

Think

by Ray Sanders

June Bug'n

Both your friends and enemies help define you.

That's right, June bug'n. Not to be confused with dune bug'n. Throughout Oklahoma, the grub worms are on the rise, have grown wings and have invaded every streetlight known to man.

They may lack the fancy paint job, but they still look like oversized ladybugs to me. For the most part, they are harmless, but can give you a scare if they ever land on the back of your neck. Get one down your shirt, and you are sure to look like you are shucking ears of corn. There is just something creepy about those prickly legs crawling across your skin that makes even a grown man scream like a little girl.

There is a reason they call them June bugs. Like clockwork, they appear about the same time every year. Not one or two, not a couple hundred-but thousands of June bugs show up every year, you guessed it, in June.

One particular June growing up, I remember sitting on the front porch of my parents' lake house. We spent the evening taking turns churning homemade ice cream. As the sun set on the water, night-lights began to draw all types of little buzzers to the festivities.

I love homemade ice cream, but I hate having to swat airborne pests just to get my spoon into my mouth. As soon as I had my bowl loaded down, I headed for the couch to enjoy my dessert in peace.

It was then that the taunting began. My brother found it funny that I would allow a few country critters to detour me from the otherwise tranquil great outdoors. His goal was to shame me back to the porch. The teasing ensued, and my posture grew poorer as I melted deeper into the couch. Say what he may, this is one city boy who was staying put.

And then it happened. There was a brief break in the sarcasm, then a loud yell, followed by spitting and pitiful gagging noises. It seems that while my brother proceeded to focus on my business, he failed to keep his eyes on his bowl of ice cream. As he delivered a spoonful of dairy to his taste buds, he was unaware of the June bug buried in the ice cream. The pop and subsequent crunch were the first signs to him that maybe the couch wasn't such a bad idea after all. The last laugh was all mine. It wasn't long before the deck was cleared and the June bugs were left to compete for the best position under the porch light.

When we feel taunted and teased by annoying people, we are tempted to take matters into our own hands. Nothing would bring greater satisfaction than to dish out some sweet revenge. During such times, I try to remember the June bug and Romans 12:19, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord."

Purrrfect

Great organizations fail from implosion, not explosion.

Cats. You either love them or hate them. For most people, there is no in between. As for me, well let's just say I'm a dog man. Growing up, we never had cats. We didn't need to because our neighbor raised enough cats for the entire state. She must have had at least 100.

Can you imagine the thrill I experienced as a little boy as I switched on the back porch light to take out the trash and looked out into the darkness, to what seemed to be thousands of felines peering at their prey? It gave me the creeps, but I fulfilled my duty with courage despite being keenly aware all eyes were on me.

How would you react to half a dozen cats leaping from beneath the lid of a trash can and several others scurrying at your ankles as you tried to dispense of the garbage in the shadows of a porch light?

One winter, a terrible smell permeated our house. At first, we suspected a mouse had met his match in our floor furnace. After several days, we knew the source of air pollution had to be a more formidable foe. As the oldest, I was the chosen investigator.

Our house was built on cinder blocks. If we weren't careful, cats would enter the crawl space through a man-hole. As I peeked through the opening with a flash light, cats scattered like angry bumble bees from a fractured bee hive. Cats came shooting out like missiles from a rocket launcher.

Outfitted in coveralls, boots, gloves and a motorcycle helmet, complete with shield, I crawled like a soldier under fire into the dungeon. I lay low as cats belted passed me and out the escape hatch. I fought the urge to stand realizing there was a reason they call it crawl space.

Once the dust settled, I followed my nose to the place of the victim's demise. Inch by inch, I backed out of the pit with collateral damage in tow. Like a coal miner rescued from a collapsed mine shaft, I was elated when I stood in the warmth of the sun.

Say what you may about cats, but the whole experience reminds me of the role many of our pastors play in our churches. Leading a church can be a lot like herding cats.

All eyes are on the pastor as he steps into the pulpit. With courage and a sense of duty, he delivers the message. His congregation scatters like cats and takes up sides as the pungent smell of disharmony permeates the church.

Is it any wonder no one wants to visit the church? God help us if we are the source of the stink. I know it sounds a little catty, but it's time we quit acting like fussy felines and bureaucratic fat cats and start looking for ways to live in harmony. Sounds purrrfect to me.

And a final word to all my pastor friends. Remember Joshua 1:9. ". . . Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Did Abortion Kill the Cure?

Silence is agreement.

An elderly man lay in his bed dying of cancer. The doctors had done all they could to make him comfortable, but the cure would not come. The cancer would win. Upset that the end was near, the man appealed to God asking Him why He did nothing to end cancer. God replied, "I sent the answer for the cure many years ago with a little girl who would someday become a medical researcher. Unfortunately, her parents chose to abort her before she had a fighting chance."

While this is not a true story, I can not help but think that it might not be a reality. According to information from the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), more than 1 million babies were aborted in 2002. That's more than 3,000 children every day; nearly 150 babies murdered every hour!

The ERLC also reports that 52 percent of U.S. women obtaining abortions are younger than 25. Black women are more than three times as likely as white women to have an abortion and Hispanic women are 2.5 times as likely. Forty-three percent of women obtaining abortions identify themselves as Protestant, and 27 percent identify themselves as Catholic. Two-thirds of all abortions are among never-married women, while more than 60 percent of abortions are among women who have had one or more children.

On average, women give at least three reasons for choosing abortion. Seventy-five percent say having a baby would interfere with work, school or other responsibilities; about 2/3 say they cannot afford a child; and 1/2 say they do not want to be a single parent, or are having problems with their husband or partner.

An American Cancer Society report indicates that in 2004, there were 553,888 cancer deaths. How would society react if it was discovered that the secret for curing cancer was intentionally locked in a vault? There would be total anarchy. We don't have a cure for a cancer, but we do know the cure for abortion. We could save the lives of more than 1 million innocent babies right now!

While we may think abortion is horrible and morally wrong, many continue to sit on the sideline and point their fingers at all those "bad" people who are killing their babies. It is time to stop pointing and get in the game.

Last year a record crowd was present during Rose Day at the Oklahoma State Capitol. Hundreds attended the rally in support of pro-life legislation. Don't you find it interesting that last year was one of the finest years for Oklahoma pro-life legislation? Coincidence? I don't think so. Taking a stand for an unborn child gives voice to a cry from the womb that might not otherwise ever be heard.

Clear your voice and speak up for the children.

The Flying Photographer Fiasco

Saul believed his own press and fell.

I have been a photographer for more than 20 years. Photo assignments have taken me on many great and exciting adventures. I have floated down rivers in Africa capturing close ups of hippos, crocodiles and elephants. I have visited remote villages where nationals prepared meals in primitive stone ovens and children played with toys made of sticks. These images have been forever frozen in time as I snapped their photo in the blink of an eye.

Being at the right place at the right time is the key to great photography. Photography is more than a spectator sport; it is about being a part of the action but without influencing the outcome.

I like to give my audience perspectives they rarely experience or perceive. Gaining just the right angle takes work. Anyone can snap a shutter, but the ability of a photographer to anticipate action while capturing incredible passion and emotion takes talent. Passive, idle picture taking is fine for vacations, but telling a story with a photograph takes commitment and skill.

Taking photographs can be life threatening at times. On one occasion, I failed to buckle my seatbelt while attempting aerial photography from a helicopter. We had removed the doors from the helicopter so I could lean out over the body of the aircraft in order to gain realistic images. I was grateful that at 100 feet off the landing pad the pilot reminded me that it might be a good idea to buckle up!

During another photo shoot, I was given permission to roam the roof of a seven-story building. Using a spotter proved wise. I failed to realize how close I was getting to the edge of the building. The spotter gave me a nudge. A half-step more and I would have been flat as a pancake. The photos on the way down may have been interesting but hardly worth the ultimate sacrifice.

Obtaining the perfect camera angle doesn't always come easy. During a recent prayer meeting, I made the decision to stand atop a table to capture a creative perspective. As I did, the table reared like a bucking bronco. Sensing certain doom, I negotiated the table back to a level position. Unfortunately, the table threw me like a loose shoe on wild a donkey.

I lunged at a chair in an effort to break my fall. My right foot found refuge on the back of a seat as my left foot did its best to find footing on the seat of the chair. Like a surfer riding a wave, it was all good until the water came crashing down. Needless to say, the prayer meeting was interrupted with my flying photographer fiasco.

Proverbs 11:2 immediately came to mind, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." Some of life's biggest lessons come from the most humbling of circumstances. Teach me Lord. Teach me before I hurt myself or someone else!

Beware Little Mouse

Solomon gave into the world and failed to end strong.

Because I live on the edge of town, it doesn't take long to reach the country. As much as we like to think of ourselves as "city folk," we still have plenty of opportunity to experience the joys of rural America. On more than one occasion, I have met delays as I followed a hay truck or farm tractor down a two-lane road. Wheat fields and cattle ranches are literally just around the corner.

With open fields and undeveloped land comes little varmints that have found refuge in the tall grass and underbrush. Sure, we have encountered an occasional jackrabbit, hawk or a family of skunks, but for the most part, they mind their business and we mind ours.

It is when those little guys that love cheese start looking for winter homes that I start realizing I am more of a city kid than a country boy. Anyone who has ever bucked hay knows you are sure to send entire colonies of mice scurrying as you raise the roof on their little haystack abode.

Late one night, I heard a strange scratching noise in the wall. As I laid on the ground with my head against the wall I knew what I was hearing. Mickey and his buddies had set up shop for the winter in the wall.

I had tried standard remedies before. Rat poison, glue traps and mouse traps were OK, but with mice in the wall, my greatest concern was not killing the little guy, but how to remove him once he met his match. There is nothing worse than living with the smell of a decomposing mouse.

I opted for an original approach. Believe it or not, I rigged a mouse trap to the end of a long string. Complete with morsels of cheese as bait, I lowered the trap down the inside of the wall. I was impressed with my ability to straddle rafters with a flashlight under my chin as I maneuvered the temptation within reach of my prey.

Finally, everything was in place. About the time I was ready to go to bed, I detected a faint snap. It was sweet music to my ears. I couldn't resist; I had to see if my plot had succeeded. Equipped with flashlight and pajamas, I ventured back into the attic to investigate.

I was not disappointed. The varmint had been extinguished. The temptation proved too irresistible. His lack of restraint brought sudden death. I lifted the victim from the darkness and disposed of the evidence.

All too often, we are like field mice. Temptation lures us into a trap. The devil knows our weaknesses. Our lack of restraint proves fatal as our lives are destroyed. Satan feels no remorse as he disposes of the evidence.

The key to survival is found in I Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand up under it." Beware little mouse, beware!

Life Takes More Than Talent

David learned from his mistakes and asked the Lord for advice—and he never lost a battle.

When it came to sports, I was always Mr. Average. I've ridden plenty of pine in my day. I remember one particular basketball game where no matter who the coach pulled from the bench, we weren't going to win. As the clock ticked down to less than one minute, I remember thinking, whatever happens, please don't send me in now.

Then it happened. It was as if life shifted into slow motion as the coach looked down the bench and yelled, "Sanders! Sanders you're in the game." No not now, I thought! Wow, a whole 40 seconds to turn the game around. Why doesn't he just send me to the locker room for towels or something?

It was all I could do to pry myself from the bench and step onto the hardwood. In a matter of seconds, I went from being a comfortable spectator to being the center of attention at the half-court line.

We were on offense. The ball was passed to me. Although no one was near me, I panicked. I bobbled the ball. I dribbled three steps and then stumbled over my feet. Like a punter for a football team, I kicked the basketball to the other end of the court. The ball fell into the hands of our opponent. Before I knew it, the buzzer sounded and the game was over.

How embarrassing. Who cares about lettering, just let me out of here! I ran off the court and down the stairs to the locker room. As I did, I hit my head on a water pipe. What a klutz. Mine was a perfect ending to a horrible game. The locker room was full of laughter as my teammates began to reenact the fiasco. What was the coach thinking? Why did he pick me?

I didn't know then, but I think I know now. My coach believed in me. He may not have seen potential in the player, but he did recognize potential in the person. A few weeks later as the two of us were leaving practice, coach put his arm around my shoulder and said, "You stay after it Sanders, and you are going to be something someday."

I will never forget that day. It was a turning point in my life. He saw something in me that I never knew existed. He gave me the gift of confidence and self-esteem. I may not be the best at anything, but that doesn't mean I can't do my best and still make a difference. The message got through. Life takes more than talent.

How about you? Do you ever feel like Mr. Average? Do you ever feel washed up and of no use? Have you embarrassed the coach and the team? God hears it all the time. I'm too old. I'm too young. I'm not good enough. I'm just an average guy. Guess what? The Bible is full of Mr. Averages, used by God in incredible ways. You are just the kind of person God wants on his team.

Different?

Make sure the devil knows your name.

I recently had the privilege of traveling to Europe on business. Experiencing different cultures can be fun and exciting, but it can also be a little bit stressful.

Take crossing the street for example. When my mother told me to look both ways before crossing an intersection, she must have had Europe in mind. Look the wrong way when crossing the street in the United Kingdom, and you might become a fatal traffic statistic. It is so bad in London that the streets are marked at crosswalks with huge painted letters reminding you which way to look before jumping out in front of an oncoming vehicle.

Talk about confused. I visited a department store while in London. I was informed that the men's apparel was on the first floor. After making several laps around the floor, a helpful attendant pointed out that I was on the ground floor and the floor above the ground floor was the first floor. I was prepared to argue the point, but remembered I was a visitor. Like a friend of mine recently commented when referring to traveling abroad, "It is not wrong, just different."

Don't even think about complimenting an acquaintance from Wales on a pair of good looking pants. You might get slapped. What we call pants, they call undergarments. If you like someone's new denim pants, you would be well advised to speak of their fashionable trousers.

Being away from home, I missed a big juicy hamburger with bacon and chips. I ordered a hamburger and got a hamburger with ham and French fries. I should have ordered a hamburger and crisps. What we call French fries they call chips. But, it is not wrong, it is just different.

Did I mention men carry purses and wear capris in Europe? This can be a real challenge when thanking someone you meet on the tube. The Mr. you thank may in fact be a Mrs. Oh, and yeah, the tube is the underground subway system. It is not something used to transport liquid; in London it transfers people.

Are you starting to get a little frustrated? It's OK. I was, too. But come to think about it, isn't that the way it usually is when you are in a foreign land? If so, I wonder why it is we often have no problem fitting in on things related to this side of Heaven. Doesn't the Bible say that as Christians we are not of this world, but foreigners with residence in a different land?

Hebrews 11:13 refers to the members of the faith hall of fame as aliens and strangers of this Earth. I Peter 2:11 says, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." Most of us don't look like aliens, but maybe it is time we start acting like foreigners.

Being here is not wrong, it is just different. How different, depends on you. The question is whether or not our lives are different enough to serve as a testimony to our King, or have we become so acclimated to our culture, no one knows we are different. We are not of this world. Our home is with our Father in Heaven.

Holy Moses?

Don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh at yourself.

It is not every week you are given the opportunity to share the Sunday morning message in your childhood church. Such was the case recently when a pastor friend asked if I would fill the pulpit while he ministered on the mission field in India.

It was an exciting day as my family was greeted by many of my spiritual patriarchs who had invested in me as Sunday School teachers, camp counselors and youth workers. It was at this church that I learned to pray, read my Bible and share my faith.

I am not alone. Hundreds of young people have been touched by Yukon, First. Like me, many are in full-time Christian service. To this day, the ladies of the church pray for those of us who are active in ministry throughout the world.

My chest swelled a little as I stepped to the platform. Like a bull in a china closet, I stubbed my toe on the top step. With grace and finesse, my quick reflexes helped me avoid certain disaster. But the worst was yet to come.

My sermon was moving along smoothly. I had even picked up a few amens along the way. During the third point of the message, I made reference to how the Bible's greatest leaders were subject to criticism.

I pontificated about how Jesus himself was criticized and asked the church to consider how Moses must have felt when his neighbors laughed as he built the ark.

Much to my surprise, my Moses comments brought smiles to many faces. Not one to miss audience feedback, I went on and on about how Moses fulfilled his calling by dragging wood, driving nails and herding animals onto the ark.

At this point, many in the congregation were struggling with laughter. However, I noticed looks of horror on the faces of my wife and children. Why were they in such a state of alarm? Everyone else was enjoying my message. Why were they in a state of panic?

Then it dawned on me, Moses building an ark! What was I thinking? Moses? Holy Moses? Were my Sunday School teachers thinking their investment in me was a total waste? Had I not learned the difference between Noah and Moses? I was ready for an alter call on the spot. I would be the first one down the aisle to confess I was a total buffoon!

Despite the stumbling and mumbling of their native son, the church gave me a second chance and invited me back the following week. They continued to believe in me, pray for me and laugh with me when I needed their love and acceptance most.

This wasn't the first time I was given a second chance at the First Baptist Church. No, Jesus gave me my first second chance there in 1976 when I accepted Him as Savior. I'm grateful we serve a God of second chances.

No doubt some of us need more second chances than others! This mishap wasn't my first and will likely not be my last. Keep praying ladies. Keep praying. God isn't finished with me yet!

I'm No Evel Knievel

Failing doesn't make you a failure.

One of my childhood heroes died recently. There was hardly a boy my age who didn't aspire to pop a wheelie like the man in the red, white and blue leather suit. The world knew him as Evel Knievel. To me, he seemed immortal.

Some called him crazy. What man in his right mind would straddle a motor on wheels and attempt to jump rows of cars, buses and canyons?

I was too young to own a motorcycle, but in my mind, my bicycle was just as good.

My first bicycle was metallic green with a beefy black and white banana seat. Some guys preferred high-back sissy bars, but not me; sissy bars got in the way of my Evel Knievel stunt simulations.

I was serious about playing the part. I pedaled as fast as I could down Poplar Street and just before the bridge, I deployed my handcrafted parachute made from an old bed sheet. It was cool. Looking back over my shoulder, I watched the parachute spin in the wind as I imagined thousands of sports fans applauding my daring feats.

One day, I decided to perform my own version of the Evel Knievel show. I organized spare lumber from a nearby construction site into an elaborate launch pad near the city park. It was beautiful. I was certain my boyhood idol would be proud.

I took a few test runs until the moment of truth was upon on me. As I approached the ramp, my nerves were on edge. It was as if the whole world were watching. I broke out in a sweat and gave serious consideration to turning back. Surely this was how Evel Knievel felt as he revved his engine toward the launch pad.

There was no turning back. My legs pushed furiously against the pedals as my heart rate and bike increased in speed. My front wheel met the ramp and I was soon airborne. Life went into slow motion as I "hovered" in mid-air. I imagined cameras flashing, announcers commenting and the audience gasping in disbelief. I screamed, "Evel Knievel" in honor of the stunt king.

Somewhere between the pinnacle of my jump and the landing pad, my left handle-bar grip pulled free. Like the master himself, a crash landing was in my future. It wasn't pretty, but I survived. My bicycle got the worst of it. I had bent handle-bars and forks but no broken bones. I discovered I was no Evel Knievel. I was trying to become something I was not.

The older I get, the more I realize there are many people who try to become something they are not meant to be. They aren't comfortable in their own skin. By the grace of God, I learned God loves me and created me for a very special purpose that can only be accomplished by me.

I may never hear fans roar in amazement or see my name on marquees, but I do live for the day when the real Master welcomes me home, puts His arm around me and says, "well done my good and faithful servant, well done."

Love is my only response and responsibility.

Whatever You Do

Eat right and exercise. You've got to have a physical body to have a spiritual ministry.

Perhaps Paul had New Year's resolutions in mind when he said, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)." I don't know about you, but I believe this is one of the most challenging verses in Scripture.

Eating to the glory of God? Drinking to the glory of God? Whatever you do, glorify God? Sounds like a great New Year's resolution to me.

Take a look around at any Baptist gathering and you have to wonder if overeating hasn't become an accepted vice among the potluck regulars. There is a good possibility there is less room in the pew because we keep reaching for seconds at the buffet line, not because we have done a great job at outreach.

I've struggled with weight most of my life. Keeping the weight off is a struggle now more than ever. The older I get, the more I understand the term "comfort foods." Stress, boredom and busyness are my worst enemies when it comes to sticking to my plan. OK, I confess, I never have the willpower to eat just one of my wife's homemade chocolate chip cookies. In some ways, many Baptists are using food to self medicate. The right food at the right time may make you feel better but in the end it is shortening our life spans and ministries.

I come from a long line of beer drinkers. I have seen and experienced first-hand the ill effects that come from drinking a tall-boy. Ask any alcoholic if they wish they'd never taken their first drink or talk to a mother who lost her teenager to drunk driving, and both are sure to mention regret.

Alcohol is responsible for as much pain and suffering as many diseases we desperately seek to eliminate. Why would we hope for anything less when it comes to booze? We could eliminate one of our leading killers and sources for the demise of family by not "popping the top on a cold one."

Glorifying God in whatever we do is the key. Everything we do is important to God. Every thought, deed and action has the potential to glorify Him. If we approach 2007 glorifying God in whatever we do, everything else will take care of itself.

Window Pain

Faith pushes us, hope pulls us and God's love guides us through uncertainty.

I have to admit, I love taking an occasional Sunday afternoon nap. There is nothing better than dozing off after a big meal on the Sabbath. I recently caught one of those cherished down times. As I faded off into sweet dreams, a faint buzzing sound caught my attention. It wouldn't go away. Just about the time I was released from the conscious world, that annoying buzz started up again.

Curiosity drew me from my stupor and to the windowpane. There he sat, a single little fly frustrated like no other. He could see where he wanted to go, but something stood in the way of him and his destiny. His trouble was window "pain."

Try as he might, he was getting nowhere. He put all his effort into breaking through to the other side, but the "pain" held him back. It was obvious he was worried, concerned and aggravated. How did he end up in such a mess? Had he come this far only to be denied the promised land just on the other side of who knows what that was holding him back?

The key to success was obvious. The answer to the window "pain" was in looking up. If only he would pause from his anxious labor and look up, he would have learned that up and over is where freedom waited to be discovered. Instead, he continued repeating the same approach but expecting different results, a sure sign of insanity. Some flies make it to the other side. Unfortunately, most die from window "pain."

In a strange way, I found myself relating to the trapped and frantic fly. I, too, had felt like a victim of window "pain." Try as I might to overcome life's challenges, I beat against the invisible barrier that somehow kept me from reaching my promised land. Determined to beat the odds, I put more effort and energy into breaking through to freedom. Frustrated and discouraged, I gave in and gave up on fulfilling my dream. Life with window "pain" became a reality.

Such need not be the case. If only I would have looked up. The answers lie above. Rather than rely on myself, my heavenly Father waited with answers sure to provide fulfillment in a life designed for me by Him. If only I had looked up to Him sooner, my life in window "pain" would have been short-lived. Instead, all too often, I relied on my own strength and wisdom and not on His.

Free us from the window "pain," Lord! Teach us Your ways. Direct our paths and lead our lives away from the window "pain" and into the freedom of Your will, Your way and into a life most fulfilling. Fly away we must. But first we must look away from the window "pain" and up into the eyes of the One who created us to prosper in the promised land.

He didn't bring us this far to leave us. He didn't teach us to swim to let us drown. He didn't teach us to fly, only to find us stuck in a windowpane! Look up. Come on over to life on the other side of window "pain."

The Vacant Seat*What feeling do people get when you walk into a room?*

Anyone who travels can relate to the anxiety I recently felt when boarding an airplane on business. No I am not referring to the nervous jitters that pass through your mind as you prepare for take-off. I'm not even talking about concern over an aisle or window seat. My angst was over the person who would fill the vacant seat next to me.

Filling a vacant airplane seat is a lot like going potluck with a college roommate, it can either be a wonderful surprise or a huge nightmare. On this occasion, the vacant seat was filled by, "Word in edgewise." No, this wasn't his real name, but it sure described the experience.

From the moment he sat down until we made our way to baggage claim, I couldn't get a "word in edgewise." WIEW, as I will call him, had plenty to talk about.

He came from a wealthy, affluent family. WIEW was proud to be the black sheep of the flock. He portrayed the role exceedingly well. As a byproduct of the 1960's hippies' culture, he never made the transition into the modern age.

Now in his sixties, he was frozen in time as a living icon for the hippie movement. He was a cross between Willie Nelson and Jimi Hendrix. Despite the temptation to be distracted by his dreadlocks, tattoos and body piercings, I took interest in everything he said.

It is fair to say that I was fascinated by WIEW. He had an opinion about most everything. He claimed to know and have influence on powerful people in the world. In his opinion, the underworld is where "big brother" really operated. Of course, he couldn't say too much for fear of his life.

At one point I took a chance and asked WIEW about where he gained spiritual direction. He indicated he never felt closer to God than when high on cocaine. He also said eternity starts now, and that he wasn't waiting to die to experience Heaven.

At this point, being the Baptist boy that I am, I sought to seize the day. If only for a moment, WIEW hushed long enough for me to share how I had found spiritual enlightenment and eternal security by becoming a follower of Christ. He seemed to pause and ponder for a moment, and then turned the conversation to rock and roll.

We shared nearly two hours of conversation on that airplane. God only knows if a Gospel seed fell on fertile soil. Somewhere today, WIEW is talking. Perhaps another Christ follower will fill a vacant seat next to him. And WIEW will pause, if only for a moment, to hear the story of Jesus as a fellow believer attempts to get a "word in edgewise."

So abundant is the life that Jesus gives that we must share it with the WIEWs of the world. Something to think about the next time you sit next to a vacant seat.

Someday when the conductor of Heaven's train cries, "all aboard," I pray there are no vacant seats. I pray WIEW will be there with me.

Mayflower

I'd rather try and fail than try nothing and succeed.

Imagine the year is 1620 and you are standing with your family on a pier in Southampton, England observing Pilgrims boarding the Mayflower. There is an excitement in the air as word has spread about the journey the vessel will take to a new land – a place of adventure and fresh beginnings.

Some consider passengers of the Mayflower to be crazy, foolish and even insane. But as you watch you can't help but wonder if you and your family should be joining this clan of pioneers.

So much is unknown. What if the ship encounters pirates? What if the captain steers off course into a violent storm? Will there be enough supplies to make the journey to dry land? What if a disease breaks out among the crew? Taking such an adventure would be risky. Stepping on board would require a clear calling and tremendous faith.

Deep inside you feel God is prompting you to go. Life for you in the old country has become comfortable. Things are going well but despite your success, a still small voice whispers, calling you to place your foot on the plank that leads to the unknown.

You have lived with few regrets. The thought of the Mayflower leaving without you causes you to wonder about what might have been. You never wanted to be one of those pitiful souls who wished they could've, should've or would've done something. If not now, when?

You have made it to the dock. You were confident God led you to make the journey. But now, doubt dances in your mind as you watch friends and neighbors prepare to push out to sea.

Unexpectedly, your spouse reaches for your hand, looks in your eyes and with a gentle but confident voice says, "I know you are scared, I know you love things the way they are, but I believe, as you, that we are meant to be at sea."

The affirmation from the love of your life and your strong desire to be in the center of God's will compels you to step forward and lead the way to a life you have never known before but a life most certainly committed to serving the Lord.

There are times in life when each of us is faced with a Mayflower-size decision. Should we stay or should we go? Is there more work to be done or have we completed the task? Should we dig in or fly away? Such are the thoughts of those who abhor complacency and seek to walk in step with the will of the Lord.

Making the wise and best choice doesn't always come easy but the Lord does promise to give wisdom to those who seek Him. James 1:5 informs us that all we need to do is ask God, and He will give us wisdom. Luke 7:35 says, "...wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it." Where is the Lord leading you? The boat is pushing back. The captain's whistle is blowing. A new beginning awaits you on a not-so-distant shore. May we welcome you on board?

Potato Cellar

Religion divides, but if Jesus is lifted up, He will draw all men to Himself.

Growing up in Oklahoma, I gained a quick appreciation for severe weather. Kids from other states sing, "April showers bring May flowers." Kids in Oklahoma sing, "April showers bring May tornados!"

More than once, I ran through the rain to find shelter in Miss Harding's storm cellar. Sirens blared as huge elm trees bowed to the spring winds. Lawn furniture bounced across yards like tumbleweeds, and lightning cracked like a whip. Safety and refuge were the goal as neighbors sought to escape the threat of a raging tornado.

When not occupied by scampering humans, the cellar was often used as a cool, dry place for potatoes. Not all of the potatoes maintained their freshness. Some had grown eyes, and others had started to rot. Nonetheless, the smell of musty, decomposing potatoes was ignored as our attention was drawn to glistening slug slime revealed by the light of smoky candles.

Seeing our neighbors in house shoes, hair curlers and pajamas was a treat. But, what appeared in the storm cellar stayed in the storm cellar. A word about appearances was never spoken above ground.

A whistling A.M. radio gave hints to the status of the storm. Hardly a word was spoken as all in attendance listened for the all clear. Eventually, the winds died down, the lightning subsided and the candles found the bottoms of their wicks. We had survived. The journey back to the house was not nearly as exciting as the race to the underground. Sleep was light and previously encountered dreams were lost forever.

Not everyone makes it to the storm cellar. Not everyone survives. My great-uncle failed to heed the call in 1974. I was below ground in the storm cellar on the family farm as the storm approached. Unaware and hard of hearing, he sat on his porch in town as the twister sucked him loose and took him for a ride on the wind that ultimately cost him his life.

Churches can be a lot like storm cellars. Some even smell like musty potatoes. But, when churches are at their best, neighbors gather there to find safety and refuge.

Unfortunately, not everyone makes it to church. Perhaps they are deaf to the idea. But in most cases, they were never asked. In the end, they are swept away by the winds of life. Left to themselves, they glide along until a major storm takes them away, forever. The journey back to the house never occurs. The all clear is never given, and they never rise above ground level. They remain trapped forever in the darkest eternity.

Proverbs 10:25 says, "When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever." As believers, we must do all we can to warn our family and friends of the storm that is coming. Spring will bring twisters. Life will bring storms. Eternity will bring either Heaven or Hell. The key is to find safety and refuge. The Church, not the building, must serve as a vessel to direct the lost to salvation found only in Christ. Otherwise, we are nothing more than rotten potatoes in a potato cellar.

Defined by Success

Success without significance is no success at all.

What does success look like for you? Is winning required in order to be successful or is finishing all that is required? Then again, is success more about the experience than the finish line? Do you have to be the best or is doing your best success for you?

How do you define success? A life with no regrets? Getting through another day? Staying out of trouble? Or the number of zeros in your paycheck.

How success is defined can be strictly personal or completely universal. What role does timing, luck, circumstances and providence play in your success? How much of your success depends on effort and preparedness? Does success require intentionality or does success show up by chance? How will you know if you have succeeded? Can success be guaranteed? What defines your life? Is your life defined by success? How is it defined at all? Unless you define success how will you know if you have succeeded?

Victims or Victors?

Jesus, plus nothing.

The day started out OK. The business trip to Atlanta with my friend and coworker had been planned for weeks. Our first hint of trouble occurred when I checked the news on my cellular telephone. American Airlines had grounded more than 200 flights due to safety concerns. As the old saying goes, "Better safe than sorry." Much to our delight, our flight was cleared for take-off.

We arrived in Dallas in time to catch our connecting flight. Once nestled in, the captain announced our flight had been delayed, but we were allowed to de-plane and grab a bite. We were getting nowhere fast.

Time passed quickly, but as we approached our gate, the lobby looked like a ghost town. Had we been left behind?

Only a few secondary lights were on and ticket agents were nowhere to be found. Our spirits sank. In our quest for food and fellowship, had we ignored the warnings for final boarding call?

We set out to find other human life forms. Eventually, a night guard directed us to activity on the other side of the security line. There we found fellow long-faced travelers in a lingering line waiting for hotel vouchers and tickets for new flights the following day. We were among the 46,000 passengers whose flights had been cancelled. As stragglers, we were issued tickets of hope. No promise of a new seat, just a prominent position on a stand-by list.

We were directed to a shuttle for a cheap hotel. The bed had hardly gotten warm before we were up again at 3 a.m. to catch our flight. The ticket counter wouldn't stir for another two hours. Absent of people, an eerie atmosphere permeated the airport. Thoughts of rapture entered my mind. Missing a flight was one thing. Missing a mass exodus to Heaven was another.

Our instincts to arrive early paid off. Unbelievably, we had been directed to the wrong gate! The sky monorail was not yet operating, but a kind TSA employee arranged for ground transport to a distant terminal. A little help went a long way! Our bodies were starting to show signs of travel fatigue, but it was nothing a tall cup of coffee and a warm muffin wouldn't cure.

We struggled to determine if we were victims or victors. Despite adversity and many false prophets, we crossed the finish line, but not without hope and prayer.

What a tragedy to struggle through life only to discover you hold a ticket to the wrong gate. Jesus said in John 10:9, "I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved." No one gets through the gates of Heaven without Him. How sad to be misled by false prophets or to gain the whole world, only to forfeit your soul to Hell.

Perhaps it is time to check our eternal boarding passes. Relying on church membership, good deeds, baptism or reciting a prayer card are sure to call us up short. Without relying on Jesus as our Savior and calling on Him as Lord, we are certain to miss the final boarding call to Heaven.

Baseball Is a Lot Like Life

Anyone can be a great winner. It takes a real champion to be a great loser.

Spring is here and the crack of the bat is being heard throughout the ballpark. With two aspiring major leaguers of my own I have participated in my fair share of America's favorite past time. The parents at these games are often more fun to watch than the kids. Even though I will have to admit there is nothing better than watching a T-ball season opener. You are almost always guaranteed to see at least one batter smack the ball and then accidentally head down the third base line! Oh the days of innocence.

Have you ever been to a little league baseball game where the best team didn't win? Maybe things didn't turn out the way they should have because an umpire made a bad call or a great player made an unusually bad play. Foaming at the mouth and screaming at the top of their lungs, otherwise loving and gentle parents turn into raging militant sports fanatics.

Haywood Hale Broun once wrote, "Sports do not build character. They reveal it." I've heard it said that you can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation. For the Christian it's not about always having to win. It's how you play the game that counts.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 makes it clear that the fastest runner doesn't always win the race and the strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The best player won't always win. Like baseball, there are many times that life just isn't fair.

Detroit Tigers Sportscaster Ernie Harwell once said, "Baseball is a lot like life. It's a day-to-day existence, full of ups and downs. You make the most of your opportunities in baseball as you do in life."

2 Timothy 4:7 says, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race and I have remained faithful." Anyone can be a good winner. Not everyone can be a good loser.

How you lose reveals who you really are. As Christians our greatest responsibility is to remain faithful to our calling not to how the call was made.

So sports fans remember 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, (*i.e. play baseball*) do it all for the glory of God." It's not about winning. As in life, it's about finishing well.

Rush Hour

Put people over projects.

It is called a lunch hour, but it feels more like a lunch flash to me. About the time I get my food, it is time to get up and go. For me, rush hour starts at noon!

During a recent dash to beat the lunch bunch, I fire-rocketed out the front door and merged my way onto the Interstate in hopes of beating a friend to the appetizers. I am confident I was in the lead until I started smelling smoke.

I thought to myself, could it be? The one time I was going to be the first to arrive, I would lose due to mechanical failure! Then I realized; it's not me! No, it's the crazy lady in the Volkswagen Beetle. Her car is on fire! Flames are shooting out from under her hood. She doesn't seem too worried, so why should I? Besides, I only have an hour. If I maintain my current pace, I will be first in line! But what if she doesn't realize the car is on fire? What if the Beetle blows up like a time bomb?

I had to do something. I stomped my foot on the accelerator, rolled down my window and began screaming and pointing at her car like a wild man. She responded with a look of total fear. At first I thought I had succeeded. But instead of acknowledging me, she sped up! Then it dawned on me. She thinks I am a road-raging idiot.

Because she was travelling so fast, the vehicle looked more like a dragster than a Love Bug. Flames were blowing by with no finish line in sight. Thankfully, she finally pulled over. But much to my amazement, she froze behind the steering wheel.

I rushed over, swung open the car door and yanked her from the vehicle. She immediately collapsed in shock not realizing the car was in flames until now. She undoubtedly thought she had a flat tire, but never dreamed her car was on the verge of exploding.

I can only imagine what onlookers must have thought as they saw a bald white man dragging an African American woman down the highway. I cared little about perceptions. I was just grateful she had escaped unharmed.

A friendly truck driver fought to get the fire under control as firefighters arrived on the scene. I held the woman in my arms as they fought to save her car. Despite their best efforts, the vehicle was a total loss.

I was late for my lunch appointment, but had the best of excuses. As I shared the excitement with my friend, I was reminded of the role we play as believers. Each day, we have opportunities to snatch people from the fires of Hell. But all too often, we hurry down life's highway ignoring the flames that shoot from their lives. We may beat the rush, but ultimately, we lose thousands of people, who unless forewarned, will continue fearlessly toward the flames.

Slow us down Lord. Pull us from the fast lane. Teach us the real meaning of rush hour. As II Corinthians 6:2 says, "... now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

The world is going up in blazes as we sip iced tea and feed our frantic faces.

Live Like There's No Tomorrow

Are you a bee or a butterfly? Life is short. Work hard and have fun.

In this day and age of advanced medical technology, we are living longer and stronger lives. I heard in a recent television advertisement that 40 is the new 30. I like the way that sounds, but the older I get, the more I like to think 50 is the new 30. The way things are looking, I'm not so sure my outward appearance is going to keep pace with that youthful zest made possible with all that technology.

I've got 100 years at best. In my younger days, getting old seemed like it would take forever. The days seemed to drag along. Would I ever become a teenager? How long until I could be trusted behind the steering wheel of a car? Would I ever get through finals and settle on a college major? When would I find the love of my life and that dream job I always wanted? Would we have one, two or a dozen kids? How long until the kids start counting the days until they move out, and I start checking the status of my nest egg?

Pretty much sums it up doesn't it? The minute we are born, we start dying. The time between the day we are born and the day we die is referred to on tombstones as the dash. This little symbol of life is a simple reminder that in the end, it is what you do with the dash that counts.

I can't think of too many things that are great about knowing you have a terminal illness. Hearing you only have a matter of time seems so final. What happened to the life you hoped to live? Things were moving along so well, and then life changed in a matter of seconds. The future dims, and every minute starts to count.

If a silver lining is to be found, perhaps this is it. Living like there is no tomorrow is the key to getting the most out of the dash. We act like we are going to live forever. The truth is, we are all going to die. No doubt this was on Solomon's mind when he wrote, "All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." Not the most pleasant representation on life, but he does make his point. In the end, these earthly bodies wear out and make for pretty good potting soil.

Praise be to God, the dash is not the end for believers in Jesus Christ. No amount of top soil is going to keep this ole boy from getting a new body and a new lease on life when Gabriel blows his horn. I'm looking forward to life eternal. I look forward to dashing out of here and praising the Lord all the day long. But until then, I think I will live like there is no tomorrow.

Beep, Beep

Nobody is perfect.

I'm a Ford truck man. Or should I say, "I was a Ford truck man." I have fallen victim to the price of oil. Gone are the good ole' days of riding high in the saddle, looking out over traffic from my gasoline-guzzling, hay hauling, eight cylinder, two tons of fun and molded steel. There is just something about a truck that appeals to the masculine nature. I'm in mourning.

It made sense to switch, but I never thought I would miss crawling up into my big rig and rolling around town like a modern-day cowboy. Doesn't the world just look better from inside a truck?

I'm trying my best to make the transition into a mini-SUV. I was certain sliding behind the steering wheel of an oversized go cart would come as less of a surprise. It's just not the same. I am amazed at how much of my identity was wrapped up in what now seems like a monster truck.

Traveling down the interstate, I possessed a sense of confidence and control. Eighteen-wheelers were kings of the road, but in my truck, even the longest convoy did not intimidate me. Now, despite a state-of-the-art air bag system, superior crash test ratings and customer satisfaction rankings, in my mini-SUV, I feel like a scooter among a pack of Harley Davidsons.

It is ridiculous, but I think my ego is suffering. I liked driving my truck, but I also liked the way I looked in it. I confess, when I think about my big, blue, long-bed, crew-cab beauty, I get a knot in my throat and a tear in my eye. Man, I miss that truck.

Driving a smaller car has its advantages. Parking is easier, take offs are faster and the miles per gallon are unbelievable. I was doing pretty good making the adjustment until an encounter with a family friend in a parking lot.

My friend commented on her admiration for the new mini-SUV. I explained how I missed my truck but things were better now that downsizing had become a reality. Then she said it, "Well it sure is cute." Her comments nearly threw me into therapy. Cute! Did she say my car was cute? I felt like popping out my chest and marching around like John Wayne.

Cute? In all my years nothing about me has ever been described as cute. Now, in less than a week, I am associated with a cute car! Not a fast car, sports car, muscle car and not even an economy car! No, I am the proud driver of a cute car!

She meant no harm. I am certain she was being complimentary. Her comments made me realize I am much more vain than I ever imagined. Most of the world walks to work and I am struggling with the size of my ride? It's time a get a grip!

Not only did I need a change in transportation, I needed a change of heart. My horn may now go beep-beep instead of honk-honk, but the experience has taken my pride through a major downsizing. That's a good thing for a former Ford truck man who has started memorizing Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."

Headwaters

You don't need the faith to finish. You need the faith to start.

It is truly a wonder of nature, a spectacular display of creation and a brief glimpse in into the mind of our incredible God. Rising some 600 feet into the air, its water rushes over the edge of a magnificent cliff and thunders down the side of the mountain as it crashes to the ground, spraying a dazzling mist on amazed and wide-eyed onlookers. It is none other than Oregon's Multnomah Falls, the second tallest year-round waterfall in the United States.

My wife and I stood at the base of the falls in awe of what we were witnessing. We were humbled by its size and to think that God had created this living work of art for our enjoyment. What a gift. What a God.

We were captivated by the top of the falls. And then we saw it, a sign that read, "Top of falls, one mile." Without hesitation we looked at each other, held hands, took a deep breath and took our first step toward the pinnacle of our fascination. It would be a tough journey to the top but one certain to reward its travelers.

We thought we were in shape, but before we made it to the first rest stop we realized this adventure would be harder than we suspected. As we caught our breath a slender, athletic man came jogging past us. He smiled at us, and we looked at each other in disbelief. We are gasping for air and he goes prancing by like a deer through a meadow. He's jogging and we are dragging. So much for working out at the gym, real men climb, no strike that, jog mountains!

It took effort, determination and desire, but in less than an hour, we made it to the top. The view from the pinnacle was more than amazing. The aches and pains of the climb quickly faded as the sound of the falls and the panoramic view took our breath away in a good way.

Standing on top of the world, I was reminded how the Christian experience is a unique personalized adventure on a journey with a God who dearly loves us. He is not only interested in us making it to the top; He is interested in every step we take along life's way. Too often we are tempted to give up, rely on ourselves or worse, to compare our Jesus journey with the experiences of others. Did I mention the mountain jogger made the trip three times before we were done?

We were made for mountain-top experiences. Abraham went to the mountain with Isaac. Moses met with God on the mountain. Jesus gave His life for us on a mountain. Mountains were created for us, and we were created for the mountains. The key is to experience Him on our journey to the top, to discover the headwaters, the source of the Living water that falls and flows into the very driest parts of our being, bringing new life to all that take Him in.

Aloysius

A good reputation can take a lifetime to build and be lost in an instant.

Countless cultural differences exist in the world today. But despite these differences there is at least one struggle every culture has in common, the struggle for integrity. It has been said that integrity is who you are when no one else is watching. The real you shows up when given the opportunity to act in anonymity.

On a recent three country journey in Africa I was privileged to secure a driver who is employed by World Vision. Water4 has partnered with World Vision on a 7,000 water well project throughout the region. Water4 is responsible for implementation of the project and World Vision provides its vast infrastructure as a means to add velocity and grassroots representation to the initiative.

Late one evening we were making our way to a modest guest house in Accra. We were tired and struggling with jet lag. We arrived safely and were looking forward to a hot shower and meal. As we nestled in for the evening our host knocked on our door. "You have a call on the house telephone," she said. I couldn't help but wonder who it might be. Was everything okay back home? Was there bad news from afar or was it one of my local comrades calling with an important message for the following day? When I reached the telephone I recognized the voice on the other end of the line. It was Aloysius, our driver. I was surprised he would have reason to contact me so late and with such urgency.

"Mr. Sanders I am sorry to bother you this evening but I wanted to advise you that I located your water bottle and business cards in my vehicle. I have secured them and will have them at the office for you tomorrow," he said. I hung up the telephone a little bewildered as to why Aloysius felt so compelled to let me know I had left a water bottle and a few business cards in his vehicle. It was nice but was it really necessary?

I settled in for the evening, emptied my pockets and laid my head down for some much needed sleep. Then it dawned on me! Water bottle? Business cards? No! Aloysius was talking about my wallet and business credit cards! I jumped out of bed, rummaged through my back pack, checked the pockets of my trousers and the counter by my bed. It was true! I had left my wallet and all its contents in the vehicle! Without it, I would be in a very bad way. Unless of course a man of integrity came to my aid.

How easy would it have been for him to have found my wallet, emptied its contents and pocketed the cash? He was alone. No one was watching. No one would ever know he had found my wallet. Certainly he could use the extra cash. Only earlier that day he had shared that he would have to take public transportation all through the night to attend the funeral of his older sister who died unexpectedly. How easy would it have been for him to have thought my wallet was an opportunity to offset his unexpected hardships? But no, he took the high road. He too wanted to sleep well that night knowing he had done the right thing.

Some may recognize the name Aloysius. In fact, they should. Many years ago there was an Italian saint named Aloysius. Of this I can assure you, there is a modern day saint named Aloysius as well. His parents picked the perfect name for their son. He is not Italian. Aloysius is an honest Ghanaian man who lives a life of integrity as he serves people everyday driving them from place to place with utmost integrity.

Aloysius will forever hold a place in my heart and serve as a reminder that integrity is truly doing the right thing, at the right time, even when no one is watching. May God bless Aloysius for he has certainly blessed me.

The 12-Minute Challenge

The Lord speaks to us through our knowledge of His Word.

It takes less than 12 minutes a day to read the Bible through in a year. It takes approximately 60 hours to read the Bible through annually. It takes 52 hours to read the Old Testament and 18 hours to read the New Testament. It takes 71 hours to read the entire Bible aloud.

The longest book, Psalms, takes about 5 hours. The book of Luke can be read in under 3 hours.

The Bible can be read 4 times a year when read less than one hour per day. There are about 622,771 words in the Old Testament and 184,590 in the New Testament, a grand total of 807,361. There are 39 books in the Old Testament. There are 27 books in the New Testament.

FUN OBSERVATION: $3 \times 9 = 27$ See it? 39 in old. 27 in the new.

I have a Chronological Bible Reading Plan that I use. I love it! If you are interested in the plan, let me know and I'll send it to you! My goal is to give each of my children and grandchildren a well read Bible, complete with margin notes and an accompanied prayer journal

Is God Crazy?

God never calls you to your comfort zone.

On more than one occasion Isaiah 55:8 has rolled through my mind, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord." Let's face it; there are plenty of times that God just doesn't seem to make sense. We see it time and time again throughout Scripture.

Put yourself in Noah's shoes. What if God called you to build a huge boat on dry ground without an ounce of humidity? Don't you know he was relieved when he saw the first rain cloud and heard the distant thunder?

What must have been going through Abraham's mind when God told him to pack up his belongings and go? Go where? No map, no GPS, just the word go. Then there is the whole kill your son Isaac episode. Talk about a crazy idea. Abraham recognized the voice of God and followed His calling despite how it might have appeared in the eyes of onlookers.

Then there was Moses, a guy with speech problems. Who wouldn't be nervous and need to rehearse their lines when confronting one of the most powerful men in the world? But God chose a man who tended to get tongue-tied to make His point.

Can you imagine being the prophet Hosea? How would you feel about God telling you to marry a prostitute? Imagine the jokes that went around the village when Hosea told his friends he was marrying Gomer the prostitute! He must have felt like a goober!

What about the prophet Isaiah? Burlap is certainly not as comfortable as cashmere but when God told him to shuck his clothes and walk around naked and barefoot, he had to be reaching for the sun tan oil! Yikes! You better have a closer walk with God if He calls you to wander around in your birthday suit.

Is God crazy? One thing is for sure, His ways are not our ways but His ways are always best.

God says, "Jump." We say, "Hold on." God says, "Go." We say, "Wait a minute." God says, "Trust me." We say, "I can't."

Is God calling you to do something crazy? You would be nuts not too! God has a way of demonstrating Himself through what we might consider loony. It may sound crazy, but God has a way of coming through time and time again. It is about faith. It is about trust. It really comes down to knowing God and walking in His presence. The more we are with Him, the easier it is to hear His voice and trust His heart even when we can't see His hand.

Is He crazy? His ways are not our ways. Why else would the God of the universe send His only son to die a brutal death in order to redeem lousy sinners like us? He is crazy all right. He is so crazy about us that He would do it again if only for one of us.

Gut Check

Jesus will take you right where you are, but He loves you too much to leave you there.

The gallon jug of the doctor's potion sat on the kitchen counter staring me down much like Goliath looked down his nose at the Israelites in the Valley of Elah. What had I gotten myself into? How would I ever devour this awful tasting gunk before I went to bed? Not to mention deal with the so-called, "cleansing effect." Nonetheless, I mustered the strength following a day of prescribed fasting and faced the medicine one big gulp at a time.

I was convinced that consuming a gallon of cleansing concoction would be no sweat. Halfway through the second hour, I was pleading for mercy. As much as I hated it, I knew if my colon exam was to be effective, I had to prepare the temple, so to speak. No way was the doctor going to blame a failed procedure on me. This Goliath was going down. By the final hour, I was begging for a break. My entire family was cheering me on. At last, the giant was slain, and I was the victor-so I thought. The final victory did not come until the wee hours of the morning.

There is something awkward about sitting in a doctor's office with a bunch of suffering patients who have survived a colon cleanse. Like kids whose hands were caught in the cookie jar by Mom, waiting for Dad to get home to dish out the punishment is the hardest part.

The fog in the waiting room cleared as the bubbly early morning-riser nurse cried out my name. Like a sheep led to slaughter, I obeyed, powerless to resist. In a matter of minutes, I was stripped of my pride and led to the exam room with nothing but an intravenous sleep tonic, a less than adequate hospital robe and my tennis shoes. Don't ask me why I got to wear my tennis shoes. It wasn't like I was going to run out of there looking like a failed super hero.

As the good stuff sent me off to sleep, I remember smiling and thinking, how could I feel any more vulnerable? These people will soon know me better than I know myself. I didn't enjoy having the gut check, but the procedure went fine. It is something I will have to do again and highly recommend, especially if you are getting up in years.

Now let me ask you this. When was the last time you experienced a spiritual cleansing? Are the sins in your life staring back at you like Goliath? Have they become a burden so heavy your life has become defeated and void of victory? Then maybe it is time you get vulnerable and schedule some alone time with the great Physician. He already knows you better than you know yourself, and in the end, no pun intended, you will walk away glad you did.

I hope I never run into my doctor and his exam team at the mall, but if I do run into you, I hope we both can put a smile on our faces knowing we've been humbled spiritually having survived a recent gut check.

The 3D Operating System

Leaders take initiative.

There is an old saying, “If you want something done right, do it yourself.”

There is something to be said about this advice. It assumes you know how to not only accomplish the task appropriately but it also assumes you are the right person for the job. You might know the right way but are you the right person?

A good filter for determining the answer is to ask yourself another question, “Is this the highest and best use of my time? Like any start-up organization, the Apostles found themselves trying to manage the challenges of a thriving movement. Good things were happening and fast. In the process, some of the finer details were starting to slip through the cracks. Rumbblings and grumbings were starting to appear as growing pains were sign of growth. Truth is, progress comes with a few stretch marks! The team was being stretched and it was starting to show in their countenance and cooperation toward a common goal.

What leadership lessons can we learn from Acts 6:1-5? I call it the 3D Operating System

1. Duplicate yourself
2. Delegate your duties
3. Do your job

The Apostles were at their personal limits. There is only so much time in the day. You can only do so much. Solution? Clone a “mini-me”! Duplicate yourself! You can’t do it all! You need help! Look for leaders who are well respected for their core competencies, are led by strong values and are known for making wise decisions.

What next? Delegate your duties. Everyone has different gifts and abilities. What are the things you are great at and are most suited for your strengths? Are there things you care doing that can be accomplished by other highly competent people? Who, if we are honest, might actually do an even better job? Stay in your lane! Operate from your sweet spot and determine what constitutes the highest and best use of your time and talents. Quite simply, delegate!

Finally, do your job. Stay focused on what you have to contribute to the team and trust others to do the same as you divide and conquer! God has given you certain gifts, talents and abilities that are unique to you. The same is true for others on your team. The key is in having everyone operate from their strengths. Highly functioning teams not only work well together, they find great satisfaction in knowing they contributed to the greater good. There is something special about knowing we did more together than we ever could alone.

I love the last line from Acts 6:5, “Everyone liked this idea.” When we duplicate ourselves, delegate duties and do our job according to the highest possible good, great things start to happen and everybody likes the idea! Try the 3D Operating System and you might just be surprised what gets done without you!

When No One's Watching

Obedience is its own reward.

What do you do when no one is watching? Are you different alone than when you are in the presence of others? It has been said that true character is who you are when no one is looking.

I recently sat in a parking lot waiting on my wife as she attended to business at a local women's boutique. As I quietly daydreamed, minding my own business, I noticed a family friend making her way to her car. She was not aware of my presence.

Before I knew it, she was crawling on the hood of her SUV, across the windshield and onto the roof of the vehicle. My otherwise tranquil slumber was interrupted as I was overcome with total amazement as my friend performed never-before-seen parking lot acrobats before my very eyes. It was as good, if not better, than any Barnum and Bailey circus act. This definitely qualified for Ripley's Believe It or Not.

Next thing I knew, she shimmied, twisted and squeezed her way through the sun roof like Santa Clause down a tight chimney on Christmas Eve. As if that weren't enough of a surprise, what happened next really caught my attention.

Once successfully inside the car, she didn't drive away. No, with keys in hand, she crawled back out the same way she came! Was the door jammed? Were the locks frozen? Apparently such was not the case. Elated, she be-bopped back into the retail shop and soon returned with shopping bag and keys in hand. The vehicle's doors were unlocked with ease as she slid behind the wheel and drove off smiling.

Did this really just happen? Would anyone believe what I just saw? At one point I did think about engaging the video function on my cell phone but ultimately opted out for fear of missing any of the action. Besides, what kind of a friend would ever reveal an incriminating mini documentary such as this to the world?

I couldn't help but wonder how the story may have changed if she had picked me up in the corner of her eye. Sure, I could have volunteered to help, but before I could sit up in my seat, she was climbing her SUV like a mountain climber on an expedition. Maybe that's where Ford got their idea for their monster SUV-from crazy ladies crawling on the hoods of their cars in urban parking lots.

Isn't it funny how our actions change when we know others might be watching? We somehow forget the One who matters most is watching all the time. Imagine what He sees from His vantage point.

Peterson explained it this way in *The Message*, "You can't keep your true self hidden forever; before long you'll be exposed. You can't hide behind a religious mask forever; sooner or later the mask will slip and your true face will be known."

Jesus let us in on the truth in Luke 12:2, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known." Give this some thought the next time you experience some alone time. Truth is there is always someone watching.

Ride of a Lifetime

Fear pulls us back, and doubt pushes against us as Satan tempts us to live comfortable lives.

One of the troubles with getting old is that you have more time to experience hurt, suffering, loss and pain. Likewise, the longer you hang around the more likely you are to experience blessings, joys, opportunities and pleasure. There are some things worse than dying and times when dying has a certain appeal. Nonetheless, a day filled with hope is a day worth living, a day worth fighting for. The future awaits us regardless of the path that leads us home. The life we live comes one breath, one minute and one day at a time. We all die and while we question when that day may come, perhaps rather than wonder, our focus should be on whether we have really lived at all during the time we have had. Let's agree to make the most of it, to spur one another on, lift each other up, stand in the gap and live life together to the fullest.

I want to cheat life rather than be cheated by life. I want to grab all I can and capture the memories of a life well lived. A life worn out not rusted through. Life abundant and filled with shared experiences and adventures.

I want to look back and wonder how I survived everything life brought my way. And then, when my day comes, I want to step into eternity with great expectations of more to come. Greater thrills, less spills and a lot of friends ready to party. Come on, lets go get it together!

I can't promise what tomorrow might bring but I can promise, if I live to see it, I am going to take in as much as I can hold onto and grab more than my share.

Life is scary but then again, most of the best rides at the amusement park are too. Since when has that stopped you? Buckle up! The good stuff is just around the bend on this ride of a lifetime!

Banana Peels

Communicate. Collaborate. Celebrate.

It is a simple task. One that even a monkey can do. Peeling a banana is easy. But perhaps you are like me and never considered optional ways to get to the middle of one of the world's most famous jungle fruits.

Optional peeling techniques for the potassium-packed staple food of the tropics was brought to my attention as I traveled the back roads of Armenia in an SUV full of missionaries and nationals.

Hungry and in need of a stretch, we decided to make a pit stop at a fruit stand and load up on the bright yellow and black striped treats. With bananas in hand, the Americans grabbed the top of their bananas and peeled away. The Armenians held their bananas with the stems down, pinched the reverse end of the banana and peeled back nature's wrapper to reveal the heart of the fruit. It was obvious we shared a love for bananas, but our perspectives on how to handle the packaging was on opposite ends of the, should I say, banana!

"Your banana is upside down," I announced to my friend from Armenia.

"No, your banana is upside down," she protested.

"You peeled your banana from the wrong end," I proclaimed.

"Your way is more difficult," she insisted.

I have enjoyed bananas in my cereal, floated bananas in ice cream, dipped bananas in chocolate and added them to my peanut butter sandwich. But never, ever, not even once in all my years had I even thought of peeling a banana from any angle other than from the stem.

I ate my banana and reached for another. This time I employed the Armenian technique. To my amazement, my friend was right. I had often struggled to peel the perfect banana with my approach. I estimate that at least 10 percent of my banana peels blow out and I end up with a stem in one hand and an unpeeled banana in the other. But using the Armenian peeling method, not one of my banana peels failed. Plus, I found with the stem at the bottom my banana had a more ergo-dynamic feel about. I assured my Armenian friends that I was going to do my best to introduce America to their superior banana-peeling technique.

So there you have it. My promise has been kept. I have done my best to introduce the world to the wiser, Armenian banana-peeling technique. You can't stand it, can you? I can see it now, thousands of readers jumping to their feet, running to the kitchen determined to peel away.

As you dare to attempt something new with something you have held in your hand for so long, remember to apply the banana principle to other areas of your life. As you peel away old ideals, you are often rewarded with a better and wiser way! Sounds a lot like Proverbs 11:2 to me, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." Humble yourself and then go peel away at a higher level!

Fireflies for Jesus

Hug longer. Show more mercy. Give more grace and love always.

I recently ventured into the woods as a dazzling sunset made its way behind the hills of a fabulous state park in eastern Oklahoma. As darkness thickened, the sounds of nightfall tickled my ears as an orchestra of nocturnal creatures performed for an audience of one. The deeper I ventured into the woods, the more impressive the performance became. The simple sound of nature at play was magnificent.

As I opened my eyes, I was greeted by the second act. A brilliant lightshow danced before my eyes as fireflies made their entrance onto the stage of the forest. Hundreds of glowing fireflies floated mid-air among the trees. They were there and gone again in a flash before appearing once again within a few feet of their last illumination. It was as if they had synchronized their choreography with that of the crickets, cicadas and bullfrogs. The woods came alive with the sound of music, and I had a front row seat.

My mind drifted back to memories of chasing lightning bugs, another common name for fireflies, from one yard to the next with my brother as a boy. It was a time when neighborhoods were void of fences and young lads were free to play from house-to-house. The lightning bugs fascinated us. Were they electrically charged? Did they actually stoke a fire in their bellies in order to light up the night? Apprehending a lightning bug was part luck and part skill. Elusive as they were, occasionally being at the right place at the right time proved effective.

As it turns out, God created fireflies with an innate ability to communicate through the use of light. Bioluminescence is the phenomenon of light emission by living organisms. While many insects exhibit this ability, lightning bugs do it best.

Each lightning bug species has a specific flash pattern. Certain lightning bugs flash continuously. Others utilize single flashes. Some incorporate a series of multi-pulsed flashes, while a few don't flash at all.

Lightning bugs are a lot like Christians. God recreated us with an innate ability to be light in a dark world. Some of our lights flash continuously, while some of our lights tend to be on the blink or not functioning at all.

Matthew 5:16 says, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven." We are all called to be lightning bugs, fireflies for Jesus, as the magnificence of His presence shines through our very lives.

It is the light from within that makes a firefly attractive. A lightning bug without its light is nothing more than an ugly beetle. It is the Light from within that makes a believer attractive. A life enlightened by Him is never satisfied with darkness, but rather seeks to shine in order to draw others from the perils of the night.

Pajamas Hanging Out?

Admit when you are wrong. Saying, "I'm sorry," is one of the best ways to say, "I love you."

When was the last time you bought a piece of luggage? Like a lot of things, luggage has gone high-tech. Not only does luggage come in all shapes, colors and sizes, but you can also now buy luggage with wheels that roll in all directions, handles that slide up and down and more pockets and zippers than a tailor's shop.

Good luggage makes life on the road more enjoyable. Push it, pull it, roll it and maneuver it as you please, today's luggage has the world traveler in mind. All is well until you blow a wheel, aggravate a zipper or break a handle.

I should know. I had the unfortunate experience of luggage equipment failure. Everything was going well until the handle to my suitcase wouldn't come out from hiding. I yanked it, begged it and pried on it. I stabbed it with a ballpoint pen. Nothing. Apparently, my new-fangled suitcase was equipped with a mind of its own.

I made the adjustment. I looped a bandana around the handle and moved ahead. My suitcase began beating at the back of my legs. If I crouched in just the right position, I could make reasonable progress. My hand turned purple as the makeshift handle impaired my circulation.

Things got worse before they got better. A well-meaning police officer sent me in the wrong direction and added another 80 miles to my walk from the subway to the hotel. Okay, it wasn't 80 miles, but it sure felt like it. I know it had to be at least a mile or two. Have you ever hauled (notice I didn't say pushed, pulled or rolled) luggage for a mile? It is horrible! How the children of Israel must have felt wandering around in the wilderness, circling round and round. Talk about déjà vu. I've been there and don't care to go back!

By the time we reached the hotel, I had worn a hole in the bottom of my suitcase. Much longer, and my pajamas would have been out in the open for all to see. I'm positive one of my arms is now longer than the other. I'll admit that it has come in handy when dusting the top of the refrigerator. Nevertheless, I eventually ditched my high-tech luggage in favor of a souped-up duffle bag.

When it comes to the Christian life, many of us are dragging around a ton of old, worn-out luggage. We may do a good job calling sin something else, or we find ways to hide its ugliness. But let's face it: we all have baggage that brings us shame and weighs us down.

Perhaps it is an old habit that we just can't break. Or a sin we can't release. Forgiving both ourselves and others is often the hardest part. So we hang on to our old baggage because it is all we know.

Jesus said He came to give us abundant life. He is happy to exchange our old baggage for a new life. It sure beats running around with your pajamas hanging out! What do you say?

The Dying Man

Begin with the end in mind.

I met a dying man today. The clues to his demise were few. He seemed so happy and at peace despite the fact that just hours before, he had received and endured another round of chemotherapy.

It is not every day that you meet a dying man. But then again, that is not true. I look at a dying man every day in the mirror. I haven't been diagnosed with a terminal illness, but my days are numbered nonetheless. Are there clues to my demise?

For the man I met, dying is a matter of perspective. Some receive death notices while others are met with death by surprise. The truth is, we are all dying. The difference is what we do with the daylight we have.

In the end, we all die. Some people live more in a day than some do in an entire lifetime. It's not the number of days you live, but how you live them that count. My dying friend made the decision to seize every minute of every hour, every day. He considered his notice on life a gift. He sees every day as an opportunity to look a little longer, to hug a little more often and to express his love as often as he can.

Someday, it will be his last time to kiss his wife, play with his kids, drink a cup of coffee, eat a donut, go for a walk, go to church or watch a sunset. Eventually he will breathe his last breath. His heart will stop and his eyes will close. His time will have come.

The same is true for each of us. Somehow, we have it in our minds that we will live forever. We determine that time is on our side. The need to apologize can wait. The opportunities to express our appreciation will be many. Surely we will have enough time to get things right with God. Won't we?

Time is ticking. Life is passing us by. I will never forget the day my fifth child was born. She was born on her oldest sister's 10th birthday. As I sat there in the hospital room, loving life, I remember thinking, so this is what a decade looks like. My, how time flies.

Jesus only lived 33 years. If Jesus were 33 today, he would have been born in 1974. In 1974, Richard Nixon resigned as U.S. President, Hank Aaron tied Babe Ruth's home-run record, Muhammad Ali knocked out George Foreman and "Happy Days" began its 11th year on ABC. A lot can happen in 33 years, but 33 years is not very long to live.

I have news for you. You may not have heard it from your doctor, but you are dying. I can't give you the time or place, but your day is coming. Hebrews 9:27 makes it very clear that we are destined to die. Now you know. The question is what you will do with the time you have left?

Perhaps you think you have never met a dying man. Think again. Take a good look in the mirror. Your days are numbered. Getting all you can out of this life includes making provisions for life hereafter. Are you ready?

Peck and Peek*The best days are so full of potential they leave little room for regret.*

Before we get much further, let me be clear. I am a computer operator not a computer programmer, developer or whiz kid. I do well to peck my way through word processing software. My astute high school typing training continues to haunt me. Let's just say I am all thumbs. I still peek at the keyboard. When I want to start a new line, I think you have to press return, not enter. Suggesting this command to younger co-workers often results in a bewildered look.

My age is starting to show in more ways than one. When I was in high school, electric typewriters were the rage. The first personal computers were just starting to become available as I graduated from college. I still remember the day, as a young corporate executive, that I watched a printed page roll out from the bottom of a desktop printer. I saw it as a sign of the end times! How could life get any better? But then came the fax machine. Talk about amazing!

I pounded out correspondence on a typewriter for years. Misspell a word and you were forced to start over. Making a correction was painful. You had to back space, insert a thin piece of white filmed paper between the typewriter and the document. Once alignment was achieved the incorrect key was then re-fired. As a result, the incorrect letter was covered in white. It was very important that you hit back space again and then type the correct letter. If you were not on top of your game, you would type the new letter over one space too many and the whole process had to be restarted! Typewriters were not very forgiving. Mistakes could be rectified but not without a lot of finagling.

My first personal computer cost \$3,000 and had about as much memory as a floppy disc. Oh, my. Here we go again. I will save the floppy disc history lesson for another day when I report on eight-track tapes!

As you know, computer capacities, speeds and efficiencies continue to dramatically change. Who could deny that technology has made things better? The world is truly a better place. Or is it? Things may be better, but are we? With all the change that has taken place, the people on the other side of the screen have changed little.

Some believe education is the key to change. Others see innovation as our hope. Still others are convinced that with just a little more money, everything will be much better, and our problems will simply fade away.

Times may change and things may change, but people don't change until they have a change of heart. Jesus is in the heart-changing business. Rest assured that those who have truly given their lives to Him and trusted in Him have been changed forever. When it comes to following Jesus, once you are changed, you are always changed. Finding Jesus is like discovering a computer after having spent years pecking and peeking away at a typewriter. Who would ever want to go back to the way things were? Not me!

The Comb Over

Are you willing to put your name on it? Even more importantly, His?

As a boy, I hated giving up summer freedoms for the confinements of a new school year. Stiff new jeans, unsharpened pencils and early morning oatmeal were no competition for bare feet, shorts and a bologna sandwich. I preferred sleeping in and crawdad fishing to reading and writing.

I was a little hefty growing up. "Big boned," my mom would say. Being redheaded and freckle faced made me a little self-conscious. Like a lot of kids, I picked up fashion hints from afternoon television. These were the days of "The Brady Bunch," "The Partridge Family" and "Gilligan's Island."

I was a comb over kind of kid. Your basic All-American haircut fit me fine. Trips to the barbershop were cool. Jumping into a huge chair with a leather razor strap made you feel like a man.

The barber teased you about getting a girlfriend, popped an apron on your neck and went to work. I can still hear the sound of those electric shears as they buzzed around my ears. The vibration and hum had a way of lulling you to sleep.

Sitting among men with faces full of shaving cream was part of my initiation into manhood. The fishing stories and discussions about past wars had a way of making you proud to be a boy.

The sweet smell of aftershave was your clue that your haircut was complete. A piece of Double Bubble chewing gum served as your reward. Initially the flavor burst in your mouth but soon turned as hard and tasty as gristle.

At the end of one summer, before heading back to school, I decided to bypass the barbershop, lose the comb over and go instead with the new, in style, feathered look.

I'll never forget the panic attack I experienced as I drew closer to school on the first day of class. I wasn't sure I could handle the thought of seeing my friends and them asking, "What did you do to your hair?"

I broke out into a sweat as I approached the schoolyard. I caved to the pressure as I messed up my hair and reestablished my comb over. Whew! What was I thinking? My feathered hair flew away like goose down in a windstorm.

In the coming weeks, my lack of courage and confidence bothered me. These were not the manhood principles I had learned at the barbershop. I mustered the courage and once again parted the waters. The results proved positive as a few girls I admired took notice of my new hairdo and liked it.

What is the point? I'd give anything for a part in my hair today. No, not really. The point is, like it or not, people are watching us every day. We serve as examples for what it means to be Christ followers. Like the men in the barbershop, I hope to serve as a lasting source of encouragement and confidence for others. Bad hair days or not, our lives can always make a lasting difference.

Are You Asking for It?

Trust and obey.

Are you asking for it? Aren't we all more affective when we lean on His wisdom?
His wisdom. It is one prayer away. He promises to answer.

As believers, we have access to God's wisdom. God will guide us if we ask and listen.
There is a reason Psalm 46:10 encourages us to be still and know! Ask? Yes! Be still? Yes!
Know? There is only one way to find out!

Are you asking for it? If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. James 1:5 Ask for it. He will give it!

Favorite Things Bring Sunshine

Expect the best. You find what you are looking for.

The older I get, the more I have come to realize that life isn't always peachy. Some days are just a lot tougher than others. Getting out of bed isn't always easy when you have had dark clouds chasing you for weeks.

It is on days like these that I am tempted to call in sick and remedy my woes with some well deserved alone time. Life seems better with my head buried beneath a soft fluffy pillow. I escape the worries of the world in a place where my mind shifts into neutral. The demands of the day are silenced.

Try as I might, hiding from the sunlight never seems to solve any of the challenges I'm facing. The longer I wait to face the music, the harder it gets to resolve the issues at hand. At some point, reality sets in and I have to crank myself off the mattress and into this thing we call life.

The smell of freshly-brewed coffee has a way of awakening my inner strength. I'm not sure if it is the comforting warmth of the coffee cup between my hands or the stimulating caffeine that gets my motor running. Either way, it's one of my favorite things. Who would have ever thought that coffee pits, when freshly ground, would be the breakfast of champions? You knew coffee beans are really coffee pits didn't you? Coffee is one of my favorite things.

Do you remember the lyrics from the Sound of Music? "Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens, brown paper packages tied up with strings, these are a few of my favorite things. Cream colored ponies and crisp apple streudles, doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles, wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings, these are a few of my favorite things. Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes, snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes, silver white winters that melt into springs, these are a few of my favorite things. When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I'm feeling sad, I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don't feel so bad."

Favorite things have a way of bringing sunshine into an otherwise lackluster day. Favorite things serve as little motivators to get us through the bumps, curves and valleys of everyday life. Sometimes, it's a favorite song, a favorite dessert or a favorite Scripture that brings breakthrough.

God knew we would have days like these. I think that is why He gave us a simple little reminder in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things."

These are a few of God's favorite things. When His thoughts become my thoughts, come what may, it's going to be a God-sized day.

Return on Investment

No man is self-made. Everyone owes someone for the power of personal influence.

Growing up in a small town has its advantages and disadvantages. You know everyone and everyone knows you. It is hard to get lost in a small town. It seems everybody knows everybody's business.

As a young driver I noticed an old AMC Rambler that had been parked for months in front of a fellow church member's house. Curious about the vehicle, I inquired about the status of the iron horse parked idle at curbside. As it turns out the owner was willing to sell me the car for exactly one dollar if I would drive it away. I made the purchase without a test drive.

I was amazed when the engine turned over on the first crank. In a matter of no time I was traveling about town picking up friends for a joy ride. Before long we found ourselves cruising down country roads kicking up gravel and mowing down ditches like Bonnie and Clyde after a bank robbery. At one point we chased cows in a farmer's field and drove so fast over terraces that the engine died following one of our many crash landings. We were young, reckless, carefree, and admittedly, just a little bit crazy.

Once we pulled ourselves from the headliner, bent the bumper back into place and set the battery right-side-up, we gave the old AMC Rambler a bath and put a for sale sign in the window. In less than one day I sold it for \$250. Talk about a return on investment!

As I look back on my life I sometimes feel like that old AMC Rambler. Even when I didn't feel like I was worth much there were people who invested in me and recognized my potential. They saw something in me that no one, not even I, could see.

I won't soon forget the school teachers who encouraged me to develop my writing skills, fellow classmates who encouraged me to run for student council, a basketball coach who assured me my work ethic would pay off some day, a youth minister who helped me discover who I was in Christ, the encouraging words from a mother who let me know how proud she was of her son, a wife who stood beside me through thick and thin and children who made me feel like I was on top of the world as they greeted me at the door after a long hard day at the office. I am especially grateful for men like Anthony Jordan, Robert Haskins, Rue Scott and Ron Fannin who saw the leader in me long before I saw it myself. Because of them, I am a better man.

As I look to the future, with change stirring in the wind, I am especially grateful for a God who cared enough to make an investment in me. He gave His all in order that I might live. I pray my life, as well as yours, provides Him with an incredible return on investment as we strive to bring Him glory and honor as we invest in the lives of others.

Motorcycle Maniac

If we ask for wisdom, He will give it.

have never been afraid of work. I bought my first lawn mower at the age of 9. I mowed nearly every lawn on our block. There was something satisfying about earning an honest day's pay for an honest day's work.

One summer, my brother joined me in the lawn mowing business. Together, we were set on owning the market. If there was a lawn to be mowed in our neck of the woods, we were sure to cut it.

Most of our lawns were within walking distance. These were the days before weed eaters. Curbs and driveways were groomed with a hoe. Houses were edged by hand with a pair of shears. I can still hear the sound of those shears as I crawled around each house. My knees and palms were grass stained, but my grip was like a vice.

Eventually, my hard work paid off, and I was able to buy a motorcycle. The experiences I had on that motorcycle determined that if my children were to ever enjoy two-wheeled transportation, they would do so using pedals. On more than one occasion, I nearly took my last ride. I was a motorcycle maniac. I should have realized motorcycles weren't for me when I drove my motorcycle to the driver's license testing station, failed the test and then drove home again without a license! How I escaped without a ticket baffles me to this day.

I eventually passed the driving test. On one hot afternoon, my brother was finishing a lawn on the far side of our territory. I got a bright idea. Why should my brother push the lawn mower all the way back home when I could give him a lift?

Rather than sit on the motorcycle seat with me, we decided it would be best if we tied the mower to my motorcycle, and my brother sat on the engine of the mower. Getting started was the hard part. Once we got the mower rolling, at approximately 25 M.P.H., the lunging and weaving stopped and the ride became manageable; that is until we passed a police officer.

I don't think he believed what he saw. I can imagine the call over the police scanner. "Yeah, this is One Adam 12. You're not going to believe this, but I just saw a young white male on a push mower chasing another young white male on a motorcycle. Strike that. I am now in pursuit. The mower is being towed by the motorcycle!"

We were pulled over one block from our house. Rather than give us a ticket, he made us push the motorcycle and the mower the rest of the way home.

Looking back on the experience, I am reminded of Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." Thank the Lord we didn't succeed in killing ourselves that day.

I have learned it is much better to do as Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." That is good advice for every man.

Going Automatic

Lies and laziness lead nowhere.

They can scare you to death if you aren't careful. You will recognize one when you see it. If you cross paths with another human being waving their hands in front of a paper-towel dispenser, beware, you are within striking distance. Restroom wash basins are going automatic. If you aren't prepared to awaken the beast, stepping in front of one of these tongue wagging paper dragons can send a shiver down your spine.

I wouldn't mind having a talk with the guy who adjusts how much paper towel you get from the dispenser. He thinks he is being sneaky by limiting the amount of paper, but he doesn't have anything on me. I get all the towels I want by simply impersonating a traffic cop. I have had a few funny looks, but when I wave my hands and kick my feet, the towels just keep coming! Maybe I would get less looks if I lost the whistle.

Automation is like magic. Wave your hand and water comes pouring. Clap your hands and light appears. I was on an airplane not too long ago, and once we reached cruising altitude, the captain appeared walking about the cabin. You guessed it, we were on autopilot! On the way to work, I've seen a few women applying makeup while driving behind the steering wheel of their cars. I didn't realize automobiles were so advanced. Now that is technology!

Several years ago, friends from rural Africa visited me in America. These are some of the sweetest and brightest people I know. However, I never pass up an opportunity to have a little fun. You should have seen them scream when the automated doors swung open at the shopping mall. If you think that was bad, you should have seen them when we went down a glass elevator! It was cruel, but it was incredibly fun to watch. They enjoyed it so much they wanted to go up and down the elevator over and over again. Shoppers thought they were elevator operators!

A friend of mine is convinced shoppers would stay longer and spend more money if shopping malls installed moving sidewalks. I think he might be right.

As much as I love automation, there are a few places where automation just won't work. Putting your relationship with your spouse and kids on automatic is a bad idea. Those closest to us need hands-on attention. When we go on automatic, they see right through our insincerity and want to pull the plug.

Putting our Christian walk on automatic is a dangerous proposition as well. As Christians we tend to settle into routines. An automated spiritual journey can become mundane and often robs us of our passion for Christ.

Romans 12:11 reminds us to never be lacking in zeal, but to keep our spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Going automatic is great so long as it doesn't deprive us of our zeal. Think about that the next time you get caught waving your hands at the lavatory. It's OK, you can use the whistle so long as no one is looking!

How Annoying!

Anger is often triggered by fear, frustration, food, fatigue, frigidity and pharmaceuticals.

Annoyances are such a pain. So many little annoyances are constantly nipping and sticking, picking and prodding into our lives. Take them away Lord! We beg you! Rid us of this nonsense! They are driving us crazy! We can't shake them off. They are, yes, thorns in our flesh. Stickers in our socks! Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12, reminds us that such nuisances are allowed into our lives in order that we might come to realize God's grace (blessings) are enough. Difficulties, troubles and challenges, when put into proper perspective, actually make us better and stronger as they prepare us for life's greater obstacles. As they say, "no pain, no gain." Or as the Lord says, "My grace (blessings) will see you through. Where you are weak, you are made strong as little annoyances prepare you for greater things to come." Little annoyances are big reminders that His grace is sufficient! When life gets sticky, start counting your blessings. His blessings will see you through!

Warrior or Worrier

There is no magic in prayer—just power!

It was late, and a friend was in trouble. He called me for prayer. As I hung up the phone, he said, "I knew I could count on you. You are a prayer warrior." I was honored that he called in a time of need. I was especially honored that he considered me a prayer warrior. As my heart turned toward Heaven, the sound of his voice lingered in my mind, "I knew I could count on you. You are a prayer warrior."

What an incredible responsibility. Could I be counted on in a time of need? If my prayer was to be the tie-breaker concerning a matter of life or death, could I even get a hearing in Heaven? As the spiritual battlefield is assembled, can I pull my weight? When family and friends count on me to join them in calling on Heaven's power, do I have a prayer?

When it comes to crisis, I often feel more like a worrier than a warrior. James promises the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Based on the results I sometimes get, it is easy to second-guess the power and effectiveness of my prayers.

Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." This verse was written for worriers like me. I find it hard to approach the Lord with confidence knowing He knows me better than I know myself. I feel so unworthy. But this verse reminds me that my righteousness is not based on my own ability but on His mercy and grace. Whew! I feel better already.

The more I pray, the more I realize prayer has more to do with changing my heart than it does the heart of God. Prayer simply reminds me that He is in control and that worrying about a situation or circumstance will prove ineffective. But the prayer of a righteous man—now that is the makings for a real prayer warrior.

Being a warrior takes practice and preparedness. It is hard to imagine a soldier walking into battle without first preparing himself for war. Daily drills prepare him for the day when his training is needed most.

It is no different for the prayer warrior. Daily prayers prepare the prayer warrior for the times when someone calls seeking comfort from a friend who gets his orders from the Man upstairs. It is then that the prayer warrior is called into action. He is ready, able and honored to fulfill his duty.

Being a warrior or a worrier is a matter of choice. If we are who we say we are, then we are under obligation to be the real deal. Our friends and family are counting on us. When we show up, all of Heaven stands ready to respond.

Attench-hut soldier! This is war. The Jesus journey requires warriors to have trust and faith in the divine commander and chief. Worriers need not enlist. The warrior's journey with Jesus is one of leaps and bounds, mountains and valleys, highs and lows, challenges and triumphs. It is anything but boring. It is an adventure to be discovered, a life to be explored, not as a worrier but as warrior of the Lord.

Your response in time of need will define you as a prayer warrior or worrier. Forward march! Let's approach the throne with confidence, knowing His mercy and grace are sufficient. And as Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Prayer: Lord, remind me that I am a warrior, a liberator and ambassador of truth; loving you and loving others as I love myself, even loving my enemies as I remain committed to advancing the revolution of love.

The Quail Hunters Club

Peace and His presence are proportionate.

We had been talking about it for months. When the day finally came, I was armed and ready. I would be joining my sons, father-in-law and several other older men on my first quail hunt. I was the rookie of the bunch. My boys had been on hunting adventures with their grandfather before, but this was my first expedition with the "Quail Hunters Club."

These are seasoned and serious hunters. When it comes to hunting, they aren't messing around. My wife loves shoes, but when it comes to gear, she has nothing on these guys. They have more gadgets and outfits than a Boy Scout has knots. Orange is the color of choice and camouflage is always in season.

We slept in a bunkhouse complete with real bunk beds, a wood-burning stove and plenty of mounted wildlife. No matter where I went in the room, it seemed some dead animal always had his eye on me.

As the lights went out, it was a race to see who would be first to sleep. The loser would live to regret it. Failing to find sweet dreams early meant tossing and turning as you fought to drown out the snoring from your fellow grizzly bears. I lost. I didn't sleep a wink.

Morning came early. Guys in their 60s live on a different time schedule. The alarm clock went off at four in the morning. "Are the birds up this early," I thought to myself as I wrestled with my sleeping bag. What is it about a sleeping bag? How is it possible for something so soft and cuddly to get so twisted around your leg? At one point, I was certain I had been captured by a boa constrictor!

Like soldiers preparing for battle, each hunter covered his body with armor. One hunter slid on a pair of snake boots that hit him at his knees. Did I get the wrong memo? I thought we were hunting quail, not rattlesnakes!

After breakfast, we unleashed the dogs and marched into the prairie grass in search of unfortunate fowl. The birds may have stood a chance if we had been left to ourselves, but with the highly trained dogs, they would have been smart to just raise a white flag and surrender. I soon discovered the beauty of a dog on point. It is nothing short of fascinating. What is obvious to them remains hidden from us.

The experience reminded me of I Corinthians 2:9, ". . . no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." I learned to trust the dogs. They saw things differently than I did. In my Christian walk, I have learned to rest in the One who knows everything. While I may have no idea what He is up to, like hunting with a dog who shakes a covey of quail loose, it all becomes clearer when I wait patiently to see what He has prepared for me.

Bits, Bites and Bald-Faced Lies

Those who can't be big, belittle.

Before calling for someone's head on a platter, casting a strong opinion or making an important decision, we need to make sure we take a good look at the circumstances. When gaining a perspective it is always best to make sure we have plenty of facts and are well informed.

Sometimes it is what we don't know that we need to know most in order to draw the right conclusion.

Things aren't always as they seem and he who speaks first often seems right until the second has spoken.

What if you are wrong? What if your sources are biased or misinformed? Worse, what if their perspective is motivated by self preservation in order to maintain status and position? What if they are simply drawing conclusions and making grave assumptions? What if half truths have worked their way into so called reality? We tend to believe what we want to hear. All too often we believe what we hear with no regard to the source or verification of the facts. There is a word for this phenomenon. Gullible. What if the roles were reversed? What if it was you who was misunderstood and it was you who others were misinformed? How would you hope to be treated if others were misinformed about you? Certainly you would welcome an opportunity to provide clarity and the benefit of the doubt in the least. In these days of sensational headlines, sound bites and high speed internet it is a good idea to be cautious about what we share realizing that we are at great risk of diluting the facts with bits, bites and balded-faced lies. Drawing conclusions from an illusion is magic at best and falsehood in all likelihood.

Be careful what you bite on. It might just come to bite you back!

Number 262

I recently attended a men's gathering in Estes Park, Colorado where door prizes were being raffled off. I was one among 250 men whose number was called.

I heard, "262!"

"That's me! I won, "I exclaimed as my buddies cheered me on.

I strutted. I pranced and I gave the victory sign as I made my way to the front to seize my prize in front of the energized crowd of men.

As I went to pick up my bounty, the facilitator sought to confirm my ticket.

My reply, "262!"

His response, "262? That number is on every ticket. Sorry man, you aren't a winner."

I was in shock, embarrassed and wanted to crawl under anything that would spare me the joy of walking back to my seat empty-handed.

It was an honest mistake that was founded in the idea that I simply heard what I wanted to hear. I thought one thing but the facts revealed reality. Not everyone is a winner. Not everyone gets the prize. Ignorance isn't always bliss.

Here is the truth. I didn't need a blue raffle ticket to inform me that I had won. Truth is, I had already won. I had taken a private jet to the mountains of Colorado, slept with the coolness of the mountain air dancing at my toes, viewed amazing wildlife within a stones throw, and enjoyed time with a group of guys who desired to get back to nature and get closer to God. I was a winner and so were they.

I'm going to keep this coupon. The number 262 will forever remind me that sometimes in life we need simple reminders that we have already won even when we lose, especially when walking through life with a Band of Brothers!

Who walks through life with you and cheers you on even when you come back empty-handed looking like a fool?**China Chuckles**

Little things make a big difference.

I have been to many countries with my travel buddy, Ross Hill. Together, we have been on the back roads of Africa, in the jungles of Latin America and on high speed trains in Asia. It is fair to say we are passionate about doing what we can to try to make a difference when given the opportunity to interact with people from around the globe. But never have I laughed so hard as I did recently during one of our Giant Experiences' Values Leadership Forums in China.

Let's just say Ross was center stage and had the whole room in a roar. It was not so much because he is known for his comic routines but because the interaction between him and his interpreter was getting downright ridiculous.

Public speaking is challenging enough in but especially when in front of highly educated business leaders from one of the world's most powerful nations. The pressures and tensions are high to say the least. You had to be there to truly appreciate it, but as Ross shared a point from his speech, there would be an unusually long pause between the spoken word and the interpretation. The rhythm soon got out of sync as east met west on stage. The interpreter was trying his best to keep up with Ross and Ross was trying hard to accommodate his understudy with patient persuasion. The interpreter began to express his playful frustration in an effort to get his interpretation absolutely right. Ross, in his attempts to assist with the cultural divide, got

tickled. That is when the whole thing unraveled and the room came alive with uncontrollable laughter.

Seeing a robust American banker in total loss of control with giggles and belly rolls of laughter in the midst of a serious talk about the world's economic crises, was all it took to push the audience over the edge! It was out of control and everyone loved it! The China chuckles were loose and the forum reached new heights of friendship and enthusiasm.

I have often heard that a smile in any language is smile. For certain was the case during my recent journey to the far east with my dear friend. Life is too serious not to have some fun along the way. Thanks to Ross, and our unsuspecting interpreter, the world was a brighter place, if not for a little while, on that otherwise very normal day. If only the world could catch a case of the China chuckles, then, for sure, the world would be a better place!

Here I Come*You only get one shot at once-in-a-lifetime experiences.*

I don't know if anyone else my age has noticed but getting up the hill sure seemed to take a lot longer than the ride down the backside. Once you are over the hill you better hold on. The pace picks up as the wrinkles deepen!

Where has all the time gone? My wife and I were at dinner recently with close friends. We happened to be at the right place at the right time. Dinner was blessed by the wooing tunes of a 60-something Neil Diamond wanna-be lounge singer.

Don't get me wrong, but do get the picture right, this guy was good, suave, debonair and old!!!! He had the ladies eating out of his hand.

He loved it. They loved it and we loved watching the gray-haired debutantes love it.

Then it hit me. I am closer in age to these Botox super-injected seniors than I am to my oldest daughter! What?!!!! No!! Wait!!! Slow down this train. Somebody hit eject on this cruise ship to the nursing home. Man over board! I'm out of here! By the looks of this bunch, there is definitely something worse than dying, it's called getting old!

I'm starting to feel it. It's sneaking in. I'm trying to resist it, but my eyes, despite their sags, aren't lying! I'm losing it! Who I was is fading away and who I am becoming looks more like Tim Conway doing the shuffling old man routine than I care to admit!

It took them a while. I don't know what they were drinking but it wasn't long before the bones quit aching and hips started shaking. These seniors were going down fighting. They may have been old but they weren't going to let that stop them. They would rather die trying to have a good time than just sit on their buttocks, not to be confused with Botox, and waste away.

So today I went to pick up a pair of new waders from Cabela's for my up and coming flying fishing trip. They rang up at \$159. I assured the cashier that they were suppose to be \$149. She called for a price check. We waited a while so I decided to lend a hand. Certain that I was correct I snapped a pic of the price and headed back to the checkout stand.

It was about this time that my vision blurred and my life went into instant replay slo-mo mode. Her voice deepened and everything she said was then in that spooky undercover eyewitness voice you hear on cop shows where you only see a silhouette.

Like a bad call in the NFL she looks at the pic and declares, "Upon further review it appears the ruling at the register stands. The price is in fact \$159." What? I took a closer look and there it was. Regular fit was \$149 but stout fit was indeed \$159!

I had been busted by a fat tax!

All I have to say is, the fish better be biting! My big butt has cost me another \$10 and I haven't even got my hook wet!

So, I suppose I will be joining them sooner rather than later on the dance floor. It might require a walker with yellow tennis balls to shake my sagging waste line, but trust me, I'll be there, lighter in hand, arm in the air, screaming like a teenager as the lounge singer clears his throat, takes a long drag off his cigarette and gives the ladies more than their pacemakers can handle!

Look mom no hands! Here I come! The ride down the hill on the back half of 100 ain't so bad as long as you are alive!

Do Cuss or Discuss?

A friend steps in when the rest of the world steps out.

When it comes to cussing, the problem with most of us is we tend to be more concerned about someone's choice of words than we are as to why the person feels the need to curse in the first place.

Granted, most often, cussing is far from necessary, offensive and is just a broader and more crass poetic use of the English language. For many, cussing has become a matter of habit or figure of speech more than a way to launch an insult.

I still remember, and can put into song, my dad's favorite string of curse words. I'll spare you the narrative. Let's just say it was impressive and predictable. Depending on the severity of the crime, mood at the moment or circumstances at hand, my dad could make a singing sailor blush. He said what he meant and he meant what he said, even if it was off color and came out hot. No doubt, many found his approach offensive, unacceptable and crude. Let's be honest. It was.

Say what you want about his choice of words, but Dad held nothing back. As much as I hate to admit it, I think he probably slept better at night knowing he got his frustrations off his chest.

My ears may have been pinned back during his rampages but when he went to bed, his rapid eye movement was well within the realm of deep sleep. Good for him. Not so good for those he sought to influence.

No, I'm not a proponent of profanity but there is something to be said about having a safe place to express yourself with no holds barred. That is different than belittling and verbal abuse.

The trouble with the polished, sophisticated and overly religious zealots is that few have close friends they can cuss with!

Knowing you have a place to cuss is not about the cussing. It's about having a deep, safe and unconditional relationship where, if need be, a brother can unload, unpack and unleash burdens that are weighing him down. It's not the cussing that helps. It's about discussing what is so disgusting that frees the soul!

It's not spelled out in the book of Psalms, but I can't help but think that a few of David's songs were censored! Who hasn't heard giggles when a preacher reading from the King James version of Bible references Balaam's ass. Yup, I said it! Check your sources. The word ass is used in the KJV more than 80 times along with several other choice words, like hell and damned. Yes, I understand the context. And that is exactly the point.

I'm poking fun of course but sometimes we let the words people choose get in the way of the person themselves. After all, it's there in living color!

Isn't it interesting how our word preferences influence which translation of the Bible we use?

Here is the deal. Before you throw me out, let's be clear. No, I don't think the King James Bible promotes foul language. But I do believe cussing is often a symptom of a hidden problem. Somebody is likely hurting at a deeper level. They have gotten to such a point of frustration, disappointment and aggravation that cussing just seems to fit the bill and, from their perspective, best expresses their current state of affairs. Yikes! Things are starting to "sound" ugly!

Can we just be real? People aren't perfect and most are prone to cuss under the right amount of pressure. Does cussing represent our finer moments as the human race? No. Are swear

words appropriate and approved by scripture? Certainly not! But, like any unacceptable behavior, the presence of cussing has real potential to signal a personal S.O.S.

Again, I'm not an advocate of foul words or coarse language. I'm not trying to lower the bar of decency or rewrite the code of conduct for a modern gentlemen.

But I am a fan of being a friend that sticks closer than a brother. I believe there are times this means letting less than perfect language fly past our ears as we draw nearer to the heart of the matter and recognize our friend is hurting. The last thing they need is a lesson on how to color correct their flavor of speech.

Here is the good news. When we come in close and help absorb some of the heat, the language cools down and tends to take care of itself.

It's the use of another four-letter word that gets us through. LOVE. Love overlooks a multitude of sins and is committed to the bigger picture.

What we fear might become a habit or pattern of speech in the life of our comrade breaks apart as we step in and help reset the cycle, unpack the irritants and help set our friend free. How so? Well, because they cussed it out and we loved the hell out of them.

Read that again. When was the last time you loved the hell out of someone? Isn't that what Jesus came to do? Love the hell out of people. If you can't say amen to that then you really are trapped in a language barrier.

If Jesus isn't out to rescue people from the pits of hell, I don't know who is! Many people don't have to die in order to go there. They are living in hell every day and desperately need a friend who cares enough to listen, even if they swear.

Do cuss or discuss? The key is having friends I can be real with. I certainly don't desire friends who encourage me to curse but I don't want them to blush if I do. I want friends who challenge me to pick my words wisely but will keep on loving me even when I don't.

The Praying Mantis

If you think about it, pray about it.

I have come to realize a repetitive call to action in my life. I respond to it at times better than others. Nonetheless, the call to pray is real and repetitive.

I am often reminded of this call during my waking hours, my busy work schedule and the stillness of the night. It is a quiet whisper that reminds me power awaits me when I pray. I am never more powerful than when on my knees praying.

This is not easy for a man of action. You could say I like getting things done. When I am idle I feel bridled! I may not be poetry in motion, and more like a bull in a china closet, but one thing is for sure, I like action.

For me, prayer often feels passive. But the more I do it, the more I come to realize it is anything but. When I really pray, prayer wears me out! It is exhausting. I end up feeling like I'm calling down fire and thunder from heaven like an opera singer bringing the house down. Sometimes I even suffer from sweaty opera singer syndrome. Isn't that why they sing with a hankie? Anyway, you get the idea.

Recently I was up and out at the crack of dawn. As I turned the ignition key on my car and looked out my front windshield I blinked to make sure I wasn't dreaming. There before my eyes was a happy little praying mantis. It was as if he too had gotten up early. Was he saying 2/2 his prayers and locked and loaded for another day?

The call to action was obvious and making its appearance once again. It was if the Lord was saying, "The mantis is praying. Are you a praying man?"

I decided to have a little fun with the little bug and backed out of the driveway anxious to see how long he could hang in there on his knees.

I hit 10 m.p.h. Nothing. Thirty m.p.h. Nothing still! I was tempted to hit the windshield wipers but instead I gunned the vehicle to nearly 60 m.p.h. Nothing! The faster I drove the more he hunkered down in his Tim Teebow stance seemingly determined to draw on supernatural powers to sustain him through the strong headwinds.

Amazingly he made the three mile ride with me all the way to the coffee shop. It was then that I decided to snap his neck. I'm kidding! I snapped his photo on my cell phone and headed in for my hour long meeting.

By the time I had put down breakfast and a few cups of java it was time to leave. As I approached the car I was reminded of my little windshield buddy. He wasn't there but long gone. At least so I thought!

We wasn't on the windshield he was now on the roof of my car and once again in a prayer posture as if to say, "Buddy, I'm sticking around to pray over you. Your driving is horrendous!"

What would you have done? I jumped in and floored it! I can testify that being stalked by a praying mantis is just plain creepy!

He must have gotten the hint because by the time I arrived at my next destination he had disappeared. I was almost sad but was certain I had been called to action once again. When life's headwinds get strong, pray! When life seems to be going nowhere, pray! Scared? Pray! Lonely? Pray! Happy? Pray!

Any occasion is an occasion to pray. Take it from me, a praying man and a friendly praying mantis who taught me how to pray, there is power in prayer. It's where the action is!

Just Passing Through

I knew I needed to get to the airport early for my international flight from Accra, Ghana to Dakar, Senegal. Along the way I would have a brief lay over in Benin, Cotonou. I was just passing through.

As a USA citizen, a VISA would not be required in order to enter Senegal. While this may be true, the ticket agent believed otherwise and was unwilling to issue a boarding pass without the proper documentation.

Since documentation was not required I did not have it. Nonetheless she was adamant and insistent that I have the paperwork.

The clock was ticking and time was not on my side. First one supervisor, then another. I remained friendly but firm in my position. I had few options and securing such documentation, for which there was no necessity, would be next to impossible.

I was not of this land. I was an outsider, a foreigner with little too no clout. While the ticket agent may be wrong, it didn't matter. Without help, I was grounded.

And then it dawned on me. I am not alone. I have friends here who could come to my aid. They could serve as my advocate with the person holding my boarding pass in solitary confinement.

In short order I called my Ghanaian friend who had already made it to the other side of the gate. Once on the telephone line with him I asked him to reason with the determined agent.

As the conversation unfolded, the facial expressions on the accusing gatekeeper gave clues that things might be about to change. A little insight was going a long way and things were appearing to shift in my favor.

A few more calls to supervisors, a brief mention of the USA embassy coming to my aid and I was soon the proud recipient of what was rightly mine, a boarding pass to Senegal! My friend had made all the difference in the outcome.

The stressful experience gave me reason to reflect on what my fate would someday be as I hoped to pass through the gates of heaven. There would no doubt be an accuser waiting at the ticket counter there as well. He would do his best to intercept my boarding pass.

But because I have a friend, named Jesus, who is from and has returned home to the promised land, he will speak on my behalf and provide me the necessary credentials needed to make it to the other side.

In this life I realize I am just passing through. No matter where in the world I might fly, it is not my final destination. No matter how challenging life becomes here, I have a hope and a future in a place far beyond the "friendly" skies!

Busted at the Buffet Line

He who is a real hero is first one at home.

We had done very well in the tournament. The little league baseball team had endured the hot Oklahoma sun, and the coach was ready to celebrate with his up-and-coming major leaguers.

Everyone was hungry and tired. Feeding the crew in short order was a priority. Having multiple food options would keep everyone happy. What better place to build camaraderie than the local buffet?

The sound of cleats marching across the tile floor of the restaurant filled the air as little foot soldiers grabbed trays and made the dash to the grazing trough. Barely tall enough to see over the side boards, short arms reached for everything from banana pudding to pizza to chicken legs. Mayhem was unleashed. The feeding frenzy was underway. The celebration was launched. Corraling parents kept food fights at bay and soft drink spills to a minimum.

As blood sugars began to level off and appetites were satisfied, my wife and I became aware of other guests making their way through the food maze. A single mother with several children gained our attention. As she piled food on plates for several small children and nudged them down the line, she allowed her straggling older son the privilege of independent food selection. Her hands were occupied keeping up with the balance of her tribe and juggling multiple food preferences.

As mom turned her back on the buffet, her lone-wolf son put final touches on his selections at the food fest. As mom dumped the diaper bag and commandeered the troops, her son placed a huge cinnamon roll on the edge of his tray. And then he did it. Unnoticed by mom, but before our very eyes he did the unthinkable.

If you are a buffet fan, then I hope what I am about to share won't ruin your Sunday tradition. However, if you are like me and the thought of eating at a buffet makes you crave bologna, you will forever be justified in demanding the group eat elsewhere.

With the cinnamon roll well placed on his tray, the little boy looked toward mom, gazed at the cinnamon roll tongs, licked his lips and then ran his tongue down the entire length of offending utensil. Without batting an eye, he placed the tongs back on top of the buffet, smiled and joined his family at the table.

Yuck! Our once satisfying meal began to churn in our bellies. Did this just happen! Had we been spared only by time itself? How would we have known any different had we been next in line? Or were we any different at all? Sure, it may not have been the cinnamon roll tongs, but what about the cake spatula or the pudding spoon! Uncertain as to whether we had been victimized, we swore off buffet lines for life.

As we drove away, we couldn't help but laugh. Maybe what you don't know won't hurt you. And then I was reminded. God knows me better than I know myself. He knows me at my best and at my worst. Nonetheless, not only does He know me, but He loves me, even if I do lick the cinnamon roll tongs.

The Point of No Return

Alcohol provides no clear benefit—only risk.

At what point does a cucumber become a pickle? Once you are a pickle, you are pickled. Try as you might, there is nothing you can do to return a pickle to its native state. You would have better luck trying to get chewed bubble gum back to its original form than to transform a pickle into a cucumber. Come to think of it, trying to fit into the same blue jeans I wore in high school could have the same result. It's not going to happen!

Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm not an alcoholic; I just drink a little often." At what point does a casual social drinker become a drunk? That's easy, after one drink too many. It's not worth the risk in my book. Once you're an alcoholic, you are always an alcoholic.

Consider these statistics:

Seventy percent of Americans drink socially, and one in 10 of those will become alcoholics.

The average alcoholic begins drinking at age 12.

Experts estimate 10-20 million Americans are alcoholics.

More than 200,000 people die annually in alcohol-related deaths.

Eighty percent of automobile drivers will be in an alcohol-related accident.

No wonder King Solomon gave strong warning against the consumption of alcohol. "Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 'They hit me,' you will say, 'but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?'" Proverbs 23:31-35

Critics will call my perspective worn out, legalistic and denominationally dependant. Some will ask me to quote chapter and verse for my stance. Others will rationalize their social drinking as a liberty found through freedom in Christ. To this crowd, I have this to say. Look around you. Who will it be? It is not a matter of if, but when. Count on it. Ten percent of the casual social drinkers you know will someday become an alcoholic. Sure, many will dodge addiction, but 10 out of every 100 social drinkers' lives will be ruined. Alcohol plays no favorites. No amount of money, stature or pedigree will protect you from the bite of one drink too many.

You'll never have to worry about going off the bottle if you never take your first sip. I don't know of one alcoholic who says booze was worth the pain it caused.

Don't we have enough to worry about already? Who needs to increase their odds of becoming an alcoholic? Think about that the next time you go to the refrigerator for a pickle spear. If you notice a tall boy or a long neck next to the mustard, pop the top and pour it down the drain. It's not worth becoming the next statistic. Do it before you reach the point of no return.

Storm Produces Cabin Fervor

You have to rest to be your best.

We were forewarned. The weather warnings were clear. “An ice storm is coming.” “Prepare for the worst.” “Everyday activity will come to a standstill.” This time, the climate predictor’s prophecies came true. The Central Plains were covered in layers and layers of ice. Time stood still, as did everything else.

Businesses closed early, schools rang their bells, runways were silent and church lights were turned out. The state was frozen solid as thousands lost power, and public servants did all they could to keep emergency travel routes clear.

Suddenly, our world was motionless. Our to-do list became awkwardly short. Our busy schedule was interrupted with nothing more to do than wait. After the first day or two of calm, our minds and bodies grew restless for action. The withdrawal from daily stimulus was starting to test our patience. Our minds pondered, “Isn’t there something we need to be doing? What a waste of time!”

Perhaps Christian apologist Blaise Pascal got it right when he suggested our desire and drive for entertainment and busyness only serve to distract us from thinking more deeply about our human condition. Pascal believed a man’s unhappiness is rooted in his inability to stay quietly in his own room. Keeping ourselves occupied diverts our attention from our condition.

Stillness has a way of illuminating our situation. Busyness becomes the salve we use to dull the pain from much deeper issues. As long as we are busy, we cope. The conflict resolution, addiction recovery, financial freedom, physical fitness and spiritual commitment, like similar issues, will wait for another day, for today, I am busy!

The more we spend time alone, the more we look forward to spending time doing anything else. Times of solitude have a way of reintroducing us to our state of affairs. We recognize our depravity-what we are, when left to ourselves.

As we gaze out the window admiring the amazing calm that has been brought our way, the Lord’s still small voice has a way of finding us there. He reminds us He is always available, and the peace and calm that manifests itself outside the window pane is available to us every day as we take time to make time to be alone and still with Him. We soon discover that we are never alone when we are with Him. Time alone with God turns cabin fever into cabin fervor. As we still our hearts before Him, He brings the renewal we need to face the day as the ice begins to thaw and life’s busyness is once again embraced.

Time to Fly

To be early is to be on time.

You would think that at my age I would have learned this one, but as of late, the Lord is continuing to help me reign it in, or should I say, bite it. No, I'm not talking about my little pony. I am referring to my big fat tongue.

James 3:2 says we all make many mistakes and if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. Tall order, right? A very tall order for me sense I am out of control in so many ways.

Recently, my wife and I set out on our annual trek to Washington D.C. for the National Prayer Breakfast. One would think that someone with such spiritual interest would walk with some level of dignity, poise and uprightness. One would think. But we forgot. Let me explain.

It is fair to say that 3:45 a.m. comes early even for those who get the worm on a regular basis. The mind is just not the sharpest before the sun comes up. This morning was no different. Nonetheless, we did our best to gather our senses and stumble through our otherwise daily routines.

Amazingly, we were right on time. I even made each of us a cup of coffee for the open road to that airway in the sky. About halfway down the highway my wife had a revelation. She had left her phone at home! What? Left her phone? How could this be? Despite the incredible urge to provide color commentary, I took a station break. I controlled my tongue! Besides, I had a tinge of empathy. What modern human could last five minutes without an electronic pacifier, let alone go a whole week without a peek or two at a flat screen?

At the next exit we whipped a u-turn and I put the hammer down. Thankfully, local law enforcement was checking on inventory at the corner donut shop as I rounded the intersection on two wheels. I rushed through our garage knocking down an array of handy-man necessities, leaped over the couch and pounced on her phone nestled quietly under a few of her favorite items from the makeup counter.

Like a pilot in a fighter jet, I jumped back in the cockpit, secured my seat, fired the after burners and propelled us back toward the interstate. We still had time so long as the friendly peace officers asked for a second cup of joe.

As we approached the on ramp, at near mach speed, it hit me like a punch in the gut. She had forgotten her phone but I had also left my travel bag sitting in the breeze way! What in the world is going on? I pumped the brakes. No, I locked them up! I looked in the rear view mirror and drove backwards out the on ramp. Oh yes I did! I shouldn't have but we were desperate and my wife was more than white knuckled. She was about to pass out from the g-forces.

We two-wheeled back through the intersection. I leaped over the fallen tools in the garage, slid into the breeze way and hurdled dogs, laundry and kitchen counters to gain back seconds I knew mattered. Wind blown and traumatized, I greeted my copilot with a grin and we were off again!

I confess it was more than wrong but I sped through our neighborhood like the mouse in Nitendo's Mario Cart. Impressive I might add. Had this been the actual video game I would have been way out ahead of the pack picking up a ton of bonus points along the way.

It would be a nail biter. But if we hit every green light, we could still make it on time. Let's just say a few of those lights were on the amber side as we blew through. How exciting, no

traffic accidents and no traffics tickets. No tickets? Wait. No tickets? Surely not. We grabbed the airplane tickets, right? Small panic but huge relief. We got this one right!

Once at cruising altitude my instrument panel gave a surprise greeting. Low fuel! Not no fuel but low fuel. I asked my copilot how far the navigation system, on her now handy cell phone, indicated it was to the airport. "Nine miles," came the reply. With the confidence of a duck on water, I replied, "We should have just enough."

With no time to spare and our fuel tank near zero we landed, yes I said landed, at the airport. I pumped the brakes. Slammed the vehicle in park and threw my wife and luggage to the curb. Trust me, she was grateful!

As I did a donut of my on in the airport parking lot I couldn't help but smile and be just a little bit proud. We had not only arrived on time, we arrived in one piece without a cross word between us.

Lesson learned? The jury is hung on that one. Time will tell but I think I'm heading in the right direction even if I may have forgotten a thing or two.

I had been focusing on the later part of the verse from the book of James. If I could control my tongue I could control anything. Perhaps the key to achieving this character quality is in the first part of the passage. When we recognize we all make mistakes, holding our tongues becomes a little easier, mercy comes a whole lot easier and like cops prone to preoccupation, we are extended an extra measure of grace!

Did I mention that after boarding the plane the captain made an announcement that our flight would be delayed. We couldn't help but smile. After all we had been through, biting our tongues and extending a little mercy and grace came natural. I have to admit that it entered my mind that if I the captain should need suggestions on how to make up some time, I had an idea or two. Besides, after all I had been through, I had earned my wings! It was time to fly! Happenstance?

The Highway Honker

Conflict is inevitable.

I recently experienced the mishap of a hitch pulling loose from my tow bar while pulling a trailer on a busy street. Argh... stress city! As I turned on my hazard lights I jumped out as I tried my best to hurry and not get smashed by traffic.

About that time, an old fella came blazing through pounding on his car horn. I thought to myself, "What a jerk. Can't he see I am in a tough spot here?"

As I got back on the road I saw the happy horn honker up ahead. I pushed on the accelerator and thought, "I'll show him what it feels like to have a large truck with a cattle guard honking on his hind end as he pokes down the highway."

The closer I got, a little reminder passed through my mind, "Isn't your word for 2020, unoffendable?"

"Why yes it is, but this guy needs to learn a lesson about compassion and mercy that I am certain he needs, after 80 plus years of existence. I am about to deliver the intimidation guaranteed to facilitate such change due to my formidable and slightly forceful influence," I thought to myself as his vanity plate came into view.

About the time I was about to lay on the horn and crush his bumper, I was reminded about perspective. Was this old coot trying to give me a piece of his mind by blowing the bugle on his buggy or, just maybe, was he trying to save my life? What if I had stepped back into traffic about the time he came driving past? What then? My heart sank. He wasn't trying to hurt me, he was trying to help me by sounding a much needed warning!

Oh man, what a life lesson. How many times has someone tried to help me and I reacted in such a way as to rebuff their loving rebuke? How many times have others, by remaining silent, allowed me to stumble and fall into more harm than good?

As I drove past the unnamed ordinary neighborhood angel, I offered him a smile and a prayer of thanks for being the hometown unsung honking hero that spared the younger buck more trouble than he was prepared to endure.

Life is about perspective. It is easy to think the worst when in fact we might just be being spared from it. My hope is now to follow the example of the highway honker and to start tooting my horn with a happy heart in hopes of paying it forward down the road of life.

Punked by a Skunk

A bulldog can whip a skunk, but is it really worth the stink?

Like most puppies, our dog, Honey Bear likes to chase rabbits. When I went to let him out late last night, I soon discovered we had a skunk amongst us in the backyard! You guessed it! What else could make 2020 even better? Right? Dog meets skunk. What could possibly go wrong? Well, much to my surprise, Honey Bear was more in protector mode than high-speed chase mode. He barked and barked, hunkered down, pivoted in and out of firing range and even did a belly crawl to take a closer look. I finally clued in and panicked! “Oh Lord! Not tonight! Have mercy on this sleepy soul! Honey Bear get in here,” came my command for all the neighborhood to hear! It worked. He relented and came inside. I flipped on the light and nearly skunked my pants when the polecat started to strut right in front of us! Honey Bear and I nearly passed out from surprise. The spooked skunk ran along the fence line for cover. I still have no clue how he got in or out. The fence is tight. He was air dropped in I suppose. The thought of cleaning a skunk-sprayed dog in the middle of the night still doesn’t sound like much fun, even this morning as I sip my coffee and assess the crime scene. Last night I went to bed grateful for the little things and even more happy “Elvis”, the skunk, had left the building! It’s true, we got punk’d by a skunk. But I’ll take whew over pew anytime! What are you grateful for today? Big or small! Stinky or not! There is good out there even if it is 2020!

A Reflective Perspective

Your greatest strength can become your greatest weakness when not under control.

The beauty of age is a reflective perspective. The older we get the more we realize how much we still have yet to learn. The more we know the more we realize we don't.

I love what Paul said as a man who had learned a lot from life and was willing to make the much needed adjustments in his perspective. "I once thought," were the words he used to describe his humble retraction regarding his former way of thinking.

As a pure-blood citizen of Israel and former zealous Pharisee, his culture, heritage and life experiences had led him in one direction but a divine encounter set everything on end. In coming face to face with Jesus, reality set in and something had to change. The truth had set him free to forget what had lied in the past and then to press on to what waited ahead in the future. Paul was a new man with a new outlook on life. Nothing would ever be the same again.

The older we get the more stubborn we become. We have worked hard to collect our vault of knowledge. Learning some of the files are corrupt or might be out of order can upset the whole operating system.

Some would rather live in denial than face the reality that the system is flawed. It takes a good measure of humility to admit you were wrong.

Thankfully, while opinions change, people change and the way things get done change, the truth never changes. The key is making the necessary changes when we realize the truth. To do otherwise is to live as an arrogant fake as if we are somehow an exception to the rule.

Don't believe it, it is in fact possible to teach an old dog new tricks, especially if they are true!

Perhaps it is time for a little reflection. Is your operating system outdated? Is it possible what you thought was, really isn't? It is worth an ask. Like Paul, is it possible for you to say, "I once thought."

What did you once think? What changed your mind or convinced you otherwise? Is your perspective rooted in truth? A personal experience or encounter? Is your belief a mere opinion or premonition or is it based on truth?

Take some time to reflect but like Paul, don't spend too much time there or the paralysis of analysis will set in and you will be stuck!

Make the necessary adjustments, ask for forgiveness, accept some much needed grace and then press on for what lies ahead! More insight. More enlightenment. More truth!

Overlooking the Obvious

Don't just see; notice.

On a recent flight to Orlando, Florida, weather left the airport in a mess as flights were cancelled and delayed throughout the region. As passengers were running to and fro hoping to make connections, everyone was frantically yelling and panting. Not so much because they were upset but because they weren't being heard. Our wonderful Covid masks were muffling our best efforts to communicate.

Subsequent flights were packed as passengers were cramming into whatever seats were available. Families and couples were separated as everyone made do.

As everyone was settling in, one particular passenger began to panic. "My Beats, my Beats. I can't find my Beats," he said. He clearly was about to melt down. Demonstrating the human spirit, that sometimes reminds us that the planet might survive us, everyone in our section started scouring the area in search of his high dollar, high fidelity audio device.

As we lifted up, looked under, crawled around and combed through the area, he kept repeating, "My Beats, my Beats, I can't find my Beats."

In attempting to recenter the search posse, a young lady asked for clarity. "Are we looking for your Beats or the cord to your Beats?"

"Not the cord. I'm looking for the Beats headset," he replied in earnest.

There was an immediate and instant unified outburst of laughter as the young lady simply replied, "Like the ones on your head?"

Needless to say, overlooking the obvious had brought unnecessary stress but a simple change of perspective from someone on the outside looking in brought true enlightenment and levity. Our "Beats Buddy" blushed with embarrassment and joined in on the laughter that was occurring at his expense! The Beats had been on his head the entire time!

"My Beats, my Beats. I can't find my beats," is a phrase that will stick with me for sometime to come. In my profession, I come alongside leaders helping them navigate the challenges of life and work. I'm often told that helping leaders process decisions is one of the greatest benefits of the time I spend with clients.

Everyone has blind spots. No one has eyes in the backs of their head. Even Tiger Woods has a coach. Sometimes we simply need someone to point out the obvious. "Hey man, what you are looking for is on top of your head!"

If you find yourself overlooking the obvious, remember it's okay to consider another perspective. It might be time to hire a leadership coach. Coaches not only help you find what you are looking for, they help you get to where you want to go!

"My Beats. My Beats! I can't find my Beats!" I'm still giggling! **Headwinds**

Problems are the seeds of opportunity.

Life is a journey. As it has been said, "Some days are diamonds. Some days are stones." Life isn't always a beach. Sometimes, and often times, life is like being lost at sea during a raging storm.

In the book of Acts we learn how the Apostle Paul was literally fighting for his life in the middle of nothing short of a category five hurricane! Things started out okay. The sun was out and the seagulls were cackling as Paul and his sojourners boarded the ship. As Paul put it,

“When the time came, we set sail.” Key point. When the time came. Put another way, when the time was right.

Timing is everything and when the time is right and we are ready there is nothing like being in the right place at the right time. It seemed right. It felt right. It was right. They pulled out of the harbor with eyes on the horizon as the wind filled their sails. Smooth sailing waited ahead. Or so they thought.

We all experience those times when everything seems to be going our way. Life is good. The bank account is fat. Our bellies are full. Friends abound. The sun is shining and our tan line starts to appear. But not too far off shore we begin to experience a few headwinds. They come as a slight breeze at first. Refreshing in fact but before long, our hat is blown into the rising waves. We sense things are changing as dark clouds roll in.

Headwinds mount. The sails are pulled. We batten down the hatches and prepare for what we hope is a passing storm. One night of lost sleep turns into many. Riding the waves puts our head into a spin. The loss of appetite? A mere symptom of life at sea.

Like life, life at sea can change in an instant. The headwinds we face not only pound the vessel they play with our attitude as well. We hold fast to anything that brings comfort as the winds that now roar in our minds bring new meaning to fighting the storm from within. Headwinds are now impacting our thought life.

The struggle is real. An expected joy ride has turned into a fight for survival. As the planks creak beneath and loosen around us, we can't but wonder; *Will it hold? Can I make it through this? Do I have what it takes to face these headwinds from within and from without? Will the boat hold or blow apart as trials, tribulations, setbacks and difficulties linger as more trouble lies ahead?*

The beautiful sunset that once danced on the horizon has now been consumed by a dark evil that looms and hisses on a violent sea and is mirrored in the skies above. We look up and can't help but wonder; *“What were we thinking? How did we end up here? Why didn't we see this coming? Where is God in all of this? Is it time to abandon ship? Will my faith get me through this?”*

The right time, even God's timing, doesn't guarantee life at sea will be easy. Life is a journey and the paths we take are often full of twists and turns. Ups and downs. Change and pains. Hurts and hang ups. Disappointments, misunderstandings, lies, betrayals, bumps and bruises are all part of the cruise we call life.

Listen up mate. Let's face it, life isn't always pretty. Some days are better than others and some are worse than all the others combined. Life is a challenge. At times giving up appears to be the only option as we consider a permanent solution to a temporary typhoon that has overwhelmed and swamped the bow.

The storm has now become internal. The battle rages from within. The storm is relentless. We wonder if we will soon go down with the ship. But then we remember. This ship is equipped with a lifeboat. It is exactly what we need. Someone has thrown us a lifeline. God has put the key to survival within reach. We can do this. With His help, we take courage. We regain hope and even start to feel hunger pains. Not just for food but for life itself. If we can hang on for just a little while longer we can make it to the break in the clouds as a glimmer of hope shines through the darkness that has engulfed every part of our being.

As what remains of our former life drifts away, broken and in shambles, we let loose of the anchors and debris that have held us back. We now find ourselves navigating calmer waters and brighter days as the shoreline begins to appear on the not so distant skyline. It looks like we

will make it! Our sea legs have strengthened as we shake off the fear that has gripped our hearts. We pushed through the pain and overcame unmet expectations only to discover that we have what it takes. We didn't know what it took but when the time came, we possessed the moral fiber, grit and stamina to see it through.

Our ship has come in and we were on it. Our little vessel might look a lot different than the robust ship we once boarded with glee, but we have arrived. We have survived. We made it! What a ride! We conquered the challenges, the highs, the lows, the doubts, the concerns and the crisis! We were headstrong in the headwind and lived to tell about!

Storms come and storms go as tranquil seas turn turbulent in no time. Nonetheless we are not satisfied to remain at bay. We must face our fears, raise our sails and push off into the great unknown where the clouds kiss the sea. Life was meant to be lived between and on top of the waves!

(For more on the storm Paul faced, turn to Acts 27 and 28.)

*You'll never perceive all that is possible., **Surviving This Crazy Life**Failing to forgive is failing to live. Forgiveness brings freedom.*

Some would say that I have been a survivor from the very beginning. My mother was pregnant with me at the age of 15. Despite being forced to drop out of junior high school and having to walk the aisle with a man 8 years her senior, she made the brave decision to give me a chance at life. She is my hero. Her courageous decision has resulted in two sons and 14 grandchildren! Way to go mom! Look at all you have done!

My dad was a farm kid at heart but somewhere along the way his life decisions led him down a road of self-destruction. Alcohol, wild living and bar fights left him nearly dead on more than one occasion. His life was often out of control as he took his frustrations out on his wife and kids. He was just flat out mean and lacked the basic life skills to be a good husband and dad. It cost him his family and what could have been a life filled with great memories. But all is not lost. There is more to his story.

When I was a teenager my dad bought a handgun, took me to a creek bed and shot at me. I was lucky to have survived. It was crazy and terrifying. He threatened my brother's life in a hostage, murder-suicide type situation in an attempt to get back at my mother. If not for the bravery and intervention of my favorite uncle, I'm not sure how the story would have ended. On another occasion my dad tried to run my brother and I over with his car. He broke into our house and I held a 12-gauge shotgun on him until the police arrived. To no one's surprise, my mom eventually divorced him.

Despite growing up in a life of domestic violence, alcohol abuse and plenty of dysfunction, I eventually found hope and a future among a group of friends and leaders who loved me and forever changed the direction of my life as I came to know the Lord in a very personal way. Yes, it is a story of hardship and pain but it is also one of hope, forgiveness and amazing reconciliation.!

That's No Bull

God is love. See God. See love.

Growing up on the Praire, life presents you with perspectives on happenings in a primal sort of way. For sure we have entered the modern age but there are regular reminders of a time that was and continues to be.

On a recent drive from the urban to rural, I happened to notice an old rancher riding fence, counting head and checking for gaps between posts. In case you are wondering what in the world I am talking about, he was basically checking on his herd of cattle. On the surface raising cattle can seem like passive work but like farming, it takes patience and expertise to reach the desired results, the fatted calf!

To cattle, a rancher appears to be the ultimate caregiver and best of friends. He provides a place to play, food to eat, a friendly community of like-minded associates and excellent health care benefits.

The burn of his brand on the cow's hind end seems to be a faint memory and a small price to pay for such amenities. His kindness comforts the herd as he welcomes new born calves into a deep trusting relationship built on mutual admiration and concern.

Life on the open range is free of worry, hassle and pain. After all, as the song says, it is where the deer and the antelope play. Life is good. What a great place to raise the kids. The rancher loves them too and just like the other cows and bulls on his place, he nurtures and cares for them in preparation for the slaughter!

The disappearances go unnoticed at first. But then it begins to click. At a certain weight and size, cattle start to vanish, never to return. Those who left long ago have one thing in common, they followed the rancher into a narrow metal trailer, for what many believed was a joy ride on an exciting field trip. Little did they know that their so-called loyal friend had lured them into a death trap. They were collateral damage, casualties and victims in a masterful mass murder.

The more cattle reflect on life on the ranch, the more they realize the signs of deception and betrayal were there all along. It was truly too good to be true. The rancher's cow hide boots, matching leather belt, leather vest, leather gloves and the smell of a juicy cheese burger on his breath, were all indicators that were somehow ignored in an otherwise blissful relationship. 2/2

That is life on the Praire. The journey from the thrill to the grill ends with an unexpected surprise, the rancher is not a friend. He is a predator! He is a master manipulator with a master plan to steal, kill and destroy. The cattle's loss is the rancher's gain.

Here is the brutal reality. We all have potential to end up as cattle on the devil's ranch. He is a deceptive, conniving fake. He acts like he cares but in the end, he is after our very souls. He comes to steal, kill and destroy. He pacifies us with toys, vices and creature comforts. It's all a big fat lie as he does his best to lure us away to the slaughter house.

What is a cow to do? It starts by realizing you aren't a cow. You are a sheep! You are meant to run in flocks not herds. You are raised for hair cuts not to have your throat cut! Don't buy the lie. Recognize who you are. You are meant to be led by the Good Shepherd not the ruthless rancher. You are not destined to be lamb chops or prime rib. You were born to thrive and stay alive!

The Good Shepherd's motives are pure. His friendship is genuine. He is a giver of life. He never seeks to pull the wool over your eyes. He is your protector, caregiver and companion. He loves you dearly and longs to be with you now and forever.

Someday, when life on the Praire is no more, he will take you home with him to greener pastures. He is a good shepherd, not an evil rancher. You are his little lamb, not a fatted calf. And as we like to say on the Praire, "That's no bull!"

The Mailbox

Fail fast and fail early.

I'd hate to be a mailbox. Life starts out fairly fun. You arrive to a new neighborhood, you are installed with much love and affection and you seem to be the center of attention, at least once or twice a day. And then all of a sudden, life becomes predictable, very routine and let's face it, just plain boring.

Every day you encounter visitors who have been on the ride of their lives. Some even arrive from around the world and are greeted with great enthusiasm and excitement while you on the other hand are simply opened and closed with little, if any, fanfare.

You go no where. Life becomes predicable, a series of events stuck on instant replay.

Oh sure there are the exciting times when a careless neighbor nearly backs into you or a migrating bird perches on your back. But other than a change in the weather, you are stuck left to explore life from your permanent address.

Surely life has more to offer than being a mailbox. Yes, it is an honest profession and yes it plays an important role but who would ever sign up to be a mailbox when there is a whole great big world out there waiting to be explored!

Think about it. How many of us have let fear, uncertainty, worry, fret, apathy, circumstances and simple old fashioned laziness keep us from all life has to offer?

To often we stay parked in our safe and familiar zip codes taking life as it comes living life through the experiences of others who pass us by through television, DVD's, the Internet, books and magazines!

I say we break free from the fence posts stuck to our behinds and grab hold of the nearest mail carrier and take life for a ride.

Go it alone. Call a friend. Form a posse. Do something. Anything but sit on you rear end and let moss grow on your leg.

Go for a walk. Meet a neighbor. Visit the library. Attend a church service other than your own. Take a round-trip bus ride in your city and introduce yourself to other passengers. Take a vacation. Ride a bike. Take a hike. Go visit an old friend. Experience bird watching. Take a photo safari. Drive down a country road. Help a friend. Lend a hand. Join a prayer group. Volunteer at a soup kitchen.

Whatever you do, do something. Do anything but be a mailbox. You were created for a purpose. God gave you the gift of life. What you do with that gift is your gift to God. There are at least 100 people whose lives would be better because you showed up!

Go for it! Go be you today. Be that special delivery that brightens the otherwise mundane life of a rusty forgotten mailbox. Real adventure awaits you just around the corner!

As a Man Thinketh

Those who hurry to worry often delay to pray.

What are we to do when everything is upended and life is a mess? How are we to react when a new normal, that isn't nice, invades our everyday lives? In times like these being worried and anxious is easier than ever before. The frailty of life has become evident as an invisible army has invaded our shores and works its way across the nation. Where do we find hope in such a time as this? When faced with a life threatening illness, making ends meet and doom and gloom are at every turn, the power of positive thinking seems to have lost its mojo. Nonetheless, it's in the thinking, the thought life, where hope hides out. How are things going for you right now? What occupies your mind at the moment? What are you focused on? What challenges are you facing under this new normal? What if I told you help was on the way? How would that change your perspective? We have a choice right now. Will you join me in a little exercise? Right down these words:

True
Honorable
Right
Pure
Lovely
Admirable
Excellent
Praiseworthy

You can't fake yourself out. This idea, to focus on the things above, wasn't my idea. It is an excerpt from Philippians 4:6-8. God has a plan for times like these. It involves prayer and perspective. When we invite him into our thoughts and challenges something changes. My mind resets and hope is renewed. No, I'm not sure how it works, but it does. The power of perspective and prayer, not positivity, works. There may in fact be many positive realities and we should certainly embrace them and elevate them in our thinking. But ignoring reality won't make challenges go away. At some point, we have to face what is true and navigate accordingly, good or bad. People in Nazi concentration camps, that tried to put a spin on positivity, lost hope. Don't confuse hope with positivity. There was little to nothing positive in a gas chamber. The key is to be real with yourself, gain proper perspective, deal with reality and invite God into the mix. Hope lies in this perspective. FOCUSING on THESE THINGS: Keeping it real and realistic, what is ...

True, right now? (Note: I didn't suggest spinning it to look positive.)
Honorable?
Right?
Pure?
Lovely?
Admirable?
Excellent?
Praiseworthy?

When we pray and gain proper perspective, worry has a way of fading from our minds as we recognize the Lord is with us, come what may. He works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purposes. There within lies the hope to die

another day. I refer to this little exercise as CODE 4, given its location in scripture. Remember CODE 4 when worry and anxiety start to creep in. Put CODE 4 into practice. Pray and think on these things. The results are very positive!

Trouble Hooks

Rejection is often protection.

“When troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity.” James 1:2 When (not if) trouble comes. Trouble comes at work, at home and in life. Trouble is like having pimples as a teenager. They are coming you just don’t always know when. We tend to spend much of our time avoiding trouble. We need not encourage it but we might as well accept it.

SERIOUS QUESTION: What is troubling you today? I have been troubled/hassled by a lot of petty little things of late. These are small developed world issues I know but nonetheless these bees in my bonnet have actually been bugging me more than I realized. My issues are nothing compared to the challenges my friends in Africa, India and Honduras face but they have been dragging on my spirit. They have been like tiny treble hooks squelching my spirit. How about you? Any “trouble” hooks holding you back? Reading this passage is very counterintuitive. What does it say? Troubles are opportunities. My first thought, get real God. Troubles are a pain in the butt! Then it says, troubles are an opportunity for JOY! Really? That has not been my experience! But wait! I could try positive thinking and a good attitude. But that is kind of like faking myself out unless, yes unless, I go back to the opening verse. There is the key. James says he is a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, a slave! A slave! Who wants to be a slave? But in reality we are all slaves to something. Perfection, money, sex, fitness, food, kids, job and even our spouse. We are often slaves to our troubles! What does James say? He is slave to Jesus. As a slave to Jesus, my troubles are my master’s troubles. Certainly troubles come to the plantation but whose problems are they ? Yup, the master’s! I’m just a slave. If I focus on obeying him, my troubles are his problems. Ah and my joy is made complete in him. 2/2 Send your troubles to the master. Ask him to deal with them. See your troubles as an opportunity for big daddy to take the wheel. Our joy is robbed when we try to take control. Remember the old phrase, let go and let God. He is the fixer upper. We are simply to listen and obey resting in the assurance that obedience is its own reward and being a slave has its privileges. Real joy being one of them.

Who's Harry?

Communication is the key to good relationships.

My good friend and compatriot, Ross Hill, has journeyed with me and other CEO's to many parts of the world. Anyone who has met Ross loves him. If they are with him for very long, they soon realize he is passionate about golf. On our recent GiANT Experience to China, Ross felt compelled to explore ways to use golf as a way to make an eternal difference in the lives of top leaders. Following one of our China Values Leadership Forums, Ross was invited to a round of golf at a prestigious Shenzhen golf course. With little notice, Ross disappeared with a forum participant named Harry. As our team was leaving for a private meeting with local leaders, my Chinese business partner asked as to where Ross had disappeared. I informed him that Ross had gone golfing with Harry. "Harry?" came my partners reply. "Who is Harry?" 2/3 "Harry was at the forum," I said. "I am very concerned that Ross has been abducted. I do not know of a Harry who attended the forum," my business partner expressed with great concern. Our China team went into panic worried that our banker buddy had been kidnapped. The thought of raising ransom money was heavy on their thoughts! After several calls and following a search at several golf courses, Ross was indeed found swinging and walking the local greens with his new Chinese friend. "Ross is not with Harry! He is with Harry," came the response from my business partner. I said, "I don't understand. He isn't with Harry? He is with Harry?" "Yes, Harry," they said. "Harry?" I said. "No, Harry!" they replied. While relieved he had not been found gagged and bound with duct tape, the communication breakdown remained. I was confused. Then it happened. My Chinese business partner began to laugh. "Not Harry, H.E.N.R.Y. –Henry! he said. We all began to laugh as yet another mystery had been solved. The Chinese said Henry, but the Americans heard Harry. They say Henry. We hear Harry! They say, Harry. And we hear Harry. To us Henry and Harry are one and the same but for the Chinese the difference between Henry and Harry was the difference between panic and praise! In short order the exchange between leaders soon resumed and the would be calamities faded away. Later I could not help but reflect on the whole ordeal and think of how many times I have worried and fretted about things that ultimately never come to pass. How often I see or hear things one way only to discover that my worry was founded in a poor perspective. All too often I see things as a "Harry" ordeal. When in fact I have been dealing with a Henry-sized problem, an issue or circumstance that is really no big deal. 3/3 When facing the "Harrys" and "Henrys" of life, I hope I will learn to laugh and trust the one who loves me most will never give me more than I can handle. To Him, Harry and Henry are the same. With Him at my side I can experience life without need of worry as I keep walking and swinging my way through the greens of life

Inside the Cockpit

Great leaders serve.

When US Air Ways flight number 1549 took off from New York's LaGuardia airport on January 15, 2009 everything appeared to be business as usual.

Shortly after takeoff the plane's leader, Captain Sully, recognized something was gravely wrong. Unfortunately, his jet had struck a flock of geese and the plane was going down. In an instant he was forced to make a life or death decision that would determine the fate of his 155 passengers and crew.

Seconds mattered. Ignoring textbook suggestions from the control tower to attempt an emergency airport landing, the former US Air Force fighter pilot relied instinctively on his perspective from the cockpit. all

Double checking critical gauges, he and his co-pilot determined to intentionally steer the jet away from the densely populated city and bring the plane down in, of all places, the Hudson River. One of his last commands was to passengers warning them to "brace for impact." In the end it was his intentional leadership and perspective from the cockpit that saved the day, not doing business as usual.

While nearly every news headline carried the name of Captain Sully, there was hardly a mention of his co-pilot Jeffery Sikes. That made him no less important. Sikes was also no stranger to the cockpit. He had sat in the captain's seat many times himself. Fortunately for Captain Sully and his passengers, Sikes was the perfect co-pilot for flight 1549 that day. Together they had more than 70 years of flying experience missed seeing a critical detail.

In his briefing to Congress, Co-Pilot Sikes commented, "We must work tirelessly to maintain an unrivaled commitment to safety and professionalism. However, another component of the positive result was the vast experience of the cockpit and cabin crew. It is certainly in the interest of the traveling public to have experienced crews in the cockpit." Sikes gave credit where credit was due—it took a full team working together to achieve a good outcome.

Conditions rapidly changed for flight 1549 on that cold winter afternoon. Thankfully, the leader in charge relied on his instincts, his critical gauges and the valuable insight of his trusted co-pilot. Together they made the necessary adjustments to safely land the plane. Because they were intentional with their leadership the passengers and crew are alive today.

CEO's can relate to Captain Sully, his co-pilot, passengers and crew. They understand that decisions from the corporate cockpit are often a matter of life or death for the company. Intentional leadership is the key to survival.

CEO's recognize that business conditions can rapidly change The Rules for Business Have Changed. The global economic down turn will not be ignored. The economy has gained the attention of every CEO. Business as usual isn't usual. Like Captain Sully, the economic engines that have sustained us have clogged. There has been a dramatic loss in thrust and altitude. Many CEO's are bracing passengers and crew for impact. The CEO's Perspective and the decisions you make from the Cockpit are mission critical. The front seat is the hot seat. How cockpit gauges are interpreted determines if the plane soars, nosedives or glides. The leader holds the company's future in his hands. Many CEO's feel like they are looking for an emergency landing Flying Solo Spells Mayday. Unsure who they can trust, many CEO's quickly learn to operate solo. For them, it is truly lonely at the top. Engaging stakeholders, directors and executive teams often presents more problems than solutions. Pressures from life at work soon spills over into

intopersonal life only making matters worse. An Experienced Co-Pilot is Essential. An experienced co-pilot, not autopilot, helps bring valuable perspective, confidence and clarity to the critical gauges in the cockpit.

Almost Welcome

The more we take, the less we become. The more we give, the more we have.

Experiencing different cultures is always fun. I recently made my first trip to Accra, Ghana. Soon after our arrival we were greeted by a friendly Ghanaian with a broad smile and a warm heart. Samuel was our host and comrade.

He had spent the better part of his life on the front lines battling in the war against contaminated water that kills nearly 2 million people every year.

As soon as jet lag waned, we were soon on a domestic flight to Tamale, Ghana with bags and bags of heavy luggage. We were traveling with heavy hand-drilling equipment used to bring fresh water to villages. Our Water4 team would be spending more than a week conducting training demonstrations with nationals who we would soon be at work helping solve the water crisis that plagues many parts of Africa.

As we stepped onto the Tarmac, and made our way to the steps to board the plane, I reached out to my new friend and expressed my gratitude for his help loading and negotiating our robust cargo. I assured him we were there to help in his work not add to it.

In a rush to make our way across the runway, he spoke over his shoulder with sweat on his brow and said, "You are almost welcome."

"Almost welcome?" My heart sank. This wasn't going too well. We weren't even on our first well site and I wasn't winning any friends or favors.

I leaned toward another one of my travel companions. "I hope we can win Samuel over. He said we are almost welcome."

I big grin and chuckle soon followed. "You are *all* most welcome. Not almost welcome. Samuel is glad you are hear and happy to assist you! That is why he said you are all most welcome."

"All most welcome!" I had been snagged yet again by cultural nuances!

I have had the privilege of serving along side many cultural warriors like Samuel. Men and women who give their lives day in and day out in the betterment of mankind.

And for each and everyone I am forever grateful. Should the opportunity ever present itself, in my country or in my home, they are all, most welcome!