, hundreds of years old, had long fallen to reveal its inner core almost gone. Some of the giants were fire ravaged, their blackened trunks open to the world. .but still growing. And the ever present sound the river made. .continuous singing as it journeyed down from the high country. .set the scene for hungry sightseers.

But alas! The bridge! The barricades were all around its entrance, higher than the tallest man, metal entwined with metal. .the message loud and clear. STAY OUT! What a change! Why? Down the riverside and around the bend, the picture was clear. The bridge was broken! The mighty metal ropes which had held its weight had collapsed. The wooden side barriers were no longer straight, but splintered and sagging. Broken and out of order, the foot bridge dipped sharply down to catch the spray from the swift current. It was not functional. It had to be repaired.

How was it so severely damaged? It was rendered dysfunctional due to the villainous acts of 30 teen age boys visiting from another region. Their parents and overseers stood by and watched as they forced extreme pressure by swinging the bridge with all their weight, laughing and badgering the bridge until a sharp crack punctured their play. .and sent them hurtling downward toward the rolling water below. None was severely hurt.

Sin too, mars beauty and strength. It twists and breaks and destroys lives and purpose and joy. But Jesus can restore and heal, forgive. And we can stand there, a witness of God's amazing grace.

“ .For by faith ye stand (II Cor. 1:24).”

February 15, 2004

In the great western lands there exist what is called The Breaks. This is eroded rock of different kinds and colors which can stretch for miles in a beautiful, stirring expanse for all who see it. It is breathtaking in areas like Zion National Park where depths of the ravines can be hundreds of feet and the canyon width a mile or more. An early day rancher once said that it was a very poor place to lose a cow!

Wherever and however approached, those precipices can be formidable should a person accidentally fall into those deep crevasses below. The danger lies in traveling cross-country and without warning this great drop-off occurs before there is time to think.

It is said that the settling of the West when Indian and white man were not always friends, a cliff was often used as an escape route during hot pursuit. By plunging hundreds of feet into a deep lake, the pursued was safe for a time, leaving the pursuers high above, looking down with intense curiosity.

How interesting that this can relate to the spiritual worth of trusting God. .which Scriptures admonish us to do. That may be clear to some, but unclear to others. They would ask, How? Confusion could reign if in escaping sure danger, a person found himself standing on the edge of a high bluff and the Lord said, "Jump!" Logically, to do so would be destruction. .IF God did not keep His word and catch him. If he knew that God would rescue him, he would jump immediately. "He CAN do it. .but WILL He?" He wasn't sure.

That's like the times God asks us to trust His judgment when we cannot see the outcome. We may not be sure. Our cliff may be high. To become sure is based in His Word. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding (Prov. 3:5)." Why can we trust God's Word? Because it is pure. "Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him (Prov. 30:5)." Purity says He doesn't lie. Purity says He does not mislead. Therefore, we can trust what He says. When He says "Jump!", we can jump, knowing He will protect us with His shield.

Sometimes, in trusting God during critical times, we may face destruction. Instead of dwelling on destructive matters which we cannot control, we can say: "But God said. ." .and quote His Word. Remember, it is pure and we are not to lean on our own judgment. .but trust His. It will work! "But God said. ." His shield will be there.

February 8, 2004

Most of us know and appreciate Nelda Thomas. Her home is nestled in a beautiful country setting in Montana with mountains, trees 'n streams all around. She travels often and far, primarily teaching people how to study the Scriptures. Several years ago God had prompted her to work in the Bitterroot Valley, establishing Bible studies in all the towns from the south to the north. .about 100 miles. She had obeyed the command and her classes have spread beyond that boundary to encompass Bible workshops and ladies' retreats in many different states. She is quick to give God praise and to thank all who pray for her. .including us.

Nelda has experienced some physical difficulties recently and praises the Lord for His touch on her knee and the leg where a cancer was removed. Recently, she became ill with virus-like symptoms, yet needed to keep her scheduled appointments. Debating with herself whether she could make the trip to Salt Lake City, she decided to go and trust God for strength. During a layover in another airport she waited for her final connection, fell fast asleep. .and missed her flight! With a hurried prayer she soon found herself on another airplane and in a roundabout way she made her destination. .on time. She walked into the meeting room and found 80 ladies eagerly awaiting to hear her instructions. During the three-day workshop, she had surges of strength aplenty when teaching, but soon afterward the illness would drain her energy. Misery was her constant companion. The Lord was faithful and gradually her health improved. Our prayers were a big help. She expresses thanks often.

Another vignette of interest is when she was recently driving home on her country road. .at night. .when suddenly a herd of elk decided to make a crossing. About 50-80 of them plunged all around her vehicle, denting the hood and left fender. She got home safely and her vehicle has been repaired. Praise the Lord! What an adventure!

Nelda is planning to attend our August Church Campout, the Lord willing. .her only vacation time in the year. We try to make it a relaxing time for her by not asking her to work. She is excited and looks forward expectantly.

It is rewarding to be prayer partners with those on the front lines in God's great army. Thanks for doing your part. It counts.

