

# **LENTEN MEDITATION BOOKLET**



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## Lent 2023

Dear Parish Family,

Each year we are called, as Christians, to the observance of a Holy Lent. Lent is the period of forty days before Easter where we attempt to focus on the life of Christ and our response to that life.

This booklet offers you a collection of stories, words or wisdom, and meditations that I hope will enhance your Lenten devotionals. There is one article for each of the forty days of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday.

All that is contained in this booklet is gleaned from a variety of sources.

I pray this booklet and its contents will be a blessing to you.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James W. Hunter" followed by a plus sign.

The Rev. Dr. James W. Hunter  
Interim Rector

## Recognition in the Kingdom

In God's kingdom, things are turned upside down- the first one is last, and the last one is first. The least is made best. The quiet one who serves gets the first place. The behind the scenes person, who does most of the work, is the most outstanding. The unrecognized one is the one who gets the greatest recognition with God.

A committee at a hospital was working on a major conference on the relationship between faith and healing. It was a small committee that met for almost two years to organize and plan the event. One of the most dedicated people on the committee was a woman named Lauren. She did most of the organization for the conference, made phone calls, addressed envelopes, made sure that every detail had been taken care of. She did a remarkable job, spending many long hours above and beyond her paid time.

When the conference was ending, the keynote speaker and a number of other people were recognized- the CEO of the hospital, administrators in several areas, and a few doctors. None of them had ever attended a meeting, addressed an envelope, or made a phone call, but they were recognized. Lauren's name was never even mentioned, even though she did more to make the conference happen than anyone else.

Those who worked with the conference knew she was the one who served the most; they knew she was the greatest one in terms of getting results, but she didn't have a title next to her name.

We all have Laurens in our lives and in our workplaces. You know who they are. They don't get much recognition, because they don't have the right title, but not much would happen without them.

***The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. The greatest among you is the servant.***

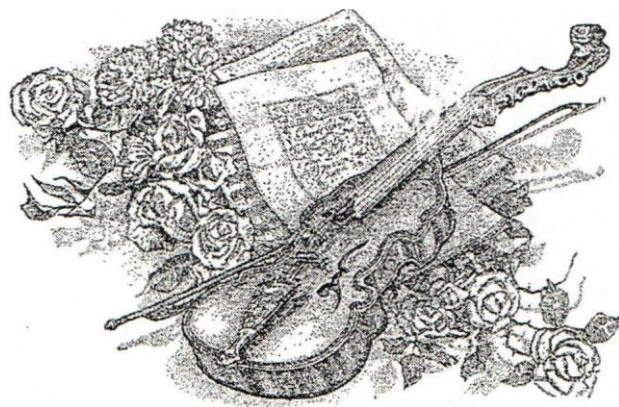


## Silent Violins

When Luigi Tarisio was found dead one morning, his house contained few luxuries- but there was found in his attic- 246 violins, many of them of great value. The greatest of his collection, a Stradivarius, was found in the bottom drawer of a rickety old bureau, where it had lain, un-played, for many decades. He had collected violins all his life, cramming them into an attic- and leaving them unplayed.

How many Christians are like Tarisio-storing and saving the truth for themselves and failing to share it with the world?

The Good News needs to not only be cherished, but proclaimed!



## The Value of the Hands

A basketball in my hands is worth about \$19. 00  
A basketball in Michael Jordan's hands is worth about \$33 million . . . . .  
It depends whose hands it's in.

A baseball in my hands is worth about \$6.00  
A baseball in Barry Bond's hands is worth \$19 million . . . . .  
.It depends whose hands it's in.

A rod in my hands will keep away a wild animal.  
A rod in Moses' hands parted the mighty Red Sea . . . . .  
.It depends whose hands it's in.

A sling shot in my hands is a kid's toy.  
A slingshot in David's hands is a mighty weapon . . . . .  
.It depends whose hands it's in.

Two fish and five loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches.  
Two fish and five loaves of bread in God's hands will feed thousands . . . . .  
It depends whose hands it's in.

Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse.  
Nails in Jesus Christ's hands produced salvation for the entire world . . . .  
It depends whose hands it's in.

As you can see now, it depends whose hands it's in. So put your concerns, your worries,  
your fears, your hopes, your dreams, your families, and your relationships in God's  
hands because- **It** depends on whose hands it's in.



## **And God Said.....-----...**

I said, "God, I hurt."  
And God said, "I know."

I said, "God, I cry a lot."  
And God said, "That is why I gave you tears."

I said, "God, I am so depressed."  
And God said, "That is why I gave you sunshine."

I said, "God, life is so hard."  
And God said, "That is why I gave you loved ones."

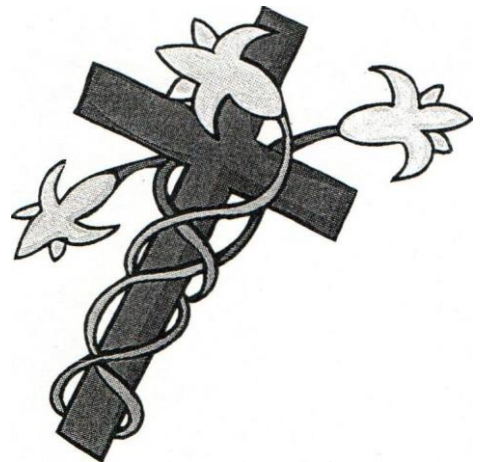
I said, "God, my loved one died."  
And God said, "So did mine."

I said, "God, it is such a loss."  
And God said, "I saw mine nailed to a cross."

I said, "God, but your loved one lives."  
And God said, "So does yours."

I said, "God, where are they now?°"  
And God said, "Mine is on my right and yours is in the Light."

I said, "God. It hurts."  
And God said, "I know."



## Is It A Job or Ministry?

Some people have a *job* in the church. Others involve themselves in a **ministry**.  
What's the difference?

If you are doing it just because no one else will- it's a job.  
If you are doing it to serve the Lord- it's a ministry.

If you quit because someone criticized you- it's a job.  
If you are serving, then it's a ministry.

If you'll do it only so long as it does not interfere with your other activities-  
chances are it's a job.  
If you are committed to staying with it even if it means letting go of other things-  
it's gotta be a ministry.

So really, what is the difference?

If your reward is in heaven- it's a ministry.  
If you quit because no one thanked you or praised you- it was a job.

If you stayed with it when nobody recognized your efforts- it was a ministry.  
If you do it for the praise of people- it's a job.

If your concern is faithfulness- it's a ministry.  
If your concern is success- it's a job.

So what's the difference?

If you have a job in the Body of Christ, give it up and seek your ministry. And if  
God has called you to a ministry, don't treat it like a job!

Churches are filled with people doing jobs. Great and growing churches are filled with  
people involved in ministries.

Which are you doing in the Body of Christ?



## THE FIRST PARENT

Whenever your kids are out of control, you can take comfort from the thought that even God's omnipotence did not extend to His kids.

After creating heaven and earth, God created Adam and Eve. And the first thing God said to them was: "Don't"

"Don't what?" Adam asked.

"Don't eat the forbidden fruit," said God

"Forbidden fruit? Really? Where is it?" Adam and Eve asked, jumping up and down excitedly.

"It's over there," said God, wondering why he hadn't stopped after making the elephants.

A few minutes later God saw the kids having an apple break and he was very angry.

"Didn't I tell you not to eat that fruit?" the First Parent asked

"Uh huh," Adam replied

"Then why did you do it?" God asked with exasperation.

"I dunno," Adam answered.

God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own. Thus the pattern was set and it has never changed. But there is reassurance in this story ...

If you have persistently and lovingly tried to give your children wisdom and they haven't taken it, don't be so hard on yourself. If God had trouble handling His children, what makes you think it should be a piece of cake for you?





## The Little Dog Story

One day a little puppy took a walk around his master's farm. When he came to the pen where the horse was fed, he heard the great animal call to him. "You must be new here. You will soon find out that the master loves me more than all the other animals because I carry large loads for him. I suspect that an animal your size is of no value to him at all."

The little dog hung his head and was about to walk away when he heard the cow in the adjoining stall: "I have the most honored position on the farm because the lady makes butter and cheese from my milk. You, of course, provide nothing of value to the family."

"Cow, your position is no greater than mine," called the sheep, "I lend the master wool to make his clothes. I provide warmth to the entire family. You are correct about the dog, however, he gives nothing to the family."

One by one the animals joined in the conversation. The chicken told how she produced eggs and the cat how she rid the house of mice. All the animals did agree on one thing: the little dog provided no service of value to the farm family.

Stung by all the criticism, the puppy found a secluded place and began to cry. An old dog heard the sobs and paused to listen to the little one tell his story. "They are right," he sobbed, "I provide no service to anyone."

"It is true," the old dog began, "You are too small to pull a wagon, and you will never produce eggs, milk, or wool. But it is foolish to cry about what you cannot do. You must use the ability the Creator gave you to bring laughter and cheer."

That night, when the master came home exhausted from long hours in the sun, the little puppy ran to him, licked his feet, and jumped into his arms. The master and the puppy romped in the grass. Finally, holding him close to his chest and patting his head, the master said, "No matter how tired I am when I come home, I feel better when you greet me. I wouldn't trade you for all the animals on the farm."

*" .....and the greatest of these is love."*





# HUGS

*It's wondrous what a hug can do  
A hug can cheer you. when you're blue  
A hug can say, "I love you so", or "Gee I hate to see you go".*

*A hug is "Welcome back again!" and  
"Great to see you!" or "Where've you been?"  
A hug delights and warms and charms,  
It must be why God gave us arms.*

*Hugs are great for fathers and mothers  
Sweet for sisters: swell for brothers.  
and chances are some favorite aunts  
love them more than potted plants*

*Kittens crave them, puppies love them  
Heads of State are not above them.  
A hug can break a language barrier, and  
make the dullest day seem merrier.*

*No need to fret about the store of em  
The more you give, the more there are of them  
So stretch those arms without delay  
and give someone a hug today!*

## **An Indian Legend**

In an old Indian legend, an Indian brave went away in solitude to prepare for manhood. He hiked into a beautiful valley, green with trees and bright with flowers. There, as he looked up at the surrounding mountains, he noticed one rugged peak, capped with snow. "I will test myself against that mountain", he thought. He put on his buffalo-hide shirt, threw his blanket over his shoulders and set off to climb the mountain. When he reached the top, he stood on what seemed the rim of the world. He could see forever, and his heart swelled with pride at his accomplishment.

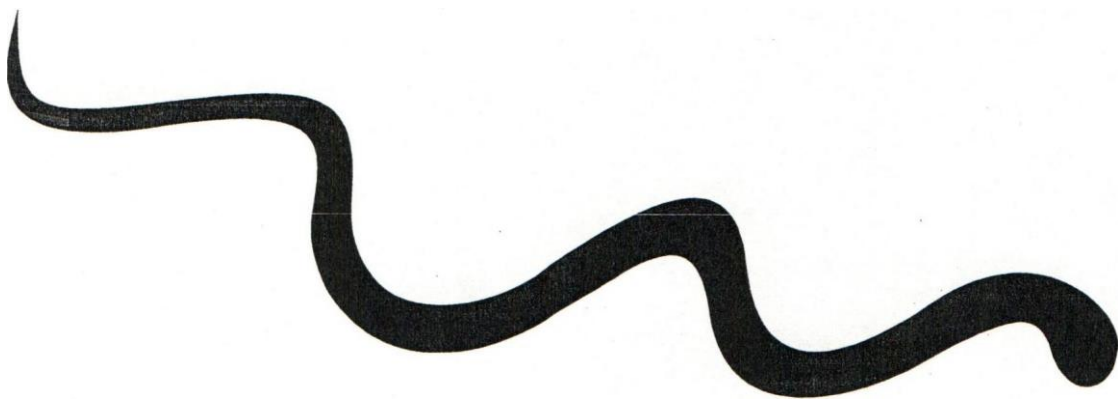
Just then, he heard a rustle at his feet. Looking down, he saw a snake. Before he could move, the snake spoke. "I am about to die," said the snake. "It is too cold for me up here and there is no food. Put me under your shirt and take me down to the valley, where I can live."

"No," said the youth. "I know your kind. You are a rattlesnake. If I pick you up, you will bite, and your bite will kill me."

"Not so," said the snake. "I will treat you differently. If you do this for me, I will not harm you."

The youth resisted for a while, but this was a very persuasive snake. Finally the youth gave in and tucked the snake into his shirt and carried it down to the valley. There he laid it down gently. Suddenly the snake coiled, rattled, and leaped, biting the boy on the leg. "But you promised," cried the youth. "You knew what I was when you picked me up," said the snake as it slithered away.

The snake could be any number of things: drugs, alcohol, greed, pride, infidelity, you fill in the blank. Anything forbidden by God and our good common sense. The point of the parable is to say that one effective way for most of us to deal with temptation is to avoid it in the first place.



## ***VISUAL REALITY***



Concentrate on the four dots in the middle of the image for about 30 seconds.  
Then close your eyes and tilt your head back. Keep your eyes closed ...  
You will see a light circle ... continue looking at the circle. What do you see?

The face of Jesus Christ!

## The Importance of One

A young man, walking along the beach at dawn, noticed an old man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Catching up with the man, the youth asked what he was doing. The man answered that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun.

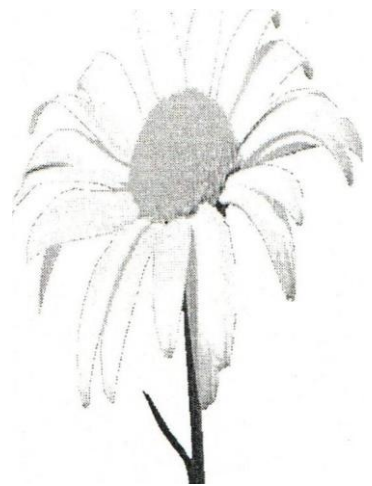
"But the beach goes on for miles, and there are millions of starfish," countered the young man. "How can your effort make any difference?"

The old man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it safely into the waves. "It makes a difference to this one", he said.



# THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER

The park bench was deserted as I sat down to read  
Beneath the long, straggly branches of an old willow tree.  
Disillusioned by life with good reason to frown,  
For the world was intent on dragging me down.  
And if that weren't enough to ruin my day,  
A young boy out of breath approached me, all tired from play.  
He stood right before me with his head tilted down,  
And said with great excitement, "Look what I found!"  
In his hand was a flower, and what a pitiful sight,  
With its petals all worn - not enough rain, or too little light.  
Wanting him to take his dead flower and go off and play,  
I faked a small smile and then shifted away.  
But instead of retreating he sat next to my side,  
And placed the flower close to his nose  
And declared with overactive surprise,  
"It sure smells pretty and it's beautiful too.  
That's why I picked it: here, it's for you.  
The weed before me was dying or dead.  
Not vibrant with colors: orange, yellow or red.  
But I knew I must take it, or he might never leave.  
So I reached for the flower, and replied, "just what I need."  
But instead of him placing the flower in my hand,  
He held it mid-air without reason or plan.  
It was then that I noticed for the very first time  
That weed-toting boy could not see: he was blind.  
I heard myself quiver; tears shone in the sun  
As I thanked him for picking the very best one.  
"You're welcome," he smiled, and then ran off to play,  
Unaware of the impact he'd had on my day.  
I sat there and wondered how he'd managed to see  
A self-pitying woman beneath an old willow tree.  
How did he know of my self-indulgent plight?  
Perhaps from his heart, he'd been blessed with true sight.  
Through the eyes of a blind child, at last I could *see*  
The problem was not with the world; the problem was me.  
And for all those times I myself had been blind.



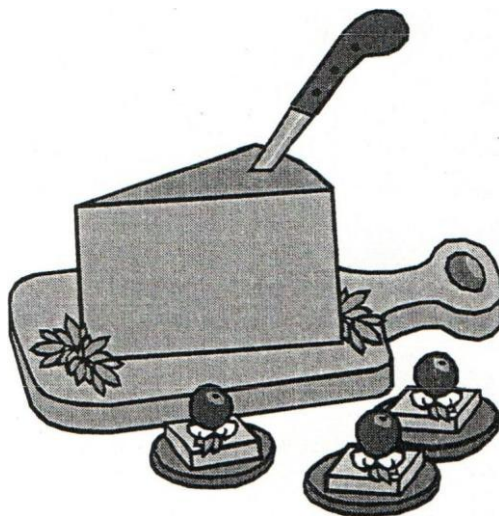


## Cheese and Crackers

A woman by the name of Bertha Adams saved for years. Her dream was to go on an ocean cruise. Finally, she had enough money and she carefully prepared a budget so that she would have a little bit to spend at each port of call. And night after night, she opened her trunk down in her state room and ate so sparingly the cheese and crackers she had carefully saved up for the trip. And on the last night of the cruise, she counted her money and said, "I think I've saved enough money to go up to the great banquet in the dining room."

She went up and there was food like she had never imagined. And she feasted sumptuously on all her favorites; and at the end of the meal she said, "Steward, would you bring me my bill?" He gave her a confused look and said, "Madam, all the meals on this cruise are included in the price of the ticket."

Many Christians eat cheese and crackers in their state room, when there's a banquet waiting for them in the dining room, because they have failed to acknowledge or have failed to put into use the spiritual blessings God has given them through faith in Jesus Christ.





## **THIS IS GOOD**

The story is told of a king in Africa who had a close friend with whom he grew up. The friend had a habit of looking at every situation that ever occurred in his life (positive or negative) and remarking, "This is good!"

One day the king and his friend were out on a hunting expedition. The friend would load and prepare the guns for the king. The friend had apparently done something wrong in preparing one of the guns, for after taking the gun from his friend, the king fired it and his thumb was blown off. Examining the situation, the friend remarked as usual, "This is good!" To which the king replied, "No, this is not good!" and proceeded to send his friend to jail.

About a year later, the king was hunting in an area that he should have known to stay clear of. Cannibals captured him and took him to their village. They tied his hands, stacked some wood, set up a stake and bound him to the stake.

As they came near to set fire to the wood, they noticed that the king was missing a thumb. Being superstitious they never ate anyone who was less than whole. So untying the king, they sent him on his way.

As he returned home, he was reminded of the event that had taken his thumb and felt remorse for his treatment of his friend. He went immediately to jail to speak with his friend.

"You were right," he said, "it was good that my thumb was blown off." And he proceeded to tell his friend all that had just happened. "And so, I am very sorry for sending you to jail for so long. It was bad for me to do this."

"No," his friend replied, "This is good!"

"What do you mean, This is good?"

How could it be good that I sent my friend to jail for a year?"

"If I had not been in jail, I would have been with you."



## Jesus and The Colonel

A man only went through the 7th grade because, as he said, "I couldn't figure out algebra." During his working years he was a streetcar conductor, a fireman on the railroad, an insurance agent, and finally, a restaurant owner in Corbin, Kentucky. When he was 60 years old he was offered \$200,000 for his restaurant, but he turned it down because he loved his business and wasn't ready to retire.

A few years later at age 65, he lost everything. The re-routing of a highway had put him out of business. All he had was a small Social Security check each month. Now, for many people this would be the end of the story, but he got to thinking about his mother who had been a widow for many years. She peeled tomatoes in a tomato factory, and also sewed for a living out of necessity.

He remembered that she was an excellent cook and how much he enjoyed her cooking. He remembered especially the delicious fried chicken he had grown up with and he got the idea to share that delight with everyone. So he took a pressure cooker and a can of specially prepared flour, put them on the back seat of his car, and tried to sell his idea to others.

It was tough going. He often slept in his car because he had no money for motel rooms. But he persisted. He called on restaurant after restaurant until he finally found a man in Salt Lake City, Utah who was willing to accept a franchise. In two years he had 200 franchises. In seven years he had 500 franchises. His business prospered. He never seemed to care much about the money and he finally sold his business for \$2 million and was hired back as a public relations man, a gracious, loving, kindly southern gentleman whom you may have figured out by now, was known as "The Colonel", Harlan Sanders, the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

When he was 80 years old, he spoke at a birthday party given in his honor in Louisville, Kentucky. He said, ***"The secret of my success is that I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I never had much of an education, but I read in the Bible once, 'Let this mind be in you which also is in Jesus Christ. And I pondered that. I figured that meant to think without hate....and so that is how I have tried to live.'"***



## **Four lessons to make you think about the way we treat people.**

### **First Important Lesson - Cleaning Lady.**

During my second month of college, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions, until I read the last one: What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school? Surely this was some kind of joke I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50s, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade. Absolutely, said the professor. In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello. I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy.

### **Second Important Lesson - Pick up in the Rain.**

One night, at 11:30 p.m., an older African American woman was standing on the side of an Alabama highway trying to endure a lashing rainstorm. Her car had broken down and she desperately needed a ride. Soaking wet, she decided to flag down the next car. A young white man stopped to help her, generally unheard of in those conflict-filled 1960s. The man took her to safety, helped her get assistance and put her into a taxicab.

She seemed to be in a big hurry, but wrote down his address and thanked him.

Seven days went by and a knock came on the man's door. To his surprise, a giant console color TV was delivered to his home. A special note was attached. It read: Thank you so much for assisting me on the highway the other night. The rain drenched not only my clothes, but also my spirits.

Then you came along. Because of you, I was able to make it to my dying husband's bedside just before he passed away. God bless you for helping me and unselfishly serving others.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Nat King Cole.



Third Important Lesson - Always remember those who serve.

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-year-old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him. How much is an ice cream sundae? he asked.

Fifty cents, replied the waitress. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it. Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream? he inquired. By now more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient. Thirty-five cents, she brusquely replied. The little boy again counted his coins. I'll have the plain ice cream, he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and left.

When the waitress came back, she began to cry as she wiped down the table.

There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies. You see, he couldn't have the sundae, because he had to have enough left to leave her a tip.

Fourth Important Lesson - Giving When it Counts.

Many years ago, when I worked as a volunteer at a hospital, I got to know a little girl named Liz who was suffering from a rare and serious disease.

Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her 5-year old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother, and asked the little boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. I saw him hesitate for only a moment before taking a deep breath and saying, Yes I'll do it if it will save her. As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled, as we all did, seeing the color returning to her cheek. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, Will I start to die right away. Being young the little boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he was going to have to give his sister all of his blood in order to save her.



## THE CARPENTER

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house-building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck but he needed to retire. They could get by. The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career. When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you." What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well. So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At important points, we do not give the job our best efforts. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have created and find that we would have done it differently. Think of yourself as the carpenter. Think about your house. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Build wisely. It is the only life you will ever build. Even if you live it for only one day more, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity. The plaque on the wall says, "Life is a do-it-yourself project." Who could say it more clearly? Your life today is the result of your attitudes and choices of the past. Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today.



## Living Water

There's a story told about a group of men who were fishing off the coast of Brazil. They ran into a squall and their mast was broken and they lost their sail and they bobbed around out there in a sea of despair, hour after hour, day after day. You can go a long time without food, but you go about 3 days without water and you are in serious trouble. On the 4th day, when they were literally dying of thirst, they spotted another boat and began signaling. The boat came up along side of them and they yelled, "Give us some water!"

From the other boat they called back. They said, "Drop your bucket over the side of the boat, you're surrounded by water!" The men yelled back, "What! Are you mocking us? We can't drink this sea water, if you drink sea water, you die!" They yelled back, "Drop your bucket over the side and drink!"

They dropped the bucket over the side, pulled it up again. and it was filled with pure, sweet, drinking water. The men were dumbfounded! You see, they were fishing off the coast of Brazil right at the point where the Amazon River dumps into the sea. It puts out 7 million cubic feet of water every second. It sends a sheet of fresh water for 200 miles out into the ocean.

These men were dying of thirst, surrounded by living water! So are many Christians- dying of thirst, surrounded by living water!

Many of us are bobbing around in our own seas of despair. Maybe it's a broken relationship- a marriage turned sour. Perhaps it's the loss of a job, or the loss of a loved one. Perhaps its concern over a health problem (our own or someone else's)- an upcoming operation, or a financial worry or worry over your children.

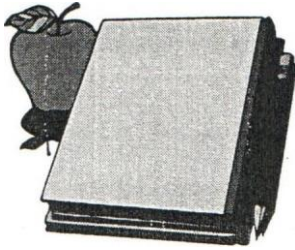
Whatever our sea of despair, many of us are bobbing around out there, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, (in some cases maybe even year after year) just like those men in the boat; slowly dying while all around us is living water.

THE LIVING WATER WHICH SURROUNDS US ARE THE BLESSINGS OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST.

These are SPIRITUAL blessings. They can't be seen physically, they can't be measured quantitatively. They are meant to be understood in the unseen world of spiritual reality. And because we often only look for and see physical reality we often miss them or fail to recognize them yet they are very real. And they are part and parcel of the Christian life.



## TOO BUSY FOR A FRIEND ...



One day a teacher asked her students to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down. As the students left the room, each one handed in the papers. That Saturday, the teacher wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday she gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. "Really?" she heard whispered. "I never knew that I meant anything to anyone!" and, "I didn't know others liked me so much" were most of the comments. No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. She never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another. That group of students moved on. Several years later, one of the students was killed in Viet Nam and his teacher attended the funeral of that special student. She had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. He looked so handsome, so mature. The church was packed with his friends. One by one those who loved him took a last walk by the coffin. The teacher was the last one to bless the coffin. As she stood there, one of the soldiers who acted as pallbearer came up to her. "Were you Mark's math teacher?" he asked. She nodded: "yes." Then he said: "Mark talked about you a lot." After the funeral, most of Mark's former classmates went together to a luncheon. Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting to speak with his teacher. "We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it." Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded and refolded many times. The teacher knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which she had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him. "Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it." All of Mark's former classmates started to gather around. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, "I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home. Chuck's wife said, "Chuck asked me to put his in our wedding album." "I have mine too," Marilyn said. "It's in my diary." Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her pocketbook, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. "I carry this with me at all times," Vicki said and without batting an eyelash, she continued: "I think we all saved our lists." That's when the teacher finally sat down and cried. She cried for Mark and for all his friends who would never see him again. The density of people in society is so thick that we forget that life will end one day. And we don't know when that one day will be. So please, tell the people you love and care for, that they are special and important. Tell them, before it is too late.



## Unfolding a Rose

A new young preacher was walking with his mentor, an older, more seasoned preacher in the garden one day. Feeling a bit insecure about what God had for him to do, the young preacher asked his mentor for advice. The older preacher walked up to a rosebush and handed the young preacher a rosebud and told him to open it without tearing off the petals.

The young preacher looked in disbelief at his mentor and was trying to figure out what a rosebud could possibly have to do with his wanting to know the will of God for his life and ministry. But, because of his high respect for the old man, he proceeded to try to unfold the rose, while keeping every petal intact. It wasn't long before he realized how impossible it was to do. Noticing the young preacher's inability to unfold the rose, the older preacher began to recite the following poem:

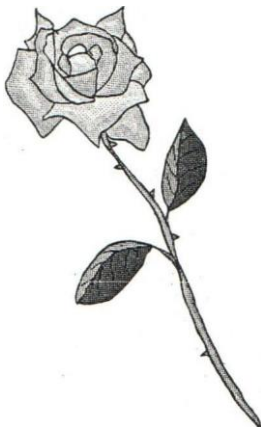
It is only a tiny rosebud  
a flower of God's design;  
But I cannot unfold the petals with  
these clumsy hands of mine.

The secret of unfolding flowers is  
not known to such as I.  
God opens the flower so sweetly,  
When in my hands they fade and die.

If I cannot unfold a rosebud this flower of  
God's design, Then how can I think I  
have wisdom to unfold this life of mine.

So I'll trust in Him for His leading each  
moment of every day  
I will look to Him for guidance  
Each step of the journey's way.

The pathway that lies before me, only  
my heavenly Father knows.  
I'll trust Him to unfold the moments  
just as He unfolds the rose.



## Forgive As You Have Been Forgiven

When the Nazis overran Holland in World War II, Corrie ten Boom, her father, and her sister risked death by making their quiet respectable home a haven for refugees- much like Anne Frank's family.

Finally the Gestapo came- and during the months in concentration camps that followed, Corrie ten Boom suffered and was tortured and was forced to watch her father and her sister die. Corrie survived, mind intact, and wrote many books about her experiences. One time, long after the war, she was speaking in Germany, when in the back of the room, she saw the German guard who had starved her sister to death. She said, "At the end of the meeting, to my dismay I saw this man coming down the aisle with his hand outstretched. I sent up an S.O.S. to the Lord. I said, 'Lord, I cannot shake hands with that man . .' But by the time he got to me, my hand shot out, and in that split second, God gave me grace to say, 'I forgive you.'" As it turned out, the man had become a Christian a few months back, and he was coming to Corrie to ask her forgiveness.

In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul reminded them and us that we are to *".....clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. And we are to bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances we may have against one another. And over all these virtues, we are to put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. We are to be merciful with our love."* (Colossians 3:12-14)

It's not easy sometimes. Sometimes we are so angry ..... sometimes we have been deeply wronged, sometimes we have felt betrayed, it may be by someone in the Church or outside the Church, sometimes it's by the leadership of the Church, sometimes it's a family member. But Jesus' word to us is clear: *"forgive, as you have been forgiven. .. lay down your anger and your desire for vindication. .. be merciful.. .."*







## God Knows!

When you are tired and discouraged from fruitless efforts ..... God knows how hard you have tried.  
When you've cried so long and your heart is in anguish.....  
God has Counted your tears.  
If you feel that your life is on hold and time has passed you by .... God is waiting with you.  
When you're lonely and your friends are too busy even for a phone call ..... God is by your side.  
When you think you've tried everything and don't know where to turn ..... God has a solution.  
When nothing makes sense and you are confused or frustrated ..... God has the answer.  
suddenly your outlook is brighter and you find traces of hope ..... God has whispered to you.  
When things are going well and you have much to be thankful for ..... God has blessed you.  
When something joyful happens and you are filled with awe ..... God has smiled upon you.  
When you have a purpose to fulfill and a dream to follow ..... God has opened your eyes and called you by name.  
Remember that wherever you are or whatever you are facing ..... **GOD KNOWS!!**

### A Parable About Love

Once upon a time, there was an island where all the feelings lived: HAPPINESS, SADNESS, KNOWLEDGE, and all the others, including LOVE.

One day it was announced to the feelings that the island would sink; so all repaired their boats and left. LOVE was the only one who stayed. LOVE wanted to persevere until the last moment.

When the island was almost sinking, LOVE said, "RICHNESS, can you take me with you?" RICHNESS answered, "No, I can't. There is a lot of gold and silver in my boat. There is no place for you, LOVE."

LOVE then asked VANITY who was also passing by in her beautiful vessel, "VANITY, please help me!" I can't help you LOVE. You are all wet and might damage my boat," VANITY answered.

SADNESS was close by, so LOVE asked for help. "SADNESS, let me go with you." "Oh LOVE, I am so sad that I need to be by myself."

HAPPINESS passed by LOVE too, but she was so happy that she didn't even hear when LOVE called to her.

Suddenly, there was a voice. "Come, LOVE, I will take you." It was an elder and LOVE felt so blessed and overjoyed that she forgot to ask the elder his name. When they arrived at dry land, the elder went his own way. LOVE, realizing how much he owed the elder asked KNOWLEDGE, another elder, "Who helped me?" "That was TIME," KNOWLEDGE answered. "TIME?" asked LOVE. "But why did TIME help me?" KNOWLEDGE smiled with deep wisdom and answered, "Because only TIME is capable of understanding how great LOVE is."



# **A Prayer is Something We Give**



A prayer is something we give to God When  
we want to say Hi.

It's also how we ask for things When  
we wish, hope, or cry.

A prayer is something we give ourselves  
To ease our troubled mind.

It helps to know we have the ear  
Of someone very kind.

A prayer is something we give to friends,  
Family, and strangers too.

Prayer is always the answer to  
"Is there anything I can do?"

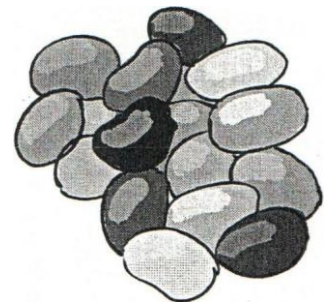
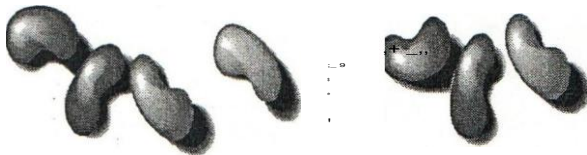
So take the time to pray today  
It doesn't matter from whom.  
Peace of mind is moments away.  
So get to praying soon!

Author Unknown

# **THE JELLY BEAN PRAYER**

Red is for the color of blood He gave  
Green is for the grass He made  
Yellow is for His sun so bright  
Orange is for the edge of night  
Black is for the sins we made  
White is for the grace He gave  
Purple is for His hour of sorrow  
Pink is for our new tomorrow.

A bag full of jelly beans,  
is colorful and sweet a  
prayer, Is a promise  
an Easter treat.



## The Dash

I read of a man who stood to speak, at the funeral of a friend.

He referred to the dates on her tombstone, from the beginning ..... to the end. He noted that first came her date of birth, and the other he spoke with tears. But he said what mattered most of all, was the dash between those years. (1968-1998)

For that dash represents all the time, that she spent alive on earth ..... And now only those who loved her, know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own; the cars .... the house .... the cash,  
What matters is how we live and love, and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard .... Are there things you'd like to change?  
For you never know how much time is left, that can still be rearranged.  
If we could just slow down long enough, to consider what's true and real  
And always try to understand, the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger, and show appreciation more,  
And love the people in our lives, like we've never loved before.  
If we treat each other with respect, and more often wear a smile ....  
Remembering that this special dash, might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy's being read, with your life's actions to rehash,  
Would you be proud of the things they say, about how you spent your dash?

Author unknown



## **A Prayer for the Middle-Aged**

Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will someday be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful, but not moody; helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and the love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of other's pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for an improved memory, but for a growing humility, and a lessing cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally, I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a Saint- some of them are so hard to live with- but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so. Amen.





## What Is A Church?



A man and his wife lived between two Christian families. The man had a heart attack and was out of work for several months. With a large family to feed, it was touch and go for several weeks as far as paying the bills. Besides all this, his roof started leaking and he had no money to pay for a roofer.

The Christian man on one side of him had talked with him often about coming to their church. He offered to stop and take the kids to Sunday School on Sunday morning. He had even bought the man an NIV Study Bible and offered to sit with him and help him to study the Bible. On the surface, it sounds like he was doing a lot, and perhaps he was reaching out- he was making offers and invitations. But understand, all the offers were made to fit into the first Christian's schedule and time available.

The second Christian man, who lived on the other side of the man, didn't just invite him to church. He didn't merely buy him a Bible. When he found out the man's financial difficulties, he and his wife talked and agreed that they would begin to use part of their tithe each week to pay for the family's utilities.

When the roof needed repairing, he didn't merely say, "I'll pray for you." He took a week off from work (a vacation week no less), recruited two or three men from his church and they tore off the existing roof, bought new sheeting and shingles, and put a new roof on for him. When the man needed to go to therapy once a week during his recovery, the second Christian man rearranged the time he had to be at work so that he could drive the man to his doctor appointments.

Now when it came time for this man and his family to choose a church to begin attending, which one do you think they chose?

# Attitudes

Chuck Swindoll, a contemporary preacher and Christian author, says this about attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skills. It will make or break a company, a church, or a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past, we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% of what happens to me, and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes.





## The Cold Within

Six humans trapped by happenstance  
In black and bitter cold.  
Each one possessed a stick of wood,  
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,  
The first woman held hers back.  
For on the face around the fire,  
She noticed one was black.

The next man looking cross the way  
Saw one not of his church,  
And he couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch.

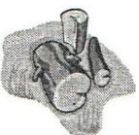
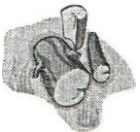
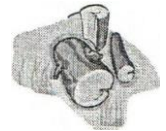
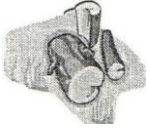
The third one sat in tattered clothes,  
He gave his coat a hitch.  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store.  
And how to keep what he has earned  
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge,  
As the fire passed from his sight,  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.

And the last man of this forlorn group  
Did naught except for gain.  
Giving only to those who gave  
Was how he played the game.

The log's held tight in death's still hands  
Was proof of human sin.  
They didn't die from the cold without,  
They died from the cold within.



## Parable of the Fishless Fishermen



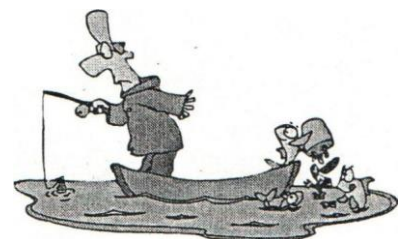
Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings, talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they did not do- they did not fish.

In addition to meeting regularly, they organized a board to send out fishermen to other places where there were many fish. The board hired staffs and appointed committees and held many meetings to define fishing, to defend fishing, and to decide what new streams should be thought about. But the staff and committee members did not fish.

Large, elaborate, and expensive training centers were built, whose original and primary purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish. They only taught fishing, they did not fish. Year after year, after tedious training, many were graduated and were given fishing licenses. They were sent to do full-time fishing, some to distant waters which were filled with fish. But like the fishermen back home, they never fished. Like the fishermen back home, they engaged in all kinds of other preoccupations.

After one stirring meeting on "The Necessity for Fishing," one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he stopped fishing in order to have time to attend the meetings to tell about the experience to other fishermen. And no one fished.....



## RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

As she stood in front of her 5" grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children an untruth. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and told them she loved them all the same. However, that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. In addition, Teddy could be very unpleasant.

It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big fat F at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records, and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise.

Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners ... he is a joy to be around.

His second grade teacher wrote, Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle.

His third grade teacher wrote, His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken.

Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and he sometimes sleeps in class.

By now Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume ... she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day, just long enough to say, Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to. After the children left, she cried for at least an hour.

On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class, and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her teacher's pets.

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. (continued)

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, and stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best teacher and favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer ... The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story does not end there. You see, there was another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom.

Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. Moreover, she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference.

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back, Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you.

For you that don't know,  
Teddy Stoddard is a Doctor at Iowa Methodist Hospital in Des Moines,  
that has the Stoddard Cancer Wing.

**I believe that friends are quiet angels who lift us to our feet when our  
wings have trouble remembering how to fly.**



## Friendship

Friendship is clearly a wonderful thing. In fact friendships can be a source of healing. An experiment was once conducted by a psychologist in Wash. DC. He took a particularly affectionate puppy who had been living in a nursing home and made a small incision on the puppy's leg. Then he bandaged it and instructed the employees at the nursing home to continue to feed and water the puppy, but to show it no special affection.

The change in the puppy was dramatic. It had always been energetic, frisky, and friendly, but now, it seemed quite forlorn and even depressed. Even more significantly, six weeks had gone by and the incision still had not healed. The doctor then instructed everyone at the nursing home to begin to lavish the puppy with love and attention. Soon, he was frisky and energetic again. And, amazingly, within a week, the incision had healed.

Of course, the doctor was pleased for the puppy, but he was more concerned about people, and what happens to us when we don't receive the love and affection we need. The experiment certainly implied that there is some type of healing power within us that can be activated by the power of love.

People were healed by coming into contact with Jesus. He was love- love incarnate, and that is what he calls us, his Church, to be. We are called to love, we are called to be compassionate, and we are called to friendship. At the simplest level, without all the Biblical scholarship and all the theology, the church is about love and about friendship.





## Trusting Jesus



Most people don't recognize the name Margaret Rose Powers. But more than likely you have read her famous poem, "*Footprints*." In a Guideposts article several years ago, she told the story behind her famous poem.

In the summer of 1964, Margaret was 20 years-old and recovering from meningitis on the family farm in Tillsonburg, Ontario, Canada. She had been confined to bed rest for most of the summer. It was a difficult time for her. She wrote, "I've never felt so empty and afraid." One August evening she wrote in her diary, "Lord, have you left me too?"

And then, an unusual chain of events took place. Her brother invited her out to dinner hoping to cheer her up. On their way to dinner they ran into one of his friends who asked to join them. Later, the man who joined them for dinner, whose name was Paul, would ask Margaret out on a date. Months passed and in early fall of the following year, Paul asked Margaret to marry him. She said, "Yes" and they went for a walk along the shore of Lake Erie. She wrote, "The waves hissed into bubbles at our feet. Paul stopped suddenly and pointed back at our tracks in the sand. 'See our footprints, Margaret? On the day we marry, they will become like one set, not two.'"

That night, the image of footprints stayed with Margaret. She couldn't sleep, so she began to write in her diary again, 'Dear Lord, where are you now, when I need you so badly?' Then, as if in a dream, she wrote, "I saw a story unfolding in my mind's eye. My pen took over as I began writing it out. I saw myself walking along a beach with Jesus, and scenes of my life flashed before us. But during the most painful scenes, I noticed only one set of footprints was left in the sand. I asked Jesus where he had been when I needed him most. Then, I wrote down his reply: 'My precious child, I love you and will never leave you. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.'"

Those words have inspired millions. They say that we need to see life from God's perspective. Then we would know whose footprints those were. Anytime we think we have God figured out- we are probably wrong. Our greatest need is simply to trust Him as Lord of our lives.



## Don't Miss Out

The man whispered, "God, speak to me"- and a meadowlark sang. But the man did not hear it. So the man yelled, "God. Speak to me!"- and the thunder rolled across the sky. But the man did not listen.

The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you."- and a star shined brightly. But the man did not notice. And the man shouted, "God, show me a miracle!"- and a life was born. But the man did not know.

So the man cried out in despair, "Touch me, God, and let me know you are here!"- whereupon God reached down and touched the man. But the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.

Don't miss out on a blessing because it isn't packaged the way that you expect!







## ENCOURAGEMENT

Bob Richards, the former pole-vault champion, shares a moving story about a skinny young boy who loved football with all his heart. Practice after practice he eagerly gave everything he had, but being half the size of the other boys, he got absolutely nowhere. At all the games, this hopeful athlete sat on the bench and hardly ever played. This teenager lived alone with his father, and the two of them had a very special relationship. Even though the son was always on the bench, his father was always in the stands cheering. He never missed a game. This young man was still the smallest of the class when he entered high school, but his father continued to encourage him. He also made it very clear that he did not have to play football if he didn't want to.

However, the young man loved football and decided to hang in there. He was determined to try his best at every practice, and perhaps he'd get to play when he became a senior. All through high school he never missed a game or a practice, but remained a bench warmer all four years. His faithful father was always in the stands; always with words of encouragement for him. When the young man went to college, he decided to try out for the football team as a "walk-on". Everyone was sure he could never make the cut, but he did. The coach admitted that he kept him on the roster because he always put all his heart and soul in to every practice, and at the same time, provided the other members with the spirit and hustle they badly needed. The news that he had survived the cut thrilled him so much that he rushed to the nearest phone and called his father. His father shared his excitement and was sent season tickets for all the college games.

This persistent young athlete never missed a practice during his four years at college, but he never got to play in the game. It was the end of his senior football season, and as he trotted onto the practice field shortly before the big play off game, the coach met him with a telegram. The young man read the telegram and became deathly silent. Swallowing hard, he mumbled to the coach, "My father died this morning. Is it alright if I miss practice today?" The coach put his arm gently around his shoulder and said, "Take the rest of the week off, son. And don't even plan on coming back to the game on Saturday." Saturday arrived, and the game was not going well. In the third quarter, when the team was ten points behind, a silent young man quietly slipped into the empty locker room and put on his football gear. As he ran onto the sidelines, the coach and his players were astounded to see their faithful teammate back so soon. "Coach, please let me play. I've just got to play today." said the young man. The coach pretended not to hear him. There was no way he wanted his worst player in this close playoff game. But the young man persisted, and finally feeling sorry for the kid, the coach gave in. "All right," he said. "You can go in."

Before long, the coach, the players and everyone in the stands could not believe their eyes. This little unknown, who had never played football before was doing everything right. The opposing team could not stop him. He ran, he passed, blocked and tackled like a star. His team began to triumph. The score was soon tied. In the closing seconds of the game, this kid intercepted a pass and ran all the way for the winning touchdown. The fans broke loose. His teammates hoisted him onto their shoulders. Such cheering you never heard! Finally, after the stands had emptied and the team had showered and left the locker room, the coach noticed that the young man was sitting quietly in the corner all alone. The coach came to him and said, "Kid, I can't believe it. You were fantastic! Tell me what got into you? How did you do it?" He looked at the coach, with tears in his eyes, and said, "Well, you knew my dad died, but did you know that my dad was blind?" The young man swallowed hard and forced a smile, "Dad came to all my games, but today was the first time he could see me play, and I wanted to show him I could do it!"

Like the athlete's father, God is always there cheering for us. He's always reminding us to go on. He's even offering His hand for He knows what is best and is willing to give us what we need and not simply what we want. God has never missed a single game. What a joy to know that life is meaningful if lived for the highest. Live for HIM for he's watching us in the game of life.



# **I Didn't Have Time**

I got up early one morning and rushed into the day;  
I had so much to accomplish, that I didn't have time to pray.

Problems tumbled about me, and heavier became each task; "Why  
doesn't God help me?" I wondered, and He answered, "You didn't ask."

I tried to come into God's presence, I used all my keys at the lock; And God  
gently and lovingly chided, "My child, you didn't knock."

I looked for joy and beauty, but the day stretched gray and bleak; I  
wondered why God didn't show me, and He said, "You didn't seek."

I woke up early this morning and paused before facing the day;  
I had so much to accomplish, that I took time out to pray.

-Unknown



## The Bird Cage

There once was a man named George Thomas, pastor in a small New England town. One Easter Sunday morning he came to the Church carrying a rusty, bent, old bird cage, and set it by the pulpit. Eyebrows were raised and, as if in response, Pastor Thomas began to speak...

I was walking through town yesterday when I saw a young boy coming toward me swinging this birdcage. On the bottom of the cage were three little wild birds, shivering with cold and fright. I stopped the lad and asked, "What you got there, son?"

"Just some old birds," came the reply.

"What are you gonna do with them?" I asked.

"Take 'em home and have fun with 'em," he answered. "I'm gonna tease 'em and pull out their feathers to make 'em fight. I'm gonna have a real good time."

"But you'll get tired of those birds sooner or later. What will you do?"

"Oh, I got some cats," said the little boy. "They like birds. I'll take 'em to them."

The pastor was silent for a moment. "How much do you want for those birds, son?"

"Huh? Why, you don't want them birds, mister. They're just plain old field birds. They don't sing.

They ain't even pretty!"

"How much?" the pastor asked again.

The boy sized up the pastor as if he were crazy and said, "\$10?" The pastor reached in his pocket and took out a ten dollar bill. He placed it in the boy's hand. In a flash, the boy was gone. The pastor picked up the cage and gently carried it to the end of the alley where there was a tree and a grassy spot. Setting the cage down, he opened the door, and by softly tapping the bars persuaded the birds out, setting them free. Well, that explained the empty birdcage on the pulpit, and then the pastor began to tell this story.

One day Satan and Jesus were having a conversation. Satan had just come from the Garden of Eden, and he was gloating and boasting.

"Yes, sir, I just caught the world full of people down there. Set me a trap, used bait I knew they couldn't resist. Got 'em all!"

"What are you going to do with them?" Jesus asked.

Satan replied, "Oh, I'm gonna have fun! I'm gonna teach them how to marry and divorce each other, how to hate and abuse each other, how to drink and smoke and curse. I'm gonna teach them how to invent guns and bombs and kill each other. I'm really gonna have fun!"

"And what will you do when you get done with them?" Jesus asked.

"Oh, I'll kill 'em," Satan glared proudly.

"How much do you want for them?" Jesus asked.

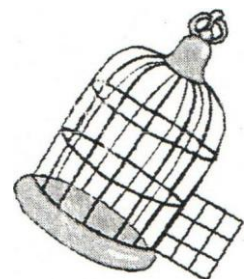
"Oh, you don't want those people. They ain't no good. Why, you'll take them and they'll just hate you. They'll spit on you, curse you and kill you. You don't want those people!"

"How much?" He asked again.

Satan looked at Jesus and sneered, "All your blood, tears and your life."

Jesus said, "DONE!" Then He paid the price.

The pastor picked up the cage, opened the door and walked from the pulpit.



## Signs on the Christian Journey

Someone once compared the Christian journey to traveling a modern highway. Along any major highway there are signs that point out directions or hazards along the way: "detour", "yield", "do not enter", "merge", "stop", "dangerous curve", and so on. These signs have a purpose. They serve to insure our safe arrival at our destination.

In our Christian journey, there are similar signs, given by God, that might be interpreted as "spiritual" direction and instruction. Just like the modern highway, the highway of life contains many obstacles that must be met and overcome. Just as we trust the highway department's road signs to lead us in the right direction, so we should trust the spiritual signs we receive from God. The disciple has faith in a loving Lord and believes he can trust these spiritual red flags:

The STOP sign: sometimes we need to just stop in our tracks and listen to God.

The DETOUR sign: Maybe we need to try another way, a different path of action.

YIELD: turn our will over to God.

MERGE: blend our lives with others in love and friendship.

We all have near misses on our journeys. The disciple of Christ learns from those near misses and learns to give the wheel over to Jesus, letting him steer as He would.

