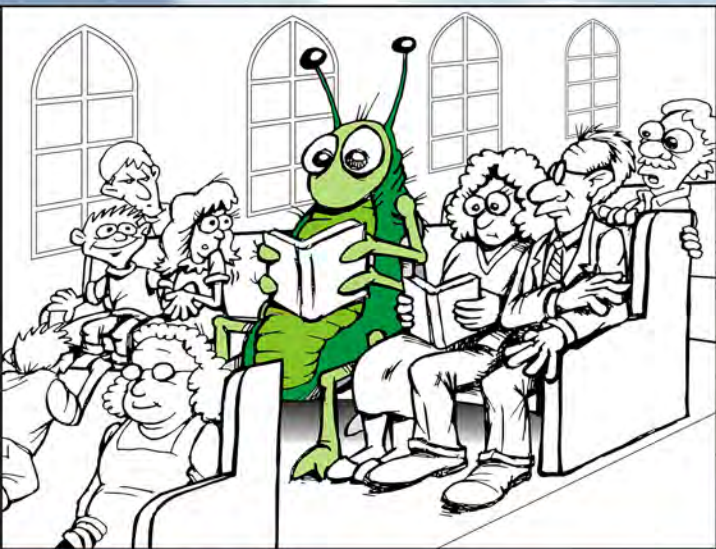


Hey God, There's a Bug in My Pew!



By Jerry Van Ronk

Ever faced situations where you cried out
“Why me?”

Are you troubled and bothered by other
people?

Have you wondered if you were important in
the universe?

If it weren't for bad luck would you have any
luck at all?

Is the future uncertain in your life?

Do you know anyone these questions fit?

This book will answer these questions
and more in a simple and humorous way!
Laugh, cry, and rejoice your way through the
next few pages. **What have you got to lose?**

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Understanding God's Plans
For Your Life!

By Jerry A. Van Ronk

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In Memory of **Pastor John Opperman** who
became my “Dad”

To the many Pastors and friends around the
country who have backed my ministry.

Most of all I dedicate this book to my wife
Jeanette

and to my children who have stood with me
in
the ministry and made this book possible.

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Chapter One: GOD?

It was a quiet Sunday morning in 1978. As the assistant manager of a large food store on the Oregon coast, I was just opening the store for the day when the first customer walked in. She was a middle-aged woman dressed in a long black dress with a large gold crucifix hanging around her neck. I greeted her with the usual ‘good morning’ and she smiled saying ‘good morning’ back as she disappeared down one of the aisles.

“Hey Jerry,” my morning cashier called me on the intercom, “Did you see that strange lady in black? She is busy talking to herself in the dairy section.”

Always on the alert for oddball behavior, I headed back to the dairy section to check this out. Sure enough, there was the lady in black picking up a yogurt container and talking to it. Then she would pick up a piece of cheese and

talk to it. Finally she grabbed a package of Parkay margarine and began to address it.

“May I help you find something?” I asked, wondering what she was up to.

“No, that’s okay. I just came in to talk with God,” She replied in a matter of fact tone of voice.

“I thought you went to church to speak to God?”

“Oh no, God is in everything and is everywhere. I just came in to talk to Him in the dairy section here,” she said with all seriousness.

I never knew until that moment that the *Crown of Glory* came from Parkay Margarine!

Today as a minister the whole idea of talking to God through inanimate objects is just plain crazy. Nevertheless, I wasn’t a Christian back then, and in some small way it seemed to make sense. After all, my grandmother had talked about God. Television shows mentioned God. There were a lot of different people who approached you at airports, parks, and even the zoo talking about God. Newspaper articles were written about God being dead. There were such a variety of opinions. Opinions, which brought endless conflicting views and confusion, seemed to be everywhere then, and still exist now. The question is now and was then, what or who is God?

There was a story heard at one pastor's conference that goes like this:

The world's scientists got together and built an enormous computer. They fed all the information known in the world into it. After completing their task, they asked it one simple question, "Is there a God?" The computer whirled and blinked and finally a card spit out with the answer, "There is now!"

We live in an age when God can be anything from a doorknob to a colossal cosmic computer somewhere out in the universe. We are flooded with a vast assortment of movies and television programs that present a whole array of images of God. In this country and through out the world, people worship anything from insects to the stars. Yet, God still declares Himself as the Great **I Am That I Am.**

Two pastors, one black and the other white, were constantly arguing over whether God was a black man or a white man. One day, after several years of friendly arguing, they decided to settle it by taking it to the middle of the street and fighting it out. As they prepared to duke it out a dump truck came around the corner and ran them both over.

They arrived before the Pearly Gates and God decided that if they were that desperate to know

whether He was black or white, he would meet them in person. As the Gates opened wide God stepped out in front of them arms opened wide and said, "Hola amigos, Como estas usted?"

I have been a Pastor and in the ministry for 26 years. I now fully understand how easy it is for some people to lack the understanding of who God is and how God thinks. Churches with different views of God exist throughout the world and all claim to be right in their theology. Each church presents its view with sincere conviction and confidence. We are desperate to satisfy our curiosity concerning God. We look towards anyone or any group who has a boldness to declare an answer as to God's nature, as though they are an authority. Let's look at just a few examples.

The mixture of Eastern religions in the past quarter century have added to the confusion that has risen in this country. There are many 'gods' or 'devas' in the texts of the Hindus, yet there is only one Supreme God. They call him Brahma. This god is elsewhere identified as Vishnu, Krishna, or Narayana. The devas are supposed to be empowered administrators in charge of different affairs in the material universe, much like angels in the Christian religion. Sometimes these devas are worshipped, but only for material benefits. They cannot give a human spiritual liberation.

Therefore they should not be put on the same level as God according to Hindu beliefs.

The American Indians worship in their culture many different gods, especially Mother Earth. The Hopi tribe worships rain and wind gods. The Aztecs of South America, as well as the ancient Egyptians worshipped sun and moon gods. So, you can see that depending on whom you are with, and to whom you listen, there reigns much confusion and many answers to that great question; who is God?

Before we look at who God is, I would like to tell you who God isn't. Our God is not the author of confusion. The enemy of our soul, the Devil himself, holds that position. The answer to who our God is lies within **His Word**. It has been there for the world to discover for all time. I believe that probably the highest authority on who God is and how God thinks would be His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus. When questioned by his disciples about his Father, Jesus declared in terms which they could understand:

John 15:1

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. (KJV)

Or in the New International Version of the Bible:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
(NIV)

Jesus said that his Father (God) was a farmer. Doesn't that fit with the Bible? I believe so. After all, the first thing that He created after forming the Earth was a garden, the Garden of Eden. One of the last things spoken of in the Bible are the trees planted by the River of Life. God created a garden. He filled it with plants and animals. He placed man in the garden and gave him dominion over it. God looked upon everything He had created and declared, "It is Good."

God told Adam and Eve to occupy and have dominion over the garden. God gave them dominion over the animals and the plants. They were free to do as they wished but they could not do one thing. They were told by God "Do not eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil."

Adam and Eve were busy enjoying the garden and the fruits of it. Lucifer, the devil, came and told Eve it was okay not to do what God had said. It was okay to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Lucifer convinced her that God had only forbidden them from eating of it because He did not want them to become Gods as He was.

Eve believed the lie and ate of the fruit. She then called Adam and shared the fruit with him. Sin likes company, and she shared her sin with Adam. From that time on, sin has been in this world, and everything has been going down hill due to their disobedience of God's commandment.

Because of their disobedience God removed them from His Garden of Eden and hid the garden from them. They then had to struggle against the weeds and elements of the Earth to Survive. God is no ordinary farmer. God is the PERFECT farmer. He created the perfect world and the perfect garden, but man has messed them both up. We bring about changes in the middle of God's perfection contrary to God's divine purpose.

God declares that He is God and he will not ever change. This applies to His design, His purpose, and His thoughts. Therefore, if we want to know how God thinks we must think like a farmer thinks.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth of the simplicity of Godly things. He asked the question directly to them. Who was it that was turning them away from that simplicity.

We cannot help but wonder who is making God so complicated today. God still has not

established an email address for man to communicate with Him and has never intended for man to know everything. His design has always been simple. He only gave Moses 12 rules on the mountain. Children keep things simple. That is why Jesus said that we must be as little children to enter heaven.

2 Corinthians 11:3 *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.* (KJV)

In his first letter, Paul had previously told them that we are as a field that God works in and through.

1 Corinthians 3:9

*For we are God's fellow workers; **you are God's field**, God's building.* (NIV)

God is a farmer. Most farmers that deal with nature have a simple understanding of how things work to obtain a harvest. It is inherent in the nature around them. They look at the cycles of life, the seasons, and they plan accordingly. Farmers plant, water, and reap. Farmers enjoy the results of their labor and it brings them great joy as they partake of the fruit of the harvest. God receives great joy from us when we produce fruit in our lives.

We have been given a great commission to go forth and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. John 15:2 confirms that God is looking for fruit in our lives and in an ever increasing quantity.

John 15:2

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (KJV)

Bearing fruit is the greatest form of pleasure that God receives from us. When we bring someone to the kingdom of God, the Bible declares that even the Angels cry with joy.

Luke 15:10

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (KJV)

Let's summarize this one more time before we go on.

1. God is a farmer and we must first understand how a farmer thinks as well as some of the principles that a farmer follows if we are going to understand God.

2. We, in our carnal minds, are in a constant battle to try and figure out God's great

plan. Most cults and religions flourish because they add words to explain the mysteries of God in human terms. Difficult as it appears to be, we must try to remember that the Gospel is not a long complicated process, but rather a simple message of hope and peace.

3. God tells us we must become as a little child in our understanding if we are going to make it to Heaven to dwell with Him.

Mark 10:15

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. (KJV)

I believe that the first eleven verses of John, Chapter 15 are the keys that would guide us to fulfill our Christian walk. In these verses we can know what God expects from us, and what can be expected by us from God.

John 15:1-11

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

4 *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

5 *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

6 *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

7 *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

8 *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

9 *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

10 *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*

11 *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. (KJV)*

Jesus states here that these words were written that we might have joy and that our joy might be full! I am amazed that we, as a country, spend billions of dollars on things that we hope will bring us the joy that is lacking within us. Like an addiction, we never quite get to the place in our lives where we are totally satisfied. It is always just one more new gadget, another new car, and another toy to play with. Yet, nothing brings us lasting joy. Real joy comes from

understanding how God thinks about you and having the knowledge of His expectations for your life.

In the following chapters we will try to look at how God views things from the farmer's perspective.

Chapter 2 : Times and Seasons

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
(KJV)

It was Christmas vacation and the wrestling practice was going a little long. Our wrestling coach had decided that we could use the extra mat time before our regular wrestling season began. About thirty of us were gathered in the gymnasium. We had run laps, done our usual exercise routines, and practiced some more wrestling moves. Now, instead of letting us go home, he had decided that we would have tag team matches.

We split into two groups. As one team would begin to flounder, the man on the mat would reach out to touch the hand of his teammate on the edge of the wrestling mat. The teammate would take over and the man that had reached for help would come out to rest.

My opponent was driving me hard on the wrestling mat. Every muscle in my chest and shoulders ached. My chest felt as though my lungs were collapsing. I could hardly get enough oxygen to feed the overworked tissue of my body. My friend Tony was at the edge of the mat nearest me. "Touch my hand Jerry! Touch my hand!" he called. I reached for his hand straining with all my might to touch his fingers. As we almost made contact his voice changed and he said "But not now!"

One of the most common questions asked is "Why didn't God?" Why didn't God heal someone we know? Or why didn't God answer our prayer? We have all been in the position at one time or another of calling out to God and feeling as though we are reaching deaf ears. We have our hands outstretched reaching towards heaven and God seems to be pulling His hand back and saying "But not now!"

David writes in the Book of Psalms

Psalms 71:9-12

9 Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.

10 For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together,

11 Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.

12 O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. (KJV)

Indeed the question is “Why?” The answer is that God is a good farmer. A good farmer knows that timing will mean the difference between success and failure when it comes time to gather a harvest. If a farmer plants his seed too early in the season, a frost can come and destroy his young plants before they take root and become established. If he waits to plant too late, the weather can change again, thus destroying the vines and fruit with a frost before they reach maturity. Waiting requires patience.

A good farmer has to have a great deal of patience. Farmers gain their patience through experience. Experience is gained through trials and errors as well as successes. Experience begins as hope, which is the root of faith. Faith is the thing that leads to fruit in our lives. Let me explain it this way.

The Bible states in **Hebrews** 11:6 that:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.(KJV)

Millions of people play the lottery in America. They buy tickets for one or two dollars and hope that they will win millions of dollars. There is no guarantee that they will win, only that they have a chance to do so. Suppose I was the head of the lottery and I told you that a certain set of numbers were going to be the winners in the next

drawing. You would not know if I were telling you the truth or not. You don't by a ticket. The numbers are drawn and they are the set that I had given you. I give you another set for the next drawing. This time you bet on the numbers because of your previous experience and your knowledge that I gave you the correct numbers the previous time. You are now acting by faith from experience.

Faith is the firm conviction that what you hope for will happen based on experience. This experience can be either your own or someone else's that you trust. I have a button gotten as a promotion from a hamburger chain that simply states **"Trust is Promises Kept."**

In the Readers Digest Magazine I read the following story:

A young man joined the Army and was put in the paratroopers. After several days of training his outfit prepared for their first jump and boarded the plane. When they reached five thousand feet the men began to jump out. The young man froze at the door.

"What's the matter?" his sergeant asked.

"How do I know this is going to be all right?" the recruit asked.

"Son, this is the Army. We have given you a parachute. If it doesn't work we have given you an extra one on your belly in case of just such an

emergency. Count to ten and pull its cord. Now, don't worry, there will be a truck on the ground to take you back to the base." The sergeant calmed the recruit as he pushed him out the door.

Naturally, the first parachute didn't open. The recruit counted to ten and pulled the emergency chute's cord. It didn't open either. "It figures" thought the recruit, "I bet there's no truck down there to take me back to base either."

God has never expected you to blindly jump up and say that He exists and now you should follow Him. First He shows you that He is by the nature around you. Then God makes many promises in the Bible and records how He keeps His promises so that you may develop faith. He told Adam and Eve that they would die if they disobeyed his word. Although it took over 900 years, they died. He said that Jesus would die and be resurrected in three days. He was and He did! Jesus said that if you will believe on Him you will be resurrected also. Because He was, you can have faith that you will be. Christian faith is summed up in a coffee cup I used to carry around that had printed on it in big, bold letters, the following words **"God said It, I believe It, That settles It!"**

Many churches wisely have a large clock on the wall behind the congregation where it is quite obvious to the preacher. The church where my friend Sam had been invited to speak did not. As

time went on, Brother Sam finally commented that he had forgotten his watch and asked, "Does anyone have the time?" "There's a calendar right behind you," piped a voice.

When we are in the middle of a crisis we count the minutes, and perhaps seconds. To God time doesn't really matter. He counts days and perhaps years. The Apostle Peter reminded the church in 2 Peter Chapter 3:

2 Peter 3:8

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the

Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (KJV)

King David after going through his problems reflected:

Psalms 90:4

For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. (KJV)

A farmer knows that you simply cannot get good results rushing the natural course of things. A chicken takes 21 days to hatch from an egg. An egg consists of the white and a yolk. The yolk is the developing chick and the white is the food for the chick while it is in the egg. There is just enough white in the egg to supply

nourishment to the baby chick twenty days. It takes another day for the chick to push with its legs and wings, and develop strength enough to break the eggshell around it. Without the struggle during the next day the baby chick would not have the strength to survive. The struggle against the shell strengthens the baby chick's legs and wings to provide victory over its imprisonment.

As a new Christian, I was excited about the Lord. I started growing rapidly as a baby Christian. My hunger to know the things of God grew and increased daily. But I was consuming knowledge without exercising my faith in Him. The smooth early days that came as a new believer in Jesus Christ suddenly ended. The world came crashing down around me much as a rock caught in a spring flood. I found myself upside down and filled with inner turmoil as I faced my first trial of my new life. Why was I going through this I asked?

I had to drive sixty miles each way to work and I would spend that time praying. The more I prayed and struggled, the more turmoil there appeared to be within me. One afternoon on the way home, I was at the end of my rope. I just couldn't take it anymore. I cried out to God and pleaded my plight. "God give me an answer. When is it going to end? You promised you

would never leave me nor forsake me,” I prayed. “You promised to protect me and to bless me.”

The radio was tuned to the local Christian station. I was enjoying a praise song as I prayed when all of a sudden the music stopped and the announcer came on. “Our scripture verse for today is found in Hebrews chapter 6, verse 15. *And so having patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*”

I knew without a doubt that these words were the answer from God to me. He was alive in my heart and had heard me in the midst of the storm. I quit struggling in panic and found the strength to endure the trial I was going through. I decided to believe God for the solution to my turmoil and to rest in Him. When the time was right the answer and the promise came. Life became good once more until the next time.

Paul said that this is how it will be:

Romans 1:17

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (KJV)

We get an answer so that we may know we can trust God. This gives us faith to trust Him the next time we need help in the middle of a trial or any situation that lies ahead.

Chapter 3: Choosing the Site

It was in the month of January 1971 that I decided to join the armed forces. Vietnam was constantly in the news and, as a seventeen-year-old boy, it seemed a glorious way to get out on my own and prove my manhood. I had to go to the Armed Forces Induction Center in Portland, Oregon to take a physical and be tested for placement. I had already decided that the Marine Corps was to be the branch I would join. After all, that was the place “Real Men” belonged.

As I stood in line with about a hundred other young men, two soldiers came down the line calling out individuals who had been drafted into a separate group. They then lined them up and a gruff looking Marine Gunnery Sergeant walked down the line putting stickers on the shirts of different men. When he had reached the end of the line, he turned and told those with the stickers on their shirts to form a new line on his right. Obediently they fell in where he had

designated them. He then turned to our group and told those of us who had enlisted in the Marines to join them. We moved quickly into place. When we were in our place he welcomed all of us in the group to the United States Marine Corps. Some of us had volunteered, some were chosen! It is the same in the kingdom of God.

I look at myself today and I am awed at what God has done with me in the ministry. I never thought I would be a "big shot" minister. (*I have gotten big, and I am almost shot!*) After all, ministers have to be tall, thin, and good looking, with lots of wavy hair. I am short, over weight, and bald with a rough looking exterior. (*The only wave in my hair was good- bye as it left!*) When I first got saved, I told myself that sitting in a pew and supporting a church was all that I needed to do to be a good servant of God. I had done a mighty and great deed by choosing to include Jesus in my life.

Then one day, while I was reading my Bible, I came across a scripture that changed my life profoundly. The scripture is found in the very same chapter that we have been talking about- John chapter 15, verses 15&16.

John 15:15-16

15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called

you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

16 ***Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you,** that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (KJV)*

I read it again and then again. I thought I had chosen Jesus. I was the one who decided to make a commitment to Him. The scripture says that He chose me! How could that be? I had so many things that were ungodly in my life. Having never been raised in a church, the Marine experience exposed me to drugs, alcohol, and pornography. I was involved in a world of trying to achieve riches and prestige at any cost. Why would Jesus choose me?

The first thing a good farmer has to do when the time is right to plant his crop is choose a site to raise what he desires to grow. He looks around for just the right spot. He doesn't choose a barren spot without anything growing on it, but rather one that is overrun with weeds and vegetation. He knows there is fertile ground under all the weeds. Look at what God told Ananais in the story of Paul's conversion. We find it in the ninth chapter of the Book of Acts.

Acts 9:1-16

1 *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,*

2 *And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

3 *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*

4 *And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

5 *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutes: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

6 *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

7 *And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

8 *And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*

9 *And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

10 *And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.*

11 *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house*

of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. (KJV)

Saul, who was later known as Paul, had already been at the stoning of Stephen. He even held Stephen's coat as his men stoned him. He was now out to do even more damage to the church. If there ever seemed a more unlikely candidate to do something for Jesus, it was Paul. Yet God said He had chosen him! Just like **He has chosen you!**

Do you find the fact that God would choose people hard to understand? It was for me also at one time, but it isn't really now. God, unlike men, looks at the inward workings of the heart, not the outward. God doesn't care what you look like. He only cares that you have a heart for Him!

1 Samuel 16:7

7 *But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: **for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.***(KJV)

At one time Andrew Carnegie was the wealthiest man in America. He came to America from his native Scotland when he was a small boy, did a variety of odd jobs, and eventually ended up as the largest steel manufacturer in the United States. At one time he had forty-three millionaires working for him. In those days a millionaire was a rare person. Conservatively speaking, a million dollars in his day would be equivalent to at least twenty million dollars today.

A reporter asked Carnegie how he had hired forty-three millionaires. Carnegie responded that those men had not been millionaires when they started working for him but had become millionaires as a result.

The reporter's next question was, "How did you develop these men to become so valuable to you that you have paid them this much money?" Carnegie replied that men are developed the same way gold is mined. When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold; but one doesn't go into the mine looking for dirt -- one goes in looking for the gold.

That's exactly the way God views people. We are but diamonds in the rough to Him. He doesn't look for the flaws, warts, and blemishes. He looks for the gold, not for the dirt. He looks for the good, not the bad. He wants to make you into a person of character and value in His Kingdom. God knows what you are doing right now.

God knows every hidden thing. There is nothing hidden from God. He knows what to chip away in order to make you sparkle and shine bright. Like a great artist, God knows the proper sequence to chip away to avoid damaging the finished masterpiece.

Hebrews 4:12-13

*12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, **and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.***

13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.(KJV)

God knew the reason that Saul was persecuting the church. He knew it was out of love and zeal for Him. He knew that that same zeal and love for Him could be turned and used

to build the church. God holds the future for us in His hands. Psalms 139 really opened my eyes.

Psalms 139:15-16

15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. (KJV)

Or even easier to understand in the NIV Version

Psalms 139:15-16

15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

*16 your eyes saw my unformed body. **All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.** (NIV)*

God already knows where you are and what you are doing. He knows what you are capable of doing for Him and He has chosen you! Paul says in Romans:

Romans 8:27-31

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?(KJV)

A lot of people believe that to be predestined means to take away the freedom of choice. **It couldn't be further from the truth!** Predestined means that there is an understanding that something is to take place. The Strong's Concordance definition states that to predestine means simply to determine in advance.

For instance, suppose you and I agree to meet at a certain restaurant, in a certain town, at a certain time. We have predestined a meeting. Should one of us change our mind it doesn't change the predetermined fact. God has predestined us to be with Him. You see the Apostle John wrote:

I John 2:1-2

1 *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:*

2 *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*(KJV)

When Jesus died on the cross everyone who came after Him was predestined to go to Heaven and be with God. They were not only to be with Him, but also to become a son or daughter.

Galatians 4:4-7

4 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*

5 *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

6 *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

7 ***Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*** (KJV)

It doesn't matter how bad you are, you were chosen for who you are and what you can become. There is nothing you can physically do to make yourself right before you come to God. Jesus died to make you right. You must accept salvation, the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

I say accept, because God has already done the work for you. We think that we must do good works and that if we do, maybe our names will be written down in the Lamb's Book of Life. I have searched the scriptures and nowhere have I found that if I am good my name will be written down. What I have found is that if I don't choose Christ and I don't keep His commandments, then my name will be erased. It is Jesus that makes me right and keeps my name in the Book!

Colossians 1:13-14

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. NIV

John 3:14-18

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath

not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
(KJV)

Our rejoicing should be in the gift of life that Christ has brought us. We try to keep ourselves driven by our own ambitions and desire to do things in our own way, and in our own time. Yet, we always have an emptiness that we struggle to fill.

Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept, because, he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Where then is happiness found? The answer is simple: In Christ alone. He said, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man can taketh from you."

Jesus said we should rejoice not because of what we can do, but rather because of what He has done.

Luke 10:20

Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. (KJV)

As I have stated; your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is a free gift from God. You simply have to take it for yourself. If you do

not accept the gift of redemption through Jesus then:

Psalms 69:27-28

27 Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness.

28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. (KJV)

Yet if you do, then you have overcome and Jesus says:

Revelation 3:5

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. (KJV)

Now the choice to respond to God is yours to make. God loves you and has a plan for your life. He has made you an overcomer through Jesus Christ in all things concerning His plans. Look at Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 1:4-8

4 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

7 *But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.*

8 *Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. (KJV)*

God knew your potential and chose you for a mission. Does this hold true to the Word of God? I believe so. Let us take a look at the Old Testament for the moment. Jerebaum the King had become afraid that if his people went to Jerusalem to worship that they might not return. He set up two temples in his kingdom. One was in Dan and one in Bethel. He appointed people that were not of the priesthood as priests and had the people sacrificing calves and burning incense in the two temples. This was a sin unto God. God sent an unnamed prophet to speak to Jerebaum. Thus we read:

I Kings 13:1-2

1 *And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jerebaum stood by the altar to burn incense.*

2 *And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. (KJV)*

One hundred thirty seven years later the story continued:

II Kings 22:1-13

1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.

2 And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

Ten years later the young King received a burden. This burden was to fix up the temples. He sent one of his staff member's sons to see the Priest.

3 And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying,

4 Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people:

5 And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house,

6 Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house.

7 *Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully.*

While working on the temple and digging through the rubble they found a scroll with the story of the unnamed Prophet written on it.

8 *And Hilkiab the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiab gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.*

9 *And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD.*

10 *And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiab the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.*

11 *And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.*

Josiah read the prophecy that had been given to Jerebaum. He read what God had said about him and the things that he would accomplish in his reign as king. It caused him to rip his clothes in grief and in repentance. After he had repented he took action.

12 *And the king commanded Hilkiab the priest, and Abikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of*

Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,

13 Go ye, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us. (KJV)

Repentance requires action. After hearing what was written concerning him, Josiah purged the kingdom of everything that was found to be evil against the God of David. He then sent out a decree to keep the Passover. A revival broke out.

II Kings 23:21-25

21 and the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the Passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.

Not just a revival, but also the greatest revival that there had ever been. This revival came because of a change in Josiah's heart and a change in the way his kingdom was living.

22 Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah;

23 But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this Passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.

24 Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.(KJV)

The revival was such that it was written that there was never one to equal it nor ever a King like Josiah.

If we could only for a moment imagine what could be written down concerning us. If we could only begin to do that which God has asked us to do, and we know we should do, then we could turn our country back to doing what is right. Perhaps the greatest revival is yet to take place! After all, God has chosen you, and as a farmer expects a great harvest to come!

Matthew 28:19-20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (KJV)

Unfortunately most Christians are "sterile". That is to say, they never reproduce themselves. God has clearly commanded us to make disciples not just decisions. Consider this found in a German farm paper:

The total offspring of a single pair of flies, if they survived to the end of summer, would create a mound big enough to cover Germany to a depth of 46 feet.

Next time you swat a housefly, remember the importance of spiritual reproduction. God expects us to win the world to Him one at a time. There are not always big crowds to speak to. There is always someone with whom you can share what Jesus has done for you. Whether they believe or not is up to them, not you.

Mark 16:15-16

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (KJV)

Chapter 4: Clearing the Ground

Hosea 10:12

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. (KJV)

In June of 1978 I was working for a grocery chain near Portland, Oregon. I was married and had two little girls, and like most young couples, we were extremely in debt.

To earn extra money I had signed up for a one-year hitch in the Oregon National Guard. Because I was a prior serviceman, I only had to enlist for one year. I was not able to attend any of the weekend drills as required due to a promotion I received with the grocery chain I worked for.

Shortly after my promotion the grocery retail clerks union went on strike. Suddenly, just as summer was starting, we had no income. I was in deep despair when I received a call from the National Guard Unit to which

I was assigned. It was time for the Guard unit's two weeks of annual training. If I didn't show up I would be ordered to full time status in the Army until my year was up.

I needed the money and I had no other way to earn any so I gladly reported to my unit. The problem was that I had not been to any of the drills. Since I had not been to any of the weekend drills, the only job I was qualified to do was to be the Commanding Officer's or C.O.'s driver.

Our Commanding Officer was a man named Captain Dan Vawter. I reported to him and he was quick to set me down with his expectations.

“ Corporal Van Ronk, I want you to know right up front that I am a Christian. As such, I don't smoke, don't drink, don't cuss, and don't tell dirty jokes. I will every so often have you pull over to the side of the road. I will do so that I may get alone with God and seek guidance for the maneuvers. You may smoke then if you need to.”

“Yes Sir” I answered, not really sure what I had gotten myself into.

For two weeks we slept, ate, and rode around together. I was amazed that the

Captain never once preached at or to me. He kept his word though. He never cussed, told dirty jokes, smoked or drank liquor. He frequently had me pull to the side of the road so that he could get off alone to pray. By the end of the two weeks I was squirming. I knew there was something different about this man than any other I'd known who ever had claimed to be a Christian. He not only talked the talk, but he walked the walk.

The camp was 125 miles north of our Armory. As the C.O.'s driver, I was the lead vehicle in the convoy of seventy-one trucks going back down the coast highway toward home. It was silent in our jeep at first. The Captain and I were leading those men and machines. I was contemplating what I was going to do back at the store with the strike still on. My mind was troubled by the uncertainties that faced me. Suddenly the silence was pierced by the Captain's voice.

“I can't help but noticing you are not very happy Jerry. You seem to be troubled this past couple of weeks. In fact you really seem troubled right now. Would you like peace?”

“Yes, I would.”

“Are you a Christian?”

“No.”

“Jesus can bring peace into your life. He can change you so that you never have to fear again. He died for your sins two thousand years ago. He did this so that you could have peace with God, peace with life, and peace within yourself. You would like that peace wouldn't you?”

Tears welled up in my eyes as I answered a weak “Yes”.

“Then repeat after me, Lord I acknowledge that you died for me and took my sins upon you. I am a sinner and would like to be set free. Please forgive my trespasses and come into my heart that I might have your spirit within me.”

I repeated those words with him. I must have been quite a sight going down the road crying like a baby. I was a baby and I felt refreshed and full of joy with a newness in my heart.

When I got back home I boxed up the drugs, pornography, liquor, and even my brand new bar that I had built, and carried them to the trash dumpster in the back alley. I have often wondered since then what the trash man must of thought as he looked at the

collection of filth that had come out of my life. I didn't care then. I had been made clean!

A good farmer expects to have to cleanse or rid the ground that he has chosen of the weeds and the other unwanted things growing in it. He does this by taking a plough and turning the ground over one hundred and eighty degrees. This brings up the roots and the non-sprouted seeds buried deep and hidden from view into the open where the sun shines down and kills them.

God, the good farmer, does the same thing in choosing you. He takes the sin in your life and turns it one hundred eighty degrees. He exposes it to the glorious Son, Jesus Christ. The light from Christ pierces the darkness of the soul and causes a cleansing to take place.

Jesus said of Himself:

John 8:12

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
(KJV)

Paul says of his conversion:

Acts 22:6-10

6 *And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.*

7 *And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

8 *And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.*

9 *And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.*

10 *And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.(KJV)*

The Apostle Peter says that we are:

1 Peter 2:9-10

9 *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

10 *Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.(KJV)*

Paul the Apostle says it this way:

2 Corinthians 4:6

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (KJV)

In the winter of 1976, John Jordan, together with three of his friends, decided to photograph Niagara Falls. They went to Goat Island to enjoy the icy beauty. While there, Jordan and two others climbed the drifts that covered protective railings, then he fell into the water along the shore about 200 feet upstream from the falls. The other two scrambled back off the ice to land, but Jordan was swept down to within fifteen feet of the brink of the Horseshoe Falls. There, somehow, he was able to grasp and cling to a chunk of ice. He hung on until Patrolman James MacNeil came along and was able to finally rescue him.

We find ourselves on the brink of disaster often enough. We live in a world that is so full of danger among the beauty. We like to live on the brink of danger and every now and then we get too close and we fall. Sometimes we escape and sometimes we don't. God sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue us if we can hold on.

Whenever we become silent and cover God's protective railings, that is, the moral laws of God, we endanger the lives of those

under our care. Right now, in the wintertime of the Church, little is said about the necessity of obeying God's laws. We sin openly and get closer and closer to the dangers that those very laws were written to protect us from. The wages of sin is still death. Let us continue to rescue the perishing and care for the dying. Let us preach too without shame God's moral law. No longer can we cover over the commandments that forbid adultery, fornication, and immorality and say they no longer apply.

And to the Ephesians Paul writes also:

Ephesians 5:6-8

6 *Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

7 *Be not ye therefore partakers with them.*

8 *For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:(KJV)*

John the Apostle states it this way:

I John 1:5-7

5 *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

6 *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:*

7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*
(KJV)

You see, when the light of God shines on you, then the knowledge of Jesus Christ fills your heart and not just your mind. His Words become life to you. It flows and then pours back out to bring life to others, free from the weeds and sin that so were so easy to have entangled you before.

John 8:31-32

31 *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*

32 *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* (KJV)

What about those things that keep overtaking you no matter how hard you try? Paul had that problem.

Romans 7:14-19

14 *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

15 *For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*

16 *If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.*

17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (KJV)

As the nature of trees and plants is in the seed from which they originate, so the cause of our transgressions is our own corruption. We are moved to do evil, and we are hindered from doing good by the corrupt seed from which we were conceived. This has been so since the fall of Adam and Eve. Only the Holy Spirit can change our nature.

A good farmer knows that you have to go back and cultivate the ground to keep it clear. The dust of the earth has hidden deep in it the seeds and roots of wild things. Man was created from that dust, and like the dust of the earth the mortal dusty body has seeds deep within it. God is continually working us to keep us clear of sin. He has ordained that when this life is over our mortal bodies will return to the earth from which they came as dust once more.

Genesis 3:19

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou

taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (KJV)

When I was sixteen I got a job with five other boys working for a farmer setting irrigation pipe. We had to change three one-mile lines every three hours. After changing the lines the first time we discovered that it only took one hour to change all three lines. This left us two hours with nothing to do.

We, as boys will do, lay under a big oak tree and began to talk about how we would spend our money and what a great job we had. Hot in the middle of the discussion, the farmer pulled up in his new pickup.

“What are you boys up to?” he asked.

“Just resting until the next changing of the irrigation pipes” we answered.

“Well, come here boys. I have presents for you”.

We rushed to his pickup with great expectations only to be met with five brand new hoes. He took us to the start of the planting and introduced us to a weed called Morning Glory. There was no glory to it. We worked hard and managed to hoe all 426 acres in eight days. We worked hard and fast

thinking that we could then take a break and get paid for doing nothing.

Before we sat down under the tree once more, we decided to check the front of the field where we had begun. Sure enough, there were the green vines wrapping themselves around the corn and beans. Needless to say, we never did get to rest.

A good farmer knows that it takes continued work and cultivation to keep the wild things in check and under control. God is a good farmer. He is constantly dealing with the hearts of His people to help them bring the flesh under subjection. He has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us and to illuminate the problem areas. We merely have to stay walking in the Spirit.

Romans 8:1-6

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

4 *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

5 *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.*

6 *For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (KJV)*

God knows that we are weak and so He has sent us a powerful tool to destroy those weeds that seem to get a hold on us. The Blood shed at the cross of Calvary is that tool and we apply it as needed by confession.

I John 1:7-10

7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

8 *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

9 ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

10 *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (KJV)*

Falling into sin doesn't condemn anybody, but staying in sin does. I gleaned the following from *Field and Stream Magazine*.

A visitor at a fishing dock asked an old fisherman who was sitting there, "If I were to fall into this water, would I drown?"

It was a strange way of asking how deep the water was, but the fisherman had a good answer. "Naw," he said. "Fallin' into the water doesn't drown anybody. It's staying under it that does."

We still need to repent and come clean before God. Falling into sin doesn't have to do us in, but staying under the guilt of our sin will drown us. God knows this. That is why we still have conviction when we sin.

Revelation 3:19-22

19 *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: **be zealous therefore, and repent.***

20 *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

21 *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*

22 *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*(KJV)

Chapter 5: Fertilizer

Matthew 6:8

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (KJV)

I grew up on a farm. On the farm we had two thousand rabbits, six hundred guinea pigs, eleven horses, several cows, sheep, goats, chickens, geese, dogs, and cats. We always had a great big garden and I would have to shovel the manure from all those animals to be used as fertilizer. I state this to qualify the fact that I know quite a bit about fertilizer (the natural kind). Just like the character Bubba in the movie *Forest Gump* who knew all there was to know about shrimp, I know about fertilizer.

One day as we were talking and I was complaining about shoveling out the horse stalls, my grandfather asked, “Do you know what they call horse manure?”

“No”, I answered, “What?”

“Road apples.”

An idea sprouted forth. I had always been a dreamer of ways to become a millionaire before I turned twenty-one. Now I had the perfect idea, I would bag the manure and sell it as "*road apples*" at the front of the driveway.

Bright and early I had my stand set up. An old plank with ten brown shopping bags filled and neatly stapled closed. A large sign above them declaring in bright red words written as neatly as any ten year old could do- **“Road Apples- \$1 per Bag.”**

My first customer was my neighbor. He had just purchased a new pickup truck and was on his way to work. He held out a dollar and said, “I’ll take a bag of those apples.”

I handed him a bag and stared at the dollar. My mind raced as to how I was going to frame that dollar and how there would be so many more coming my way. I was so engrossed in thought that I forgot to say anything about what was in the bag as he drove off.

Suddenly there was the sound of screeching brakes and an engine gunning as tires spun backwards. My neighbor had wanted a cool apple for breakfast and had torn the bag open to eat one on the way to

work. Horse droppings were all over the seat of his new truck. I was out of business and after I got through cleaning up the mess, I had to give back the dollar. One thing I can tell you about fertilizer, it often stinks!

We have the impression when we first get saved that life will suddenly be perfect. We will never have any more problems. Yet problems come. Jesus declares:

Matthew 5:45

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (KJV)

Let us face the facts, the truth is life often stinks.

The Apostle Peter says:

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: (KJV)

The story goes as follows concerning an accident response from a worker:

I am writing in response to your request for additional information. In block number 3 of the

accident reporting form, I put, "Poor Planning", as the cause of my accident. You said in your letter that I should explain more fully, and I trust that the following details will be sufficient:

I am a bricklayer by trade. On the day of the accident, I was working alone on the roof of a ten-story building. When I completed my work, I discovered I had about 500 pounds of bricks left over. Rather than carry them down by hand, I decided to lower them to the ground in a barrel by using a pulley which, fortunately, was attached to the side of the building at the tenth floor.

Securing the rope at ground level, I went to the roof, loaded the 500 pounds of bricks, then went back down to the ground and untied the rope, holding it tightly to insure a slow descent of the 500 pounds of bricks. (You will note in block 11 of the accident reporting form that I weigh 135 pounds). Due to my surprise at being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rapid rate up the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the fifth floor, I met the barrel coming down. This explains the fractured skull and broken collarbone.

I continued my rapid ascent, not stopping until the fingers of my right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley.

Fortunately by this time I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold tightly to the rope in spite of my pain.

At approximately this same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground, and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel now weighed approximately 30 pounds.

I refer you again to my weight in block number 11 of the accident reporting form. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the fifth floor, I met that barrel coming up again! This accounts for the two fractured ankles and lacerations of my legs and lower body.

The second encounter with the barrel slowed me enough to lessen my injuries when I fell into the pile of bricks, and fortunately, only three vertebrae were cracked.

*I am sorry to report, however, that as I lay there on the bricks -- in pain and unable to stand -- watching the empty barrel ten stories above me -- I again lost my presence of mind -- **I LET GO OF THE ROPE.***

Sometimes our lives go in that direction. The trials seem to go from bad to worse and back to bad again.

In our garden, the manure was spread over the ground that we might reap a harvest from our garden. Each type of plant would require a different kind of manure. Our lives are the same way.

John 15:8

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (KJV)

God wants fruit in our lives. We ask ourselves, “*What could God do with me?*” We go through such a variety of trials and tribulations as we journey through this life. Our ministry is based upon those trials and the things that come our way.

Jesus says in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 12:11

And they overcame him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. (KJV)

The key words are our testimony. Without trials there would be no victory. Without victory, there is no testimony. Paul says that our ministry is given to us like this:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

3 *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;*

4 *Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by*

the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. (KJV)

Our testimony and the fruit in our lives are not that we are in trouble or in the middle of a trial, but that God is able to keep us and deliver us through the trial.

I love Tomatoes. There is absolutely nothing more wonderful than to walk out into the garden in the cool of the morning with a saltshaker in your back pocket. As you walk among the tomato vines, you spot a fresh red globe and pick it. A foot from your nose you taste it for the first time. Then, licking it, you sprinkle salt on it and consume it on the spot.

When I got married and we bought our first house, I was determined to plant a garden of my own. I picked out a spot in the back yard, had the ground worked up, and bought twenty tomato plants.

After carefully transferring them into the earth, I went inside to watch a spring baseball game on television. I was peacefully watching the game when a commercial came on for a product that claimed to make tomatoes grow best. Being impressionable at the time, I said “good-bye” to my wife, and headed for the local garden store.

I briskly walked the aisles until I found the **Miracle Grow**. There were many different sizes of packages to choose from. They varied from 8 ounces to a ten-pound box. Being the kind of guy that I am and seeing as how I really like tomatoes, I grabbed the ten-pound box on the bottom shelf and headed home.

Now, my wife knows me better than anyone else, and as I entered the front door she saw the large box I had purchased and called out “Honey, you had better read the directions first.”

I looked at the side of the box and read very carefully: “*Mix 2 tablespoons to one quart of water*”. What kind of puny mixture would that be? Nevertheless I did as the instructions said and fed the plants the weakened formula.

The next morning I got up early to head off to work. Before leaving I went out to check the progress of my plants. To my amazement, there was about a half inch of new growth! My, Oh My, I thought if that puny mixture did that well, I would make a man’s mixture and show my wife a thing or two. I carefully measured a half-gallon of Miracle Grow into a bucket, added a gallon of water, stirred, and poured the thick blue syrup around each plant. Then, quietly I left for work.

My mind wasn't really on work all day. I kept imagining what it would be like to get home and find my tomato plants eight feet tall! I could visualize the local paper coming out to take my picture. Imagine, me holding a tomato the size of a basketball! I worked this up so well that I rushed home and, instead of going in the house first, I grabbed my tape measure and went to the garden.

What a shock I received when instead of tremendous growth, all my plants lay dead on the ground! You see, a good farmer doesn't over fertilize! God is a good farmer. Paul understood this when he wrote to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 10:13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.(KJV)

God is not in this plan for your life to kill you off. He wants you to have life and life abundantly! If you are going through a problem, start praising God and giving Him the glory. He wants to rescue you. See how fast He can bring you out of it. The Bible Illustrator tells the story like this:

A bone-weary father dragged into his home dog tired late one evening. It had been one of those unbelievable days of pressure, deadlines, and demands. He looked forward to a time of relaxation and quietness. Exhausted, he picked up the evening paper and headed for his favorite easy chair by the fireplace. About the time he got his shoes untied, plop! into his lap dropped his five-year-old son with an excited grin on his face.

"Hi, Dad. Let's play!"

He loved his boy dearly, but his need for a little time all alone to rest and think was, for the moment, a greater need than time with Junior. But how could he maneuver it?

There had been a recent moon probe and the newspaper carried a huge picture of earth. With a flash of much-needed insight, the dad asked his boy to bring a pair of scissors and some transparent tape. Quickly, he cut the picture of earth into various shapes and sizes, then handed the pile of homemade jigsaw puzzle pieces to him.

"You'll tape it all back together, Danny, then come on back and we'll play, okay?"

Off scampered the child to his room as dad breathed a sigh of relief. But in less than ten minutes the boy bounded back with everything taped perfectly in place. Stunned, the father asked: "How'd you do it so fast, Son?"

"Aw, it was easy, Daddy. You see, there is this picture of a man on the back of the sheet. And when you put the man together, the world comes together."

No matter how hard it appears to get through a trial and to get our lives back together again, God has a simpler way. He sees the back of the picture. He has made a way of escape. When we turn it over to Him in praise and thanksgiving He takes it and puts us together that we might bear fruit, much fruit, fruit that will endure!

Chapter 6 : Bugs!

Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

(KJV)

When I was eleven, I went deer hunting with my father. He was a very avid deer hunter and he would camp for days out in the woods. It was a time of adulthood reserved for the mature. I was proud to be included with the men.

The first day out I was hiking along the top of a ravine. The birds were chirping and the wind was gently rustling the autumn leaves. My heart was pounding so loud that I knew it would scare off the game, yet I hadn't gone too far when I came upon my first deer.

He looked so beautiful and majestic as he stood across the ridge from me grazing on the damp grass. I took aim and carefully pulled the trigger. He turned, looked at me with big brown calf like eyes, and then bolted down the hill. I aimed again on the run and fired. He fell down.

I approached him anxiously and as I drew near he turned his head towards me. He looked at me with those innocent, big brown eyes. I knew in that second as I fired one last shot to his head that I had killed Bambi! I was never able to deer hunt again.

Though I don't like hunting animals, I do like to hunt bugs. I find it rewarding to sit in my garden as the day turns to dusk, armed with an old insect sprayer, blasting any winged creature that comes my way. It is as though I am shooting down some enemy aircraft flying overhead in some old war movie. I could sit there for hours. Because of my patience and terrific aim, I didn't have many creatures attacking my beautiful foliage.

With the lack of pests my plants grew tall and lush. There were lots of pretty flowers, dark green leaves, and strong stems everywhere. They looked absolutely great. The only problem was that they had no fruit!

A good farmer knows that it takes bugs to produce fruit. Bugs fly from one flower to the next carrying pollen on their wings and legs. They are continually flying from one plant to the next leaving a deposit of pollen that they picked up from the stop before.

God knows that it takes bugs to produce fruit! After all my years in church, I can assure you that there are bugs in Church! There are bugs in my pew.

The Pastor will bug you. The Pastor's sermon will bug you. The music will bug you. The ushers will bug you. The visitors will bug you. The children will bug you. The old people will bug you. You can go on and on with the list. Let's face the facts; the church is full of bugs! Wherever you find people you will find bugs.

My wife had always wanted to go to Hawaii. One year we were invited to go with another Pastor and his wife to Honolulu. It was so exciting to get on the plane and finally be headed for the fulfillment of her long

cherished dream. What we didn't realize was how long the flight over to the islands would be nor how packed the budget flight would be!

There was not an empty seat anywhere. The tour company had had extra seats added to the plane and we could imagine how sardines felt in a can. As tight as things were, the flight would have been peaceful had it not been for this one fellow traveler who treated the plane as though it were his own. We were hot, hungry and trying to make the most out of the situation by thinking of other things. Yet this man was constantly walking around and helping himself to the refrigerator in the galley.

Here we were stuffed in seats. Seats we could not get out of for six hours, and this fellow was guzzling soft drinks and consuming peanuts as though none of the rest of us existed. To make matters worse, he would start talking to others in a very loud voice and then let loose with this hideous laugh when he thought he had been funny. His laughter and arrogance were to the point of being overly obnoxious by the time we landed in Honolulu. It was so grating on our nerves that my wife and I were in real danger of losing our good humor and joy.

At the airport we were greeted with a sweet smelling lei and we soon forgot the flight over. We signed for the usual tours and managed to go on and have a good time any way.

After our week spent being the tourist, we got to the airport a couple of hours early so that we could secure seats in the front of one of the sections. There we could move about on the way home and have a little more space to stretch. When we had boarded and taken our seats, there was one seat left available next to my wife. The seat remained empty until the very last moment.

You guessed it. The same man, instead of being farther from us, was now seated next to us all the way home!

God knows that it takes these bugs to stir your heart and break you to where in Romans 1:5 Paul declares that the *love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

It takes these bugs for us to come to the place where we can allow God's will to override our desires. Jesus came to this place of surrender:

Matthew 26:39

And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. (KJV)

I have found that when I get bugged I am taking things in church and around me too personal. I have forgotten that this is not my thing but God's thing. Paul reminds us:

Colossians 1:16-18

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (KJV)

Jesus is the head of all things and He is in control. He overlooks the times I am a bug and I need to overlook those people who are bugs to me. I cannot do it without truly making Jesus Lord of my life. In the Bible Illustrator we find the story of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.

William Booth walked among the poor, hungry, sick, and lonely people of London,

England. The people were crammed into crumbling buildings that were full of rats. They had no jobs. There was no one to help them. Worst of all, there was no one to tell them that Jesus cared. They did not know that Jesus died to be their Saviour and lives again to be their Lord.

William Booth told his wife, "I have given myself to work for God among those sick souls." The work that was begun at that time is today known as the Salvation Army.

Years later when someone asked General Booth the secret of his success, he said, "God has had all there was of me to have! From the day I got the poor of London on my heart, and a vision of what Jesus Christ would do for them, I made up my mind that God would have all there was of William Booth. God has had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life."

One area in church today that seems to cause the most irritation is the music. Each generation has it's own beat and type of music. There is such a variance that someone is always upset. The drums are too loud. Why do we need drums? The singer is off key. The songs are too long. The songs are too short. The songs are too fast. Why do we always have slow songs? Why can't we have slow songs? It is hard to please everyone.

I remember when The Beatles first came to America. My mother was always yelling at us children to turn the racket off the radio. The other day I was visiting her and she had the radio on. A Beatle's song played and she commented on how much she liked it. Now I find myself doing the same thing with my own children and the music they listen to.

A good farmer knows that it takes a variety of chemicals and conditions to grow a garden. Each type of plant takes a little different set of conditions and nutrients. Some can reach a balance acceptable to all, and some cannot. The secret to a thriving variety of plants or people is the balance. Balance comes from who you are, and who is in charge of your destiny.

William Booth gave Jesus complete charge of his life. He made Jesus Lord of all. We need to do likewise. Things and people don't come close to bugging us when we have the right perspective and see them from God's limitless point of view. We need to be reminded that it is not our opinions which count but God's. It is His Divine purpose and not my purpose that is important, unless my purpose is the same as His.

Chapter 7: Grafting

Colossians 2:7

7 ***Rooted** and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.* (KJV)

I grew up on a farm. On the farm, besides the animals that I have already mentioned, we had 210 cherry trees, three pear trees, and two apple trees. I came to love the orchard. It was my job to work the ground and spray the trees for insects. I enjoyed the orchard so much that I took a class on orchard practices in high school.

One of the areas of study that we covered was grafting. Most fruit trees come, not from the seeds of the fruit, but from grafting limbs from the kind of tree you want onto a seedling produced from a seed of that species of tree. In simpler words, if you want a Red Delicious apple tree you have to take a limb from a Red Delicious apple tree and graft it onto any other apple tree root. It doesn't matter what apple root you use. The same holds true if you are talking about

cherries, pears, apples, peaches, plums, etc. The branches determine the continuation of the type of fruit, not the seeds or roots.

The exception to this is the olive tree. Easton's Bible Dictionary says:

The "olive-tree, wild by nature" (Romans 11:24), is the shoot or cutting of the good olive-tree which, left ungrafted, grows up to be a "wild olive." In Romans. 11:17 Paul refers to the practice of grafting shoots of the wild olive into a "good" olive which has become unfruitful. By such a process the sap of the good olive, by spreading through the branch which is "grafted in," makes it a good branch, bearing good olives. Thus the Gentiles, being a "wild olive," but now "grafted in," yield fruit, but only through the sap of the tree into which they have been grafted. This is a process "contrary to nature" (11:24)

I made a call to The University of California in Davis, California and spoke to a botanist there. He informed me that this was correct. Contrary to the way every other fruit tree is produced; grafted olive branches produce the fruit of the rootstock.

Olive orchards are formed three ways. Branches are grafted into root systems; cuttings are taken and caused to root, or by splitting the root and grafting branches into the parts thereof. It makes no difference

which kind of branches you use. Whether the fruit is good or not is determined by the root (or vine), and not the branches.

Paul speaks of this to the church in Rome:

Romans 11:16-25

16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.

24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good

olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.(KJV)

When we first get saved, one of the hardest things to do is to let go and let God have His way through us. There is a constant battle within us to die and let God bring life. Our old nature wants to live and struggles to keep control. We are constantly trying to do for God instead of allowing God to do through us. Jesus said it very well when in John Chapter 15:5 he states:

John 15:5

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (KJV)

For it is being rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ that produces our ministries. It is surrendering to Christ and allowing Him to increase by His Holy Spirit within us that we become fruitful and bear much fruit. The mystery that Paul writes about is this: That we are joint heirs with Jesus. We can, and do receive the same gifts and inheritance that he

received. That inheritance comes to us the same way it came to Jesus.

Jesus said:

John 14:10-12

10 *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*

11 *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

12 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. (KJV)*

Because we are grafted into Christ, the Spirit of God dwells in us. As the Spirit dwells in us it begins to flow through us. As it flows through us, we manifest the works of God. The determining factor is on the amount of the Spirit that we will allow to flow through us. We must decrease so that He may increase. I believe that is why Paul says that he dies daily.

1 Corinthians 15:31

I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. (KJV)

That is, Paul doesn't get wrapped in his own thing but in Christ's thing. It is no longer how Paul views the people and situations, but how Christ views them.

I was attending Golden Oaks Bible School in California and was the youth pastor in a church in Sacramento, when I was invited to speak at a church in San Francisco. I felt honored that they would ask me to come and minister. I began fasting and seeking the Lord for the service three days before I was scheduled to speak. I was only speaking to the youth on their Saturday night service, but I wanted it to be a blessing.

Saturday came and I was prepared. When I ministered, God used me in a mighty way. The anointing was upon me, and people both young and old were ministered to. The altar was full at the invitation. I felt that I had arrived in the ministry. Watch out Billy Graham! Here comes Jerry Van Ronk.

Afterwards another pastor came to me and asked if I would minister the next morning at his church. My head swelled as I agreed to come. I knew I had arrived to greatness. A stranger had asked me to minister his Sunday morning service!

I should have known there was more to it than at first outwardly appeared. The pastor had asked me to meet him at an off ramp to the freeway so that I could help him pick up his people for church. Of course I said yes. I met him at the appointed place and time. Following him through the streets of San Francisco I was in shock when we pulled up in front of a street mission. Lying around on the sidewalk were various types of people. Some were sleeping. Some were drinking from brown paper bags. Some were high on drugs.

"Don't worry about the smell or the fleas," my new friend informed me as he started loading my car with people. "I have some spray to use in your car to take care of both later."

We arrived at the church building that he had rented in another part of town. His wife had prepared a meal for "his" congregation, and then I ministered the Word to them. Like a thousand hungry puppies, those thirty men and women fed on the Words of Life as I ministered on God's love from the Book of John. When I gave the altar call no one held back. They swarmed to the front for prayer and to receive strength from Jesus Christ! I was ecstatic as they began to come forward.

The first to reach the front was a little old man in a ruffled brown suit. He smelled of urine so strong that you began to notice it from thirty feet away. His thin white hair had fleas and bugs crawling all through it, their black bodies standing out as they crawled through his white wispy hairline. He approached with his arms outstretched for a hug of embrace, his eyes firmly fixed on mine. As I watched him approach I gagged on the stench and bugs. "Lord, please don't make me hug him." I cried under my breath at the repugnant thought of getting close to him.

The Lord spoke back to my soul and said, "My son, he looks no worse to you than you look to me." Something changed within me as I hugged that man. The love of God began to flow outward from within me. I prayed for him in a new light of compassion. Then, one by one, they came and I prayed for each person before me with a new sense of vision. I no longer looked at the outward appearance but truly saw them for what was in their hearts. I have never been the same since that day.

The Spirit that dwells in us determines our fruit! The Spirit that dwells in us is determined by where we go to seek our strength and nutrition. A life drawing from worldly things

will only produce worldly, unGodly fruit. A life drawing from Christ will produce good fruit. It will produce Holy Spirit Fruit.

It is God, the good farmer, which has determined what your life will produce. What it produces will strengthen His Kingdom. It is merely your task to submit to Him. Each of us has to reach the stage in our walk with Him that we are able to say "If it be your will let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but your will Lord."

Chapter 8: Planting for Harvest

Galatians 6:7

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.
(KJV)

We were just preschoolers when my sister and I began to help in the garden. We would always get to put seeds in the ground after mother had trenched the rows with a hoe. What great delight and pride we felt as we would place each seed, one at a time, carefully in the trench. When we had the seed set just right, placed in a straight line with the other seeds, we would pat the rich earth over it tucking it in to rest. Then mom would come behind us and give the row a dousing of water to start the seeds on their journey towards maturity.

Mom would buy treats once in a while for us and hide them in a drawer in the kitchen. One year, during planting season, we discovered a bag of brightly colored jellybeans in the drawer. We waited and one day after

mom had gone to fix dinner, my sister and I decided that we would plant our own crop. Carefully we trenched a row and, one after another, we planted the different colored jellybeans in a neat little row. We were sure we would avoid trouble when we harvested our first crop and had replaced those jellybeans that were missing from the drawer.

We watered and waited. We took extra care to protect the plants that came up on that special row that we had planted together. We made sure to put extra fertilizer and extra water on the plants that were thriving under our care. We waited and waited for our first crop of jellybeans. It is no surprise that by the end of the summer we had the healthiest crop of weeds in the garden.

A good farmer knows what to sow to get a crop. He knows the difference between those plants that he has planted and those plants that come up on their own. God is a good farmer. He knows what to plant in our lives to reap fruit from us. He knows which of us are His and which aren't His. It is unfortunate that we are as children in our understanding of what we are planting in our lives. Planting imitation seeds won't produce fruit. We live in a very plastic, artificial world.

Planting plastic, worldly seeds will never produce godly fruit.

We are as much in ignorance of the principals of sowing and reaping as some of the people in the poorer countries that our country has tried to help feed. We send them seeds to plant and because of their hunger they consume the seeds instead of planting them for a future harvest. If they would have planted the seeds and waited, then they would have had plenty to eat. Instead they received just a temporary easement of their hunger. The seed would have been multiplied. Instead of one kernel of corn they would have had several hundred. God has blessed us with good seeds to plant for the harvest to come. I believe we need to look at two areas of sowing. These are the Spiritual and the Physical areas of our being.

The first area is our ***character and reputation***. The spiritual man determines these. Character is what the world sees in us. Reputation is the fruit of our character when we are not around. Character is who we are without the plastic when we are all alone. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:14-15

14 *Do all things without murmurings and disputings:*

15 *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;* (KJV)

We live in a negative world. Life is filled to overflowing in this world with sin and darkness. A few years back I went to work for a newspaper in Sacramento, California called the ***Good News Review***. It was starting out with the promise that it would print only positive, uplifting, news from around the world. The paper lasted three months. No one was interested in the good news.

People, it would seem, would rather hear the bad news. Maybe this is so their world won't seem to be quite as bad and intimidating as it really is. After all, it is not so bad when someone else has it worse. My Grandfather used to say that he cried and cried because he had no shoes. Then he met a man who had no feet.

Perhaps our carnal man craves the bad so that he won't appear to be as corrupt as he really is. We have all heard, and have probably used the excuse that so and so is doing it. Our minds justify our character by comparing our own morality to one with a lower standard than we are normally compared to. Have you noticed how much violence, corruption, and

evil is focused at us from television and the other media? When we compare our own morality with the gauge of television, we find we are not so bad. Perhaps you have noticed a change in the attitudes and ambitions of our young people today. It is the result of the things that our young people, and even we our selves, have become accustomed to in our environment. For example, if we watch a show with profanity in it, we have a real danger of using profanity in our own conversations. It is not that we want to, but that it just slips out.

The Apostle Paul writes:

Ephesians 6:11-12

11 *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

12 *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (KJV)*

The battles that we wrestle for, and the seeds we need to plant, are in our minds and planted by our senses. You might have heard the old saying- "see no evil- hear no evil- speak no evil". These are the very things we contend with and that we need to plant in our lives.

We find the believers in the Book of Revelation sweet speaking:

Revelation 14:5

And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God. (KJV)

Jesus when he chose his disciples said of Nathanael:

John 1:47

*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, **Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!** (KJV)*

A change has to take place in us if we want to sow good seeds of character. We need to grow a righteous character in ourselves through the Holy Spirit. James, the Lord's brother, gave an understanding of this in his book:

James 3:18

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. (KJV)

To make peace we must first have the desire to change. We have to desire to be in Christ. We cannot develop that desire by staying focused on the world. Nor can we possibly achieve it by accumulating worldly possessions. That peace comes from Jesus

Christ. He told the crowd that gathered around Him:

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (KJV)

Plastic surgery, pills, or transplants cannot make us new. The Apostle Paul again writes:

Galatians 6:15-16

15 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, **but a new creature.***

16 *And as many as walk according to **this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.** (KJV)*

The secret that works in achieving peace and a righteous character is being in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, **he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.***

18 *And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;*

19 *To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses*

unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

21 *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*
(KJV)

How do you get in Christ? Paul again speaks on this:

Romans 12:2

*And be not conformed to this world: **but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* (KJV)

Philippians 2:5

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (KJV)

1 Peter 4:1-2

1 *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, **arm yourselves likewise with the same mind**: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;*

2 *That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.* (KJV)

What seed do we plant within ourselves to obtain this mind? Paul writes:

Philippians 4:8-9

8 *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think on these things.***

9 *Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: **and the God of peace shall be with you.*** (KJV)

The second area is the area of our *finances*. As joint heirs with Jesus I believe God wants to bless us. I don't mean with just money but in all the physical areas of our lives. Whether we stand or whether we fall hinges so much on how our physical comfort and finances are doing. Yet it is not just money. Finances are more than a little bit of change in our pockets. Finances are the clothes that we wear, the food that we eat, and the roof over our heads. Finances are the areas that we consume as we go through our time on earth.

Jesus told His disciples:

Matthew 6:25-33

25 *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

26 *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*

27 *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*

28 *And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:*

29 *And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

30 *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

31 *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

32 *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

33 *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (KJV)*

God, as I have said, wants to bless you and prosper you. It is His great pleasure

to give you the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said it, not I.

Luke 12:32-33

32 *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

33 *Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.*(KJV)

But He also says that we need to give to receive. The prophet Malachi wrote

Malachi 3:7-12

7 *Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?*

8 *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*

9 *Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*

10 *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

11 *And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.*

12 *And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts. (KJV)*

God gets glory when you are blessed. The world sees what God does for His people and they desire to receive also. The door is opened for us to witness of the power of God and to bring others into the knowledge of what Jesus has done at Calvary. I have become a believer in giving to God. It wasn't always so.

I had only been committed to Christ a little while when the pastor of the church I had begun attending called me in to talk with me about tithing. I was renting an apartment from the church and I had recently taken a promotion, which had resulted in a loss of overtime pay and thus income for me. Financially I owed a couple of hundred dollars more each month than I was making.

I listened as the pastor explained the importance of tithing. How God required it and would bless obedience. When he was through, I explained my situation to him and

he agreed that it looked as though I would need to wait before I started giving. Yet, when I got home, I couldn't get the words of Malachi out of my mind. Would a man rob God? *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

Payday came and I still was troubled by those words. I decided to take God up on the challenge. I told God that I was going to pay my tithes on Sunday. The rent for the apartment was due on Wednesday, and, if I did not have enough money to pay my rent to the church I was going to explain that God didn't keep His Word. Wednesday morning came and I still didn't have the rent. I dreaded the thought of going to the evening service. On the way home that afternoon I stopped at the post office to pick up my mail.

In the post office box was my Oregon State tax refund. Sounds like no big deal, doesn't it? The miracle was that I had only mailed in my forms the week before. It takes six to ten weeks to get your refund in Oregon!

There have been many more times since then that God has kept that promise in

Malachi. Not only in money matters, but also in every area in my life. As I said in the beginning of the chapter, instead of consuming everything because of our hunger and need, we must learn to sow for the future so that there is no need.

It applies to our time, money, love, and resources. Give to God and he gives back without measure. Withhold from God and the Devil will steal the blessing from you.

Chapter 9: Tends the Crop

Matthew 6:6-8

6 *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

7 *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

8 *Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (KJV)*

I saw a poster in the doctor's office once that had the following words on it. Perhaps they fit our outlook at times.

You know it's going to be a bad day when:

* You wake up face down on the pavement.

* You call suicide prevention and they put you on hold.

* You see a 60 Minutes news team waiting in your office.

* Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.

* You turn on the news and they're showing emergency routes out of the city.

* Your twin sister forgets your birthday.

* You wake up to discover that your waterbed broke and then realized you don't have a waterbed.

* Your horn goes off accidentally and remains stuck as you follow a group of Hell's Angels on the freeway.

It is hard to understand why bad things happen to good people. As a pastor I found it difficult to understand how some of the very people that God had placed in my care could go through the rough times that they were going through.

We had a young couple that came to the church after we started picking up their children for Wednesday nights. They became curious as to why their children never wanted to miss a service. Not long after the couple began coming to services, they committed their lives to the Lord. What an asset they were! Whenever there was a need in the church for helpers, they were the first to volunteer.

One day I received a phone call. The husband was calling from the hospital where they were operating on his wife. She had gone to the school to take her daughter's pet rabbit for show and tell. After the presentation she was leaving the classroom when a blood vessel burst within her brain. She had just turned thirty.

Being at the hospital, and seeing the family torn up by the tragedy that was unfolding in their lives, it was hard to understand what purpose God could get in all this. When you are in the midst of a storm it is hard to understand that God is still there. I watched as the husband shared his faith with the doctors and nurses. You could see the hopelessness of the situation as they tried to warn him that his wife would probably not make it through the surgery.

Later the doctor came out and told of how she had had another vessel break further around her brain during the surgery. It was a miracle that she had made it through the surgery. She was in a coma, but she was still alive. We praised God together and thanked Him for her recovery.

I watched the family as they would first trust God and then falter. Trust God, and then falter again. Staggering under the

pressure of uncertainty, much like a weight lifter adding untried weight to his routine, while trying hard to keep trusting God. It appeared at times that it was hopeless. Yet, after 28 days, she opened her eyes and came back to the living.

A good farmer watches over his plants. He knows what they need in the way of sunshine, water, fertilizer, and pesticides to cause them to grow and to be the best that they can be.

God watches over us and He knows what we have need of before we ask. If we are abiding in the vine he says that we can ask and he will supply. These are promises from God.

Why then does it not always seem to work? In fields of wheat there are plants that when they are young look just like the young wheat plants. These weeds are called tares. If, when they are old enough to be recognized for what they are and the farmer tries to pull them out, he will destroy the young wheat plants along with them. So the farmer allows them to grow up together. As the fruit becomes evident the tares are easy to identify.

Matthew 13:29-30

29 *But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*

30 *Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather*

ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.(KJV)

As we have read in previous chapters, trials come our way to accomplish several things.

First- they allow us to test and strengthen ourselves.

Second- they allow us to demonstrate to others going through the same thing God's care and comfort.

Third- They give us a first hand knowledge of the power of God that we can share with others as Word of Testimony.

Revelation 12:11

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. (KJV)

Fourth- they serve to straighten us up before we are destroyed completely.

Not too long ago I had reached a place of frustration and impatience with God. Like a child throwing a fit when he doesn't get his way, I told God I was going to quit the ministry for a year. I was going to build a house and get out of debt. After all I argued, what would He do about it?

Two days later I was on a ladder just five feet above the ground. The ladder slipped and I fell. When I landed, I destroyed three of the ligaments in my right knee, and all the muscle on the outside and back of it.

As the doctor examined me in the emergency room, she asked what I did for a living. I told her I was a carpenter and an evangelist. She said that at least I could preach the next year- carpentry was out. God sometimes breaks us, so we will change direction just as a farmer breaks a branch that is wild so that it will conform to the tree.

We read the parable of the shepherd with the hundred sheep. One strays and he leaves the ninety-nine to find the one. When he finds it, he breaks a leg and then carries it on his shoulder until the leg heals. By the time the leg is healed the sheep and the shepherd have such a relationship that straying is no longer a problem.

No matter what is going on in your life the answer is still the same. He cares for you! Abide in Him. Peter as he was facing death wrote to the church:

1 Peter 5:7

7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (KJV)

Chapter 10: The Dormant Season

John 15:2

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

(KJV)

Every farmer that grows fruit trees does so to achieve a harvest. We recently purchased some property and planned our orchard. We laid out on paper apple, pear, prune, and cherry trees. There was great excitement as our thoughts were filled with the thought of fresh fruit for years to come.

After a short trip to the local garden store, and a brief conversation with the head gardener our excitement waned. July was not the time to plant a new orchard. "Wait until the leaves fall off", he informed us. "Your trees have a better chance of surviving."

February came and we finally went back and purchased our trees. They looked like nothing more than dead branches as we placed them in the damp, dark soil. As we gazed over our new orchard there was very little pride as we looked at the barren sticks and twigs now standing in rows across the field. How could this ever be fruitful? Surely we must have made an awful mistake. I don't know how many times we have ministered in churches that appeared the same way.

A new church does not have all the branches or ministry that the big churches have. Where are the Sunday school teachers, the choir, or the children's church? Don't you have a piano player, a guitarist, or a drummer? It would be wonderful if every church that was started could be started as a mega church. Unfortunately such a church would be lacking the root system necessary to support it.

Imagine our bewilderment when we got home with are new trees and removed the sawdust sacks from around their roots. There was not very much root in the bag. For good longevity a tree has to establish its root system and the fruitful branches at the same time. Most trees have a root system in the ground equal to or that matches the branches. A good farmer has enough patience to wait for trees to become established.

Jesus spoke of God's patience with a parable:

Luke 13:6-9

6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

(KJV)

Don't be discouraged with a small church.
Get rooted!

Every farmer knows that there comes a dormant season. One of my first jobs as a teenager was helping a neighbor, Rudy Leffler, in his orchard in the middle of February. I still remember him coming and offering me the job for fifty cents per hour. He had a large metal sled that he called a boat. He put a couple of tires in it and set them ablaze. As he

dragged the boat with his tractor, my job was to throw the branches he had pruned from the pear and walnut trees into the fire.

At first I thought there were a lot of dead branches in his orchard and that he had killed the trees. When we stopped to have a drink, Rudy explained to me that it was necessary to prune the trees back in order for the trees to continue to grow and bear fruit. Fruit comes from the new twigs and spurs that grow on the old branches, not from the old branches themselves. There comes a time when the old branches stop producing new growth and it becomes necessary to prune them out of the tree. This allows the energy and nourishment that the unfruitful branches drain from the roots to reach the branches that are producing fruit

A good farmer knows that to get good fruit it is necessary to prune the tree. My friend Tom came to stay with us. Tom had been a gardener and tree trimmer since I had first known him. As we were standing in my back yard looking at my apple tree at the end of the garden, Tom offered to prune it and I gladly agreed.

Imagine my shock when I came home and my beautiful apple tree, which had been thirty some feet tall, was now only three feet tall. I

was so angry that I was ready to ring his neck. Yet the next year, branches sprang forth around the crown of that stump. The year after that fruit appeared. This time I had bigger fruit, and two new kinds of apples had grown out of the stump.

A.B. Cooper said that one autumn day he went to a chrysanthemum show and observed some wonderful blooms. He inquired of a gardener, "How in the world do you manage to produce such marvelous flowers?"

"Well, sir, we concentrate all the strength of the plant in one or two blooms. If we would allow it to bear all the flowers it could, none would be worth showing. If you want a prize specimen, you must be content with a single chrysanthemum instead of a score."

For the same reason, God sends trials to prune from our lives the useless blooms of self, popularity, and comfort, so that He may perfect in us one exquisite white blossom of holiness.

I have found myself caught in the cycles of great growth. Suddenly a dormant season comes my way. I begin to question myself and to reflect on my stand with the Lord. In my heart I wonder why I have become so cold.

My desire is to see the fire again. Oh, to have the burning presence and purpose of God flowing through my body once more. It becomes a time of casting off the unfruitful areas of my life and strengthening the others.

The Lord knows that there will be those times in our lives. A time for the reflections of our souls to be gazed upon and sorted. No wonder that Jesus told us in Matthew:

Matthew 24:12-13

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

(KJV)

Churches go through the same cycles. They grow and are flourishing and suddenly everything appears to stop. People begin to panic and ask of themselves what is wrong? They look at the sudden lack of activity and panic. How often I have heard the term “dead church” used. If only we could realize that God is a good farmer. The slowing down of activity is a common occurrence that happens in nature in the wintertime. It is necessary to allow the trimming of tree branches without killing the tree. It is also necessary in order for

the churches to get pruned without killing the Church. The branches that are drawing nourishment from the body without bearing fruit are the first to go. Maybe some of the stronger supporters leave and decide to start another church. It is frustrating to go through a split or division within the church. Yet, with the patience of a good farmer, God allows it knowing that it is necessary to produce continued fruit in His kingdom and to expand the borders of his planting.

Chapter 11: Expects a Harvest

John 15:2

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (KJV)

One thing that every farmer, whether good or bad, has in common is that they expect a harvest. God expects a harvest in our lives. In America, we have become a church that has lost the burden to produce fruit for ourselves. Paul Harvey said, "Too many Christians are no longer fishers of men but keepers of the aquarium."

Perhaps it is conditioning. We have become so accustomed to going to the supermarket and buying the fruit of other men's labors that we have forgotten how to produce fruit for ourselves.

Revivals begin when men and women catch a hold of the vision and simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I struggled one time with the question of why the Power of God

was not moving in my life the way it had in the past. A deep troubling was in my heart where a hunger for the presence of the glory that once had been!

After many hours of prayer, I felt led to attend a church in the country that I had never been to before. As I walked into the building a thin, older gentleman with gray hair, leaning against the doorway stopped me and gave me some words that will never be forgotten.

“Son, God says to tell you that you have not the Power of God because you have quit using the Power of God, thus you don’t need the Power of God!”

I have found that the key to having the Power of God in my life is to get about the Father’s business. Paul said:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-19

16 Rejoice evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

*19 **Quench not the Spirit.*** (KJV)

When we quit witnessing, quit praising God, and quit thanking God, we quench the Spirit of God within us. The Spirit of God is

the power of God manifested within us. The Spirit moves with the power to be a sign to the unbelievers of the truth of God's Omnipotence.

If we want fruit to be born in our lives, we must be obedient to the calling of God and the purpose for which He has chosen us. He has chosen us to be a Witness on the Earth of the things to come.

Every Christian has an apostleship, or a purpose to fulfill. We are all chosen to be witnesses, no matter what our other calling, profession or labor.

A generation ago there was a wealthy man in the Midwest who was an outstanding Christian layman. People used to ask him what he did. He would reply, "I am a witness for Jesus Christ, but I pack pork to pay expenses." Your apostleship differs in degree but not in kind from the apostleship that was given by God to Paul.

This is the way we bear fruit. Bearing fruit is essential to Christian discipleship. A life well lived is a more effective witness than words well said. Another illustration from the Bible Illustrator tells of Benjamin Franklin.

Benjamin Franklin learned that plaster (lime) sown in the fields would make things grow. He told his neighbors, but they did not believe him and they argued with him trying to prove that lime (plaster) could be of no use at all to grass or grain.

After a little while he allowed the matter to drop and said no more about it. But, he went into the field early the next spring and sowed some grain. Close by the path, where men would walk, he traced some letters with his finger and put lime into them and then sowed his seed in the field.

After a week or two the seed sprang up. His neighbors, as they passed that way, were very much surprised to see, in a brighter green than all the rest of the field, the writing in large letters, "This has been plastered." Benjamin Franklin did not need to argue with his neighbors any more about the benefit of plaster for the fields. For as the season went on and the grain grew, these bright green letters just rose up above all the rest until they were a kind of relief-plate in the field -- "This has been plastered."

"By your fruits shall all men know that you are my disciples." It is more important how you live than what you say.

Jesus's Last commandment to His Disciples was:

Matthew 28:19-20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.(KJV)

Mark 16:15-20

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

19 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. (KJV)

We can get so busy arguing the cause of Christ and the intellectual merits of the Bible if

we are not careful. We forget the greatest fulfillment of these commandments is the simple telling of, and the demonstration of, those things we have seen and heard that we know are true.

I John 1:1-3

1 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;*

2 *(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)*

3 *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*(KJV)

If you have never accepted the work of Jesus for yourself, don't you think now is a good time? There will be three things that will surprise us when we get to heaven. **First**, we will be surprised to find many people there that we did not expect to find there! **Second**, to find some not there whom we had expected to be there! And **third**, and perhaps the greatest wonder of all, will be to find our selves there.

Paul said that:

Romans 3:23-24

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (KJV)

John said:

I John 1:8-10

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (KJV)

You merely have to acknowledge that you are a sinner and ask Jesus to forgive you. According to John 3:17 God didn't send Jesus to bring condemnation but to bring life.

Paul said it works like this:

Galatians 3:22-29

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

23 *But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*

24 *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*

25 *But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*

26 *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*

27 *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

29 *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (KJV)*

Won't you take a moment to pray right now? You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. **May the Lord richly Bless you.**



About the Author

Jerry Van Ronk grew up on a farm in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. He was raised in a non-Christian home and attended very little church as a child. In 1971 he joined the United States Marine Corps where he became involved with alcohol and drugs. During this period he almost received Christ in his heart but due to his alcohol problem he was not allowed to go to church the day he was ready to make a commitment.

It was while working for Safeway Stores Inc in 1978 that he made that Commitment. He attended Bible College in Roseville, California in 1980-82 and worked as a Youth pastor and A.C.E. school Administrator with Pastor John Opperman in Sacramento until 1982.

In 1983 he met his wife, Jeanette, and they were married. They live in Chehalis, Washington. Besides pastoring for eight years, they have traveled over the United States bringing words of encouragement, exhortation, and edification.

Jerry is a popular camp and church speaker with a gifted way of blending the Word of God and humor that holds the interest of young and old alike.

WARNING!



Have you ever faced situations where you have cried “Why Me?”

If it weren’t for bad luck, would you have no luck at all?

Are you bothered by other people and what they are doing?



Prepare for a wild ride of humor, scripture, and encouraging insight as the author takes you on a journey into the mind of God and His plans for your life. After all, what have you got to lose?



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