

Real Life  
Devotions  
For Real Life



Living The Transforming Power Of  
God's Word

David P. Dowling

# **Real Life Devotions For Real Life**

Living The Transforming Power Of God's Word

By David P. Dowling

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## INRODUCTION

This devotional book was designed to be different than probably any others you have ever had a chance to read. Instead of reading a new scripture and a new story for each day, this book is laid out to focus on one particular passage for a whole week. This allows you the opportunity to learn and apply God's Word in such a way that it can be retained and hidden in your heart, so it can be easily used in everyday living.

Each devotional is based on a true story, (although some names may have been changed for varying reasons) and written how I remember it or how I remember it being told to me. We use real life stories, because we live real lives. After each story is a thought for the week to help us use the story to pull out God's view, and following that is a section called This Week's Checklist Challenge.

The checklist challenge is meant to be read through completely before you attempt the tasks of any of them. The purpose of the challenge is to bring exercise into the scripture you are reading for that week. There is a line to check off once you complete an action in the checklist. Each checklist is unique and is designed for the specific passage and story for that week. Some are simple; others are more difficult to do. The idea is after reading them all, to select which ones you will attempt first. There are seven tasks, one listed for every day of the week. I strongly recommend you make the scripture memory tasks a priority.

By writing out the verses to be memorized on a 3 x 5 card and keeping it with you all day will allow you to memorize it faster and more efficiently. Read it over and over as you travel to and from work and put it on your desk or work area to keep before you.

The idea of focusing on one scripture for an entire week will allow us time to actually live it out which is what God designed for us to do with His Word. I would suggest you try your best to complete all seven tasks for the week if possible.

I would also recommend that you read the scripture each day in its entirety and work on

memorizing those verses in the checklist. You may also want to reread the story as a reminder of what God is trying to have you work on that week in your life.

My hope for you is that this book will draw out the things in your life you need to change, and encourage you in the things you need to do, so that you find yourself closer and stronger in your walk with the Lord.

I have by no means arrived in my relationship with God and therefore struggle in my walk the same as everyone else. In essence I am living it and learning it with you. May these devotions cause you to see yourself in a new light and open up your heart, that you might see you, the way God sees you. Enjoy!



## THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK

### **Read: James 5:13-16**

*<sup>13</sup>Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (NIV)*

I was on the return trip home from a Promise Keepers convention in Washington D. C. The trip was totally outstanding. The speakers were awesome and the fellowship tremendous. But the most meaningful and probably the most life changing part of the whole trip was the four and a half hour ride home.

A good friend of mine and I were driving together. Both he and I were taking cat naps. It was during my turn to drive and Dave's turn to sleep, that I reflected on the weekend. I thought of all the powerful things that were talked about, but I still felt there was something wrong. As great as I felt I knew that sin still had its icy grip on my life. How could that be, I loved God with all my heart, yet was still hurting Him deeply, and with the one thing that cost Him His Son's life.

As I sat there driving down the highway, God's Word became alive to me, His Word that tells us in James 5:16: Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed... THAT WAS IT! That was the key to overcoming this sin that had driven a wedge into my heart, and made me feel helpless.

But how was I to share it? To tell someone my darkest sin, my biggest fault, one nobody had ever known about. Everyone had always looked up to me. I was an elder and leader in the

church. What would they think of me now?

When Dave woke up, and he and I began to talk, I knew that if I never shared this secret about me that, I could never be what God had planned for me to be. I could never be used by Him to the fullest potential, because people would never really be seeing me, but a man behind a mask.

Dave I said; “God has laid something on my heart and I need to share it with you.” I began to tell him how sin had crept into my life. How it had been etched there by an event that happened in my younger years. How it was hurting me, and God and how it needed to be stopped. He asked me to pull the car over and there on the shoulder of the highway we prayed. With tears running down both our faces we shared with each other our sins and our struggles.

That day a friendship was not only strengthened but sealed. We made a commitment that day to pray daily for one another’s needs and hurts, to push each other on, even under fire and take the next hill, the hill that lay just ahead.

The sin that had been my darkest secret, that had caused so much pain in my life, no longer had power over me, but I over it! But this power does not rest in me, it rests in Jesus Christ. So grab the hand of one you trust, a friend and travel together to the foot of the cross, knowing that together in Christ you and I can receive the VICTORY!!!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Growing up, there were many heroes and superheroes that I grew to envy that I would watch on TV. Many you may remember: Batman, Robin, Kato, The Green Hornet, Zorro, Spiderman, The Lone Ranger, and others.

All of them were great crime fighters, but all of them were afraid to show others their true identity. Although they each did great things, they all hide behind a mask, never letting others see who they really were. In fact, they often fled the scene after saving the day, so that others never got the chance to guess who they really were.

I believe that each one of us has a desire to show others who we really are inside but can't or don't because we allow fear to stand in our way. We are afraid, of what others might think of us!

I am reminded of a really funny TV program called Home Improvement, and of the next door neighbor Wilson, whose face you never see. That's what makes this part of the show so funny, everyone always hoping to get a glimpse of his face, and at the same time trying to figure how he will keep it hidden in the next scene. Isn't that us? Only it's not so funny. Living our lives for Christ is what I am sure almost all of you reading this book want. A life that's full and has the power of God in it, but we can only be effective for God and affected by God if we remain who we really are.

I am saddened by how many Christians never share who they really are inside. Maybe it's because if they let others know who they really are and of the sin they are struggling with that they will be thought less of. All of us, every one of us struggle with something we can't overcome on our own. God designed us as Christians, to be a body, a team, an army for him. The more we share of each other the stronger ourselves and others become. How else will others know how to pray for the very thing that keeps you from being who you can and should be for Christ?

When men and women are sent off to war they become united under one flag, and with one goal, VICTORY! Nobody can win a war on their own. It takes an army; an army that has fears. I don't know of one serviceman who deep in the midst of combat isn't afraid. But what gave him the courage to go on, is that he was going on with others. Each one encouraging the other to move ahead, even under fire, knowing he was a part of something bigger and larger than himself, and together they could have the VICTORY!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

- \_\_\_ Memorize James 5:16
- \_\_\_ Make a list of people that push you closer to Christ.
- \_\_\_ Make a list of three of the hardest sins you face.
- \_\_\_ Sincerely confess these sins to God.

\_\_\_ Confess one or more of those sins to a close friend (one of the people you have listed above).

\_\_\_ Pray regularly for the friend you shared with.

\_\_\_ Make yourself more transparent with others, showing them more of who you really are.

## CARLOS GOES HOME

### **Read: 1 Corinthians 15:58**

*<sup>58</sup>Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (NIV)*

The year was 1968 and the place Camp Carol South Vietnam. A friend of mine, Carlos, was a Marine. His job was to carry supplies by truck to his company. This was one of the toughest fighting areas in Vietnam. Many times that Carlos had squeezed past enemy soldiers undetected, in order to successfully restock the dwindling supplies of his fellow soldiers and friends.

This day seemed no different than any other. The fighting was coming and going just like the wind, unexpectedly and random. Carlos had been driving his truck down a battered dusty dirt road. Just as he was arriving at camp, the enemy mortar fire hit. Carlos' truck was hit through the hood and as the mortar exploded it drove metal and shrapnel up through the floor board of the truck and across the left side of his body. In shock, Carlos opened the door of the truck and fell to the ground. The left side of his body had been torn open, from his hip to his armpit. As Carlos tried to crawl to the nearest hole to take cover, he looked around. He could see the impact of the mortars taking a devastating toll on the people and the ground that surrounded him.

As Carlos lay there bleeding in a hole, two soldiers appeared. One grabbed Carlos' jacket and wrapped him as tightly as he could, helping to close up the wound. Choppers began to make their appearance, coming to rescue the wounded. As one touched down, each man who had been in the hole with Carlos, grabbed his jacket. With a tightly fastened grip on each shoulder and under enemy fire, they lugged Carlos towards the chopper across the field, dragging him

face down. They headed through the debris across the battlefield towards a clearing where the chopper waited.

As they arrived at the chopper, its blades spinning hurriedly, both men lunged into the helicopter, still holding onto their companion. The pilot gave power to the throttle and the Huey responded. Because of being under fire, the pilot left quickly and before Carlos could be fully lifted into the chopper. As the helicopter banked hard each of Carlos' friends grip tightened, refusing to let go. As Carlos hung suspended in the open doorway, the only thing between himself and death was the grip of his friends. When the chopper finally leveled off Carlos was pulled to safety. The men, both whole and wounded, headed for base where Carlos was treated for his wounds and sent home to the states.

Carlos made it home because his friends were there for him and never gave up hope that he would make it. Think about your friends and your relationship to them. Are there friends of yours that you are, and have been praying for to come to know the Lord? Have there been friends that have hurt you deeply for one reason or another, that need your forgiveness and prayers?

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

There are times in most of our lives where all hope seems to fade slowly from our grasp. There are times when our prayers directed toward and for our friends seem to go unanswered. It's at these times when hope begins to fade that we need to tighten our grip, just like Carlos' friends.

I know of a daughter that prayed earnestly for her mother to come to know Jesus as her savior. It wasn't until thirty-five years later that the prayer she had prayed daily was answered, and her mom came to know the same kind of joy her daughter had known. Thirty-five years is half a life time to some. I am sure that through all those years hope may have begun to fade. But just like Carlos' friends she tightened her grip, setting her faith and focus to the God who is all powerful and can do all things, and kept on keeping on.

Many friends and family don't know Jesus and it seems doubtful that they ever will, but that doesn't stop me from praying for them. After all, I have seen God heal relationships, reunite people's marriages, and save one of the biggest sinners around - me! You and I may doubt

ourselves, but we should never doubt our God! Let us like Carlos' friends, tighten our grip, set our faith and focus to the God who is all powerful and can do all things, and together keep on keeping on!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Corinthians 15:58

\_\_\_ Make a list of people that you really need to pray for, and pray for them every day this week.

\_\_\_ Talk to God about your disappointments concerning unanswered prayers and expectations.

\_\_\_ Pray about a goal you have that may be unreachable. Include God in that process.

\_\_\_ Make a list of answered prayers that God has granted to you, as a reminder of His faithfulness.

\_\_\_ Make a list of the areas of your life (prayer, sin, studying God's Word, etc.) that you need to tighten your grip on.

\_\_\_ Make a plan of action so that tightening your grip in those areas will become a habit. For example pick a specific time each day to read the Bible, or write out a prayer list that you will use all week, etc.

## BEING A COTTER PIN

### **Read: Acts 11:22-24**

*<sup>22</sup>News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup>When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup>He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (NIV)*

Once, two men were sitting at a diner, debating who had the largest ranch. One would describe how big his part of the planet was, and then the other would chime in and try to top it. Just then a Texan walked in and while sitting at the counter, overheard these men debating about who owned the biggest piece of property. After about 10 minutes, the Texan walked over to the two men, and in his deep, long Texas drawl, he said to the two of them, "My ranch is so big back where I come from, I can get in my truck and I can drive all day, and all night, and all morning the next day and still not reach the other side of my land." One of the men looked up at him real intently and said; "Yeah, I know what you mean, I had a truck just like that once."

That is an old joke, but it helps set the tone for a true story that happened to me, that holds a very basic biblical truth. I remember quite a few years back as I was traveling home in my dad's old 1970 Ford pickup. Everything was great, except that every few miles the truck would begin to shake and shimmy a little, but then would ride real smooth again. I didn't think much of it at the time, and I figured that I could check it out when I arrived at home, which was just a few miles down the road.

The last few miles were fine but it didn't last for long. Turning onto the dirt road that leads to my home, I notice that the front of the truck was suddenly and unexpectedly leaning forward with the front bumper on the driver's side low to the road. I quickly slammed on the brakes and jumped out of the truck, and there was the cause of the shaking and shimmying. The tire, that



just a few feet prior was helping to roll the truck safely forward was now jammed up under the front axle, between the hub and the ground. Looking at the tire I noticed that not only the tire but also the front drum was dislocated. On even closer examination, I found the reason for my whole dilemma. The small cotter pin that held the main lock nut on the hub had fallen out and allowed the nut to slowly loosen and fall off along with the wheel.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Now I can probably already hear you now! What kind of great biblical truth is lying deeply embedded in this story. Well if you haven't found it already I'll tell you. I never really took the time to understand the importance of that little cotter pin; that is of course until it was gone. Only then did its part of that vehicle or lack of it seem to make a difference to me. In the time I have been a Christian, there is one thing that I have found to be of the utmost importance to me, as well as those around me in leading the Christian life in a powerful and dynamic way. This one thing that I have discovered can cause someone who is weak in the faith, to become a spiritual giant in just a short amount of time. So, what is this major discovery! It's nothing new, it's called encouragement!

If we take a close look at the book of Acts (Chapter 9, verses 26-27) we discover a man who knows that God has chosen him for something special. Here is a man who wants to be part of the team of those who call themselves Christians, but who can, because everyone is afraid of him. Nobody will take the time, or the chance to look deeper into this figure of a man and see who he really is, to see the very things that God sees, to see all that he could be, that is except one - Barnabas! Nobody gave Paul a second look, let alone a second chance, that is except Barnabas. Do you know what the name Barnabas means? It means son of encouragement, a name he lived up to.

Think for a moment, if Barnabas never took the time to look past the hardness of Paul, and into the softness of who God could allow him to be; then he may never have given Paul a chance and introduced him to the apostles. And if that was the case, Paul may never have gone on to be bold enough to preach to the thousands he did, and may never have written the 16 books of the New Testament through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In essence Paul may never have had the chance to be the Paul that God wanted him to be, only the Paul that others wanted him

to be. So what does that have to do with you?

Well where would you be without Paul? Where would you be without the words that God allowed him to pen in the New Testament? In reality, it may very well have been one of the many whom he had led to Christ, that may have indirectly had something to do with you giving your heart to Christ, and all of it because of Barnabas and the time he took to encourage a brother on to greatness. So it was Barnabas who was the key. It was through his encouragement that he became the cotter pin that God wanted him to be, and thus held that greater part of Gods plan for Paul on track.

I remember playing football in high school, but even more prevalent in my mind is not so much what took place on the field, but what took place prior the games. I'll never forget the day I went to select my equipment. Mike, a veteran player and a captain that year greeted me. I had known Mike for awhile, as he was in a lot of my classes. But that day he seemed to take a real interest in me. He went with me to each equipment table to select what would be the best for me to wear into battle. He walked me through like a mother buying clothes for her child, and when we were done, I held much more than an equipment bag. I held in my heart the firm grip of confidence that I would carry through the whole season. It wasn't the fact that he helped me with my equipment selection, but how he did it. I could see in his eyes, and hear in his voice the very fact that he believed in me, and that if I was going to take the time to be part of the team he played on, then he was going to take the time to make me the best I could be, and it was his encouragement that made all the difference in how I believed in myself.

Encouragement is more than a word or something you say. It is the very heart of ministry. It also the cotter pin that holds on the wheel and keeps us pointed toward home. It is the basis for how we grow as Christians. But encouragement takes a very special commodity, time! It takes time to stop and look through the hard outside covering. To look deep, deep into the softened heart and marrow of a person, and take the time to see that very thing that God sees, a wheel. One that will either stay tightly held to the cross by the cotter pin of encouragement, and that will joyfully carry the gospel down the road to the next person they come across, or a wheel that will soon work its way loose, become detached and roll off the path and down the hill far out of sight of what they are, or ever could be for Christ. Encouragement is a small thing, but

then again so is a cotter pin. But as you can see it can make all the difference in the world.

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Acts 11:23

\_\_\_ Memorize Acts 11:24

\_\_\_ Ask God to give you the names of seven people you feel He wants you to encourage this week.

\_\_\_ Call three of those people, one person a day.

\_\_\_ Hand write a note or letter to the other four people, and send them in the mail.

\_\_\_ Pray for each of the seven people each day this week.

\_\_\_ Do something that encourages you and your walk with God. Maybe it is to attend a conference, church service, or take you Bible for a walk some place quiet.

## FOR HIS GLORY

### **Read: Colossians 3:17**

*<sup>17</sup>And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NIV)*

We were frantically hurrying. We had been working all day on projects in this part of Jamaica. Now all our team had assembled in order to bring to completion a water diversion project at one of the pastor's homes. The high concrete block retaining wall that would serve to hold back the mud and water that all too often spilled down off of the bank behind the house and enter in through the back door had already been completed. The job that lay ahead though was just as strenuous to complete and needed to be done today. We were going to be mixing and pouring a concrete pad that would divert the water that poured through the drainage holes in the retaining wall in order to carry it down to the road.

All our supplies were delivered. The only problem was that they were down the base of the hill at the road and needed to be carried to the top of the hill before the work could actually begin. First the bags of cement were hauled up. Then the rough gravelly sand was pushed up the hill, using a wheelbarrow with two or three people pushing it at one time. At the top it was dumped into a pile on the floor of the carport. Water was added, and the slow hand mixing process began.

For the next several hours our team worked in procession. Diligently we pursued our goal. The concrete was mixed and placed into buckets and handed to the members of our crew to be dumped on the ground by the wall. Then with the work of a trowel it was given pitch and form in order to be effective in its task. The last bucket of concrete was poured into place and the trowel coaxed it into shape. Then as the afternoon grew late, the entire pad was floated into place using a board to create the final desired finish. In celebration of our hard work, we signed

our masterpiece with these words: "PROJECT SERVE 1993." We all stood there, proud of our work and glorying in it.

It was only a short time later that the thing any concrete man fears happened, it began to rain. As the clouds rolled in so did the rain, and as it fell so did our hopes. The rain was now falling with even more intensity and washing away the top layer of cement, carrying it down the hill to the road. We all gathered into a circle, knowing that all we could do was pray, and pray we did, asking God to stop the rain, and save our hard work. But the rain continued on. Finally after a half an hour it let up and then stopped altogether. Grabbing the board again, I began to re-float the concrete pulling more cement to the top and pushing the exposed gravel into the floor. After about forty-five minutes or so it was done. Taking a stick and carefully working my way to the corner I again wrote on behalf of all the team: "PROJECT SERVE 1993." But again as we were beginning to pack up, the clouds once again appeared in the distance and we knew what was to take place next. Gathering again in prayer, we asked that our hard work would not be in vain. But as the clouds came so did the rain, and it was pouring. After twenty minutes or so it stopped, but not after it had done a damaging job on the concrete.

I believe in my heart that God was in the very process of showing me an important truth that I have carried with me to this day. As I grabbed the board for the third time and began working the floor back into shape. I thought why would God allow all our hard work for Him to be destroyed? Even our prayers seemed to go unanswered. Then as I worked the board back and forth, this thought stuck in my mind. We were proud of our work, and we were glorying in our work, not our God. We were taking the credit for ourselves instead of giving it to the one who made our work possible, the Lord Almighty. As I completed the floor, I worked my way back to the group and told them what I felt. I said that I feel we shouldn't write our group name in the concrete, but instead give all the glory to God, not taking any for ourselves. Everyone agreed and as we packed up to leave, the sun began to shine again not only in the sky, but I believe also in the heart of God.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Do you remember in school when a teacher would bring out a pointer, maybe it was a solid wooden one, or one of those metal retractable kind. Then they would point to a specific spot on

a map or the blackboard. Let me ask you this, did you look at the pointer or where it was pointing?

As we minister to others about the Lord Jesus we need to be pointing others to Him, so they focus on Him - the blackboard, not us as the pointers. Whatever ministry you are involved in, whether you are one of the head leaders in your church, or somebody that has a real desire to reach out to your neighborhood in the name of Christ. You and I need always to remember that the ministry we pursue is God's, not ours! God is the initiator, the reason for its being, the one who has placed you and I in it, and the one who directs it; it is His, lock, stock, and barrel. He is the one who deserves all the praise. He is the one who deserves all the glory, and only He should be the one to receive all the glory.

God has shown me, that I am nothing without Him. Without His might, without His Grace towards me, without His undying love, and without His forgiveness I am nothing of significance, but with Him I am everything! Let us hold to the right frame of mind, and realize our part. Let us know who we serve and why. And then let us take the praise and glory that is directed towards us and point to the blackboard of our faith, our Lord and Savior being the one who truly deserves it all!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Colossian 3:17

\_\_\_ Think of one or two things that you have been prideful about lately, that made others think you were more than you are, and did not acknowledge God in.

\_\_\_ Offer those things up to God and ask His forgiveness for acting out in pride.

\_\_\_ Ask God to grant you ability to succeed at something special for Him, so that you can direct the praise to Him.

\_\_\_ Make a list of five things that you accomplished in your life so far that you know you could not have done without God, and then thank and praise Him for each one.

\_\_\_ Make a list of twenty blessings that God has given you so far in your life.

\_\_\_ Look up the word glory or glorify, and really think about what it means when it pertains to God.

## THE FUN HOUSE

### **Read: Deuteronomy 30:19-20**

<sup>19</sup>*This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live*  
<sup>20</sup>*and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (NIV)*

As we pulled into the parking lot of the amusement park, I could see the huge clown that hung above its entrance, and excitement began to flow through me. Mom and Dad, decided to take me for a day to Dorney Park. Entering in, there was so much that a kid could do, it was overwhelming. But there was one ride that really caught my eye. It held the mystery of what was inside. It was the old fun house.

After the usual harassment given to a father by his child, my dad conceded and decided to take me inside. Being only about ten years old, and having little fear, I ventured a slight bit ahead of my father, but close enough to know I could comfort him should he become a little afraid.

Down the first hallway we went. About half way down, air exploded from small air guns in the floor, scaring me half to death. As we rounded the next bend, I found myself now standing by my father's side, and peering front and back, looking for the next thing that would try and take me by surprise. Slightly down the next hall, we encountered them, the OGA BOOGERS; at least that is what I called them. Ugly, hairy beasts, with eyes that hung out of their head, and claws six inches long (or there about, I didn't take the time to measure them) lunging back and forth at us, going oga booger, oga booger! Ten years old, and my life was already going to be over!

By now my hand was tightly clenched onto my dad's pant leg, and feeling a little safer we



pressed on. Each dark corridor held something even more frightening than the last. And each hall brought me clinging closer to my father. Within a short time, both my arms were wrapped around my dad's leg as we traveled the gauntlet of fear together. Somehow the fact of knowing my dad was there with me made me feel safe even when it seemed I wasn't. Again the OGA BOOGERS attacked, this time in full force. There were more of them and they were coming more often, and boy were they uggggggglyyyy!

The barrage of monsters was so overwhelming that I noticed I was no longer moving under my own power. During the last onslaught of creatures, I had somehow now wrapped both my legs and arms around my father's leg and slid down until I was sitting on his foot, facing his knee. Onward we continued, my father now carrying me on his foot. With each step, he would carry me forward, that much closer to the safety that lie outside, and he did it without one complaint. Throughout the entire ordeal it was as if he took joy in seeing me cling to him, in knowing how very much I needed him! He was happy to just be there for me, and to comfort me as each and every monster made his attack.

Riding along on my father's leg, I no longer felt afraid as I had when I was traveling by myself or just standing by his side. No, it seemed that now I was in the midst of his protection, and if anything wanted to get me they would have to go through my dad first and that would be no easy task. After all, my dad was fearless throughout the whole course of events. So as we finally made our way safely out of the fun house, from my lowly perch upon my father's foot I realized that day just how strong and powerful my father really was, and how fortunate I was to have him to cling to!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I find that fear is one of the greatest things that stop us as Christians from being all we can be for our Lord. Think about it. Many of us don't share the good news about Jesus with others for a lot of fearful reasons. We begin to rationalize our fears, and make up excuses why we shouldn't do what God Himself through the Holy Spirit has laid on our hearts to do. Maybe we say in our thoughts: I don't want to offend someone by telling them about Jesus, or I just don't have the talent to do that, or I am afraid that the right words won't come out, or I might lose my job, or my status of who I am!

Maybe there are other things that frighten you, like the fact that in your heart you know that God is leading you to go someplace, maybe to a new job, maybe to move your family to the other side of the country or the world. Maybe God has called you to go into the ministry, or the mission field, or maybe a thousand other things. You and I know what they are and only you and I can make the decision whether or not those leadings will ever become reality!

In this life we live in, there are an awful lot of OGA BOOGERS. Monsters that represent fear around every dark hallway and corridor we travel. But along with those monsters and creatures of fear, there is one greater than our fear of all those monsters combined, and that is our DAD! Our heavenly Father and He stands by our side ready at all times to give His comfort, as we cling to Him.

Fear has tremendous, ominous stopping power when we travel ahead of our Father and confront it face to face on our own. But from our lowly perch on our Father's foot, and with our arms wrapped tightly around His leg, fear has no more stopping power than a butterfly has against a charging rhino. Because we are no longer resting in our own strength and in our mortal imperfect selves, but we are resting on the foot of the most high, on the power of the living God, and we no longer are traveling under our own power but under His!

In order for you and I to experience the awesome safety of riding on the foot of our Father, there is one thing that needs to happen. We need to replace the fear in our life, with the faith in our God.

For me to experience the safety of my father years ago in that fun house, one thing needed to happen. I needed to trust him to get me through. It was that simple and it still is today. That is what faith is, a trust that says yes, when logic says no! Remember this, that no matter what monster or creature of fear has raised its ugly head in your life, that if you place that faith of yours in your Father instead of in yourself, then as you exit the next ride of fear in your life, you can look up from your lowly perch upon your Father's foot and realize just how strong and powerful your heavenly Father really is, and how fortunate you are to have Him to cling to!

## THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE

\_\_\_ Memorize Deuteronomy 30:19

\_\_\_ Memorize Deuteronomy 30:20

\_\_\_ Remember and think about two times when fear stopped you from doing something for God.

\_\_\_ Make a list of five things that cause you to be fearful right now.

\_\_\_ Make it a point to push through just one fear you have today as a sign that you are willing to trust God. It might mean a phone call, or a contact, or sharing your faith with someone as the opportunity comes up, or making a big decision you know you need to make.

\_\_\_ Call your earthly father this week just to tell them you miss them, or write a letter to them if they are no longer living, expressing the same, then file it somewhere. Think back what it was like to be a kid again.

\_\_\_ If you are a parent then think about the joy your children bring you when they show you they need you. Offer that same joy back to your heavenly Father by telling Him how much you need Him.

## JUDY & THE SPEAR

### **Read: Ephesians 4:26-32**

*<sup>26</sup>“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup>and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup>Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. <sup>29</sup>Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. (NIV)*

Growing up, it had to be my all time favorite place to visit as a kid. The docks were like runways, that floated up and down on rings secured to long pilings. The bait shack stood at the water's edge, its inside filled with its special smell. It was small, but loaded to the roof with outboard motors, and fishing supplies. Connected to the back of the bait shack was Frank's room. Frank was the caretaker for my Great Aunt Millie and Uncle Claude. This was their place, and in my heart I have photos that I take out and look at every now and then to remember just how grand it was to be a kid.

As far as I was concerned it was the best place I ever visited as a youngster. I would look forward to that trip out to my Aunt Millie's for weeks. I would pack my crab traps, my fishing poles, and all the other ocean gear I had. I probably looked like Gilligan getting ready for a three-hour tour. Finally the day arrived and we would drive that long drive into Long Island. From the moment I got there, to the end of the day, as my folks would visit I would be out on the dock fishing, crabbing and exploring. The only thing that drove me inside was lunch. Does that surprise you?

I especially remember this one day. The tide was low and that meant only one thing for me, exploring. After baiting and setting out my crab traps I would walk down the boat launch on the other side of Frank's place down to where the water receded. From there I could slip in under the stationary dock of the bait shack and explore for sunken treasure. I would scan the hidden beach for any tell tale signs of majestic worth.

Then in a flash, I saw it. Laying flat in the mud was a spear from a speargun. Evidently someone had dropped it, and it had fallen through the crack in the dock up above me. I was amazed. It was my biggest find of the century, or maybe whole young life. I played with that spear all day long. I took it with me everywhere. During the slow times of crabbing and fishing, I would imagine what it would be like to be diving the ocean depths, spear fishing for Cod Fish and Grouper, it was awesome.

Sometime during one of my journeys deep, deep, into the ocean depths, my cousin Judy arrived. I really liked Judy she reminded me, and I am sure would have reminded you too of Judy Garland, she was extra nice.

Judy and I were playing together out on the rowboats that my Aunt rented out to fisherman, and I remember handing Judy my spear. It was only for a moment. I scurried over to the dock and ran up the incline to the top. I turned expecting Judy to do the same, but she stood there tapping the bottom of my spear on the top edge of the boat.

Then it happened, the event that would change history. As she brought the spear down for another tap, it missed the edge of the boat, slipped out of her hand and was gone forever. Anger began to creep up in me. Starting at my toes and ending at my head, I felt like I was going to explode. I became furious. Enraged! How could somebody I loved and trusted lose my most prized possession? I can't quite remember the words I used to yell at Judy that day but I know that they were cruel and harsh. After all, the thing I loved was gone, and how could I forgive Judy for what she had done?

## **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

THINGS, THINGS, THINGS, PEOPLE. That's the way I looked at life. After all, happiness comes with the next purchase. To want, and to have; were the only things that really mattered.

It wasn't until I found Jesus, or I should say He found me, that I began to look at things differently.

I can still remember the look of hurt on Judy's face, the downcast look into the water, the look that said that piece of rusted old metal was more important than her. I have since forgiven Judy. But the pain I left her may be something that she carries with her wherever she goes, like the photos I carry with me of Aunt Millie's. Photos in her heart that are not of the joy of Aunt Millie's but of a cousin that was selfish enough to put things ahead of people, and not just any person, someone who was sweet, caring, and most of all someone who loved me for who I was.

There is nothing wrong with having things. Things are great. They are tools we use for everyday living. But that is all that they are - tools. The problem comes when in our great intelligence and self-centeredness of playing lord of the ring, we lose the truth that we are to use things and love people, not the other way around. Take a look around you, at all the things you own. Remember how you struggled to get them and then once they were yours, the pleasure slowly left, the bills came and the happiness and the search for it was directed to the next thing.

But you are probably saying, what about you Dave? What about that spear you loved? I really didn't love that spear, what I really loved was the excitement and the glow of who that spear made me imagine I was; a big shot deep sea explorer. You see the love of things has the tendency to change us into people we want to be, not the people God intended us to be.

When I look at the memory of Judy, I see Jesus. I see the times that I became angry at God because I couldn't have the things I wanted. I look at the memory of Judy and again, I see Jesus, someone who really loves me for who I am. Looking at that memory one more time I see a fool who needed to be taught a very powerful lesson in their life, and I was that fool! It is only too bad that I learned it at the expense of my cousin and her love.

Judy, I'm Sorry!

## THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 4:31

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 4:32

\_\_\_ Make a list of ten possessions that you would have a hard time selling or letting go of.

\_\_\_ Remember a time when you were angry with God. Go to Him and ask His forgiveness.

\_\_\_ Recall three people from your past that hurt you in some way and forgive them for it.

\_\_\_ Contact at least one of them if not all of them and let them know that you were hurt, but that you forgive them. You can call them, email them, write a letter or message them through social media. Whatever you decide to use, please do it. I know this is tough, but it solidifies your forgiveness and remember forgiveness is for you, not them.

\_\_\_ From this day forward commit to only being angry until the sun goes down. Then forgive and forget about it.

## BEING JUST US

### **READ: Ephesians 4:11-16**

*<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teacher, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (NIV)*

It was at a sportsman show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania when I discovered a very valuable truth, a truth that many of us seem to forget from time to time. My son Joshua and I were having a terrific day together. It was our day, one that we could share as father and son, alone, and together. We had just bought some food, and decided to take a break in the small arena of the Farm Show building.

In a few minutes an animal show would be taking place and Josh being only four years old, was waiting with anticipation. Joshua seemed to enjoy the show immensely, as each animal performed. The last act to take the stage was without a doubt the best. It was a dog act, but there was something unique about each of the dogs as we were to find out. Prior to the performance the dogs' trainer gave an introduction about how the act was put together. He explained that each of the dogs used in the performance were adopted from the animal shelter, and they were of no special breed, and that the actual show was designed around each of the dog's natural abilities and talents. He shared that as the dogs were brought home, that they each began to express certain gifts, and it was these gifts the trainers use to bring the



performance to life.

One dog always loved to jump at you when your back was turned. Another would just plain love to jump. Still another loved to steal things like hats or whatever that you threw on the ground. But all in all it was the things the dogs naturally loved to do that made the show the outstanding performance it was. As each one's abilities were fine-tuned and directed into a positive direction, the show took on zest that left you laughing and made you feel like it was totally unrehearsed. In plain English it was alive.

Watching the show that day with my son made me realize something much deeper than what I saw. It made me think of us as individuals, brought together for the one great monumental performance for our God - called life. Each one of us as Christians being captured by sin and held to die, are adopted from the "animal shelter" of life, and instead of facing death are placed into God's family. As the trainer explained, each one of those dogs were just ordinary animals, with nothing special to contribute, except who they were. It was their master's keen eye that spotted their natural abilities, and developed them to be something extraordinary. In the same token it is God who has called us, and created us to serve Him, to love Him, and perform for Him, with nothing greater than who we are.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

As I look around at fellow believers, I see many who can't or won't understand who they are in Christ. Because they feel inadequate, they act inadequate. It is often because of this inadequacy that they begin to wish that they were someone else, someone of more importance; someone with greater gifts and abilities. This should never be. Many of us fail to realize that in looking at others and their abilities, we take our eyes off of what we have to offer. You might say that you don't have anything to offer, but you would be wrong - you have yourself. In establishing a true picture of who we are, I can't help but feel that it's not always how we perceive ourselves but how others perceive us.

While playing football in high school, I learned what teamwork was all about. If you were a part of the team, and you wore the uniform, then you were a player. In my senior year in high school our team went 10 and 1, and I believe that it was because of the contributing factors of

everyone's natural abilities. Everyone was just as important as the next. Coaches supplied the drive and strategy. The girl managers, provided the water and cared for equipment and the small things that nobody thinks about. The players themselves were different. The Quarterback, was a leader of the offense using both physical and mental ability. The Linemen, were protectors and aggressors, using their strength and size to stop the advancement of their opponents. The secondary, used their gift of speed and judgment to zone out the offensives forward pass. On special teams - the kicker, goal line defense, punt return, extra point team, all were valuable and important although never really given thoughtful consideration.

We are a team. As Christians all the positions that we hold in Christ are important. Just like every one of the positions of our football team were. Without the Managers, there would be no equipment, to protect us, or water to keep us going. Without linemen, I don't care how good a quarterback is, he wouldn't last very long. Without the secondary, the other team would score every time. Do you see my point?

Don't every think that the things you do for Christ are unimportant, or go unnoticed. God knows your heart and all the things you have done for Him out of love. Big or small, that doesn't matter; they are all the same in His eyes, because you did it for Him. The next time you begin to feel small, or unimportant in the family of God, remember that you are an intricate part of the team and without you the team just wouldn't be the same. It doesn't matter what position you fill, coach, quarterback, lineman, kicker, or manager, take just one away and we all lose. So don't forget to suit up with whatever abilities God has given you, and I'll see you under the lights, giving all you have by doing your part in making God and all of us winners!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 4:15

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 4:16

\_\_\_ Looking at all the parts of the human body, try to envision which one or ones you are and then try to think what effect it would have if you no longer served as those parts.

\_\_\_ Thank God for five abilities God has blessed you with.

\_\_\_ Ask God to forgive you for the times you put yourself down as a Christian because you thought of yourself as less important compared to someone else.

\_\_\_ Think of five ways in which God used you for His glory, and then thank Him for them.

\_\_\_ Make a list of the things that make you feel inadequate in your walk with God and then ask Him to remove those feelings.

## MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

### **Read: James 1:12**

*<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (NIV)*

Remembering back, they were the toughest two weeks I have ever faced. I had never worked so hard, and with so little. The weeks I refer to were two weeks that I had spent in Jamaica as a short-term missionary. Our team of seventeen had built concrete walls, poured concrete floors, demolished solid concrete walls, constructed a library addition onto an existing school, ministered to the weak and the sick in a nursing home, organized and ran a Vacation Bible School, and a host of other things.

During the day our work was hard, but at night our rest was satisfying, knowing that we had given our all in serving our Lord Jesus that day. Our goal was to not only build a retaining wall which would stop the mud from flowing into a pastor's house every time it rained, but also to successfully complete an addition onto a school that would serve as a library for the kids in the town of Fellowship.

Day after day we labored. Pressing on to the goal we had established for ourselves. We laid concrete block after concrete block. We mixed yards and yards of concrete by hand with shovels and on the bare ground, while sifting rocks from hundreds of pounds of sand, so it could be mixed with the concrete. As our time grew shorter, so did our distance from meeting our goals. It was on the very last day that we were able to work, that all our projects with one final push came to completion. We visited each construction site and dedicated the outcome of all the hard work we had done to the glory of our Lord.

Arriving at the airport a day later, we were forced to say our good-byes to the people that we had not only worked together with, but had grown to love. Our team would be taking different

flights out of Jamaica, and I was one of the last to board the first flight home. As I was walking across the Jamaican runway, and was thinking of all we had done in the name of Christ, a great sense of peace came over me. While I looked out onto the mountains that surrounded the airport, and toward the rest of the team waiting inside for the next flight home, I could not help but drop my bags and reflect on all God had done through us and in such a short time. As I stood there in the final moments before my departure, I felt these words laid on my heart; "Well done, mission accomplished."

After arriving home, the following day, I received a call from a good friend I had met on the trip to Jamaica. As we talked, Sam questioned me as to what I was thinking as I stood there by myself on the runway and looked off into the mountains. I told him of the words that God had spoken to my heart. "Well done, mission accomplished." All Sam could do was agree with me, for after experiencing all we had together it was evident that within his heart he had felt the same way!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

You and I as Christians, need to understand our mission if it is to ever be accomplished. I am not talking about our gifts and our talents. I am talking about our mission and our purpose. Our gifts and our talents are only the tools which God gives each of us in order to accomplish our purpose. For each of us our purpose is different. Some of us are servants, others are teachers, and to others we are still something else. But in God's divine holiness, He has through the Holy Spirit determined to each of us what gifts we should have, in order to fulfill the Godly purpose for which God has designed for each one of us.

I have been a Christian a lot of years. But I never really discovered God's purpose for me, until about a year ago. Until then although I had done a lot of things for God, I had no vision, and vision is what God places in our life in order to fulfill our purpose for Him. Without vision as a Christian, it is as if we are adrift on a raft in the middle of the ocean, going wherever the current and wind takes us. But when we catch God's vision for us, it is as if God Himself has attached a 150 horsepower outboard motor to the back of our raft, given it full throttle, and pointed us in the direction of our destination, wherever that may be.

Each one of us has a specific purpose in the kingdom of God, and I believe that only you and I can accomplish our mission and our purpose like no other. That is why God has chosen you, and chosen me for our specific tasks. I pray that today you might seek God wholeheartedly and ask Him to show you your purpose if you don't already know it, so that you might work towards being the best that you can be for Him. If you already know your mission, pray that God would instill vision in you, and point you toward your destination, so that someday when you stand before the throne of our heavenly Father and know in your heart that you have given all you could to the purpose He set out for you to achieve. You might hear these words, as we share in God's victory; "Well done, mission accomplished."

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize James 1:12

\_\_\_ Remember back to a time in your life when God was praising you for a job well done for Him.

\_\_\_ Spend some time asking God this week to show you your mission if you don't already know it.

\_\_\_ Make a plan of action listing five things you must do to live out your mission for Christ.

\_\_\_ Ask God to clear the path for you in those things of action to help you be successful in your mission.

\_\_\_ Name five talents God has given you to live out your mission for Him and then thank Him for them.

\_\_\_ What two things are holding you back from being all God wants you to be. Pray about them and ask God to help you work around them. It could be a fear, a person, lack of time, or whatever.

## MORE THAN JUST NAMES

### **Read: Revelation 20:11–15**

*<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup>The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup>Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (NIV)*

At the time of this writing, there have been only two times when I have had the opportunity to visit Washington D. C. Both times that I was there, the viewing of one of its memorials has touched me like no other, either before or since. It is known as the WALL. It is made of black granite and etched into this hardened stone are the names of 58,000 Americans that were either lost or killed in the Vietnam War.

The Wall was something I had heard about in my younger years and something that I had always longed to see. My first opportunity came in 1993. I was there to prepare for a short-term missions trip to the island of Jamaica. I along with the other leaders of the trip, were staying at the home of a friend. On Saturday night I had mentioned that I had never had the opportunity to visit the Wall and would really like to see it, even though our schedule was very tight. We were offered the use of a car and accepted. So at 6:00 AM along with two other leaders Sam and Carl, I went to visit the Wall for the first time.

As we arrived early that Sunday morning, the mist was just lifting off the green grass as we made our way down the path and around the corner that leads to the Wall. Its view was

impressive to say the least. Men were at work busily washing the black granite faces of the rock to prepare for that days multitude of onlookers. Looking in the book of names of those written on the Wall, I found to my amazement the names of seven soldiers with the last name of Dowling. Walking down the pathway, it was as if the names were given life and jumped out at me. Not just those containing my last name, but all of them. As I read each name, I tried to think what each had gone through and how they had left this world for another.

As I was standing there before the wall of names, I stood not only looking at the names of those who had died in combat, but of the names that now represented those who must stand before the God of all creation and give account for their life on this earth! The thought to me was overwhelming, not only that these brave men must stand before the Lord, but everyone someday will!

My second visit to the Wall was in some respects much like the first. Myself, along with three of my friends Dave, Bob and Scott were gathered together for something that had brought 52,000 other men to D.C., a Promise Keepers convention.

The convention had ended late Saturday night and we were planning on seeing some of the sights Sunday before going to church and then home. I mentioned to the guys that we should see the Wall and they all agreed. I told them that since it was Memorial Day weekend we had better go early. So leaving early on Sunday, I arrived again with friends to see what so many others had come to see in the past. There were only a handful of people there early that morning. Walking down the pathway once more and looking into the eyes of my friends, as they read the names as I had two years earlier, I could see their eyes were glazed over and tears were beginning to form. It was then I knew, that they not only felt, but also understood what I had, standing in this same spot two years prior.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Tears in our eyes! That is how we should feel inside, when we think of others who don't have Christ in their life and are headed down the road that eventually leads them to the judgment seat and then to the lake of fire. That is what we should feel, when we think of our friends, our family, and people we don't even know, but who God knows and loves enough to give His Son



for. People that will never have the opportunity to know the unstoppable love of God, His awesome feeling of peace, or His ever increasing forgiveness, unless we tell them!

Being a person engaged in ministry I have had the opportunity to share Christ many times, and with many people, but one stands out from the rest. Gene was the owner of a rather large business, selling outdoor equipment. I owned a small mail order retail business at the time and bought most of my supplies from Gene's firm.

It was a Wednesday some years back, and I had driven up north to Gene's to pick up an order. Not having enough cash on hand, I quickly went to the car for my checkbook. I was moving pretty fast, because they were getting ready to close for the night. I grabbed my checks and closed the door, only I realized my keys were still in the car as the door seemed to swing shut in slow motion, locking me out of the car. After calling my wife and giving her directions to come pick me up, there was nothing left to do but wait.

Outside it began to rain heavily, Gene insisted that I wait inside. One by one the workers left, until only Gene and I remained. We talked mainly of business. But as time passed Gene began to open up to me. He shared with me about the death of his son, who had been killed in an auto accident, and how he missed him so badly. He told me of how his wife had become a vegetable of sorts, depressed, staring at the walls and not feeling much of anything. He told me how he was afraid to go home at night and face her.

Then he said something that will always be with me until the day I die. After a short pause he looked softly into my eyes and said, "What's our purpose in life? What are we here for?" Immediately I could feel the Holy Spirit urging me, tell him, tell him, TELL HIM! But instead of sharing with him Jesus Christ, the solution to all his problems, and the answer to his question, I decided to remain silent, because I didn't want to risk upsetting our business relationship. How could I have been so foolish? Here was a man that cried out for the answer, and I knew it, but I didn't want to make waves.

Since that day I have relived our talk over and over in my mind, and have kicked myself repeatedly for not telling him what I should have.

The choice that I made that day wasn't good in itself, but a good thing has come out of it. I now

know, that I can never ever let anything stop me from sharing Jesus with those who need Him so badly. If we don't tell them, nobody else will. God has left the job to us and us alone. So the next time you and I look at those around us who need the savior, I pray we would look at them with tears in our eyes, and conviction in our hearts, so that their names will not just be written on a cold, black granite wall, that so respectfully displays their departure from this world, but also written in the Lamb's Book of Life that will signal their arrival to the next!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Revelation 20:13

\_\_\_ Memorize Revelation 20:14

\_\_\_ Memorize Revelation 20:15

\_\_\_ List three of the biggest things you know that keep you from sharing Christ with others, and ask God to help you with them.

\_\_\_ Remember a time like mine when you said nothing to someone about Jesus and knew you should have. Then ask God to open opportunities for you again in those areas.

\_\_\_ Develop your personal testimony about how you came to Christ, and be prepared to share it. This is something that nobody can argue with you about.

\_\_\_ Pray for five people you know this week that don't know the Lord.

## MY MENTOR

### **Read: 2 Timothy 2:2**

*<sup>2</sup>And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (NIV)*

His physical stature is small, he stands only about five foot four, but to me he will always be a giant. His name is John. Physical stature means very little in the life of a Christian. What truly counts is what lies on the inside. I first met John when I was introduced to him at a youth group meeting in 1978.

I had just recently given my life to Christ, and really had no understanding of what my next move was. After all, this Christian life thing was very real, but it was also very very new. There was so much to learn, where was I to even start? That is where John stepped in. From the very start I saw something unique in his life. He was a giver, and still is. He was the leader of the Church youth group. He poured out countless hours into the lives of kids, one of which was me.

He not only would teach of Christ from our lesson book, he also taught us with his life. In every situation that would come up, myself along with others, would get to see firsthand how someone who was serious about living the Spirit filled life would react to the conflicts and disappointments of life, the outcome of which was always a positive one.

God had given John several gifts to use for His Glory. And use them he did. After several youth meetings John had the ability to look into your heart and see the trouble and pain. Pulling me aside he would share stories of his past that clearly showed how it was God who made him who he was. Many of those stories are still in my mind, helping me to remember that it is God who made me what I am today.

Even after youth group our relationship continued as well as the guidance. It was John who gave me the direction I needed in making the right choice in a job change. We went winter camping together, deer hunting, hiking, and even fished in his pond.

I remember the one thing John possessed was the ability to visualize people for who they could be, rather than who they were.

I remember a time when I drove my pickup truck wildly into the church parking lot trying to show off for everyone. I swung into the entrance, raced over to the parking area and cut the wheel sharply. I was going much too fast at the time and the passenger side of the truck dipped sharply and as I skidded around the back driver's side tire lifted off the ground. The truck finally came to a stop and I thought for sure I was in big trouble. But John just looked at me and never said a word. Because of our friendship and his look I could sense his disappointment and that spoke volumes to me. In fact John's eyes, his look, and his smile spoke more to me than his words ever could, and they left a lasting impression that is with me even to this day.

All the time we spent together, not one sermon was preached, and no lesson plan was discussed, yet I believe that those times possessed the greatest, yet simplest form of ministry - love. Ministry comes in many forms but one of the most effective is just the fact of showing someone how much you care both for them and for Christ.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Looking back, I believe the reason that John was able to have such a tremendous impact on my life was the fact that he was a chance giver. He always took the time to allow me to develop into who he knew I could be for Christ, and that made all the difference in who I am today, and who I could have been!

Some years back the local newspaper did an article about me and the ministry that I was working for. Not long after it was published, I received a phone call at my office. It was a girl named Jennifer that was one of the youth that we ministered to. We would do a summer Bible study at different kid's homes and called it Summer Bananas. Jennifer was one of the teens that took part in these studies and we had become friends.

She told me that she had been packing away some things for a move and was using newspaper that her mom brought down from where she lived which happened to be where I ministered. When Jennifer grabbed a piece of paper to fold around one of her breakables she saw my picture. It brought back a flood of memories and she decided to call me and let me know how she was doing.

She told me that she was now married to a believer and that they were getting ready to move and how they were very active in their church and were growing in the Lord. We talked about our times together and what they meant to her, and then said our good-byes. Isn't it amazing how you never know the lasting impact you can have on someone's life?

Over the course of my ministry I've had the opportunity to have conversations with kids who are now adults whose lives I was able to build into that are living out their lives for Christ. One of those is Bill. Last week I received a phone call from Bill. Bill is now a man, but I have known Bill ever since he was a teenager. Bill would come to our Youth for Christ meetings. I remember picking up Bill and his brother in our old Scout and taking them to the meetings. I remember looking at Bill and seeing someone that needed to be loved, someone that needed to be nurtured in Christ and given a chance to be whatever Christ had planned for him to be. As we talked on the phone Bill shared with me all the ministry God has laid out for him to do, of his workings within the Church, of his trip to Brazil on a short term mission project, and how through him his family is beginning to respond to the gospel of Christ.

I don't have any idea were my life, Jennifer or Bill's life might be right now in Christ, if it had not been for John, but the one thing I can say is this, Bill and Jennifer's lives were changed ones, and so was mine. Why? Because someone took the time to be a chance giver, to look into the lives of others and see them how God does. To spend time with, to nurture, to be a guide, and to mentor and to perform the greatest ministry of all - love!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Timothy 2:2

\_\_\_ Think of two people this week that you have high expectations for and encourage them with a letter, email, or phone call.

\_\_\_ Uplift three people this week at church with a meaningful compliment.

\_\_\_ Think about what things you need to change in your life right now in order for your life to really show Christ without saying a word to people. Maybe you need to change your work ethic, your honesty, your compassion, etc.

\_\_\_ Pick one younger person you would be willing to help grow in the Lord and then do one thing a week for them to help them grow closer to God.

\_\_\_ Think of someone in your life that mentored you in some way, and contact them to thank them and then thank God for them as well.

\_\_\_ List the greatest thing right now that is keeping you from being a mentor, and change it so it is no longer in the way.

## THE STATUE

### **Read: Deuteronomy 1:21**

*<sup>21</sup> See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged.” (NIV)*

Bob is a neat guy, and a good friend of mine. I think our bond of friendship has been cemented together over the years by our mutual love for the game of soccer, as well as our shared trust in Christ. Bob's love for the game of soccer as well as his ability to play the game well, along with his love for kids, led him into a coaching position in a youth soccer league.

During the process of coaching, no matter what the sport, there always seems to be one or two players that seem to stand out from among the rest, and Forest was no exception to this rule. He was a stout stocky fullback whose size was dwarfed only by his desire to learn the game. Each practice Forest's desire and eagerness to learn was overwhelming. He was always leaning on Bob for guidance and direction. He had a thirst that could only be quenched by the approval of his coach as he showed up for each and every practice.

Forest was what every coach dreams of, a player who is not only teachable, but willing to give it all for both his coach and his team. As a soccer fullback, Forest held a powerful responsibility in his hands, or rather his feet. His objective was to guard his goal from the attack of the opposing team, and never allow the goalie to be faced with the sole responsibility of protecting the net. Forest's job was to take control of the ball as it entered his field of play.

The fullback's job is to charge forward and neutralize his opponent by gaining possession of the ball if possible, and blocking the shot if not. Forest assumed his position on the field, forward of the goal, and at the ready.

Bob looked on with eager anticipation for Forest to carry out his mission with the same desire

and drive he had demonstrated at practice, over and over again. But as the advancement of the other team drew near a strange event took place on the field. Forest froze. All the eagerness and drive to perform was somehow locked inside this cemented form. For all intents and purposes Forest had become a statue. Frozen for whatever reason, fear, panic, or anxiety, we do not know. But whatever it was it was able to drive the lifeblood of desire from what was before, someone to be reckoned with, but who was now an icy figure, standing motionless on the field, as the ball dribbled by just inches from his feet, with no response at all.

How many of us have ever felt like Forest did? I see those hands, and I see mine too! We practice and practice and practice some more, for the big play of our lives, and then never seize the moment when it comes along. You know the play. You know the time. The time you didn't tell your son or daughter that you were proud of them when you know you should have. The time you yelled unjustly at your wife or children when you know you shouldn't have. The time you allowed pride to take the limelight when you know you shouldn't have. The time you said NO to Jesus when you know you shouldn't have. The time you,..... well you know the time, and so do I!

Seems we can spend all the time we want in God's Holy Word. Seems we can know all we can about how God wants us to handle a certain situation. Seems we can have all the drive and desire on the practice field, but it sure doesn't do us or God much good unless we learn to unleash it on the field of life.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

There are three things I think God would want all of us to know, and take to heart. The first is that God Himself loves you and He loves me, for the very people we are. His love is the motivation for breaking out of the encrusted form that you and I have become. His love is the compelling force behind the fact of why someone would give up everything they own to go and be a missionary in a place they have never seen, somewhere on the opposite side of the world. It's the same force that drove Christ to give up all He had and die a tragic death for your sake and for mine. Can you and I develop within us any less compassion when we reason Gods love? I don't think so.



Second, God forgives us of our sins! What a great thought. But all too often You and I think more about who we were in the past, instead of who we can be in the future, with His love and forgiveness to comfort us. You and I need to concentrate more on what God want from us, then what we want from ourselves. Forgiveness is the lifeblood of knowing Christ. It is the power of knowing that I am going to mess up from time to time, but if my heart is right with God, His love can drive out that fear and panic that drives out the desire to try again when I seem to mess up the first time.

Finally, God is our Goalie, the Savior of our souls. But the fact that God guards the net to our hearts is no reason for us not to still try our best in becoming what He wants us to become; conformed to the image of His Son. For many of us we have allowed complacency in our lives to slowly cement us into the people we have become, to freeze our feet, when we know in our hearts they should be moving. It's time to demonstrate to God, our coach, what we have learned quietly in our prayer closet with just Him, His Word, and our desire to break free of what we were, and break into who we can be. We need to rush forward into our opposition and seize the moment, to seize it for the souls being lost, for our families who need to know that God lives in us, and for God Himself, as a thank you to Him for who He is, and what He has done for us, through the blood of His Son Jesus. These three things, love, forgiveness, and the sovereignty of God should be all we need in order to never again let pigeons rest their feet on our shoulders.

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Deuteronomy 1:21

\_\_\_ Name two fears you faced this week about life and address them to God.

\_\_\_ Ask God to help you stop being complacent about things in life and challenge you with the desire to do something life changing for Him. Maybe it is to teach a Sunday School class, or preach, or help at Vacation Bible School, etc.

\_\_\_ List ten things that shows that you are loved by God.

\_\_\_ List ten things that God has forgiven you for.

\_\_\_ List ten things that shows God's sovereignty in your life. An example might be a time He protected you, your talents, the job you have, etc.

\_\_\_ Accept whatever challenge God has for you this week by facing it like Joshua did with strength and courage, and see what happens.

## STEVE'S STRENGTH

**Read: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12**

*<sup>7</sup>But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup>We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup>We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup>For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup>So then death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (NIV)*

It was on Father's Day that I had heard the news. My pastor pulled me aside before the beginning of church and told me what had happened. A friend of mine, Steve, had a diving accident and had broken his neck, at this point no details were available. He asked if I would like to go with him to visit him at the hospital tonight. "Sure" I said.

Steve was a big man. Standing about 6' 3" and weighing almost 270 pounds. But as big as he was, his spirit was gentle. I had known Steve for quite a few years. His mother called our church and asked if her boys Steve and his brother could attend. She wanted them to be confirmed. My pastor said to bring them on Sunday and they could meet with me and start things off by being involved in my Sunday School class.

After meeting the boys, a friendship had begun. We had many of the same interests, such as hunting which helped to draw us closer. Steve and his brother began to also attend Youth for Christ, a program I worked with very closely. It was only a short time later that both of them had accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Over time our relationship grew. Steve went off to college but would still call me occasionally to ask me questions about the Christian life. We would talk and share over the phone. When

Steve came home, he usually made time to say hi or to drop over the house.

During church this particular Sunday an announcement was made about Steve during our prayer time. Throughout the church you could hear groans of shock and disappointment. At 5:30 that afternoon, I was to meet the pastor at the Church so we could drive down to the hospital together.

As I sat there in the truck waiting for the pastor to arrive, I began to think of what I was going to say to Steve. How could I give comfort to a man who may never walk again? Who may never again know what it's like to play football or run or even walk down the Ocean City Boardwalk like we had done together so many times before.

As the pieces of what had happened were placed together we found out that Steve had been swimming over his girlfriend's house. He had dove into the lake and hit his head on a rock, His girlfriend seeing the whole thing swam over to him and helped pull him with the help of her father safely to shore. A nurse later told us that he had shattered his spine at the C6 vertebrate and although he may have use of his arms it is doubtful he will ever walk again.

After an hour's drive, the pastor and I arrived at the hospital. We made our way up to the Intensive Care Unit and into Steve's room. Steve lay there motionless on the bed. His girl friend was standing beside him, holding his hand. As we came to his bedside, he recognized the pastor and then seeing me said, "Oh, and Mr. Dowling too." I will never forget the next words from Steve's mouth. As he lay there flat on his back, and looking up at us in a neck brace, with hoses and monitors hooked to his body, he said, "What Word do you have for me?" I think the word that Steve was talking about was God's Word not ours. In the midst of his anguish many of us might have turned from God, but Steve wanted to hear from Him!

After some chit chat, I opened my Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 7 and began to read. I shared with Steve how the real you and I are so precious to God our Father. That who we really are, lies deep inside and that our bodies are only the container for who we are. You see, we are not physical people with a spirit. But we are spiritual people within an earth suit, our bodies. God has placed the treasures of who we are in these jars of clay, so that God could show in us mere mortals His unsurpassing power.

## THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Many men come home from war missing arms and legs, and feeling like half a man. Many people for different reason lose mobility to some or all of their body. But our body isn't who we are. Who we are lies inside and in the knowledge of God. Each of us is designed for a purpose and God often uses the things that to us look so bad, but to God can be used for His good and His Glory.

As I stood there, I realized that Steve already knew the things I shared. He already knew that there would be nothing in this world that could separate him from the awesome, unlimited love of God and that God was big and still had a purpose for his life.

As Steve lay there able to move only part of his arms, I realized that I was looking at not half, but a whole man. Because Steve realized who he was in Christ Jesus, and that is all any man ever needs!

## THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Corinthians 4:7

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Corinthians 4:8

\_\_\_ List what limitations you have either physical, spiritual, or emotional that cause you to not feel like a whole person.

\_\_\_ Surrender those limitations to God, and seek out what you can do to move past them.

Listen to the song "Overcomer" by Mandisa (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z29olPjFbqg>)

\_\_\_ Seek out someone with a disability that you know and praise them for their ability to be and overcomer.

\_\_\_ Change your thinking this week to come to understand as I heard one speaker say that you are a spiritual person in an earth suit and not the other way around. Our earth suit can become torn, or punctured, or sick, but that doesn't have to affect who we really are. Live your week

with that in mind.

\_\_\_ Thank God for the blessings of health in your life.

## THE BIG GAME

**Read: John 16:33**

<sup>33</sup>*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* (NIV)

I remember the day when I walked in to get my gear. Helmet, shoulder pads, pants, shoes, shirt and other assorted apparel. Mike was there to greet me, a veteran of three years, and one of the best players I have ever known. With his experience we walked around together and picked out the equipment and helmet that was best suited for my position on the team, offensive guard and defensive tackle.

A few short days later we found ourselves standing on the crest of the practice field looking down at the sleds. I turned to my friend Jim and said, "Where do we push those sleds?" Jim's reply was "Where don't we." I knew then and there that the next three week of summer practice was going to be no piece of cake, and I was right! Up the field, down the field, six point explosions, driving the sled, driving the sled, driving the sled, memorizing plays and calls over and over again, practice, practice, practice! Almost nine hours a day, six days a week our team practiced, and practiced hard. Our practices were difficult but they made us what we were, a team and a team that was good.

One night, as the bus made its way into the stadium parking lot, we each grabbed our gear and headed for the visitors' locker room. Tonight was the big game. This game would in most probability decide whether our team Pleasant Valley, or the opposing team Stroudsburg would be league champions for that year. Our team was undefeated, and Stroudsburg had only suffered one loss, but to a non-league team. There were several more schools each team had to face, but in a nut shell, this game was for all the marbles.

In the locker room each of us were mentally going over our assignments, quietly to ourselves.

Each of us knew that this was THE GAME! Clothed in our armor on the outside and with butterflies on the inside, the coach finally said, "It's time."

Onto the field we exploded. The crowd was enormous, like that of a college game. They knew too that this was THE GAME.

We received the ball, and in a short drive had scored. From here on in though things would only get tougher. I had been switched to nose guard for this game and had only one assignment, stay low in front of the center and sandbag that opening, and clog it tight. Each play was like war. I would have to defend against two men with the force of others pushing behind. I felt helpless, even at 6', 240 lbs. Each time the ball was snapped I would be driven up and back, allowing the ball to be moved forward one more time. The intensity in the game had grown, each man declaring war on his opponent. The battle raged on for what seemed like all night, until finally the scoreboard had declared the victor. Pleasant Valley 13, Stroudsburg 28.

Victory shouts could be heard from the other side of the wall in the winning team's locker room. But on our side not a sound was uttered as showers were taken, equipment loaded, and we all boarded the bus. I will always remember that ride home. Just the drone of the motor, and each man either staring into space or out the window. In the only game of our high school playing career that really mattered, we had lost!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

You may not have played football in high school; you may not have ever played any sports. But you know what it is like to play in THE GAME! Each day is a play. Some are gains, others losses. Sometimes in THE GAME we get to help in scoring a touchdown. But more often than not, we get hit high and low, by two or more of the opposition and driven back a few more yards. We suffer from broken bones and broken hearts. We feel that no matter how hard we fight on the battle field, victor is a title reserved not for us but for our opposition!

Remember this, our victory lies not in how good we can carry out our assignment, but in our coach Jesus Christ! It may seem like fourth and forty, but I have read the back of the book. And guess what? It's our locker room that is screaming the victory cheers. It's our team that is hugging and shouting, but not for us, but for our coach Jesus. You see in reality Jesus was the



one who suited up and won the VICTORY before you and I ever hit the practice field. Before you and I even chose a helmet! I remember my high school coach saying these words to me the night of our first game. "You guys have worked hard, and it doesn't matter if you win or lose every game, I am your coach and I'll be there for you, and we will go through it together!" I was honored to play for a coach like that then, and I am even more honored to play for the coach of glory, who promised me, I will never have to ride home again in a school bus in silence!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize John 16:33

\_\_\_ Remember a time when you felt helpless and needed God to rescue you. Remember also how He came through for you and praise Him for it.

\_\_\_ When the Israelites left Egypt and Pharaoh's army pursued them, God told them (Exodus 14:14) through Moses "The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still." Think about what has been overwhelming for you and what God wants you to be still about as you trust Him to do the work.

\_\_\_ Read and study Ephesians 6:11-17, and visualize putting on as much of God's armor as you can today, then use it as you face opposition.

\_\_\_ Remember something God gave you great victory over and praise Him for it.

\_\_\_ Practice standing your ground with Jesus, by not compromising what you believe to be true about Christ and how He wants you to act out your faith.

\_\_\_ Ask God to fight the battles for you that you face today and trust Him in it.

## THE BOARDWALK DOLLAR

**Read: 2 Timothy 2:25-26**

*<sup>25</sup>Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup>and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (NIV)*

For just about every year for the last twenty plus years, I have been going to the New Jersey shore, at the beginning of each summer to a Youth for Christ conference. This event brings together hundreds of teens from all over the Northeast region and it challenges the kids to evaluate their relationship with God and if they never have before, to receive Christ as their Savior.

My main focus in going on a trip like this is to hang out with the kids. By spending time together and getting to know each other, I can better share Jesus with them on a one on one basis. Besides all the structured activities there is also plenty of free time for kids to just be themselves and have fun. It was while hanging out with the guys that I discovered just how imaginative these kids could be. The amount of people who walk the boardwalk in a day's time must be staggering, thousands upon thousands, and the kids I were with, wanted to put these people to the test. So here is what they did!

While the boys and I stood against the boardwalk railing, one teen would go under the boardwalk, and taking a dollar bill from his pocket, would stick it up through the crack between the floor boards so that only half of the dollar was exposed, while the other half he held tightly between his fingers.

As people would walk by many wouldn't see the dollar, but those that did almost always stopped in their tracks and reached to pick it up, in hopes of being a dollar richer. Just as the person's hand was inches from the dollar one of the boys would stomp their foot on the

boardwalk and the one holding the dollar would pull it quickly down through the crack just as the person was about to pick it up, completely unaware of what was happening.

To watch the different expressions of the people was something else. Some would stomp their feet and snap their finger as if to say "Why didn't I see that sooner?" Others thought "Oh well." Still others kept looking back disgusted that they couldn't have what their eyes fancied. Still there were a few, who after seeing the dollar, walked by and even though we looked natural leaning against the rail, gave us a smiling glance that as much as said "I know your tricks, and I am one person too smart to be fooled by the likes of you."

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

My hat goes off to those people who take the time to evaluate the situation before they plunge into it and come out looking foolish, or even worse. I have a friend of mine, who I have been told, after many years of marriage and two children is going to be leaving his wife for a secretary at work. The world might say that's OK, But the God who designed us and knows our needs and how we work says, ITS NOT!

I believe that there are so many times when Satan stands under the boardwalk of life and holds up through the cracks the things that our eyes fancy. And just as we reach for the next thing that we think will bring us happiness, he pulls it from our fingers and we stand there looking like fools.

So then, how do we know, what is from God and what is from Satan? How do we know the difference between what just looks good and what is truly the real thing? Most everything that you and I purchase at the store comes with some kind of an instruction book. You buy a car you get a book, you buy a DVD player you get a book, you buy a stereo you get a book. When you and I were born, we came complete with a book. God had already seen to it that an instruction manual for you and I had already been provided for us, and our use, it is called His Word, the Bible. Think about it, if each of us never took the time to read the manuals we have acquired and do what they say, most of the equipment and cars we own would be in the trash heap, and that is the reason so many people's lives are. It is not enough to own the book, we had better learn it and apply what it says or you and I can never expect to feel or have the

fullness of God in our lives.

The only way that you and I can overcome and defeat the enemy is to know Him. To study Him, know His thoughts, His way, and all we can about Him. On the other side we need to know who is in charge and what He would have us to do, and how to go about doing it! God's Word allows us the ability to know both those things. Why do you think that God has described His Word as a sword? It's because out of all the armor of God, His sword, aside from prayer is our only offensive weapon, and in order to defeat the enemy, you and I had better know how to handle it and handle it well.

We need to practice carrying it, holding it close to our side, never going a day without feeling the grip of its handle, and the weight of its blade. We need to know its length and the feeling it gives us as we wield it against our foe, not only for our benefit but for God's as well.

God has laid out principles in His Word that can give us the answers to any question that life can throw at us. But we need to know where in His Word those answers are, and that comes through spending time in it each day. I know in my life, that when I increased the length of my daily devotional time with God, my spiritual endurance increased as well. What I mean by that is that I could see my life more like God saw my life, and then I could move ahead, knowing I had the power of God's Word to guide me.

Make a commitment to God today, set up a time and place to meet with Him every day. Spend time getting to know Him in a way you never have before. Study His Word, applying its truth to your heart, and make it alive through your actions.

Then when you and I march down the boardwalk that God has laid out for us to travel on, and through the cracks of life we see Satan's dollars being pushed up from below, we can walk on by and with a smile on our faces, we can send a glance his way that says, "I know who you are and I know your tricks, and I am one person too smart to be fooled by the likes of you!"

Life is so about choices. Where will I live? Who will I marry? Will I marry? What do I want to be? What church should I attend? The list goes on and on. As I write this thought for the week I am torn in a choice I must make. It is a choice that could not just affect me, but hundreds of people and how I minister to them. Choices are not always easy, and sometimes the answer

isn't so simple, but sometimes it is!

I had one person in my office a short time ago who had wound up in an affair with a married person from the same church. Another person that had moved in with someone and had two babies with this person and then gave one up for adoption and is struggling as a single parent now. The list of people above, like the list of questions goes on and on.

The sad fact is that these people I've just share about are Christian people. But somewhere along the way they were fooled into believing that their quest for happiness could be found by making their own way. They knew God's Word. They knew what the right thing was to do. Only they chose to believe the fleeting for the permanent. They chose their way over God's way, and never once have I seen that way bring a depth of lasting and real joy into a person's life.

Both of these people ended up with complex, hurtful, and difficult situations to deal with or try to remedy. But both of their ending choices as well as yours and mine all will start with a single first choice. It is that first choice each of us should be focusing on today. If our first choice in every situation is the foundation for every other choice in that situation, then shouldn't we base that first choice on what God knows to be, instead of what we think to be best? If you take the time today to begin the process of making right choices to start with you, may find yourself finishing sooner and farther ahead of the pack and with a smile on your face to boot! Remember this, the biggest questions in life are not always where you will live or who you will marry, but what does God want from me, and am I willing to do it?

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Timothy 2:25

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Timothy 2:26

\_\_\_ Make it a practice this week to ask God about His direction in any important choices you plan to make before you make them.

\_\_\_ Practice taking every thought captive in your mind, especially the ones leading you into sinful behavior.

\_\_\_ Make sure to avoid situations that can lead you into temptation and sin. Things like going on the internet alone late at night, or hanging out with the wrong type of people, etc.

\_\_\_ Confess any known sins to God and get them out of the way in your relationship with Him.

\_\_\_ If you are unsure about a decision you must make, weigh it heavily against the Word of God, by finding the answer or a principle for making that decision in the Bible.

## THE CAR SALESMAN

### Read: 2 Timothy 2:15

*<sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (NIV)*

Growing up in Staten Island; New York, with my folks and two older brothers was always an adventure. There was never a dull moment, for there was always something going on. On more than one occasion, my older and middle brother Edward would come rambling down our street and into the driveway in another one of his just purchased vehicles.

These cars were never in, let us say, “mint” condition, they were more like in no condition; actually. Each one was a jalopy in its own right, a real thunder buster. But they were my brother's, handpicked by him, to serve as his gallant stead, to take him to the uttermost parts of the globe, or just across the street if he was lucky enough for it to start.

Although my brother knew very little about how cars worked, he always knew all about the cars he drove. How they handled, or didn't for that matter. He knew how to give it that little extra jiggle or how many times to pump the gas in order to make it start. If there is one thing he was good at, it was knowing the cars he had bought, inside and out, which came in real handy when it came time to unload, I mean pass them on to the next person.

I remember one day when a man came to our house and asked to look at the car that was for sale. My brother escorted him outside to his four wheeled treasure. The only problem with this beauty, was that in order to start it, you had to run along side of it, pushing it down the road. Then when you had gotten up enough momentum, you would open the driver's door, leap in, depress the clutch, shift in into second gear, pop the clutch and jiggle the gas all at the same time. Simple, right? Well to my amazement, this man, after looking over the car and being filled in on the above and easy to follow instructions given by my brother, gladly paid the

asking price for the car. So with a hardy but lengthy push from both him and my brother, and a few acrobatics, fired the engine to life and he drove down the street and out of sight.

My brother had not only sold the car, but had made a profit too. In fact, I can't remember a time, when my brother didn't make a profit selling one of his finely tuned, spit shinned autos. If there was anything my brother was it was a salesman, and a good one at that!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Looking back on that story, I can't help but think of what kind of salesmen you and I are for Christ. We may not know why He chooses us to do certain things, or know the actual workings and thoughts of God. But that shouldn't stop us from knowing Him through an intimate and loving relationship. It also shouldn't stop us from knowing His character, His power, His steadfast commitment to us, or the depth of His love. But knowing these things, how is it we seem to always come up short in making a presentation of Christ to our friends and neighbors? Knowing Jesus is the best thing that has ever happened to you and me, So why do we always have such a hard time convincing people of the greatest deal of all time? Yet my brother seemed to almost never fail at convincing those that his cars, as junky as they were, were a great deal at a great price.

I feel the answer to that question lies in these two facts. The first one being that my brother knew all about his cars not because he heard it from somebody else, but because he was the one spending the time behind the steering wheel. As Christians we tend to try and know what a Christian is supposed to perform like, not from actually spending time behind the wheel, but from watching others drive.

The second fact is this: he believed in the cars he owned, even though he couldn't tell you just how it was they worked, he knew that they worked, and that belief spread into enthusiasm whenever it came time to make a sale.

I know that you and I can never grasp all there is to know about the Almighty God. How He thinks and why He does this or that, but we can know this very simple and powerful fact that will make people stand up and take notice, and that is this, I may not know all there is to know about God, but there is one thing I do know about having Jesus in my life, and that is, THAT



## IT WORKS!

Too many Christians think that in order to share Christ with people they need to have a college degree, or be a pastor, but all they really need is to be themselves. When two things begin to happen more and more in your life; when you spend more time driving instead of listening to others, and when you begin to realize that not only does having Jesus in your life work, but has been working all along. Then the enthusiasm of knowing Jesus Christ will begin to be revealed in all you do, and your presentation of Christ won't just be for a fleeting minute here or there, but will radiate from your life and into the life of others, as long as you have breath and as long as you hold this basic truth close to your heart. It comes down to simply this, know who you preach, and preach who you know! Being a salesman for Christ isn't just something we do, it's who we are!

## **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Timothy 2:15

\_\_\_ Test yourself to see how many Bible verses you can recall to memory. In your task you need not have them completely memorized, but you need to know what they say and where they are located in the Bible for them to count.

\_\_\_ Look up and study three scriptures on worship.

\_\_\_ Look up and study three scriptures on coming to Christ.

\_\_\_ Look up and study three scriptures on God's love for you.

\_\_\_ Look up and study three scriptures on sin.

\_\_\_ Prepare an answer to the question "Why does God work in your life?" So you can readily share it with people that ask.

## THE CHECK

### Read – Matthew 6:25-34

*<sup>25</sup>Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup>Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? <sup>28</sup>And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do no labor or spin. <sup>29</sup>Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>So do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' Or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup>Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (NIV)*

Being in ministry and being paid for it holds many rewards. Most of those rewards are in the fruit of seeing lives changed; with fewer of them being financial.

It was late in March and my staff and I were working through plans to take a group of senior high teenagers to one of our conferences that we attend called IMPACT. This is a great conference with approximately four thousand in attendance. Over the course of the weekend the teens are given the opportunity to learn the deeper things of God as well as the chance for those seeking to come to know Jesus Christ personally.

Things were going well for the ministry and the conference, but not very well for my family and me on a personal level. As I mentioned, serving as a local missionary did not give me an excess of funds by any means. In fact my family was having a hard time making ends meet. In

fact they were not meeting! Financially we found ourselves about \$7,000 behind with the immediate need to have about \$1,000 just to keep from going under. My electric bill would be due on Monday without the means to pay it and on this Friday prior I would be taking a busload of teenagers down to the conference knowing they needed to hear from God and so did I. It often becomes really hard at times doing for others when you know you can't provide for yourself!

The conference was as always very well done. We had many opportunities either during the free time or late at night for the staff or me to minister to the teens one on one. Sunday morning quickly came. This was the last day of the conference and we would be heading home just after lunchtime. I was walking through one of the event areas when someone I knew came up to me and we started talking. We shared about how the conference was going and spoke about life and other things, but I never remember mentioning our immediate need. As we were about to leave each other's company he looked at me and said to meet him by the front of the conference hall in about 15 minutes as there was something he wanted to give me. I continued to browse through the event area for a while and then headed to where he wanted me to meet him.

Working my way through the crowd I finally found him standing next to one of the welcome desks. As I approached him he handed me a blank envelope and told me "God directed me to do this for you." Not knowing what was in the envelope I thanked him. As we talked our conversation turned to ministry, I don't remember all of our conversation, but I do remember telling him that I wanted to be available for God to use me in any way He can. Saying our good-byes we shook hands and parted.

As I made my way through the crowd of people both young and old my thoughts turned to the envelope. Pulling it out I folded the flap back and pulled on the sides of the envelope so I could see what was inside. It was a check, a check in the amount of \$1,000. Standing in the middle of that crowd with people banging into me tears fell down my face. God had not forgotten me!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

There is a saying that "God is almost never early, but He is never late!" Sometimes it is easy to

feel discouraged living on the edge. Wondering where God is when going through a sickness, financial problems, marital problems, business issues or just dealing with people that are just not nice. Whether you are in paid ministry or not, we all want to have a sense of belonging and approval and we want God's blessing to show us just that.

One thing I like to tell people going through a hardship is that nothing comes to you or I without first being passed along God's desk for approval. The fact was, that while I was ministering to teenagers my wife Gail was home praying to God not knowing how we were going to pay the electric bill along with a host of others bills that had piled up. Even though it felt like God was deserting us, He wasn't. He was preparing to show His Glory by preparing my friend's heart and using him to bless our lives.

My friend had no way of knowing our exact need. I never mentioned to him our need to pay those bills, or that we needed \$1,000 by Monday to keep our head above water, but God knew! This is not the first time this has happened either. Time after time when our need was the greatest God walked through the door of our lives with the exact blessings we needed. In my walk I have come to realize that I shouldn't sweat the small stuff, and in reality, it is all small compared to God!

Remember God's faithfulness is always greater than our faithlessness. His desire is to bless us, to show us His love and to let us know probably the greatest lesson we can learn and that is that we are His!!!

So no matter what you face today realize that God knows you and He knows your need. All God asks of us is to seek Him and His righteousness and He will take care of all the rest. With all of us facing problems big, small or indifferent, we can rest assured of one thing if we seek Him and put Him first, that God's reply to us will always be "The Check Is In The Mail."

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Matthew 6:33

\_\_\_ Memorize Matthew 6:34

\_\_\_ Make a list of six major problems you are facing in your life right now. They can be financial, emotional, on the job, in your family, anything.

\_\_\_ Take each one of the six problems on your list to God, one each day this week (except the day you are to forget about your problems). Spend time sharing your heart and concern with God over them. Give them fully to Him and trust Him for the result.

\_\_\_ Make a list from your memory of five times in your life when God miraculously came through in those problems. Then thank Him for His faithfulness.

\_\_\_ Pick one day to put your problems aside and forget about them. One day isn't going to matter and spend that day just focusing on climbing up in God's lap and being loved by Him.

\_\_\_ Think what it means to "Seek first the Kingdom of God." Are you doing that and if not ask yourself why and what you can do about it.

## THE CHIMNEY

**Read: John 15:8-11**

*<sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (NIV)*

My dad was a skillful man, able to do just about anything. So, seeing the need for a woodstove in order to heat our cabin, he set his mind to build one. As a family, we never really had a lot of money to just spend on any old thing. So my father decided to build his stove from scrap, and parts that he could salvage from where he worked. Using the old type, hand crank oil tank, he fashioned the main body. Half inch steel plates were bent in a curl to serve as the legs. A section of a dump truck tailgate door was used for the base. Reinforcing rod was bent into handles for the sides and trim for around the door. The top tapered up on all four sides to the point where the stovepipe connected to the chimney. The stove was then painted black, and a small gold painted metal eagle was mounted just above the door for that extra special touch. To look at the finished product you would think that it was commercially made. As usual, my dad, the craftsman he was, produced another one of his many masterpieces.

Firing it up on those cold fall days and watching the flames roar well into the night, gave a sense of great peace as well as accomplishment. The flames would turn different colors and the way they would curl around the logs and lick the top of the stove before they made their way up the chimney fascinated me. I remember sitting there for hours, mesmerized by its action.

I remember the day well. My folks had invited several of their friends to visit, and to spend the day at the cabin. It was a crisp fall day and as usual, the woodstove was in the process of doing its brilliant job of heating. As people arrived and entered the cabin, their attention was

immediately drawn to the newest addition of our family, busily doing its job in the corner. Everyone was so impressed by how well it functioned and by the workmanship in its construction and design.

As my dad began to explain how each part he had salvaged went into the making of the stove, I decided to go play with a few of the kids also visiting. I don't know why it is, but boys in general seem to have a mischievous streak in them that needs little prompting in making itself manifest. I was no exception to the rule.

Looking up at the smoke billowing from the chimney I wondered in my mind what would happen if I covered the chimney with something? There was only one way for me to find out. Grabbing a piece of homeasote board and a rock I climbed up the tree, which overhung part of the roof. Once up on the roof, it was almost as if I had turned into James Bond or a Green Beret. Cautiously, and silently I crept towards my objected target. Once in place, I seated my equipment squarely on top and fastened it with the rock for good measure. Making my way along the peak of the roof, I came to the end, and while laying on my stomach and hanging slightly over the edge of the roof I could look in through the vent window in the peak of the house.

As I lay there the results of my mission was beginning to tally up. As my dad stood there continuing with his talk, smoke began to make its way out the top of the door. The steady stream of smoke continued to increase. With my dad's full focus on what was happening, he began to open and close the damper in hopes of freeing whatever was blocking the smoke from leaving. One by one people not being able to breathe, exited the building in a hurried fashion. Still my dad persisted in freeing the stove. I don't know why to this day. Maybe it's just a sense that parents have or maybe my dad knew me and figured that in some way, I had something to do with this. But almost stopping dead in a sense of wonder, he turned and looked straight up at the window I was looking through. As he shook his closed fist at my upside down face in the window, I knew then and there, that my foolishness had succeeded in embarrassing my father. I had taken from him all the joy he had, in presenting to his friends the thing he labored so intensely on, his masterpiece.

## THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Can you ever remember a time when you were embarrassed? How about a time when you embarrassed someone else? I think that when you and I come right down to it, there isn't much difference in the feeling of hurt, whether we have received it or caused it.

I felt for my dad that day. How could one of his own children, deliberately do something, knowing that it would probably hurt the one who had sacrificed those times to go fishing, skiing, and the time he took to make things with me, the time he took to be my dad? Maybe for some of us it's time we asked that question of ourselves. How many times have you and I embarrassed our heavenly Father? How many times have we been ashamed to show others who our DAD is? How many times have we let the thing that He hates so much, sin, come between Him and us?

The great thing about our God, our Father, is His forgiveness, and although we can't change the past, with His help we can change the future. Our Father is so deserving of our love. In all we strive to do, we should lift Him up, not tear Him down. As Christians we bear His name. Christian meaning Christ's ones or little Christs! The problem is when we selfishly put the focus on ourselves and we no longer live up the word Christian, instead, we become an "IAN." Remember in order for you and me to be living up the name Christian, we as "IANS" need to let Christ go before us!

My dad has since forgiven me of that incident that happened over twenty five years ago. But that day, and its outcome, I have remembered, and have made it a point to never again cover the chimney of my Father's glory.

Let us reach out and receive our Fathers forgiveness like I did so long ago. But let us also make it a point to remember the times, that because of us, God's glory was turned to embarrassment. Let us not remember them, to feel the sadness again, but to remember the outcome, so that you and I will make every effort, with our heavenly Father's help to never again cover the chimney of our Father's glory. But instead fan into a blaze the flames of praise of His masterpiece, us!



## THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE

\_\_\_ Memorize John 15:8

\_\_\_ Remember a time you were embarrassed and how you felt.

\_\_\_ Remember three times you stole God's glory or were ashamed of Him in something.

\_\_\_ List two things you can do to glorify God this week and do them. Maybe give praise to Him at church or dedicate something and offer it up to God.

\_\_\_ Remember YOU are God's masterpiece and He wants to show you off to others. What can you do to make sure you are at your best for God's presentation?

\_\_\_ What are some of the things you place on God's chimney? Make a plan to get rid of them and do it.

\_\_\_ Ask God to forgive you for every time you can remember that you grieved Him or let Him down.

## THE D & E CHUTE

### **Read: 1 Chronicles 4:10**

*<sup>10</sup>Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request.(NIV)*

The day as usual in Jamaica was a hot one, and our work for that day intense. Mixing concrete on the ground all day with nothing more than water and shovels in the hot sun was enough to drain the strength from anyone. It was the first of our two week stay in Jamaica. We had a shower facility that resembled the one on Gilligan's Island. The stall had bamboo poles, banana leaves, and black plastic to hide those showering. With the fact that it had water pressure to it only sometimes, it didn't take us long to discover the river that lay only a few miles away.

After only a short ride down the customary dirt roads, we arrived at the river. Several of the Jamaicans were washing their pots and pans, some were bathing, and even one was washing his truck down river. We decided to swim up under the bridge because most of the water was only about two feet in depth. As we made our way to the water hole, the feeling of that cool water running over my body was great, washing away all the dirt and heat of the day.

During my time on this mission trip, I had gotten to know and love a fellow leader on this trip, his name was Sam Eddy. Sam and I hit it right off. Both of us had a lot in common, and both of us each possessed a deep sense of adventure. On this day it hadn't taken us long to notice that further down the river were a small set of rapids, rolling over shallow water. Off we went.

Laying on our stomachs with our hands in front of us and our heads out of the water, we traveled down through that set of white water and into what seemed the most beautiful section of the river. There were deep, clear, slow moving water, with pools twenty feet deep, and rock

cliffs just as high to jump from.

On our next trip to the river found us back at this location, jumping into the crisp clear water from a rocky crag. For the next few times that we visited the river this would be the place. Being far better than the last location where everyone crowded into a five foot deep pocket of water to bath in their swim suits.

After a few of the trips to that section of the river, it didn't take Sam and I long to want to see what was even further down river. Letting our sense of adventure get the best of us, we left the rest of the teens and the leaders to swim where they were and Sam and I made our way down the river. At first the water moved slowly for about half a mile. Then gradually the water became more shallow and faster. Before long we saw a long moderate set of rapids two hundred yards long and at the end a deep pool as the river made a huge sweeping bend. Looking at each other we both knew we had found what we were looking for. Laying on our stomachs, with our arms stretched out in front of us, and our heads under the water we pushed off into the current. With the same sensation superman must have, it felt as if we were flying as fast as a speeding missile. You could see for several feet in front of you, and as you glided inches over the rocky bottom, that awesome feeling of flight enveloped you.

Suddenly the rapids dumped into a huge pool at the end. And kicking your legs up you would dive down into the channel below. Enormous boulders lay on the bottom and as you would spin over onto your back looking ten or more feet up from the bottom, the reflection on the water's surface was almost like that of a mirror. Breaking the surface Sam and I knew we had found something and that we needed to share it with the others. Walking back up the river, we found the others and convinced them to come see for themselves. As each experienced a ride down the D & E chute, (as it was named after its founders Dowling & Eddy) each shared the thrill that Sam and I had, as we discovered it to be the most exciting section of the river!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

That river reminds me so much like our Christian walk, with each part getting better as we discover it. But for many Christians they never take the risk, or time in discovering what, or who they could really be for God. There are so many that are content to swim in the shallows,

when the depths and rapids lay just a few hundred yards away.

I heard a speaker one time talk about the growth of goldfish. If you have ever looked at a goldfish in a small aquarium, it really isn't much to look at. Something a college kid would probably swallow on a dare. But if you have ever been to an outdoor garden with a large fish pond then you have probably seen goldfish big enough to feed a family. What makes them so big you probably wonder? Are they a different fish? No, but they are in a different environment. You see as with any fish, it can only grow as big as its surroundings. You wouldn't expect a fish to outgrow its bowl, but when you take that same fish and place it in the lake, you can, over time watch it double, triple, even grow ten or more times its old size.

As Christians that is what needs to take place in our lives. We need to get out of the fish bowl and into the lake. Sure you may feel comfortable in the bowl, you know every inch of it and you know just what is going to happen next. You know when feeding time is and when you'll get your water changed, but you also won't grow any bigger unless you make your way to the pond.

In the pond you may feel so uncomfortable. You may not know what is going to happen next, or where you're going. But isn't that when you and I stop depending on ourselves and start depending on God. It's then that we can see how far we have come and who it was that got us here. It's then that our faith in God grows and we realize just how powerful He is. If you and I never stretch ourselves, if we never make our way to the pond, and if you and I never come out of our little comfort zone, than you and I will never experience a ride down the D & E chute, and discover the best section of God's river and all He had planned for us, because we were to afraid to experience it!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Chronicles 4:10

\_\_\_ Like Jabez, what are the territories in your life you want to increase? Picture what they are and ask God to give them to you.

\_\_\_ Ask God to bless you, but be specific and ask Him to bless you in detailed areas so that when He does you will see the result.

\_\_\_ Name two things that are keeping you from stepping outside your comfort zone for God. Then offer them to God for Him to deal with.

\_\_\_ List two things you can do to grow as a Christian in the next week.

\_\_\_ Remember a time when you stepped out in faith and God came through for you. Spend some time thinking about how that felt.

\_\_\_ Find someone that will push you forward out of your comfort zone for God. Give them permission to challenge you from time to time.

## THE HARD LANGUAGE LUNCH

**Read: Matthew 5:14-16**

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>15</sup>In the same way let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (NIV)

It was a Sunday afternoon. Our Project Serve team had arrived in a little section of Miami, Florida known as a tourist park, containing some malls, bands, boat rides, etc. and because of its attraction drew a lot of people to the area.

The afternoon was ours, all thirty-nine of us and we were here to relax and enjoy the day for tomorrow our work was to really begin in helping to rebuild some of the homes destroyed by hurricane Andrew, the real reason we were in Florida to begin with. Lunch time was upon us, and as we followed the teens that made up most of our group, we arrived at a restaurant that is well known throughout Miami. I won't tell you its name, but I will tell you the story of what happened that day.

Our tables were ready and we all jockeyed for position of where to sit. At our table were four of the leaders of our trip, with teens and other leaders scattered about at other tables. Our waiter was cordial and wasted no time in bringing our sodas and ice tea. Music was piped throughout the restaurant, for our listening pleasure. The only problem though was at the end of one of the songs, not music but some of the most vulgar language that I have ever heard was allowed to be broadcast through the speaker system. I glanced around at the tables. Nobody seemed to hear it or even care. A table with a family and young children acted as if nothing was wrong, but something was wrong! I turned to my friend Dave and said, "They didn't say what I think they said, did they?" Without hesitation he replied, "It's what you thought they

said."

Even though the language had gone unnoticed or ignored by some, a small group of our teens had heard it and in the midst of the others began to sing "Jesus Loves Me." What an encouragement to see that our kids were not afraid to show what they believed.

In his efficient manner our waiter again arrived to fill my iced tea. Because of the language that we had heard, Dave, myself and the other two at my table had discussed leaving. So as the waiter asked to see if he could fill my iced tea, I covered the top of my glass as the four of us continued to discuss our options. As one unit we all agreed to leave and I quickly asked the waiter for the check. "Why" he asked? "Because we didn't appreciate the language that we just heard on the speakers," was our reply. "Please wait here while I get the manager" he said.

After several minutes the manager arrived with the CD in hand of the group responsible for the escapade. He apologized to us and told us that all their music CDs are screened. "Well it doesn't seem so in this case" I said. "I don't use that language at home and I certainly don't want to pay to listen to it while I eat here. Besides we are responsible for a large group of teens, that were made to hear that, and from a business point of view, I am sure that there are others and families that did not appreciate hearing what we were forced to hear, but chose not to say anything." The manager assured us that the CDs that they use in the future would be better screened, and gave us the option to leave, but also asked if we would stay and finish our lunch.

As we talked together about the situation we determined that we had taken a stand and made our point, and because of the way in which the manager felt after hearing our say, we decided to stay and finish lunch.

Not only once, but several times during the course of our meal both the manager and the waiter expressed how sorry they were, which I will say, said a lot for the restaurant and their desire to correct their mistake. I realized that the incident was not deliberate and appreciated and applauded their efforts to remedy the issue and again live up to be a restaurant you could bring your family to.

As our meal was about to end the manager came to our table and sharing his feelings once

again informed us that our meal was on him, and that he hoped we would enjoyed the rest of our time in Miami.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

A friend of mine Kelly has a tee shirt that says on the back "You got 2 stand 4 something". The problem is that a lot of those who call themselves Christians don't. They sort of wander around and only take a stand if it is comfortable for them. I have never known anyone to grow in their comfort zone, we have to learn to be bold for God. What good are we to God if we act and look just like everyone else.

We have got to stand out for Him, only then will others notice Him. I am not saying to go looking for trouble, that's not it at all. But what I am saying is that when you and I are challenged to give in to the wrong when we already know what is right, we had better decide what side of the fence we stand on, and for.

I have worked in the construction trade most of my life, and have been around men with the ability to cuss wallpaper off the wall. As I worked more and more together with these guys I was noticing a change and respect in them for who I was. Most times when strong language was used by one of them, they immediately apologized. I believe that what they had respect for wasn't me but the person of Jesus Christ living in me! Years ago I not only accepted Jesus as my savior but also as Lord. This means that I try to play only by His rules and accept only His standards.

Sure there may be times when I do blow it! But just like anything else I have got to get back up, and refocus my thoughts. I need to press on to my goal so that in me others might see Jesus Christ in all I do! Today if you haven't already, make Christ's standards your standards, and watch others lives change. You may not get a free lunch but you'll surely grow in Him!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Matthew 5:14



\_\_\_ Memorize Matthew 5:15

\_\_\_ Memorize Matthew 5:16

\_\_\_ Is there someone that causes you to feel intimidated? Ask God to help you be bold around them in the way you live your life for Jesus.

\_\_\_ Name two times you have compromised your faith, in order to please others.

\_\_\_ Ask God to forgive you of those times you compromised.

\_\_\_ List two areas in your walk with Jesus that you will not compromise, and make a stand to not cross that line.

## THE KAYAK

### **Read: Ephesians 5:15-17**

*<sup>15</sup>Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (NIV)*

Each year for the past four years, I have been fortunate enough to be able to go on a retreat. This is a retreat strictly for the men who live in my area. Every October, Christians from different churches and backgrounds gather together to praise our Lord Jesus and to grow closer to each other.

It was at one of these retreats that I learned something new. Not really something new in the spiritually perspective, although that is how I am going to apply it here today. I learned the laws of using a high rider kayak.

This type of kayak is one where you don't sit down inside it, like the one I own, but rather up on top of it, and in a small molded depression for your seat and feet. Everything else operates pretty much the same as a regular kayak, but there is one difference as I will explain later.

Early one morning a good friend of mine, Howard, was walking down by the lake and as he strolled by the boats he eyed one of the kayaks. It seemed to be calling his name. After all it was a great day for a ride on the lake. So grabbing a paddle Howard armed himself for battle, although he didn't know it at the time.

Pulling the boat close to shore, he took his position in the cockpit and prepared for his morning glide around the lake. Pushing off he experienced great joy for the first thirty seconds. After that something seemed wrong. He found it terribly difficult to stay on the upward side of the boat. Each move he made seemed to force the boat in the other direction. Slowly at first like

the motion of a babies cradle, then with increased speed until he met the point of no return and saw the lake from a different side, from under it. Howard came up wet that day and understood the difference between a regular kayak and this one, the key of which was in keeping his balance.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

It seems the more time saving devices that are invented, the less time we have. Think about it. We have dishwashers, microwaves, cars, cell phones, planes, telephones, dryers, and a whole host of other gadgets that are designed to make life easier, but somehow tend to make them more difficult. It becomes a struggle for us to find and hold onto that balance of time in our lives that we all so desperately need.

Balance is not just important in the everyday lives of our job, and duties but is even more important in our Christian walk. You are probably saying to yourself, what in the world does he mean by that? I'll tell you. Although our everyday lives and our Christian walk are, or should be interwoven together, let's try and separate them for just a minute and concentrate on our Christian walk.

Take a look at Christ. I mean a real hard look! What do you see? I know what I see. I see a man who was God. I see a man who had perfect balance in His life. He was angry at people's sin, but loved the people. His heavenly Father's will, was His top priority, not His. He loved those who hated Him. How could He do this? Because He held firm to the standards of His heavenly Father and made them real in His life, that is how! And because He lived His life first for God, all other areas of His life came into balance also.

It says in Luke 2:52: *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man* (NIV). Look at those four areas of Christ's walk on this earth. One, wisdom, that is mentally. Two, stature, that is physically. Three, in favor with God, that is Spiritually. And four, and men, that is socially. Perfect balance. Because He followed the principles of the almighty God, and took a stand for what they meant!

When you and I are obedient to our Lord and live our life with Him in the midst of it, that is when all other things will fall into place. I learned from building homes over my years as a

contractor that if the foundation is off level, or out of square, so will the rest of the house, and everything in building it will become that much more difficult. If we don't adhere to the foundation of Jesus Christ, how do we ever expect our home to be what it should be?

I believe that balance is something you learn over time. But it requires a starting point, and a striving. It requires that we examine ourselves daily and reevaluate our walk, and then strive with the help of our God, to be obedient to Him and His ways. We have to always determine what the most important thing is in our life, if it's is not the Lord Jesus then there is something wrong. Our Christian life will be empty. Our life will be shallow, and our voice without power.

Having Christ in our lives, and not just having Him, but making Him Lord, and being obedient to Him, is where you and I need to start. Being conformed to the image of God's Son should be our goal and that is an everyday process. In learning balance in our Christian life we need to compare ourselves against what God would have for us, and continually ask ourselves, did I follow Gods standards or my own? Did I stay on top today, or did I wind up in the lake? If you did, don't be discouraged, keep trusting God and strive to be obedient and soon you will see life from a different perspective, one without compromise of God's standards. One that will allow you to stay strongly seated in the kayaks cockpit, while you enjoy the view of the lake from above it instead of in it! Remember you can't stand without balance!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 5:15

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 5:16

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 5:17

\_\_\_ What two things do you need to exchange in order to live a more obedient life to God?

\_\_\_ Make a list of the areas of your life that are out of balance that rob you of the time you spend with God, and then change them.

\_\_\_ What does it mean to you to make the most of every opportunity as it talks about in verse 16? Train yourself to look for those opportunities today.

\_\_\_ Challenge yourself to be wise in just two areas of your life today walking in God's wisdom. They can be things like money, time, your speech, etc.

## THE SAFETY CHECK

### **Read: Genesis 17:1**

*<sup>1</sup>When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty, walk before me faithfully and be blameless. (NIV)*

It wasn't until that afternoon, that I had learned what had happened. I was working as a pipe welder, during the construction of a nuclear power plant, about 70 miles from where I live. Each night all welders were instructed to disconnect their gas lines from the main gas manifolds. This was done as a safety precaution, so that no gas could leak from a loose connection and cause a devastating explosion.

I had learned that one of my good friends, Rodney, who also was a Christian, had, in the hurry of leaving that evening, failed to disconnect his gas hoses. The fine for which was 10 days suspension from work without pay. Each night safety inspectors walk the plant and checked for those that failed to follow these procedures, whether on purpose or by accident, as in Rodney's case. Finding Rodney's tag and number on the hoses, the inspectors then notified the supervisors who would determine what form of disciplinary action would be taken.

The following day Rodney was instructed to go to the general foreman's office. As he entered the office, several foreman were present, and Rodney was informed as to why he was there. Then he remembered what had happened the day before. The one in charge of the meeting looked into Rodney's eyes, and after telling him that the safety inspector had found his hose still attached to the gas manifold that night, asked him, "Did you, or did you not, fail to properly follow procedures and disconnect your hoses last night?" Rodney could have taken the easy way out, and say that he had disconnected the hose, but that someone reconnected them after he had left. He could also have said that the inspector didn't like him, and had set him up. But as I stated earlier Rodney was a Christian, and not just somebody that calls

themselves a Christian, but he lived out his walk with Christ.

After a short pause, Rodney looked up and told the men exactly what had happen. That he had plain and simple forgot to do what he was instructed to do, and that he fully understood the consequences for his actions. Here was a guy who could not afford to be out of work 5 days, let alone 10. But because he had made a commitment to his Lord, Jesus Christ, to serve Him and to honor Him, he told the truth as Christ would have wanted him to.

Each of the men looked at each other. Almost in a baffled expression, could it be that this was the first guy that they had come across that had understood what the results of his punishment could mean, and yet told the truth anyway? After a brief meeting of the minds, they came up with his punishment.

Looking down at Rodney in the same expression he had earlier, the foreman announced their decision. They told Rodney that because of the circumstances involved with the incident that all charges against him were dropped, that no suspension would take place, and that he was to return to work immediately.

That afternoon Rodney told me of the incident, and seeming as perplexed as the men who interviewed him were, saying to me "I just don't understand it, why would they just forget about it like nothing happened and let me go?" That was what he said with his mouth, but I think that he knew the answer all along in his heart!

Seems it is easy to do the right think, when we are not in the midst of the situation, or the one that will be affected by its consequences. But when the heat is on, and the pressure of making the right decision falls on us, how often do we fall. We know exactly what we should do, but fail to do it. We often talk a good game, but when the chips are down, does our talk become reality?

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

In Rodney's case, I can't help but emphasize three truths that are staring us both in the face right now! Truth number one, Rodney loved his God! There is no doubt in my mind that he loved God and wanted the closest relationship he could have with Him, as I am sure you do

also. Truth number two, Rodney wanted to serve God. I believe Rodney in his heart wanted to be the best he could be as a servant, doing what God expected from him. As I am sure you do also. Truth number three, Rodney not only longed to do what was expected of him, but he did it! I believe that God was the one who honored Rodney by pardoning him from the situation, because he honored God.

Truth number three, is often where you and I fall short in our relationship with the Savior. I can remember countless times, when I have fallen short of what I knew God expected of me. Why is it that we do that? Why is it that we see the situation and allow it to overshadow God, who is larger than any problem we encounter, and the solution to it at the same time?

You and I need to always remember who it is that we love and serve, and then we need to remember why! It's out of love isn't it? It's out of devotion right? Isn't it love that would cause us to march into fiery flames to save a loved one? Then out of love we need to march for our God. We need to put legs to our faith, and then through trust in our God, and the thought of knowing what He can do for us, we need to learn to march into any situation we face, and then march out the same way, honoring Christ!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Genesis 17:1

\_\_\_ Define for yourself what God means by walking before Him faithfully and being blameless.

\_\_\_ If you were in Rodney's situation would you have responded the same way? Ask yourself why you would respond the way you think you would, and talk to God about it either way.

\_\_\_ Be conscious of three opportunities today to be blameless before others and God and take advantage of them.

\_\_\_ Remember a time when it cost you something to be faithful. Remember what it was that it cost you and ask yourself why were you willing to give it up in exchange?



\_\_\_ Look up and study three verses on being faithful to God.

\_\_\_ List two things you struggle with that prevent you from being faithful to God and talk them out with Him.

## THE SNEAKER RELATIONSHIP

**Read: James 2:18**

*<sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. (NIV)*

Many people who enter, comment about how beautiful it is. How the height of the twenty-four foot cathedral ceiling draws their eye to the peak. How the hand cut and chiseled 8" x 8" beams that are mortised and pegged together demonstrate the strength of the structure. The place I am referring to is my home. Although it may seem beautiful to others, I have even a stronger feeling toward it. You see our home is not just any home, but one that my wife and I painstakingly built with our own hands and the help of friends and family over the course of eleven long years. It's not just a home but also the completion of a dream.

When my wife Gail and I made plans to get married, we also made plans to own a home. So being of little money, but having the knowhow, we began to plan and to dream. Our home changed shape and design many times before settling on the post and beam design we ended up with. Now that the plan was done, what were we to do? I only had \$4,500 dollars saved and we were getting married in two and a half months. There was no way that we could afford a mortgage payment, for even a medium sized home, let alone what we had designed. So we decided to build it ourselves!

From the very start we knew it would be work, but that is what it takes to fulfill a dream. Taking a personal loan for \$10,000 dollars and adding that to what we already had, and working hard we were able to put up the foundation, the first floor deck, and a small apartment in the basement. We moved in on our wedding night, with no running water, three light bulbs for light, and lawn chairs for our living room furnishings.

Since that time we have saved, and sacrificed. We hauled water in for the first six months from

my mom and dad's house a hundred yards away, both for drinking and for flushing the toilet. Slowly we made progress. As we were able to acquire money, we installed the well and pump and began the framing and chiseling of the timbers. We heated our little apartment strictly with wood. This meant that any free time went into cutting the winter's supply of firewood from our eleven acres of property. Over time the structure took its shape. But before we could get it under a real roof, our temporary roof on the first floor began to leak. We began to dread each time it rained. Out would come the buckets and bowls to catch the drips.

As we neared the end, the intensity of our work increased. Arriving home from my job, we would grab our nail aprons and the kids (two of which we had by now, Sarah, and Jeremiah) and would head upstairs. We would work until about 11:00 PM, we would quit for the evening, eat our supper and join our kids who were put to bed hours before.

Every day we came closer and closer to reaching our goal. Friends and family would come to help install insulation, unload sheetrock, pull electrical wire, shingle, install windows, plywood and a host of others things. This structure would not just be a house, but our home, because others shared our dream. Finally after eleven years and around the same month of the year that we had originally started construction our home was completed. Everyone that had had a part in its construction, whether big or small, were invited to the dedication of our new home. As all eighty people or so that were present gathered in the living room. My good friend Wes Wales with tears in his eyes read the plaque that even now is fastened securely to the center-supporting beam in the middle of the living room. The plaque is one I had made, in order to reflect the thankfulness in both my wife's heart, and mine and to confirm to others the true purpose of our desire to own such a home in the first place. It reads as follows:

"This house was designed and built by Dave and Gail Dowling and brought to completion through the determined effort of family and friends, whom without ones love, support, sweat, and hard work this home may never have become a reality."

Dedicated this day to God and to His service.

September 20, 1992

## THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

As I was studying the book of Acts, I could not help but take a look at all that Paul did for the Lord Jesus Christ. All the places he traveled to, all those he ministered to, and all those he confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul had a vision, a dream and not just any dream but one that was seated deep in his heart by Jesus Christ. Paul's dream was also his desire. But Paul not only dreamed, he understood one thing that many don't, each man's dream remains only a dream, unless it acquires legs.

If you and I plan to fulfill whatever God has laid on our heart to fulfill. If we are going to complete the journey that He has laid out for us. If we are going to take the vision, and the dream He has given us and make it reality, then our dreams have to acquire legs and not just any leg but ours!

I am reminded of a sneaker company who I am sure has become quite successful through a slogan that they have created, I am sure you have heard it more than once. The slogan says "JUST DO IT!" The more I thought about that, the more I began to realize that that is exactly the type of relationship that you and I need to have if we are going to live out who God designed each of us to be in the Lord Jesus. Just wanting to do things for God isn't enough. We have to put legs to our mission, we have to get up and "JUST DO IT!"

Please don't get me wrong here, our relationship with God is not based on performance! God could never love us anymore than He does right now! What I am talking about is living a life so close to God that our service and action to live out God's dream for each of us comes from the understanding of that love and our desire to live out the dream through it. Before we can live the dream, we need to know what it is. If you are unaware of God's dream for you, start today by following the small callings to obedience God places on your life, like making old wrongs right, by loving people in your life you have taken for granted; and listen and putting into action those promptings from God to do what He is asking you to do. You and I can't follow the big plan God has for our life, if we can't follow the small everyday plan.

In living out that plan we need to take the time and put on our nail aprons if we ever expect to make the dream happen. We need to step out in faith knowing that God is the one who will use

us to make it happen. We have to make God's dreams our dreams, that they might be brought to completion through the determined effort of you and me, but with the backing of the mighty power of the living God, whom without ones love, grace, forgiveness, and undying mercy they would never have the chance of becoming a reality. You and I can never put any points on the scoreboard for God by being a spectator. We need to do as Paul did. We need to run the race and not just run, but also run to win! We need to have a sneaker type relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ coupled with our relationship of His love and grace. So remember if we ever plan on making those dreams He has placed in our heart for Him become a reality, then we need to do like the commercial says and "JUST DO IT!"

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize James 2:18

\_\_\_ List two things that stop you from putting legs to your dreams, and ask yourself why they do.

\_\_\_ Take those two things to God and ask Him to help you to step through them.

\_\_\_ Take at least two steps of action for each of the two things that are stopping you from living your dream for God. Make these step real not just thinking about doing them, but acting on them, like signing up for guitar lessons, or making a phone call, or deciding to teach a Sunday School class, etc.

\_\_\_ Plan out two more steps (bigger ones) and set a date in the very near future were you will act on accomplishing those next steps before that date.

\_\_\_ Set an end date for the completion of your dream project for God, and plan the rest of the necessary step to get there by then. Maybe it is going from learning to play guitar to doing a song for the offering at church.

\_\_\_ Talk to God everyday this week and ask Him to remove the fear that is stifling your faith to live for God.

## THE TEE BAR

### Read Act 8:29-31

<sup>29</sup>The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." <sup>30</sup>Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. <sup>31</sup>"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (NIV)

It was my first real mountain and it towered before me. Standing at the bottom, it seemed like it was a long way up, so far I couldn't see the top. But even so, I was determined to ski it. We were visiting my brother and his family in New Hampshire over Thanksgiving week and I was promised that I could go skiing.

Jumping in the car, we headed off to the slopes. Now up until this time my skiing had consisted of one time on a small gradual slope with a rope tow lift, and the back yard of my brother's house. I was no Jean Claude by any means. Putting on the old laced up boots and the cable binding skis that were given to me, I made my way to the tee bar lift.

Now, if you're not exactly sure what a tee bar lift looks like, it sort of resembles a ship anchor. It's made of wood and it rides on a retractable cable, suspended from a much heavier cable. As you move into position, the ski attendant grabs it, pulls it down and slips one side of the hook end around your rear end, and when the spring loaded cable becomes taught, it pulls you in such a way that you are actually skiing up the mountain. Now this was to be my first time on a tee bar, but everyone else was doing it and it didn't seem that difficult, so I took my place in the ski line. Finally it was my turn and I placed both my poles in my left hand and skied into position. The attendant in one quick clean motion pulled the bar down and placed under my rump. The cable tightened and began to pull me forward. I was on my way, until I decided to do the very thing you never do on a tee bar, SIT DOWN! Without even realizing what had

happened, I had flipped backwards over the bar and was lying in the cold wet snow. The attendant stopped the lift, (with me looking like Herman Munster on skis, he was probably expecting me to fall) and called me back to try again. Skiing into position like a pro, I readied myself once more. I could feel the tug of the cable and off I went, I was doing great, for about three second, then my ski got caught in a rut and I fell forward. That wasn't bad enough, but the tee bar had gotten caught in my belt and was dragging me up the mountain. Once again the attendant stopped the lift. Releasing myself I slid back down the mountain.

Feeling about as dejected as one can feel, I stood there wondering if I was ever going to get to the top of that mountain. Just then I heard a voice, looking over I saw a women in a red jacket and brown pants and around her waist was a fanny pack that read National Ski Patrol. She asked me if I would like some help with the tee bar. A big "YES" was my response. As we stood in line and readied ourselves, she explained the basics of the lift to me. Once again skiing into position, myself on the left and the instructor on the right, the cable tightened and away we went. At first I began to lose my balance again, but the instructor reached over and grabbing hold of my jacket pulling on my arm just enough to keep me upright.

What a difference two people made. I was so much more balanced, and every time I would slip the instructor was there to keep me from winding up in the snow again. When we reached the top, she didn't leave right away, but stayed and gave me some basic instructions in how to snowplow my way down the mountain. She stayed with me, until she was sure I could make it down on my own safely, then I watched her ski off down the slope and out of sight.

That day I not only made it down that mountain once, but several times, and over the course of the afternoon, with a little work managed to ride the tee bar all the way to the top without falling. That was over thirty years ago, when I was just a kid.

I have since skied some of the top ski areas on the east coast and have even skied the Swiss Alps with my wife on our honeymoon. But if that ski instructor hadn't taken the time to help me up my first real mountain, I might have only remained a spectator and never have been a participant in this wonderful sport of skiing.

## **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I see it all the time. I see people coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ, accepting Him as Savior, and then falling by the wayside. They never really getting plugged in to God, never really understanding the importance of that commitment, and after a short period of time, they fall back into the way they were before they knew Christ. Taking their relationship with Jesus they set it on the back burner, only to pursue easier relationships. They're missing out! They're taking the greatest opportunity of their lives and throwing it away, and whose fault is it - OURS! It's ours because we didn't take the time to show them how to make it to the top. Because we didn't take the time to make sure that they could make it down on their own, and do it safely, without falling into the pitfalls of Satan.

Don't you see it's our responsibility, yours and mine, to come alongside those infants in Christ and show them how to grow, to feed them, guide them, give balance to their life, and to hold them up when they begin to fall. None of us would take our newborn baby and set him or her in a high chair and say "Food is in the fridge, clothes are in the closet, diapers are in the bathroom, and the TV remote is on the coffee table, your mom and I are going out, we will see you in a week, love you, bye, bye!" So how come we do that very thing with newborn Christians.

Think back to someone in your life that made a difference in helping you walk the Christian life you now walk, as opposed to the way you might have turned out. You and I are important instrument in the hands of the Almighty God. We are tools that can change the course of people's lives and the future, if we will only take the time. If you and I don't take the time to help those new in Christ to make it to the top of their first real mountain now, then who knows, they may never have the opportunity to make it to the heavenly Alps of God's kingdom and the opportunity to know Christ in the deepest sense.

## **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Acts 8:29



\_\_\_ Make a list of three people you are nurturing in Christ right now.

\_\_\_ If you don't have at least three people on that list, ask God to show you three people that you could come along side of to help them grow in Christ.

\_\_\_ Do one action step for each person this week to encourage them or teach them something, or serve them in some way. It can be anything like bringing them a meal, or just emailing them or sending them a card.

\_\_\_ Pray specifically for each of those three people each day this week.

\_\_\_ Send a card or make a phone call to someone that made a difference in your Christian growth because they came along side of you.

\_\_\_ Ask God to continually remind you to encourage these people.

## THE THIRSTY HIKE

### Read: Isaiah 55:1-2

<sup>2</sup>“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. (NIV)

A few years back, a friend of ours who was in the area visiting called me and wanted to get together. Seems he had brought some youth up to visit with him and was looking for something adventurous to do. He asked me if I would be willing to help him find something for the kid to do. I suggested a hike on the Appalachian Trail, which runs from Maine to Georgia and lies only about seven miles from my house.

Mike arrived at my house the next day with a truckload full of teens. I had made plans to begin and end our hike from Little Gap. Hiking out towards the Smith Gap shelter and then hiking back. The trail guide book for that section of trail showed two water springs, one at about two miles and the other at a shelter at 10.8 miles.

Everyone arrived safely at the starting point and nobody wasted any time in getting ready to conquer the trail. I led and Mike and the rest followed. Mike was carrying his guitar in hopes of playing it for lunch. At first the walk was great, we climbed to the top of Little Gap and the view was awesome! We pushed on, hiking through most of the morning. We skipped the first spring because it was down the mountain on a side trail. Finally around noon we reached the Smith Gap Shelter and the site of the second spring. All of us were really dry, all our water had been used up several miles back, and everyone couldn't wait to taste that fresh clear water.

We dropped our stuff at the shelter and raced down the hill to the spring. Disappointment was hanging on everyone's faces when we found the spring bone dry. Hiking back to the shelter, people just didn't seem to have the same excitement. At the shelter Mike and I made plans that he and I would hike to Wind Gap, which would make the total distance hiked for the day about

15.4 miles. Because at that time we did not have cell phones I would call my wife to come pick us up from the motel in Wind Gap, and then we would meet the rest of the group at the dirt road about three miles from the shelter. The plan sounded simple and effective, so the teens hiked back to the dirt road, and Mike and I pressed on to Wind Gap.

About half way to our destination Mike's feet were developing blisters big time. So he decided he would rather walk barefoot. Not the best of ideas considering this section of trail is ranked as one of the rockiest sections of the whole 2,000 mile long trail. We continued on slowly. By now our mouths felt like cotton balls were in them, all I could think about was the soda machine at the motel at the end of the trail. The heat of the day added to our dilemma, but we pressed on. Finally we came across two surveyors, who shared that Wind Gap was only about a mile down the trail. I could already taste that soda going down. Mike's feet were not in the best of shape but we managed to make it down the trail and over to the motel. As I fumbled with some change and forced it into the slot on the soda machine, I could never remember being as thirsty as I was that day. Pressing the button a can full of ice-cold refreshment dropped through the slot and I grabbed it with my hand. In one fluid motion I popped the top and chugged it down.

As quickly as I could, I repeated the process, until my thirst was finally satisfied. I called my wife, retrieved the kids, and headed home. To this day I cannot think of a time when I was ever as thirsty as I was that day. I know that even though my thirst has since been satisfied. That feeling in my mouth and my body will always be remembered.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

The same type of thirst that I experienced that day is the same type of thirst all of us need to have, only not a thirst for soda, but for God. I want you to take a minute and reflect on how badly you want God to be in your life. It may seem that you are right where you ought to be, pressing on to the mark with a desire that burns deep and so big nothing can stand in your way! But it also could be that somewhere along the way your passion and your desire for God has dimmed or maybe fallen through the cracks completely.

I am reminded of story of a man who came to his pastor and told him "I think God has called

me to the ministry." His pastor asked him to walk down to the river with him. Upon arriving the pastor led him out into the river. The man said, "Pastor, I have already been baptized." "Not to worry" the pastor said, and he dunked the man under the water. With arms flailing and his legs kicking the pastor held the man under until all of the man's air supply was gone. Then with a quick jerk the pastor pulled the man from the water and helped him to shore. The man fell on all fours gasping desperate for air. Then the pastor spoke, he said "When you seek for God as much as you sought for air to breath you will find Him."

It is amazing to me how far we can go in order to be satisfied when we are thirsty. In the same way God can mightily use us when we are thirsty for Him. Ask God today to develop a thirst in you for Him that only He can satisfy. To bring about in you a thirst that will always be remembered, and forever sealed in your heart, and soul. Today seek Him like you seek air and then watch as He begins to mightily work in your life!

Thirst comes when we deprive ourselves of the fluids we need to keep our bodies going, or drink something less than the most refreshing of all liquids - water. This week maybe it's time to think about the things you have been trying to quench your thirst with.

If I held up two bottles to a thirsty person, one containing Cola and the other being water, many would choose the Coke over the water. Yet have you ever noticed how soda never really seems to satisfy? A speaker I once heard compared the difference of the world and Jesus to Cola and water. He said Cola is a complex formula. Water is simple H<sub>2</sub>O. You brush your teeth with water. You don't brush your teeth with Cola. You bath in water. You don't bath in Cola. You drink too much Cola you could die. You don't drink enough water you will die.

So take some time this week to search your heart and discover what bottle you have been drinking from. You may just discover the Jesus not Cola is the "Real Thing" and the reason many of us feel so empty is we have been drinking from the wrong bottle. This week make some changes if you haven't already and drink from the well that never will run dry. I guarantee you won't be disappointed.

## **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Isaiah 55:1

\_\_\_ List three things in your life right now that you are substituting for God's best for you.

\_\_\_ When we deprive ourselves water our body craves it and we become thirsty. List three things you are depriving yourself of spiritually in your relationship with Jesus.

\_\_\_ Take action to correct each of the three things you are depriving yourself of spiritually. Maybe that means setting a hard and fast time to read your Bible every day, or focus in prayer, or step out in faith or something like that.

\_\_\_ Look up and study two verses on thirsting for God.

\_\_\_ Ask God to squelch your thirst for things and replace it with a desire for non tangible real things in life like joy, peace and such.

\_\_\_ What is the one thing that keeps you from becoming thirsty for God? Talk to Him about it today and ask Him to remove it from your life.

## THIN ICE

### **Read: 1 Corinthians 10:13**

*<sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (NIV)*

We had only been in our new home a few weeks. Actually our new home was comprised of only a basement that was separated into two halves a garage and a living area we had fixed up into a small apartment. On top of the foundation was only a heavy grade of black granulated tar paper that would protect our dwelling place from the elements. In spite of all this, to us it was still our home. It would be the first beginnings of our present home, and for now it would have to do.

I awoke early one morning to the glorious smell of what I knew to be the pleasant aroma of do - do. I immediately began to look for the dog, figuring he could be the only source of this smell. Looking over the side of the bed, I notice the smell grew stronger. Leaning upside-down and peeking under the bed I found the source, only the dog was not the culprit, our main septic pipe had clogged and backed up and leaked out the clean out under our bed.

Getting dressed, I ventured outside and found the source of the clog. In our hurry to move into our new home, we hadn't backfilled the pipe entering the septic tank, only covered it with hay. But this was not enough to stop the bitter cold of that December from freezing the pipe solid.

Being the handy and resourceful person that I am, I removed the concrete tank cover and stuck my head into the half full tank. From the upside down position it was easy to see that my assumption was right, the pipe was frozen solid. Searching in the garage, I found an extra ground rod (it's a solid metal round bar a little over a half inch thick and eight feet long), this ought to work perfectly, I thought. With my new weapon in hand I strolled back out to the

tank. Laying with my stomach on the top of the tank, I now let the top half of my body hang upside down in the tank, and with the rod in hand began to chip away at the ice. It didn't take long to realize two things. One, it was not only difficult to keep from falling into the tank, but two, I wasn't getting very far, trying to break the ice from this position.

Examining my options, I saw that the pipe was not only frozen but also the water in the tank as well. Climbing down into the tank, it felt as if the ice was fairly thick, it held my weight anyway. Pulling the rod inside, I began to poke furiously at the ice clogged pipe, and I was beginning to make some progress too. That's when I heard it, pulling back to give it a real good shot, I heard the ice begin to crack. Letting go of the rod I leaped for the opening, but it was too late. The ice gave way, and I found myself dipped knee deep in septic sludge. Pulling myself out, I was not a happy sight to behold to my wife, myself or the dog.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

How many times have you done it? You know, walked out on the ice of temptation, knowing that there was only a thin layer of ice separating you from the sludge and waste of sin. At first we all have that confidence in our ability to handle the flesh. We say it's OK, I know when to stop, I know just how far I can go, until the ice breaks and we plunge head long into that sin that we just can't seem to be able to beat. You know the sin I'm talking about! The one that comes to mind when you read these words, the one that stares you in the face, day after day. You know the guilt you feel because you just can't seem to overcome the sin that has tormented both you and your Christian life. It may have started out as something rather small, it usually does. But now it has grown into an unstoppable monster that destroys the very heart of your relationship with God.

Satan and his helpers would like you to believe that the sin that weights heaviest on your heart is unstoppable, and that you can never have the relationship with God that you really want. But that is lie straight from the father of lies himself.

In order for us to beat our opponent of sin, we need to realize two things. One, that God loved you and me, with the greatest love before we ever knew Him as Savior. Didn't He die on a cross for our sins, that we might be free from sin, and doesn't He continue to love us in spite of

who we feel we are? The problem is most of us don't realize just who we really are. We are the body of Christ, the family of God, children of the All Mighty and All Powerful God, a God that will love us and cherish us, with all His heart, no matter how we feel. Know this oh Christian, that no matter what you and I have done to destroy our relationship with the Father, the blood of Christ has already rebuilt. When our heavenly Father looks at us, He sees purity, not ours but Christ's, as long as we are covered under His blood.

The second thing we need to know is this. My problem of winding up covered in do - do at the beginning of this story came about because I chose to venture into the tank, and I chose to venture out onto the ice, a place I never should have chanced to be. If we are going to beat sin, then we first need to beat temptation. You and I can't allow ourselves to be tempted in such a way that we might fall through. We need to STOP, and draw that line on the shore, before we even get out onto the ice. Maybe that is why we call it a shore line. But maybe we should call it a sure line, a place of safety, a refuge where you and your creator can gather, and not be distracted by the weight and guilt of sin. A place where the monster cannot venture and a place where our God would love to see us be, off the thin ice and standing on the rock!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13

\_\_\_ Make a list of the top three sins in your life, and confess them and your struggle with them to God.

\_\_\_ Ask God for the strength to draw a line in the sand that you will not cross when it comes to being tempted. Things you need to change to elude sin. Maybe it is a place you should not go to, or people you should avoid hanging with, etc.

\_\_\_ Find at least one person that will ask you tough questions each week to hold you accountable to sin.

\_\_\_ Each time you are tempted this week pray through temptation while at the same time moving away from it. Like praying for self control and at the same time looking away from



something you shouldn't be looking at.

\_\_\_ Look up and study three verses on sin.

\_\_\_ Memorize one of those verses.

## UNDERSTANDING GRACE

**Read: Ephesians 2:8-9**

*<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. (NIV)*

I have just left a Youth for Christ conference with about 4,000 kids. Throughout the weekend kids were challenged about their faith, their hurt and how the two relate to a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is late Saturday night and all that continues to echo in my mind is the words of a kid that shared the ride down with me. He shared that it has been a while since he has come on a trip like this one, and that since that time he has not been walking with Jesus the way he felt he should.

This is not the first kid to have told me they have such a hard time connecting their commitment to God with their real world. Understandably so as the kids I know and deal with are facing being abused, raped, having a parent commit suicide, having a disconnected father, cutting, and drinking, along with others who are facing personal internal struggles and sins.

I know their heart is soft enough, and their desire is to truly surrender to Jesus their life and their heart. So how do they become so disconnected from their relationship? I think it is the same way most people do, by losing their true understanding of grace. Not just any grace, but God's grace, or maybe never understanding it in the first place. After all, grace is something we talk about, or hear from a pastor on Sunday morning, but what is it, and how can it make a difference in the lives of those struggling to follow Jesus? In a little bit of a twist and through the use of this next story (I really love stories), maybe we can look at this thing called grace and hold on to it as well as see why God offers it freely to us and wants us to have it in the first place.

## THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Picture that you just bought a brand new luxury car after saving your money for the last ten years. You worked extra hours, pinched pennies and dollars with the goal of owning your new Jaguar free and clear. You drive it home from the dealer making sure you swing by all your friend's houses to show off your newest addition to the garage. You pull into your driveway and park your baby, and head inside the house to make a few calls.

Sometime through the second call as you are sharing your glory with a friend, you hear a car engine come to life. But not just any car engine, but a Jaguar engine. You're half way to the door before the phone receiver hits the floor, and as the door swings open you find yourself in awe as your car speeds violently backwards down your driveway and across the street slamming into mailboxes and garbage cans along the way, finally crashing into your neighbors stone wall.

The horror doesn't end as you hear the gears grind and see the car leap forward swerving down the street narrowly missing parked cars along the way, running the stop sign at the end of the street and crashing with such force into the Jone's big oak tree that the rear end of the car lifts two feet off the ground before slamming to rest. As you race down the street anger builds with each step. In the time it takes to travel the two hundred feet your mind has become fully coiled to explode on the person that not only stole your car but your dream as well. Pulling up alongside of what used to be your Jaguar, you look inside only to find that little Johnny Martin who is only ten years old is sitting behind the wheel.

Based on time and money we might have had invested, and the anger level at the moment most of us would probably respond to little Johnny Martin by screaming at him with clenched teeth and shaking one fist at him while we pound on what was left of the car with the other.

Grabbing your cell phone you call the police and have Johnny taken into custody. This my friend, is what most of us call JUSTICE, and Johnny would be getting just what he deserves.

But some of us might have taken the time to realize that Johnny was just living out what most would be afraid to do and sit behind the wheel of your neighbors new Jaguar. Sure he turned the key and started the engine, but he didn't know that he would bump it into gear or that his

foot was pressing down on the clutch, and once things got out of control he panicked moving gears and pressing pedals which now left the car totaled and Johnny almost killed. Even though your anger is still present you see that Johnny is crying and that he isn't even sure what has happened. You are doing everything in your power to hold back all your pent up anger. Finally after staring at Johnny for a full fifteen minutes, you tell him to get out of your car and get home before you call the cops. This is what most of us would call MERCY, withholding the punishment that someone deserved.

But there is one more offering. The one God loves to lavish on His children. He calls it GRACE. Unlike JUSTICE, getting what we deserve, or MERCY, withholding what we deserve, GRACE extends much farther. If God, not you had owned that Jaguar and found little Johnny Martin behind the wheel I picture Him handling the situation much differently. First I can see Him saying "Johnny, Johnny, please don't cry. Everything is going to be all right. I'm not worried about the car, all I care about is you!" I can picture Him pulling Johnny from the wreckage and holding Johnny close to Himself, rocking him back and forth with all the tenderness of a mother with her newborn son. Then as He looks into Johnny's eyes He says, "Johnny I can always buy a new car, but I can never buy another one like you. That car ride must have shaken you up, how about we walk down one block and I buy you some ice cream and make sure you're OK?" That my friend is GRACE, not only not getting what we deserve, but what we don't as well.

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 2:8-9

\_\_\_ Make a list of ten things God has been gracious to you about. Like the parents He gave you, or your spouse, or your salvation, or job, or health, etc.

\_\_\_ Make a conscious decision this week to be gracious to other people.

\_\_\_ Do five acts of grace towards people this week to cement that decision.

\_\_\_ Just spend some time this week thinking about what it really means for God to extend

grace to you as the story above talked about.

\_\_\_ Think about what it cost Jesus to be gracious to you about your sin.

\_\_\_ Spend some time thanking God for His grace in your life.

## A FEAST FOR THE CROWS

**Read: Romans 6:22-23**

*<sup>22</sup>But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. <sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)*

We had been traveling back from a job we were working on, that is my friend Dave and myself, when the topic of our yearly Passover meal came up. Every year our Church has a Seder supper, prior to Good Friday, in order to represent the story of Easter that we would soon celebrate. Dave is the head cook for this meal and goes all out in keeping within the traditional menu. As we talked, he said it was too bad that we didn't have any venison to make the traditional stew with. Being hunting season was long over with, and most of it was devoured by hungry hunters and their families, little if any was left in people's freezers. I said, "Yeah, we'll just have to use something else."

The next morning as I was traveling to Dave's house to meet him to go to a job, I spied something about fifty feet off the road in a grassy field. Slowing down, I now saw that it was a deer. Evidently it had been hit by a car and traveled into the field before dying. I pulled the truck off the side of the road, and walked over to the deer.

Reaching the deer, I noticed it was still warm, telling me it was just recently hit. I dragged the deer back to my truck and loaded it in the bed, closing the tail gate I continued on my way to Dave's. When I arrived at Dave's, I told him of how fortunate we were that God had provided us with venison for the Seder supper. As I was showing Dave the deer, Randy, a close brother that would be working with us that day pulled into the driveway. Borrowing a knife from Dave's parents we drove down to the lower end of the field, and prepared to remove the entrails, so the meat could cool in the garage before going off to our job. Removing the deer

and laying it on the ground we made short work of removing the guts and leaving them in a nice sized pile in the field, a job we had all done many times before during hunting season.

Washing up at the house we noticed that a large number of crows began to gather in the corner of the field we were just in. Within minutes the trees began to grow with a number of the black scavenging birds. Then one by one they began to fly down from the trees and land in the still steaming pile of guts. We began to comment to each other about what they might be saying; "Oh boy a smorgasbord," "Great a nice hot meal for a change, one that warms my feet too!" Those birds ate like no tomorrow, probably because there would be no tomorrow, for if they didn't eat it, something else would.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

If I could read your mind, and probably your face right now, for most of you it would be telling me "Oh gross, I can't believe I'm reading about birds eating deer guts." But there is a reason, a very important reason that I bring this story up to you.

Those birds gathered to that gut pile within minutes. It is was as natural for those birds to stand in and feast on a warm pile of entrails, as it is for you and I to breath. To us it is offensive, and gross, but to them it is their nature. These birds were as comfortable eating the guts as they would be eating the meat. Which brings me to the point, I think those birds would have preferred the guts to the meat.

Take a look at people as you think God might look at people. It might remind you of those crows we watched, at least it does me. Thinking about watching those crows reminds me of how I think God might view us. He might be saying the same thing you were a few sentences ago, "Oh gross, I can't believe that they would allow sin to warm their toes and fill their belly. How offensive and disgusting." Pretty accurate don't you think?

In the story about the crows, think of the guts as sin, all the junk that stays on the inside that we never let anybody see, and as soon sin comes around we all begin to feast on it and warm our little tootsies in the mush. All the while God stands by and watches saying how can they stand to do that! Here I stand with the good meat of my Word, and they would rather wallow in the entrails of sin. How can that be?

I feel that for many, for those who don't know Jesus Christ, they just don't know any better. They don't know the glory and the joy of knowing the meat of His Word. But what about those who do know Jesus? What about them? Why is it that you and I still continue to roll in the entrails of sin, like a dog does on a dead animal? After all isn't that what sin is to us, a dead animal?

In our search for what is filling to the soul, we need to realize where we are going, not where we have been. That the entrails of sin are no comparison for the filet mignon of God's Word, and living out a real relationship with Him. That the past sins in our lives can never compare with the glory to be revealed. We, and by we I mean you and I, need to step from the gut pile of sin, and wiping our feet on the green dew filled grass, and need to fly straight to the Master of life, where we can feel the warmth of His embrace, and the glory from the meat of His Word. Moreover may we never step back into the entails of sin or settle for anything but the mouth watering taste of God who can fill our souls, if we will only take the time to taste and see that He is oh so good!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Romans 6:22

\_\_\_ Memorize Romans 6:23

\_\_\_ Keep yourself from judging other peoples sins this week. Because you have sin in your life although they might not be as evident.

\_\_\_ Forgive anyone that sins against you or hurts your feelings this week.

\_\_\_ Call to mind the sin that continually draws you in and ask God to remove the desire for it.

\_\_\_ Read and study through Romans 6:1-14

\_\_\_ Ask God to forgive you for any sins that are between you and Him right now.



## BEDROOM SHADOWS

**Read: Psalms 91:1-2**

*<sup>1</sup>Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. <sup>2</sup>I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." (NIV)*

I remember certain events standing out as I grew up a child, as I am sure we all do. One that I remember so vividly was my bedtime as a kid. After my mom or dad would tuck me in, strange things began to happen to my room. As darkness was exchanged for the faint glimmer of my Abraham Lincoln night-light, my room began a change, almost before my very eyes.

Laying there in bed with the covers pulled up tight around my neck, things would begin to take shape. In each corner of my room, the darkness would transform itself into eight-foot high men, each wearing a black trench coat and a dark sinister looking hat. Each man stood with his head tilted down and his hat covering his eyes. They all looked like the typical gangster type of the twenties and thirties. Although their heads were down I knew that they could still see me, and they were only waiting for me to fall asleep and then, without warning they would get me. Each night I would lay awake gripped with fear, and fighting sleep, knowing the minute I closed my eyes that I would be rubbed out by Muggsy and Lefty!

One night my fear had grown to be so intense that I could stand it no longer. Muggsy, Lefty, and the rest of the boys stood there in their usual intimidating way, leaning against the wall in true gangster fashion. Tonight I knew for sure that the waiting game was over. Tonight would be the night that they would do me in. I could tell by the way they stood there, almost glaring into my eyes. I had to make a break for it, but where? I know! The only safe place in the house was mom and dad's bed. No self-respecting gangster would dare go up against my folks, especially my dad! But the question that remained unanswered was could I make it there alive.

My only chance was to take them by surprise. In one fluid motion I flew the covers off me and leaped to my feet, my legs churning as they hit the floor. I was out the door before they had a chance to even draw their guns. Down the hall I sped. I knew that they were right behind me. I swung into my parents' room, and with one flying leap that would make any trapeze artist envious; I landed safely between my parents and the protection of my father.

As I worked my way under the covers and between both my parents, I could see my gangster friends beginning to take shape again on the walls of my parent's bedroom. But it didn't matter to me now I was in the safest place I knew, next to my father and nobody could touch me there, not even Muggsy, and the boys!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Nobody ever said life would be easy. Even Jesus said that in this life you and I would have hardships and rough times, but remember, Jesus said, "*But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33 NIV) It's all a matter of realizing one thing, that our Father's bedroom is only down the hall!

Look at what God said about living in this life, He never meant for us to live this life under our own strength, although many of us try to, even Christians who should know better. We think that we can overcome the enemy all by ourselves, and that is just what Satan wants us to believe. If you and I begin to think that way then we begin to trust in ourselves and not in our God, we begin to take our eyes off of our Savior and Lord, and put the focus on us. We become our own refuge, and in the long run find ourselves empty and a world around us that is crumbling.

Our God is a loving father that cares for you and me, more than we care for ourselves. It's next to His side and under His wing that we need to draw comfort and protection from the Leftys and Muggsys of this world. Our power lies not in ourselves but in our heavenly Father. Our power lies in His wisdom, in His knowledge, in His love, and in His faithfulness to us.

The one thing that I know, that is as real to me now as it was that night so long ago, is that when the fears of who I am, and where I am going, and how I am going to get out of this mess I am in, no matter what it is, overcomes me, and is just too much for me to bear, I know the

safety and securest place in the whole house, is my Father's bedroom and it's just down the hall!

Take some time today to go sit in your heavenly Father's lap and feel again what it is like to be a kid with no worries. Give Him your issues, and your worries. He wants them, and even more important is He wants YOU. Isn't it time to exchange your weakness for His strength? It can be just that easy with a trip down the hall to your Father's bedroom!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 91:1

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 91:2

\_\_\_ Think back to three times when God granted you protection, and thank Him for each of them.

\_\_\_ Spent some time today just sitting and resting in God's lap, whatever you imagine that to be like.

\_\_\_ Make a list of ten weaknesses you have and ask God if you can eliminate any of them.

\_\_\_ Make a list of ten strengths you have and thank God for each of them specifically.

\_\_\_ This week practice turning things over to God rather than trying to tackle the things that are too big for you.

## LOST AT THE LAKE

### **Read: Proverbs 3: 5-6**

*<sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, <sup>6</sup>in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (NIV)*

Every year my wife, four children and myself spend at least one week at the family cabin. The cabin is a great place to just get away from it all and relax. It is located in Pike County, in the heart of the Delaware State Forest. The forest stretches for miles and miles. It is possible to travel for many a mile before you come to a house or road.

I remember the day well. It had been drizzling on and off all day and I decided that this would be a good time to look for deer and other wildlife, as the ground would help make for silent walking and get me out of our cramped quarters for a time. Packing only a few of the bare necessities, my knife, compass, topographical map, and a few other items, I dressed in the usual hunting camouflage and left on my venture. Looking at the map I decided to travel west until I came to a location that would be familiar on the map, from there I would then determine my next course of action.

Traveling along in the wet leaves made walking almost silent. The only sound heard was that of the raindrops falling to the ground. Cresting the next ridge I spied several deer as they headed for safety down the other side. The forest was different somehow. The rain had changed its appearance. It now overwhelmed me with the feeling of aloneness, and I decided to head back. Looking at the map, I found that I was about a mile and a half from the cabin if I traveled in a straight line over the rocky ridges in front of me. But I was afraid of going that route because of the short time I had left before the afternoon light faded into darkness. I was afraid because I might misjudge my compass reading by only a few degrees and miss the lake and cabin entirely. So following the stream I had arrived at, I headed north until I could find a

spot where I could take a shorter more accurate heading. After about a mile I located my reference point, set my heading and began the hike back.

Within a short time I felt something was wrong. It was as if I were heading in the wrong direction. But my compass said I was going east, the way I should be. Only an hour or so of light remained. The longer I walked the more sure I was that I was going the wrong way. Again I looked at the compass. It's got to be wrong! East is that way, I thought, looking in a totally different direction. Looking at the compass one last time, I decided that all the rain, lack of sun and the difference in the forest was throwing off my sense of direction and my only true reference would be my compass. I knew from past experience that I needed to trust the compass, and not my own instincts. Locking once again onto my east bound compass heading, and I pressed on. Hiking another mile, I crested a rocky plateau and there below me only a few hundred yards away was the lake, and fifty feet from its shore was the cabin, with a dry set of clothes inside and the company of my family waiting for me!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

It may not seem like it but it is raining outside. It is raining all the things that distract us from God. As we travel the journey, we travel rough and rocky roads. We travel grassy meadows, next to clear streams. We even travel deep fertile forests where the rain has fallen. But no matter where it is we wander during our journey on this earth, we had better carry with us our reference point.

If I had decided to leave my compass home that day, or refuse to follow its leading I would have been lost and would have been greeted by the darkness of the coming night. But instead I chose to follow the instrument that was designed to show me the path that leads home.

Think for a minute of the powerful reference point God has given us, the Bible. It's the road map to heaven; it's the fulfillment of real joy; it guides us to making the right decisions, and it gives us assurance, comfort, and hope. It meets us no matter where we are in this life and gives to us a heading that any person can hold to and follow. It's the instrument that God has designed to show us the path that leads home.

Psalms chapter 119, verses 104–105 puts it pretty clear:

<sup>104</sup>“I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. <sup>105</sup>Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (NIV)

It is all that and more, but unless we follow in the direction it points, all of us will be lost and greeted by the darkness of the coming night. God meant for us to use His Word, not to let it collect dust on a shelf in some back room. I am surprised at the number of Christians that never find the time to refer to the Word of God, except when trouble or tragedy strikes. God’s Word was meant for fair weather travel as well as in the storms of life. We all need to take the time to daily look beyond its cover, and see where God would lead us that day. Power lies within its binding, but that power remains there unless we firmly grasp the handle of the Sword, and learn to wield it in our lives like God intended us to. It is then that God’s power will be revealed in us, and more and more as we trust Him and do what His Word says.

As you and I study our reference point, the Bible, our grip on life becomes solid because we are no longer trusting in our own instincts or the world’s, but in the knowledge and wisdom of the living God who created it all. Someday I plan to stand before my precious Lord and King, and walk the streets of gold, but until then I need to remember that God can see what is over the next ridge in our lives and so will we if we learn to use God’s reference point and just trust Him at His Word!

### **THIS WEEK’S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Proverbs 3:5-6

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 119:104

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 119:105

\_\_\_ List two things you find it really hard to surrender to Christ in trusting Him and ask Him to help you trust Him.

\_\_\_ Surrender one of those two things to Christ this week, and leave them with Him.

\_\_\_ Pick one verse pertaining to trust and follow what it says, even if it is scary for you to do.

\_\_\_ Think about what direction your life would take without Christ and then thank God for your personal relationship with Him and for His guidance.

## THE WALL

### **Read: Psalms 127:1**

*Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. (NIV)*

It was a typical hot Jamaican day and the project that loomed over us was no small task. Seventeen of us now stood before a concrete block wall filled solid with more concrete, and reinforced with steel rebar every sixteen inches.

Part of our mission while in the small town of Fellowship, located in the Northeast corner of Jamaica, was to build an addition onto and already existing school so that space for a library could be made available to the children. The only problem was that this massive obstacle, a wall 8 feet high, 20 feet long and 6 inches thick was in our way and had to go.

As we began to work and think together, a plan of attack was formulated. Not knowing what to expect on the trip, I had brought a variety of tools along. Now I was glad I did. In my assortment I found several masonry cut off blades that mount on a standard circular saw and can then be used to cut through brick or concrete. With this setup a few of us would painstakingly and slowly cut a shallow groove on each end of the wall from top to bottom.

Uriel who was our Jamaican construction leader, picked up our only available sledge hammer. Swinging furiously at the wall a few small chips of concrete began to fall to the ground. As he began to tire the next person in line would take his or her position and would continue the process. After several hours a hole large enough for a person to walk through was literally beat into the wall. Then it happened! With one wrong blow the handle of the sledge was broken, and the head lay there on the ground.

The horror of what had happened had begun to steal the hope of ever completing this project from our hearts. But then another motivation began to come to life in each one of us -



determination! Each of us had brought a small framing hammer with us to Jamaica. Grabbing it, each one assembled themselves at various parts of the wall, and like ants on an opened watermelon began the attack. Slowly and little by little the tiny pieces of the wall fell to the ground. The mission continued on.

After an hour or so the sledge was now back in operation a little shorter, but usable. By afternoon there were large gaping holes throughout the wall. Late that day with one massive push the wall or should I say what was left of it, came crashing to the ground. You could see the exhilaration and joy that was written on the faces of each team member as we all now stood over the rubble of the very thing that hours before had hovered over us. It was a moment I will never forget.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I can't help but feel that inside our hearts, a wall of sorts looms over each and every one of us. This wall can be sin, a struggle, maybe a burden, but it is there, and you and I know it is there. All of us know the power it has in stopping us from getting to the real task of what God has called us to be. Each of us face it in different ways.

Some are scared by it and tend to try and go around it, only to have to face it again later on. Some people just stand there, stunned by the immense size of it. Still others try to climb over it realizing it is too high.

Defeating the walls in our life like defeating the flaming arrows of the evil one (as it talks about in Ephesians 6:19) requires faith. Now each of us has faith! If you have ever gotten in your car and stepped on the brake pedal expecting the car to stop you had faith. If you sat on any chair today, you trusted that it would hold your weight and therefore you had faith. In fact it says in Romans 12:3 that God has distributed to each of us faith. So it becomes our job to exercise that faith and make it stronger. Growing it by putting it to the test with every increasingly more difficult challenges. But we all have to start where we are if we ever want to get where we know we need to be.

Let me share with you something. The story above about the wall took place on my very first short term mission trip twenty years ago and since that time I have gone from being a part of a

mission trip as a participant to leading a trip of thirty plus people multiple times to Africa as well as other parts of the world. In order for these trips to take place vast amounts of planning and detail had to go into them, with many of these trip's budgets doubling many family incomes for the year, with all of it taking faith to accomplish.

I remember having dinner one night with some people as one of them said, "I could never have the faith to do what you do, running trips and all." Now what they failed to remember is that twenty years ago I could never have done it either. It took first going on trips and seeing how they worked and then working with another leader to help in the planning of a trip and then leading a small trip in the states, then other trips to Honduras and finally yet other trips to Africa. It was a process like anything, growing my faith by taking ever increasing steps stretching myself and my dependency on God.

Therefore in order to defeat the wall, what you and I need to do as soldiers of the King is to mount our positions on the wall and with whatever tools of strength and faith God has allowed us to have, whether a sledge hammer or a small framing hammer, begin steadily to chip away at the wall. As the chips begin to fall and the size of the holes begin to grow so will our faith. As determination and commitment take the place of fear, you and I will be able to someday stand with look of exhilaration on our faces and joy in our hearts over the rubble of the very thing that stopped us from being all we can be for God, and that is a feeling none of us will ever forget.

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 127:1

\_\_\_ List two big obstacles you are facing right now and ask God for the strength to attack them head on.

\_\_\_ Develop a three step plan of action towards conquering each obstacle you are facing

\_\_\_ Watch the movie "Facing the Giants" (<http://www.facingthegiants.com/dvdmovie.php>)

\_\_\_ Ask God to lead you as you act out on your action steps to overcoming your obstacles, and then start living them out.

\_\_\_ Pray about the areas of beating your obstacle you have no control over. Ask God to specifically intervene on your behalf and open or close that door for you.

\_\_\_ Read and study Revelation 3:7-8

## HE IS MY SON

### Read Philippians 4:6-7

*<sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (NIV)*

It was a day in August when I received the call from my wife on the phone. She was crying on the other end of the line. She had taken our eleven year old son Caleb to the eye doctor and he had found something wrong in the back of our son's eye and sent him for an emergency MRI. I told her I was on my way to meet them both, and hung up the phone.

Arriving at the MRI center we were taken in right away even though it was almost closing time. The three of us sat in the doctor's office as he shared with us the results of the scan. I'll never forget the words he spoke, he said, "Your son has an abnormality in his brain." "You mean a tumor" I said. He replied "Yes, but I have even seen people healed from this." Listening to those words from where I was sitting he wasn't offering much hope.

We spent the night with the whole family watching a movie and sharing Kentucky Fried Chicken. Sleep was a commodity that was hard to come by that night. So I worked my way out to the living room couch. It was about 4:00 AM, I opened my Bible to the book of Job being I could probably identify with him the most right now. I started reading from the first chapter and when I got to the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter, verse 15 the words just jumped out at me: *Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him, I will surely defend my ways to his face. (NIV)*

I sat there feeling hopeless, unable to do anything about the situation. There was nothing I could do but pray. Closing my Bible I laid it next to me and out of desperation spoke these words to God: "Lord you know my heart and you know that I trust you, but Lord if you need to take my son from me, then I am OK with that." I couldn't believe the words I shared, but it was what was on my heart. I knew there was nothing I could do for my son and I knew that God's

plan was always bigger and better. So I surrendered the one I loved more than anything in all the world to my God. It wasn't that I didn't love my son, in fact it was the exact opposite, I wanted God to know that I was willing to face whatever He knew I and my family needed to face, and that He was still my God no matter what the outcome. I wanted Him to work on our behalf, and I stepped out to trust Him the only way I knew how.

I can't explain it but at that very minute peace filled my whole house, even my wife in our bedroom felt it. The next day my wife called the brain surgeon at Philadelphia's Children's Hospital to set an appointment. The secretary told my wife that there was an appointment scheduled for him for Thursday, but asked her "How did you do that?" "Do what?" my wife replied. "How did you get the doctor to take you on Thursday, he never has appointments on Thursdays?" This is just one of the many miracles that would follow, and even though the tumor was not cancerous it has been a long haul and a tough road for my son who is now driving his car, attending college and growing up. All this is because God was gracious in answering not only my prayer but the prayers of many others as well.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Prayer, what a wonderful thing, isn't it? Isn't it awesome how God answered my prayer in a miraculous way? You're probably saying to yourself right now, wait a minute, did I miss something, I don't remember reading anything about you praying for God to heal your son. So how could God answer something that wasn't prayed for. Well let's stop and think for a minute what prayer actually is. Isn't it a desire and an attitude of the heart, an interaction of our spirit with the Spirit of the living God? Even though I don't remember speaking the audible words for my son to be healed, it was my number one desire above anything else, and God knew that! Prayer goes on in our hearts or at least it should continually. Haven't you ever found yourself praying to God out of hope or desperation, and never really realized that you were praying. That is exactly what 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is saying. What that means is we need to leave the phone off the hook, and to listen to and to talk quietly within our hearts to the one we love, and the one who loves us. It needs to be a continual conversation, one that may have long pauses between, but one that never ends. It is a time when we leave our hearts open and vulnerable to God, almost in a type of invitation to come and minister to us, and it can happen during any

part of the day.

Just because we have a specific prayer time with God during the day, and because it's usually during those times that we pray focused with our mouths and our hearts about specific things and people, doesn't mean that after we give God our grocery list we should hang up the phone.

Think about your relationship with your spouse or your girlfriend or boyfriend. Think about your very first date, did it go something like this. You drove up to the house and walked to the front door, and there stands your date, the one you have longed to be with for weeks, the one you have admired for months, and the one you have dreamed of all your life. They ask you, "Where are we going tonight?" With all the grace and charm you can muster you reply, "UGH." You take them by the hand and lead them to your car. Driving down the road, you spot the finest restaurant you can afford, entering inside you find yourself at a romantic table by the fireplace, the food is fabulous and your date says, "Tell me about yourself." You reply "UGH." You travel to the movie theatre and your date says, "What movie are we going to see?" You say in the most romantic voice you can "UGH"! Finally you and your date arrive at home once more. They look at you and say, "I had a real nice time," and in reply you say, "UGH."

If this were the case how long do you think you and your date would actually be dating? The answer; is not long! Why, because there was no communication, and communication is the key to any relationship. What would your relationship be like right now, if all you did was spend 15 minutes a day talking to you spouse, or your girlfriend, or boyfriend? It wouldn't be nearly as good as if you spent every minute of every day with them. There is so much of them to learn about, but of God there is even more. So much so, that we need to spend every minute of every day on the telephone of prayer with Him.

As in my case, God knew the needs hidden in my heart long before my voice ever acknowledged it. It was truly amazing that God would use His sign of peace as a precursor for the many wonderful things that were to come on the road ahead.

Prayer, just the sound of it can sooth your soul. It can work in our life, when nothing else can. It can draw us to a God that sometimes seems so distant, and it can show the power of the Most High God to us in unexplainable ways. So the next time you and God talk don't forget it's

better if we leave the phone off the hook!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Philippians 4:6-7

\_\_\_ If you don't have one already start a prayer list of the things in your life that you need to pray for like your family, people's salvation, finances, specific people, etc.

\_\_\_ Focus on keeping your lines of communication with God open today. Praying to Him often even about the little things.

\_\_\_ After you share your needs and wants with God today, keep silent and let God speak to you. This is the second half of prayer.

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Thessalonians 5:16 -17

\_\_\_ Learn to pray specifically not in general. Don't pray "Lord bless my friend." Instead pray specifically about that person, their health, finances, needs, etc. and listen to the song "He's my son." by Mark Schultz ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_109AJ9IXSE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_109AJ9IXSE))

\_\_\_ Choose five people to pray specifically for today.

## THE AIRPLANE ENGINE

### **Read: Joshua 24:14-15**

*<sup>14</sup>“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup>But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day who you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (NIV)*

When my older brother Larry was young he made a discovery that would thrill any boy his age. While exploring around where we lived in Staten Island, New York, he saw it, it was a gas powered model airplane that had crashed. The plane itself was beyond repair, but the engine still looked intact. Taking it home he stripped it down and saved the engine and prop. It was a big engine as compared to the smaller engines I had on my similar planes growing up.

He made his way down into our basement and over to the workbench my dad had set up there. He clamped the engine gently in the vise bolted to the table, and began cleaning all the mud and junk from the engine. Once it was finally clean he primed the engine with fuel and attached a battery to the glow plug on the engine. Taking his finger he then began to flip the meaty twelve inch long propeller. For the first few tries it just spun a quarter turn and bounced back, but with the next try the unexpected happened. The engine roared to life, its blade spinning wildly with tremendous noise to boot.

Although the workbench my brother chose to use was convenient it wasn't ideal. On top of the bench was sawdust, papers, odds and ends, and a bunch of clutter that accumulated over time. As the engine sped wildly out of control it launched these items, clouding the basement with dust and debris.

My dad who was sometimes an excitable person (small understatement here) heard the noise.



Wondering where it could be coming from he followed it to the cellar door. Opening the door (probably to yell at my brother) he found more than he bargained for with dust billowing up the staircase and into his face. My brother finally killed the engine or it ran out of fuel and stopped but by then the damage had already been done.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Choices, we all have to make them, and during a day's time we can literally make hundreds of them. Maybe we haven't really thought about it but each choice has a tendency to build off the other and if we aren't careful can lead us down a path we never intended to travel on.

Being in ministry I've seen a lot of people make choices in their walk with God they knew were wrong, but did them anyway and suffered the consequences for them as well. Life is so about choices. Where will I live? Who will I marry? Will I marry? What do I want to be? What church should I attend? The list goes on and on.

Choices are not always easy, and sometimes the answer isn't so simple, but sometimes it is! I had one person in my office a short time ago who had wound up in an affair with a married person from the same church. Another person I was ministering to had moved in with someone and had two babies with this person and then gave one up for adoption and is struggling as a single parent now. The list of people above, like the list of questions goes on and on.

The sad fact is that these people I've just shared about are Christian people, believers in Christ! But somewhere along the way they were fooled into believing that their quest for happiness could be found by making their own way. They knew God's Word. They knew what the right thing was to do, only they chose to believe the fleeting for the permanent. They chose their way over God's way, and never once have I seen that way bring the depth of lasting and real joy into a person's life.

Both of these people ended up with complex, hurtful, and difficult situations to deal with or try and remedy. But both of their ending choice as well as yours and mine all will start with a single first choice. It is that first choice each of us should be focusing on today. If our first choice in every situation is the foundation for every other choice in that situation, then shouldn't we base that choice on what God knows to be best, instead of what we think to be

best?

My brother's focus that day wasn't about anything but seeing if he could get that engine started. Although he did make sure it was secure in the vise, he didn't think twice that he should probably clean up the sawdust and debris from the workbench before trying to start it. It was a choice that would soon turn his elation into grief.

Chose this day whether you are going to serve the gods of self or the God of all creation. If you take the time today to begin the process of following God and making right choices to start with you may find yourself finishing sooner and farther ahead of the pack and with a smile on your face to boot! Remember this, the biggest questions in life are not always where you will live or who you will marry, but what does God want from me, and am I willing to do it. By guiding our choices to follow God's ways instead of our own, we can be assured of avoiding not only a lot of pain, but displeasure, not just for us, but for our heavenly Father as well.

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Joshua 24:14

\_\_\_ Memorize Joshua 24:15

\_\_\_ Practice pausing before making most of your decisions today and ask God to direct you in the choice you make.

\_\_\_ You may be tempted to make a choice quickly for whatever reason this week. If you are not sure about which way to go stop and don't move forward on it until you find some direction from God either in the scriptures or intervention from Him.

\_\_\_ Try and sort out the important decisions you make this week making sure your choices are based on the Word of God. Remember every last choice begins with a first choice. Make that one the best.

\_\_\_ Make it a conscious choice this week to be joyful, and express love instead of hate, and to

forgive instead of becoming angry. Measure how much better your life will be at the end of the week because of it.

\_\_\_ Pick two items you have made bad choices about in the past and are paying for now. Take at least one action move to correcting both of them. Maybe it was buying a car you couldn't afford, or something you said to a person in anger, whatever it is work towards fixing the mistake this week. You will be glad you did.

## THE DIAPER CHANGE

### **Read: Hebrews 11:5-6**

*By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (NIV)*

My wife and I have four wonderful children and raising them, although a lot of work at times was a real joy in life. Our marriage has always been a great partnership, each pitching in to support the other.

As each child is born as you know, there are certain duties that need to be performed to nurture that child. My duty was diaper changing. I actually sat down one day and figured out that my wife and I had over the course of our four children changed almost 14,000 diapers. Now if you know anything about diaper changing, you know it isn't the most glamorous job in the world. So in order to make it more fun I developed a small game I would play with the kids to make it that way.

Once they were able to stand, after each diaper change I would prop them up on the changing table and step back. They would stand there wobbling back and forth a little and then I would hold out my hands and say, "Jump." In an effort to grant my wish they would fall forward into my arms and I would pull them close to me in the process.

As they got older they would actually begin to leap off the table and into my arms. Soon the diaper changing table area became too small for the game and we moved the jumping to the staircase. Step by step they would move farther up the staircase as time went on, moving higher and having to leap farther as they felt more daring. My son Jeremiah was probably the one that enjoyed this the most. He would leap wildly from the staircase into my arms driving us both backwards.

I was preparing to speak at a youth retreat one day and was looking to use the stair jumping as an illustration, so I asked Jeremiah how high up the staircase he would be willing to go and jump to me? Now our stairs have thirteen steps, looking at the stairs he said, "I would go up eight or nine steps." I said, "You wouldn't go all the way?" His reply was, "No." But I said, "You would go eight or nine?" and he said, "Yes."

Now some of you might think I would be disappointed in my son for not trusting me enough to jump all the way. To tell you the truth I was extremely pleased he was willing to go that high for me. The ninth step on my stairs is about six foot back and six foot high from the floor where I would be standing to catch him, and as big as he was at that point I would probably have a hard time doing it.

But there was a very important reason that he would be willing to jump from that far into my arms, even with all that space between us, and that is because I never dropped him. In fact I never dropped any of my children in our jumping game, and in the same way God has never dropped you or me either!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

When was the last time you felt the exhilaration of leaping through space into the arms of God and trusting Him with all your being and having the faith that He would catch you? Maybe you have never felt that, because you have been trying to live your life as securely as you could without any risk. If that is the case I want to challenge you on your way of thinking.

You see, you express faith in your life every day. Let me give you an example: You get sick so you go to a doctor whose credentials you know nothing about, who gives you a prescription you can't read, that you give to a pharmacist who you do not know, who puts pills that were made by people somewhere you are not familiar with, that you take in hopes of getting better. Now that is having faith.

So why is it easy to have faith with things like that, but difficult when it comes to trusting God? Maybe because to us the things God asks us to do can be scary and they put us out of our comfort zone. That may be, but the fact that He has never ever dropped us when we jump out in faith should make us want to move up the staircase just a little more.

I know that developing faith is a process, just like my children learning to trust me was a process. I also believe that God is pleased when we show Him we trust Him even if it is scary. I also believe that God is pleased when we try our best to go our farthest for Him.

Faith is a **belief** that is so **strong** that it leads to **trust**, that leads to **action** specifically **surrender!** When you and I are leaping out in faith there is nothing around us to catch us but the arms of God. God wants so much for you to move out of the security of your little world and into His, because it means a deeper more dynamic relationship between you and Him.

Take time this week to begin to redirect your faith from the things you know to the things God wants you to do, and the person He wants you to become. It's time to move from the diaper changing table and out onto the staircase, eventually and hopefully making the top step our end goal. Remember without faith it is impossible to please God. But when we step out in faith to show God how much we trust Him, He not only will grant your desire for a life worth living, but I guarantee He will catch you each and every time you are willing to leap towards His arms!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Hebrews 11:6

\_\_\_ Read and study Hebrews chapter 11 all the way through.

\_\_\_ If you are having a hard time trusting God ask yourself why you can trust Him to save your soul and grant you salvation, but you can't trust Him in the thing He is asking you to do?

\_\_\_ List the biggest thing you are struggling to trust Jesus with right now, and list the reasons keeping you from stepping out in faith.

\_\_\_ Visualize what your staircase with God looks like and determine what step you think you would be willing to jump from, and then ask yourself what is preventing you from moving up to the next step.

\_\_\_ Work on taking that obstacle out of your way, by praying for God to increase your faith and then taking action in leaping in that direction.

\_\_\_ Faith is something given to each one of us (Romans 12:3 & 6) and it needs to be exercised in order to grow. What are you doing to exercise your faith? Figure out this week ways you can step out of your comfort zone in the things God is directing you to do, and then do it!

## THE SLED

### **Read: Romans 7:20-25**

*<sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. <sup>21</sup>So I find this law at work: although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*

*<sup>22</sup>For in my inner being I delight in God's law, <sup>23</sup>but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.*

*<sup>24</sup>What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*

*<sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (NIV)*

It was a cold night in the dead of winter and my wife Gail and I were visiting her mom. There was about half a foot of snow on the ground at the time. It had rained just recently and the snow was glimmering in the moonlight from a layer of ice that had formed on it.

Both of my wife's brothers were avid sledders, they each owned a flexible flyer type sled and were proficient with them. They would even ride down the hill close to their house in the dark with flashlights taped to the front of the sled.

It was a gorgeous evening and the moon must have been full or close to it because you could make out the outline of most things even in the darkness. I looked at Brian, Gail's oldest brother who was about twelve at the time and said, "Brian let me borrow your sled so I can take a ride." "No" he said, "You'll bust it." "No I won't" I told him. "Oh yes you will, I know it, you'll bust it." By now I was getting a little angry with him. Here was a twelve year old telling me about life. After some more debating Brian finally relented and let me borrow his sled, but only after I promised to buy him a brand new one if I broke his.

Taking the sled I walked over to the hill down from the house. It was a wide open field extending down about a hundred yards or so. I mounted the sled laying on my belly. I felt like I was on the Christa Run in the Olympics. I pushed off hard to get things going and then let gravity take its course. I began to pick up speed. The runners on the sled were cutting into the ice and throwing the fine snow underneath back up into my face. Just about when my speed



had climaxed it happened. There was a loud noise and then I was no longer on the sled. I was traveling in mid air. After my short flight I landed into the snow, flipping and turning and coming up looking like the abominable snowman.

As I walked back to the sled farther up the hill I could see it was a mangled mess. The runners were twisted and I believe the wood was broken. It was beyond repair. The boys never told me that half way down the field was a boulder sticking up out of the ground that had been buried by the fallen snow. One of the hardest things I've had to do was not buy Brian a new sled, but walk back up that hill and tell a little boy he was right about me breaking his sled.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Have you ever spoken these words to God: "I promise God, I will never do that again." I think we all have at one point or another. We want so much to please God by being obedient to Him, but always seem to come up short.

Sin has a way of doing that to us. When we give into temptation, sin has a way of taking us farther than we wanted to go and keep us there longer than we wanted to stay. It pulls us down and separates us in our relationship with God.

It is as if we borrowed God sled because He trusted us with it and then had to return it all broken and in pieces. Like me having to face Brian again we might look at this as a really difficult task. We feel guilt in failing, and a disappointment in our own selves. But even though we might feel badly about our disobedience, it can still be hard to ask God for His forgiveness knowing that we will probably do the same thing over again.

One small comfort we can take from this is that we are not alone. Even one of the greatest apostles Paul struggled with sin as it talks about in the verses for this week. But one thing he comes to realize and states at the beginning of that passage is that it is no longer him that is doing the bad it is sin living in him.

Do you remember Saturday morning cartoons? There was a cartoon I remember where someone opens the back door on a robot and throws in a wrench. The robot that was acting normal a few minutes prior now starts to act crazy running into things and going completely

out of control. This is what happens to us when we make room in our life for sin to live.

Sin becomes etched into our lives like a computer monitor that has been left on without a screensaver running. It becomes burnt into our being and therefore hard to overcome. The only way for you and I to beat sin is to trust in Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We have to drive sin out by coming to the understanding as it says in Galatians chapter 2:20, that we no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So we need to make space for God Himself to take up residence in our hearts, driving sin out. He will do the cleaning. He will repaint and wallpaper, move in new furnishings and repair the leaking roof if necessary. Not just because we ask Him to, but because He wants to. This week let's focus on striving to push sin out of our lives. Knowing that when we do fall, that if we will only turn to God with a repentant heart He can fix our mangled sled no matter how badly damaged it is. Not just because we ask Him to, but because He wants to!

### **THIS WEEKS CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Romans 7:24

\_\_\_ Memorize Romans 7:25

\_\_\_ Read and study Galatians 2:20

\_\_\_ Memorize Galatians 2:20

\_\_\_ Ask God to take up residence in your heart this week and force out the greater sins you are struggling with.

\_\_\_ Find a stone or rock weighing a couple of pounds and in your mind name that rock the greatest sin you are struggling with right now. Carry it around with you all week. Put it in your purse, or on the front seat of your car. Keep it with you and then at the end of the week as a sign of repentance towards God go to where nobody is and throw it off a bridge into a stream or lake where you can never find it again.

\_\_\_ Thank God; and I really mean thank Him for His provision of Jesus Christ as your Savior from your sins. Realize what it cost Him and how much He really loves you!

## MT. LORETTO RESCUE

### **Read: Romans 5:8**

*<sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (NIV)*

I was young then. I don't remember how old I was at the time of this event, just that I was at the age where I wanted to hang around with my older brother (I still do). There was a mission not too far from our house in Staten Island, New York, at that time called Mt. Loretto.

There was a football game being played close to there and my brother Larry wanted to go to it and took me along. It was a pretty fair crowd from what I remember and we didn't sit in the stands (I don't even remember if there were any) instead we watched from the ground along the sidelines. Well at least my brother watched. I was too little to see anything but the back of all those people's legs.

I moved around trying to find an opening to see through, but didn't find any gaps. People were packed tightly against one another. I wanted to see the game but just couldn't.

I remember standing right behind a group of people when suddenly they were gone. I mean they were there and then in a flash they were gone. I stood there with this huge hole in front of me caused by everyone moving aside. Now I could see the game. But I didn't have to look too hard, because the game was coming to me.

Everyone had scattered because a player was being chased out to the sideline, and it was clear he was headed out of bounds in a hurry, right where I was standing. All I remember is a helmet, ball, and padded legs sliding towards me with the player's spikes right by my legs.

There was no time to panic. There was no time to do anything, so I froze. I was too little to react like the others had. Besides they could see it coming and had some advanced warning. Once the space widened it was too late for me to do anything, the player was already headed

my way.

Just before impact I felt this strong grip grab me under my arms and whisk me up and out of the way. I remember it being my brother! He evidently hadn't been too far from me and because he was taller saw the action coming my way. He arrived just in time and saved the day, not to mention me.

I don't remember the score of that game, what the colors the players were wearing, or anything much except that my brother was there for me, and was I ever glad he was!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

When I think about that story it reminds me of God saving me in a different way. I can't help but feel that God was watching my life from even before I was born. Like my brother He could see things even before they happened. He orchestrated events and times, placing people in my path at just the right times, even planning the time and place I would be born and the parents I would have. That is because it was, and is, His plan and wish that everyone of us come into a saving relationship with His Son Jesus Christ.

God never sleeps, and He goes to great lengths to make sure we don't wander too far from his presence. He wants to be there for you and for me in every aspect of our lives and wants to protect us, especially from the things we can't save ourselves from, including our sin.

Let's face it without His love for us we would be dead in the water. There is no way you or I could make it to heaven based on our own merit. God laid out a simple plan for us to follow in the form of the Ten Commandment, but because of our sinful nature, we couldn't keep from breaking His law.

One of the things I used to do when doing ministry was to test people especially youth, using the Ten Commandments. I used this technique from Ray Comfort and Kirk Cameron from [www.wayofthemaster.com](http://www.wayofthemaster.com), only I modified it to fit a little differently.

On a big sketch board I would write out the Ten Commandments, in two columns, five in each column. Then I would offer someone \$20 if they could past the test of being a good person. There was never any shortage of people willing to try.

I would ask them what was a passing grade in school and they would say, "Sixty-five or seventy percent." I would say, "Good, I'm going to do even better than that and if you get fifty percent or more you win." They were all up for that!

Then the dialogue would go like this:

(When they would fail to keep one of the Commandments I would cross that one off on the board).

Me: "Did you ever tell a lie?"

Them: "Yes."

Me: "OK, then you are down to ninety percent and that is still a good percentage."

Me: "Did you every steal anything, no matter how small?"

Them: "Yes."

Me: "OK, now you are down to eighty percent, but you are still passing."

Me: "Did you ever covet or want something someone else had?"

Them: "No."

Me: "Well if you were never jealous of what someone had, why did you steal it then?"

Them: "Yeah, you're right."

Me: "OK, now you are down to seventy percent."

Me: "Did you ever use God's name in vain or as a curse word?"

Them: "Yes."

Me: "OK, now you are down to sixty percent, but you are still passing."

Me: "Did you ever look at someone with lustful thoughts?"

Them: “Yes.”

Me: “It says in the Bible in Matthew 5:27-28, *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (NIV)

Me: “OK, that means you have committed adultery according to the Biblical definition of what adultery is, so that means you are down to fifty percent and if you get any more wrong you will have failed the test.”

Me: “Did you ever murder someone?”

Them: “No.”

Me: “You know it says in the Bible in 1 John 3:15 *Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.*” (NIV) “Have you ever hated someone?”

Them: “Yes.”

Me: Then according to the Bible’s definition you are a murderer and that brings you to forty percent, which means you have failed the test.

I then take them through the final questions:

“Did you ever put anything ahead of God?”

“Did you ever not keep the Sabbath Day holy?”

“Did you ever make anything else in essence your God?”

“Did you ever disrespect your parents?”

By the time we are done they realize just how far they have come from receiving a passing grade. In fact many if they are honest will only be credited with keeping one of two of the Commandments, and many have failed them all. In reality it says in the scriptures; *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

(James 2:10 NIV)

It just shows us how helpless we are on our own and how much we need a Savior. Fortunately that is what God longs to be in our life and it doesn't matter how badly we have failed His test, He has made a provision through Jesus Christ to save us and bring us into all eternity with Him if only we will trust His free gift on the cross!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Romans 5:8

\_\_\_ Read and study through Exodus chapter 20

\_\_\_ Make a list of any of the Ten Commandments you have broken this week alone.

\_\_\_ Reflect on what it cost God to save you from your sin.

\_\_\_ Confess any outstanding sin in your life to Jesus and ask for His forgiveness.

\_\_\_ Take the Ten Commandments test to see where you score yourself overall. Be honest!

\_\_\_ Remember God not only wants to save you from your sin, but He is also not far from us and wants the best for us so we can look more and more like Jesus. List two things God has allowed you to go through to make you more like Jesus, but was gracious to you in the process.



## THE BUM

### **Read: Isaiah 61:1-3**

*<sup>1</sup>The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, <sup>3</sup>and provide for those who grieve in Zion to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. (NIV)*

We were having a youth group / club meeting with Youth for Christ in the Bushkill region of the Pocono Mountains. We wanted to make this meeting impacting as there were quite a few kids that attended these meetings. So here is what we did.

I got one of our volunteer staff to meet me at the club meeting location about an hour early. He brought a wig with long hair and a hoodie jacket. We then moved a picnic table that was on the grounds right up against the barn type building we were meeting at that night. Then I had Hookie (our volunteer staff person) put on the wig and his hoodie and lay face down on the picnic table with the hair across his face. Then I placed an empty bottle in a paper bag and placed it in his hand and we waited.

You should have seen the look on the parents' faces when they drove up to drop their children off. The youth too, as they walked past even gave an inquisitive look or that of disgust. As they peered down from the picture window overlooking the picnic table I could hear them talking. "I think I saw him walking down the road this week" one said.

When everyone arrived we started the meeting. There were about thirty kids there that night. About half way through our session there was a knock on the door. I went over to the door and opened it. There stood our friend the bum. I invited him in and asked him to sit on a couch that was already loaded with kids. You should have seen them move. Hookie sat there with his

head low so the hair from the wig would cover his eyes.

I went on with the lesson and then stopped to ask the kids if they loved Youth for Christ. They all said “YEAH!” I then asked them if they loved the staff. Again they resounded with a hearty “YEAH!” Then I asked them if they loved Hookie? They all yelled, “YEAH!” I said, “Good because he is here!”

With that Hookie ripped of his disguise. The kid’s jaws dropped open! I then went on to share with them the story of the woman at the well when she met Jesus there. I shared how she came at a time in the day when no other women would be there because she was looked down upon.

Then I talked about Zacchaeus the tax collector in the book of Luke chapter 19, and how the people called him a sinner, but Jesus reached out to him and changed his life. I went on to talk about how there are so many hurting around them that need to be reached out to in the name of Christ, and how much He loved them and those they needed to reach out to.

That night seven kids received Christ as their savior and many more made a commitment to reach out to the lost and hurting in their school, all in the name of Christ! It was a night I will never forget and one I think many of them won’t either!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

When I came to receive Christ into my life as my Savior, I remember one of the motivating factors being my realization of how much He loved me, and how much He loved me for me!

The thought of that made a huge difference in my life, both then and now. Understanding how much God loved me was saying volumes to me in the fact that I was not worthless as others might label me, but I was instead worthy, worthy of love, because God chose to make it so.

In high school there was this girl I’ll call Susan. From what I can remember Susan was not the most popular, or among the most beautiful, as most people would think of beautiful, and she never seemed very pleasant to be around. One day I was traveling down the hallway and Susan was coming the other way. We must have been between classes and were the only ones in the hall at the time.

As we drew closer I thought to myself that I should go out of my way to be nice to her, as it didn't seem anyone else I can remember ever was. After all, my dad used to say, "It doesn't cost anything to be nice."

When we were almost even with each other I looked over to her and said, "Hi Susan." Without even blinking she swung and hit me with her huge purse. I was stunned. All I did was try to be nice, and here I was taking a whipping for it. What's with that?

As I look back on that situation, I can understand why Susan did what she did. Probably for a good portion of her life she had been made fun of. There were probably few people in her life that even gave her a second look, let alone engage her in conversation. When that happens it is easy to train ourselves to be on the defense, always guarding ourselves from the next comment or put down. It probably happens so much it was expected, and what was not, was someone being nice.

Who is there in your little world that has been isolated by others? Is there someone you can think of that was cast off by society. Maybe that someone is you? Regardless, Jesus has a very special place in His heart for people like that, and He wants you to develop that same type of love.

Take the time this week to look at people differently. Try and look past the wig and hoodie they are wearing and try to see them for who they really are. It might just be that you not only make a new friend, but change someone's life, or even lead them to Jesus.

As for Susan, I later came to find out that she was a really sweet person, who also found her love in Jesus the same way I did. Both of us were searching for the same thing and thankfully we both found what we were not only looking for, but longing for; a personal relationship with the God of the universe, who loves us for who we are with no strings attached, and that has made all the difference!

### **THIS WEEKS CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Read Isaiah 61:1-3 again

\_\_\_ Memorize Isaiah 61:1

\_\_\_ Make a list of five people you know in your church, work, school or elsewhere that you know are hurting and need to be loved for who they are.

\_\_\_ Send or give a card to two of them this week.

\_\_\_ Pray for all five people this week that they would find God's deep love for them.

\_\_\_ Practice looking past the masks people are wearing to discover the hurt people are really feeling, and then pray and ask God how you can reach out to them and then do it.

\_\_\_ Go up to someone you've never introduced yourself to in church this week and make it a point to do just that.

## A FISH STORY

**Read: Joshua 1:7**

<sup>7</sup> *“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”(NIV)*

I was working in full time ministry at the time and nothing seemed to be going as I planned for it to go. Even though I had seen many lives changed and commitments made to believe in Jesus, I was feeling like a failure. I needed some encouragement, so I decided to go do something I was usually successful in doing and go fishing.

Now I consider myself a pretty good fisherman and have won the pool on party boats several time (that is a contest that you pay to enter and the one with the biggest fish wins all the money) so I thought I would have a good chance of coming home that day feeling like at least I could do one thing right. I even remember praying to God and asking Him to help me be and feel successful today because I didn't right now.

I got on the boat, signed up for the pool, and paying my five dollars for the pool and my other money for the trip took my spot at the rail. We were fishing for striped bass that day, something I'm accustomed to catching. We came to our first stop and the captain blew the horn to signal we could start fishing. I was working my jig on the end of my pole with all I was worth, but couldn't entice a fish to bite. The guy to the right of me caught fish and the guy to the left of me caught fish, and people all over the boat were catching fish.

I tried different lures, I change the leader on my line, I tried all the different tricks and techniques I learned over the years, but for the next eight hours I couldn't buy a fish. The last horn of the day sounded, calling us all to reel in our line as the boat was headed for home.

Although many people caught fish that day none of them were legal size. Some were short by only an inch or two, so they all had to be thrown back. I asked the mate on the boat what they did about the pool at that point. He said, “Everyone writes their name on their ticket and puts it

in the can and we pull out a winner.”

Now I was feeling very disgusted at this point, I had prayed and asked God to help me feel successful and I fully expected Him to answer that prayer because He knew how I felt. But it seemed He hadn't and I was to go back home again feeling the same way I had come. Then God spoke to me and although it was not an audible voice that people could hear I could hear His words spoken clearly in my head, and this is what He said, “Dave, today I am going to cause you to win the pool, so that when you do you will know that you are successful not because of anything you do, but because of what I do.”

I sat there on the bench stunned, with the full belief that they would pull my name from the can. A small boy was asked to come over and reach into the can and pull out a ticket. The mate grabbed it from the boy and read off the name. He said, “Dave Dowling.”

I knew then without a doubt that God was with me. He had not abandoned me and that **HE** was going to work **THROUGH** me and in me because that is what He wanted from me. I realized He would cause me to be successful in producing fruit for Him, only because He was the one leading me and producing those successes. I was just along for the ride. This not only helped me feel like a success (because God had chosen me) but also took a tremendous amount of weight off of my shoulders, knowing that my focus from now on was just to be obedient and it was His job to handle everything else!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

The first time I ever shared this story in writing was as a letter of encouragement to a good friend of mine Jessica who is a missionary in Kazakhstan. She had been pouring her heart out to the people there, sharing the love of Christ and encouraging others to follow Him.

One girl she especially became close to, made a decision to accept Jesus as her Savior, and Jess worked with her closely in showing her the next steps in following Christ, helping her to not only become a believer, but a disciple of Jesus as well. They would attend Bible studies together and gatherings and grew very close.

Then after growing in the Lord for four years this friend of Jessica's started dating a Muslim,

and slowly Jess started noticing a difference. At first she was still coming to the Word studies and was even talking openly about her relationship with her new boyfriend. She was convinced she could persuade her boyfriend to be saved, and said she would never marry a non-believer.

Jess goes on to say, “As time went on, she got more serious with him, choosing to believe she had a peace about being with him, and changes in her were visible. Like things she started to say about Islam and that she believes her boyfriend is righteous and she couldn't say that he was a non-believer. Eventually she stopped coming to the studies and meetings altogether, and even expressed to Jess that she no longer wanted to be around her and that she felt she was no longer a believer in Christ.”

I see it all the time on Facebook with kids I have shared with over the years. I have to remember though that where those kids go and how they turn out is nothing I can control. That is totally between them and the Lord. But because I don't always understand it, it is easy to look at myself and say, “I've failed.” In reality I did what I could to present to them the good news about Christ and offer them a relationship with God that can bring abundant life. Although I can talk to them and encourage them the only real power I have to help change them is to pray for them.

Ministry work is hard work if done right. It is also easy to feel like a failure because we pour our heart into people wanting them to know the joy we do, and when they do come to Christ and then fall away we don't understand, and can even feel like it is our fault.

Just a few minutes after I reminded Jess about this and encouraged her in her walk I noticed this post on Facebook. It was from a girl I ministered to as a teenager who had a picture of the two of us together that she kept and put on her inspire wall as she calls it and along with the photo she posted this comment:

“I knew a little about God growing up. I believed in Him but I didn't see Him in people I always just saw a bunch of rules. Thankfully looking back I can say there was a few people that really made an impact on my life, that help me become who I am today. This man from a distance showed me Jesus, showed me servanthood. Dave, I just wanted to encourage you, this photo is on my inspire wall, It was taken 6 years ago and where I am and what I am doing

could not have happened without you and partnering with my old church, seven project, and Gettysburg Masters Commission. It was a life changing week for me. Even though I fell away for a bit I couldn't escape His love and the call that I felt that day. Thank you for choosing Him.

I shared this post with Jess because it was such an encouragement to me, and I knew it would be to her as well. So as we walk with the Lord we need to remember only one thing and that is to remember to work like everything depended on you, but trust God like everything depends on Him, because it does!

### **THIS WEEKS CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Joshua 1:7

\_\_\_ Think back in your life to two people you know that have fallen away or struggled in their walk with Christ and pray earnestly for them to come back.

\_\_\_ Pray for three missionaries from your church this week. Asking God to grant them a sense of peace in their work to share Him with others.

\_\_\_ Focus your attention this week on just being obedient to the Lord in what He wants you to do, and trust Him for the rest.

\_\_\_ Think back to a time or times in your life when God caused you to be successful. Linger in them for the day and remember them in your heart as a reminder of His great love for you!

\_\_\_ Try to envision what it will be like to stand before God someday and the feeling you might have as He says the words: "Well done good and faithful servant." Try to realize that everything we do for Him has lasting power.



## THE FLY

### **Read: Psalms 91:14-16**

*<sup>14</sup>“Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him, I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. <sup>15</sup>He will call on me, and I will answer him, I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. <sup>16</sup>With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. (NIV)*

As I was coming home one day in my truck and I was making a left hand turn off of the main road onto a back country road, I saw him. It was an ordinary house fly that had fastened himself to my driver’s side window.

As I pulled through the left hand turn I thought I would have some fun. So I sped up a bit wanting to see how much he could take before the wind current ripped him from the window. As I sped along he held fast. I pressed harder down on the gas. He still hung in there. I had to stop for stop sign and make a right. As I pulled through this turn he still clung to the window.

I hit the accelerator and could see the affects of the wind pushing on him. Then to my amazement I saw something unbelievable. The fly started to slowly move up and forward on the window. As he did, it looked like every step was a strain for him. While moving each leg forward it looked almost like he was quivering and he probably was from the force placed on him.

He was being pounded by the wind and could have just given up and flew away, but he didn’t. Instead, despite the onslaught of the wind against him, he inched ever forward to the safety of the lip of the door overhang at the top of the window.

Try as I might I couldn’t stop the fly. Even under the pressure of the wind he kept going until finally he made it to the shelter of the door lip and was safely out of danger.

### **THOUGHT OF THE WEEK**

During the time of World War II while the Germans were bombing England their Prime Minister at the time, Winston Churchill was quoted as saying these words:

“Never give in--never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

(Quote sourced from [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/2834066.Winston\\_Churchill](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/2834066.Winston_Churchill))

Those words still echo their truths today and were spoken to a people under a time when they were facing immense opposition. They were said to spur on people that could have surrendered in their heart because of the brokenness around them, but instead took those words to heart and became extraordinary in their power to hold steadfast.

I don't know what you are facing right now, if anything. But I do know you will at some point face a giant in your life, and when you do, hold fast and draw ever closer to God when that day comes. He is the shelter in the time of a storm.

In December of 1944 the Germans of World War II launched one of their greatest offensive moves called the battle of the bulge. The idea behind it was to divide the allied troops by driving a wedge between them in strategic locations. One of the towns they were hoping to secure was Bastogne being held by the American troops at the time.

The town was completely surrounded at one point and the opposition strong. Four Germans carrying a white flag approached the Americans and presented them with a message demanding the Americans surrender. General Anthony McAuliffe felt a reply was needed and gave them this one word answer, “NUTS.” This was a definite non affirmative reply to the German's request.

McAuliffe and his troops even though surrounded still went on to accomplish their mission and held the city, blocking the advance of the Germans and gumming up the works. (Facts sourced from <http://www.thedropzone.org/europe/bulge/kinnard.html>).

Some may look at the word NUTS as derogatory but I like to look at it as an abbreviation for something greater, to me it stands for: **Never - Underestimate - The - Savior!**

As finite beings we can never know the true power of God. When things look bleakest, and we are surrounded by life, we need to remember what that abbreviation stands for, and trust Christ no matter what!

Like great men and women of the Bible we need to trust no matter what the cost or what we face and move ourselves closer to the lip of the door where we are out of the storm. God, right now is waiting for you to join Him. He wants to meet you where you are and walk you through your adversity with Him guiding your every step. Trust Him today, He will get you through, and remember Never, never, never, never give up!!!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 91:14

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 91:15

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 91:16

\_\_\_ Ask God for strength and the ability to face the giants in your life, not that you might avoid them, but that He might grant you the ability to go through them.

\_\_\_ Think of two new people this week that are struggling and pray for them diligently for God to break through to them and their situation.

\_\_\_ Think back to several times when you felt hopeless and underestimated God's ability to rescue you and He came through anyway.

\_\_\_ Praise God this week openly in church or to a friend for His faithfulness no matter whether you are through your storm or in the midst of it.

## THE TRACTOR MANIFOLD

### **Read: Ephesians 2:10**

*<sup>10</sup>For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)*

The first farm tractor I can ever remember us having was an old Massey Harris Pony. It was a great runner for a number of years and I used it to haul firewood and cut the tall grass with a sickle bar, and disc the garden.

As time went on it began to get tired as all mechanical things are prone to do. She would start fine, but over time there was some major leakages from rust holes in the intake and exhaust manifold. It would spit and put when the engine was running, and something had to be done before we were no longer able to use it.

This was years ago before the internet and when finding parts for a tractor like this was not easy. So being a high pressure pipe welder at the time I asked the boss at work if I could take some pipe and flat stock and build a new manifold for the tractor. With his approval I got to work.

Taking the old manifold off the tractor, I used it as a template for design and so that the bolt holes would line up for the engine and carburetor as well as all the holes for the intake and exhaust ports. I started with the flat bar stock and cut it to length and bored the holes for the ports and engine bolts. Then I bent all the pipes to connect the exhaust pipe and the air intake for the carburetor. Taking another piece of flat stock I fashioned the mounting flange for the carburetor and tig welded the whole assembly together making sure everything lined up.

When I finished it was quite a sight to behold with all its curves and how all the pipes fit just right. I headed home that night with the surprise in hand to show my dad.

When I got home I told my dad that I had something for him, and showed him what I had made for him. He was stunned! He just keep looking at it, turning it this way and that. I don't

remember what he said at the time, but his expression of gratitude said it all.

You know what? That manifold never made it to the tractor until almost two years later. Why? Because my dad hung it on the family room wall and almost every time someone would come in the house he would grab them and take them over to it saying “I got to show you what my son made.”

To everyone else it was just a manifold, but to my dad it was a masterpiece, an absolute masterpiece to be cherished, and put on display for the whole world, because his son made it for him.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

When my children were smaller they would make me pictures and cards and I would cherish them and even frame them and display them on the walls of my office. They too were masterpieces to me and I never threw any of them out because of it.

Whether you realize it or not you yourself are God’s masterpiece, His fabulous creation made in His image. Now there may be times you look at yourself and say “Yeah, right.” But really you are. It has nothing to do with how you look physically, or how smart you are, or how talented. You are God’s workmanship, special in every way.

If you look in the book of Job chapter 1 God is in essence showing off Job to Satan. Boasting about how faithful Job is to God and how much he respected God. Here is what the Lord says in verse 8:

*<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him, he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” (NIV)*

God was putting Job on display to show him off to Satan. God rejoices and is pleased when we bless Him by living up to our calling when we come to know Christ as Savior. I can’t help but imagine how much He love to show us off to the angels and all the powers of darkness as we honor Him and reflect and glorify His name.

You and I are His handiwork. So don't ever put yourself down or let others for that matter. Instead change your focus to reflect who you are; a child of the King. After all God would never have sent His Son to redeem someone who wasn't worth anything. But you are! You are so loved by God, and that proves your worth.

Remember this week to hold that thought close to your heart and rejoice that no matter what happens, no matter who enters your life or exits it, no matter how you feel or anything else, remember you are God's masterpiece. Moreover, He has placed you on His family room wall and you are on display for the whole universe to see! So don't let Him down, because He loves you more than you know!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Ephesians 2:10

\_\_\_ Memorize Job 1:8

\_\_\_ Make a list as big as you can, describing all the things God has built into you to make you, you. They can be your talents, your faith, your love for Him, how you think, etc.

\_\_\_ What have you done for God lately that you know really pleased Him? If you can't remember, focus this week on bringing glory to His name through your actions and thoughts.

\_\_\_ Read and study Psalms 139

\_\_\_ Rest this week just in knowing that you are God's child!

\_\_\_ What type of legacy are you creating to leave for others to follow once you are gone. If you don't know lay out a plan to develop one and begin living it out!

## THE CLEAR CUT

### **Read: John 10:9-10**

*<sup>9</sup> I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (NIV)*

I'm a big hunter and fisherman, and living in the Pocono Mountains of Northeast Pennsylvania affords me easy access to areas in order for me to sustain my pursuits in the great outdoors. I love to hunt for big game, like deer and bear, which require a great deal of stealth, but for a more relaxed hunting atmosphere grouse and woodcock are hard to beat.

While hunting these game birds you can talk with your fellow hunting partners as you bust through brush in an effort to flush birds. There are also many more misses than connections so that makes it even more of a challenge and just plain fun.

I was hunting the Pike County area not too far from my home with two other friends. Each of us owned a Springer Spaniel hunting dog, and were planning on using all three dogs to really put it to the birds today.

We loaded our guns and let the dogs go. We traveled down one logging road with the dogs working out in front and to the sides of us. For hours we covered the area down one hill and up another. We hit every "birdie" looking spot we came across, but couldn't muster a bird.

Although the day was beautiful and the exercise much needed, it would have been nice to locate some birds to add to the hunt. Reaching the bottom of a valley we crossed a stream and headed up the other side. Moving up just a short way we could see that the ground was more open. It was a clear cut. It was an area where the forest division cut down the trees to let in more light to the forest floor and spur on the development of new growth. There was also something unique about this clear cut in the fact that a small trickle of water flowed through the middle of

it making the ground a little swampy and a real magnet for Woodcock which love to eat earthworms.

Working our way through the clear cut it wasn't long before our first bird of the day flushed with a thunderous sound, and the report of the shotguns sounded. In the course of the next hour we had, with the help of the dogs flushed twenty three birds, both grouse and woodcock, with each of use bagging a bird. Now if you know anything about grouse hunting in the Northeast you will realize that to flush that many birds especially in one area is extraordinary. I've since taken others there to the spot and hunted it many times, and even without the help of my dog I have limited out on grouse and shot quite a few woodcock as well.

The funny thing about the clear cut though is hunting it was only productive if you hunted inside of it or no more than a hundred yards around its perimeter. Any farther than that and it was unlikely you would flush a bird, but within its boundaries the action was fierce.

I realized early on that this place was a Mecca for birds because it provided them with everything they needed. This included shelter, food, and water, allowing them to not only survive, but thrive in the process. It became my go to spot for grouse hunting and I made sure only a few choice friends knew about it.

Since that time the hunting has changed right along with the new growth of trees, but I will never forget my days spent there, sharing a sandwich with my dog or a friend and feeling the soft warmth of the sun on my face hunting those Indian Summers. Also, let's not forget to mention the fare for my family's table when I was fortunate enough to be successful in my hunting.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

That clear cut was like a life support system for wildlife. It nourished them and provided for them all their needs. Not unlike what God does for us. I often shake my head at myself for the times I've ventured outside of God's will for my life, struggling to have my so called needs met, only to come up short and feeling empty. This made me realize how much I needed to stay within the confines of God's best for me, His clear cut.



Picture for a minute that you have a car that you paid a lot of money for, but every now and then it runs into a problem. You've taken it to your local mechanic to look at, but he can't figure it out, so you then take it to the dealership where you bought the car only to be disappointed in the fact that they come up unable to diagnosis the problem as well. For weeks this same problem arises, but there is nobody available to have the knowledge to find and fix the issue.

Then you receive a recall in the mail to take your car to the dealership because your issue has been linked to the same problem people have been having in other cars like yours and the designers of the vehicle have discovered the cause and solution.

We in life may think we know what we want and need, but it is really God our designer and builder that knows what is best for us, and true life is found only in Him. He knows what makes us tick. He designed us with so much more than we could ever know, like how our mind can process things with the ability to reason, or how our body can perform so many different actions from threading a needle, to squat lifting hundreds of pounds.

We have been uniquely designed out of all of God's creation to be the only ones to have the ability to fellowship with Him. He designed us to be connected with Him and flourish when we do. From Him comes our strength our wisdom, our knowledge of love, and moral fiber, and so much more.

If you want a more abundant life you need not look any farther than the clear cut of God's goodness to you. He knows everything about you, where you would be born, to which parents, who you would marry, if you would marry, where you would work, and a host other factors we just can't comprehend.

Outside of God's clear cut is just the same old woods you've trampled through for most of your life, but in the center of the clearing in the midst of His will for us is refreshment and the ability to feel the soft warmth of the sun of the Indian Summer on your face as you enjoy God and your relationship with Him. That is what you were designed for!

## **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize John 10:10

\_\_\_ Make a list of everything you purchased or achieved that you thought would satisfy your longing but didn't.

\_\_\_ When was the last time you just rested in Jesus? I mean when was the last time you just spending time with Him turning all your issues over to Him and trusting Him to fulfill your needs and desires? If you can't remember set aside some time this week to do just that.

\_\_\_ Figure out this week what Jesus means by the phrase "Have life, and have it to the full," maybe your definition and God's are not the same.

\_\_\_ Define for yourself what God's clear cut looks like for you.

\_\_\_ Read and study though John chapter 15

\_\_\_ Think about how much of your life you are living apart for Jesus and how much you are living through Jesus. Then talk to the Lord about any changes you need to make.

## SUPERMAN DRESS UP

### **Read: 2 Samuel 23:8-12**

<sup>8</sup> *These are the names of David's mighty warriors:*

*Josheb-Bassebeth, a Tahkemonite, was the chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.*

<sup>9</sup> *Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty warriors, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the Israelites retreated,<sup>10</sup> but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.*

<sup>11</sup> *Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them.<sup>12</sup> But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory. (NIV)*

When I was a little kid I used to love the TV shows of the 60's, because many of these were geared to villains and superheroes. As time went on I began to embrace Spiderman as my favorite, but the one I cut my teeth on and I will always remember was Superman!

I would have my mom safety pin the corners of a towel to both sides of my shoulders and then I would run around the house with my arms stretched out in front of me pushing air through my teeth with my lips puckered making a SSSHHHH sound like I was cutting through the wind. I'd leap off the stair landing onto the floor and pretend I was all powerful, clearing tall buildings with a single bound, and bending steel in my bare hands, I was Superman!

Day after day I would act out my imagination to be the man of steel. It was fun and the feeling it gave me was that I was unstoppable, so much so that I went a little too far in portraying my

character.

My dad had a machine shop just past our backyard where he kept all this equipment and where he worked on various projects. I was playing in the backyard and of course dressed like Superman. Running around the yard I came to the door of my dad's shop. It was wooden and had about six panes of individual glass in it so you could see through it.

I must have heard the sound of someone crying for help inside with my super human hearing, but instead of using my x-ray vision (I must have forgot I had that) I decided to enter the premises and catch the villain red handed and rescue the person who needed my help.

Now I don't remember if the door was locked or not because I don't remember trying the handle, and anyway I was Superman and you don't enter the normal way a mere mortal person would, you smash the door down. So reaching back I thrust my right arm forward shattering the lower glass window in the door. There that would teach those villains inside! But when I pulled my arm out of the opening I remember seeing blood and not feeling so good, so I did what any Superman would so in that very instance, I ran back into the house screaming for my mom!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Each of us as kids dream of being something great, it could be a soldier, a fireman, an astronaut, a fashion designer, even president. I think it is our natural desire to strive for greatness, which is why we admire so much those that achieve it.

When we look at David's three mighty men, we have to realize that although they did some extraordinary things, they were ordinary people, just like you and me. But they did two things that made the difference in their service to God that stood out among everyone else.

1. They believed enough in God to put their faith into action even to the point of death and in the face of odds that far outweighed their abilities.
2. They surrendered their service to the Lord, no matter the cost.

That is what makes ordinary people extraordinary! David probably had around four hundred

fighting men. Of the four hundred, thirty seven of them were considered mighty and above the mighty there were three that were the mightiest, Josheb-Bassebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah.

It doesn't matter where you are right now in life, whether you are old or young, or financially well off or struggling, or bold or shy, you can be a great warrior for Christ in your own right. It all starts with believing that God has designed you for great things, and believing that so strongly that you put that faith into action.

I remember my dad telling me a story about a time when he was a tool and die maker and machinist and the engineers came to him at the plant he worked at and asked him if he could build a three dimensional tooth mold they had come up with. Looking at the plans my dad said, "Sure," even though he had no idea how he was going to do it, and in the end he was able to accomplish the task without a hitch.

I've adopted that same philosophy in my faith with God, undertaking some pretty big projects. I would develop a plan of action, but had no idea how things would turn out. Instead I left that area up to God and trusted Him to accomplish the task, and like He did for the three mighty men of David the Lord brought about a great victory.

Now I can hear you now, "But Dave, I'm not an upfront person like you. I could never do the things you do." Well let me tell you I could never do the things the three mighty men did either. But I can do what God has called me to do!

If you think some of the projects I've done for the Lord were scary to accomplish than you are right. Many times I was fearful of how things would ever work out, but that didn't stop me, because unlike the three mighty men, I had a team of people all working alongside of me with the same goal in mind. I couldn't do it without them and each of them was different from the person I was, Kathy had tremendous gifts of planning and detail; Gilmore had great diligence in carrying out all the foundational tasks; I was the visionary, Donna handled the finances; and many more people partnered and carried out tasks of varying sizes.

Each one a mighty warrior in their own faith for God, accomplishing what many would flee from. But when you step out in faith to do what God has called you to do and couple yourself with trust in Him to bring it about, great things happen!

As a child my bleeding arm made me realize I was only pretending to be a Superhero, but as an adult I've come to realize that I really can be one for Jesus if I'll only trust God and all He has for me!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Samuel 23:10

\_\_\_ Read and study 2 Samuel 23

\_\_\_ Is there something God has laid on your heart that you keep thinking is too hard to accomplish? Maybe it is putting together a mission trip, or running a Vacation Bible School, or writing a book, or partnering with someone doing those things, etc. Put a name to this task and ask yourself why it scares you.

\_\_\_ Develop a plan of action to accomplish the special thing God has designed only for you to do.

\_\_\_ Start to work out that plan. Remembering many small steps lead to the finish line.

\_\_\_ Learn to push aside your fears. Most of the time we are fearful because of the unknown. Work as much knowledge into you plan and then act on it, if you wait until you know everything you will never start.

\_\_\_ Pray and ask God for success in your project or task. Bath your work in prayer and always remember that even though David's men were mighty, God brought about the victory.

## STARS & PLANETS

**Read: 1 Peter 5:5-7**

*<sup>5</sup>In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. <sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. <sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (NIV)*

You know, for most of us we go through life with our head and eyes focused on what is ahead of us, whether we are driving or walking or just trying to figure out where we are going. It is rare that we ever look up. Did you notice that? We seem to always either look straight ahead or down, but not up.

In looking up we can see a splendor we would normally miss and a free light show if we take the time to watch it transpire in a dark setting.

When I go to our families' cabin each year for vacation, my kids and I would many times go down to the dock at night and lay on our backs to watch the stars. We would try and count how many shooting stars we saw or just take in the vastness of the universe.

My son Jeremiah is the astronomer of the family and knows the stars and constellations probably better than most people and he would point out what they were and their names and where they were located in the sky.

I've always loved watching the stars at night, they have always fascinated me, just in the visualization of how vast the expanse is of them and where they are located. So when I got my first computer I had a program installed on it for me that located the stars, I don't remember what the name of the program was called, but it was really neat. You could pick out a star in space and then zoom in on it and it would tell the name or the number given to it.

If my memory serves me right you could even pick an open piece of space and zoom in on that until you would eventually come to a star that you couldn't see at first. All in all I believe there were over 9,000 stars listed on this program. That is a huge space to fill in the universe when you come to think about it.

In reality that is just a drop in the bucket as there are probably so many more stars that we don't even know exist or couldn't even begin to name or number. When I lay on the dock with my kids I just can help but become mesmerized by the number of stars I see when looking just at the Milky Way alone. It is almost like looking at a dimly blurred light in the sky, all of the stars blending together into one big mass. It is truly awesome, and reminds me just how big God is and just how small I am!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I remember a speaker many years back that talked about stars and planets this way to help his listeners understand the greatness of God.

He held up a basketball and then said this basketball represented the sun or a star. He wanted us to picture this as just one representation of a star, but that there were thousands. Let's figure that there would be around 9,000 stars. That means that there would be about 180 stars scattered across each of the fifty states. Circling each one of those stars are planets. Now take our sun. Circling our sun are nine planets (if you count Pluto) stretching out into the universe and we will represent those planets with a ping pong ball. Now we will pick one planet represented by a ping pong ball that we call earth, and on that planet we put a dot mark from a pen. That dot mark represents a city where you live. Now on that pen mark you prick it with the tip of a needle, that point of that pin prick represents an individual, and for most of us if you listen closely to that little pin prick you can hear them saying, in the tiniest, squeakiest little voice:

“God I don't need you, I've got everything under control. You can't tell me what to do; I'm going to do things my own way.”

Now if you and I were really honest that person could be us. Let's face it we may not talk to God like that, but sometimes we express to Him those words in our actions and lack of faith.



Each of us has a defiance in us that wants us to do things the way we want to do them. If that isn't so then why do we break God's law the Ten Commandments? It's because of pride in our life.

Take a look at that word for a minute. What letter is smack dab in the middle of that word "PRIDE?" It's the letter "I," meaning self. Now look at the word "SIN." What letter again is smack dab in the middle of that word as well? Again it's the letter "I."

Pride is the exact opposite of God's character which is why He despises it so. Pride is all about self and drives us away from God instead of drawing us to Him. If left unchecked it can cause us to forfeit what God's best is for our life.

I was always a very arrogant person. Even when I first became a Christian it was hard for God to break through to me, and humility was not a very common thing in my life and in the reflection of who I was.

I remember being at a Promise Keepers event many years ago, my friends and I arrived late on the final day of the conference and parked and made our way quickly to the gate to try and secure a seat as the place was packed.

Just outside the gate was a friend of mine from home his name was Howard. He waved me over. "Hey Dave" he said, "I've got four seats saved for you." I said to him "Howard, how did you know I was coming?" He said, "I didn't, but I saved you four seats."

Without questioning him further, I along with the three friends I was with found our way to the seats. They were right on the isle in the middle of the field, they were perfect.

During the conference I remember there was a time where most everyone in the stadium was at a point of worship, and I was no exception to the rule. I was standing there with my hands raised to the Lord, pouring my heart out to Him, when He spoke to me. Although no one around me heard anything, I could hear God's words echo loudly in my head and they were very clear. He said, "Dave, stop what you are doing right now!" I replied, "But Lord, I'm worshipping you?" Again He said, "Dave, stop what you are doing right now!" I remember opening my eyes and becoming SERIOUSLY frightened.

As I looked around it seemed that everyone in the stadium was frozen in time and I don't remember anyone moving. God then spoke to me again saying, "I want you to look at Howard." Now Howard was in the same row as me, but seated about eight seats down to my right, so I had to lean forward and sort of look up a little to see where he was standing at the time, because the people between us were blocking my view. As soon as my eyes saw Howard he fell forward to the ground on his knees, grabbed the back of the chair in front of him and buried his face in his hands and appeared to be crying. God then spoke to me again and said, "Humble yourself like that man right there and I will use you!" Now I was frightened more than I think I've ever been before, or since. That day God's words and that experience would change my life forever.

As I already shared growing up I developed a very arrogant attitude that even spilled over into my Christian walk. But God had changed all that in a miraculous way, by meeting me where I was and speaking to me directly. From that day forward I have worked to do what God had shown me that day and to imitate my friend Howard, who was one of the most humble men I have ever known. It has been a work in progress, but I have strived all these years in the hopes that God would do what He said, and that He truly would use me for His glory!

Won't you trust God this week to do the same for you? Humble yourself before Him and see how God will work in using you in a mighty way!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Peter 5:5

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Peter 5:6

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Peter 5:7

\_\_\_ Try to pinpoint in your life this week what it is that causes you to be proud instead of humble before God and others. Maybe it was how you were raised or the feeling it gives you to be in control, etc.

\_\_\_ Take those factors that cause you to be proud and lay them before Jesus and ask Him to change your heart from this point forward.

\_\_\_ Practice saying you are sorry (If you truly are) once for each time this week you have done wrong to someone.

\_\_\_ In the next few days focus making every situation more about others than yourself. Maybe that means listening more intently to your spouse, or a co-worker, or offering someone your seat, or giving them the opportunity to choose where you might eat lunch together, etc. As you surrender the smaller things of control in your life as you trust in Christ, you humble yourself and allow God to lift you up in the process.

## BANGOR MOUNTAIN

### **Read: James 1:12**

*<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (NIV)*

Each year for just about seventeen years and as part of our ministry outreach at Youth for Christ I ran and organized a bicycle trip from the Pocono Mountains in northeast Pennsylvania to the southern New Jersey shore. I would take kids from our ministry and challenge them with this riding experience, over the course of two or sometimes three days and have them bike between one hundred and fifty and two hundred and ten miles.

This type of journey required training and a lot of it. For three months prior to the trip we would have meetings covering bicycle safety, rules of the road, how to ride as a group, bicycle repair, and actual group and individual riding time.

Each person was required to log in four hundred miles of riding time prior to the trip including a fifty mile group ride we called “The Qualifier.” The purpose of all this ride time was to force the kids to not only get used to handling the bike in all situations, but build up there endurance for a such a trip, as the first day of the ride required over a hundred miles of travel to reach our evening resting place.

We would leave the first day of the trip on a June day at 5:00 AM. After traveling fourteen miles we would come to our greatest obstacle of the day, Bangor Mountain. This mountain has a steep windy road that cuts up through it for 2.4 miles.

As we would leave its base I was always the last person for two reasons:

1. I wanted to make sure I could be there for anyone struggling that fell behind.

2. I was usually 260 plus pounds which meant I probably had to fight harder than anyone else on the trip to overcome the challenge.

As the incline increased that meant getting off my seat and standing on the pedals to increase the leverage to overcome the resistance. How the metal tubing of my bike frame held up under the strain of my weight and the force from each downward stroke of the pedal was beyond me. To watch me climb that mountain meant a steady slow rhythm. It was often said that it looked like I was walking in slow motion as I cranked the pedals in a circular action.

I had always made it a rule that under no circumstances was anyone allowed to walk their bikes. I wanted each person to earn the right to say that had been able to accomplish the whole trip riding on their bicycles. Because of that rule it was easier to just keep going instead of stopping to rest as on a mountain like this it is much harder to start from a dead stop than to just keep moving forward no matter how slow.

Each pedal crank inched me closer to the top, although it felt like it was taking forever. If I felt I needed to I would look ahead and pick an object then focus on making it just to that object. Then I would pick another one and repeat the process. In doing this it was a way to eat at the mountain in little bites instead of being overwhelmed by its great size.

Curve after curve, and higher and higher, I and the others would climb. It was easy to want to stop, my body crying out from the discomfort, but I pressed onward up through a very steep part of the mountain. Then finally around the last curve the hill began to lessen and my speed would pick up and finally the others who had already made it to the top and were resting in the parking lot would come into view.

Once all of us were together, I would gather us all around and we would line up facing back down the mountain we had all just climbed and with a loud voice we would all shout in unison, "I BEAT YOU MOUNTAIN."

Speeding down the other side of that mountain with the cool air cutting through your helmet and enveloping your body was certainly a welcome reward for all the hard work and preparation it had taken to successfully get to the top.

## **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Sure it would have been easy to just give up half way up that mountain. In fact it would have been easier to just never have decided to take the challenge to ride all the way to the shore in the first place.

For some people they look at their walk with Christ the way they would look at that bicycle trip. For some they are willing to do what it takes to meet the challenges of knowing God on a personal basis, and for others their choice is to give up shortly after that relationship begins and for some they are even willing to give up on life all together.

I remember meeting a woman one time that was on her way to drop off her two children at someone's house she knew and then was going to commit suicide and end her life. As I sat across from her I told her about Jesus, but she refused to listen to me, instead her whole focus was on giving up. Finally after saying some shocking things to her about the reality of what she was going to do, she looked at me and asked me, "Tell me about this Jesus one more time?" A short time later she walked out of our meeting with a Bible in her possession and a child in each hand heading back home to her husband, because she accepted Jesus and was willing to trust Him with her life.

Now no one ever said that coming to Christ and truly living for Him would be easy, and you would never face any problems, if they did then they were lying to you. There may be many downhills, but there are certainly a great deal of mountains to climb on our way to reach them, and like the bike trip it requires a great deal of preparation to accomplish those climbs.

The great thing about God though is He is God. He knows it all and therefore knows just how much we can endure and face as we climb with one stroke of the pedal after another.

Remember I told you that one of the reasons I was always last was to encourage those that might fall behind and were struggling. I would come alongside of them and keep pace with them talking to them and distracting them from the hurt they were facing. If they needed to stop I would stop with them and encourage them that they could do it and that they could finish the course.

God is even greater at that when it comes to our walk with Him. I don't know what things have

transpired in your life that might look like a mountain to you, but God surely does, and He is not only able, but willing to come alongside of you as you deal with it. It can be easy to just give up. But I am reminded of something my grandmother used to say, “Perseverance conquers all things.” Even to this day those words hold true for me. Our goal doesn’t need to be in how fast we run a race or how strong we are when we finish, but instead that we make sure we finish!

Remember the hardest part of life, facing death, was already dealt with by Jesus dying for our sins on the cross. The hardest part of the journey is already been done through the work of Christ. All we have to do is trust and follow, and with God by our side that can mean that one day we can turn around and face the mountain of life and scream, “I BEAT YOU MOUNTAIN.” If only we will continue to remember that God freely gives us the strength and encouragement to do just that, if we are only willing to endure to the end.

### **THIS WEEK’S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize James 1:12

\_\_\_ Read and study 1 Corinthians 4:8-14

\_\_\_ What is the biggest thing that is draining your strength right now in your struggle to stay close to Christ? It could be a divorce, or a death or foreclosure, etc. No matter what it is share it with God and ask Him for the strength to endure it.

\_\_\_ It is OK to rest from the struggle before you face it again. Take some time today to just rest in Jesus and try to forget the pain you are feeling knowing that no matter what, God has already won the biggest battle of death.

\_\_\_ Read and study Revelation 7:17

\_\_\_ Read and study Revelation 21:4

\_\_\_ Read and study 1 Peter 2:9

## GOD'S GIFT

### **Read: Philippians 1:4-6**

*<sup>4</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (NIV)*

Roxanne was on our staff at the ministry where I worked and we were talking one day when the conversation turned to the subject of boats. Now I love boats! I grew up on Staten Island, New York, and there were boats and boat yards all around. My great Aunt Millie owned a marina in Long Island and my brother Larry used to own and rebuild boats. I love the feel of them on the water and the look of them as well.

Now at this point I owned a twelve foot Jon boat with an electric motor as I couldn't afford a larger boat that I could take in the ocean. But I was content, that is until Roxanne mentioned that she owned a seventeen foot Glastron with a one hundred and fifteen horse power motor on it, and the best part of it was that she said I could have it if I wanted it. It sat on her dad's farm and she no longer had any use for it.

So one day in August found her and me traveling to upstate New York to her parent's farm to retrieve my prize. It was a long drive, but I knew it would be worth it in the long run. We finally pulled into the farm, and after stretching our legs made our way around back to look over the boat.

Looking into the vessel you could see that the seats were falling apart, the floor had rotted out and was collapsed, the hull was delaminating in some areas, the tires were shot on the trailer and the lights didn't work, and the paint on the boat was faded. After this brief inspection



Roxanne looked at me and said, “Dave, I didn’t know that it was in this bad a shape and if you don’t want it I understand.” My reply was, “It’s Okay! Don’t worry, you don’t see what I see.”

Roxanne was gracious enough to buy new tires and trailer lights for the rig and I installed them, and we started back home. Now I knew very little about building boats at the time, so I contacted some people that did. They told me to check the transom to make sure it wasn’t rotted as well as that is where all the force from the motor is pushing, and it could break and cause the boat to sink. I checked it for caked saw dust with a fine drill bit as suggested and instead of loose flakes falling out of the wood as I drilled into the back of the boat; the sawdust was caked to the drill bit indicating wet and rotted wood. At this point I felt the only thing to do was scrap the boat. That is until my young son Joshua started to cry proclaiming the words “But I wanted to go crabbing on that BBBOOOAAATTTTT.” To calm him down I told him, “Let me see what I can do.”

After some thought, I decided to try and rebuild the boat. I started by separating the top from the hull by removing the bumper gasket that goes around the boat and drilling out all the pop rivets. Then I tore out the seats and the floor, and lifted the top off. Then I tore out the rotted transom and the floor stringers that the floor sets on. I dismantled the trailer and cleaned it up, took care of any rust, taped it off and painted it. I spent weeks working on the boat refiberglassing the damaged hull and repairing the top. I completely rewired the electrical system. Installed a new pressure treated floor and transom. I epoxy sealed all the wood and installed a new gas tank steering wheel, seats and carpeted the floor. I then repainted the unit with a special polyurethane marine paint, I reattached the top to the hull, and installed new gauges and electrical controls.

When the rebuild was finish I named the boat “GOD’S GIFT,” being it was what I considered as a gift from God. The boat after all the work looked top notch, in fact I got a complement for how pretty she looked while she sat at the dock at the boat launch. She has gone on to serve our family well, from everything from water tubing to fishing for striped bass in the ocean at night.

It cost a great deal of time and money, but it was worth it, and to think that I almost threw it all away except for the cry of a little boy!

## **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I can't help but think that God sees us the same way I imagined that boat when I first saw it. I didn't see what it was then, only what it could be. The great thing about God is He can see all the way to the end of our lives and therefore can orchestrate the people, times and places that interact with us and help us to be what He wants us to be.

God's work on us is supernatural. I once heard a speaker say that God works this way: He starts with our spirit and when we come to Christ He miraculously makes our spirit new by indwelling us with the Holy Spirit. Once our spirit is new He starts to convict our soul (which makes up our mind and our thinking) and small areas of our thinking then change, which affects our actions and how our body carries things out. Then God works on another small area and so on and so on. God transforms us into the likeness of Christ one step at a time, using a process not unlike that of me restoring the boat, only God does it supernaturally.

As Americans our first response to damaged goods is to throw them away and buy new. But not with God, He desires to take us in our sinfulness and brokenness and create something pristine.

Have you ever taken a piece of wire, like a coat hangers and bent it, then tried to straighten it again? It is impossible, if the only tools you have are your hands. There will always be a kink in it no matter how hard you try to fix it. But that isn't the case with God He can take us no matter how damaged we are and turn us into His masterpiece, making us look more and more like Jesus as He works on us.

The greatest thing about our desire for God to restore us starts with a single cry, not unlike my son Joshua crying out his request to me. Aren't you glad that God's desire to refurbish us and our desire to be refurbished can be the same?

I once heard the saying, "God doesn't make junk, He recycles." The truth is God never looks at us as being junk. To Him we are precious in His sight and no matter how we look at ourselves; He looks at us and says, "It's Okay! Don't worry; you don't see what I see." God is willing and wants to restore us, drawing us deeper and deeper into a relationship with Him. His desire is to make Himself more and more real in our lives and change us in such a way that we might

realize we are the result of “GOD’S GIFT.”

### **THIS WEEK’S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Philippians 1:6

\_\_\_ Find two other verses in the Bible pertaining to God reconstructing you and study what they really mean.

\_\_\_ Think of the largest thing you have ever built no matter if you did it by yourself or with a team of people and reflect on the satisfaction it gave you once completed. Now think about what it must feel like for God as He sees us begin to be changed by His Spirit.

\_\_\_ Make dinner one day this week (especially if you don’t normally) and think about all the ingredients and process of turning it from food into a meal. Then reflect on, and list the ingredients God has brought into your life to make you into His child.

\_\_\_ Think about the person you were when you first came to Christ compared to the person you are now.

\_\_\_ After thinking about the changes to your life through Christ, ask yourself what more you can surrender that God could use in making you more like Jesus.

\_\_\_ Thank Jesus this week for not abandoning you, but instead indwelling you with the Holy Spirit that you might be transformed and restored to God.

## PATIENTLY WAITING

**Read: Habakkuk 3:16-19**

*<sup>16</sup> I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound, decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. <sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree does no bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. <sup>19</sup> The Sovereign LORD is my strength, he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments. (NIV)*

It was July 1969. Jim was a marine on a recon patrol in Vietnam. Without warning they were surprised by a much larger force of North Vietnamese army regulars. These were not the Viet Cong that were recruited to fight, but hardcore regular army personnel.

The encounter didn't last long before the American soldiers realizing they were outnumbered and about to be overrun, broke contact with the enemy and did the only thing they could do which was to protect themselves by hiding in the heavy brush surrounding them.

The Vietnamese army began what looked like a rabbit hunt searching the thick brush for the American fighters. They pushed through hoping to scare them into moving or running so that they might get a shot at them. They didn't just pursue them for an hour or two, but for three full days, camped at that spot and searched for the men that had eluded them.

I remember Jim telling me that he laid there face down in the dirt and didn't dare move, and that there were times he could hear the enemy being so close that he was sure they could hear the sound of his heartbeat echoing loudly in his chest. Throughout those three days there would be reports from the enemy's rifles meaning that one of Jim's comrades would be no more.

Minutes turned into hours and hours into days, but all Jim could do was patiently wait. Agonizingly he lay there waiting and hoping.

As the third day arrived the sound of the voices from the Vietnamese were no longer present and no other sounds of activity could be detected. But still Jim laid there motionless for several more hours until he could be sure that the enemy had left.

After that prolonged time, slowly and painstakingly and with as little noise as he could he rose just high enough to check that the coast was clear. Finally after examination of the area he was able to rise fully to his feet. He found only two other men had made it through the ordeal. Slowly and deliberately they inched their way back to base taking the long and arduous route as to avoid any more contact with the enemy. Their patience had paid off, they were alive!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Patience, when it comes down to it, is something most of us lack. It is like the old joke of someone praying for patience saying, "Lord I want patience, AND I WANT IT NOW." I think all of us desire to have patience, we just don't want to go through the process of letting God develop it in us. Unfortunately like the old adage "No pain, No gain," we are forced to live by the saying, "No process, No patience."

It was January 14th of 2010 when I received the news. I had just returned from leading a mission trip to Kenya, Africa in July and shortly after that noticed I had trouble swallowing. My difficulty seemed to come and go until it became frequent enough that I decided to get it checked out. So I set up an appointment in January to have an endoscopy (a video camera they place down your throat to see what is going on) done. When I awoke that day from the procedure the doctor was there to share with me that he had discovered, I had esophageal cancer.

Over the course of the next almost three years I would be facing losing my business because I was too weak to work and unable to eat. I would also go through radiation procedures and about a year of chemotherapy. I had a prolonged application of chemotherapy because I developed a second cancer in my lymph nodes behind my left kidney as well. This was all on top of the fact that I had nine different surgeries in twenty four months and a host of complications that left

me one hundred and fifty pounds lighter, and extremely helpless and weak.

For almost two years I was helpless to do for myself, struggling just to get to the bathroom without passing out. During that time I lived on my living room couch, I had no desire to read, or watch TV or even go on my computer. I sat there for almost two years waiting patiently for God to rescue me, and by God's grace, after all that time, I am now cancer free!

As I write this book I am still struggling through my recovery and am still unable to work physically as I did. But during this process I've had to wait a lot. I've had to wait for money to pay bills (mainly gifts from friends and family that came in the mail), I had to wait on items we needed until God provided them (the timing belt went in our SUV and my son-in-law repaired it without charge), and I especially had to wait for healing and my strength to fully return, which has not quite yet happened, but I am better than I was and am still patiently waiting.

God wants us to learn patience because it models what He is like. He waits patiently for us to come to Him, to surrender to Him, and to grow in Him. I'm sure God could just zap us and make us the way He wanted to. But He chooses to take us through a process that it might be real and permanent and come from us as well.

Looking back I wouldn't trade my illness for anything. Yes, it was extremely hard and I faced death on several occasions, but God was there for me through all of it. He has taught me that not everything needs to happen right now, and that by waiting many times we get to taste the best of what He has to offer instead of a cheap substitute. All in all the process was painful, but through it I have grown tremendously, and so from what I have learned I will strive not to worry about the tyranny of the urgent, but instead to what God calls me to do in order to be more like Him and patiently wait!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Habakkuk 3:16

\_\_\_ Memorize Habakkuk 3:17

\_\_\_ Memorize Habakkuk 3:18

\_\_\_ Memorize Habakkuk 3:19

\_\_\_ Ask yourself why patience is so important to God in your walk with Him and why it should be important to you as well.

\_\_\_ Make a list of several things you feel you need to accomplish and then take them to God and ask that He bless you in those situations and that He would make His timing perfect in accomplishing them.

\_\_\_ Focus, slowing down this week in a deliberate manner so that you might enjoy life more. Life is not about purchases and things we think we need, instead life is about relationship and loving through God. Accomplish the first, but do it focusing on the latter and while you wait on God's perfect timing. Don't be in a rush and don't be anxious.

## THE WEDDING

### Read 2 Corinthians 11:2

*<sup>2</sup>I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (NIV)*

August 24th, the day had finally arrived and my son Jeremiah was marrying Antonia the girl of his dreams. His wedding to her and the plans for their union were very elaborate. This is not to say that it was expensive as some weddings are, but detailed to a fault in exactly how things would be done.

We have eleven acres of land on the top of a mountain and Jeremiah, Antonia and friends cleared out an area on the edge of the view among the oak trees that would become the outdoor chapel, and at the exact spot where he had proposed.

I took him to see a high school friend of mine that owns a sawmill and we had him cut two inch thick slabs of maple and birch to use as seating for the wedding. These would be positioned on top of cut off sections of logs and set up to resemble an old time revival meeting.

A wide path was cleared to allow access to the ceremony location. Signs were painted offering direction. Music was supplied through a portable amp system. There was even a small wishing well located in the base of a tree where water collected and pennies could be thrown to offer best wishes to the couple.

On the opposite side of our property the grounds were prepared for the reception. Our field was mowed, lights hung, speakers, tables and chairs set up and arranged. Tents were erected by the caterer to house the food and refreshments. Yard games were placed about. Signs were hung and a special table was prepared for the bride and groom along with a dance rug and my son's favorite orange chair.



Both he and Antonia wanted to make this day super special and it was. The weather was a true blessing from God and the day could not have gone any better. During the ceremony they exchanged the wooden engagement rings that each had made for the other for their heavy more permanent metal rings. They committed the nicest vows to each other and even presented a painting that each had done, that when placed together symbolizing their connection to each other, and as their first act as a married couple took communion together.

Afterwards there was a celebration party in our field with all sorts of food including, fruit and vegetables, snacks, dip, all types of non alcoholic beverages like mango / strawberry / lemonade. The main course was barbeque chicken, planked salmon, and grilled beef with rolls, salad and parsley potatoes. Everything was so delicious and well prepared.

The opportunity to share all this with friends and family was wonderful and the pictures spell out just how great a day it was. The work that went into the wedding and all the details from little acorn favors for the guests to the days of marriage counseling and preparing were well worth the effort so that this day would always be remembered, not just by the bride and groom, but by all those in attendance.

Seeing the joy on my son's face and the excitement of his bride spoke highly of their desire to live life together and was powerful and real. The ceremony and celebration was better than if it had cost many thousands of dollars. Moreover the joy they felt in their union was equalled to the fact that Antonia would now be not only be our son's wife, but a daughter to our family as well!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Weddings can be fun and full of laughter, but we need to remember that marriage is an institution that comes from God. In essence it is a parallel of our unity with Him when we come to know Jesus Christ as our Savior.

As a believer in Christ you are His bride to be cherished and adored like my son's wife Antonia is. God has gone to great lengths to reach out to you and make you His. His love for you is far greater than anyone could ever love you. You are God's prized possession worth more than anything in all creation.

Since the creation of the world God has been preparing your inheritance inviting you into His family (Matthew 25:34). We are His bride worthy of Him and His glory, and that is why we were created.

I had lunch the other day with Dana, a friend of mine who is also a pastor. As we sat at lunch and caught up with one another (we hadn't seen each other in several years), our conversation somehow turned to our relationship with the Lord. But we didn't just talk about it as something we were a part of, but from a perspective of how God sees us in our relationship with Him. Dana talked about an analogy he heard once, of our union with Christ being like a dance between the trinity of God, and how the Holy Spirit invites us into a relationship with Jesus.

It is a powerful illustration of God's deep desire to unite us with Himself. The three persons of the trinity of God dancing in a circle together and welcoming us into that circle that we might dance together as all four of us are united through the power of God. Although we can never be God's equal we are in fact made His children and the bride of Christ, when we receive Christ as our Savior (John 1:12).

In Ephesians 5:22-33 the Word of God compares the union of a husband and his wife like that of Christ and the church, with you and I making up the church. So if you have ever come to a point in your life where you have received the Holy Spirit's invitation to receive Christ as your Savior and surrendered yourself to Him, then that makes you His bride and a child of the King.

The wedding then planned so long ago and the celebration of which lasts our entire life and even into eternity. Let us then celebrate knowing God more and more intimately and learning to dance the dance with everyone around us watching. Clinging close to Christ, knowing He will not just be a part of us, but one with us as He and the Father are one. So as I told my new daughter-in-law, my son's wife Antonia, "Congratulations and welcome to the family."

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 2 Corinthians 11:2

\_\_\_ Read and study Ephesians 5:22-33

\_\_\_ Read and study Song of Solomon chapter 4

\_\_\_ Is there anything in your life right now that is stealing you, Christ's bride away from Him? Make a list of anything that is and ask God to remove it from your union from Him.

\_\_\_ Picture the celebration of your wedding day with Christ. This was the day you came to know Him as savior and the party that took place in heaven over it. Read and think about Luke 15:10

\_\_\_ Think about how Jesus in His love for you protects you, cherishes you, and provides for you as you cling to Him, how He invites you into the dance with the Father, and listen to the song "I hope you dance" sung by Lee Ann Womack. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV-Z1YwaOiw>) as you think about it.

\_\_\_ As you worship the Lord this week remind yourself that you are His bride and how much He loves you that your worship might take on a new perspective.

## SARAH'S FINGERNAILS

### **Read: Psalms 139:13-18**

*<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being you knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful, I know that full well. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body, all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. <sup>17</sup> How precious are your thoughts, God! How vast the sum of them! <sup>18</sup> Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake, I am still with you. (NIV)*

On August 1st our family celebrated the birth our first grandchild, Matthew Troy Rispoli. He was six pounds eleven ounces and twenty and a half inches long, a true bundle of wrinkly cuteness. He was so tiny, yet so detailed in every way a real live person.

That birth brought me back twenty plus years prior to another birth, causing me to remember the day April 20th, 1985. That was the special day when my first child, my daughter Sarah, who is also Matthew's mom, came into the world. My wife suffered through a tremendously painful and prolonged labor, but because of my wife's small frame she was unable to give birth naturally, so an emergency Cesarean section was scheduled.

I sat there by my wife's side in the operating room and watched as the doctor entered and performed the procedure. Reaching over the top of me and moving carefully with a scalpel he made a low cut incision along the bottom of my wife's belly. The muscles separated and I could look right inside. It was scary and beautiful at the same time.

Taking a long handled device that looked much like a shoe horn he placed it under my daughter's head and while applying pressure leveraged my baby out. She was slimy and coated with stuff, she was tiny, and beautiful and she had arrived.

I was never cut out to be a surgeon (no pun intended) so after watching my girl come into the world, I left the room while they cleaned up Sarah and did all the normal checks and took care of my wife.

A short time later I got to hold my little girl (which she will always be), and stare into her tiny face. I noticed so much about her, it was just fascinating to gaze on her, but the thing that stood out the most to me was her fingernails. Yes, you heard me correctly, it was her fingernails that caught my attention. They were so much smaller than mine, yet so exact. I knew right then and there that it was no mistake how she was created. No one but God could have done such a tremendous work in putting her together.

In fact I noticed something special that stood out on each of my children when they were born. Each child made an impression on me in their own way, and they each still do to this day, even though they are grown now. But there is still something special I will always remember about Sarah's fingernails, how delicate they were, and I will always be thankful for the beautiful creation God had entrusted to me on that day so many years ago!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Growing up and all through high school I was made fun of. I was never the most popular or the smartest, or most athletic, but I did own a host of features that were a great target for people's comments.

I was always fat, I had a dandruff problem, my eyebrows grew together and my ears stuck out. In fact my own grandmother use to say in conjunction with my ears that I looked like a taxi cab coming down main street with the doors open. I know this wasn't very nice, but it was true.

I developed nicknames for the features I possessed as well. I was called Snow White for the dandruff, Wolf Man for the eyebrows and Dumbo or Earbo for my ears sticking out. So my need to be loved always had me searching, that is until I found Jesus Christ.

This was one of the contributing factors of me surrendering my heart to Jesus. Not only had God created me, He designed me to look and act just like I do, and then on top of all that He chose to love me. He chose to love me before I accepted His Son's gift on the cross. He chose

to love me in the midst of my sin, and He chose to love me for me.

The more I learned about God and His love for me the more the verses in Psalms 139 above became my favorite of all the passages I would study in the Bible. Let me explain to you why. First off, it shares with me how special I am to God. How detailed God was when He created me. He knit me together. Ever watch someone knit or crochet? Hours upon hours of linking each loop together. You don't just usually create an afghan in one evening's time. I've watched my wife crochet baby blankets and such for hours, creating each loop a link, on and on and not just the same color but a mix of them. All woven together and not just color, but design as well. They are a sight to behold, and so are you and I when we were created, even if I do look like a taxi cab coming down main street with the doors open because my ears sticking out.

Each of us are created special and unique for a purpose and a time. Loop by loop and link by link you were knitted together for great things for God. God took delight in His creation of the earth and He takes great delight in His creation of you. So much was His love for you that He was willing to sacrifice His Son's life in place of yours. WOW! If that is not love I don't know what is.

Even though God spoke of the detail of my creation in this passage in Psalms chapter 139, my all time favorite verses come at the end of the passage, specifically verses 17 and 18:

*<sup>17</sup>How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast the sum of them! <sup>18</sup>Were I to count them they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake I am still with you. (NIV)*

These verses became more real to me than any others I have encountered either before or since. The more I read these verses and deciphered its meaning the more impact it had on my life and well being.

One of my all time favorite things to do is go saltwater fishing, either from a boat or from the shore. I live in the northeast part of the country, about two hours from Sandy Hook, New Jersey. For both me and my brother Larry, who is my fishing buddy, this spot is our go to location to fish. We go in search of many different kinds of fish from bluefish to striped bass and everything in between.

In a sense then, it was my love of fishing that brought me my understanding of God's love for me, and these verses alive. You see these verses above tell me that God's thoughts of me are so precious because when He thinks of me, His thoughts about me outnumber the grains of sand in all the world and no matter what happens I'm still with Him.

When I go to the beach to go fishing and stand at the ocean's edge, I can look to my right and then again to my left and all I see is sand. But that is just one beach, and does not include the sand under my feet that may go down 20 feet or more. If I would continue south down the Jersey shore from Sandy Hook I would hit other beaches like Brielle, Point Pleasant, Ocean City, Cape May and then over to the state of Delaware, to Lewes beach, Rehoboth, Slaughter, Ocean City, Maryland. Then through every beach south of there to Miami, the Florida Keys and along the Southern shore of the United States. That doesn't include the west coast or points north of Jersey, or any of the other beaches of the world. Double WOW! Can you even begin to fathom how much God thinks about you? Can you even begin to understand the depth of His planning, or the complexity of the paths of travel He has laid out for you, with people you have yet to met, or children yet to be born, all revolving around you!

God even goes to the extent to say that even the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Matthew 10:30). That verse means exactly what it says, that all your hairs are numbered, not counted. What is the difference? First off, it would be physically difficult to count the hairs on someone's head. I suppose if someone had the time and the focus to do it, it possibly could be done. But I mean you would have a hard time of it. You would either have to pluck each hair out individually or shave them all off being careful not to cut any in half in the process and then count each, one by one. Numbered is a whole different ball game. God says they are numbered because if all your hair would fall out for one strange reason or another, God would know exactly what hair would go in each follicle, a humanly impossible feat. Yet God concerns Himself with this, something we might relate to as unimportant. But it is not just our own hair He has taken the time to inventory, but the heads of everyone in the whole world.

I don't know what you are facing this week, and it may be that you are discouraged over how you look, or what you possess or what you don't, or maybe it is the fact that you are feeling unloved. Let the Words of God echo deep in your heart this week and assure you that you are a

mighty, wonderful creation and just like I was in awe over Sarah's fingernails, God is in awe over you!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 139:17

\_\_\_ Memorize Psalms 139:18

\_\_\_ Read and study through John 3:16 and really think about what it means for God to give His Son's life in place of yours.

\_\_\_ Take the time this week just to think how you are made. Think about how your hands work, your brain processes things, your ability to love, and move and breath and heal and all the other things God has built into you.

\_\_\_ Focus this week not on what you don't like about yourself, but what you do! Remember God is pleased with how He created you and you should be too!

\_\_\_ Find, read, and study two verses today that pertain to God's deep love for you!

\_\_\_ Read and study through Romans 8:34- 39 and see if you could name something that can stop God from loving you so much.



## FACEBOOK CHALLENGE

### **Read: Deuteronomy 13:4**

*<sup>4</sup> It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him, serve him and hold fast to him. (NIV)*

I've gotten more and more connected with friends on Facebook over the years and I opened it up the other day just to see what was going on. As I scrolled through the posts I was noticing something that bugged me. I've seen this happening more and more over time and tried to ignore it, but today there were several posts from people I knew were Christians that just weren't right.

I won't mention specifically what these people posted in order to protect their identity, as that isn't important, but I will tell you that one person posted a photo with extreme sexual content, another made their opinion known what I felt was condoning and affirming people's sinfulness. I've also seen abbreviations depicting coarse language or using the Lord's name in vain, and at times have even seen people (who I believe made a commitment to follow Christ) use strong language spelled outright for all to read.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm just as sinful as the next guy, and I realize that. I don't always follow through with what I'm supposed to do either, but as I read these posts my heart sank. I could just feel how disappointed God must feel when we let Him down and don't honor Him or His Word.

I felt convicted to post my own comment to these people, but thought even if I did they probably wouldn't listen. But God was convicting me to do something about what I saw and what I was feeling.

So I went to my timeline and started to write. I didn't want my thoughts to be harsh, or

judgmental, but I did want them to express to people what I was seeing just the same. As I started to type, my keyboard went haywire. As I pressed the keys my cursor started jumping around and the up and down arrows were typing letters. I rebooted my computer and tried again. Everything was fine for a little bit and then the same thing happened. So I opened a word document and decided I'd type in that and then copy and paste it to Facebook. No go, the same thing was happening. Not only was I feeling uncomfortable about sharing my thoughts, but now I was having trouble with my computer. I clearly felt that Satan didn't want this post to go through as it might convict some people and point their focus back to doing things to please God rather than people.

After going to system restore several times I finally got the thing working properly as it is now. So I composed my thoughts and as carefully and lovingly as I could I wrote these words and hit post:

“So I go to my timeline and there is this little box that says, “What’s on your mind?” So I thought I’d share it. You know what we say and do in our lives can have an effect on other people and how they look and act on things. So I’d really like to encourage you especially if you are a follower of Jesus Christ to weigh everything you post on Facebook, asking yourself, is it pleasing to God or not? That can include your opinion, your language, or even photos. I know I can be negative at times myself and don’t always say the right thing, which is why I’m throwing this out there to spur us all on to do greater things for others and for God. So I encourage you to stay positive and Godly and go make a difference in someone’s life, and have a great day doing it! Blessings! Dave”

As always my fear of offending and hurting others was completely unmerited. I received back many “Likes” and many positive comments of encouragement, some expressing that this is how they felt as well. I learned a powerful lesson that day and that is to be obedient as diligently as I can to the things God lays on my heart. In doing so it not only allows my heart to be at peace, but helps other in their walk with the Lord as well!

Remember you are the only Jesus some people may ever see. You are God’s hands and feet, His instrument to reach out to hurting people. Follow God’s leading and the words will come as you share with people. I firmly believe that. Just be obedient. Obedience to God is another

area where God has never let me down yet and I know He never will!

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I remember being at a conference one time with about 1,100 teenagers and staff. I was sitting in about the middle of the auditorium listening to the speaker, when suddenly the speaker said something from the stage that was totally inappropriate. As I continued to listen I could feel God prompting me, telling me to go up to the speaker afterwards and show him his fault. God never shared this through an audible voice, but it was clear to me what He was telling me just the same. I said, "God there are 1,100 people here why did you pick me?" There was no reply, but the feeling was now as strong as ever to talk to the speaker. The session finally ended and people began to make their way out the side doors. People were also walking past the speaker who was down on the bottom of the stairs by the stage. I made my way over to him and said to him, "I really appreciated what you had to say, but there was one thing I needed to talk to you about."

Before I could tell him he blurted out what he had said, and said, "I know I never should have said that, I just got caught up in trying to connect with the crowd." We shook hands and he thanked me for coming forward to share with him. Even if he hadn't listened and taken offense to what I had to say it would have been between him and God, not him and me.

All this is to say that if you truly want to help others you need to sacrifice your time, energy, and grow deep in your relationship with the Lord. You need to feed yourself if you intend to feed others. But even with all that unless you follow God by being obedient to His leading, you will have missed the opportunity to be greatly used by Him, to help change people's lives.

Now I'm not talking about removing a splinter from your brother's eye while there is a plank in your own eye. We need to always lovingly correct others while still remembering that we are just as sinful in other areas.

My friend once gave me correction over breakfast one day. I'll tell you the truth I didn't want to hear what he had to tell me, but it was the true. Even though I had a hard time swallowing his words they were true and Godly counsel and have served me well to this day.

Never be afraid to share the truth in love, as long as your heart is right and you realize that it is not your job to change people only to point them in the direction of Jesus.

We all get lost now and again, so we need each other to keep us moving forward and stay focused in the right direction. So remember obedience isn't just about giving direction it is about taking it as well!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Deuteronomy 13:4

\_\_\_ Make a list this week of all the things you have been compromising in your walk with God, in your quest to please others over Him.

\_\_\_ Ask God for the strength to abandon those habits and sin that you might serve Him with a pure heart.

\_\_\_ Read and study Joshua 24:15

\_\_\_ Memorize Joshua 24:15

\_\_\_ Next time you have the opportunity to lovingly correct someone and God is prompting you to do so, take the chance and do it. I know God will bless your efforts and the other person as well. Just trust Him for the outcome and don't be afraid!

\_\_\_ Pray for strength this week, that God might grant you the ability to be bold yet loving in helping others on their walk with Jesus.

## CLUB TO CHEEK

### **Read: Colossians 1:19-23**

*<sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. <sup>21</sup>Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. <sup>22</sup>But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation - <sup>23</sup>if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I Paul, have become a servant. (NIV)*

My son Caleb was young at the time and playing over at my brother Larry's house with his cousin Matthew. They were ragging around as kids do (especially boys), and Matt was playing with a golf club.

Now my sister-in-law Franny, knowing how boys are, warned them both to be careful to make sure that nobody got hurt. Unfortunately young boys don't retain much of anything adults say, except maybe to come for dinner or let's go to the amusement park.

Caleb was standing behind Matt which is probably the safest place for him to be when someone is swinging a golf club. Unfortunately he wasn't paying attention and walked directly behind Matt and right into the back swing of Matt's stroke.

The club hit him with full force right in the mouth and actually tore a good size hole in his cheek. Once Franny heard the commotion she came tearing out of the house and being a registered nurse, wanted to check Caleb out to see what happened.

She could see the hole and the blood and it looked like some of his teeth were broken, but we

later found out that he had a wad of M & M's in his mouth and it was just the pieces from the candy that she saw.

She called me and I came right over. Grabbing Caleb, I put him in the car and drove him to the hospital to the emergency room. They brought him promptly to the back room and I went with him. I could see the huge tear in his cheek and you could look right down inside his mouth. Things didn't look good.

Once the doctor arrived things started to move along and I held Caleb's hand the whole time. After cleaning things up, they started the process of putting things back together. I stood there and watched the event come about.

Caleb was an absolute trooper through the whole affair. Half way through the surgery I so wanted to trade places with him if I could. The doctor continued to stitch up Caleb's mouth both on the inside and the outside.

Finally after watching my own son go through what he was experiencing and being unable to do anything about it, I could watch it no longer, I not only felt for him but watching the surgery was making me sick, and I had to turn my head away, even though I never let go of his hand.

The hole in his cheek has since filled in over the years and you really can't even see where the damage occurred. But I will never forget the pain I felt for my son as I watched him there on that gurney. I am glad he has fully recovered from that experience, but because of the pain both he and I shared in, I never want to go through something like that again.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I don't know if you have ever experienced a situation like I did with my son, but I will tell you it was more than just unpleasant. I felt so badly for him, yet there is nothing I could do to make things better, he had to just endure the procedure until the end.

When I think about that story it reminds me of just a small inkling of what our Heavenly Father must have experienced watching Jesus pay for the sins of the world on that cross the day He was crucified.

I often ask people if they can tell me how long they think Jesus hung on that cross that day? Most people don't have a clue, but the answer (according to Mark chapter 15) in case you were wondering is about six hours! That is a tremendously long time to endure anything let alone crucifixion. Most of us would have a hard time riding in a car for six hours let alone hang from a cross with nails in our hands and feet.

I would sometimes speak at chapel for a local Christian school. Now speaking to kids that have been to church most of their life and have heard it all, so to speak, can be difficult. So I always try and come in the back door of their hearts and surprised them with a truth from the Bible or present it in a way they haven't heard of or experienced before.

I asked for a volunteer from the audience. But not just anybody I wanted to have one of the strongest kids in the school come forward. Searching the crowd I asked for a teen that thought they were really strong. I picked one and had him come forward to stand with me at the front.

After asking his name (I'll call him Chris), I asked him to do a simple thing for me. All I wanted him to do was stand to my side and behind me and hold his arms straight out to the side. Once Chris obliged me and held his hands out, I told him to just stay like that and turned around and started to share with the others.

After a few minutes I would turn quickly around to see Chris with his arms not quite horizontal, and sagging down a bit. Once he saw me turn around though he would quickly pull them back up. I would then ask him, "Chris, are you OK there?" To which he would reply, "I'm fine."

This cat and mouse game would continue for the next fifteen minutes or so with each time me turning around finding Chris' arms more and more tired. Finally after watching the struggle Chris was having, two boys from the group came up front and each grabbed one of Chris' arms, and helped him hold them up.

Chris a big strapping boy couldn't hold his arms up for twenty minutes, yet Christ didn't just have to worry about His arms He had to endure and struggle to lift His sagging body each time He needed to take a breath, pushing up with His nail pierced legs and pulling with His arms. This is how crucifixion works, with a person pulling themselves up each time to take a breath

until they are too weak to do so any longer and finally suffocate, it is a horrible death. On and on He endured the torture and for the last three hours of the crucifixion darkness fell over the whole land then when all was accomplished He cried out:

*“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”* (NIV)

At this point He committed His Spirit to God.

Now some say that the darkness on the land and the fact that Jesus cried out that God had forsaken Him was an indication that the Father could no longer look on the Son, because all the sins of the world were on Him as that point, and that the Father had to turn His face away.

I don't know if God turned His head away like I did, but I do know from the scripture above that God did leave Jesus alone on the cross that day forsaking Him for a time to suffer for all the sins of the world including yours and mine.

All I can say is I know how much I love my son and I can't help but believe that God's love for Jesus was even stronger, yet He allowed Him to suffer and die on my behalf. When I think of that day in the emergency room with Caleb and the fact that I could no longer stand to look at what my son was going through, I am reminded of God and what He must have endured for my sake and for yours, and if that isn't love I don't know what is.

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Colossians 1:19

\_\_\_ Memorize Colossians 1:20

\_\_\_ Think of a time where you saw something that made you look away and remember what it was probably like for God to witness the death of His Son Jesus.

\_\_\_ Read and study Mark chapter 15

\_\_\_ Don't just think about the cross this week, think also about everything Jesus endured



leading up to it like the beating He took and so much more, all for you!

\_\_\_ Memorize Matthew 16:24

\_\_\_ Answer for yourself what Christ means by denying yourself and to carry your cross, and then practice trying to live like that.

## LISTEN UP

### **Read: Isaiah 6:8**

*<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (NIV)*

I remember a time traveling to an appointment for a job I had to do. I was running late, a thing I hate to be. I was traveling up a back country road when I passed a man whose vehicle had obviously broken down alongside the road.

Now I often play the part of the Good Samaritan and stop to help people, but this time I was running late and had a specific place I was supposed to be at. As I sped past, I could feel the Holy Spirit speaking to my heart, saying, “Go back and minister to that man.” Looking at my watch I continued on, all the while rationalizing my situation with God, and ignoring His request for me to be obedient to His calling. Again, I could hear His words softly speaking to me, “Go back and minister to that man.” I really did want to help but I was in a hurry, so I said, “God I’m running late, and I need to be at this appointment on time.” Figuring God would organize the rescue of that poor soul, by providing someone else to help him.

Several miles had now passed between the man and my car, and although I was thinking about the man I was more focused on my appointment. But once more God changed my focus as I could hear the Spirit’s gentleness speaking in my heart, “Go back.” Continuing to balk at the situation and request I traveled on for a mile or so, then like hitting a wall, I knew what I should do. Quietly in my heart I surrendered to the Lord, saying, “OK, I’ll go back. I just need to find a place to turn around”. No sooner had I spoken those words and my eyes began scanning for a pull off on the curvy narrow road, did I hear these words, and have the Holy Spirit speak to me, for the final time, “It’s too late.”

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I have never forgotten that incident, nor do I think I ever will. God may have you doing tremendous things for him, right now. Things He has laid on your heart for you to do in times past. But when the Spirit of God whispers His words of guidance to us, we need to yield to it. Not ten, five, three, or even one mile down the road. But the instant we hear His voice, is the instant we need to say, "Yes." We need to let go of self, and hold fast to the new instruction that God our Father gives us. For if we don't we may find more miles between us, and the power of God in our lives, than we ever care to imagine.

Why is it that you and I fail all too often to listen to the words of our heavenly Father as they speak softly to our hearts. You know the words I mean, words that settle gently on our hearts and guide us softly in telling us it's time to change direction on our journey with Christ, time to move, and to move quickly. It may be time for us to move to a different level of ministry, or maybe to pray for a particular person or situation, or to refrain from a sin that we just recently were convicted of. Whatever it is that God has spoken to you to do, whether through His Word, or through the communion of His Holy Spirit with our spirit, we better had not only listen, but we also need to act upon it, for if we don't, we may not only be hurting ourselves, but also the lives of others.

Many of us as adults don't really understand what surrender is, until it hits us smack in the face. We hear about it, but hardly ever see it in action. Until times like the story above when our spirit and our mission become renewed, and we begin to understand that our job is surrender. Surrender of who we are, to who God is!

Have you ever picked up a wrench or screwdriver, and went to use it, only to have it fight you, and to refuse to go onto the nut or screw, or have it turn to the left when you want it to turn to the right. Of course you haven't. That is because a tool yields to the person in control, to the one guiding it, to the one who knows and understands why that nut or screw has to be turned. People, our job isn't to try and understand the workings and complexities of the Almighty God. Our job as Christians is to yield ourselves to His use. To be the very tool that God has designed us to be, so that we might have the opportunity to touch the lives of others. As I heard one speaker say we have to become a conduit for the power of God to flow through.

None of us knows what God has in store for us, and I am not saying that God will require

extreme sacrifice on your part in order to reach the hearts of others but then again He may! But one thing I do know is that unless you and I surrender to God, as the tools of His trade, and stop saying, “No” to God, instead of saying "OK God, I trust you with my salvation, I know I can trust you with my life." Then you and I as Christians will never know what real Life is, only what it's like to just exist!

So the next time be like the great men of the Bible, be like Abraham, Samuel and Isaiah who each proclaimed without even knowing what God had in store for them “Here I am” or “Here am I.” I know what great things God did with those men, because of their willingness to answer the call. If only we could and would be as bold and trusting!

### **THIS WEEK’S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Isaiah 6:8

\_\_\_ Read and Study Genesis 22:1

\_\_\_ Read and study 1 Samuel chapter 3

\_\_\_ Practice listening to God’s voice today, it is often soft and quiet so pay attention as His Spirit speaks to yours.

\_\_\_ If you hear God speaking to you in your heart don’t be afraid to act on it. Be bold and trusting.

\_\_\_ Ask God to help you blindly trust Him like Abraham and the other great men of the Bible.

\_\_\_ At the end of your times of prayer throughout the week take time to listen to God’s reply after you pray.

## THE REFRIGERATOR

### **Read: Revelation 3:19-23**

*<sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. <sup>20</sup> Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me. <sup>21</sup> To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>23</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”(NIV)*

I was quite young at the time and my mom called me into the other room. She was looking at the newspaper and coming to her side she asked me if I knew a certain boy called Jeffery (I think that was his name, remember I was young) who had suffered an accident. After hearing his full name, I affirmed to my mom that I did know him and that he went to school with me.

She went on to tell me the story. Now Jeffery had been playing hide and seek, this is a game that was extremely popular in my neighborhood growing up and we would play it for hours all the way until night fall.

Like most of us the key with hide and seek is to either be faster than the person seeking in order to get back to home base before they could once you were discovered (at least that is how we played it), or hide so good no one could find you.

As the seeker was hiding his eyes the kids scattered all over looking for the best hiding spots. Jeffery was no exception and found an old refrigerator out in the back yard that was probably put there because it didn't work anymore. I can only picture what happened next. Climbing inside he probably closed the door enough to peek out to see if the seeker was coming, but when they got close or was coming his way he somehow closed the door on himself and it latched shut. Remember these were the old style refrigerators with a handle that fastened the door shut and could only be opened from the outside.

Now in complete darkness Jeffery was isolated and insulated from his friends. Most of the kids by now had been found, but Jeffery's location remained a mystery to them. As they continued to search he was nowhere to be found.

At first inside the refrigerator Jeffery was suffering no ill effects. It was just dark and lonely, but as time went on he was finding it harder and harder to breathe. I can just imagine him taking ever more struggling breathes opening his mouth trying to grab as much air as he could. He probably tried to yell for help, but couldn't because by the time he needed help his air supply was minimal. Besides that the walls of the refrigerator were thick and well insulated.

As the clock ticked away he grew weaker and weaker with less and less air left for survival, until he slid to the floor of the refrigerator and took his final breath. After searching for quite a while they finally did discover Jeffery's hiding spot, but unfortunately for him it was too late.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Now if this story depressed you, I'm sorry. I know that it was a tragedy then and still is today. None of us like to hear about an event like this, unfortunately they do happen.

The reason I share it with you though is to help you realize that you yourself may be trapped in a refrigerator just like Jeffery was, or maybe you know someone who is. I'm not talking about an actual refrigerator, but one that is nonetheless is just as real.

For many of us we struggle through life trapped by bad choices, sin, depression, or addiction to things. We are caught in a vicious cycle that as hard as we fight it, we can never seem to escape its grasp. Maybe you are too weak from fighting to cry out for help, or too embarrassed. You feel lost and helpless, even as a Christian, and it could be that you feel guilty for even feeling that way.

Years back, through a series of events, I found myself suffering from severe depression. Like Jeffery I was trapped, and struggled just to survive. Although I could not see hope back then, I cannot only see it now, but embrace it as well! In that lost darkness there was little that was recognizable. But nonetheless hope was still there, and looking back I also now know that hope traveled every dark day, caught every fallen tear, and understood when nobody else could.

Standing now on the rim of the deepest canyon that almost swallowed me, the pit of mire that almost consumed me I have finally come face to face with hope and His name is Jesus Christ. Not the Jesus I thought I knew, but the real Jesus, the one I now call HOPE!

My struggle with the horrid beast of depression raged within me for two and a half years. It broke my strong will like a toothpick and crushed me like an empty aluminum soda can under the weight of a giant. Yet when I reached the place that was my lowest, the spot where I could go no deeper I cried out to God! The God, that because of my depression I had deserted, the God I left behind, the God I had forsaken, the God who I was angry with for allowing this to happen to me, but who had still not forsaken me. I cried out to Him and said “God I can’t do this one more day.” I begged Him to help me, to somehow rescue me! Little did I know that by the end of the next two weeks God would somehow, somehow break through the chains that bound me and restore me to the person who I once was only with a new resolve. Miraculously he did it without continued counseling, and without medication, and gave me the grace and understanding to write a book called [“Freedom From Depression In Less Than A Month.”](#) In it I share the whole story about how God restored me in order that others might be healed as well.

But the great thing about God is that no matter who we are, where we have been, what we have done, or what we are going through, He understands and travels that road with us. Two thousand years ago Christ died on a cross in order to free us from sin. How much more does He also want to free us from the things that represent our refrigerator?

Today Jesus stands at the door of your refrigerator and although you can’t open it from the inside God can easily free you from the outside, all you have to do is ask.

I remember taking my daughter to a hunter safety course which was required for her to get her hunting license. In the course they teach you about firearms safety, and use, as well as survival techniques.

They showed a story of one man who had been a veteran hunter for many years that had gotten lost in the woods tracking a deer. It was snowing and the weight of the snow on the branches of the trees made everything look the same. The hunter (I’ll call him Bill) was lost and had no idea which way to go. He started to walk aimlessly in the woods, and out of panic he began to

move faster and faster (I've actually seen this in another lost hunter). Leaving his rifle behind he then began shedding his bulky clothes as he traveled along in order to move faster.

Finally darkness fell and his family was worried when he had not returned. A search party was sent out to look for Bill. Fortunately they found him that night huddled around a tree and suffering from hypothermia. He lost several of his digits to frostbite but was alive and made a full recovery.

As the searchers looked for Bill they could follow his journey in the snow and found out that the amazing thing was that because of his state of panic, Bill actually ran from a group of snowmobilers that could have saved him, along with the grief he experienced as well, but instead he ran from them instead of towards them.

Today I encourage you, that no matter what you are facing in the trapped state of your refrigerator, to cry out to Jesus. No matter how weak you are or how guilty you feel, cry out to Him to open the door to your prison. I know He did it for me and I know He can do it for you as well. So today don't run from the very thing that can save you, instead run into His arms, they are open and waiting and they are your source of life. No matter how you feel, come on home to Jesus, and stop trying to do it on your own. It may take some time, but the first step starts with you knocking on the door, He is waiting!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize Revelation 3:19

\_\_\_ Memorize Revelation 3:20

\_\_\_ Put a name to your refrigerator. It could be called sexual sin, depression, jealousy, fear, pornography, unforgiveness, etc. You probably don't need to think too long about what to call as it is the thing that envelopes you.

\_\_\_ Start the week with the smallest step by getting alone with Jesus and crying out to Him to open the door to your prison. It is OK to scream it out loud. Show God you are serious and



tired of living like this and sincere in wanting Him to deliver you.

\_\_\_ Read and study Job chapter 1

\_\_\_ Read and study Job chapter 2

\_\_\_ Read and study Job chapter 42

## THE FOUR WHEELER RIDE

### **Read: 1 Kings 18: 36-39**

*<sup>36</sup> At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed. LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. <sup>37</sup> Answer me LORD, answer me so these people will know that you, LORD are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again. <sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil and also licked up the water in the trench. <sup>39</sup> When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD - he is God! The LORD - he is God!" (NIV)*

My wife and I were visiting her parents one summer night. My father-in-law at the time had recently purchase a new ATV four wheeler. It wasn't small in size by any means, it was one of the biggest you could purchase and he was hounding me to take it for a ride.

Now I grew up riding a motorcycle and I am completely comfortable riding one either on or off road, but ATV's scared me! I didn't like the fact that my feet were up and my knees bent and that the vehicle is too wide to straddle in the event of an emergency. It made me feel trapped while sitting on it. But my father-in-law continued to pressure me. He wanted me to experience his new toy and so I finally gave in and obliged him.

The woods behind their house goes back for a long way without interruption from other roads or houses. In fact it was usually loaded with deer and one of my go to spots for hunting, so I knew it well. It was later in the evening when I finally relented to take the four wheeler for a test drive and it was well after 9:00 PM.

It was a smooth running machine, I must say that. It took the bumps and turns very well and had loads of power. Coming to the edge of the mountain I took it down the step pathway to the

bottom, turned it around and started back up with a vengeance. The machine roared up the hill, pulling me smoothly up the incline. Towards the top though the path steepens sharply and this is where I ran into trouble. The ATV started to bog down some as the gear it was in was too high for the slope. Before it stalled I needed to shift to a lower gear to clear the top. But being this machine shifted the opposite of the bike I use to own, I proceeded to put it into third instead of first gear.

The machine's forward motion all but stopped and I realized my mistake, quickly I shifted it into first gear and hit the gas, but because of the sudden forward thrust of the four wheeler and the steepness of the hill the machine pulled a wheelie and stood straight up on its back wheels. I can still see in my mind the headlights shining off the underside of the leaves on the trees. I knew if I stayed like this my weight would pull the machine back over on me and crush me, and I couldn't straddle it like a motorcycle and step away. So thinking quickly I rolled off the back of the machine and hit the ground. I figured the machine would fall back onto me and I would use its momentum to throw it off of me and send it down the hill.

Unfortunately for me the force of me pushing off the ATV pushed it down onto all four wheels again and instead of doing what I expected it to do which was to fall back on me, it rolled down the hill towards me. I was not prepared to receive the impact I felt. Instead of feeling the weight of the four wheeler on top of me it slammed into my side, wrapping my left leg around the axle and breaking it while the machine continued to roll over me pushing me down the mountain leaving my right leg up under the front axle and me in a split cracking my pelvic bone and leaving me with the weight of the machine on top of me.

I was stunned for a moment and then realized what had happened. I had to get this machine off of me, but how? I took my helmet off and put my arms under me and pushed up. I could feel the machine lifting and actually got it onto its side two wheels, but then thought that it might spin around and tear my leg off in the process, so I let it back down again.

I then reached up and hit the starter and the ATV and fired up. Then I turned the handlebars so I could reach the throttle and shifted it into first gear with my elbow. I revved the gas thinking the four wheeler would drive forward over me and unwrap my leg in the process. Then I could grab the tree root in front of me and pull myself to safety before the vehicle rolled back on top

of me again. But instead of my plan coming to fruition all I succeeded in doing was have the knobby tires rip into my side as it tried to climb over me, but to no avail.

I laid there screaming for help but no one came. So I began to pray, but not just any prayer, but a specific prayer. I knew my brother-in-law David Lee was back at the house so this is what I prayed:

“Dear Lord you know my situation and that I’m trapped here. I would ask you to send David Lee to come look for me and to help me get out from under this machine.”

I left the engine running so they could hear where I was and I left the lights on so it would shine up the hillside and make it easier to find me. Not long after that David Lee came running down over the mountainside and although he couldn’t lift the machine off of me completely he did manage to get my right leg out from under the front axle to take away some of the pain I was feeling and then went and got help. But in his absence I lay there knowing that my God is a big God and that He does answer prayer because He proved it to me by granting my very specific request.

Before long and with some help they were able to get the ATV off of me and with some effort seven emergency medical people carried me down of the mountain and took me to the hospital.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

I believe in prayer! As you can tell from that story I have every reason to. In fact there is more to the story that I didn’t find out about until after I was in the hospital that really cemented my belief of how powerful prayer can be.

Now during my ordeal, only about thirty minutes had passed and while I lay under that machine my wife was doing dishes with her mom and David Lee was watching TV. Now if you knew my brother-in-law back then to get him away from a television set was difficult to say the least. Yet at the exact time I prayed he was overcome with the strongest feeling that something was wrong and that I was hurt and had to come look for me.

He went to my wife in the kitchen and said, “Something is wrong, I have to go look for Dave.” But my wife said to him, “Don’t worry he is probably down in the field looking for deer.” But

David Lee replied, “No he is hurt and I have to go look for him.” Jumping on his dirt bike he scanned the woods until finally he saw my headlights shining up the hill, and came to my rescue. From my mouth, to God’s ears, to David Lee’s heart, a true miracle in the making!

Now I want you to think for a minute why we don’t see more of our prayers answered in miraculous ways like that. Maybe it is because we don’t pray specifically enough. Let me explain. I believe there are two different types of prayers. There are shotgun prayers and rifle prayers. Let me explain the difference. A shotgun prayer is scattered and goes something like this: “Lord, bless my friend,” while a rifle prayer is more specific and goes more like this, “Lord my friend John is struggling right now with financial troubles, he has lost his job and looks like he might lose his house because of it. He is depressed and ready to give up. My prayer is that you might lead him to the next place you want him to work. Please give clear direction to help him find that job and then grant him success in the interview. In the meantime show me what I can do to help him keep his house, and help with his depression. Give me the right words to say and bring the right people into my life to show me how to help him.”

Big difference isn’t it. You see when we offer up to God a prayer that is so general that even we don’t know what we want, what would be the purpose in God answering it, because we would never know if He did or didn’t because it is so general.

But a rifle prayer spells out to God our heart. It aligns our heart with the heart of God which is what prayer is supposed to do, and it gives God the opportunity to show us His glory, because when He does answer that prayer in an affirmative way, we see it and know without question how powerful He really is.

Praying in the form of a rifle prayer not only helps us to understand our heart thoughts, but draw us closer and deeper in our walk with God as we see Him answer us over and over again.

This time was not the only time I’ve seen God work in my life when I prayed specifically. I remember a time when our family was struggling financially because of the transition I was making from business into ministry. As I gathered our family for devotions that night I remember praying this prayer:

“Lord you know our need right now and I don’t know how you are going to do this, but

tomorrow we need to have \$5,000 in our mailbox to cover all our bills. I don't know how you will do this, but I am asking for your help to provide for us."

The next day I was mapping out a bicycle route for our ministry ride with the youth and was in southern New Jersey when my wife called on the cell phone. She said, "Dave I wanted to call and let you know that there wasn't a check in the mailbox this morning." I said, "No." She replied, "No, there were two checks, one for \$4,600 and one for \$500." One was a down payment for a proposal I had submitted and the other was from a customer that owed me money that I thought would probably never get paid from.

I couldn't believe that God had not only granted my request so specifically, but even provided more than I asked for. It has been events like this that have sealed my belief that God listens and wants us to share our heart specifically with Him. Now even if God chose to answer my prayer differently, it would not make God any less God and it still should not affect my desire to pray and to pray specifically. Remember God always answers prayers in one of three ways, "Yes, No, and Later." Praying specifically allows us to see more clearly which of those choices He is choosing for us.

So stay encouraged and the next time you go hunting for answers. Take along a rifle not a shotgun and you'll come to find out that a shotgun is something you point, but a rifle is something you aim. Never stop praying in specifics, those prayers will help you probably more than anything, to allow you to see the power of God lived out in your own life, and the lives of others!

### **THIS WEEK'S CHECKLIST CHALLENGE**

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Kings 18:36

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Kings 18:37

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Kings 18:38

\_\_\_ Memorize 1 Kings 18:39

\_\_\_ Make it a practice to make sure when you pray to God this week that you do so by praying specifically and directly so that when He does answer, you can see it and know that it could only come from Him.

\_\_\_ If you haven't ever started on make a prayer list for specific things to pray for. Label it in the following way:

Priorities

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Then ask God to show you what to put under each category or day, and under each, list the items or people that come to mind. Priorities are items or people that you pray for everyday regardless of the day, like loved ones that need to come to the Lord, or your children or grandchildren. The other days are for people and items that you pray for weekly, but not daily. This list can help you stay focused and specific in your prayers and feel free to change it from time to time as God directs.

\_\_\_ Make it a point this week to write down prayer requests at church so that you can pray specifically for them at home and if you offer to pray for someone this week ask them how you can pray specifically for them and then do that as well!

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

I hope you have enjoyed journeying with me through these stories, thoughts, challenges, and scriptures, and that they have become deeply embedded in your heart and your life. My prayer is that these scriptures may always be a constant help and reminder for you in how to act and live and serve the one that gives us life. May you find strength as you strive in your walk with God, to give honor and glory to Him, and may you go on to live a life worthy of your calling and bless Christ and others in your own journey with the Lord.

That is my desire for you, but even more than that my prayer is that you might find yourself drawn ever closer to the God that loves you and gave His Son to give you life. Stay close to Him. He can offer not only the answers you seek, but life as well.

There is one other thing I must share with you before I let you go. It may be that even while reading this book you may never have experienced the joy of coming to the Lord by coming to know Him personally as your Savior. Whether or not that is the case I want to share with you my personal testimony to encourage you and to point you in that direction if that is a decision you have never made.

Up until 1978, I had always been a loner, and the class clown. Fact of the matter was I was always seeking acceptance and love. But felt I never really got any, except from my own family. That is until May of "78", that is when a guy I met in welding school, shared with me about the greatest gift, anyone ever gave.

Over lunch one day he told me how he was looking for the same things I was, acceptance, joy, and love, but his longing led him a different direction. He had been doing some heavy drugs, and his life was totally messed up, and getting worse.

But he seemed to have his life in order now. What made the difference? He told me, that one day, someone shared with him how Jesus Christ could heal his life. How Jesus, could make



him whole again, and restore him to the kind of person that he was meant to be.

He told me how God loved me, and how He sent his Son Jesus to die for my sins on the cross. At first I thought that he was from some kind of cult or something. But I later found out that everything he told me was in the Bible, and it was true. He told me that God wanted me to have a personal relationship with me. He then asked me if I had ever been saved. I wasn't sure what he meant by that so he explained to me that God sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins, to actually die in our place, so that we could have forgiveness by saving me from my sins, and restoring us in a right relationship with God.

That night driving home I asked Jesus to forgive my sins, and to come into my life. That was thirty plus years ago, and God has totally changed my life because of my prayer that night. He has given me the love and acceptance that I was always longing for, and His Word, the Bible tells me that because I received God's free gift of Jesus I now have eternal life (1 John 5: 11-13), and can live forever with Him in heaven.

Now you may be wondering why I am telling you all this after we have just spent a year together studying the scriptures? It is because I want to take nothing for granted and assume that just because people want to grow closer to the Lord that they know and have accepted Jesus as their Savior. I want to grant every opportunity to those around me to never miss out on the greatest gift they could ever receive.

If you never have made a commitment to accept Christ or if you're not sure what I am telling you is true, then find a Bible, and look up that popular scripture verse. You know the one that you see on banners at football games all the time. John 3:16. It says:

*<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life. (NIV)*

Since God has come into my life, that spring day in 1978. I have had joy in living that I cannot describe. He has been my strength in the good times, and the bad, and He has given me the kind of life I always wanted to live, but didn't know how.

I knew that if God was big enough for me to trust Him with my salvation from sin, then He

was big enough to trust Him with my life and I could turn it over to God for Him to run.

I now try to live and do things the way I feel He would have me do them, and I believe and know that it is Him who gives me the strength and the courage to keep striving.

So if you ever find yourself looking for answers. My advice to you is to look to Jesus. Trust Him. He alone has given me life, and life abundantly, and I know that He can do the same for you, and if you have never accepted Him as your Savior I would encourage you to pray as I did and ask Him to forgive your sins and invite Him into your heart and make Him Lord of your life.

If you want to know more, about how you can know God in a personal way. Start by reading the Bible in the Gospel of John, or visit a Bible believing church in your area, or call any Youth for Christ chapter listed in the phone book.

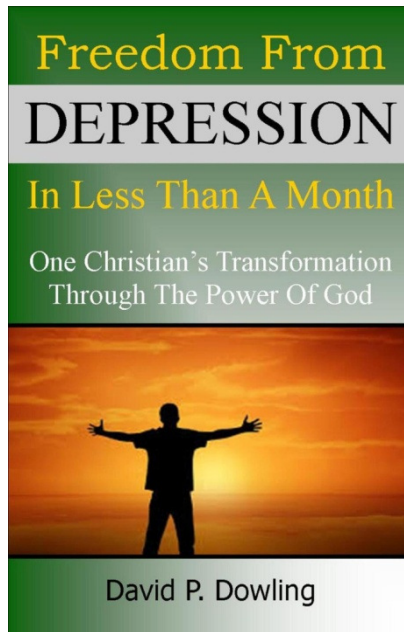
If you should still have questions or you have decided to put your trust in Jesus and are not sure what to do next. I would encourage you to download my FREE book “Growing Deep” by going to the link on our website at (<http://www.inheritancewm.x10.mx/Ministry%20Items.html>) it will help you in your next steps in your new walk with Christ or to help you refocus the walk you already have with Him.

God bless you richly, Dave

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## **OTHER WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR**

**“Freedom From Depression In Less Than A Month: One Christian’s transformation through the power of God”**



### **Book Description:**

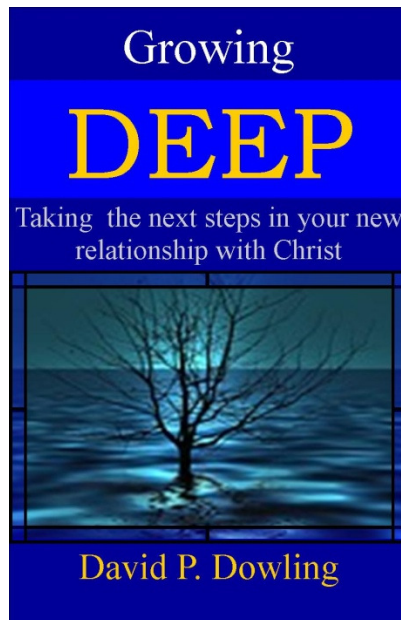
Depression is a real and controlling part of many people's lives, Christians and great men of the Bible being no exception. Struggling with severe depression for over two years, this Christian author found his life broken and shattered. Even after counseling and medication he found himself being pulled down deeper and deeper, and held strongly captive by the beast of depression until he felt all hope was gone. In desperation he cried out to God to somehow rescue him, and He did.

This book is a story of his journey of how God revealed to him a plan of healing and health and how God restored him in less than a month to the healthy person he once was. In it he reveals the step by step process God laid out for him in overcoming depression. A process he has shared successfully with many youth and adults as he ministered to them through their own depression and who have found healing on the other side in the same way he did.

This book guides you through the four boxes of anger, finding the root of depression, building a life filter, understanding forgiveness, finalizing forgiveness, how to use God's Word to find true healing, celebrating your recovery, building a beachhead, how to reach out to others in

depression, and much more. Filled with Scripture this book with its eleven chapters is a powerful transforming tool for anyone going through depression or for someone who wants to reach out to somebody they know who is. Click the title above for the link.

[“Growing Deep: Taking the next steps in your new relationship with Christ”](#)



**Book Description:**

In our ministry over the years we have seen many people make a decision to follow Christ and we have also seen many people who have made a commitment to follow Jesus not know what to do with this new relationship.

So seeing the need we developed this FREE booklet for both new believers and also for those struggling in their faith in order to help them grow closer to God as they grow in understanding

what it is like to walk with God. Thus we have named it "GROWING DEEP."

Nestled between its pages are the fundamental truths needed to grow as a Christian, with eight sections containing truths about what it means to walk with God, understanding the Holy Spirit's role in your life, learning to trust Christ, and more.

For simplicity we have formatted this book as a PDF. Please feel free to read or download and print out as many copies as you need for your church youth group, church function, or to just give to a friend that is struggling. The only thing we ask is that you don't distribute them for financial gain in any way! The love of God is Free and so we feel this booklet should be as well. Click the title above for the link.

[“To The Brink & Back Again: A Christian’s journey with God through cancer and what it is like to come out the other side”](#)



**Book Description:**

After being diagnosed with stage three esophageal cancer, this Christian author began a search for answers both spiritually and physically in order to prepare for his journey that lay ahead. Although he searched diligently he found little to satisfy his questions, which became the motivation to pen the words in this book.

Within its pages is a timeline of his adventure of how he traveled the course and faced cancer not just once but twice. Moreover this book offers its readers the answers to the questions he faced as well as what he learned about the faithfulness and sovereignty of God as it pertained to his finances, his cure, his healing and his whole life.

He openly shares about the things rarely discussed when it comes to cancer, like the emotional

feelings and struggles people face as well as how his deep dependency on God made all the difference in his ability to keep going on.

Laced with scripture the author discusses in detail about what he didn't expect, what it is like to work through recovery, finding hope, dealing with survivor's syndrome, and how to walk with and come along side others facing cancer as well. It is a must read for anyone experiencing cancer personally or for a loved one looking to help someone who is.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



David P. Dowling has been ministering to teenagers and adults for over two decades. He served as a volunteer staff person with Youth for Christ in the Pocono/Slate Belt area of

Pennsylvania starting in 1980, with Dave serving as the Executive Director from 2001 to 2008.

It was during his time at Youth for Christ that Dave had his first experience in short term missions, traveling to Jamaica to work on an addition for a school. Through that trip and others Dave gained the experience to go on to lead short term mission teams in the U.S. and to Honduras, and both Ghana and Kenya, Africa.

He is presently the Executive Director of [Inheritance World Ministries inc.](#), a ministry that trains and equips God's people to perform various types of ministry, as well as lead short term mission trips. He and his wife Gail have also come along side of [Through the Storm Ministries](#) to help in the building and support of their ministry of an orphanage in Kenya, East Africa. Dave plans on continuing to lead short term mission teams there to help both physically and financially.

Dave struggled for over two years with severe depression. It was only when he hit rock bottom that he turned back to God and found the answers that led him back out of his sickness into healing. As Dave sought after God, God revealed to him not only the steps that led to his depression, but also the path that would lead him back to health in a period of just a couple of weeks. It was what he learned on that journey that he decided to place between the pages of a book in order that others might find the same freedom he now has.

Dave has the ability to make God's Word real to people, and feels right at home whether he is speaking to 20 Junior High teenagers at a winter retreat or closing with a Gospel presentation at a Michael Card concert to hundreds.

Dave is extremely professional in engaging people, both from the stage and one on one. His desire is to see people understand God's Word so they can apply it to the way they live, and live a life in a way that brings glory to God.

Dave lives with his wife Gail in the Pocono Mountains of Northeast Pennsylvania. They have one daughter Sarah, and three sons, Jeremiah, Joshua, and Caleb.

You can also connect with Dave online on [Facebook.com](#) or through [Inheritance World Ministries Inc.](#)